

Annual Scrutiny Report

2008/09



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Foreword

Welcome to the council's annual scrutiny report for 2008/09. This report is submitted to Council for consideration under the terms of its constitution and sets out a short summary of how we have fulfilled the overview and scrutiny role this year. I believe that the main purpose of scrutiny is about building public confidence and trust in local democracy. I hope that by investigating issues of local concern to local communities in Slough, enabling their voices to be heard, scrutiny can keep the focus on improving outcomes and making a difference.

In a tough year with resources stretched the council has continued to deliver excellent services against the odds. The current financial issues facing the council are always at the fore-front of our mind as is the commitment and dedication of the council officers who facilitate the progress of the town and I would like to take this opportunity to pass on our appreciation for their hard work over the past year. I am delighted also, that the council has recently regained its status as a three star authority following the 2008 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The new score is an improvement on the two star rating in 2007 and the Audit Commission found that the council is "improving adequately" and is "now much better placed to deliver improvements in future."

The scrutiny function is in fact, important both in terms of assessments such as CPA and more importantly in supporting overall council effectiveness and improvement. As we move into the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), the level of scrutiny and oversight will be even more critical for the year ahead. The key challenge for scrutiny will be how well we listen to our residents, engage with our partners, and scrutinise performance against the targets set by the government with our partners known as the Local Area Agreement.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the council is affected by the global financial crisis which will lead to difficult decisions in the near future, I hope that the decisions taken this year will ensure that the council can sustain the progress which continues to be made in improving the town which makes us all 'Proud to be Slough'. For scrutiny we will continue to question decisions that challenge how we are delivering against the priorities set out in the council's Strategic Plan and test our understanding of what our residents tell us; and that we develop work programmes that take account of both local and national issues as well as emerging matters outside of the planned programme.

In this last year we have seen the consolidation and development of the scrutiny process. It is important that we continuously review and make improvements to scrutiny so that council is confident that policies and decision-making undergo a robust examination.

In conclusion, I believe that our Overview and Scrutiny performance will go from strength to strength. Our procedures must develop and adapt to the changes taking place around us and I have every confidence in our ability to do this.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have been involved in scrutiny over the year; particularly councillors, co-opted members and officers, and I look forward to the challenges ahead.

I commend this report to the Council.

Cllr Grewal
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel



What is scrutiny?

The formal definition of scrutiny is given as a “close examination” or a “searching look”. In local government, it is about listening to the concerns of local people and to check how the council, its partners and other organisations are performing and where necessary seek improvement. The actual function of scrutiny has been part of local government since 2003, and is both a statutory power and duty for locally elected councillors to hold the cabinet to account, review policies and public services on behalf of our residents and promote public involvement

Holding the Cabinet to Account is carried out by

- Examining decisions that have been, or are about to be made.
- Evaluating policies, performance and progress.
- Ensuring that consultation, where necessary, has been carried out.
- Using the powers of call-in where decisions made, but not implemented, need further investigation.

Review of policies and public services

- Reviewing services, ensuring they represent value for money and developing policies for improving services.
- Contributing towards the priorities set out in the council's Strategic Plan.

Promoting public involvement by

- Ensuring they are consulted properly where change is being proposed or required.

- Considering those issues that are of concern and interest to the local community.
- Providing accessible information on the scrutiny process and activities.

The process involves locally elected councillors publicly checking the work of the council and other public bodies such as the Environment Agency or the local NHS Trust. It provides an open forum for issues to be debated fully. It brings transparency and can influence future decision making.

Overview and Scrutiny can be the most effective way for councillors to hold a mirror up to both the cabinet and all those who are responsible for the delivery of public services to fulfil the core responsibility of the council and ensure community wellbeing.

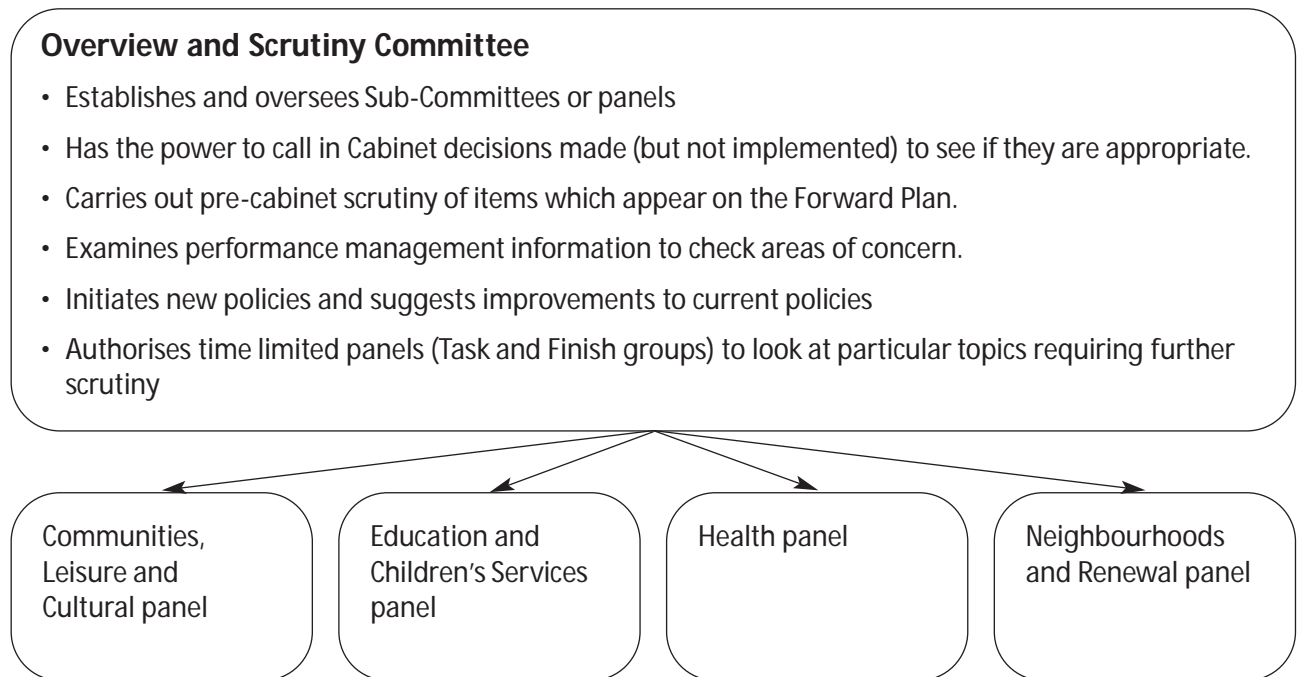
What happens in Slough?

In Slough, we have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four panels, each with their own specialist areas. These are:

- Community, Leisure and Environment
- Education and Children's services
- Health
- Neighbourhoods and Renewal

Scrutiny panels are made up of councillors from all political parties. Sometimes specialists are also asked to join to bring their own expertise. Council staff and outside bodies are called to give evidence or their opinions. If detailed work is necessary, task and finish groups are formed to carry out specific short-term projects. The panels aim to meet every four to six weeks although special meetings can be called at short notice.

Flowchart showing relationship between the Committee and it's panels



Task and Finish Groups

These are established as single issue investigations or reviews and are time limited. There are currently three reviews underway:

- i) the determinants of food choices within communities
- ii) the promotion and sponsorship of council events
- iii) the library service

Call ins

Where members of the council or public are concerned about decisions taken by the council, they can request the matter be 'called in' to be scrutinised. The following have been subject of call ins in this municipal year.

- Appropriation of land at Upton Court Park
- Closure of the Bar at the Haymill Centre
- Cross Border Working with Neighbouring Authorities
- Music and Dance in the Park
- Communications Strategy

Committee Membership

Councillor Grewal (Chair)
Councillor Basharat (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Coad
Councillor Davis
Councillor Dodds
Councillor Haines
Councillor Matloob
Councillor Munkley
Councillor Walsh

Overview and Scrutiny Committee key responsibilities:

- Overall policy and strategic direction issues including budgetary strategy
- Organisational development/Human Resources
- Performance Management
- Equalities issues
- Audit issues
- Corporate Communications
- IT and E-government Strategy
- Property and Assets Management Strategy.

The Chair's Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has undertaken many interesting and worthwhile investigations to improve the local environment for Slough's



communities. We continue to question the activities of both the Council and the work of our partners including the Police and the local NHS Trust. We make sure that residents concerns are listened to and that the way decisions are made is transparent and fair.

The chance to play an active role in the development of the 'Art at the Centre' and 'Heart of Slough' projects that will shape the future Slough both environmentally and aesthetically is both an honour and responsibility in which the members of this panel have been proud to be involved.

The protection of our parkland and community facilities has been at the forefront of our minds as we strive to ensure that Slough is a place where residents are proud to live and can enjoy their surroundings whilst meeting the needs of the expanding and diverse community.

The current financial issues facing the council are always at the forefront of our minds but we have aimed to balance this with the need to protect the long term development of the town to ensure that progress is sustainable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues on the Committee for their attendance, support and hard work.

Cllr Grewal
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Key examples of scrutiny undertaken by the committee

1. Appropriation of Land at Upton Court Park

Background

In 1999 Kelobridge Ltd purchased farmland that had no access to the highway for a substantial sum which in itself is not out of the ordinary. The company secured outline planning permission for the land but has yet to secure an access route to the local highway. Kelobridge Ltd made offers to the council to purchase an area of Upton Court Park and the council is in negotiations as the sale of the land in question would raise substantial capital in the current difficult financial climate.

Kelobridge also have two planning appeals being processed which offer alternative access routes to the development site but these will reduce the amount of properties which can be built on the site. Council officers consider the land is no longer required as part of the parkland as it is currently used as a track for access to an electricity substation, owl sanctuary and a small car park which, it is reported, is underused. The Cabinet decided to appropriate the land from parkland to planning in preparation for the potential sale on 10th March 2008 following submissions from council officers recommending this action.

Scrutiny

The matter was called in to scrutiny as incorrect information was provided at the time of the decision relating to the 'Green Belt' status of the land and three councillors indicated that they may have voted differently had they been furnished with the correct information. The councillors felt that the restrictive covenant was not fully investigated by council officers and councillors were also concerned that, should the sale of the area of Upton Court Park take place, this may set a precedent causing the park to suffer further development in future.

Outcome

As a result, the decision of 10th March 2008 was revoked and the consultation and decision making process was recommenced with all facts available for consideration. The decision to appropriate the land from parkland to planning was approved in September 2008.

The panel learned in its meeting of the 26th of February 2009, that the matter had been discussed at length at both formal and informal meetings and a number of briefing notes prepared for the then Cabinet, copies of which had been provided for the Committee at previous meetings.

Following further discussion, it was moved and seconded that, in the light of the fact that Officers had provided answers to all of the questions asked to the best of their ability in the light of the information available, no further purpose could be served by pursuing the matter further.

This has been a challenging issue but by bringing the issue to scrutiny, members were given the opportunity to debate the subject, raise questions and follow the audit trail of a complex issue.

2. Closure of Haymill Bar

Background

During the production of the Performance, Finance and Human Resources Monitoring Report 2008/09 it was revealed that, whilst the Haymill Centre was a useful community resource in relation to the sport, youth and community work, the bar was making an ongoing annual loss which was projected to be £43,000 this year.

Scrutiny

The committee recognised the positive benefit to the community that the facilities at the Haymill Centre provided and the potential value of the bar if successfully managed. However, the panel also considered the effects of continuing to fund the bar which was placing financial pressures on the council during a period of global financial difficulty. The committee reluctantly recommended the closure of the bar in view of the financial pressure it produced.

Outcomes

By bringing this issue to scrutiny, the committee was able to provide additional insight into what may or may not work; it can be proactive and contribute to understanding the use of resources and shift to earlier intervention thus ensuring that services provide value for money as well as make a positive difference to residents.

3. Art at the Centre

Background

Art at the Centre is bringing colourful artwork and innovative designs for lighting, seating and paving to revitalise Slough's High Street. The work started on the new High Street in late 2007 and is due to be completed in spring 2009. The initiative, which was launched in April 2004, combines engineering, planning, art and design to bring more life into Slough Town Centre and make it an appealing place for everyone.

A group of professional artists have been working with designers, Allen Scott Ltd in conjunction with Waterman Civils - to inject colour, style and uniqueness to the town centre. The council has been working with Slough residents to develop the art work and designs for the new look High Street.



The project is part of a regional scheme supported by the Arts Council South East. Slough is the only one of three towns in the Thames Valley to be involved; the other two are Reading and Bicester.

Scrutiny

The committee receives regular updates on the progress of the project giving the opportunity for any areas of concern to be raised. Residents had expressed concerns over a number of issues and the committee then raised the following:

- The quality of workmanship and the cleanliness of the granite paving
- Health and Safety breaches on the site.
- Re-location of the taxi rank and the impact on the amount of disabled parking spaces.
- Long term protection of the artwork

Outcome

The council officers assured the panel that the issues relating to maintenance of the granite were being addressed. The officers were also monitoring compliance with Health and Safety requirements, and found that the new layout had produced an overall increase in disabled parking spaces. Officers were considering declaring the site a 'protected zone' which would protect against any non-essential excavation for a period of five years but in the event of essential excavation, contractors would be obliged to reinstate any disturbed areas. Members acknowledged the improvement in the management of the scheme.

In its final meeting of the municipal year, the committee was given an update following a call-in. Both the project contractors and council staff were given the opportunity to address the committee. Members too had the opportunity to revisit some of the concerns that had been raised around safety, cleanliness and timely completion of the works. The committee agreed that there had been progress but due to the scale of the project and the number of issues, it was one that needed a post-implementation review after its completion. This would allow a thorough examination of the issues and draw out any lessons that could be learned for future projects of this type.

4. Thames Valley Police

Background

The Scrutiny committee invited the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police and Local Area Commander for Slough to report to the Committee outlining the Force's overall priorities for policing, in particular the Slough policing area, and the priorities for the town identified through the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs).

Scrutiny

It is essential that the provision of policing services within a community are delivered in a way that takes account of the views, perceptions and needs of the public. It is acknowledged that this is a time when partnership working and shared outcomes are a key requirement, and scrutiny has a vital role in understanding and challenging the police initiatives and activity in the local area.

The committee noted that, whilst there had been falls in certain types of recorded crime, there was concern over the increase in assaults at around 15% recorded in Slough, particularly, in the town centre area. Local residents across the town had prioritised anti-social behaviour in their areas as their primary concern rather than crime which was generally due to such behaviour affecting a larger number of residents than isolated incidents of crime.

The Thames Valley Police Authority had agreed to an increase in its budget for 2009/10 of 4.5%. This would enable a further 94 police officers plus support staff to be recruited to the force in the next year with an additional 12 in the Berkshire East area.

A new Home Office confidence target was to be introduced. This would be monitored on a quarterly basis through the British Crime Survey and related to "how well are the police and the local council tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in your area?" The Police had some concerns about the difficulty of meeting the proposed target.

The role of the Police Community Support Officers was discussed and clarity was sought as to their role and the community understanding of this. It was explained that individual police services could decide which responsibilities could be delegated to them and therefore there was not a nationally defined role. It was advised that a national review was currently underway. Members requested that the Chief Constable considers a publicity campaign to assist in clarifying the role for Thames Valley.

The issue of drugs in Slough and the police response to them was discussed. "Operation Chester" had targeted many of the major drug dealers in the town and taken them off the streets. Cannabis is still the most prevalent drug in the town, followed by heroin and cocaine. With regards to "Crack", this was not considered to be a major problem for Slough although there were occasional seizures.

There were no identified drug 'hotspots' in the town at present and there was no evidence to indicate that Slough was a 'drugs hub'. The view was that "Operation Chester" had been successful in reducing the amount of open drug dealing in the town and had had a positive impact overall.

Members asked many questions of the police regarding the recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic Officers and the policing priorities for the coming year.

Outcomes

Members of the Committee were able to put a number of questions to the Superintendent ranging from the effects of the "fear of crime" to issues such as how funding was allocated to Slough (as compared to its neighbours in Berkshire) given that there was a recognised deficit in population figures. Members expressed the view that a more frequent six monthly update from the police would be appropriate to ensure issues could be raised in a timely manner. The Chief Constable agreed that she would attend annually and the Local Area Commander would attend six monthly.

5. Heart of Slough

Background

A 29-acre site in the town centre has been identified as an area of redevelopment and regeneration. The site adjoins the railway and bus stations, as well as Thames Valley University and the town's retail area. The aim is to construct a set of inter-linking developments and transportation links that will put Slough on the map and enable a more pedestrianised and user friendly environment.

At present, a planning application has been submitted for the redevelopment and reconfiguration of the existing roundabout at the junction of Wellington Street with William Street, to create a crossroad layout at this junction. The existing pedestrian subway underneath Wellington Street will be removed and alterations to the pavements of Wellington Street, William Street and High Street West will enhance the landscaping within these areas.

In addition, outline planning permission is sought for the redevelopment of the four quadrant sites adjacent to the roundabout: Thames Valley University, Brunel Bus Station, Slough Public Library, Slough Day Centre and the Church of Our Lady Immaculate and St Ethelbert's to provide 1,598 new dwellings, 48,708sqm of office space, a 120 bed hotel, a new bus station, 6,085sqm of community floor space including a new library, retail, café and leisure facilities. Slough Borough

Council is working in partnership with Development Securities in order to secure the success of this project.

Scrutiny

The committee is regularly appraised of the progress of large projects such as this, with this one very much in the developmental stage. The involvement of the committee gives the opportunity to play a key role in developing Slough Town Centre into a more attractive and user friendly location.

Outcomes

Members expressed concern about the withdrawal of Berkley Homes from the purchase of the Thames Valley University site and were assured that, as housing development was not on the current timeframe, this was not a threat to the project.

Members also raised their concern that the partnership with Development Securities was not secured in writing but assurance was given that Development Securities' commitment was demonstrated by their large investment both financially and in time. First Buses' long term lease, due to expire in 2018, for use of the current bus station building was also discussed as the building is intended for demolition as part of the redevelopment. The council agreed to keep members informed of ongoing negotiations with First Buses regarding this.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for 2008/09

- Appointment of Scrutiny Panels, Allocation of Seats and Appointment of Members
- Broom and Poplar Houses Refurbishment
- Statement of Council Accounts 2007/08
- Financial, Performance and Human Resource Monitoring 2008/09
- Achievements of Resources Directorate - Capital Programme 2007/08 and Targets for 2008/09
- Review of Terms of Reference of Scrutiny Panels
- Temporary Staffing Contract
- Achievements of Green and Built Environment Directorate - Capital Programme 2007/08 and Targets for 2008/09



Artist's impression of the Heart of Slough Project

- Office Accommodation Strategy - New Headquarters Office Procurement
- Annual Attitude Survey
- Neighbourhood Shops Policy
- Decision to Appropriate land currently part of Upton Court Park
- Closure of Haymill Bar
- Consultation - Communities in Control:- Real People, Real Power: Improving Local Accountability
- Revenue Budget Strategy 2009/10 and beyond
- Shared Services for Transactional Back Office Functions
- CPA to CAA - Implications for Overview and Scrutiny
- Progress of Art at the Centre
- Progress of Heart of Slough
- Presentation by Chief Superintendant of Thames Valley Police
- Local Strategic Partnership

For more information on the above agenda items or to view meeting documentation please go to:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx>

Forward Plan Agenda items

The committee has raised the following items as potential areas for scrutiny in 2009/10.

- Heathrow Airport expansion and the impact on employment, transport and partnership working in Slough
- Office of National Statistics population figures for Slough
- Post project (implementation) review of Art at the Centre

Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel Report 2008/09

Panel Membership

Councillor Walsh (Chair)
Councillor Coad (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Davis
Councillor Grewal
Councillor Jenkins
Councillor Latif Khan
Councillor Long
Councillor Pabbi
Councillor Qureshi

Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel responsibilities:

- Careline Services
- Customer Service Centre
- Benefits/Council Tax
- Resident/Community Participation
- Voluntary Sector issues
- Leisure (libraries, sports, arts, community facilities, parks and open spaces)
- Community Cohesion/Community Celebration/Community Information
- Inclusion of Excluded Groups
- Agenda 21 Issues (Sustainable Development)
- All Environmental Services
- Environmental Health and Trading Standards
- Licensing Issues (Public Houses, Retail etc)
- West Wing
- Olympics

The Chair's Summary

Since being appointed Chair of the Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel I have had the pleasure of working with members and officers who are enthusiastic and committed to the scrutiny process. This has been a busy year and there have been many items on the agenda which will continue to impact on the community of Slough for many years to come.



Our involvement with the developments of the waste recycling programme in Slough has seen recycling increase hugely in the past year. The impact of this will not just benefit Slough residents but enables us to contribute to a problem which needs addressing globally. In addition to this the council is committed to a long term Carbon Management programme which will have equal importance for us and future generations to enjoy our planet. It has been a privilege and an honour for panel members to make a difference in areas of international importance and we look forward to monitoring Slough Borough Council's progress on these agendas in the coming years.

In addition the panel also monitors community events and leisure facilities which impact on the enjoyment of the community of Slough and raise the profile of the borough as a vibrant and enjoyable place to spend time. The Music and Dance in the Park 2008 event, whilst making a financial loss, was professionally organised, and delivered successfully. It did however, attract intense scrutiny due to the loss of anticipated income. As a result, the whole issue of promoting and handling events is being reviewed by a scrutiny working group, reporting to the panel in autumn 2009/10. The panel hopes that the council will take on board any lessons learned and continue to put Slough on the map as a venue for spirited and stimulating local events.

Cllr Walsh

Chair of the Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel

Key examples of scrutiny undertaken by the panel

1. Recycling

Background

The Head of Environmental Services was invited to report on the new policy to implement a weekly kerbside recycling and refuse collection scheme. The report also detailed changes to the bulky waste collection which would now be free of charge to all older persons and limited to two collections per year. It was requested that Members comment on the proposals and provide any suggestions for the publicity. It was reported that lessons had been learnt from the roll out of the black box scheme. It was noted that publicity would be targeted at all Slough residents. There would be an extensive scheme including lamp post banners which alternated between how recycling was changing and what could be recycled in Slough.

Scrutiny

This was a major council policy affecting Slough residents hence the matter coming before the panel. Members were concerned about the publicity being focussed in the town centre and asked what was being done to reach those who did not journey into the town centre. Officers noted that it was difficult to put banners up on lamp posts and whilst it was an expensive scheme, hopefully many people would see the banners whilst waiting at traffic lights or roundabouts. The panel recommended that bus stop posters and billboard advertising was used to highlight the council's recycling programme in areas outside the town centre.

Outcomes

The panel asked about the monetary pressure that the change to the recycling scheme had placed on the budget. It was noted that an additional £300,000 was required for the scheme, funding for this would be from Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) monies. The LABGI scheme is a financial incentive scheme to encourage economic growth by allowing local authorities to retain a share of increased Non Domestic Rate revenue. Authorities are free to spend LABGI revenues on their own local priorities.

Members also questioned the size of the bins. Those with smaller gardens or limited space would be given a smaller bin. Larger bins were intended for houses with multiple occupations. Residents could choose either a smaller or larger bin once the scheme was in operation. It was also intended to make red boxes available for homes that could not accommodate an additional wheelie bin.

Members were concerned about the large number of bins that would be on the road side each day. Members recommended that the green wheelie bin recycling collection should take place on an alternative day to the normal refuse and recycling collection to lessen the obstruction of too many bins on the pathways. Also the panel recommended that the council advertise the option for neighbours to share bins which would be both space and budget efficient.

2. Carbon Management

Background

A report was submitted outlining the intended approach to carbon management. The officer noted that in addition to developing the approach detailed in the report, a team, Community Agenda 21 Group would be set up to co-ordinate the voluntary sector and business perspective.



Slough's distinctive red recycling bins

The approach detailed in the report focused on the establishment of a Carbon Management Board, a strategic co-ordinating body to manage the reduction of carbon emissions across the Council's operations. The report emphasised that a framework for an approach to carbon reduction was provided by the draft carbon management mapping report from Atkins Consulting which contained suggested schemes and projects for consideration.

The Officer informed the panel that the Carbon Management Board would deliver an action plan, using the Atkins report for guidance and that this action plan would include both long and short term planning. The Officer further highlighted that the action taken by Slough Borough Council could be put into the context of the international commitments to reduce carbon output made by Central Government.

Scrutiny

The panel welcomed the cross-party agreement on the issue. In response the Officer stated that such commitment would be key to the success of the carbon management strategy as well as ensuring that the financial structures supporting the scheme are appropriate. Members recommended that the savings from the scheme be set aside to support the agenda.



Wind turbines - reducing carbon emissions

The panel also recommended that an opposition Member be nominated to the Board. A Member asked when the carbon management strategy would commence. The Carbon Management Board would be set up for December 2008 and report back in spring 2009.

Outcomes

The Panel recommended that officers periodically report on progress of the Carbon Management Board to the Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel and this was agreed.

3. Music and Dance in the Park

Background

The proposed issues relating to the Music and Dance in the Park event were called in to scrutiny as a financial loss had been made and Members felt there had not been adequate consultation in the choices relating to the event. A report was presented in response to a member call-in. The call-in questioned the music choices and level of preparation for the event, asked what lessons could be learnt from authorities involved in organising similar events and queried how the financial shortfall from the events would be recovered.

The report noted that acts chosen to perform at the event reflected several objectives including a desire to broaden appeal outside of Slough, as well as from within the Borough and the intent to complement rather than compete with the Slough Mela, which was scheduled to be held a fortnight before. Approximately half of those who had purchased tickets had come from outside Slough.

The report also highlighted that there had been an opportunity to take advantage of Jools Holland's tour schedule for 2008 which left out several nearby locations. The disappointing ticket sales could be seen within the context of a disappointing year for many events and were not seen to be the result of tight timescales however, levels of local sponsorship were thought to be affected.

It was widely acknowledged that the Music and Dance in the Park event was professionally organised and delivered successfully and to its planned expenditure budget. However, in order to improve the organisation of similar events in the future, areas of best practice would be explored.

The shortfall from the event would be made up from central services budgets and not from client facing services.

Scrutiny

Concern was raised by members regarding the promotional strategy for the event particularly outside of the borough. A copy of the media plan demonstrated that the event was advertised in various media including local newspapers in several different areas, a national newspaper and a number of free websites. The media plan also detailed the poster and flyer distribution for the event. Members recommended that greater advertising in London may improve ticket sales for future similar events. Concern was also raised that the commencement of advertising was too close to the event date to allow for appropriate exposure in increasing ticket sales and sponsorship.

Outcomes

Members recommended that their comments be addressed for future events and that increased awareness be utilised to increase private sector sponsorship. As a result of the call-in the panel agreed to undertake a review of event sponsorship. This is one example of how scrutiny can analyse where the money goes, what services cost, and whether this investment leads to better outcomes.

Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel’s Work Programme 2008/09

- Supporting People Strategy Update
- Recycling Scheme and Waste Minimisation - Options for Further Development
- Customer Service Centre Update
- People 1st (Slough) Update
- Member Call In - Music and Dance in the Park
- Community Facilities Strategy
- Neighbourhood Management
- Refocusing Food Safety Enforcement Priorities
- Smoke Free Enforcement Strategy
- Carbon Management
- Environment Agency Activity to Reduce Flooding in Slough

- Investigation Team Annual Report 2007/08 and Interim Report for Period 1 2008
- Slough Library Service - A vision for the Future
- Slough Community Leisure - Improvement and Development Proposals
- Revenue Budget Strategy 2009-10 and Future Years

For more information on the above agenda items or to view meeting documentation please go to:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails>.

Forward Plan Agenda items

The Committee has raised the following items as potential areas for scrutiny and invites the Panel for 2009/10 to discuss these:

- The impact of the current economic climate on Slough services eg Housing, Benefits and Debt Advice
- Carbon Management
- Slough Borough Council Customer Service Centre



Jools Holland - performer at Music and Dance in the Park

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel Report 2008/09

Panel Membership

Councillor Pantelic (Chair)
Councillor Dale-Gough (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bal
Councillor Basharat
Councillor A S Dhaliwal
Councillor Finn
Councillor Mann
Councillor Munkley
Councillor Qureshi

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel key responsibilities:

- All Education issues (including Adult Learning)
- Children's Social Services (Lead)
- Youth Services/Young People's Centres
- Youth Offending Team

The Chair's Summary

I have been privileged to chair the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2008/09 and I have been fortunate to be assisted by dedicated and committed members.



The areas of work this panel is responsible for addressing the needs of the young people of Slough and this can often be harrowing work. The much publicised and tragic case of 'Baby P' has brought home to all members, officers and professionals working with children the importance of partners and council departments working together to ensure the safety of children. The dedication of the professionals working in this field is evident and this panel wishes to thank them for their dedication to their role this year.

Education is also of paramount importance in building positive futures for the young people of Slough. The results of the recent Ofsted inspections for Slough Schools are recognition for the unwavering commitment of those in the teaching profession and support services to ensure that the young people of Slough enjoy their learning experiences and leave school with the best chance of success in their adult lives.

The professionals and volunteers who support the services provided by the Education and Children's Services Directorate are a credit to Slough Borough Council. I would like to extend the appreciation of the panel to all those people. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the members of this panel who have dedicated their time to ensure that staff are supported in their work and best value is achieved within difficult financial constraints.

*Cllr Pantelic
Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel*

Key examples of scrutiny undertaken by the panel

1. Corporate Parenting

Background

Members received training on the council's responsibilities to young people who are 'Looked After Children' (LAC). The council has a corporate responsibility to provide care, support, protection and opportunities for LACs to achieve their full potential and councillors have a responsibility to ensure the process is delivered effectively and monitored.

A report was also presented which provided an overview of key information in relation to Children and Families Services in Slough. The report provided members with a clear picture of Slough's performance as a corporate parent and detailed information about children in the authority's care.

Scrutiny

The issue of corporate parenting had been identified by the chair as a critical issue and one that required greater attention and awareness by scrutiny panel members. The panel raised a number of questions and asked how professionals could be prevented from becoming overly trusting of carers. It was reported that a new assessment process required children to be seen by the professional and that strong management structures were in place to support social workers in evidence based practice. Independent reviewing officers would report any child not seen and in Slough children were generally seen more often than the legal minimum.

The panel raised concerns that the demographics of Slough lent themselves to a higher number of children being cared for in 'private fostering' arrangements. It was explained that a child was considered to be in such an arrangement if they were in the care of someone for 28 continuous days and there were only a small number of close relatives who could care for children and not be considered as such. The authority needs to be aware of such circumstances to ensure adequate support is in place and members were asked to report any such situations they were aware of to the Children and Families Team.

Outcomes

In the light of the tragic and highly publicised case of 'Baby P' members requested information on whether there had ever been similar cases in Slough. It was reported that there had not but children had died and been injured in Slough. These cases included all accidental deaths. Slough had not experienced any cases which caused significant child protection concerns but monitoring and supervision arrangements were in place to minimise the risk of this occurring.

It was reported that each child at risk of significant harm had an individual child protection plan which reflected individual needs to keep the child safe with specific actions and time limitations.

The panel requested clarification of the term 'child in need' and it was explained that a child was 'in need' where they would be at significant risk if no intervention took place. Members recommended that a full definition as detailed in the Children Act 1989 and a copy of 'Corporate Parenting in Practice' was provided to all members to ensure the panel fulfilled their role in the protection of children and this was agreed.



2. Schools admissions

Background

The Head of School Services was invited to report to the Panel on primary and secondary admissions for September, 2008 and the review of admission arrangements for future years. It was noted that approximately 90% of applicants could be placed at their first preference primary school for 2008. All primary school pupils had a school place although some were not in their first preference school. Faith schools in Slough reserved 20% of places for pupils from other faiths. In this, it was noted that the local authority could only guide admissions as voluntary aided and foundation schools controlled their own admission arrangements.

Scrutiny

The panel learned that the increased number of secondary school applications was generally based on the preference of parents for Slough schools. The number of parents stating out of Borough schools as a preference had decreased in recent years. However the total number of applications for school places generally matched the total number of children from Slough. It was noted that not all children who passed the 11+ obtained a place in one of the Slough grammar schools.

Officers informed members that they were working with the grammar schools to try to amend their admissions policy to allow a preference for Slough pupils. It was noted that regardless of whether a child received a place at a grammar school every child at a school in the borough was receiving a good or outstanding standard of education according to Ofsted inspections carried out in the period.

A Member noted that on 'offer day' about 50 to 60 pupils had not received a secondary school place. Officers assured members that these would receive an offer before the new school term and the admissions team was working with a number of secondary schools to aid expansion of their published admissions number.

Outcomes

Members recommended that the results of the work with grammar schools admissions should be brought back to the scrutiny panel when completed.

It was recommended that officers also provide information on the number of children going to higher education from Slough grammar schools and non-selective schools and the council agreed to look into this.

3. Languages in schools

Background

With the changing nature of Slough's population the panel asked for information on how this affected community and modern foreign language teaching. Slough's composition as a local authority was very different to others in the South East and had been identified as a hub of good practice.

Scrutiny

A number of teaching assistants in Slough were bilingual and teaching assistants were actively recruited from among different communities. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service provided a team to work alongside schools to deliver support to teachers. The panel were informed that most primary schools had chosen to teach a modern European language. The local authority does not have the power to direct schools to teach a specific language although, Iqra school taught Arabic and Urdu and Khalsa school taught Punjabi.



Slough Grammar school had provided language support to some primary schools but these were also developing their own specialist expertise. Claycots Primary School had received an award for its Spanish teaching. Many secondary schools offered GCSE's in mother tongue languages. The local authority was working with schools to see where community languages could be developed. Officers informed the panel that the newly arrived Polish and Somali communities provided different challenges and opportunities.

The panel were advised that special evenings had been held to recruit teaching assistants from within these communities.

Outcomes

Members recommended that the council look at ways to improve the recruitment of qualified teachers who could also speak community languages. It was noted that teacher recruitment was challenging in Slough as there was competition from London boroughs with higher wages. It was acknowledged that the changing population in Slough would mean that different community languages would be more or less in demand at different times. The panel recommended that the progress of this work was reported back to the panel at a later stage to ensure the education provided continues to meet the needs of the whole community.

4. Under performing schools

Background

A report was produced relating to those ethnicity groups who were recognised as underachieving, comparing their achievements in Slough to the national data. In Key Stage (ages 5-7) Slough schools were exceeding national figures in nearly all areas. However, Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) was recognised as a problematic area throughout Slough. It was noted that recent improvements were entirely from non-selective secondary schools as the grammar schools regularly reported successes at 98 or 99%. Government grants for the next three years had been confirmed and the authority was undertaking identifying areas for change.

The Panel received a report which provided information on the outcomes of the latest Ofsted inspections of Slough schools from February 2008

to October 2008. Members were informed that all of the schools inspected during this period achieved an outcome of at least 'satisfactory' and several achieved 'good' or 'outstanding'. At present there were no schools in Slough who were deemed to be 'inadequate'.

Scrutiny

The Panel were drawn to concerns regarding the outcome of recent inspections whereby schools had been graded below expectations and the judgement by Ofsted appeared to be inaccurate. Members noted that the comments in the report did not seem to fit accurately with the outcomes. The local authority was currently awaiting the decision of the head teachers as to whether or not to challenge the ruling. An example was given of two Grammar Schools who had similar results and value added scores but one was graded 'outstanding' and the other 'good'.

Outcomes

Members recommended that the council look into what could be done to ensure that the standards at Montem Primary School and James Elliman Primary school were raised as these two schools had been ranked as 'satisfactory'. Officers informed members that Montem was actually a success story and had until recently been judged as inadequate. The local authority had taken over the management of the school from the governing body and addressed the



problems that the school suffered. The local authority has individual and detailed action plans for working with some schools to raise standards and would report back to the panel on their successes. The members asked that their congratulations be reported to the schools involved.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2008/09

- Corporate Parenting Briefing
- Adoption Service - Statement of Purpose and Adoption Activity
- Pupil Ethnicity and Standards
- Local Education Authority Governor Vacancies
- Development of Play in Slough
- Pathways to Employment including Apprenticeships
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Strategy and Action Plan
- Community Languages in Slough Schools
- Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board - Annual Safeguarding Report
- Corporate Parenting Briefing
- Revenue Budget 2009/10

- Annual Performance Assessment for 2008
- Parenting Support Strategy and Action Plan

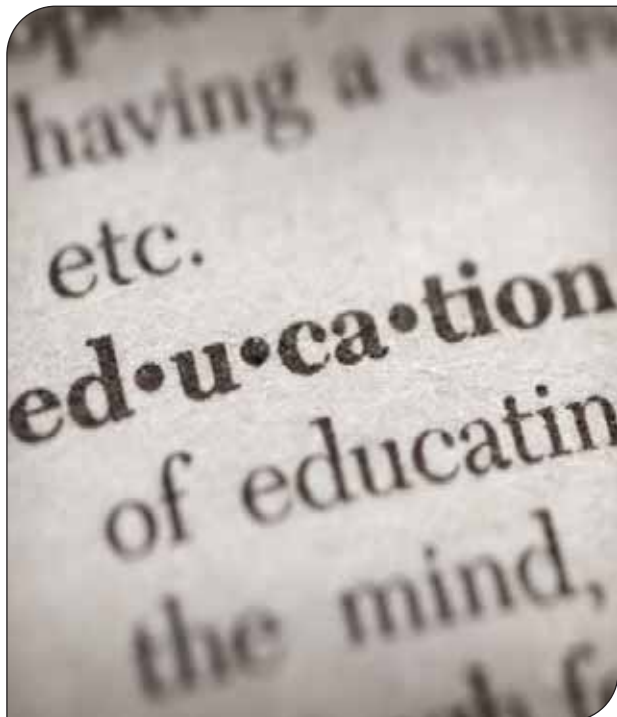
For more information on the above agenda items or to view meeting documentation please go to:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails>.

Forward Plan Agenda items

The Committee has raised the following items as potential areas for scrutiny and invites the Panel for 2009/10 to discuss these:

- Safeguarding young people
- Disappointing results at Key Stage 2 in Slough Schools
- Services to Children with Disabilities



Health Scrutiny Panel Report 2008/09

Panel Membership

Councillor A S Dhaliwal (Chair)
Councillor Plimmer (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Chohan
Councillor Cryer
Councillor Dhillon
Councillor Dodds
Councillor Matloob
Councillor Pantelic
Councillor Shine

Health Scrutiny Panel responsibilities include:

Discharging the functions of the Authority to review and report on matters relating to local health services as set out in Local Authority (Overview and Scrutiny Committees Health and Scrutiny Functions) Regulations 2002 and the following:

- Adult Social Services Community Care
- Parenting/Family Services
- Health Links/Partnerships
- Substance Misuse Strategy (with Neighbourhoods & Renewal Panel).

The Chair's Summary

I am delighted to present the annual report for the Health Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2008/09. As Chair I have had the pleasure of working alongside members who are dedicated to improving quality of life and the work that has been undertaken will hopefully lead to improvements in the health of the residents of Slough.

Councils currently have the power to investigate any issue which affects their local area or its inhabitants. Generally service providers external to the council only take part in scrutiny on a voluntary basis. The exception to this is the National Health Service, where NHS bodies have a legal duty to respond, therefore, it is essential that the Health Scrutiny panel use this power effectively and wisely.

There are many national initiatives aimed at preventing ill health by addressing issues including obesity and smoking which have been embraced at a local level by the council members, officers and the Berkshire East Primary Care Trust which are seeing positive results. With ongoing dedication we hope to see greater improvements in these areas.



The panel had submitted a funding bid to undertake a scrutiny review on the wider well-being issues impacting the health of communities, groups or sections of communities. The bid is for funding from the Improvement and Development Agency for up to £5,000 to understand the key determinants of food choices and dietary habits within communities.

In addition caring for the older residents of Slough has been high on the agenda following the implementation of the Care Standards Act 2000 which gives direction as to the accommodation within which older people are cared for on a residential basis and much is being undertaken in Slough to ensure that care provisions meet the required standard.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the board, the officers and the staff of the PCT and Health authorities for undertaking the work with such enthusiasm and commitment.

Cllr Dhaliwal
Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel

Key examples of scrutiny undertaken by the panel

1. Local Public Service Agreement Health Targets for Slough - Reducing Smoking and Obesity

Background

A presentation was given from Berkshire East Primary Care Trust on the progress and outcomes from two projects: cessation of smoking and reducing obesity.

The smoking cessation project was regarded as a success with 345 individuals having successfully given up smoking - a quit rate of 64%. As a result of the success the PCT had gained "reward funding".

The aim of the Reducing Obesity project had been to assist individuals to lose between 5% and 10% of their body weight in conjunction with "Slimming World". This scheme had had some success but more importantly lessons to be learned could be drawn from it for example more preparatory work with the GPs and more data analysis on participants who chose to leave the programme.



Scrutiny

The scrutiny panel were keen to understand how effective mainstream interventions were particularly as Slough is marked by broad disparities in health, with significant differences in life expectancy and susceptibility to obesity in children.

The health outcomes of particular communities in Slough also differs substantially

Outcomes

Members recommended that reliable data be collected on members of Black and Minority Ethnic communities participating in the slimming project, given that certain communities suffered disproportionately from diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Officers confirmed that future projects would aim to do more to access the harder to reach members of the community, including BME communities in the town

A member referred to a recent announcement by the Department of Health on free swimming for older adults and the under sixteen's and it was recommended that the PCT pursued this matter with the intention of putting this in place for Slough residents.

The panel recommended that information was gathered on the prevalence of smoking amongst various age groups in the town to inform future target groups. The PCT agreed to collate this data. It was further recommended that those who have quit smoking be monitored after a year as this would provide a truer picture of how successful the scheme had been.

2. Health Inequality Plan for Cardio-vascular disease prevention (PCT)

Background

Dr Angela Snowling presented on Vascular Disease Prevention Programme with an aim to increase life expectancy in the most deprived wards within 5 years. It was noted that ischaemic heart disease was the highest single cause of death for men and the third highest for women. Members noted the modifiable risk factors and priority patient groups. The 16 week programme included healthy diet, physical activity, alcohol harm reduction and smoking cessation and would be followed up with a one year assessment.

Scrutiny

One of the aims of the Health Panel was to understand the reasons for the lower life expectancy within Slough compared with its neighbours. Members were particularly keen to understand the impact of interventions within their ward.

Outcomes

Members recommended that the main meal provider in the household be targeted and offered healthy meal preparation education. The suggestion was noted and it was stated that obesity education was already being provided in schools.

Members noted concerns that Britwell Ward had the highest rates of obesity and recommended that alternative methods of communication needed to be considered as the current methods did not seem effective. The panel raised concern that there were a disproportionate number of fast food outlets in relation to recreational facilities and recommended that this was addressed in future work.

In response to the panel's request, Dr Snowling agreed to circulate details relating to the correlation between certain diseases and occupations.

3. Older People's Care Home Re-provision - Outcome of Option Appraisal and Consultation

Background

The Strategic Director, Community and Wellbeing, outlined a report setting out the outcome of the options appraisal and consultations on the re-provision proposals for residential and nursing care services for older people in Slough. Care home buildings were no longer fit for use. Wexham and Longcroft Homes had high maintenance costs and did not provide modern standards required to provide adequate care.

It was recognised that the increase in the demand for services could not be met by the current buildings. A new residential and nursing care facility was currently being built and was on target for completion in April 2009. The service had 120 beds providing general and specialist care and increased nursing provision than was currently available. The Director advised that the regulations

prohibited the Council from running nursing homes. Therefore, when a person required nursing care it was necessary to transfer them to nursing home accommodation supplied by the private or voluntary sector. Older people were now supported to live in their homes for longer. The needs of people over 85 years of age had increased and there was a growing need for people who required varying levels of dementia care. Newbeech was the only residential care home in Slough providing high dependency residential services. There was an average of 15 people waiting for nursing care at July, 2008 and there was an increasing demand for interim and intermediate care beds.

Scrutiny

The panel were asked to consider the report and the proposal on whether all the homes should be closed in the passage of time as they were replaced. It was suggested that there was a need to ensure that two homes closed by July 2009 and all residents would be moved to the dual residential home in stages. In the 18 months following July 2009 arrangements would be made to close the third home and Gurney House should be assessed to make sure that it provided a specialist residential service.



The panel queried Care Standards Act regulations in terms of room sizes and the availability of en-suite bathrooms and raised concerns that the rooms at Newbeech did not meet the required criteria. The officer advised that when the Care Standards Act came into force most of the rooms did not meet the standards required in terms of room sizes and the availability of en-suite bathrooms but there had been a slackening of the enforcement of these rules where there was an existing service at present but this could change in future.

A member queried the ongoing transition costs during the transfer of services and patients. The Director advised that the costing included a 13 week transition cost. The financial implications regarding the re-provision options were noted by the panel.

Outcome

The Panel recommended that all the homes should be closed as per the council's current proposals and that they are replaced gradually.

Health Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2008/09

- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Report
- Local Public Service Agreement Health Targets for Slough - Reducing Smoking and Obesity



- Feedback on 'Right Care, Right Place' Consultation
- Healthy Schools Report
- Transforming Adult Social Care
- Dentistry in Slough
- Older People's Care Home Re-provision - Outcome of Option Appraisal and Consultation
- Car Parking Charges at Upton Hospital
- Parking and Transport Issues at Wexham Park Hospital
- Dementia UK Report, Presentation Key Findings & Implications for Slough
- Diabetes Care - Current Service and Future Plans
- Annual Performance Assessment of Adult Social Care Services 2008
- Adult Social Care - Annual Complaint Report
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
- Revenue Budget Strategy 2009/10 and future years
- Task and Finish Group - Health Scrutiny on Well Being Issues
- New Mental Health Act Provisions
- Strategic Health Authority Health Inequality Plan for Cardio-vascular disease prevention (Primary Care Trust)
- Funding Bid for scrutiny review on Wider Well Being Issues impacting the Health of Communities or groups or sections of communities

For more information on the above agenda items or to view meeting documentation please go to:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails.asp?ID=140>

Forward Plan Agenda items

The Committee has raised the following items as potential areas for scrutiny and invites the Panel for 2009/10 to discuss these:

- Personalisation of elderly care
- Influences of food on behaviour and choices

Neighbourhoods And Renewal Scrutiny Panel Report 2008/09

Panel Membership

Councillor Pabbi (Chair)
 Councillor Haines (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Buchannan
 Councillor Coad
 Councillor Dale-Gough
 Councillor Davis
 Councillor Matloob
 Councillor Rasib
 Councillor Walsh

Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel - key responsibilities

- All Planning, Highways and Transportation Issues (including Regional Planning and Local Development Framework)
- Emergency Planning
- Community Safety Strategy
- All Housing issues including Neighbourhood Housing
- Tenant Services
- Economic Development

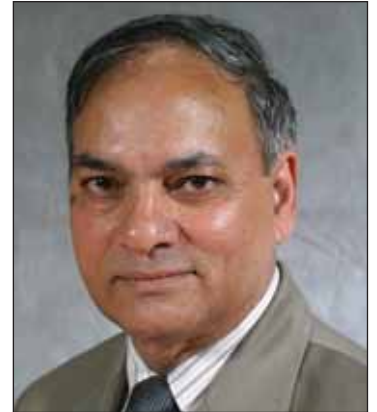
The Chair's Summary

It has been a busy year working with the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel and I am pleased to present this annual report.

I am pleased with the progress of the Local Transport Plan and I look forward to receiving responses to our recommendations and monitoring progress against these. I feel that more work is needed in these areas and recognise that this may present a challenge for the panel in the coming years as the 'Heart of Slough' project gains momentum.

I am equally pleased with the work we have done in relation to the development of the Neighbourhood Enforcement Teams. Their effort to improve the cleanliness of the borough will continue to provide challenges but their successes to date will no doubt continue. The panel will continue to support and guide them as they strive to improve the environment for the residents we serve.

The borough's excellent working relationships with our neighbouring councils are vital to support our efforts to meet the needs of all residents. As large scale future development plans in areas adjoining Slough are emerging, it is of paramount importance that we continue to develop these associations to protect and capitalise on these opportunities to ensure the residents of Slough are consulted, protected and benefit to full potential.



Finally, it has been an honour to chair the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel during the current year and I am extremely grateful to my fellow panel members, officers, and other individuals who have contributed to the work of the panel and shown a true commitment to improving services for the residents of Slough.

*Cllr Pabbi
 Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel*

Key examples of scrutiny undertaken by the panel

1. Cross Border Working with Neighbouring Authorities

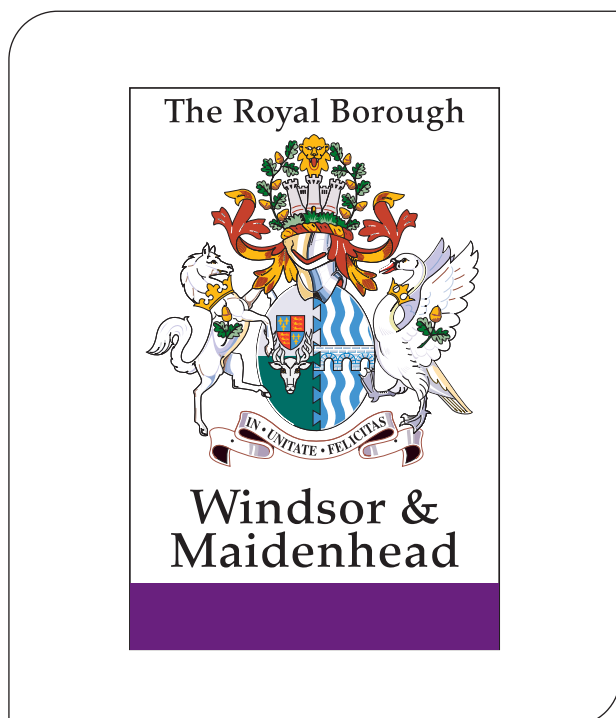
Background

This topic concerned the arrangements for cross-border working with Neighbouring Authorities in light of a recent successful planning application.

Scrutiny

A member call-in was submitted requesting scrutiny for current arrangements for cross-border co-operation between local authorities in respect of planning applications within one area that had a significant effect upon an adjoining Borough.

Concerns had arisen following a recent successful planning application by Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) in respect of gravel extraction from land to the east of Horton Road in Colnbrook. The effect this would have is an additional 800 Heavy Goods Vehicles per week using Horton Road and it was felt the very serious environmental impact had not been properly raised.



The panel were informed that the RBWM had consulted this authority under the “spheres of mutual interest” arrangements and Officers reported it to the Planning Committee. The Committee had objected to the proposals. A public inquiry was jointly funded and supported by RBWM and Slough and the consultants were also jointly funded. The spheres of mutual interest arrangements were well established and, in this case, had worked well with co-operation between the two Boroughs throughout the process although the final outcome was not what was desired.

It was acknowledged that it was not possible for the Panel to scrutinise the decision made by the Planning Committee however Officers were invited by members to make any suggestions to improve cross-border co-operation.

Outcomes

The panel recommended that the current arrangements for “spheres of mutual interest” planning applications were monitored over a three month period and if not felt adequate, a report be submitted detailing alternative methods of communication.

Members also recommended that arrangements be made for details of all planning applications received under the “spheres of mutual interest” arrangements to be included in the fortnightly list of applications circulated to all Members of the Council. This was agreed to be actioned with immediate effect. In addition, the panel recommended that officers submit a report looking at the current procedures for dealing with spheres of mutual interest applications with a view to involving Ward Councillors at an earlier stage.

The panel also expressed concern regarding the effect on Slough of large scale nearby plans e.g. further major proposals for growth at Heathrow and recommended that the methods and extent of public consultation be examined for all planning applications received under the “spheres of mutual interest”.

The member who had submitted the call-in hoped that lessons learned from this application could be utilised in respect of any such future cross-border applications.

2. Activities of Neighbourhood Enforcement Team

Background

A report was submitted to update Members on the council's enforcement activities that helped to deliver the cleaner and safer neighbourhood's agenda in Slough. The role of officers within the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team was outlined and their responsibilities explained. It was noted that the number of wardens had been increased from 10 to 14 in the current financial year so each ward has its own warden.

Scrutiny

The details of the main complaints received in 2007/2008 from the public were presented and Members were provided with details of enforcement action taken. It was highlighted that fly tipping and the incorrect disposal/storage of domestic and commercial waste were significant problems and hotspot areas were identified and patrolled. Notices had been erected to warn fly tippers they would be prosecuted if caught and where possible surveillance cameras were used.

Clarification was sought as to whether a Warden would personally remove litter. It was advised that, if the amount of litter was minimal, then this would be the case. Wardens would be required where possible to look through rubbish to establish evidence of the fly tipper and take photographic evidence. Members were reminded that Wardens had the power to serve fixed penalty notices.

Concern was also raised that residents were sometimes being refused the right to offload items at the Chalvey Refuse Site. It was explained that a policy was in place to prevent commercial businesses from using the site as this presented an enormous cost to the Council.

There was also concern that gardens where rubbish was not properly disposed of encouraged rat infestation and it was asked what measures were taken to enforce tidiness of such gardens. A leaflet had been produced explaining the risk of rat infestation. It was asked whether the surveillance cameras used were mobile and whether residents could request placing in certain locations. It was advised that cameras were left in place for several months as there was a cost for moving them.

The decision on location was often made considering feedback from the public.

Outcomes

The panel recommended that contact details for all wardens with designated neighbourhoods be circulated to members in order that the public be properly signposted when issues arose. The panel recommended that better and wider education, publication and distribution of the current information material be conducted in relation to the potential risk from rat infestation and how this could be avoided.

3. Local Transport Plan Progress Review

Background

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out the transport-related improvements planned for over a five-year period. The Transport Strategy Manager introduced his report updating members on progress of the second Local Transport Plan (LTP). He advised that the LTP had been assessed as 'good' by the Department for Transport and the transport and highways teams had made good progress towards achieving their targets.



Community Warden at Slough Borough Council

Key stakeholders including the Local Strategic Partnership and Members had been consulted on the report and a copy had been sent to all Members earlier in the year through the Members' Bulletin with a request for comments. It was noted that the progress report had been complimented by the Government Office for the South-East and its format was being cited as an example of good practice for other authorities.

Scrutiny

The LTP describes how the authority will meet the needs of the community in terms of better transport. For the scrutiny panel, it is important that this plan goes beyond simply increasing the extent of the road network, and shows also how we will make jobs, education, health and other services more accessible by a range of transport. These need to be balanced by the negative effects of transport such as congestion and the impact on the local climate agenda.

Members were concerned that the improvements made to the bus routes serving Slough Trading Estate had been made at the expense of the other services. Officers clarified that the new services were predominantly financially supported by Slough Estates for staff travel from Slough and Burnham stations.

Concern was also raised regarding late running buses. Members recommended that council officers revisit the lack of bus services serving Northborough Estate and Farnham Road areas with First Buses (service provider) and that First Buses undertake a survey to establish the scale of the problem of late buses and to examine what action could be taken to remedy this.

Several members referred to the recent failure of the traffic lights on the Brunel roundabout and commented that, whilst they were inoperative, traffic flows appeared to have improved. Officers acknowledged that, particularly at off-peak times, traffic flows appeared to have improved however, the use of traffic lights at peak times was essential to avoid accidents. The panel recommended that a study be undertaken into the possibility of the lights being switched off during off-peak periods.

Outcomes

As well as the individual issues raised, the panel recommended that a study be undertaken to look at a range of measures to encourage parents to use other methods of transport and to examine the possibility of a youth bus pass addressing the financial implications.

Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2008/09

- Thames Water- activity to reduce flooding in Slough
- Installation of Burglar Alarms in Council Housing Stock
- Combating Counterfeiting
- Doorstep Crime Initiatives
- People 1st Performance Management
- Activities of Neighbourhood Enforcement Team
- Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to South East Plan
- Member Call In - Cross Border Working
- Local Transport Plan Progress Review
- People 1st Rent Collection Performance
- Leaseholder Service Charge Collection and Overall Satisfaction
- Thames Water Attendance to Answer Members Questions



- Revenue Budget Strategy 2009-10 and Future Years
- New Permitted Development Rights for Household Development in respect of Paving Over Front Gardens to Domestic Properties

For more information on the above agenda items or to view meeting documentation please go to: <http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails.asp?ID=515>

Forward Plan Agenda items

The Committee has raised the following items as potential areas for scrutiny and invites the Panel for 2009/10 to discuss these:

- Engagement of Thames Valley Police to address crime and disorder issues.
- People 1st - Housing and Communal Areas
- Community Safety and Crime Prevention



Future development of scrutiny

Reporting on Scrutiny in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2008/09, the Audit Commission said "change is being supported by the implementation of a comprehensive officer and councillor development programme including a specific framework for improving the effectiveness of scrutiny." It adds "Committee agendas are more focused" and the "formation of the Improvement and Development Directorate now provides the capacity to drive corporate performance management and improve data quality arrangements across the Council and with partners".

As mentioned, one of the Commission's recommendations, suggests the level of "scrutiny and oversight" needs to improve further and that this will be "particularly critical for the year ahead". Scrutiny and the engagement of our partners will be even more important under Comprehensive Area Assessment from 1st April 2009. In seeking to make the Scrutiny process more effective and to ensure it continues to evolve we have proposed a number of developments over the coming 2009/10 Municipal Year.

Raising awareness

Using both internal and external media we aim to involve the wider community in the scrutiny process so those who live, work and learn in Slough can actively influence decision making within the council and partner services. The council's internet site will be updated to provide ongoing information to those who want to participate.

Developing good practice

We will continue to develop work plans that include priorities expressed in the Council's Forward Plan, as well as those issues that have a national or local importance. In addition a tracking process for the Committee and Panels' recommendations will be implemented so feedback can be given to members on the results of their participation.

There will also be work carried out to look at the best way to implement the scrutiny provisions in the Local Government Act 2007, such as petitions, councillor call for action and wider scrutiny of partners.

Member Development

A programme of leadership training is being developed for all members with particular skills around scrutiny for scrutiny members.

Officer Training

Slough Borough Council recognises that, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness within the scrutiny process, council officers need to be likewise supported. Training will be offered to those officers who are required to present reports to the Committee and Panels.

Further information

If you would like to find out more, the information below will guide you to organisations and websites where you will locate further information on scrutiny.

The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone. They work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services and promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/>

The Centre for Public Scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny was created to help those who look at the effectiveness of public services. They are an independent non profit making company set up originally by the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government, and incorporated as an independent organisation in 2003 by the Local Government Association, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Democratic Health Network of the Local Government Information Unit.

<http://www.cfps.org.uk/>

Slough Borough Council: Constitution

Slough Borough Council has agreed a constitution which sets out how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/mycouncil/articles/2227.aspx>

Slough Borough Council: Overview & Scrutiny

On the council website there is further information on how the scrutiny process works at a local level.

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/mycouncil/articles/7616.aspx>

Get involved

In Slough we actively seek to engage members of the public in the scrutiny process. Residents are welcome to suggest issues to be considered although the panels do not investigate individual complaints. If you would like to raise an issue to be considered contact your councillor or e-mail scrutiny@slough.gov.uk.

Want to come along?

Slough Borough Council recognises that the residents of Slough have a valuable contribution to make in developing services for the people. Slough Borough Council invites you to attend scrutiny meetings and dates are published on the Slough Borough Council website. For further information please go to <http://www.slough.gov.uk>

For further information please contact:

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Tel: 01753 875480



This document can be made available on audio tape, braille or in large print, and is also available on the website where it can easily be viewed in large print.