



South Derbyshire

District Council

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of the Report

This is the Annual Report to Council from Overview and Scrutiny, as required by Article 6 of the Council's Constitution.

The report outlines how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has discharged its functions during the municipal year 2012/13 and details the current position and outcomes of its activities.

1.2 Composition of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has eight Members, being four Members of the Conservative Group and four Members of the Labour Group in accordance with the political balance of the Council. For 2012/13, the following Members were appointed to the Committee:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chairman), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Patten.

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Bell, Mrs. Mead and Pearson.

1.3 Main Purposes of Committee

The main purposes of the Committee are as follows:-

- (a) Make reports and/or recommendations to Full Council, Policy Committees or Area Forums in connection with the formulation of Policy and the discharge of any functions.
- (b) Consider any matter affecting the District or its inhabitants.
- (c) Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions.
- (d) Exercise the Call-In procedure in respect of decisions made, but not yet implemented, by any Policy Committee or Area Forum.
- (e) Oversee the Best Value process and report findings to the relevant Policy Committee.



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1.4 Officer Support

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is supported by three Heads of Service and a Democratic Services Officer. Other Officers attend meetings to contribute to specific reviews.

1.5 Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee usually meets every six weeks, on Wednesday evenings at the Council's Civic Offices, although some meetings are held in other venues related to the review area being discussed. Meetings are held in Open session, unless there are Exempt items for consideration. Additional task groups and special meetings have taken place for certain review areas.

1.6 Call-In of Policy Committee Decisions

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to determine 'call-in' requests of any policy committee decision made but not implemented. During 2012/13, no policy committee decisions were 'called-in'.

2. Specific Areas of Activity and Achievements

2.1 Scrutiny Focus Sessions

The Committee held a 'Focus Session' in May 2013 to give consideration to the Work Programme for 2013/14. This followed a period of consultation, to seek suggestions on areas for scrutiny activity. The consultation included policy committee chairman, parish councils and parish meetings, the South Derbyshire Partnership, Members of the Committee and a press release to seek public input.

As a result of the consultation, review areas were suggested by the National Forest Company, two parish councils and two residents. All the suggestions were discussed in the focus session, resulting in the initial work programme shown at Section 3 below.

2.2 Task Group Working

The Committee appointed a task group for its review of the Grounds Maintenance Service. The task group comprising Councillors Atkin and Bell held initial meetings at the end of the 2011/12 year. The group sought to gather feedback on this wide-ranging service, which includes the maintenance of parks and open spaces, highway verges and hedges, together with grass cutting in residential areas. This review area continued into the 2012/13 programme, with a further report to the full Committee in October.

2.3 Town Hall and the Delph

A presentation was made to the Committee which reminded of the scope of the review, to increase business, improve facilities, look at a potential for a change of use and the links between The Town Hall and adjacent Delph area. It included the venue's history, its origins and the improvements made over the years. Also reported was the Town Hall's listed building status and other issues which would need to be considered in deciding its future use. The



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presentation covered the facilities available at the Town Hall and the current programme of use, including hire of the Town Hall for weddings. Management aspects were discussed together with the marketing literature and income, including that from the adjoining shop units.

With the shop income and growth in use as a wedding venue, a small surplus was being made. There was recognition of the successful events held in the Town Centre. It was agreed to receive the presentation and to ask Officers to complete the planned review of marketing literature.

2.4 Update on Leisure Services

The Committee received a series of presentations on Leisure Services at its meeting in September 2012. These started with a presentation from Active Nation, which had taken over the contract for management of the Green Bank and Etwall Leisure Centres, giving a review on the first year of operation of the contract.

A joint presentation was provided by Debbie Chesterman of Aurora Country Developments and officers, on the Rosliston Forestry Centre. This presentation covered the facilities and projects delivered from the Centre, key statistics on visitor numbers, details of events and the funding arrangements.

Next, the 'Get Active in the Forest' partnership project was considered and the wide range of activities provided. A presentation on parks and woodlands followed, which focused initially on the Eureka Park at Swadlincote and a lottery application to restore and repair the heritage features at the Park. Updates were also provided in respect of the Swadlincote Woodlands, Newhall Park and the Maurice Lea Memorial Park, as well as improvements to the Swadlincote Skate Park and a scheme being delivered at Cockshut Lane, Melbourne, in conjunction with the Melbourne Sporting Partnership. The Committee also received presentations on the Environmental Education Project and the Melbourne Assembly Rooms. It was suggested that an area of future leisure scrutiny activity could focus on the legacy of the 2012 Olympic Games.

2.5 Funded Voluntary Organisations

As a follow up to the review in 2011/12, the Housing and Community Services Committee had taken up the offer for Scrutiny to undertake some additional work. This was to recommend criteria for the distribution of £100,000 of additional support to the voluntary sector, being a one-off sum, in addition to the Council's existing support. The Committee looked at proposals for the criteria and size of grants to be used. The aim was to develop a scheme that had enough detail to address Council aims and objectives, whilst remaining as open as possible to groups providing services within the District. Proposals were recommended to the Housing and Community Services Committee, based on a well-established scheme, which have subsequently been used in allocating the identified monies.



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2.6 Regulations Made Under The Localism Act

The Committee proposed minor alterations to the sections of the Constitution that related to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to meet requirements of regulations made under the Localism Act 2011. Alterations were required to Article 6 of the Constitution and to the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2.7 Homelessness – Temporary Accommodation Costs

As a result of earlier scrutiny work, the Housing Services Division conducted a review of how temporary accommodation was provided, looking at a range of options for service improvement. A proposal was considered for the Council to build further on work with a charitable organisation, which provided and managed the single persons' hostel in Swadlincote. The proposal for provision of temporary accommodation would satisfy the majority of the homeless requirements and recommendations were submitted to the Policy Committee accordingly.

2.8 Service Review: Grounds Maintenance

The Committee received a further report on this review area, which covered quality control, customer feedback, including a resident survey and County Council-funded works, including a proposed funding cut. The merits of seeking an external accreditation were also considered, but it was recommended to develop further in-house quality monitoring processes instead and to produce an annual report detailing priorities for future action. The first report would be produced before the main cutting season commenced in April 2013. There was recognition of the service provided in what had been a difficult year for grounds maintenance, due to the weather conditions. Some complaints were still received and particular issues were excessive spraying around street furniture and the infrequent full width highway verge maintenance, which would be raised with Derbyshire County Council. It was agreed to receive an update in October/November 2013 on this service.

2.9 Regulation Of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

The Committee has a function to monitor the use of covert surveillance techniques. A report was considered in December 2012, which set out changes affecting the Council's use of the RIPA powers and sought approval to changes to the Council's Policy and Guidance document. Due to legislative changes, there were now additional requirements in some cases for a judicial approval mechanism, in addition to the existing authorisation process. The Inspection regimes would continue as would the quarterly reports on the usage of RIPA. It was noted that during this period, there had been no requests for authority to use the powers.

2.10 EMAS Consultation

At the December meeting, a piece of reactive scrutiny took place to respond to the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) consultation on plans to review its service called "Being the Best". The EMAS proposal was to create purpose built hubs, community ambulance posts and standby points that were fit for the future. A presentation was received from EMAS



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representatives, who also responded to Members' questions. Areas discussed included cross-border arrangements, vehicle breakdowns, emergency cover and patient transfers/slow patient handover. A series of questions was submitted about the vehicle fleet, its replacement, the growth in population, increasing numbers of calls for service and the move to the new arrangements. Views and recommendations were compiled to respond to the consultation and it was requested that the Committee be informed of the outcome of this review.

2.11 Cemetery Service and Provision of Cemetery Space

A report was considered in December, to provide background on the Cemetery Service, progress to date and to seek Members' direction and priorities. The Council did not have a statutory duty to make provision for burials, but this was a service that was expected. There were currently six cemeteries within South Derbyshire and the Council offered grant aid support towards the maintenance of 13 closed churchyards.

A shortage of land meant that it came at a high premium and a lack of burial space was becoming a problem, in particular at Etwall and Church Gresley. Officers responded to questions about the lack of capacity and the potential for a woodland burial site within the District. There was a consensus that the Council should continue to provide cemeteries. Officers were asked to investigate sites for additional cemetery space, both at Church Gresley and at Etwall. An offer would be made to undertake further scrutiny work on this service area, to look in detail at statistics relating to churchyards, woodland burials and statistics on the number of burials as compared to cremations, both at Bretby and Markeaton Crematoriums.

2.12 Budget Proposals 2013/14 and Financial Plan to 2018

The Committee has a specific role to assist the Finance and Management Committee to develop the budget proposals. The Committee considered the budget at two of its meetings, in January and February 2013, looking at the General Fund, Capital, the proposals for Council Tax and the Housing Revenue Account. Members of Overview and Scrutiny were also invited to attend the policy committee meetings, where detailed presentations were provided on each aspect of the budget. The Committee made a recommendation as part of its budget response that the level of Council Tax be increased by 1.9%.

2.11 Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

The Council has a duty to undertake Crime and Disorder Scrutiny at least once each year. Consultation took place with the Chair of the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership, the Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel and the Safer Communities Manager, in selecting the topic for this year's scrutiny work.

A dedicated meeting was held in May and focussed on domestic abuse services within South Derbyshire. There were four main agencies that worked directly with victims, comprising Victim Support, Next Step, Trident Reach and North Derbyshire Women's Aid. Details were provided on the role of each agency and the multi-agency risk assessment conference between partner agencies, to put appropriate measures in place to protect the victim and rehabilitate the



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offender. Members questioned the funding arrangements and also discussed the recent awareness-raising events.

2.12 Joint Scrutiny Work

The Council has continued its involvement in the Derbyshire Scrutiny Liaison Group and the East Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network. South Derbyshire hosted the March meeting of the Regional Network. These County and Regional groups provide a useful dialogue on the ever-changing requirements for scrutiny.

3. Work Programme 2013/14

Consultation took place to gather the views of a range of stakeholders in drawing together a list of potential review areas for 2013/14 and these were considered at a work programming session in May. The Committee then agreed to the following review areas being included in the initial work programme for 2013/14:

- Debt Recovery Processes.
- Environmental Volunteering.
- Update on Cemetery Provision in South Derbyshire.
- Grounds Maintenance – Comparative Update.
- Work of the Clean Team and Litter.
- Prescribed Scrutiny areas: Crime and Disorder, Budget Scrutiny and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers.

4. Concluding Comments and Acknowledgements

This report has aimed to demonstrate the tangible effect that Overview and Scrutiny can make towards improving and delivering quality services to the residents of South Derbyshire. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognises and appreciates immensely the valuable contribution that elected Members, Officers and representatives from partner organisations make towards its work and acknowledges that without this support and co-operation, it could not fulfil its aim to improve services for the benefit of South Derbyshire residents.

Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Members
of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

May 2013