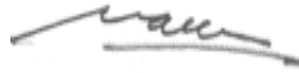




**ANNUAL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
REPORT
2007**



I am particularly grateful for the input from our communities and partner organisations, without which our scrutiny reviews would be incomplete.



Brian Allen
Chief Executive

Overview & Scrutiny plays a central role in Sedgefield Borough Council. It provides a means of holding the Cabinet to account and reviews policies and services on behalf of the public. It therefore has an essential role in making sure the Council continues to improve.

Overview and scrutiny has been proactive in looking at issues that matter to local people. A number of major reviews have taken place during 2006/07 which will lead to improvements in key areas.

It was particularly pleasing to see that an evaluation conducted by the Improvement & Development Agency concluded *“it is very clear that Sedgefield Borough Council has made real progress in developing overview and scrutiny and that Members and Officers have a shared commitment to the continuous improvement of the function”*. The evaluation has enabled further improvements to be made, thus demonstrating the Council’s commitment to continuous improvement.

I am thankful to all those who have been involved in the work of overview and scrutiny, current and former members of the Council, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Committees and Review Groups and officers of the Council who have supported the processes.

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Introduction by Chairmen of Overview & Scrutiny Committees

We are pleased to introduce Sedgefield Borough Council's Annual Scrutiny Report for 2006/07, which sets out in some detail what Overview & Scrutiny Committees have been doing over the last year and also sets the scene for 2007/08.

2006/07 has been a demanding period for all involved with Overview & Scrutiny. We have continued to keep a watching brief on key decisions made by the Cabinet, contributed to the development of a number of new policies in significant areas and have scrutinised the performance of the Council's services.

We have also monitored the implementation of agreed recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews and it has been particularly satisfying to see the impact these have made.

A number of Scrutiny Reviews were completed during 2006/07 covering many important issues for the Council and local people. The Cabinet has considered the recommendations made by each Review Group and agreed all but a few. We look forward to seeing the fruits of our labours as they are implemented and the plans monitored by the relevant Committees.

The overview and scrutiny function itself has been subject to an evaluation by the Improvement and Development Agency. We feel that it is essential to open our own processes to examination, not just because of the positive benefits of the exercise, but also that it demonstrates that we genuinely believe in the concept of scrutiny in its widest meaning. The fact that the outcome of the evaluation was complimentary was heartening, but more importantly it gave us a number of recommendations that have helped us improve still further.

We cannot mention the success of scrutiny without thanking those who have contributed to this achievement. We are truly grateful to the former Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees for leading the way and for current and former elected Members, co-opted members and Scrutiny Support Officers for their efforts and commitment. We would also like to express our gratitude to our partner organisations and members of the public who have participated in the reviews and scrutiny meetings.

With the reorganisation of local government within County Durham on the horizon there are many uncertainties for our communities. We will however continue to work to ensure that service standards remain high. We are also keen to ensure that the needs, priorities and concerns of residents are a prominent part of our focus in the forthcoming year and in the run up to the formation of a unitary council.



**Councillor
A. Gray**

Chairman of
Strategic Leadership
Overview & Scrutiny Committee



**Councillor
J. E. Higgin**

Chairman of Healthy Borough
with Strong Communities
Overview & Scrutiny Committee



**Councillor
G.C. Gray**

Chairman of
Prosperous and Attractive
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Section 1: What Is Overview & Scrutiny?



The Improvement & Development Agency (I&DeA) defines scrutiny as ‘the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised. Councils make decisions on behalf of the public and spend public money. They make decisions about the future management of public services that affect the daily lives of constituents. Public scrutiny is what representation really means – holding executives to account for decisions taken on behalf of the public and in the public interest’.

In May 2002 Sedgefield changed the way it makes decisions in accordance with the Government’s modernising agenda for local government. The aim was to make local government, and particularly its decision-making processes, more open and accountable to the people it serves.

Decision-making processes in Sedgefield Borough Council

The Borough Council formally introduced executive arrangements based on a Leader and Cabinet on 24th May 2002. This was done following the introduction of a pilot Leader and Cabinet scheme and extensive consultation with local people that concluded with a Mayoral referendum.

The Council has 50 Councillors who are democratically elected by and accountable to residents of their wards. The role of all elected members is to develop strong links with their wards and maintain regular contact with the people and communities they serve and represent.

Council

a meeting of all councillors, is responsible for determining the composition, membership and terms of reference of the Cabinet, committees, and other bodies.

Council determines schemes of delegation and has responsibility for approving the overall policy framework and for setting Council Tax and related budgets.

Meetings of Council are chaired by the Mayor. To maintain independence, the Mayor is not a member of Cabinet or an Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet

is responsible for ensuring that the Council achieves its ambitions within budgets and is comprised of the Leader of the Council, who chairs meetings, and 8 other Cabinet members.

Cabinet members are responsible for a specific portfolio of services/functions which they lead at a political level.

Portfolios have recently been aligned to the Council’s Corporate Ambitions to ensure clear lines of responsibility at a political level. Responsibilities are set out in Table 1.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

support the work of Cabinet and Council as a whole and monitor the decisions of Cabinet.

They can ‘call-in’ key decisions of Cabinet before they are implemented to consider whether it was appropriate. They can recommend the Cabinet reconsider a key decision if they think it was inappropriate.

They can also establish review groups to examine issues in detail in order to improve services or to tackle a problem being experienced within Sedgefield Borough.

Three Overview & Scrutiny Committees have been established by the Council. They are aligned to the Council's ambitions and reflect Cabinet portfolios. Responsibilities are set out in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Overview & Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities

Corporate Ambition	Portfolio	Key Responsibilities	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Strategic Leadership	Leader	• Resource Management	Strategic Leadership
		• Corporate Planning	
		• Community Engagement	
		• Governance	
Healthy Borough	Community Health	• Public Health	Healthy Borough with Strong Communities
		• Community Care	
	Leisure & Culture	• Leisure	
		• Culture	
Strong Communities	Housing	• Strategic Housing	Healthy Borough with Strong Communities
		• Landlord Functions	
	Safer Communities	• Antisocial Behaviour	
		• Crime and Disorder	
Prosperous Borough	Learning & Employment	• Economic Development	Prosperous and Attractive Borough
		• Education and Lifelong Learning	
	Social Regeneration & Partnership	• Social Regeneration	
		• Social Inclusion	
Attractive Borough	Environment	• Cleaner, Greener Issues	Prosperous and Attractive Borough
		• Environmental Management	
	Planning & Development	• Planning Policy	
		• Planning Delivery	

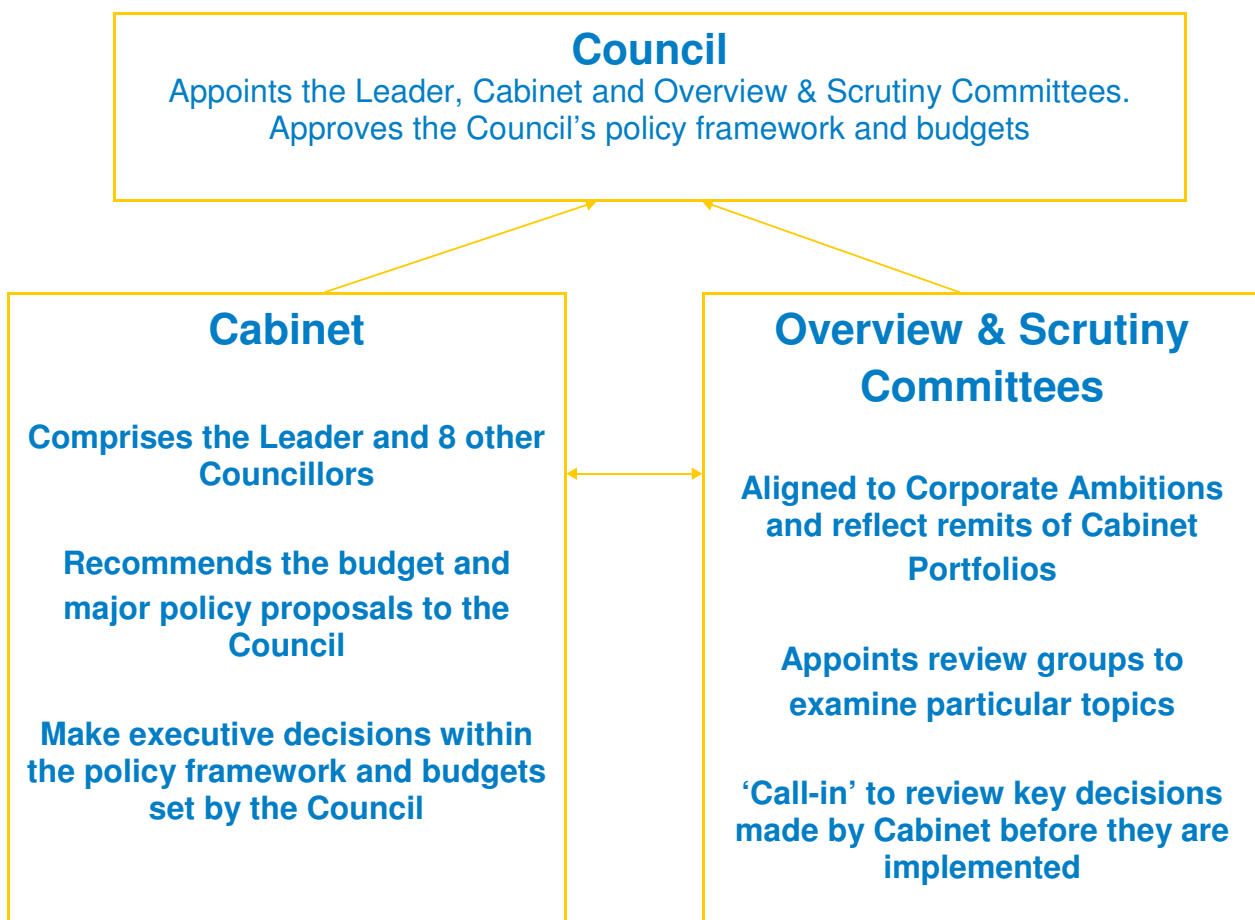
Apart from the Mayor, councillors who are not members of Cabinet, sit on an Overview & Scrutiny Committee or the Audit Committee. Two Council tenants' representatives have been co-opted onto the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee. In addition during 2007/08, the Prosperous & Attractive Borough Overview & Scrutiny Committee are to co-opt two members to its Committee.

The three committees have the potential to review, or scrutinise, the full range of Council services and activities. This can be done by the committees themselves or by smaller topic-based Review Groups.

In addition, the work of external agencies and bodies may also be examined. Durham County Council is responsible for carrying out the overview and scrutiny function relating to local health service provision. Two councillors are appointed to the County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee to represent the Borough and its residents. Minutes of that committee are reported to the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information and comment.

A diagram showing the roles and relationship of Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Roles and Relationship of Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny



Procedures in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process are contained in the Council's Constitution and are explained in full in the Council's published "Overview and Scrutiny Guide".

Section 2: What Have We Done? Achievements

Last year's Annual Report set out an ambitious programme for each Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The following section details the work which has been undertaken by the Committees during this period. Particular attention is drawn to the following achievements which are presented in accordance with the four main aspects of Overview and Scrutiny.

- Holding the Executive to Account
- Policy Development and Review
- Performance Review and Service Improvement
- External Scrutiny

Holding the Executive to Account

According to the Centre for Public Scrutiny (Guidance for District Councils), holding the executive to account through scrutinising their activities is self-evidently a vital component of the overview & scrutiny function. It goes on to say that it is important to remember that scrutiny is about more than call-in and that there are many other ways in which committees can scrutinise the work of the executive.

The I&DeA recognise that this role involves scrutinising executive decisions at a number of different stages of the decision making process: before decisions are made; before they are implemented; and after they are implemented. This role is largely interpreted as the 'scrutiny' side of the overview & scrutiny role.

The following methods have been identified for holding the executive to account

Examining the Forward Plan

The Leader of Cabinet prepares a Forward Plan on a monthly basis which lists the key decisions that are likely to be taken in the following four months.

The Forward Plan includes a description of the decisions to be made, when they will be taken and by whom, details of proposed consultation and documentation which will be taken into consideration.

The Forward Plan is published two weeks before the start of the period covered. It is published on the Council's website and also distributed to all Members of the Council for their information. Members of Overview & Scrutiny Committees use this information to keep abreast of planned key decisions and may also use it to inform their Committee's work programme.

The Forward Plan is also considered at the Scrutiny Chairs meetings which are held at the end of each cycle of Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings to co-ordinate and help plan future scrutiny activities.

Cabinet agendas are published at least 5 clear days before a meeting. As well as being available for public inspection at the Council Offices they are also published on the Council's website.

Agendas are issued to both Cabinet and Non-Cabinet Members at the same time. Minutes of Cabinet meetings are normally published within 2 working days of the meeting being held. Minutes are available for public inspection, published on the Council's website and distributed to all Members of the Council within this timescale.

Calling-in Decisions

The Call-in procedure allows Members of the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to request the Cabinet to reconsider a key decision they believe to be contrary to the Council's decision making principles (Article 14 of the Constitution) which are:-

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- c) respect for human rights;
- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes;
- f) an explanation of what options have been considered and giving reasons for decisions.

3 Members of an appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee can call-in a key decision within 5 days of it being published.

During 2006/07 municipal year no key decisions were called-in.

Cabinet Member Attendance at Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meetings

Members have raised concerns about a number of issues which have resulted in the appropriate Cabinet Member attending a Committee meeting to respond to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's concerns.

There have been a total of 22 attendances by Cabinet Members at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2006/07 to respond and provide information to the Committee on CCTV, Budgets and Recycling Services .

Scrutiny of Budget Proposals

The procedure for developing the budget is detailed in Part 4 C of the Council's Constitution.

Overview & Scrutiny Committees may consider the Cabinet's initial budget proposals and comment on them within a 4 week consultation period.

As Overview & Scrutiny Committees have responsibility for determining their own work programme it is open for them to consider and comment prior to the end of the consultation period.

The procedure states that ‘the Cabinet will take any response from an Overview & Scrutiny Committee into account in drawing up firm proposals for submission to the Council.’ The report will reflect the comments made by consultees and the Cabinet’s response.

During 2006/07 all Overview & Scrutiny Committees made arrangements to hold a special meeting during the consultation period in order to consider the Cabinet’s initial budget proposals relating to their respective portfolio areas. Following detailed consideration all 3 Overview & Scrutiny Committees gave support to the Cabinet’s initial budget proposals.

Policy Development and Review

“Council policies should reflect the community plan and provide an adequate framework to ensure community well-being. It is the role of scrutiny to maintain an overview of policies as they are developed and reviewed. Policy development involves shaping the formulation of key policies, by examining alternative options against needs, priorities and resources”.
(I&DeA, A Councillor’s Guide 2004/05).

Overview & Scrutiny Committees have managed their own work programmes to enable a small number of high quality reviews to be undertaken that make a real difference to the work of the Authority, rather than high numbers of reviews on more minor issues.

Each Overview & Scrutiny Committee has therefore identified and undertaken two reviews during 2006/07. In each case the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee has established a Review Group, comprising of 5-6 Members, to undertake the review.

The following reviews have been completed during 2006/07:-

- **Review of the Council’s Community Newspaper Inform**
- **Review of Sickness Management**
- **Provision of Affordable Housing**
- **Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme**
- **Future Recycling Services**
- **The Council’s Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability)**

The Chairmen of these Review Groups have prepared the following summaries.

Review of Inform the Council's Community Newspaper

Members of the Review Group: Councillors J.M. Khan (Chairman) and Councillors A. Gray, J.G. Huntington, B. Meek and J.M. Smith

Rationale

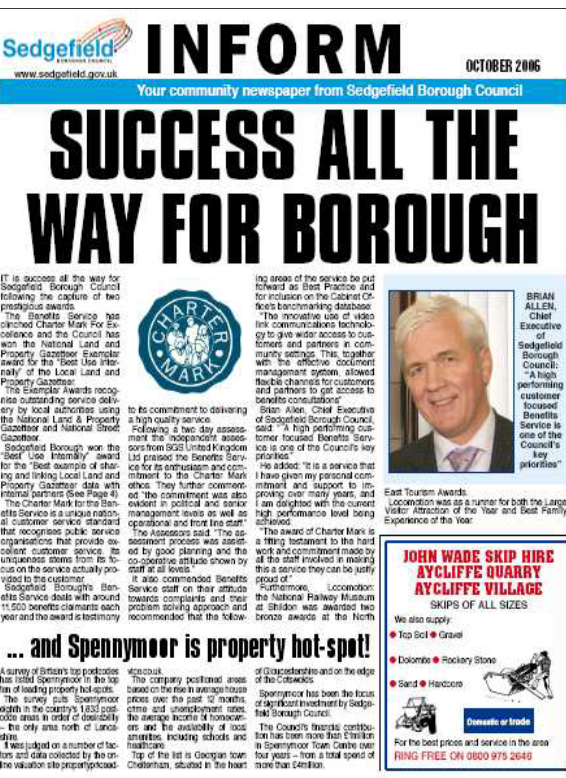
The Council produces a community newspaper, Inform, on a monthly basis as a means of promoting the Council and keeping the public informed about Council related activities. Inform has been produced since 1975. Initially produced on a quarterly basis and has been produced monthly since 1991. The objectives of the Review are to examine the Council's Community Magazine Inform and assess that it is fulfilling its purpose, is comparable to Best Practice examples and to identify areas for improvement.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review contributes to towards the Council's Corporate Value of engaging local communities. The objectives of the Review are to examine the Council's Community Magazine Inform and assess that it is fulfilling its purpose, is comparable to Best Practice examples and to identify areas for improvement.

Findings and Recommendations

The Review Group gathered its evidence through meetings and presentations with officers and carrying out a Satisfaction Survey with Residents, Sedgefield Borough Council Members and



INFORM
OCTOBER 2006
Your community newspaper from Sedgefield Borough Council

SUCCESS ALL THE WAY FOR BOROUGH

IT is success all the way for Sedgefield Borough Council following the capture of two prestigious awards.

The Benefits Service has clinched Charter Mark For Excellence and the Council has won the National Land and Property Gazetteer Excellence award for the 'Best Use Internally' of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer.

The Excellence Awards recognise outstanding service delivery by local authorities using the National Land & Property Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer.

Sedgefield Borough won the 'Best Use Internally' award for the 'Best example of sharing and linking Local Land and Property Gazetteer data with external partners (see Page 4).

The Charter Mark for the Benefits Service is a unique national customer service standard that recognises public service organisations that provide excellent customer service, its uniqueness stems from its focus on the service actually provided to the customer.

Sedgefield Borough's Benefits Service deals with around 11,500 benefits claims each year and the award is testimony to its commitment to delivering a high quality service.

Following a two day assessment the independent assessors from Skills United Kingdom Ltd praised the Benefits Service for its customer and commitment to the Charter Mark office. They further commented "the commitment was also evident in political and senior management levels as well as operations and front line staff".

The assessors said "The assessment process was assisted by good planning and the co-operative attitude shown by staff at all levels".

It also commended Benefits Service staff on their attitude towards complaints and their problem solving approach and recommended that the following areas of the service be put forward as Best Practice and for inclusion on the Cabinet Office benchmarking database.

"The innovative use of video link communication technology to give wider access to customers and partners in community settings. This together with the effective document management system, allowed flexible channels for customers and partners to get access to benefits consultation".

Brian Allen, Chief Executive of Sedgefield Borough Council, said "A high performing customer focused Benefits Service is one of the Council's key priorities".

"He added: "It is a service that I have given my personal commitment and support to improving over many years, and I am delighted with the current high performance level being achieved".

The award of Charter Mark is a fitting testament to the hard work and commitment made by all the staff involved in making this a service they can be justly proud of".

Furthermore, Locomotion: the National Railway Museum at Shildon was awarded two bronze awards at the North East Tourism Awards.

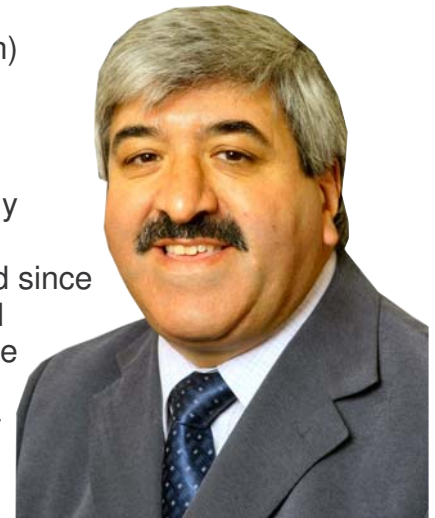
Locomotion was an runner for both the Large Visitor Attraction of the Year and Best Family Experience of the Year.

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Councillor J. M. Khan
Chairman of the Review Group

Chief Officers to obtain their views and opinions of Inform. An exercise was also carried out by the Review Group to compare Inform with copies of Local Authority Newspapers and Magazines that have received accreditations and examples from a selection of North East Councils.

Is Inform fulfilling its purpose?

The Review Group concludes that Inform fulfils its purpose of highlighting Council issues, success stories and informing residents of what is happening within the Borough. As it is published on a monthly basis, information contained within it is timely and relevant. Inform also contributes to the Council's commitment to the core actions of the Local Government Association Reputation Initiative.

This view has been supported by information received and survey findings from Officers of the Council and Residents.

Comparisons with Best Practice Examples

When compared to Best Practice examples of Council Newspapers and Magazines identified, the Review Group agreed that Inform compares favourably and recommended that the existing format of Inform should therefore be retained. The Review Group did recommend that advertising should also be retained at its existing level to enable Inform to focus on providing information on Council news stories and events.

The Review Group noted that the budget had remained the same for 2006/07 from 2005/06 and that the size of Inform had increased from 8 to 16 pages and recommended that appropriate budget provision be made to support a 16-page publication.

Improvements to Inform

Through information received and survey findings, the Review Group identified areas for further improvement. This included reviewing procedures for identifying stories to be included within Inform, re-designing the Masthead on the front page of Inform and enabling Inform to be available to download from the Home page of the Council's website.

Cabinet's Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration. Cabinet subsequently agreed all ten recommendations from the Review Group. An Action Plan to implement recommendations, which identifies responsibilities and timescales, has been agreed.

Follow Up

The Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the Action Plan, which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor J.M. Khan

Chairman of the Review Group

Review of Sickness Management

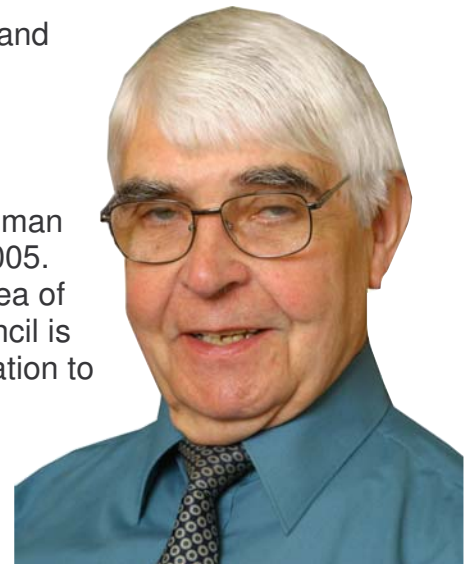
Members of the Review Group: Councillor B. Hall (Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, D.M. Hancock, G. Morgan, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith and K. Thompson

Rationale

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1 considered progress on the Human Resource Best Value Service Improvement Plan in September 2005. Members of the Committee identified Sickness Absence as an area of Concern. A Review was established to investigate what the Council is doing now and to determine what can be done in the future in relation to sickness management and the control of sickness absence.

Links to Corporate Aims

This Review contributes towards the Council's Corporate Values of Investing in Our People (Employees), Be responsible with and accountable for public finances and Being open, accessible, equitable, fair and responsive to the public.



Councillor B. Hall
Chairman of the Review Group

Findings and Recommendations

The Review Group gathered evidence from presentations and discussions with the Council's Human Resources Section, Payments Section and Company Health Ltd who provide the Council's Occupational Health Service. A series of meetings with Chief Officers and focus group sessions with Staff and Trade Unions was carried out to undertake research relating to sickness management procedures within the Council. A survey was issued to 250 members of staff. The Review Group was invited to attend an event on proactive measures to deal with Sickness Management and General Health and Safety at 3M in Newton Aycliffe.

Findings from research gathered by the Review Group highlighted the following areas:

- Code of Practice & Procedures
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Information
- Training
- Occupational Health

Code of Practice and Procedures

The Employee Survey reported that staff have a good understanding of absence procedures. The Review Group acknowledged work that had been undertaken over recent years to update the Code of Practice and the introduction of Company Health Ltd to provide Occupational Health Services. The Review Group considered proposed procedures contained within a revised Code of Practice for sickness management.

Management of Sickness Absence within the Council requires focus on early intervention and procedures that are applied consistently throughout the Council. The Review Group recommended that the proposed procedures for the Management of Sickness Absence, Occupational Health Referrals and Occupational Sick Pay be supported.

Roles and Responsibilities

Management of Sickness requires expertise to proactively monitor absence rates, deal with Occupational Health referrals and provide performance information on a monthly basis. The Review Group believe this expertise lies within Human Resources Section, and recommended that specific elements of Sickness Management administration be transferred to Human Resources in order to better enable Occupational Health referrals and performance monitoring.

Performance Information

Throughout the review, Chief Officers and Trade Unions identified reducing sickness absence as a priority. Detailed performance information is available and the Review Group recommended that this information should be reported to Members on a regular basis to effectively monitor sickness absence within the Council. Sickness information should also be made available to managers as necessary so they can effectively manage sickness and a performance indicator be included in departmental service plans.

Training

The Review Group identified a need for training to be undertaken for managers to ensure that sickness management procedures are delivered consistently and enable managers to have the relevant skills to carry out their role. The Review Group recommended that the Organisational Development Plan specifically include training for appropriate managers relating to 'Absence Management'.

Occupational Health

There is evidence of proactive working between Occupational Health, Human Resources and Council Departments. Company Health Ltd have a fundamental role to play in proactively managing sickness absence. The Review Group recommended that Company Health's key objectives should be monitored and the services they provide promoted to employees of the Council.

Cabinet's Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

Cabinet subsequently agreed all nine recommendations from the Review Group. An Action Plan to implement recommendations, which identifies responsibilities and timescales, has been agreed.

Follow Up

The Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the Action Plan, which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor B. Hall

Chairman of the Review Group

Provision of Affordable Housing

Members of the Review Group: Councillors J. Wayman J.P. (Chairman), W.M. Blenkinsopp, J.E. Higgin and J.P. Moran and Mrs. M. Thomson (Co-opted Tenant Representative)



Councillor J. Wayman J.P.
Chairman of the Review
Group

Rationale

The review was undertaken after members recognised that the housing market in the Borough of Sedgefield had changed significantly over the past three years, with rapid increases in house prices and an increased demand for social housing.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Council's ambitions and community outcomes are shown in its Annual Corporate Plan. The Review contributes towards the Council's ambition to create a Borough with strong communities and the community outcome of securing quality affordable housing.

Findings and Conclusions

The review heard evidence from the Council's Housing Strategy Manager, Forward Planning Manager and Senior Development Control Officer. The group also heard evidence from applicants to the Authority's first affordable housing scheme, which allowed the review to adopt a more user-focused perspective in its deliberations. A site visit was also conducted to observe Tees Valley Housing Group's approach to providing affordable housing.

The conclusions of the Review Group are focused on four main themes:

- Defining Affordable Housing
- Intelligence
- Effective Use of Existing Housing Stock
- Delivering New Build Housing

The review forwarded a definition it considered refined what affordable housing meant for Sedgefield borough and would give a clear steer to the development of the policy. Furthermore, since the housing market is moving so rapidly, the Group recommended that the Housing Needs Study be updated during this Council year (2007-08) to reflect these changes.

The Review Group also concluded that information relating to affordable housing needed to be monitored continuously and reviewed so that the Authority was able to be in a position to provide housing that best reflected the needs of the market.

The review urged the Council to consider how best to make effective use of, not only its existing stock but also private sector stock.

In conclusion, the Review Group's report comprehensively looked at the issue in hand and made a series of recommendations to improve the current situation. Furthermore, members of the Review Group also benefited from gaining an increased knowledge of affordable housing.

Cabinet Response

The Cabinet agreed with all of the recommendations of the Review Group and formulated an Action Plan of responses. This has been presented to the Prosperous and Attractive Boroughs Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Follow Up

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall continue to monitor progress as it pertains to the implementation of their recommendations, in order to ensure that the actions it proposed bring about the desired changes.

Councillor J. Wayman J.P.

Chairman of the Review Group



Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme

Members of the Review Group: Councillor Ms. M. Predki (Chairman) and Councillors J. Burton, Mrs. J. Croft and Mrs. E.M. Paylor.

Rationale

The rationale is to review the current Concessionary Pricing Scheme and identify solutions to improve communication to the residents of the Borough and increase take up of the scheme.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review of the Council's Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme will aim to contribute to the Council's Ambition to create a healthy Borough and the associated Community Outcome of creating leisure opportunities.

Findings and Recommendations

The Review Group gathered evidence from presentations and meetings with the Council's Leisure Services, Neighbourhood Wardens and the community groups of CAVOS and Cornforth Partnership. A focus group meeting was also held with existing users of the Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme at Ferryhill Leisure Centre and information on existing schemes and research was gathered from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Executive.

The Review Group made recommendations to improve access to Leisure Facilities through the Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme. This included undertaking a feasibility exercise to extend the Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme to clubs and associations based in the Council's Leisure Centres, and consideration be given to extend concessionary usage of the Lifestyle suites between 7.30 p.m. and 9.00 p.m.

To improve communication and marketing of the Scheme the Review Group made recommendations that information, advertising and case study examples be promoted through the Council's Community Newspaper Inform. The Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme Communications Plan be monitored on a monthly basis and include bespoke marketing communications materials relevant to the targeted group.

The Department of Health profile for 2006 highlighted that the Borough has above average levels of health deprivation. The Review Group recommended that Partnership working be undertaken with County Durham Primary Care Trust to promote the Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme in GP Practices within the Borough and information be provided to Primary Care Health Workers to promote the scheme when discussing the health benefits or exercise with patients.

Prior to the review commencing the Council rolled out the B:Active Membership Scheme with the aim to eliminate any potential stigma of the previous 'Leisure Saver' Card. Information from the B:Active Scheme is used to provide information to support Performance Indicators and Marketing Information. To create accurate information to assist Performance and Marketing Information the Review Group the Review group recommended that all Members be transferred on the B:Active Scheme by September 2007.



Councillor Ms M. Predki
Chairman of the Review Group

The Review Group considered information regarding initiatives and research that has been put into practice by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Executive.

Research reports evaluating these initiatives are due to be reported in early 2007, the Review Group recommend that the Council's Leisure Services take account of the findings of these reports to identify if any points for future improvements could be made to Concessionary Leisure Pricing Scheme.

The Review Group concluded that the Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme meets the objectives of the pricing principles identified by the Council's Leisure Services. The pricing scheme has reduced barriers and encouraged participation in physical activity for the economically inactive via reduced concessionary prices to generate associated health benefits.

The reduction in prices, implementation of the B:Active Membership card and a marketing campaign to promote the scheme has contributed to the 38% increase in Membership of the B:Active Scheme. Therefore the Review Group recommended that Leisure Centre Concessionary Prices remain at their current level for 2007/08

This review has evaluated areas of the existing concessionary leisure scheme and has identified areas for further development to achieve the aims of the pricing principles and may increase membership and take up of the Concessionary Scheme.

Feedback from the Focus Group gave support to retain the scheme, attendees were supportive of the pricing structure and the benefits to which the scheme offered.

Cabinet's Response

The Review Group's report was considered by its parent committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2, who supported the recommendations and forwarded it to Cabinet for consideration.

Cabinet subsequently agreed all ten recommendations from the Review Group. An Action Plan to implement recommendations, which identifies responsibilities and timescales, has been agreed.

Follow Up

The Healthy Borough and Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the Action Plan, which will be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.



Councillor Ms M. Predki
Chairman of the Review Group

Future Recycling Services

Members of the Review Group: Councillors G.C. Gray (Chairman), D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. J. Gray and M.T.B. Jones



Councillor G.C. Gray
Chairman of the Review Group

Rationale

Sedgefield Borough Council's Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan ended in March 2006. Whilst the Council was on track to reach its 18% recycling target set by the Government by that date, new targets are awaited. And within the drive towards greater recycling rates, it was anticipated these targets would be more challenging. A review of current service provision, including kerbside collection, green waste, bring sites, bulky items/white goods and waste minimisation initiatives, together with consideration of the options available to the Council to provide improved recycling services, was required.

Links to Corporate Aims

The review contributed to the Council's ambition of delivering an attractive borough through reducing waste and managing natural resources in order to ensure a cleaner, greener environment.

Findings and Conclusions

It was recognised by members that the effective promotion of any new recycling scheme is essential to achieve optimum participation rates and ensure the success of new arrangements.

The Council's kerbside collection contract with Premier Waste Management will come to an end in March 2008 and alternative recycling services need to be agreed to ensure residents have access to appropriate recycling services and the Authority is able to achieve these Government targets.

Decisions were still awaited from Durham County Council, as the waste disposal authority, in respect of its Waste Management Strategy and procurement options post-2008. As a result, members had to consider that there was no assurances about the disposal facilities that will be available to the Borough Council.

In considering the preferred options, the Review Group established four key objectives for future recycling services:



- Achieve current and future recycling/composting targets.
- Convenient to use and accessible to residents.
- Financially sustainable.
- Operationally feasible.

In concluding the investigation, the opinions and views of residents gathered through the stakeholder consultation survey were considered. This was supported by knowledge gained following a visit to Derwentside District Council, to investigate the experiences of an alternative service provision Authority. Finally, the Group evaluated the evidence collected on the advantages and disadvantages of each option and its ability to meet the key objectives.

The Review Group concluded that the introduction of a co-mingled system for collecting dry recyclables (materials not sorted at kerbside), utilising twin wheeled bins, will most effectively meet the key objectives established for future recycling services. It was considered that weekly household waste collections should continue, but collections should alternate between recyclable material and residual household waste. The collection of glass for recycling post-2008 was supported and an assessment of glass collection methods at a future date would allow full appraisal of up to date collection, separation and disposal options.

It was felt that there was a need to rationalise the Authority's 29 bring sites to ensure effective targeting of resources. The 6 high yield bring sites located throughout the Borough at Newton Aycliffe (Tesco), Sedgefield (Library), Shildon (Co-op), Spennymoor (Asda), Tudhoe Civic Amenity Site and Aycliffe Civic Amenity site should be retained, with the remaining 23 sites phased out.

The continuation of existing arrangements for the separate collection of white goods and televisions for recycling was supported. However, the continuation of a free green waste collection service in a selected area of the Borough does not align itself with the Authority's corporate value to *"Be open, accessible, equitable, fair and responsive to the public"*. Therefore, the continuation of this scheme cannot be justified following the cessation of grant funding in 2007/08. However, the collection of green waste ought to be encouraged. Therefore the provision of a service throughout the Borough should be explored. However, in order to ensure the financial viability of such a scheme, the service should be offered on a discretionary chargeable basis, on an opt-in/opt-out basis.

Cabinet Response

The report was presented to Cabinet on the 21st June 2007. As yet, their response has not been forthcoming to the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Follow Up

Pending the acceptance of the recommendations of the Review Group, the Cabinet shall draw up an Action Plan. This shall be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and members shall monitor the Plan through to completion.

Councillor G.C. Gray

Chairman of the Review Group

The Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability)

Members of the Review Group: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman), K. Henderson, A. Smith, Mrs L. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat.



Councillor V. Crosby
Chairman of the Review Group

Rationale

Whilst the Borough's official unemployment rate has fallen to 2.7%, the number of people who are economically inactive, i.e. do not have a job but are capable of working, remains high. Both the employment rate and the economic activity rate in the Borough are significantly lower than the national average; with over 13% of the Borough's working age population in receipt of incapacity benefit. Whilst awaiting Government policy measures to help tackle the problem, there is a need to assess the Borough Council's own services and those of other providers in order to provide comprehensive access to employment.

Links to Corporate Aims

The Review supports the Council's ambitions to create a prosperous and healthy Borough, and the community outcomes of tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion and working in partnership with others.

Findings and Conclusions

There is considerable evidence that worklessness can damage a person's life chances, significantly influencing aspirations, especially those of children and young people.

People in areas where there are lots of other people who are able to work but do not, have lower expectations of starting a job, and a lower probability of actually starting one. Individuals living in deprived areas are significantly more likely to be out of work than similar people living elsewhere.

Over the past few decades, working and workless people have been moving apart geographically in the UK. Living in the most deprived areas with the very highest levels of unemployment has particularly strong negative effects on a person's chances of leaving poverty.

A significant number of children are in danger of growing up in families and neighbourhoods with little contact with the world of work, and limited aspirations to join it. This has the potential to derail progress towards Government objectives on child poverty, educational attainment and employment.

People who live in concentrations of worklessness tend to be from groups who are known to do badly in the labour market. For example:

- Almost half of the working age population in areas of worklessness have no qualifications.
- Half of all households in concentrations of worklessness have at least one person with a limiting long-term illness.
- A third of carers in these areas provide more than 50 hours of unpaid care each week.

The review undertook a range of methods in the course of its investigations. It heard evidence from officers, including the Authority's Head of Strategy and Regeneration as well as the Regeneration Manager as well as the Cabinet Portfolio holder. Externally, the Group also questioned representatives of Job Centre Plus, the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative and the County Durham & Darlington Primary Care Trusts Public Health Improvement Team.

The Chair attended an Employability Workshop to consider initiatives regarding employability in County Durham, identifying strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and drawing on examples of good practice. Members also attended Finchale Training College in Durham in order to gain an insight into its initiatives and programmes linked to referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

The Review Group found that employability was a complex and emotive issue with many causes and consequences. Current unemployment figures for the Borough mask the numbers who are economically inactive, and it is usual for levels to be highest in certain pockets of the Borough. Therefore, to reflect this the Review Group recommended that the Council operate a specific three-pronged attack to tackle the three main facets of low employability, i.e. health, employment, education. As part of this the Review Group felt that the Authority should focus its aim on encouraging entrepreneurship and reconsider its support infrastructure to provide grants for individuals starting businesses. Support should also be available to these businesses.

In order to tackle the problems associated with worklessness, the Review Group recognised the importance of partner organisations in ensuring the issues are resolved. Therefore recommendations included the Authority engage in the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative programme as well as utilising the skills in the Local Strategic Partnership and the voluntary and community sector.

Cabinet Response

The report has been presented to Cabinet. At the time of publishing, their response has not been forthcoming to the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Follow Up

Pending the acceptance of the recommendations of the Review Group, the Cabinet shall draw up an Action Plan. This shall be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and members shall monitor the Plan through to completion.

Councillor V. Crosby.
Chairman of the Review Group

Performance Management and Improvement

The Overview & Scrutiny Committees have an important role in monitoring progress on Service Improvement Plans (SIP's) agreed following a Best Value or Service Review. Progress has been monitored on the following SIP's during 2006/07:-

- Human Resources Best Value Review SIP
- Benefits SIP
- Housing Department SIP
- Development Control SIP

Members have also highlighted concerns with regard to certain services and have requested the relevant Cabinet Member and/or the Head of Service to attend a meeting in order to consider the particular service. Issues examined by the Committee include:-

- Public Sector Efficiency
- Percentage of Women in Top 5% of earners
- CCTV Arrangements within the Borough
- Disabled Person Adaptations
- Regeneration of Town Centres
- The percentage of Appeals allowed against the Authority's Decision to Refuse a Planning Application
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

In addition to this, Performance Indicator (PI) information has been reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committees on a regular basis to enable Members to monitor performance. This process assists Overview & Scrutiny Committees to identify issues to include in their work plans. Members are able to invite relevant Cabinet Members and senior officers to meetings so that performance can be challenged where it is not achieving targeted outcomes. The process also provides an opportunity to highlight and acknowledge areas of achievement, as well as highlighting areas for a future reports and/or reviews.

Following a Performance Management Workshop with Members, a recommendation was agreed to change the format of the reports to exception reports that will enable a full and frank discussion on indicators that are not achieving target.

Under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 Councils have the power to 'promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area in order to respond to the needs of their local communities'. This inevitably involves an increasing amount of partnership working and some examination of the contribution of partner agencies.

Scrutiny Network

A Scrutiny Network has been established in County Durham, which is developing into a vibrant and active alliance. The Network includes representation from all District Councils within County Durham as well as the

County Council. The network was primarily set up as a learning set to share expertise and experience and establish build on best practice. It also enables issues that cut across boundaries to be discussed and builds a collaborative approach to problem solving.



The Network has been commissioned to carry out an investigation into transport provision in the County. All Councils in the County are contributing to this investigation, which is planned to conclude early in 2008.

In addition County Durham's Children's Trust has requested that a Countywide scrutiny review be carried out in relation to young people not in education, employment or training, known as NEET's. The Scrutiny Network will be used to co-ordinate these activities.

Health Scrutiny

The Health and Social Care Act 2001 gives responsibility to the local authority with social services functions to carry out scrutiny of health matters. Therefore in this area Durham County Council hold this responsibility. Health scrutiny has a key role in challenging and holding the health bodies to account. Many health issues cut across county/district responsibilities and therefore district Councillors are co-opted to the County's Health Sub-Committee to represent their councils and, more importantly, local people.

During 2006/07, the Committee has scrutinised various aspects of the following local NHS providers, County Durham Primary Care Trust, County Durham & Darlington Acute NHS Trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and the North East Ambulance Service Trust.

In addition Members of the Committee have undertaken an in-depth Scrutiny Review on the Misuse of Alcohol and Drugs by Young People in County Durham.

Section 3: I&DeA Review of Overview and Scrutiny

Sedgefield Borough Council has taken part in the Leading Edge Programme, which is supported by I&DeA and assists the ongoing development of elected members in the areas of Political Leadership, Community Leadership and Overview and Scrutiny. A key component of the Overview and Scrutiny strand of the programme was a light touch scrutiny challenge to ascertain how scrutiny processes were developing within participating authorities (Sedgefield, Derwentside, Durham City, Easington, Wansbeck, Wear Valley and Tyndale).

Following the evaluation a report was prepared by I&DeA which states that “the Overview and Scrutiny structure in Sedgefield Borough Council appears fit for purpose in terms of tackling corporate issues, policy review /development and service delivery issues. The Committee remits are linked to those of Portfolio Holders and to the Council’s Corporate Ambitions”. The report goes on to say that “Sedgefield Borough Council has evidenced its clear commitment to the scrutiny process by resourcing a dedicated scrutiny support team”.

The report concluded that;

“...it is very clear that Sedgefield Borough Council has made real progress in developing overview and scrutiny and that Members and Officers have a shared commitment to the continuous improvement of the function”.

A number of recommendations were made to assist the Council in its development of vibrant and meaningful scrutiny. These recommendations have been used to form an Action Plan in order to achieve progress on the areas highlighted by the Leading Edge programme.

So far the following has been completed

- Overview & Scrutiny Committees have been re-branded to increase transparency of function
- The format of the Annual Scrutiny Report has been reviewed
- Consideration has been given to moving Committee meetings away from more formal venues to more local, accessible and community friendly venues
- Seating arrangements have been altered to reflect the differing roles of Members and Officers within Scrutiny
- The format and presentation of Performance Management Information has been reviewed to ensure that Members receive information which is meaningful and comprehensible to them
- Public Information Leaflets on Overview and Scrutiny has been made available to the public.
- Internet pages have been developed to help promote Overview & Scrutiny

The remaining actions are to be completed in the forthcoming year

- The public have participated in a number of Reviews. The internet pages and public leaflets will allow an additional way to encourage their input.
- Members have received training on various aspects of Overview & Scrutiny. Further training is planned

Section 4: What Are We Doing? Work Programme 2007/08

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are responsible for agreeing a realistic, achievable and considered work programme on the understanding that, from time to time, more urgent or immediate issues will require scrutinising. Issues may, for example, be raised by Cabinet reports, Members' constituency business or be referred to Overview and Scrutiny by Cabinet in advance of a Cabinet decision.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees review their Work Programmes at each meeting to identify issues that Members wish to consider. This process will continue during the forthcoming year to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny continues to be Member led.

The Minister for Local Government, John Healey, announced on 25th July 2007 that the Secretary of State was 'minded to implement 9 unitary proposals which councils had submitted in response to the Government's invitation to Councils issues on 26th October 2006'.

Included in the 9 unitary proposals that are to be implemented is a single unitary council for County Durham. The establishment of a single council within County Durham will mean that the 7 existing district councils and the county council will be abolished and replaced by a new council covering the whole of the county. It is expected that the new council will be up and running from April 2009.

The Borough Council's medium-term plan, the Corporate Plan sets out the Council's aims and also outlines how it will work with its partners to achieve its stated ambitions. Given that the Borough Council will be abolished in April 2009 the Corporate Plan is to be reviewed so that short-term priorities can be addressed. Overview & Scrutiny Committees will then need to reflect the short-term priorities within their own work programmes.

In the period running up to the establishment of the new council Overview & Scrutiny is continuing to work to ensure that service standards remain high and that implementation plans from previous reviews are on track.

Members are keen to ensure that the needs, priorities and concerns of the residents of Sedgefield Borough are a prominent part of the plans for the new Authority, and that Sedgefield Borough leaves a lasting legacy for its community. Scrutiny is an extremely effective tool to help achieve this and members are keen to work within the Authority and with neighbouring Authorities to see that this transition is a smooth and positive process.

Section 5: Overview & Scrutiny Committee Membership

Strategic Leadership Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Chairman:

Councillor A. Gray

Vice Chairman:

Councillor B..F. Avery J.P.

Members:

Councillor D.R. Brown
Councillor V. Chapman
Councillor D. Farry
Councillor T.F. Forrest
Councillor Mrs. J. Gray
Councillor B. Haigh
Councillor T. Hogan
Councillor Ms. I. Jackson
Councillor B.M. Ord

Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Chairman:

Councillor G.C. Gray

Vice Chairman:

Councillor B. Lamb

Members:

Councillor Mrs. L. Cuthbertson
Councillor P. Gittins
Councillor D.M. Hancock
Councillor Mrs. I. Hewitson
Councillor G.M.R. Howe
Councillor Mrs. E. Maddison
Councillor B. Stephens
Councillor J. Robinson, J.P.
Councillor A. Smith
Councillor A. Warburton

Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Chairman:

Councillor J.E. Higgin

Vice Chairman:

Councillor P. Crathorne

Members:

Councillor W.M. Blenkinsopp
Councillor D. Bowman
Councillor J. Burton
Councillor Mrs. S. Haigh
Councillor Mrs. H.J. Hutchinson
Councillor Mrs. E.M. Paylor
Councillor K. Thompson
Councillor T. Ward
Councillor J. Wayman, J.P.
Councillor Mrs. E.M. Wood

Mrs. M. Thomson

(Co-opted Tenant Representative)

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