

Item 7

REPORT TO COUNCIL

27 FEBRUARY 2009

REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ANNUAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY REPORT 2008/09

SUMMARY

This report presents the Annual Scrutiny Report to Members for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 That the Annual Scrutiny Report be approved.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with Paragraph 6.03 (c) of Part 2 of the Council's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must report annually to Council detailing their work over the previous year, and in relation to future work programmes and working methods.

Due to implications of Local Government Review the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report focuses on the work undertaken by the Committees throughout 2008/09.

DETAIL

In January 2008, Council agreed a Transition Plan for the period leading to the establishment of a unitary council in County Durham in April 2009. This required Overview and Scrutiny Members to reconsider their work programmes for this period so that they could be carefully managed to ensure that the most important issues are considered within the limited time available. In addition, work undertaken by Committee's must compliment the Council's transition plan and make a positive contribution to the wider aims of the Council within the period leading to the establishment of a new Unitary Council in April 2009.

Work undertaken by Committees during 2008/09 is 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

No key decisions of Cabinet have been called-in during the past year. However, 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 26 attendances by Cabinet Members at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2008/09 to respond and provide information to the Committee.

Policy Development and Review

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

In previous years Overview and Scrutiny Committees have established review groups to undertake in-depth investigations into Council functions, policies or services. Within the transitional year, this would not be appropriate as recommendations following a Review would not have time to be implemented.

Overview & Scrutiny Members attended a workshop to consider options for undertaking scrutiny reviews within the transition year. Members supported undertaking a State of the Borough Review, which would look at quality of life topics and achievements within each of the Council's ambitions.

The aim of the Review was to highlight achievements made by the Council and its partners towards delivering of Quality of Life topics that contribute to achieving the Borough's ambition of a 'Healthy, Prosperous and Attractive Borough with Strong Communities.' The Review would also provide a benchmark for future assessment, highlight areas for improvement and where relevant, make recommendations to the new unitary council.

Four Review Groups were established to examine the following quality of life topics within each of the Council's ambitions.

Healthy Borough Review Group

The Review Group examined the Quality of Life topics, Public Health, Community Care and Leisure and Culture which contribute to '*a borough where people can lead healthy, active and fulfilling lives as part of vibrant and strong communities*'

Strong Communities Review Group

The Review Group examined the Quality of Life topics, Crime & Disorder, Community Cohesion and Housing that contribute to community where '*people can access the housing they want in attractive and safe neighbourhoods*'.

Prosperous Borough Review Group

The Review Group examined the Quality of Life topics, Employment & Economic Activity, Regeneration of Town Centres, Improvement of Community Assets – Local Improvement Programme and Learning & Skills that contribute to '*A borough where high quality businesses can prosper and where local people have the confidence and skills to access the jobs that the offer*'.

Attractive Borough Review Group

The Review Group examined the Quality of Life topics, Street Cleanliness and Waste, Open Spaces and Transport that contribute to a borough with '*A cleaner, greener, sustainable Environment and Improving design and environmental quality of towns and villages*'.

The four Review Group's gathered evidence and information from council officers, representatives from partner agencies, relevant policy and strategy documents and feedback from the 2008 LSP Annual Stakeholder event.

Following an in-depth study each Review Group presented their report to their respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees in November and December 2008. The Committees supported the findings and recommended that the reports be combined into a single 'State of the Borough' report to be considered by Cabinet.

The State of the Borough report was considered by Cabinet in January 2009. Cabinet approved the report and supported its recommendations. The report has been published and forwarded to Durham County Council and key partner agencies.

Monitoring of Previous Reviews

Overview and Scrutiny Committees have monitored Cabinet Action Plans detailing progress of implementing recommendations from previous Overview reviews.

Within the past year, Committees were satisfied that Review Group recommendations from the following Cabinet Action Plans have been completed and require no further monitoring.

- Affordable Housing
- Regeneration of Older Sector Private Housing
- Streetsafe
- Leisure Centre Concessionary Pricing Scheme
- Recycling
- The Council's Contribution to Reducing Economic Inactivity (Increasing Employability)
- Sickness Management
- Recruitment and Retention

Completion of recommendations within Review Group Action Plans have contributed to policy development, implemented enhanced services and demonstrated the positive role of Overview and Scrutiny.

Performance Management and Improvement

Overview and Scrutiny Committees play an important role in monitoring the Council's performance indicators. Performance reports containing indicators relating to their portfolios have been considered by Committees on a six monthly basis. Following feedback and comment from Members, the format of performance reports was revised during 2007. This led to the production of a well-structured document that has enabled Members to focus on key performance areas.

Following consideration of performance reports, Members raised concern with a number of performance indicators that were performing below target and requested that the relevant Cabinet Member and/or the Head of Service attend future meetings to discuss progress in achieving performance measures. Issues highlighted included:

- Council Tax Collection
- Participation in Leisure Centre activities
- Number of People Spectating or Participating in a Cultural Activity
- Satisfaction levels of and turn around times of re-let Council properties

- Housing Benefits
- Satisfaction of Building Control Service and Percentage of Building Control plans approved/responded to within three weeks
- Percentage of conservation areas in the local authority area with an up-to-date character appraisal

Scrutiny of External Organisations

The Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a special meeting to provide Members with the opportunity to debate and give their views on two NHS consultation exercises, 'A Big Conversation' and 'Seizing the Future'.

Representatives from County Durham & Darlington Foundation Trust and NHS Durham attended the meeting to give a presentation on both consultations and respond to Members questions. Following the meeting the Committee's response was sent to NHS County Durham and County Darlington Foundation Trust. In addition a copy was forwarded to Durham County Council's Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee for them to consider within their deliberations on these issues.

Consideration of Cabinet's Budget Proposals

All three Overview and Scrutiny Committees gave detailed consideration to Cabinet's budget proposals in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules. Each committee considered the budget proposals as it related to their portfolio areas.

Following detailed examination, Strategic Leadership and Prosperous & Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committees gave support to the Cabinet's initial budget proposals. The Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Committee made recommendations to the Cabinet to reconsider areas within their initial budget.

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 two district Councillors are co-opted to the County's Health Sub-Committee to represent their councils and, more importantly, local people.

The Committee has scrutinised various aspects of the following local NHS providers, NHS County Durham, County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and the North East Ambulance Service Trust.

In addition Members of the Committee have established a working group to provide a response to NHS County Durham's consultation 'Seizing the Future' and also participated within a joint health scrutiny committee to respond to the 'Momentum –Pathways to Healthcare' consultation.

The minutes of the Health Scrutiny Sub Committee are reported to the Healthy Borough with Strong Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee so that Members are kept

informed of work undertaken by the Committee and can contribute to the scrutiny of health through the Borough Council's representatives.

Financial Implications

None associated directly with this report.

Consultation

None associated directly with this report.

Contact Officer: Jonathan Slee
Principal Scrutiny Officer
Telephone No: (01388) 816166 ext. 4362
E-mail Address: jslee@sedgefield.gov.uk

Ward(s) Not Ward Specific

Background Papers

None

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Councils Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Councils S.151 Officer or his representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>