

**Redditch Borough
Council**



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08

Annual Report 2007/08

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Annual Report 2007/08

Foreword from the Chair



**Chair of the Committee:
Councillor C MacMillan**

The start of 2007/08 saw Redditch Council adopting a new approach to Overview and Scrutiny. With a new remit, new Chair, new Vice Chair and newly recruited Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers the Committee has gone through a year which required the development of new processes, procedures and policies. As the year has progressed and the Committee has become more experienced it has been able to build on its initial foundations to the point where Overview and Scrutiny is now fit for purpose and ready to accept the challenges that lie ahead.

As Chair I have been surrounded by hard working Officers and elected Members who really wanted Overview and Scrutiny to succeed. They were prepared to take a few risks and to put in the creative thinking that has been necessary to get us up and running. Starting with an almost blank piece of paper the Committee has built very firm foundations for the future. Overview and Scrutiny has, in the years ahead, a capacity to be a great force for good and to help deliver real benefits for the residents of the town.

During the year the Committee has undertaken some interesting work in a number of significant areas and all who have worked on these tasks should be congratulated. On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank residents, Members and Officers for their support throughout the year.

Councillor Colin MacMillan,
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2007/08

Summary

There is an annual requirement for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to produce a report outlining their 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.

“I think as the years go by Overview and Scrutiny just keeps getting better and better!”

Councillor A Fry, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Contents

Introduction	page 1
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Commissioning Body Role	page 2
Scrutiny Member Development	page 2
Performance and Budget Monitoring	pages 3 - 4
Portfolio Holder Annual Reports	page 5
Civil Parking Enforcement	page 6
Public Engagement	page 7
Monitoring Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations	pages 8 - 9
Additional Scrutiny Monitoring	page 9
Work Programme Planning Day	page 10

Contents

Task and Finish Groups

Scrutiny Scoping Document	page 11
Task and Finish Update Reports	page 11
Task and Finish Membership	page 12
Optimum Number Groups	page 13
Short Sharp Reviews	page 13
Communications T&F	page 14
District Centres T&F	page 15
Fees and Charges T&F	page 16
Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding	page 17
Outcomes	page 18

Contents

Membership Gallery	page 19
Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers	page 20
Overview and Scrutiny Contact Details	page 21

Annual Report 2007/08



Members attending a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In order from left to right these Councillors are: Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andy Fry, Councillor Diane Thomas, Councillor Jack Cookson and Councillor Kath Banks.

Introduction

For the first time, at the Annual General meeting of full Council, held on the 21st of May 2007, a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee was appointed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises eight 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 to ensure that decision-making processes remain transparent and accountable.

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 and to monitor the effectiveness of the policy and budget setting process at the Council.

“As the year has progressed and the Committee has become more experienced it has been able to build on its initial foundations to the point where Overview and Scrutiny is now fit for purpose and ready to accept the challenges it faces”

Councillor C MacMillan, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership 2007/08

Councillor C MacMillan (Chair)

Councillor A Fry (Vice Chair)

Councillors Banks, Brunner, Cookson, Passingham, 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.

Scrutiny Member Development

To ensure that all Members became familiar with the new scrutiny arrangements the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee led a Member Development evening on the 10th July 2007 introducing Members to the new scrutiny process. This training event also provided an overview of the new arrangements for proposing Task and Finish Group exercises.

There was a positive response from Members to this training which facilitated both Member understanding and engagement in the scrutiny process. To maintain this level of understanding and to ensure that scrutiny remains effective at the Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that all new Councillors should attend at least one meeting of the Committee a year in future.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Performance and Budget Monitoring

The Committee performs an important role on behalf of the Council in that it receives and considers quarterly budget and performance monitoring reports from each of the Council's four Directorates. Through monitoring 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 maintains a close eye on the Council's progress towards achieving its performance and budget targets.

“The Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to refine its strategies for ensuring an adequate overview on the Council's major budgetary and performance monitoring information”.

Steve Skinner, Democratic Services Manager

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also received information about the Council's internal performance management system. The Committee was keen to ensure that all Members could access this system to enable them to scrutinise the Council's performance. At the instigation of the Committee, Officers will be working with Councillor volunteers to develop an appropriate training package which should enable Members to utilise the system effectively in future.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This year Members have investigated ways to ensure that consideration of performance and budget data by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is undertaken in a constructive manner. Following the submission of a quarterly monitoring report, the Committee requested a presentation on the subject of community safety, to which all Members were invited. At this presentation detailed information about the Council's performance in relation to its community safety responsibilities was considered and Members identified a preferred format for monitoring community safety data at future meetings.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

“This year links with the Executive Committee have been strengthened and the Council’s Portfolio Holders have all attended meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give presentations and discuss with Overview and Scrutiny Members their areas of responsibility. This closer relationship helps ensure both “wings” of the Council work better together”.

Steve Skinner, Democratic Services Manager

Portfolio Holder Annual Reports

For the first time this year the Council’s six Portfolio Holders were invited to present Annual Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The objective of this exercise was to ensure that the decision making process was transparent and democratically accountable. All the presentations delivered by the Portfolio Holders have been gratefully received.

The Annual Reports this year have tended to provide broad overviews of the roles and responsibilities of the Portfolio Holders. In future, Scrutiny Committee Members have agreed that Portfolio Holders will be invited to concentrate upon updating the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about work undertaken in areas relevant to their portfolios. Scrutiny Members have also agreed that Portfolio Holders shall be required to incorporate a discussion of relevant performance and budget indicators, and the Council’s performance in relation to these indicators, into their Annual Reports.

It is envisaged that through introducing these changes Portfolio Holders will become more accountable to scrutiny Members and to the public.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Civil Parking Enforcement

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee published a final set of recommendations for a review of Civil Parking Enforcement. Members recommended that Redditch Borough Council enter into partnership with Wychavon District Council to deliver a parking enforcement service in the Borough.



The Committee considered a request from the Executive Committee to submit further recommendations. However, Members agreed that the recommendations contained within the report were appropriate and the report was forwarded to a meeting of full Council where the recommendations were approved. The Civil Parking Enforcement arrangements are due to be introduced in 2009.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Public Engagement

During the year attempts have been made to engage with the public. For example, the Members of the District Centres Task and Finish Group toured Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres where they met with commercial and residential tenants to discuss redevelopment needs in the centres. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has recognised that there is a need to improve and extend the level of engagement.

“For the District Centres Task and Finish review we sought knowledge from customers, residents and local business people to identify improvements that could be made to the centres.”

Councillor A Fry, Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group.

The Committee recognises that relations with local media representatives need to be enhanced to enable the Committee to engage more effectively with the Public. In future press releases will accompany the launch of scrutiny exercises and will be used to promote public involvement in scrutiny.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monitoring responses to scrutiny recommendations

In the 2006/07 Annual Report it was reported that there was a need to develop an effective monitoring framework to track the response of the Executive Committee's responses to Scrutiny recommendations. This has proved difficult because the majority of recommendations have been produced for consideration late in the year. The Chairs of the Task and Finish Groups, following submission of their recommendations, will be asked to monitor the response of the Executive Committee and full Council. Where recommendations are approved, relevant senior Officers will be asked to produce an implementation plan for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



The Committee did monitor responses to the recommendations made by Members who scrutinised anti-social behaviour and homelessness in 2006. The Committee considered the Council's response to the Anti-Social Behaviour report on the 26th September 2007. Members were informed that since the publication of the report changes at the national level, such as the introduction of the Respect Agenda, had rendered some of the report's recommendations invalid. However, Members were provided with a detailed explanation about action undertaken by Officers to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monitoring responses to scrutiny recommendations

The Committee received the Preventing Homelessness update on the 28th November 2007. Officers explained that Housing Services had altered working practices to focus upon preventing homelessness and managing individual cases, in accordance with many of the recommendations contained within the report.



Additional Scrutiny Monitoring

At the beginning of 2008 the Committee introduced an Actions List as a standard item on the Overview and Scrutiny agenda. The objective of this item is to enable scrutiny Members to monitor responses to actions requested at meetings of the Committee. The Committee intend that this should form the basis of future developments in the scrutiny monitoring process at the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme Planning Day

At present at Redditch Borough Council the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reviewed regularly and Members have the 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 Day. This Planning Day was identified as an example of best practice used at other local authorities which could facilitate continuous improvement in Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. The Planning Day was approved as an opportunity: for Members to discuss the objectives for scrutiny for the year; to identify subjects for review during the year; to identify ways to improve working relations between 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.

“Overview and Scrutiny has, in the years ahead, a capacity to be a great force for good and to help deliver real benefits for the residents of the town.”

Councillor C MacMillan,
Chair of the Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee.

Members agreed that the Planning Day should take place in May every year, following the appointment of Members to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the Council's Annual Meeting. The first of these Planning Days is due to take place on the 23rd May 2008.

Task and Finish Groups

Scrutiny Scoping Document

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the scoping document, which forms the basis for the work of Task and Finish Groups. As a result of this review proposed scrutiny exercises were required to adhere to SMART principles: to be Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; and Timely. The majority of reviews established under this new framework have focused on strategic issues and have therefore required long-term commitment from Members.

“During the year the Committee has undertaken some interesting work in a number of significant areas and all who have worked on these tasks should be congratulated.”

Councillor C MacMillan, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Task and Finish Update Reports

The Committee has a standard agenda item dedicated to Task and Finish Group progress reports that are delivered by the Chairs of reviews. This arrangement provides Members of the Committee with an opportunity to advise a Group as well as to monitor whether they are adhering to the original objectives of their exercise. Members have committed to make this process more rigorous in future particularly to ensure that reviews are completed in a timely manner.

Task and Finish Groups

Task and Finish Membership

Task and Finish Groups this year have been chaired by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Other non-executive Councillors have been involved in the Scrutiny process, by acting as members of review Groups and representing the Council on the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny exercise into Flooding. The Task and Finish Groups have had either five or eight Members this year.



Councillor Field, Helen Saunders (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer) and Councillor R King working on the Communications Task and Finish Group.

A membership of five Councillors has proved to be more manageable and helps to reduce the Member capacity problems that can arise in smaller local authorities. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that in future a maximum of five Members should be appointed to Task and Finish Groups.

Task and Finish Groups

Optimum Number of Groups

It has become increasingly apparent this year that the Council's capacity to support Task and Finish reviews with both Councillors and Officers is limited. In future years, to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny process remains productive, it is recommended that there should be a mixture of Task and Finish Groups and short, sharp reviews.

Short Sharp Reviews

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a recent meeting agreed that the Committee should assume a greater role in scrutinising topics. Indeed, they concurred that in future the Committee would undertake more wide-ranging debates about any subjects proposed for scrutiny. 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 the Committee may decide to make recommendations directly to the Executive Committee. These Committee deliberations are likely to form the basis for short sharp reviews at the Council.

The likely impact of this approach upon the scrutiny process is difficult to ascertain at this stage. A trial run of these new arrangements occurred on the 27th March 2008 when the Committee met to discuss the subjects of economic development and the Worcestershire Joint Policy on Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments. It is felt that the Committee will be in a stronger position to assess the outcome of these new arrangements in the 2008/09 Annual Report as this will enable the Committee to build experience in the area.

Task and Finish Groups

Communications Task and Finish Group

Membership 2007/08

Councillor J Brunner (Chair)
Councillors Banks, Field, Fry and R. King.



**Chair of the Group:
Councillor J Brunner**

The Communications Task and Finish Group was established in June 2007 and has been undertaken in two stages. During stage one Members explored the perceptions of Redditch and Redditch Borough Council and sought to establish what profile and key messages Members and Officers wanted to portray about the Council at the local, regional and national levels. During stage one of the exercise the group consulted with other Members; Officers the Council's partner organisations; expert Communications Officers; and with key local media representatives.

The aim of Stage Two was to explore ways of improving the Council's current communications processes in order to tackle the negative perceptions and to promote a more appropriate reputation for the Council and town. The Group have reviewed the strategic approach that the Council takes to delivering communications and scrutinised the Council's use of key communications tools to convey key messages to local residents: including the civic newspaper; press releases; and the corporate branding of services.

The Group are due to produce their final recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April.

Task and Finish Groups

District Centres Task and Finish Group

“This Task and Finish review has been an extremely interesting exercise and, through the redevelopment of Church Hill, should lead to the biggest change to the town of the last forty years.”

Councillor A Fry, Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group

Membership 2007/08

Councillor A Fry (Chair)

Councillors Banks, Chalk, Dudley, Enderby, Hicks and Hunt.



**Chair of the Group:
Councillor A Fry**

The District Centres review was launched in 2005 and originally had aimed to determine which of the four purpose-built District Centres (Church Hill, Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow) should be the subject of a wholesale redevelopment. Church Hill was selected for this task in October 2006.

The second stage of the review began in May 2007. The objective for this stage was to investigate what cosmetic improvements could be made to Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres.

In May some new Members were appointed to the Group. To familiarise themselves with the conditions in the areas Members toured the District Centres on the 4th September 2007 and met with local commercial and residential tenants.

At subsequent meetings Members have discussed numerous actions that could be taken to cosmetically improve the District Centres. The Group are due to produce their final recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April.

Task and Finish Groups



Membership 2007/08

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group

Councillor C MacMillan (Chair)

Councillor A Fry (Vice Chair)

Councillors Chalk, Clayton, Cookson, Hicks, Hill and Passingham.



The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group was established in July 2007. The overarching objectives of this review were to assess the contribution charging can make to funding efficiency and the strategic effectiveness of the Council; to ensure the Council's charging arrangements support the Council's strategic objectives; and to examine and recommend ways to manage the impact of charging on equity.

The Group have scrutinised charges on a service by service basis and have approved existing fees and charges for a number of services. Members have also identified areas where a charging framework might be appropriate and made recommendations that the Council should charge for some existing services such as for the provision of pre-application advice to individuals seeking planning permission. The Group is currently in the process of developing a draft charging policy for the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that recommendations can be forwarded to the Executive Committee on an ongoing basis. The Group are undertaking a strategic exercise which is likely to take a long time to complete. Members should therefore expect to receive an additional summary on the progress of the exercise in the 2008/09 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

Task and Finish Groups

Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise on Flooding



**Redditch Borough
Council Representative:
Councillor M Chalk**

Redditch Borough Council Member Representatives 2007/08

**Councillor M Chalk
Councillor A Fry (Substitute)**

The 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 district Councils in the County were invited to participate. The Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to take part in the exercise and nominated Councillor M Chalk to represent Redditch Borough Council.

The Joint Scrutiny Group will be reviewing the immediate response to the floods by local public agencies; the recovery of the County since the flooding; and what action needs to be taken to ensure that there is a clear approach to deal with any future emergencies.

The Group are due to interview representatives from local public agencies at forthcoming meetings. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be receiving regular updates on the progress of the exercise from the Redditch Borough Council representative. A report containing the Group's draft recommendations are due to be considered by the Committee in summer 2008.

Outcomes: Scrutiny Reports

Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Reports presented to the Executive Committee / Council during 2007/08:

Full (Formal) Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Civil Parking Enforcement (15th August to the Executive Committee and 17th September to full Council)

Communications Task and Finish Group (due to report to the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April)

District Centres Task and Finish Group (due to report to the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April)

Smaller (Informal) Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group (20th February 2008)

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group (2nd April 2008)

Fees and charges Task and Finish Group (23rd April 2008)

Membership Gallery



**Councillor Colin
MacMillan**



**Councillor Andy
Fry**



**Councillor Kath
Banks**



**Councillor
Juliet Brunner**



**Councillor Jack
Cookson**



**Councillor Betty
Passingham**



**Councillor
Debbie Taylor**



**Councillor Diane
Thomas**

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers

Officer Support

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders (from July 2007)



Jess Bayley, Councillor David Hunt and Helen Saunders in March 2008

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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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>

Overview & Scrutiny
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