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Annual Report 2008/09

Chair's Foreword



**Chair of the Committee:
Councillor Phil Mould**

As Chair of Overview and Scrutiny for the year 2008/09, I have attempted, aided by my Vice-Chair, David Smith, to take the Overview and Scrutiny process on from where Councillor MacMillan had capably left it. In this, the Committee have been guided and helped by our two excellent Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders.

We have started and finished reviews looking at the roles of both the Third Sector and the Mayor. We are also currently working on reviews of arrangements for the cleansing of communal areas in Council flats and the mutual exchange processes between Council accommodations. Added to this there are possible reviews pending looking at the need for a fishing museum; the role of the Neighbourhood Groups; and also examining the uses of the Countryside Centre and the Bordesley Abbey Visitors' Centre, and any possible links between the two.

Once again, I would like to thank all of the Members and Officers who have taken part in scrutiny this year for their hard work and enthusiasm.

Councillor Phil Mould
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2008/09

Summary

There is an annual requirement for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to produce a report outlining its work and achievements during the previous year. The report also contains information about the reviews that have been undertaken by Task and Finish Groups during the year.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity for Members to consider future work programmes and amended working methods. Recommendations about how to further improve the Overview and Scrutiny process in future years have also been incorporated into this document. These recommendations have been developed via a process of consultation with the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and relevant Officers.

This report has been produced by the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers in conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Members, particularly the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Contents

Chair's Foreword	Page I
Summary	Page II
The Overview and Scrutiny Committee: March 2009	Page VIII
Introduction	Page 1
Four Key Principles of Scrutiny	Page 2
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
• Commissioning Body Role	Page 3
• Work Programme Planning Afternoon	Page 3
• Work Programme Planning Afternoon: Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committee Relations	Page 4
• Work Programme Planning Afternoon: Suggested Topics for Scrutiny	Page 6

Contents

Overview and Scrutiny

- **Training Programme: New Members** **Page 7**
- **Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference** **Page 7**
- **Scrutiny of Performance** **Page 8**
- **Select Committee Trip** **Page 9**
- **Portfolio Holder Annual Reports** **Page 10**
- **Performance and Budget Monitoring** **Page 11**
- **Pre-Scrutiny** **Page 13**
- **Monitoring Responses to Scrutiny
Recommendations** **Page 14**
- **Short Sharp Reviews** **Page 15**
- **Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Bus Services** **Page 15**

Contents

Overview and Scrutiny

- **Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments** Page 17
- **Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Ditches** Page 18
- **Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Fly-tipping** Page 19

Task and Finish Groups Page 20

- **Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group: Completed Review** Page 22
- **Task and Finish Group Meeting** Page 21
- **Third Sector Task and Finish Group: Completed Review** Page 23
- **Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding: Completed Review** Page 25

Contents

Task and Finish Groups

- **Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group: Ongoing Review** **Page 26**
- **Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group: Ongoing Review** **Page 28**

Press Coverage **Page 29**

Conclusion: Scrutiny in the Future **Page 30**

Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Page 31**

Membership Gallery **Page 32**

Expert Witnesses **Page 33**

Co-opted Members **Page 34**

Glossary / Key to Abbreviations **Page 35**

Contents

Officer Support

Page 36

Contact Details

Page 37

Contents

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee: March 2009



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets approximately every three weeks. At this meeting of the Committee in March 2009 a number of Offices and Members presented evidence before the Committee. Featured in this photograph are (from left to right) Matthew Bough (Housing Policy and Performance Manager) and Councillors Colin MacMillan, David Hunt, Carole Gandy, William Norton, Kath Banks, Bill Hartnett, Robin King and David Smith.

Introduction

Redditch Borough Council has one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee which commissions and oversees a series of time limited review bodies called Task and Finish Groups. One of the most important facets of the scrutiny process is that it is led entirely by the Councillors. They are responsible for the identification of topics to scrutinise and the emphasis lies with Members to plan, lead and develop the work of the Committee and the Task and Finish Groups





The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a statutory role in the Council's local democratic process. The main aims of Overview and Scrutiny are:

- to promote transparent decision making;
- ensure democratic accountability;
- to monitor the effectiveness of the policy and budget setting process at the Council;
- to develop new policy; and
- to undertake reviews of current policies.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises nine Members. The Committee meets approximately every three weeks and convenes a week after meetings of the Executive Committee. This provides Members with an opportunity to monitor the work of the Executive and to ensure that decision-making processes remain transparent and accountable.

Four Key Principles of Scrutiny

This year Members have aimed to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council complies with the four key principles of scrutiny identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the organisation set up to promote effective scrutiny in local government. The four key principles of effective scrutiny are:

-  to provide a critical friend challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers;
-  to enable the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
-  for scrutiny to be carried out by independent minded governors who lead and own the scrutiny process; and
-  to drive improvement in public services.

These symbols will feature, where relevant, throughout the report to demonstrate how the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council has complied with these four principles during the year 2008/09.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership 2008/09

Councillor P Mould (Chair)

Councillor D Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Banks, Chalk, Hartnett, R King, Norton, Taylor and Thomas.

Commissioning Body Role

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Redditch Borough Council is designed to act as a commissioning body. The Committee has the power to authorise policy reviews and to scrutinise issues of local interest in depth. This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commissioned a number of strategic reviews that have been conducted by Task and Finish Groups. It has also undertaken a number of shorter reviews at the Committee level over a series of meetings.

Work Programme Planning Afternoon

Presently at Redditch Borough Council the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reviewed regularly. Members have an opportunity to debate the contents of the Programme at each meeting of the Committee.



In early 2008 Members agreed that the Council should organise a Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Afternoon. This Planning Afternoon was identified as an example of best practice used at other local authorities for facilitating continuous improvement in Overview and Scrutiny. The Planning Afternoon was approved as an opportunity: for Members to discuss the objectives for scrutiny for the year; to identify subjects for review; to identify ways to improve working relations between

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme Planning Afternoon

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Executive Committee and the Council's local partners; and to set a realistic timetable for completing Task and Finish and Short Sharp reviews.



The Work Programme Planning Afternoon took place on 20 June 2008. This event was attended by a mixture of non-Executive and Executive Committee Members, though Executive Committee Members were only permitted to attend the first session of the event focusing on relations between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny.

Work Programme Planning Afternoon: Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committee Relations

During the course of the Work Programme Planning Afternoon a number of proposals with regards to the working relations between the two Committees were suggested by Members.



The Overview and Scrutiny Members have responded to many of the requests put forward by Executive Committee Members during this session. For example, as requested, all the Task and Finish Groups that have completed their reviews this year did so according to schedule and reported their recommendations before the Executive Committee in a timely manner. Also as requested, Overview and Scrutiny Members have sought to limit the number of recommendations forwarded for the consideration of the Executive Committee at any one time.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Afternoon



Members participated in Group activities and reported their findings during the Work Programme Planning Afternoon in June 2008. Featured in this photograph are (standing from left to right) Councillor Phil Mould and Jess Bayley (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer), (seated front row) Councillor Jack Field and (back row from left to right) Councillors Debbie Taylor, David Hunt, David Smith and Mike Chalk.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme Planning Afternoon: Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committee Relations



Similarly the Executive Committee has complied with many of the requests from Overview and Scrutiny Members. For example, Overview and Scrutiny Members requested that specific meetings of the Executive Committee be convened to address scrutiny recommendations when considered appropriate. Correspondingly, The Executive Committee convened a special meeting on 13 January 2009 to consider the recommendations from the Third Sector Task and Finish Group (for further information about this Group please view pp 23 - 24).

“I think scrutiny is a really effective process as it provides a useful route for achieving local aims and objectives”

Councillor Kath Banks, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Work Programme Planning Afternoon: Suggested Topics for Scrutiny



Also during the Work Programme Planning Afternoon the Overview and Scrutiny Members suggested a number of potential subjects for scrutiny. Many of these suggested items for scrutiny were subsequently reviewed as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process. Some of these subjects, such as the proposed review of bus services within the Borough, were scrutinised by the Committee in the form of short, sharp reviews (for further information about this review of bus services please refer to page 15). In addition, a number of the suggested items, such as the review of Council flat communal cleansing arrangements, have been analysed as Task and Finish Group exercises. (For further information about the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Review please refer to pp 26 - 27).

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Training Programme: New Members



Both members of the Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers have undertaken scrutiny related training during the course of the year. At the beginning of the year, an introduction to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided for newly elected Councillors. This evening session involved a general presentation from the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers informing Members of: the principles, roles and objectives of scrutiny; scrutiny arrangements at Redditch Borough Council; and examples of effective scrutiny. New Members were given a chance to ask questions about scrutiny and guidance was given as to how Members could get involved in scrutiny at the Council.

Individual Member Training



Members of the Committee have also individually attended training courses this year. Early in the year, the Vice-Chair of the Committee, Councillor David Smith, Attended a “Chairing Scrutiny” course that was facilitated by the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University. Later in the year Councillor Robin King attended a Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) facilitated seminar, which provided him with a chance to observe a Select Committee meeting in Action and to learn more about scrutiny at the national level.



Members participated in group exercises during the Work Programme Planning Afternoon. Featured (from left to right) are Councillors David Hunt, Debbie Taylor, Phil Mould, David Smith and Kath Banks

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference

In June 2008, both of the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers attended the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Annual Conference. The Conference took place over two days and provided an opportunity for delegates to hear speakers discuss issues such as Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) and public accountability. The second day of the conference focused on the training needs of both Officers and Members. Delegates had an opportunity to attend an assortment of mini-sessions examining bespoke skills for scrutiny such as communication and project management skills.

Scrutiny of Performance



This year the Committee identified performance scrutiny as an area for improvement. Accordingly, the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Phil Mould, attended a "Scrutiny of Performance" training session delivered by Dr Philip Whiteman from the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), the University of Birmingham. Councillor Mould reported that the training was helpful as it had provided an introduction to alternative ways of considering performance related information.

The Committee agreed that all Members of the Council would benefit from undertaking this training. Consequently a bespoke training course focusing upon performance scrutiny was incorporated into the Council's Member Development Programme in March 2009. During the course of this session Members were provided with details about: the role that scrutiny will have to play in the Comprehensive Area Assessment process (the new local government performance assessment framework); the pending duty to co-operate for local partner organisations and partnerships in the scrutiny process; and ways to strengthen Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Select Committee Trip



Site visits have also played an important part in the Committee's Development Programme this year. In October 2008 five Members of the Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers travelled to London for the day to sit in on a Select Committee meeting taking place at Portcullis House.

They attended a session of the Business and Enterprise Select Committee which was examining the role of Regional Development Agencies. This provided the Councillors with an opportunity to see MP's using some of the fundamental skills required in scrutiny including questioning and chairing skills.



Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attending a Select Committee meeting in October 2008. They are (back row from left to right) Councillors Robin King, David Smith, Phil Mould and Diane Thomas, (front row from left to right) Councillor Kath Banks and Jess Bayley, (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer).

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Portfolio Holder Annual Reports



Councillor Carole Gandy delivered her Annual Report before the Committee, as Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership, in March 2009.

During the year the six Portfolio Holders that sit on the Council's Executive Committee have been invited to present their Annual Reports before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The objective of this exercise was to ensure that the decision making process was transparent and democratically accountable. This process also enables the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a critical friend challenge to the Executive Committee.

Each Portfolio Holder attended a separate meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Their presentations were based on themes and questions proposed by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As suggested in the 2007/08 Annual Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Portfolio Holders were invited to concentrate upon updating the Committee about work undertaken in areas relevant to their portfolios.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Portfolio Holder Annual Reports



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made a number of recommendations based on the information provided by the Portfolio Holders during these Annual Report sessions. In particular, following the report from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism, Councillor Peter Anderson, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made some recommendations that were designed to enhance public interest in the content of the reissued civic newspaper, Redditch Matters.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to thank all of the Portfolio Holders for presenting their Annual Reports at meetings of the Committee.

Performance and Budget Monitoring



The Committee receives and considers quarterly budget and performance monitoring reports from each of the Council's Directorates. From these reports, the Committee monitors the Council's performance in comparison to local and national performance indicators, as well as any budget variances that may occur throughout the year. The Committee also tracks the Council's progress towards achieving its performance and budget targets.

This year, the Committee has used the information provided in these reports to select areas for further scrutiny and to request further information explaining the figures from Officers. However, Members have recognised that further consideration is needed as to how to make performance and budget scrutiny more effective.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



A number of Officers from the Council have attended meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide evidence during the year. Featured in this photograph of a meeting of the Committee that took place in March 2009 are (from left to right) Helen Saunders (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer), Steve Skinner (Democratic Services Manager), Jackie Smith (Director of Housing, Leisure and Customer Services), Councillor Brenda Quinney, Teresa Kristunas (Head of Finance, Revenues and Benefits) and Clive Wilson (Operations Manager – Asset Maintenance).

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Pre-Scrutiny



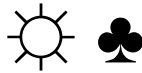
This year there have been attempts to incorporate more pre-scrutiny into the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. Pre-scrutiny is a process whereby Overview and Scrutiny Members review subjects or reports prior to their consideration by the Executive Committee and / or full Council.

The Committee has undertaken some pre-scrutiny work during the year. In particular, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered information about the Council's Initial Estimates for capital and revenue bids with a view to contributing to the preparation of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2009/10 – 2011/12. Members also considered information about the Council's Corporate Plan (Part II) for 2009/12 and made a number of recommendations about the contents of this document for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has recognised that further work needs to be undertaken to progress pre-scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council. Effective pre-Scrutiny arrangements should facilitate more constructive working relations between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Pre-Scrutiny should also enable the Committee to contribute more actively to the Council's corporate business planning. This is therefore an area which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will seek to address more vigorously in future years.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monitoring responses to scrutiny recommendations



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a responsibility for monitoring the implementation of approved scrutiny recommendations. During the year the Committee monitored the implementation of recommendations produced as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process in previous years.

As part of this process the Committee received an update report on the progress in implementation of a Civil Parking Enforcement Scheme within the Borough, which had been recommended by the Civil Parking Enforcement Task and Finish Group in 2007. Members noted that the Council was on target to introduce this scheme according to schedule.

The Committee also reflected on the impact of the Choice Based Lettings system on the housing and homelessness appeals process, which had been reviewed as a Task and Finish exercise in 2006/07. Members concluded that The Choice Based Lettings system had had a positive impact demonstrated by the a reduction in the number of appeals that were referred to the Housing Appeals Committee. However, they agreed that on balance there remained a need for the two stage housing and homelessness appeals process in place at Redditch Borough Council.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Short Sharp Reviews

During 2007/08, the Committee decided that it should itself assume a greater role in scrutinising topics. Indeed, Members concurred that in future the Committee would undertake more wide-ranging debates about any subjects proposed for scrutiny. The Committee in 2008/09 agreed with these proposals. If, as a consequence of this debate, Members consider that a Task and Finish Group review would be appropriate, a Group could be established. However, it was recognised that these debates could also be conducted at the Committee level in the form of short sharp reviews. Committee members could then decide to make recommendations from these reviews directly to the Executive Committee.

Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Bus Services



An example of a short sharp review conducted at the Committee level was the scrutiny of local bus services. During the Work Programme Planning Afternoon, it was suggested by Members that the Committee could commission a review of the bus services in the town, as some Members had received complaints from their constituents about the bus services. A scoping document was submitted for the consideration of the Committee. Members decided that before commissioning a Task and Finish Review of these issues that they would first invite Officers responsible for public transport issues at Worcestershire County Council to a meeting of the Committee.

Officers from the County Council along with representatives from Diamond bus company attended two meetings of the Committee where they addressed some of the issues that were mentioned in the scoping document.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Bus Services cont.



Officers also provided an overview of a review that was taking place of passenger transport in Redditch. Members decided that, as there appeared to be a large amount of work being undertaken at the County level to address some of the problems in Redditch, a Task and Finish review would be unnecessary. However, the Committee did decide to invite the County Council Officers to a meeting later in the year to review their progress with these issues.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments



As a result of some Councillors experiencing problems with Gypsies and Travellers stopping on land within their ward, the Committee decided to look at the issue of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments in the Borough. The Committee found that there had been insufficient adherence to the Joint Policy towards Gypsy and Traveller Unauthorised Encampments by all the partners signed up to the policy. The Chair wrote to the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer at Worcestershire County Council to initiate a meeting to discuss the policy. Officers from Redditch Borough Council attended this meeting to represent concerns raised by Members and the Committee.

“Short sharp reviews demonstrate the ability and flexibility of Overview and Scrutiny, not only to deliver lengthy detailed pieces of work, but also rapid, responsive outcomes.”

Councillor David Smith, Vice Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

During 2008, Officers dealing with Gypsy and Traveller encampments, attended a number of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to provide updates on the working of the Joint Policy and the number of incursions experienced in the Borough. As the number of incursions was decreasing, Members agreed that there was no reason to conduct further work on this issue at the present time.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Ditches



In 2007 Members expressed concerns about the condition of local ditches, particularly the ditches located within the Batchley Ward, and agreed that this might be an appropriate subject for scrutiny in 2008/09.

In March 2009 relevant Officers attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide further details about the condition of the ditches in the Borough. Members were informed that measures were being taken by the Council, in co-operation with other local authorities within the County, to manage local ditches.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Short Sharp Reviews: Review of Fly-Tipping



The Committee requested further information regarding the ways in which the Council dealt with fly-tipping. This request stemmed from a meeting where Members had scrutinised quarterly performance figures.

Officers provided the Committee with an update on rates of fly-tipping in the town and the action that was being taken to combat it. Members requested that Officers attend a future meeting to update Members on the progress of fly-tipping initiatives.



Task and Finish Groups

Task and Finish Groups

This year a number of Task and Finish Reviews were commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Task and Finish Groups have undertaken these reviews in accordance with terms of reference provided by the Committee.

Each Group has been chaired by a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Task and Finish Reviews have also provided non-Executive Councillors, who have not been appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with an opportunity to participate in the scrutiny process.

Two Groups have completed their work this year: the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group and the Third Sector Task and Finish Group. These Groups both completed their reviews according to schedule. Two further Task and Finish Reviews were launched this year and should be completed according to schedule.

“The (Third Sector Task and Finish Group) exercise was an excellent opportunity to find solutions to persistent and complex problems.”

Peter Rose, Policy Officer

The Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny into Flooding Task and Finish Group also completed their review this year. Redditch Borough Council was represented on this Group by a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee alongside representatives from the other local authorities based in Worcestershire. It is hoped that there will be further opportunities for joint scrutiny working in future years.

Further information about each of these reviews are provided in the following pages.

Task and Finish Groups

Task and Finish Group Meeting



The Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Review was launched in 2008. Featured in this photograph are from left to right : Councillor Anita Clayton; Councillor Brenda Quinney; Liz Tompkin (Head of Housing and Community Services); Chris Hemming (Asset Maintenance Officer); Councillor Phil Mould, (Chair of the Task and Finish Group); and Councillor Debbie Taylor.

Task and Finish Groups

Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group: Completed Review



**Mayor for 2008/09:
Councillor Jack Field**

Membership 2008/09

**Councillor M Chalk (Chair)
Councillors Boyd-Carpenter, Enderby and Hunt.**



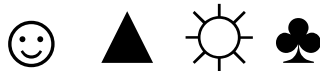
The Role of the Mayor review began in July 2008. The aims of this review were: to examine how the role of the Mayor could be developed; to scrutinise ways of using the Mayor to effectively promote the town; and to investigate ways in which the history of Redditch could be displayed in the Town Hall.

During their review, the members of the Group interviewed previous Mayors of other local authorities within Worcestershire. This enabled them to understand how the role of the Mayor was utilised in other authorities and to see if there were ideas for best practice that could be adopted by the Council. Members of the Group also interviewed representatives from the local press to find out the best ways of working with the press to promote the activities of the Mayor.

The Task and Finish Group reported their recommendations to the Executive Committee on 18 February 2009. These recommendations contained proposals relating to: improving the Mayor's Parlour; ensuring photographs of the Mayor were displayed in the Town Hall; increasing the amount of funding for the Mayor's hospitality budget; improving the Mayoral pages on the website and improving the Mayor's handbook. All of the recommendations were accepted with some minor amendments by the Executive Committee.

Task and Finish Groups

Third Sector Task and Finish Group: Completed Review



Membership 2008/09

Councillor D Thomas (Chair)

Councillors Banks, Cookson, Farooqui, Pearce and Shurmer.

Co-opted Member: Mrs Ann Sowton, from the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN).

The Third Sector Task and Finish Group were commissioned to review the Council's overarching approach to allocating grants and donations to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. They were asked to bring forward proposals that would shape the Council's grants process from 2010/11 onwards.

“The Scrutiny exercise was an excellent example of ‘joined-up thinking’. Having detailed analysis linking the political, procedural and community viewpoints in one process was a real step-change in policy development.”

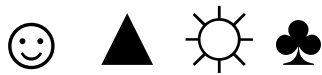
Peter Rose, Policy Officer.

During the course of their review the Group undertook a detailed analysis of the Council's existing grants process; scrutinised central government guidance; and reviewed potential options for inclusion within a corporate grants process. The Group also interviewed relevant expert witnesses from Gloucester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, which had been identified as examples of best practice in the field of local authority grants processes.

The Group recognised the significance of their proposals for local third sector organisations. Consequently, on 21 November 2008 they hosted a Voluntary Sector Grants Consultation Event which was attended by representatives of local third sector organisations.

Task and Finish Groups

Third Sector Task and Finish Group: Completed Review



During the course of the event there were a number of interactive group activities and information sessions which provided delegates with an opportunity to contribute to the review.

All the contributions made by delegates during the Consultation Event were considered by the Task and Finish Group and informed the Group's final recommendations.

The Group reported their recommendations at a special meeting of the Executive Committee on 13 January 2009. These recommendations were all approved.



Mrs Ann Sowton, Co-opted Member of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group, facilitating a working session during the Voluntary Sector Grants Consultation Event in November 2008.

Task and Finish Groups

Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise on Flooding: Completed Review



Redditch Borough Council Member Representatives 2008/09

Councillor M Chalk
Councillor D Smith (Substitute)

The Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding was proposed in response to the flooding which occurred in Worcestershire in summer 2007. The exercise was set up at the instigation of Worcestershire County Council in November 2007 and representatives from all the District Councils in Worcestershire and from the County Council were invited to participate. The Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee nominated Councillor Mike Chalk to represent Redditch Borough Council.

The Joint Scrutiny Group reviewed the immediate responses to the floods by local public agencies; the recovery of the County since the flooding; and what action needed to be taken to ensure that there would be a clear approach to dealing with any future emergencies.

The Group reported their findings to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2009. Following this report the Committee recommended that a working party of relevant Officers should convene to review the contents of the document; the implications for Redditch; and any actions required from the Council in relation to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations. This working group of Officers is tasked with reporting to a meeting of the Executive Committee in due course.

Task and Finish Groups

Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group: Ongoing Review



Membership 2008/09

Councillor P Mould (Chair)

Councillors A Clayton, B Quinney and D Taylor.

This review started in October 2008 and the Group have been working to a deadline for completing the exercise of June 2009. The objectives of the review were: to review the cleansing arrangements for communal areas including both those covered by the Council's cleaning contract and those that are not; to review the contents of the Council's cleaning contract; to determine the expectations of residents regarding the cleaning of communal areas; and to make recommendations that could lead to more efficient cleansing arrangements for the communal areas in the future.

Early in the review, to familiarise themselves with the conditions of the communal areas, Members visited several blocks of Council flats across the Borough. Members found that the levels of cleanliness of the communal areas which had cleaning arrangements covered by the Council's cleaning contract were much better than those that were not.

As part of the review, the Group agreed to arrange consultation with Council tenants and leaseholders. The first consultation took place in January with the Group visiting the Borough Tenants' Panel to gain feedback on the review and the possible proposal of implementing cleaning across all of the communal areas in Council Flats. The second consultation meeting was scheduled to take place in April and all Council tenants and leaseholders will be invited to attend. The Group wished to hear the opinions of tenants and leaseholders regarding cleaning arrangements and to discuss possible solutions to the issues raised.

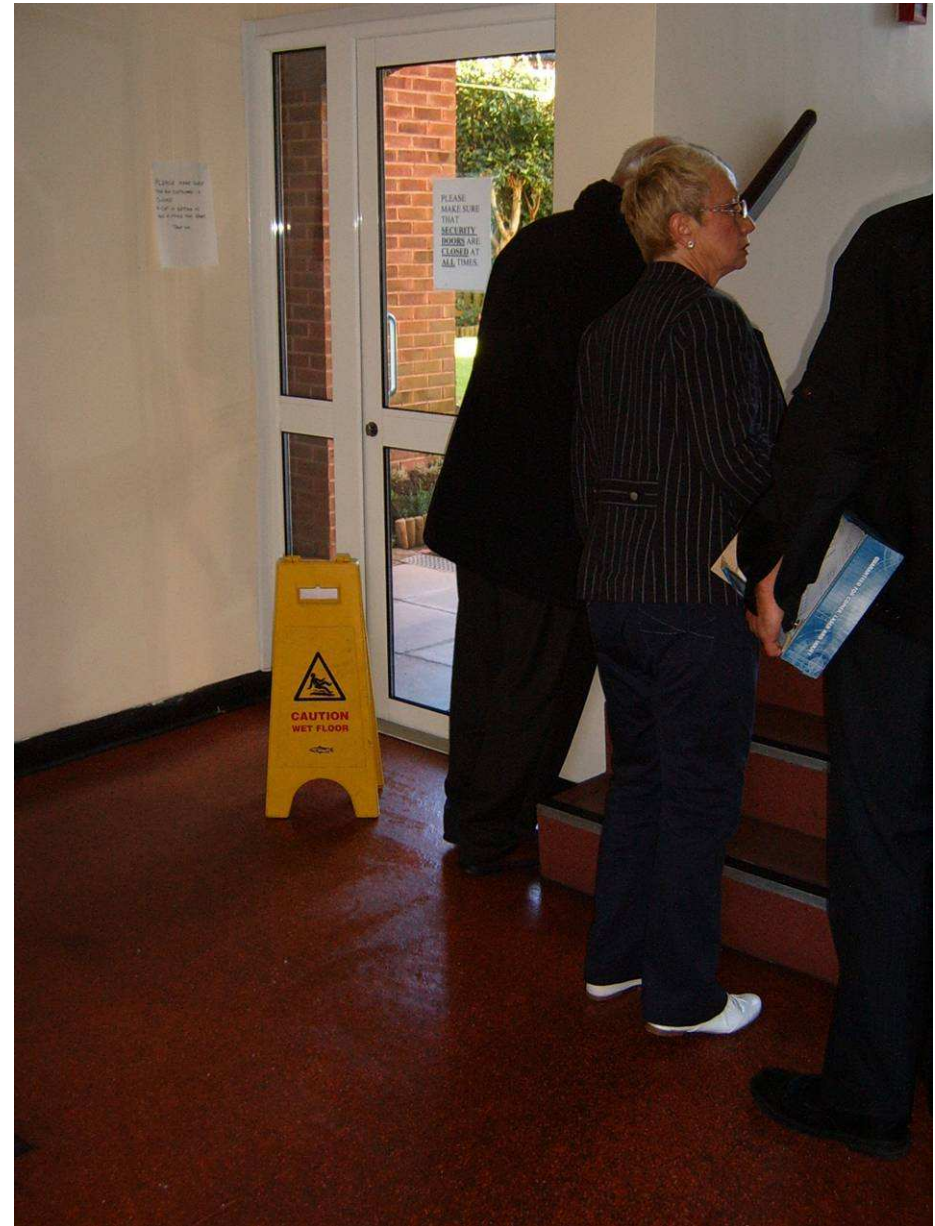
Task and Finish Groups

Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group: Ongoing Review



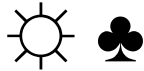
Members of the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group visited various Council flat blocks and sheltered housing schemes in October 2008 to observe the impact of cleaning arrangements in communal areas.

The picture to the right is of a communal area in Chiltern House, a sheltered housing scheme situated in Redditch. The Councillors featured in this picture are (from left to right) Councillors Phil Mould and Anita Clayton.



Task and Finish Groups

Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group: Ongoing Review



Membership 2008/09

Councillor D Smith (Chair)

Councillors J Cookson, J Field, B Hartnett and D Thomas.

Co-opted Membership (subject to consideration at the time of writing)

The review of the Council's approach to Housing Mutual Exchange was originally proposed during the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Afternoon in June 2008 (for further information about the Work Programme Planning Afternoon please see pp 3 - 6).

Members agreed that this review would focus upon: whether the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange policy and practices were fit for purpose; arrangements for exchanges with areas outside of the Borough; the methods utilised by the Council to advertise mutual exchanges to tenants and whether these could be improved; and lessons of best practice that could be learned from other local authorities.

Originally it was agreed that this item would be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself. However, it quickly became apparent that this in-depth review would be more appropriate for a Task and Finish Group exercise.

The Task and Finish Group aim to complete their review by the summer 2009.

Press Coverage

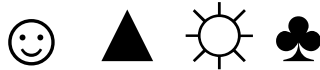
The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is always looking for ways to promote its activities and to raise awareness of the scrutiny function outside the Council. Last year's Committee, at the end of the year, issued a press release promoting the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2007/08. This prompted a complimentary article in one of the local newspapers.

This year, the Third Sector Task and Finish Group used the local press considerably to raise awareness of their work. The Group utilised both a press release and an advert to invite representatives of the voluntary sector to the Consultation Event they hosted in November 2008. There was also some coverage regarding the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group in the local press.

The recent re-introduction of the Council's newspaper, Redditch Matters, provides further scope to advertise the activities of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. Articles regarding the Overview and Scrutiny function and about the Third Sector Task and Finish Group are due to be published in a forthcoming edition of Redditch Matters.

Conclusion

Scrutiny in the future



The Committee feels that this year it has undertaken some very thorough reviews and has made a significant number of recommendations to the Executive Committee both in the form of Task and Finish Group recommendations and recommendations derived from work undertaken by the Committee itself.

Members of the Committee agree that it is becoming more effective at: undertaking policy reviews, holding partners to account, and conducting short sharp reviews at the Committee level. However, the Committee recognises that there are still areas of scrutiny that could be developed and improved.

During the coming year, Members and Officers have identified the following issues for further work:

- the development of a Councillor Call for Action process, including a specified role for Overview and Scrutiny within that process;
- effective scrutiny of local partners and partnerships;
- more effective scrutiny of performance and budgetary information; and
- more effective pre-scrutiny.

Membership Gallery

Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



**Councillor Phil Mould, Chair of
the Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



**Councillor David Smith,
Vice-Chair of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

Membership Gallery



**Councillor Kath
Banks**



**Councillor Mike
Chalk**



**Councillor Bill
Hartnett**



**Councillor Robin
King**



**Councillor William
Norton**



**Councillor
Debbie Taylor**



**Councillor Diane
Thomas**

Expressions of Gratitude

Expert Witnesses

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the following expert witnesses for their contributions during the year:

Wayne Arthur, Worcestershire County Council
Alec Benwell, Tamworth Borough Council
The Borough Tenants Panel
Austin Birks, Diamond Bus Company
Matthew Cooper, Diamond Bus Company
Stephen Harrison, Worcestershire County Council
Susie James, Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Stephen Inman, Worcester City Council
John Jordan, Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Martin King, Wychavon District Council
Alison Kite, Gloucester City Council
Tessa Liebschner, Gloucester City Council
Councillor Richard Morris, Droitwich Spa Town Council
Lorraine Pitt, Droitwich Spa Town Council
Andrew Powell, The Redditch Standard
Martin Rowe, Worcestershire County Council
Gordon Stewart, Worcestershire County Council
Chris Wilson, Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Valerie Wood, Pershore Town Council

Members would also like to thank the 25 delegates who attended the Voluntary Sector Grants Consultation Event in November 2008.

Expressions of Gratitude

Co-opted Members

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the following co-opted members for their contributions:

Trish Buckley, Co-opted Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from UNISON

Ron Colebrook, Co-opted Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from UNISON

Ann Sowton, Co-opted Member of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group from the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)

Officers

A number of Officers have been particularly supportive of the Overview and Scrutiny process in 2008/09. Although it is not possible to acknowledge all Officers in this report the following individuals deserve recognition for their outstanding contributions to the scrutiny process this year.

Sue Hanley, Deputy Chief Executive

Angie Heighway, Head of Strategy and Partnerships

Chris Hemming, Asset Maintenance Officer

Teresa Kristunas, Head of Finance, Revenue and Benefits

Peter Rose, Policy Officer

Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing.

Glossary / Key to Abbreviations

BARN

The Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) is a local infrastructure organisation which supports the Voluntary and Community Sector.

CfPS

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) is the organisation set up to promote effective scrutiny in local government.

Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan forms one link in a chain of plans and strategies which are targeted at achieving a vision for the County of Worcestershire. Redditch Borough Council's Corporate Plan for 2009 to 2012 is a key document which demonstrates how the Council will work towards the vision for the Borough set out in the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy.

INLOGOV

The Institute of Local Government Studies, (INLOGOV), is a department at the University of Birmingham which specialises in public sector research. The department runs numerous seminars throughout the year, including sessions that focus on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The Medium Term Financial Plan contains information about the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for the forthcoming three year period. In particular, general information about the budget; required savings; and potential revenue and capital expenditure is provided in this plan.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers

Officer Support

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders, received the Outstanding Support Service Award at the 2008 Redditch Borough Council Employee Awards.



Featured are (from left to right) Helen Saunders and Jess Bayley holding the trophy and certificates awarded to them during the Staff Awards Ceremony in January 2009.

Overview and Scrutiny Contact Details

For additional copies of this report, or to find out more about Overview & Scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council please contact:

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Helen Saunders, Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer
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Further information about the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council can also be found on the Council's dedicated web pages. To access these web pages please use the web address attached here and then follow the links:

<http://hub.whub.org.uk/home/rbc-your-council-overview-and-scrutiny>

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