

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report of the Community Scrutiny Committee, produced in accordance with Article 6 of the Constitution.

The report details the work of the Committee between July 2001 and May 2002 and looks forward to the year ahead.

It describes the Committee's membership, functions, terms of reference and working arrangements; reviews the work that has taken place over the last 10 months; considers the implications of the District Auditor's recent recommendations on the Council's new political management arrangements; and, proposes a work programme for the next 12 months.

BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Article 6 of the Constitution sets out the composition, functions and terms of reference of the Committee.

Composition

The Committee has 7 members, chosen to reflect the 'political balance' of the Council. Membership during 2001/02 comprised:

Labour Group

Councillors Richards (Chair), Routledge (Vice-Chair), Evens, Knight and Sherratt

Conservative Group

Councillors Harrison and Mrs Robbins

The Chair, Vice-Chair and Councillor Mrs Robbins are also members of the Overview Committee and in accordance with statutory guidance; do not sit on any of the Council's Policy Committees

Functions and terms of reference

The Committee has three main functions:

- to contribute to policy development and review
- to scrutinise the decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's functions
- to review performance and 'oversee' the Best Value process

The focus of the Committee's work is on community and environmental services. These include culture, leisure and the arts; waste management, street cleansing and grounds maintenance; community safety; housing strategy and management; economic development and regeneration; land use planning; and, licensing and registration.

Essentially, this means that the Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of most of the Council's front line services.

Meetings

The Committee normally meets every six weeks. 7 meetings have been held since July 2001.

All meetings have been held in public. However, few members of the public have attended.

Working arrangements

From the outset, the Committee sought to operate in a manner that has a clear service user/customer focus and which challenges Members and Officers in an open and constructive way. Generally, this approach has been well received.

Members have initiated research and have also responded to invitations to visit the Planning Department and the Depot to meet staff and gain a first-hand perspective of service delivery issues

At its first meeting, the Committee agreed a work programme until May 2002 covering the monitoring of Best Value Reviews and the scrutiny of plans and strategies that form part of the Council's budget and policy framework.

In practice, the work programme has been reviewed at every meeting thereby allowing new items to be included (as appropriate). This arrangement has also provided Officers with sufficient time to research and produce reports

THE 2001/02 WORK PROGRAMME

Best Value Reviews

Over the past 10 months, the Committee has monitored progress on 6 Best Value Reviews. The nature of this work is summarised below.

BEST VALUE REVIEWS		
REVIEW	NO. OF TIMES MONITORED	COMMITTEE INPUT AND OUTCOMES
<p>Cleansing the Environment <i>(a Year 1 Review completed in September 2001. The Review covers refuse collection, cleansing, grounds maintenance and control of dog fouling)</i></p>	2	<p>The Committee scrutinised the Final report and Action Plan; and, monitored the implementation of the Action Plan.</p> <p>In February, Best Value Inspectors assessed the Council as providing a 'fair' (one star) service with 'excellent' prospects for improvement. The Clean Team has been established as part of the Action Plan.</p>
<p>Sheltered Housing and the Warden Service <i>(a Year 1 Review completed in January 2001)</i></p>	2	<p>The Committee monitored the implementation of the Action Plan.</p> <p>A revised structure for the service was agreed in October 2001 and the new service commenced in March. Progress on some strategic and operational issues has been slower than expected.</p>
<p>Development Control <i>(a Year 1 Review completed in September 2000)</i></p>	2	<p>The Committee monitored the implementation of the Action Plan. This has been delayed pending the resolution of a number of corporate issues.</p> <p>A new Review of Environmental Planning and Control (planned for 2003) is expected to become the focus of attention.</p>
<p>Housing Services <i>(a new Year 2 Review. Part 1 covers housing strategy, private sector housing, homelessness and housing advice; and, housing allocations and the housing register.)</i></p>	2	<p>The Committee scrutinised the scope of the Review; and, monitored progress generally.</p> <p>Part 1 is scheduled for completion in November.</p>
<p>Car Parking <i>(a possible Year 2 Review)</i></p>	1	<p>The Committee considered a report proposing to review car parking later in the programme.</p>

Cemeteries and Bretby Crematorium <i>(a possible Year 2 Review)</i>	1	The Committee considered a report indicating that the Joint Committee was already reviewing the Crematorium and as a consequence, cemeteries would now be reviewed later in the programme.
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Policy Framework

The scrutiny of plans and strategies has been a major area of work. The aim of the Committee has been to try to 'add value' to the work of the relevant Policy Committee.

PLANS AND STRATEGIES	
Topic	Commentary
Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy	<p>The Committee has received two reports on the second Crime and Disorder Strategy (which covers the period 2002-2005).</p> <p>The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on Derbyshire Police, Derbyshire County Council and the District Council to work in partnership to develop a strategy to reduce crime and fear of crime.</p> <p>The first report in November 2001 focused on the audit of crime and disorder within the area. The second, in April, dealt with the contents of the strategy, including priorities, performance targets and arrangements for implementation.</p>
South Derbyshire Local Plan	<p>In January 2002, the Committee received a report on the first Deposit Draft of the South Derbyshire Local Plan.</p> <p>This is an important key stage in the review of the Plan which will direct the development and use of land throughout the district for the period up to 2011.</p> <p>A second report summarising the outcome of the consultation programme and the next stages in the process of preparing Plan was considered by the Committee in April 2002.</p>
South Derbyshire Housing Strategy and Housing Investment Programme	<p>In March 2002, the Committee received a report outlining the response from the Government Office to the Council's 2001 Housing Strategy and Housing Investment Programme submission.</p> <p>The report also outlined arrangements for the completion of the 2002 submission by the July deadline. It was planned to produce updated versions of the Housing Strategy and Private Sector Renewal Strategy and to consult widely with tenants of Council homes.</p>

South Derbyshire Community Strategy	<p>In October 2002, the Committee received a report explaining background to the proposed South Derbyshire Community Strategy.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 2000 gives the Council new powers to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well being of the area, linked to the duty to prepare a community strategy. The strategy will need to involve the community and be prepared and implemented by a 'Local Strategic Partnership' (LSP),</p> <p>A second report in April reviewed the training that had been received by Members on community planning and partnership working and plans for having a first meeting of the LSP.</p>
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Community issues

The Committee has also initiated reports on various topics of community interest – the use and development of the Council’s web site, abandoned vehicles, the community consultation strategy and the performance of the Clean Team. Details of this work are given below.

COMMUNITY ISSUES	
Topic	Commentary
Use and Development of the Council's Web Site	<p>This issue cropped up during consideration of the Development Control Best Value Review Action Plan.</p> <p>In January 2002, the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Network and IT Manager outlining the background to the site, recent improvements to make it more 'user friendly' and future development proposals.</p> <p>Planned new features included provision for online payments and forms, more information about committees and agendas, improved links to other sites, latest news and events, and, improved tourist information.</p>
Abandoned Vehicles	<p>This was another issue that resulted from the Committee's consideration of a Best Value Review - in this case, Cleansing the Environment.</p> <p>A report was made to the March meeting of this Committee. The report covered the legislative framework for dealing with abandoned vehicles, the number of cases dealt with (which was growing) and the financial implications for the Council.</p> <p>The issue was subsequently referred back to the Community Services Committee.</p>
Community Consultation Strategy	<p>Officers outlined proposals to review the Council's current Consultation Strategy at the Committee's January meeting.</p> <p>Although, the review follows a recommendation from the District Auditor on the Best Value Performance, effective arrangements for community consultation will be required to support work on the Community Strategy.</p> <p>Progress reports were also received at the March and April 2002 meetings.</p>

'Clean Team'	<p>The 'Clean Team' was set up in December 2001 as a result of the Cleansing the Environment Best Value Review. It is a rapid response 'hit squad' for dealing with complaints of fly tipping, dog fouling and litter. There is also a free phone number to help people to report incidents.</p> <p>In April 2002, the Committee received a report detailing the performance of the team during the first three months of operation. This identified significant reductions in response times to incidents.</p>
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DISTRICT AUDITOR'S REPORT

The District Auditor's report covers the new Constitution, decision-making, overview and scrutiny, member support and working relationships. On overview and scrutiny, the report notes:

'We are very impressed by the extent of innovation in developing the overview and scrutiny function. There is much to commend here and we would encourage the Council to build on these foundations..'

Some of the items commended include:

- the development of clear 'rolling' work plans which provide a structured, focused approach
- the examination of sensitive issues
- Members writing and presenting their own reports to Policy Committees
- visits to departments to meet staff and gain a first-hand perspective
- the engagement of Members in the work of their committee (e.g. in contributing to work plans)

The District Auditor makes 4 recommendations, which specifically concern this Committee. They are:

- review how performance can be effectively scrutinised
- review the ways in which Scrutiny operates to hold Policy Committees to account
- review the way in which Scrutiny operates, to further develop an outward-looking focus
- ensure that officers and all members are clear about the roles and operation of scrutiny

The Committee has sought to reflect these recommendations in its proposed working arrangements, priorities and work programme for the year ahead.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Working arrangements

It is expected that present working arrangements will continue. However, the Committee acknowledges that there will also be a need to:

- develop a more outward-looking focus. This will involve looking at best practice from outside of the organisation (such as Beacon Councils); inviting external stakeholders to assist in the scrutiny of decisions and the development of policy; and scrutinising the performance of other public bodies operating in the area
- strengthen arrangements for performance management. A key area of work will consist of monitoring Service Plans and challenging managers and Policy Committee Chairs about their respective performance. The Committee will also provide more feedback to Policy Committees on the matters arising.
- conduct or (initiate) 'reality checks' on Best Value Reviews to ensure that there are 'no surprises' when services are inspected. This may involve, for example, site visits, discussions with service users or the commissioning of studies by external organisations.
- find ways of sharing the workload amongst members of the Committee, for instance, by working in small teams to collect information
- generate more public interest in, and awareness of, the scrutiny agenda. As a starting point, the Committee intends to reconsider the time of the day that meetings are held.

Future priorities

The main priorities for Committee in the year ahead comprise:

- helping the Council to prepare for the Corporate Performance Assessment announced in the Local Government White Paper '*Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services*'.
- scrutinising poorly performing services and/or those which are important to the local community
- finding ways of helping the Council to develop and implement the South Derbyshire Community Strategy

2002/03 Work Programme

A copy of the outline programme for the coming year is attached at Annexe A.

The programme makes provision for the monitoring of Best Value Reviews and Service Plans, the scrutiny of plans and strategies that form part of the Council's policy and budgetary framework, and work on several projects of community interest.

The Committee will continue to monitor the Development Control, Sheltered Housing, Cleansing the Environment and Housing Services Reviews and will begin to review progress on the Community Safety Review that will commence shortly.

The Committee will also monitor Service Plans of the Community Services, Environmental Services, Development Control and Licensing Committees.

The scrutiny of the Community Strategy, Housing Strategy, South Derbyshire Local Plan and the Crime and Disorder Strategy will continue. This will be extended to the strategies for Waste Management and Contaminated Land.

In terms of special projects, the Committee intends to focus on the performance of the Council's housing services and will begin to scrutinise health related services (in conjunction with Derbyshire County Council). Consideration will also be given to economic development and regeneration including work with partners.

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank all members and officers who have contributed to meetings or who have provided assistance and support.

Councillor Kevin Richards
Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee

ANNEXE A: COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2002 / 2003

	Best Value Reviews & Performance Management	Budget & Policy Framework	Community Issues & Performance Management
<p>May - July 2002</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing Part 1 (Strategic) <input type="checkbox"/> Community Safety</p> <p><u>BV Action Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development Control <input type="checkbox"/> Cleansing the Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Sheltered Housing 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Community Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Strategy & H.I.P <input type="checkbox"/> South Derbyshire Local Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Contaminated Land Strategy</p> <p><u>Implementation Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Crime & Disorder Strategy 	<p><u>Community Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Community Consultation <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Services <input type="checkbox"/> Health <p><u>Service Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development Control <input type="checkbox"/> Community Services <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Services <input type="checkbox"/> Licensing
<p>Aug - Oct 2002</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing Part 1 (Strategic) <input type="checkbox"/> Community Safety</p> <p><u>BV Action Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development Control <input type="checkbox"/> Cleansing the Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Sheltered Housing 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Community Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Strategy & H.I.P <input type="checkbox"/> South Derbyshire Local Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Contaminated Land Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Waste Management Strategy /Recycling Plan</p> <p><u>Implementation Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Crime & Disorder Strategy 	<p><u>Community Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Community Consultation <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Services <input type="checkbox"/> Health <p><u>Service Plans (as above)</u></p>
<p>Nov -Jan 2002/2003</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing Part 1 (Strategic) <input type="checkbox"/> Community Safety</p> <p><u>BV Action Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development Control <input type="checkbox"/> Cleansing the Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Sheltered Housing 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Community Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Strategy & H.I.P <input type="checkbox"/> South Derbyshire Local Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Contaminated Land Strategy</p> <p><u>Implementation Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Crime & Disorder Strategy 	<p><u>Community Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development & Regeneration <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Services <input type="checkbox"/> Community Consultation <p><u>Service Plans (as above)</u></p>
<p>Feb - Apr 2003</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Planning & Control <input type="checkbox"/> Community Safety <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Services Part 2 (Landlord and tenant functions)</p> <p><u>BV Action Plans</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Part 1 (Strategic) 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Community Strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Strategy & H.I.P <input type="checkbox"/> South Derbyshire Local Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Waste Management Strategy /Recycling Plan</p> <p><u>Implementation Plans</u></p>	<p><u>Community Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development & Regeneration <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Services <input type="checkbox"/> Community Consultation

	<input type="checkbox"/> Sheltered Housing <input type="checkbox"/> Cleansing the Environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Crime & Disorder Strategy	<u>Service Plans (as above)</u>
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