

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2009/10

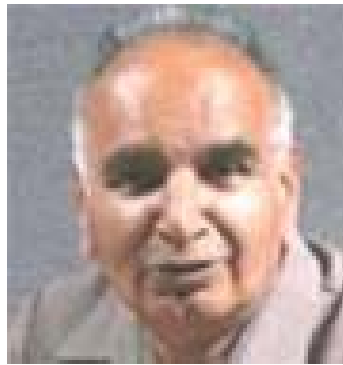


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Foreword

By Councillor Mewa Mann – Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



I am delighted to introduce the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2009/10. The report includes a summary of the work undertaken during the year by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (O&S) and each of its sub panels. Annual reports give an opportunity to understand the nature of the work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny and to assess its effectiveness.

As we take a selection of topics scrutinised during the year, it is important that we evaluate the outcomes from that scrutiny and identify the next steps. This will be a running theme throughout the report as we try to understand what impact or difference scrutiny has made.

During the year as Chairman, I have been keen to widen the scope of Scrutiny and encourage resident participation as it is essential that residents are able to raise issues for Scrutiny and have an opportunity to direct our work wherever possible. It is for this reason that I introduced a series of informal “Scrutiny Surgeries” across the borough where both Vice Chair Councillor Diana Coad and I were available for members of the public and councillors to raise issues of concern they wished to have scrutinised by the authority. A number of matters were brought before the surgeries, ranging from questions on crime and disorder to the use of outbuildings within Slough. Both subjects were considered before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Elected members have a primary duty towards their constituents, and I believe that the role of scrutiny is to provide effective challenge, ensure that there is transparency, and be a lead in best practices. As an example, this is the first year that we have published a rolling record of attendance records for the O&S Committee (Appendix 6). It is hoped that work continues in this way for the rest of the council meetings.

The focus of the work programme for both the Committee and panels has been to develop the programme throughout the year and respond to issues as they arose. The report provides details of the work of the individual panels. The report this year picks up on the different approaches that have been used to scrutinise topics:

- Regular and continuous scrutiny of performance indicators and inspection findings has helped members to develop a joined up more strategic perspective rather than concentrate on issues in isolation;
- Special meetings such as those on Safeguarding Children have allowed for more detailed scrutiny of an issue and partner performance; similarly special meetings on Stoke Road Cemetery allowed community involvement in developing a solution.
- The scrutiny of Traveller Incursions within Slough has encouraged this to be looked at in the wider context of social inclusion and developing appropriate policies for our Traveller community.
- Finally Health Scrutiny has continuously used its statutory powers to hold the PCT and Hospital Trusts to account and intervene early particularly over the recent changes proposed for Mental Care Services

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the councillors for their valuable contribution and dedication in serving on various panels throughout the year, especially the Chairs and Vice Chairs who have driven the work programme forward. Similarly, I am grateful to those councillors who have attended and contributed at scrutiny meetings throughout the year. I also want to thank all the Council officers for their time and support, our partners and residents who have taken part at meetings and contacted us throughout the year.

This report takes a look back at the accomplishments and challenges of the past year, but it also focuses on the year ahead by outlining the expectations and challenges for the future. For example, the report notes that there needs to be increased scrutiny and focus on our partners and rigorous performance monitoring.

I want to conclude by expressing my commitment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the coming year. It is my sincere hope that Scrutiny will make a difference to the lives of residents by securing better outcomes and that it will help to make Slough town a great place to live and be proud of.

I commend this Annual Scrutiny Report to the Council

“ ..Overview and Scrutiny and it is often seen as an umbrella term which covers a range of functions...”

Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny is an integral part of modern Government and was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. This Act set out major changes to the way Councils make decisions by implementing new political structures with two distinct roles, Executive and Overview & Scrutiny. An Executive or Cabinet as it is more commonly known is responsible for taking key decisions about services and proposes and implements policies. To balance these powers, Overview and Scrutiny is responsible for holding the Cabinet to account for its decisions and review policy.

What does it do?

There is no single definition of Overview and Scrutiny and it is often seen as an umbrella term which covers a range of functions. Whilst it does not have the power to take and implement decisions, it does have the potential to make a difference by raising awareness of emerging and important issues; it can challenge the council and its local partners to take action and influence them to deliver services which are sustainable. In this way help to make improvements for our communities and the well-being of our residents.

Call-ins

Where Members of the council or public are concerned about decisions taken by the council, they can request the matter to be “called in” to be scrutinised. More information on call-ins can be found on the Council’s website under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure rules:

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/documents/constitutionPart4.5overviewscrutiny.pdf>

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 and 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.

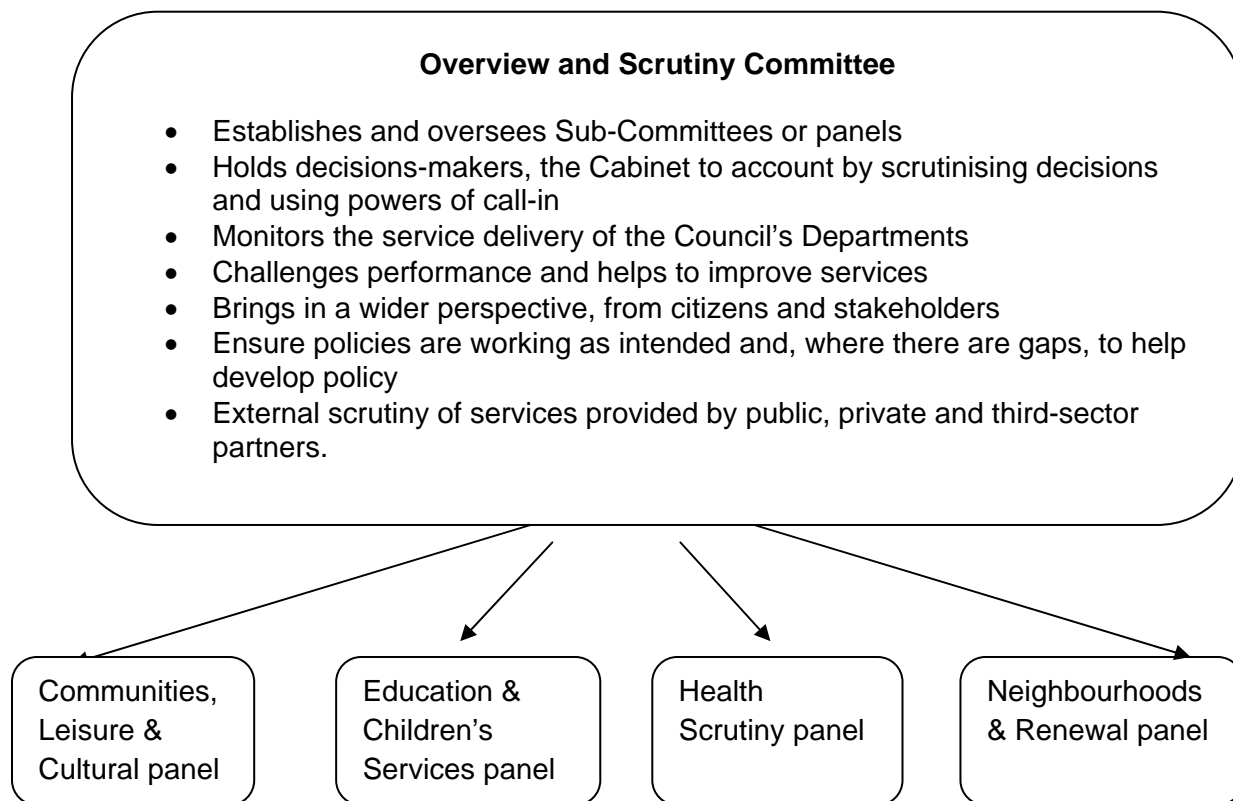
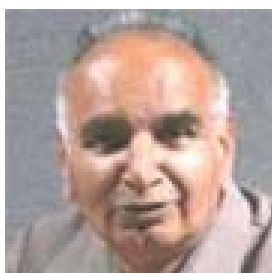


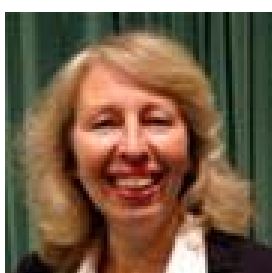
Figure 1 Flowchart showing relationship between the Committee and its panels

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the overarching committee and is responsible for appointing membership of the four Scrutiny Panels which fall under it.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Mewa Mann - Chair



Councillor Diana Coad – Vice Chair

Membership

Derek Cryer

Roger Davis

Arvind Dhaliwal

Rakesh Pabbi

James Walsh

Chair's summary

During the year the Committee covered a wide range of topics ranging from the proposals on Slough Town Football Club to the outcomes of the resident Place Survey. It also heard two Call-ins, one on the Council's IT systems and the second on the scrutiny of Child Protection services. (Section 1.4)

The Committee has followed in particular the challenges faced by Slough in relation to levels of crime and the impact of the economic climate. The results of the resident Place Survey, Comprehensive Area Assessment, and regular performance monitoring reports have allowed the Committee to track performance and look at these areas in more detail.

1.1 Crime and Disorder

Throughout the year the Committee has made use of a variety of sources to inform its work. Regular performance monitoring reports are received which provide the latest snapshot of the council and its partners' performance in relation to a number of performance indicators. In addition to performance reports, the Comprehensive Area Assessment, which assesses how well the council and key partner organisations are performing and the Place Survey, which reports on local resident opinion and perceptions, were key sources of information. Together they revealed that statistics on crime levels and confidence levels in crime solving have shown a worrying trend against a back-drop of inadequate resourcing levels for Slough's population. This provided essential information in advance of the Local Area Commander's visit in September 2009 and the Chief Constable in April 2010.

1.1.1 Performance monitoring

In September, the Committee noted that there had been an increase of 16% in the assault with less serious injury crime rate over the same period in the previous year, although the overall severity of the violence in Slough had decreased. The committee was presented with a range of measures that had been put in place to tackle this particular issue but members were very concerned that whilst the overall severity of violence recorded in Slough had been decreasing, there was still concern that the base figure for the town was above the national trend with the overall level of crime at a higher level than would be expected.

Several Members of the Committee referred to the ongoing problem of inadequate policing resources in Slough as compared to the position in other, densely populated areas and the problems that this was causing. The Chief Executive confirmed that recent figures demonstrated that the level of policing in Slough both in terms of per head of population and per crime was well below that of all of the metropolitan areas despite the fact that this town was similar in many ways to those areas. Members suggested that the matter should be raised at a senior level with the Thames Valley Police and the Chief Executive undertook to write to the Chief Constable outlining the Committee's concerns on the level of resourcing.

It was suggested that the views of the Committee on police resourcing were shared by the local force and that they were likely to welcome the support of the Committee in seeking additional police numbers or other resources for the Slough area. The view was expressed that Slough's particular problems, including the diversity and transient nature of its residents, the under-counting of its population and the "Heathrow effect" whereby the problems associated with the proximity to a large international airport including drugs, had not been fully taken into account by the Thames Valley Force. For these reasons, amongst others, Slough could not be

compared with other non-metropolitan areas around the country because of its particular needs.

1.1.2 Comprehensive Area Assessment

In September 2009, the Audit Commission was also invited to outline their initial judgement on the council's performance. The committee was advised that the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) examined how well councils were working together with other public bodies to meet the needs of the people they serve. The Audit Commission outlined its initial findings, drawing attention in particular to the possibility of a "red flag" in respect of the partnership's capacity to deliver improvement on crime and fear of crime.

Several Members expressed their extreme concern at this situation, given that, whilst Borough Councillors were democratically elected and accountable to local people, other members of the partnership were not, and it was not always within the ability of the Council to influence those partners sufficiently. In this particular instance, there was a possibility of a red flag at least in part because the Thames Valley Police, at a strategic level, had not adequately resourced policing in the town. The local population, therefore, would be unlikely to distinguish between the various partners and would be likely to blame the Borough Council for all poor performance in the town, whether or not it was directly responsible.

Members of the Committee added that it was essential that the assessment took fully into account the very difficult circumstances in Slough and sought assurances that the following issues were recognised:

- An ageing population,
- An increasing birth rate,
- A substantial under- counting of the local population which had been acknowledged at national level,
- The under-resourcing of the police force as compared to all other metropolitan areas in the country and
- Issues in respect of the proximity to Heathrow airport which gave rise to particular issues such as drugs.

1.1.3 Place Survey

The Place Survey is a statutory resident survey that is undertaken by every local authority in England and carried out on a two yearly basis. Members were informed that the survey reported on a set of national indicators that were common to all areas.

One of the findings was that whilst improvement in anti-social behaviour had been noted, it remained an area of high concern amongst Slough residents. It reported that the indicator on Safer Communities Perceptions of anti-social behaviour was 35.30% in 08/09, representing performance in the lowest quartile with Slough 6th (lowest) out of 6 Berkshire authorities. The South East Region average value was 16.2% whilst the England average value was 20.0%.

Members were concerned that the results of the Place Survey had been notified a year after the original survey and therefore, there was a very small window of opportunity to act on some of the findings before the next survey was due. Furthermore, that it was essential that results of the survey and pending action should be communicated to residents. Members were advised that a more detailed analysis of the survey would be undertaken to identify all the issues that needed to be addressed prior to the next survey and that once this was completed, a plan would be produced and presented to the Committee.

1.1.4 Visit by the Local Area Commander – Thames Valley Police

Superintendent Chris Shead, Slough's Local Area Commander attended the Committee meeting in October 2009 to answer Members' questions and present on policing issues in Slough.

Crime levels

Members were advised that overall, there had been a reduction in crime compared to the same period last year which equated to some 1,200 fewer victims. However, the level of crime in Slough was still high as compared with other similar policing areas. Furthermore, the Thames Valley force continued to suffer from a lack of resources with fewer officers per head of population and per crime than most similar authorities. Public confidence in the police was improving but there was still much work to be done.

Resources

Members sought clarification on the number of police officers in Slough and were advised that Slough had 240 officers and that a contingent of 4,200 officers covered the Thames Valley area. It was believed that the force was under-resourced and should be treated the same as a metropolitan area. Considerable lobbying continued to be undertaken but it was unlikely that there would be a change for the better in the short term. The Superintendent was asked whether any additional officers had been obtained for Slough as had been hoped by the Chief Constable when she had attended the Committee earlier in the year. He responded that two additional officers had been obtained for the Slough area.

Preventing Violent extremism

In response to how the police measured the effectiveness of its strategy to tackle violent extremism members were informed that the key to measuring effectiveness was for the police to evaluate the usefulness of the projects being undertaken. This was of necessity a long term issue and it was not always easy to find good methods of evaluating success. However, a programme to support vulnerable individuals was in place to help such individuals from being radicalised. It was also about building resilience within the various communities to identify potential problems and to work with partners wherever possible.

Anti-Social behaviour

There was concern at the level of anti-social behaviour in the Borough and a perception amongst the public that not enough was done by the authorities to tackle it. Reference was also made to the current government interest in anti-social behaviour arising particularly because of the recent tragic case of Fiona Pilkington and what action was taken in respect of the victimisation of disabled people who were often targeted by anti-social behaviour. Members were advised that such crimes were greatly under-reported and this was an area that required a more cohesive response locally. As an example of this, he did not believe that partnerships with local disability groups were as well established as they could be and he was addressing this.

1.1.5 Visit by Chief Constable 7th April



Figure 2 Sara Thornton - Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police addressing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Sara Thornton, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, accompanied by Superintendent Richard Humphrey, Local Area Commander (LAC) for Slough, made a presentation to the Committee outlining the strategy for Policing in Thames Valley 2010 – 11 and referring in particular to the Slough policing area. There was a clear focus on continuing to

improve public confidence and awareness of the police role in line with the Policing Pledge.

A Member queried what criteria were used to determine funding across authorities. The Chief Constable confirmed that the formula to determine funding related to the level of crime statistics and the funding was shared across Berkshire East including Slough and Windsor & Maidenhead. Further that two thirds of the funding was drawn from government grant and a third from the Thames Valley Police precept agreed locally. The Chief Constable agreed that the funding in Slough was the 8th lowest in terms of officers per head of population but not 8th lowest in terms of crime rate.

Further concern was shown by Members over the recent inspection rating by Her Majesty's Inspectorate Constabulary which assigned Thames Valley a 'poor' rating to detection rates. The Chief Constable confirmed that 3 out of 4 measures had been rated as 'fair' and only 1 as 'poor' and that in the previous year, no specific targets had been set with regard to detection, but this was now being focussed on in the targets for 2010 – 2011.

1.2 The Impact of the Economic climate on Slough town

The Committee considered the impact of the recession on the town very early on in the year with a presentation on the effect on the town including levels of unemployment and highlighting the work that the council and partners were undertaking to mitigate the worse effects. The Committee learned that there were particular concerns around long term unemployment and the increasing number of young people who were possibly moving into long term unemployment.

The Committee agreed that mitigating the effects of the recession in the short term was vital but that it was important to keep a close look at the future economy and the long term investment in innovation, skills and links with universities and colleges. Also that it was important that the council and its partners should be communicating a regular feature about the impact of the recession on the area, the steps the council and its partners were taking to respond to that impact and plans for the future.

An update was brought before the Committee in February of this year and members were keen to know the progress being made in establishing Credit Unions in the area given the role they can play in tackling financial inclusion in times of recession and low income areas.

1.3 Conclusions and Next Steps

Over the year the committee has taken account of a variety of performance measures which have helped to build a picture and identify key areas of concern. Public confidence levels around crime levels and anti-social behaviour are of concern as evidenced by the Place Survey, the CAA and talking with our partners. It is clear also that inadequate police resources and low detection rates as evidenced by recent inspection findings would also contribute to low public confidence levels.

The Thames Valley Police's strategy on tackling low detection rates will need further scrutiny in the new municipal year given that detection is a core policing activity that if weak, would also contribute to poor confidence levels. It is generally recognised that Slough Town is more comparable to a metropolitan area given its population by numbers and breakdown and therefore, this issue requires continued awareness and lobbying, particularly more-so if there are not enough resources to commit to detection of crime.

Scrutiny has a key role in ensuring that there are effective mechanisms in place to ensure that there is co-operation and accountability with our partners such as the Police. Moreover, that evidence and performance data is used to challenge the cabinet and partners. Further demonstration is also needed on how resident views and surveys (such as the Place Survey) are taken into account in planning solutions and confirmation that residents are also advised of how their views have been used.

In terms of the Economic climate the challenge for Scrutiny will be to ensure that the response to the economic climate evolves and responds to shifts in the local economic picture. That in scrutinising performance evidence is sought on the range of recession indicators from unemployment rates to housing repossessions as well as the impact of interventions. Further scrutiny will be needed on the progress of setting up credit unions.

Finally that early intervention concentrates not just on employability, but also in offering a range of skills training, debt advice to the newly unemployed and being mindful of the impact of the recession on mental health in individuals.

1.4 Call-ins

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received two call-ins.

- 1.4.1 The first was on the **Council's IT infrastructure and resilience** (8th June 2009) concerning the number of disruptions and loss of availability of IT over the past two years.

In his call-in Councillor Plimmer commented that "As the raft of ICT problems in the Council has not abated, with network failures and slow IT performance

becoming a regular occurrence, this Council needs to take a long hard look at ICT in the Council.

With intermittent IT problems, our officers' time and Council resources are wasted, making it very difficult for the Council to perform at a high level. I would specifically like to examine what we can do to resolve this issue”.

A report was therefore presented setting out options for addressing the situation, a preferred option being to engage a third party to host the Council's computer room. It was explained that the computer room was essentially an office space that had been assigned to accommodate computer equipment and, was inefficient and the floors could not be raised to enable proper air flow. Because of this, the room was costly and difficult to keep cool and was operating close to its maximum potential. Discussions had taken place with Sungard who had a long term record in providing such services and were competitively priced. However, this would require the removal of the service to a site in Docklands.

Whilst supporting the proposals to move the Council's computer facilities off site, there were significant concerns expressed at any proposal to move them out of the Slough area entirely. It was pointed out that a number of options had been looked at in the Slough area but none had been satisfactory to date. Members commented that, although the amount of employment which this would generate was relatively small, it would be far preferable to use a Slough-based business if at all possible.

Officers commented that they would continue to seek the best solution for the authority and that the package proposed by Sungard was the best available at the present time. However, it would continue to seek alternative solutions in Slough.

For more information please refer to the council's website on <http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=105&MIId=3173>

1.4.2 The second call-in was on **Child Protection Policies (15th October 2009).**

The Committee considered a call-in from Councillor Stokes seeking in-depth scrutiny of both the Borough Council and all relevant partners in respect of their child protection policies and practices. These partners included the three local health authorities (Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, The Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals Trust and the Berkshire Healthcare Trust), the Thames Valley Police, the local voluntary sector and the Probation Service, amongst others.

In his call-in Councillor Stokes stated that “ Child protection is of obvious importance to the people of Slough, especially of our children and the

Government, Local Government Association, Audit Commission, Ofsted have all emphasised the lack of adequate scrutiny in child protection policies and practices..”

A number of options were put to the committee and members of the Committee were unanimous in the view that this was an issue of the utmost importance and that Members should satisfy themselves that appropriate practices and procedures were in place in Slough. Following considerable debate, the Committee decided that it would be appropriate to pass the call-in to the Education & Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel to consider the issue.

For more information on the call-in please refer to the council’s website on:

[http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000105/M00003597/\\$\\$ADocPackPublic.pdf](http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000105/M00003597/$$ADocPackPublic.pdf)

Health Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Arvind Dhaliwal (Chair)



Councillor May Dodds (Vice Chair)

Membership

Councillors:

Balvinder Bains

Roger Davis

Balwinder S Dhillon

Patricia O'Connor

Responsibilities

This Panel has a monitoring role covering the following areas –

- Adult Social Services, Community Care, Parenting/Family Services
- Asylum Seekers/Refugees
- Substance Misuse Strategy with Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel
- Health Links/ Partnerships
- 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.

Chair's summary

This has been another busy year for the Health Scrutiny Panel. The scrutiny of health services is a statutory function as laid out in Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and allows the Health Scrutiny panels to review any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the area of its local authority. This is a duty that offers huge opportunities to influence the provision of health services and address health inequalities. I believe that the best use of these powers is where we scrutinise local health issues as well as those services provided or managed by the NHS.

Adult social care is currently undergoing major changes to transform the way services are designed and delivered and this year the panel was given a presentation on the recent "Putting People first paper" which sets out government objectives and aims over the next three years. The panel learned that there will be changes to the way care is funded and more choice over how care is arranged. There is a real opportunity for scrutiny to help shape future policy in this new field and ensure that the changes achieve improved outcomes for local people, families and communities; not forgetting that as people are given more choice and control, we ensure that we put in place proportionate measures to help safeguard those that are vulnerable.

Throughout the year, the committee has actively followed the progress of proposed changes over the future of local Mental Healthcare services and the serious implications of the financial decline of the Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. These concerns are even more relevant when we consider the recent revelations over the serious failings of Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust which illustrate how failing hospitals can deteriorate undetected despite passing inspections and achieving foundation status.

The panel received the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which is a comprehensive piece of work that identifies the main health trends within an area and determines the provision and commissioning of services; it is a key piece of evidence that the Health Panel should draw upon throughout the year.

The year has also seen the establishment of the Slough Local Involvement Networks (Links)*, which is a statutory body set up to assess health concerns and issues from a patient's perspective. Slough LINKs are regular attendees and contributors at the Health Scrutiny Panel.

Finally, the panel has also supported the Joint East Berks Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee's review into car parking arrangements at NHS establishments which is currently underway.

2.1 Changes to Mental Health Provision

A request was made to Berkshire Health Care NHS Foundation Trust, to attend the Health Scrutiny Panel after Members had heard that a number of changes were being proposed relating to Mental Healthcare services for Slough residents; one of which was the transfer of inpatient care from Slough to Prospect Park Hospital in Reading and the suspension of plans to provide for new mental health services at Upton Park Hospital in Slough.



“... the Trust had given an assurance that these services would remain in Slough..”

Members expressed serious concern with regard to these proposals, stating that mental healthcare required a significant amount of support from family and friends, which in turn required a service that was easily accessible. Re-locating the service more than thirty miles away could be extremely disruptive for both the patient and their carers.

Representatives from Berkshire Healthcare attended the Health Panel on the 9th of February 2010 to discuss the proposals and the background that had led to those options.

The Panel was advised that although the NHS had experienced a period of unprecedented growth in the past few years, the recent economic recession and the future impact on public finances would have a significant impact on future funding within the NHS. In September 2009, the Next Generation Care Programme (NGC) was established by the Berkshire Health Care NHS Trust to help transform the cost and quality of services.

The Panel was informed that in the year 2010/11 the Trust would have to find cost efficiency of approximately £3m and between £9m and £12m in the year 2012/13.

The Panel noted that by the end of February 2010 proposals to cover the 2010/11 financial gap would be completed and presented to the Trust Board for approval. The options and broad direction for later years would also be reviewed at this time. By the end of June 2010 a document and strategy for public consultation on the options

would be produced and approved by the Trust Board, and public consultation on the chosen options would take place between 1st July and 30th September, 2010.

2.1.1 Scrutiny

Members sought clarification over which proposals had been considered by the Trust. The panel members were advised that at present there were no proposals and that the Trust was only at the early discussion stage. Once the process had progressed the Trust would be in a position to bring ideas to the Panel for comment.

Despite this assurance, members raised concerns about the possibility of Mental Health services being moved to Prospect Park Hospital, in Reading. This point was considered to be significant for a number of reasons not least because 18 months ago, extensive consultation, Right Care Right Place had taken place which concluded that it was important that services would remain local. In response to whether this commitment would be honoured the panel was advised that if there was any deviation from that commitment then the Trust would be required to carry out further consultation and the public would decide on the right course of action to be taken.

The Panel was advised that approximately 5000 patients were looked after in the Slough area and they were visited in their own homes or for example in community buildings. However, there had been discussion related to the future provision for the 27 inpatient beds in Slough and whether these would remain or possibly be moved to Prospect Park Hospital in Reading. All other mental health service provisions would remain unchanged.

Consultation

Members were concerned about the consultation process and asked whether the Trust would consult with all groups including GPs, patients, emergency services. They were advised that consultation would be carried out in as wide a way as possible and there was an extensive time slot available to undergo the various stages of the consultation. There had already been some consultation with various parties. It was highlighted that at this stage ideas were being tested to obtain views and it was emphasised that no decisions had been made yet.

Cost

In response to Member questions, the panel was made aware that the PCT had set a percentage savings target of between 11-13%, equating to £13m but was yet to be finalised.

Members were interested to know whether any of the proposals impacted negatively on the unit cost for the Berkshire East PCT and whether for example there would be an impact on the unit cost of an outpatient bed. The Panel was advised that it was

not possible to say at present what the unit cost savings would be. This would be considered when assessing the financial implications.

Impact on Slough

The Trust upheld that the quality of services was pivotal to provision and the Trust's contract was driven by quality. Members were interested to know whether the people of Slough would be more adversely affected than the people of Reading were these proposals to go ahead. It was accepted that the impact on Slough would be felt more widely but stated that in the current economic situation all options would need to be considered. It was also important to assess whether it was viably economic to run a hospital in Reading at less than capacity.

Members questioned whether there would be transport provided if mental health bed provision was moved to Reading from Slough and they were advised that it would be necessary to cost in a transport solution were the bed provision to be moved to Reading. They were also advised that in the last eight weeks every visitor to mental health services had been asked for information relating to the way in which they had arrived at the hospital. This information would be used to assess transport needs if required. The outpatient service would remain in Slough.

2.2 Conclusions and Next Steps

In the main, as a result of scrutiny, the panel put in place a number of early interventions to secure better understanding of all the options. In particular members wanted to be confident that a robust consultation process was put in place and ensure that the consultation was not shaped in such a way as to meet the preferred solution.

The Panel registered their serious concerns regarding the possible relocation of mental health service bed provision being moved to Prospect Park and placed on record its view that the provision for Mental Health Service beds be retained in Slough and not moved to Prospect Park Hospital, Reading.

The Chair requested that a member of the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust return to the panel to give more detailed information on the Option Appraisals for Mental Health Services in Slough.

The Chair expressed the view that the cheapest options may not always be the best options. Moving mental health inpatient care to approximately 25 miles away, might be cheaper in monetary terms but the long term cost to carers, emergency services, the health economy of Slough as well as patient treatment could well be higher. The Chair added that local health bodies such as the Primary Care Trust who purchase healthcare services on behalf of their patients have a responsibility to ensure that the service and they purchase is of the highest quality.

The panel was due to hear from Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust on the 22nd of March but representatives were unable to attend. The meeting has been scheduled for June 22nd. In the meantime, members have put together questions to be submitted in advance of the meeting and ahead of the Trust's consultation. The focus of the questions will be on:

- How the Trust will assess the impact of various options upon users of the service
- How will quality of the service be evidenced
- What options for travel arrangements will be costed
- Who will be consulted and what questions will be asked

2.3 Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospital Trust Financial Position

Following the use of intervention powers on the 14th of October by Monitor, the independent regulator of NHS foundation trusts, the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel asked for an urgent update on the situation at the next Health Scrutiny panel on the 26th of October 2009.

The Panel learned that Monitor had used its intervention powers to appoint with immediate effect an Interim Chair at Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS foundation Trust, as a result of the Trust' rapid decline in financial and operational performance.

With regard to the financial situation, it became clear earlier this year that there was a total shortfall in the budget of some £20m which required savings of £10m this year and a similar amount next year. As this equated to some 10% of the Trust's turnover, such savings presented a real challenge.

There were a number of reasons for the shortfall and also measures that were being put together to address the situation. Members asked that the Trust returns with their Turnaround plan in March 2010.

2.3.1 Scrutiny

There was concern that the uncertain nature of the Trust's finances had not been picked up much earlier. It was confirmed that a certain amount of complacency had set in as well as a high turnover of senior staff and unplanned for expenditure.

There was some concern that doctors were not already prescribing generic drugs wherever possible which would greatly reduce costs without compromising safety.

Members cautioned against the loss of too many administrative staff if this impacted on patients in any way. It was confirmed that the Trust was fully aware of this and was undertaking benchmarking against other hospitals to ensure that any job reductions were sustainable and did not cause undue problems.

Members noted the suspension of the current development programme at the Hospital and referred to the state of certain of the wards, seeking an assurance that improvements would be made wherever possible.

The Panel also requested that the report pick up on the issue of patients whose appointments were repeatedly cancelled as this was a major indicator that patient safety and well-being were being put at risk.

Members noted the Turnaround plan presented to them in March and made reference to the impact it would have on number of beds, appointments and staff cuts. Members cautioned against making cuts to the service and staff numbers in pursuit of targets and cost cutting. Members sought clarification on whether the Trust was one of two in the country classed as a “serious risk” with a one out of five rating for both governance and finance.

2.4 Conclusions and next steps

Looking ahead the challenge for scrutiny will be to keep a watching brief on the progress of the Turnaround plan and draw upon how the Trust performs in the next annual assessments by the Care Quality Commission and Monitor. The Chair of the panel stressed that the number one priority for every NHS organisation must be on providing excellent care for patients and achieving the best possible outcomes from treatment, ensuring that financial planning is not at a cost to quality. Financial pressures and the pursuit of government-imposed targets must not distract management away from that focus.

2.5 Joint Strategic Needs Analysis

Asma Nisa, Consultant in Public Health, Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, outlined a report and presentation to inform Members of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and informed Members of the policy content. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) places a duty on local authorities and Primary Care Trusts to undertake a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA is a process that identifies the current and future health and wellbeing needs of a local population, informing priorities and targets and obtaining the best services that will improve and reduce health inequalities.

As scrutiny members it is important for to ensure that the JSNA is central to all strategic planning and is routinely used to inform the buying in of services to meet the needs of our population.

In evaluating the JSNA, scrutiny members found that the health of people in Slough showed a mixed picture and some indicators such as those for diabetes were worse than the England average. Within Slough there were many inequalities including the fact that the life expectancy for men living in the less deprived areas was six years higher than for those living in the deprived areas. Indicators of child health including child poverty, physical activity in children, and tooth decay were worse than the England average. There was a high incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) and a high prevalence of HIV was also identified. The prevalence of HIV was at the highest rate in the south-east apart from Brighton and it was recognised that there was a link between HIV and TB because immune compromised individuals were more susceptible to TB.

2.5.1 Scrutiny of Tuberculosis

Members raised the following issues:

Education

Members were particularly concerned about the prevalence of TB and HIV and asked whether the population was being educated about these issues. They were advised that a multi-agency working group had been formed to address the TB issue and there would be an action plan and a link to consider the problems relating to HIV.

Houses in multiple occupation

Members raised the issue of the number of houses in multiple occupation in Slough and overcrowding in homes was raised, in particular the issue of people living in close proximity to each other, thereby increasing the risk of the transfer of TB. Further whether the messages regarding such dangers were being adequately conveyed. It was suggested that a good communication strategy was needed which targeted various religious organisations, mosques and temples as well as households. It was agreed that this should be reflected in their action plan.

Investment

A Member commented that in Hackney, the early diagnosis of TB was supported by the use of portable x-ray units and asked whether a similar scheme could be made available in the Berkshire East area. In response members were advised that both Hackney and Tower Hamlets had a well resourced team dedicated to this issue. A lot of investment had been made in the East London area and it was notable that the same level of funding was not available, here in East Berkshire. It was felt that the PCT should raise its game in this area and that more funds should be made available to address this worrying trend.

Migration issues

There were concerns about how migrants could unknowingly be at risk themselves and to others by carrying infectious illnesses. Further, that they may not necessarily register with a doctor's surgery. The Panel were advised that there was a 'New Entrants' nurse based at Upton Park and individuals were referred here from Heathrow Airport. Those individuals who presented themselves were screened for TB but it was accepted that work was needed to target very hard to reach groups.

The Panel was informed that there had been 40 hospital admissions for TB in the Berkshire East area in the last year. The current identified rate for HIV in Slough was 3.75 cases for each 1,000 members of the population.

2.6 Conclusions and next steps

As a result of scrutinising the JSNA, members concluded that there were a number of priorities that could be drawn for future scrutiny work plans and it was decided that further scrutiny needs to follow the action plan for TB and come before the panel. Further that these priorities are identified in regular performance data and reflected in strategies such as the Local Area Agreement and the Sustainable Community strategy.

The understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of the population involves intelligence from stakeholders and local communities. Therefore where services might be changed such as changes to mental health care provision, scrutiny needs to ensure that the community perspective is included.

Given the significant increase in older people there would be an increase in pressure on health and social care services and carers and other areas such as mental health problems scrutiny has a role in understanding the knock on effect of shifts in demography and the associated impact.

Further scrutiny is required to ensure that targeted interventions improve the outcomes for younger people. The Slough JSNA outcomes identified higher birth rates and a younger population, and child wellbeing indicators (with the exception of education) in the bottom 25% nationally.

It is known that the poorest members of our community are often more likely to suffer from poor general health. This is borne out by findings that the Chalvey Ward has the highest rate of deprivation and mortality. Health scrutiny needs to use evidence such as this and the JSNA to challenge local health inequalities to ensure fair and equal access to quality health services for everyone in the borough and to ensure that partners work together to meet the greatest health needs.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Patricia O'Connor - Chair



Councillor Peter Dale-Gough –Vice Chair

Membership

Councillors:

Balvinder Bains

Roger Davis

May Dodds

Mohammed Rasib

Roy Davey (Oxford Diocese), Pat Parker (Diocese of Northampton)

Sandy Hopkinson (Primary School Representative) and

Charlie McGeachie (Head Teacher)

Responsibilities

This panel has a monitoring role with a portfolio overseeing the following areas –

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

Chair's Summary

This has been an interesting and challenging year for this panel. Our panel is committed to ensuring that mechanisms are in place to improve outcomes for children and young people in Slough. As well as the councillors on the panel we have co-opted members representing education providers and faith groups giving the panel overall a wide range of experience and expertise with which to hold decision makers to account and improve services for children and young people.

One of the challenges for the panel has been to balance its commitments in respect of receiving statutory reports and the need to undertake more targeted scrutiny of key issues. The panel tackled a broad range of topics within its Work Programme ranging from Looking at Slough's Fostering Service, Development of Play Areas in Slough and Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

The Panel decided this year to strengthen its scrutiny of children's safeguarding given that in recent times public confidence in safeguarding practice has been understandably low. Also the Panel had received a Call-in which supported setting up a Task and Finish group to carry out in- depth scrutiny of our Child protection procedures and partners. The Panel recommended that it was important firstly to explore the context of children's safeguarding arrangements locally and arranged two special meetings to focus solely on safeguarding of children.

For the first meeting we invited the Independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to update us on the work of the board over the past year. We received evidence of latest developments and partnership arrangements but considered that further scrutiny of individual partners is essential. Therefore a second special meeting was arranged to look specifically at the role of Health Partners in safeguarding of children.

In terms of Education, the panel is keen to ensure that continuous improvements in educational attainment are being achieved across the board. Key Stage 2 results are an area of concern and the panel has been closely following the progress of the actions being taken to address this issue. The panel welcomes the extensive research and analysis in this area and will continue to monitor progress in the new municipal year.

The number of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is of concern and reducing those numbers is a priority for Slough. The panel was given an update on the situation to date and the measures being taken to improve this indicator.

3.1 Safeguarding in Slough

Safeguarding children and improving their welfare is one of the key statutory responsibilities vested in local authorities. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is a statutory body and as such has the lead responsibility for ensuring that the welfare of all children is safeguarded and more specifically for ensuring children are actively protected from harm. Therefore it was decided that the first special meeting would be held on the work of the LSCB.

3.1.1 Special meeting – The work of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

The Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) gave a presentation to the Panel which included information on the different partners who were members of the Board, the work carried out by the Board and the statutory responsibilities. A number of issues were raised during the presentation which fell into three main areas of Partnership, Quality & Performance and Practice.

Partnership

Here members of the panel were keen to find out more about the working relationship between the individual partners, how effective the LSCB was in holding individual agencies to account and whether the relationship between the LSCB and the Children's Trust was clear and working effectively to improve outcomes for children.

Communication between Partner Agencies, the Children's Trust (CT) and the LSCB

It was felt that there was good communication between the CT and the LSCB. The Independent Chair of the LSCB also sat as a Member on the CT which improved communication. There was a Berkshire wide LSCB Chairs meeting to allow LSCBs to share information and the Independent Chair was confident that there was good communication between partners. It was reported that the LSCB was positive about the significant learning outcomes to be gained by all partners from each other and was confident that these were fed back efficiently by LSCB Members to the partner agencies.

LSCB Membership

The LSCB considered that they had sufficient access to senior officers in partner agencies and that the representation on the LSCB was in a position to report back on the work of the LSCB to their own organisations. Members of the LSCB were named individuals or positions in order to ensure accountability and that those people had a full understanding of the responsibilities of the organisation they belonged to. The Panel was advised that each LSCB member had to hold their

organisation to account and report back to their organisations as the voice of the LSCB.

Relationships between the LSCB and Partners

Members asked whether there was a possibility of the LSCB implementing sanctions on partners who were not fulfilling their safeguarding requirements sufficiently. Members were advised that the LSCB did not have authority over other agencies as they were independent and had their own procedures and governance arrangements in place. However, the LSCB requested reports on work carried out by partners. Prior to the establishment of the LSCB there was minimal overview of partner agencies.

It was noted that Section 11 audits were carried out to find out how statutory partners were functioning and 90% partners reported back into the LSCB on any action points. (Section 11 of the Children Act places a statutory duty that requires key organisations such as Police or Probation Service to carry out existing functions in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children).

Monitoring of Partner Agencies

The LSCB monitored and checked performance of agencies but it was the role of the delivery agencies themselves to instigate improvements. Organisations on the LSCB had a statutory requirement to deliver against the Safeguarding agenda and most key organisations were considered to have met these requirements. A Member was concerned that further reassurance could not be given due to the fact that some organisations with high profile failings had received recent good inspections. The Chair of the LSCB advised that the LSCB was a statutory body and that attendance and participation was entirely mandatory and was taken very seriously across the board. Members undertook their role with due diligence to the importance of the safeguarding agenda.

The Board Manager was asked about the accountability of smaller groups represented on the Board. The Manager advised that she was not aware of any groups that were not performing adequately. However it was noted that the representation from the voluntary sector relied upon overarching groups which represented smaller organisations

Quality and performance

Members were interested to know how the LSCB performed its quality assurance role and whether there was evidence that it led to service improvement.

The LSCB had established a number of Sub-Groups to carry out specific functions one of which was the Quality and Performance Sub-Group which involved a lot of work around Section 11 audits and accident prevention. The Sub-Group also

undertook spot checking on cases which came into Slough to see how they were handled. The cases that were looked at were selected independently.

Health Care Figures

A Member raised a query about the figures contained within the report that indicated Slough had many more admissions to hospital than other local authorities. It was thought that this was a problem with double counting in the NHS procedures that were being used at Wexham Park Hospital. This was being investigated and the LSCB was awaiting the final report. Officers advised that the LSCB did not get a sense from the PCT that there was a significant problem in this area. The final report would be shared with the Scrutiny Panel and Elected Members present.

Practice

The focus here was the standard of the quality and frequency of supervision given to support frontline staff. Also more information was sought on early intervention, particularly where there was more than one authority involved, and finally were services reaching the most vulnerable groups e.g. children with disabilities, children in families affected by substance misuse, domestic violence or parental mental.

Training for Partner Agencies – Health Service.

It was confirmed that all frontline health practitioners received training on safeguarding issues. A Member advised that he had been informed that frontline officers did not receive basic child abuse awareness training and that cases of domestic abuse where children were involved were not reported back to social services. Officers confirmed that all cases were now reported to social services if there were children involved. The Assistant Director undertook to follow-up on the training issues raised.

Serious Case Reviews (SCR) and Child Death Panels (CDP) carried out by the LSCB.

A question was raised on which local authority LSCB has had responsibility in cases where a death occurred in one local authority but the child lived in another authority. The Independent Chair advised that CDP usually took place in the authority where the child had the greatest involvement or was registered with a GP. There was a degree of exchange of information between authorities if this situation occurred. In response to a question regarding the type of deaths considered by panels it was confirmed that accidental injuries were reviewed but that these would probably not be elevated for SCR. Officers advised that they had commenced two SCRs over the last few years that were still to be fully concluded. In response to a question it was confirmed that the local authority was not aware of either case before the death occurred.

Children excluded from School

Some concerns were raised regarding the actions the Local Authority was taking in response to children who were particularly vulnerable to exploitation. For example, those who had effectively been excluded from the formal education system or were members of gangs. Officers advised that any pupils who were identified as being out of school were channelled through behaviour programmes to help them engage with education. However some children had suffered high levels of disengagement and were only able to attend programmes for a few hours a week to begin with. The Council had undertaken attendance sweeps in conjunction with the police to ensure that children were in school.

3.2 Conclusions and next Steps

The Special meeting was found to be useful in giving a clearer understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the LSCB and the Panel was able to take time to explore the context of children's safeguarding arrangements in their local area and to decide how best to proceed. There was also the opportunity to take some of the findings arising from this meeting with respect to Health responsibilities to the next Special meeting with Health partners.

The next steps for future scrutiny would be to gather evidence on how improvements have been made and better outcomes secured from the work of the LSCB. It is also clear that continued attention on the mechanisms that are put in place to monitor and influence partner performance. The scrutiny panel will need to seek evidence that the partner arrangements have been embedded and ensure that a rigorous system of performance monitoring and reporting to members is fully established and maintained.

3.3 Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Members were advised that NEET numbers were increasing and the National Indicator 117 stood at 9.2% as at August 2009 compared to Slough's target of 4.4%. The Panel was advised that this was due to the impact of the current downturn and the resulting lack of vacancies. Further that Slough's target had been set some time ago by the Government of the South East prior to the downturn and efforts to re-negotiate the target had not been successful.

Statistics contained in the report highlighted the situation for groups of vulnerable young people including teenage mothers, people with learning difficulties and disabilities and care leavers. It appeared vulnerable groups did not appear to be subject to any further disadvantage than our mainstream cohort.

Members noted the various initiatives that were taking place to improve the NEET numbers and asked a number of questions:

Initiatives

Members were keen to know what specific services were being provided by Connexions. It was confirmed that they had advisers in schools and provided intensive support to people on an individual basis for specific needs. There was also a Connexions Centre in the town that young people may freely access which advertised vacancies although these had decreased over the past few months.

In response to a question Members were informed about the Slough Community Partnership training; which aimed to create a link between what schools required and what businesses could offer. The partnership looked at the needs of each individual school and put in place long term planning to ensure young people had the right skills for jobs being created in Slough.

Members were advised of the NEET strategy group which conducted multi agency work in planning for provision for young people. The Chair asked whether there were voluntary sector partners in the group. It was confirmed that there were and that a number of young people were engaging with volunteering.

A Member suggested that the focus over the next twelve months should include voluntary work and the accessibility of apprenticeships. Apprenticeships had taken a downturn over the past few months. However the Chief Executive was talking to major companies in the area to encourage them to offer apprenticeships

Demographics

Members were advised that a number of those who were NEET were white teenage mums and white working class boys. There was less representation from other ethnic groups. Ethnic minority young people tended to go into further education whilst white young people would be more likely to access work based training.

3.4 Conclusions and next steps

It was clear that there were a number of initiatives and agencies involved with NEETs and perhaps approach for future scrutiny would be to ensure that there was a coordinated approach/response to avoid duplication and wasting resources. There was an opportunity also to bring local information linked to ward data to allow members to see if specific areas were affected more than others and explore some of the barriers that present themselves to young people such as accessibility, transport. There was also scope to analyse further any barriers to those young people coming from white backgrounds groups.

Scrutiny members have throughout the year been keen to have reports which included actual figures alongside percentages to understand the extent of the problem and influence and contribute at a local level.

Communities, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel



Councillor James Walsh - Chair



Councillor Mohammed Basharat – Vice Chair

Membership

Councillors:

Councillors: Jagit S Grewal

Mewa S Mann

Rakesh Pabbi

Azhar Qureshi

Responsibilities

This Panel has a monitoring role with a portfolio overseeing the following areas:-

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

Chair's Summary

This year has been a productive and eventful year as the work of this panel continues to focus on finding ways to improve the cultural and leisure activities in the town as well as exploring ways to allow our communities to thrive and become more unified. The environmental challenge is ever present, and I believe that in protecting our environment we will all be investing in the future of our communities.

The panel has considered issues ranging from Biodiversity, proposals for Slough Tennis Centre, the future of the West Wing and Transport for the 2012 Olympic Games. We also received an update on Parks, Allotments and Open Spaces - a subject which is as important to communities as they promote healthy lifestyles, moderate the effects of climate change and provide an outdoor meeting place for people to meet and integrate.

During the year we have keenly followed the progress of the Task and Finish Group which was set up to carry out a strategic review of Libraries. The working group included expert witnesses, officers and elected members including two from this scrutiny panel. Regular progress reports were brought before the panel as well as the final recommendations and conclusions to Cabinet. The Panel learned that there was an opportunity to transform the look and use of our library services, bringing them into the 21st Century. The Panel sought assurances that whilst better outcomes are sought for the local authority and residents, staff who worked for the Library services are supported through the change and the best outcomes are secured for them.

The panel has been actively involved in the Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium after a number of concerns were raised from residents including the suitability of the drainage, condition of the graves and capacity of the grounds. This was a challenging piece of work for the panel because there was a balance to be met between being objective and being sensitive to the needs of all members of the community.

As you can see the panel has a wide remit and I would like to thank all the external guests, officers and members of the public that have attended the meetings over the year for their time and contributions.

4.1 Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium

The subject of the Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium was raised initially in Full Council, by a Member who had received concerns about the state and conditions of the graves in the Muslim area. It was agreed that this should be passed to the Communities, Leisure and Environment panel to investigate.

The Panel considered a report from the Assistant Director, Environmental Services and Quality, outlining the current site conditions and management policy for the

Cemetery and Crematorium, and plans for future investment and expansion for the site.

An independent industry consultant had been commissioned to provide an appraisal of the cemetery site and had concluded that there were no particular issues with inadequate drainage. However, the use of wooden burial chambers could eventually contribute towards grave sinkage. In addition, cemetery management rules had been inconsistently applied, and therefore a community wide consultation on these rules was recommended. The Assistant Director also advised that preliminary work was under way to bring an adjoining Council-owned field into use for burials, in line with expected need. A capital bid for this would be considered in the current budget setting process.

Councillor P Choudhry, who originally submitted the Motion² regarding these issues to Council on the 21st July, 2009, addressed the Panel and highlighted the need to ensure that all members of the community were entitled to bury their loved ones according to the practices and traditions of their particular religion. Further to this, these issues should be addressed both for the immediate future and for the long term; grave sites should be properly maintained for both current and future generations to pay their respects.

Several spokespeople were invited to address the Panel on behalf of the community and subsequently, a number of issues were raised. In particular, considerable concern was expressed in relation to the use of wooden burial chambers and the perception that the current management rules did not support Islamic burial practices. In addition, the need to extend the Crematorium Centre to ensure that there was adequate space for funeral services was highlighted. A clear and strong inclination was expressed by all parties for a community-wide consultation on these issues regarding Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium to take place as soon as possible.

¹Under the council procedure rules, members of the council can ask for any matter that affects the areas, or which the council has responsibility for, to be discussed at a formal meeting. If the member invoking the procedure asks for the full council to discuss it, the council has to decide whether to discuss it then and there or to refer it to the cabinet or an appropriate committee.

The Panel subsequently recommended to Cabinet that

a) A comprehensive consultation be undertaken with all sections of the community with regard to a range of issues concerning the Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium, including:

- The Slough Cemetery and Crematorium Rules
- The condition of the graves -

- Delineation of graves, (length, height, mounding, verge etc.)
- Gaps between graves.
- Pathways

These recommendations were endorsed by Cabinet on 5th November, 2009

4.2 Special Meeting – Slough Cemetery and Crematorium – consultation

A special meeting was called to hear the results of the user consultation on Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium management issues and site rules.

The consultation was conducted over the period of a month, closing on 15th February, 2010. The Panel learned that 230 responses were received, out of 2453 questionnaires sent out, providing a 9.8% rate of response; and that this was a standard level of response to consultations.

The consultation identified that whilst there was a majority view against overall change at the cemetery site, there was significant demand from sections of the community for the implementation of changes to reflect their faiths, traditions and customs. It was highlighted to the Panel by Officers that these views had been expressed by several large, organised community and faith groups in Slough and should therefore, be given considerable weight in the Panel's considerations. This was further emphasised by several of the Members in attendance at the meeting and various community representatives.

A number of queries were raised regarding the way in which the consultation was conducted. The meeting was advised that consultation documents had been sent to a range of individuals and groups. All grave plot owners from the year 2000 onwards had been consulted, as had a variety of community and faith groups and related businesses. The consultation document had included an invitation to speak directly to the Assistant Director, either in person or over the telephone.

Several spokespeople addressed the Panel on behalf of a number of community organisations and faith groups. The concerns outlined included the use of kerb sets, mounding of graves, allowing benches on site, the use of different types of burial chambers and the provision of extended facilities for mourners in site buildings. The need for these concerns to be adequately addressed and the matter to be resolved as quickly as possible was emphasised. Further to this, a demand for regular consultation and monitoring of community needs was also expressed.

The Assistant Director advised that it was appropriate to offer a range of options for cemetery users and that with regard to the burial chambers, an opportunity existed for joint working with community representatives in terms of the materials and design of the structures. There could be some difficulties with kerb sets in the Muslim

The Panel made a number of recommendations to Cabinet:

- That the management rules for the Muslim section of the graveyard be revised in consultation with representatives from Muslim communities.
- That the capital expenditure for the planned expansion of the cemetery is prioritised and that a section of the new site is allocated for Muslim burials.
- That the Council offer a range of options with regard to burial chambers, including both wooden and fibreglass structures.
- That the capacity of the viewing areas within the Crematorium Centre be examined by Officers in the longer term in consultation with appropriate community representatives.

section of the existing cemetery site due to restricted space; however, in conjunction with community representatives, other options such as light weight kerb sets could be explored.

Figure 3 Stoke Road Cemetery and Crematorium



4.3 Outcomes and Next Steps

As mentioned this was a challenging issue and one that required sensibility as well as sensitivity. On the strength of the initial evidence the Panel decided that a consultation was required. In assessing the results of the consultation, the Panel took into account the fact that the responses to the consultation included a number of community groups that represented their members. Therefore these responses would carry more weight. Further, that there was scope to review the management rules, burial options and capacity with community groups. This is an example where scrutiny was able to play a key role in working with a community towards a solution.

4.4 Strategic review of libraries

The Panel were presented with the findings and proposals of a strategic review of the library service from April to July 2009, which had been commissioned by the

Panel in the 2008/09 municipal year. The review assessed the current performance of Slough's library service and considered a wide range of options and opportunities through which the performance of the library service could be improved.

Several different models for delivering the library service were considered within the review and, out of these, a 'local authority strategic partnership' model was found to be the most appropriate ie one where the council worked in partnership with another provider. The review recommended that officers proceed formally to market test this model for the whole library service, inviting local authorities to express interest.

Clarification was sought by Members in relation to the way in which the mini-libraries would operate and the role that was envisioned for the voluntary sector. The Officer advised the Panel that mini libraries would be solely operated by the Council but would be held in various community venues such as children's centres, schools and community centres. In addition voluntary organisations with the capacity to afford and manage a computer terminal accessible by their members or client groups could be linked to the library network. This could enable greater access to Slough's library systems at no additional cost to library service.

The Strategic Director, Community and Well-being, further advised that there were currently two opportunities for the inclusion of a library within a community venue being explored. The first of these was the planned development of a new community facility in Chalvey and the second, the creation of a new Children's Centre in Colnbrook which was planned as part of the wider regeneration of the area.

Following this discussion, a member queried whether schools would be considered as possible venues for new mini libraries. The Panel were informed that all opportunities would be examined but would need to be approached in a consistent way. There were several challenges involved with the use of school sites, particularly in terms of access and security. However, there were several existing examples in other areas where these issues had been mitigated and libraries operated successfully. A further query was raised regarding the possibility of merging school and public libraries to create efficiencies. The Assistant Director advised that this had worked in some areas, and a good example of this kind of joint library existed in Buckinghamshire. Opportunities would have to be examined and matched to where gaps in provision currently existed.

4.5 Conclusions and next steps

Although this was an officer led review, scrutiny panel members were actively involved in the review both as part of the Task and Finish group and also in terms of receiving regular appraisals. This allowed scrutiny to have early involvement in a strategic review and in formulating future policy. Throughout the review, members were keen that staff were supported with any proposed changes.

In summary the review concluded that

- A new vision for public libraries as a force for change and improvement at the heart of communities is adopted.
- Extended provision of the service through mini libraries in community venues
- The take the opportunity to invest to save strategy to improve service outcomes for customers and communities while reducing expenditure in other areas to deliver efficiencies
- The option for a local authority strategic partnership to be taken forward

The panel endorsed these recommendations and agreed also that quarterly performance reports be submitted to the Community, Leisure and Environment Scrutiny Panel regarding the progress in implementing actions arising from the review.

Neighbourhoods and Renewal Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Rakesh Pabbi - Chair



Councillor Balwinder S Dhillon – Vice Chair

Membership

Councillors Roger Davis

Mohammed Rasib

James Walsh

Raja M Zarait

Slough Federation of Tenants & Residents (Non-Voting Co-Opted Members)

Barbara Goldstein

Glynys Higgins

Heather Mason

Responsibilities

The Panel covers matters relating to Planning; Highways and Transportation; Emergency Planning; Community Safety Strategy; all Housing issues; Tenant Services and Economic Development.

Chair's Summary

I am pleased with the continuing progress this panel has made in tackling key issues over the year. The panel has looked at a range of public services, plans and strategies and made recommendations and observations for improvement.

The panel has actively monitored the performance of People 1st, which is the organisation that manages the day to day management and running of the homes for tenants and leaseholders on behalf of the council. It is also responsible for the decent homes programme which aims to bring Slough's 7,500 council homes up to a decent standard by 2012. Of particular note was the poor turnaround time in letting Void properties. The Panel actively pursued progress on this and requested regular updates.

During the year a decision was made to bring the Housing Management function back in-house, after consultation and significant support from tenants. The implications for this panel will be that it will need to continue to monitor ongoing day to day performance but also monitor the progress of the project to bring the function back-in house.

The Head of Drugs and Community Safety, at Slough BC outlined a report to inform the Panel of new legislative provisions relating to the scrutiny of crime and disorder. The requirements were that a panel is established where issues of community safety can be scrutinised. It was agreed that the scrutiny of such matters be considered by this panel since there is already an established structure to support the new legislative provisions. Any panel established to scrutinise crime and disorder matters must meet at a minimum once a year. The panel began exercising its new powers by scrutinising a report on measures taken by the Safer Slough Partnership to improve community confidence in December 2009. The panel will be using the new legislative powers in future work plans to look at items for in-depth scrutiny.

5.1 Bus Services to Heathrow

The Panel invited representatives from Transport for London (TFL) and First Buses to its first meeting of the municipal year. At the previous meeting, the panel had been presented with the plans and opportunities for the future to the public transport link from Slough to Heathrow. The panel learned that a main priority for Slough, the surrounding local authorities and for central government was to reduce that congestion and allow the Thames Valley area to thrive by being accessible. Encouraging the travelling public onto public transport was also a primary objective for Slough Borough Council.

Further, the Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 which is a statutory plan submitted every five years to the Government Office for the South East, contains Access to

Heathrow as one of SBC's main transport priorities for residents to access employment opportunities and to travel.

Given that a large proportion of Slough's residents worked in Slough, the panel were keen to find out whether the services accommodated the current needs of those users and future needs, allowing that there would be expected growth and expansion in and around Heathrow.

In addition, there were concerns that the Colnbrook area being on the outskirts of Slough should not be disadvantaged from the network of bus routes.

The panel learned that the way bus services in London are funded is very different and this causes some of the interface problems between buses to Heathrow from London and those from Slough. London services are supported by Transport for London and heavily subsidised. It would only be possible for the council to have parity with London bus prices if the bus support budget for SBC was increased dramatically. Some of the bus services that run from Slough to Heathrow are supported by BAA



A number of questions were put to the bus including whether buses operated by both First Beeline and TfL could be better co-ordinated to improve access to the various parts of Heathrow Airport.

Members were advised that the services provided by First and TfL were provided under two different regulatory regimes, First operated under a mainly commercially deregulated environment, whilst TfL operated under contract in a regulated environment. The TfL service was an important part of the Slough bus network and it had been a London Transport red bus route for many years. TfL had statutory

responsibilities for maintaining cross boundary links particularly where there was a high demand for end to end journeys. First was happy to consider suggestions as to how its resources and TfL's could be better co-ordinated but there were fundamental differences, particularly relating to fares, resulting from the ways in which services were funded and delivered.

Members asked what measures were being taken to prevent overcrowding particularly on route 81 Colnbrook at peak times and whether linkages between Conbrook and Terminal 5 could be improved.

The panel were advised that TfL were aware of the overcrowding and were looking to provide extra capacity by running double decker buses but that any solution would be dependent on coordination with First services.

TfL took the view that whilst changes to the routes could benefit Colnbrook residents wishing to access Terminal 5, this option had to be weighed against the increase in journey time between other areas in Slough and the Airport. It was likely that 3000 passengers per day who used the current service would increase their journey time by between 10 or 12 minutes and it was likely that there could be a net loss of passengers using the service, which would in turn affect income levels. It was argued that any benefit to Colnbrook residents did not outweigh the additional journey time for passengers in other areas.

The panel also asked whether there could be an extension of the present route (74) to Heathrow to service Terminal 4. They were advised that any extension of the existing bus service would need financial support because the additional revenue would not cover the additional operational costs in the early years. However there might be a possibility to extend a route (78) which already operates to Terminal 5 and First Buses would be happy to discuss this option with BAA and local authorities. It was noted that Terminal 4 suffered from its remoteness but there was no prospect of a direct link to the Terminal in the foreseeable future.

In relation to the provision of services in Colnbrook, a Member asked whether customers had been surveyed. He was advised that the operators relied on feedback from passengers and officers and in his opinion Colnbrook had adequate services and connections to other routes and to change these would be to the detriment of other routes and passengers.

5.2 Conclusions and next steps

The panel bought awareness of the issues around capacity and accessibility of transport from Slough to Heathrow; and that whilst the bus operators were open to suggestions, the options had to be balanced against demand and revenue. Of note however, is that customer feedback and consultation should be a significant driver in the provision of services.

In order to address some of the issues around transport, there is an opportunity for scrutiny to include the Local Development plan which is due for renewal in 2011 in the work plan, thus enabling scrutiny to get involved much earlier and provide a strategic oversight.

5.3 Traveller Policy and Practice

The topic of Traveller Policy had been raised by a Member at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following several unauthorised incursions during the summer of 2009. The matter was referred to this panel. The Panel was advised that whilst there had been unauthorised traveller incursions on Council and private land across the Borough, it became apparent that there was not a general understanding across the Council as to the policy and procedure for such activities.

The Officer advised the Panel that it was recognised that there was a need for more traveller and gypsy sites in Slough. The Government Office of the South East (GOSE) had set out an allocation for Slough of seven new gypsy or traveller permanent sites and one new Travelling Show person site by 2016. A similar number of sites were proposed in the following ten year period up to 2026. It was noted that the Council had supported this level of provision (apart from the 3% growth factor) and had been agreed at Cabinet on 30th October, 2008.

The Officer had discussed the allocation within other Berkshire Authorities and it was clear that given the compact nature of Slough and the shortage of land for other purposes it was not appropriate or practical to seek to provide a site in the urban area. Therefore any need for a gypsy or traveller site would have to be provided within the Green Belt and it was likely that the site would be situated at Poyle on the land south of the Trading Estate, subject to overcoming a number of issues including ownership and potential flooding constraints.

In conclusion the Panel were asked to comment on the actions described within the report and decide whether it wished Officers to formalise an enforcement policy for adoption by full Council. The Officer advised that the Council would be in breach of the South-East Plan if the required number of additional pitches were not provided. It was therefore essential to find additional pitches and she asked that the Panel support this by making the necessary recommendation to Cabinet.

Panel members asked a number of questions including:

- The costs of enforcement and removing repeated unauthorised incursions compared to the provision of a permanent site for the gypsy and traveller community.
- How it had been agreed that seven sites would be needed in Slough
- How many travellers were expected to be in Slough at any one time and whether the Council had the resources to fund the clean-up exercise

- In relation to location, whether residents would be consulted before the location of the sites was agreed.
- A point was raised that in Poyle there were certain groups within the community who did not get on and this needed to be borne in mind.

In response the Panel was advised that GOSE had decided on the number of sites in consultation with the various local authorities and their working groups. It was confirmed that whilst there was no specific budget allocated for unauthorised incursions, wherever possible land was protected through fencing and barriers. Finally, that there would be consultation prior to allocation of sites and as yet no definite area had been identified.

In their conclusions the Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Council take suitable action to provide more permanent gypsy and traveller pitches in Slough in accordance with the allocation in the South East Plan. Further that the current enforcement practice in removing unauthorised traveller incursions on Council land be set down as a policy for adoption by Council. An information note on rights and obligations for Landowners is prepared and that officers carry out a cost analysis of removing repeated incursions compared to the cost of providing a permanent site.

5.4 Conclusions and Next Steps

In bringing this topic to scrutiny, the panel learned that as well as ensuring that there is an enforcement policy for unauthorised incursions, the local authority has a duty to ensure that appropriate sites are identified through the planning process, for the Traveller community. The Traveller community has been called the most socially excluded ethnic minority in the country and nearly a quarter of Gypsies and Travellers who live in caravans have no authorised place to stay and raise their families with the result that they camp on land they do not own without permission.

The scrutiny function needs to ensure that the council meets its obligations in identifying appropriate sites through the planning process, but also that the accommodation needs of Travellers are assessed in the same way as for other housing.

6.0 Joint Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This Committee is formed jointly with Bracknell Forest and Windsor & Maidenhead Councils. It meets on a regular basis and is chaired on a rotational basis annually, with Slough Borough council taking the chairmanship and providing officer support during 2009/2010.

The role of the Committee is to consider health issues and services across East Berkshire and carry out reviews into particular areas of concern.

In June 2009, members of the committee put forward a proposal to set up a working group to investigate the arrangements around car parking at NHS establishments in more detail. The view of the Committee was that there were serious concerns about the existing contractual arrangement, how income from the car parking charges were being utilised, insufficient parking, lack of information on exemptions and the impact if any on the levels of crime.

In September 2009, the proposal was supported by all three authorities and resources and membership of the working group were identified. As the lead authority, Slough Borough Council committed scrutiny support for the study. The study commenced in November 2009 and is due to be completed in late Spring/Summer of 2010.

7.0 Looking forward

In recent years, the role and responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny have steadily grown and widened in scope. In addition to the Health service, scrutiny now has the responsibility for investigating the delivery of services provided by a wide range of partners. As well as the legislation introduced during the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Bill announced recently, is looking to further strengthen and broaden these powers so that all significant local public service spending can be covered by scrutiny. This could mean service providers being held to account on a range of issues.

With the increased emphasis on scrutiny, it is important that the scrutiny function and processes within the council are supported and developed to take on those challenges.

7.1 Performance monitoring

In their Annual Audit and Inspection letter 2008, the Audit Commission stated that *"Members need to ensure leadership in the scrutiny of performance in weaker & priority areas"*.

"It is important therefore that future work plans for scrutiny continue to further develop and sustain effective practices which monitor and challenge the performance of the council, and the Local Strategic Partnership using the performance framework and Local Area Agreement targets. Regular performance monitoring as cited in the report and identifying key indicators provides an opportunity for scrutiny to track performance, make evidence-based recommendations and build up a strategic view of the council's and its partners' performance.

7.2 External scrutiny

There is considerable scope to increase further opportunities to consult and involve local partners in overview and scrutiny as well as further developing professional working with Thames Valley Police, Safer Slough partnership and the NHS trusts. The Audit Commission stated that we need to *“Ensure there are sound arrangements in place to actively monitor, manage and evaluate the performance and impact of partnership working”*.

7.3 Inspections

As well contributing and responding effectively to the challenges of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), work-plans need to incorporate and plan for inspection findings. We can see that such evidence this year has been vital in the scrutiny of external bodies such as the Police and NHS.

7.4 Mechanics of Scrutiny

There is considerable scope also to use different approaches to scrutiny, in terms of greater use of varied meeting formats and selecting meeting styles appropriate to the subject matter, eg investigative, discussion, short-sharp focused reviews, light touch exploratory reviews and public involvement.

Finally to continue to work towards having a Member led scrutiny process by selecting topics which strike an accord with residents and are thematic with other agenda items as well as questioning what value it will bring to the organisation.

8.0 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.

8.1 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 and invites you to attend scrutiny meetings. Dates are published on the Slough Borough Council website. For further information please go to:

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