
REPORT TO:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 7
DATE OF MEETING:	May 2014	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
		PARAGRAPH NO: N/A
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SUBJECT:	Annual Report 2013-14	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: N/A

1.0 Recommendations.

1.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny considers and agrees its Annual Report for the 2013-14 local government year.

1.2 That the Committee's Annual Report be submitted to the annual meeting of the Council.

2. Purpose of the report.

2.1 To set out the Annual Report to the Council from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as required by Article 6 of the Council's constitution. The report outlines how the Committee has discharged its functions during the course of the 2013/14 local government year. It explains what issues the Committee has

3. Background: what is the role of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

3.1 Overview & Scrutiny plays an important part in the life of the Council and the wider South Derbyshire community. It provides elected members with an opportunity to question those who are responsible for taking decisions about how Council and other services are run / hold them to account for their performance. It also gives them an opportunity to come up with their own ideas and recommendations for how they think things could be made better.

3.2 The Council's constitution explains what the role and purpose of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is. Briefly, it has been asked to:

(a) Make reports and / or recommendations to full Council, the policy committees or area forums in connection with the formulation of policy and the discharge any functions;

(b) Consider any matter affecting the district or its inhabitants;

Review and / or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions;

(c) Exercise the call-in procedure in respect of decisions made, but not yet implemented by any policy committee or area forum. (The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has the power to determine 'call-in' requests of any policy decision made but not implemented.)

3.3 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee meets every six weeks or so. The meetings take place on a Wednesday evening and are usually held in the Civic Offices in Swadlincote. Members of the public can attend these meeting, although they are required to leave the room if the Committee decides to consider a so called 'exempt item.'

3.4 The Committee is made up of eight elected members of the Council. Four of them are from the Conservative group and four from the Labour group. They are:

(i) Overview & Scrutiny Committee members drawn from the Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (chairman), Councillor Atkin (vice chairman), Councillor Mrs. Hood and Councillor Mrs. Patten.

(ii) Overview & Scrutiny Committee members drawn from the Labour Group

Councillor Bambrick, Councillor Dunn, Councillor Mrs Mead and Councillor Pearson

4. What the Committee looked at during the year?

4.1 The Committee scrutinised a wide range of issues over the last twelve months. The key issues that it looked at were:

May 2013 – Crime & Disorder and especially the problem of domestic abuse;

June 2013 – Environmental volunteering;

September 2013 – How the Council is using the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and its Council Tax recovery procedures;

October 2013 –The ground maintenance services and the operation of the ‘Clean Team’;

December 2013 – Updates on the environmental volunteering projects and the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and domestic abuse services within South Derbyshire;

January 2014– The Council’s draft budget and medium term financial plan;

February 2014 – The Housing revenue account, including the proposed rent increase for council properties and the longer term financial projections for the service.

4.2 A short summary of the Committee’s work during the year is set out below.

5. Domestic Abuse.

5.1 The Committee carried out a valuable investigation into domestic abuse services. During this investigation members learned that there were currently a wide range of services in the district, whose aim was to help the victims of domestic abuse. Many of these services are provided by voluntary groups. What emerged during the investigation was real concern about whether these groups would still be able to provide these services in the future. This was because there were doubts about their long term financial viability. Much of their funding is provided by Derbyshire County Council and there was a danger that it may be cut so that the County Council to achieve significant financial savings.

5.2 The Committee felt that there needs to be a more cohesive approach to how we provide services to the victims of domestic abuse. A cornerstone of this new approach would be to try and ensure that these groups continue to be properly funded. The Committee decided, therefore, to raise this with the county’s Police & Crime Commissioner – sending him a copy of its report and explaining to him why the elected members were concerned.

6. Environmental Volunteering.

6.1 The Committee's investigation into environmental volunteering to help make the district an even more pleasant place to live, work and visit, proved to be especially valuable. Members learned just how much had already been done to encourage volunteers. In particular, they heard that the Council was now actively seeking local companies to become involved in the scheme and asking them for suggested projects to work on. The Environmental Forum - an informal local network of people & groups with an interest in joining or running environmental projects - had also been invited to submit project ideas for volunteer groups to get involved in.

6.2 Members of the Committee discussed environmental volunteering at length. One of the key issues that they focused on was how projects could be funded and, crucially how all parts of the district, including those areas that did not have parish councils, would be able to finance future projects. As a result of the Committee's work, members agreed that a scheme of charges should be produced by the Environmental Development Manager in consultation with the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and this schedule should then be submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee for approval. They also looked at ways in which we could more effectively capture information from businesses and parish councils etc. about potential schemes; for instance by making this process easier and so help to ensure that people provide the required information.

7. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

7.1 One of the ongoing areas of work which the Committee carried out during the year was to look at how the Council uses its investigatory powers and in particular how it makes sure that it does so in line with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act? As in previous years, members learned that the Council has robust arrangements in place to make sure that these powers are not abused and used sparingly.

8. Financial.

8.1 The Committee continued to play an important part in the Council's budget setting process by scrutinising the draft spending proposals. Members heard from the Director of Finance & Corporate Services about the financial settlement figures that the Council received from the government and especially the Revenue Support Grant, Retained Business Rates and the New Homes Bonus. The Committee was told that, in common with many other local authorities, the Council would have to make significant savings in order to achieve a balanced budget. For

this reason, specific proposals had been brought forward to achieve savings of £300,000 per annum.

8.2 Similarly, the Committee heard about the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2014/15, along with the long term financial forecast for spending over the next ten years, to 2024. Providing housing is an important service for the Council, but under nationally determine rules the way it is paid for is separate to or 'ring fenced' from the wider budget. Members were told that the average rent increase had been set at £4.16 per week. In percentage terms, this was increase of 5.5%.

8.3 Member views on both the Council budget and the Housing Revenue account were then fed in to the Finance & Management Committee so that they could be taken on board when finalising these budgets.

9. Grounds Maintenance.

9.1 Finally, the Committee looked at what action had been taken following the service review of Grounds Maintenance, which it carried out during 2012. One of the key points that it learned was that 65% of service users rated it as either good or excellent. Members were reminded that a lot of the work carried out by Grounds Maintenance is actually funded by Derbyshire County Council. Although this work had been maintained at previous levels, the Committee felt it important that the Council continues to work with the County in order to help make sure that the funding is not cut.

9.2 One of the things which the Committee looked during this investigation was the operation of the 'Clean Team'. Two of its members – Councillors Patten and Dunn - spent time with the team. They were very impressed with what they saw and the ways in which it could be improved still further.

10. Future work programme.

10.1 The Overview & Committee will now carry out consultation with a wide range of stakeholders over the next few months to draw together and then agree the list of reviews that it will carry out during the 2014/15 local government year.

11. Concluding comments and acknowledgements.

11.1 This report has aimed to demonstrate the tangible effects that Overview & Scrutiny can make towards improving and delivering quality services to the residents of South Derbyshire. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recognises and appreciates immensely the valuable contribution that elected members, officers and representatives from partner organisations made towards its work.

Without this support and co-operation, the Committee could not fulfil its aim to improve services for the benefit of South Derbyshire residents.

Chairman, Vice Chairman and Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, May 2014