

2009/2010
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Welcome to the 2009/2010 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

In the past 12 months Overview and Scrutiny in Swindon has continued to be recognised at both a regional and national level. The Councils' Scrutiny Unit continues to Chair the South West Overview and Scrutiny Network and has been re-elected to act as the South West regions Officer representative on the Centre for Public Scrutiny National Scrutiny Forum. In addition the Scrutiny Unit and key Health Scrutiny Members were part of the Great Western Ambulance Joint Health Scrutiny Committee along with Members from Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Bath and Bristol which won the Centre for Public Scrutiny 'Good Scrutiny' award in 2009.

"Overview and Scrutiny in Swindon has continued to be recognised at both a regional and national level"

I greatly value the role of the overview and scrutiny function and recognise that it plays a significant role in working towards a vision of improving the quality of life for the people of Swindon. The Council continually strives to deliver improved services that provide choice, quality of service and value for money. To achieve our vision and improve the Borough of Swindon we need to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny process:

I look forward to working with the Overview and Scrutiny function to ensure it continues to develop and is successful on behalf of the people of Swindon.

- Holds service providers, including the Council, to account for their decisions in an open and transparent environment
- Has a key focus on the issues that really matter to the people of Swindon
- Is able to identify areas of under-performance and local concern
- Can develop evidence based recommendations to improve service delivery, partnership working, improve policy and influence emerging thinking of the Council and its partners

Insert Chief Executive Signature

Gavin Jones, Chief Executive
Swindon Borough Council



Introduction from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

It has been a very busy year for Overview and Scrutiny in Swindon, having completed various reviews, held decision makers to account, scrutinised the Council's budget proposals and having been through a controversial call-in in the Scrutiny Committee itself.

This was my first year as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny function and it has been an interesting and fulfilling experience.



In order to continue to make the Overview and Scrutiny function as effective as possible, to ensure that it continues to contribute effectively to service improvements across the Borough and continues to hold decision makers in Swindon to account I began the year by setting out my vision for Overview and Scrutiny in Swindon and the improvements that I hoped to see take place.

My vision for Overview and Scrutiny

Cabinet members would personally com

- Fully take part in Scrutiny process
- Would contribute fully in developing work programmes
- Commit to using Overview process to develop policy proposals
- Involve Scrutiny in the budget setting process
- Resource the Overview and Scrutiny function as necessary

Council Service areas would help build on existing scrutiny best practice and encourage and promote the scrutiny function within their service areas, leading to:

- Improve understanding amongst officers of the process
- More proactive officers leading to increase in work programme suggestions and bringing policy renewal areas to relevant Committees
- Improved report process
- Develop a Member champion role

Councillors would take responsibility for the Overview and Scrutiny function through:

- Open door policy between scrutiny unit and all Members
- All Members to get involved in committees and task groups, not just the usual suspects
- Greater ownership of work programmes
- Appropriate use of outside expertise and views

Improved practice within the Overview and Scrutiny function to include:

- All committees to have full briefings prior to formal committees
- Agenda planning to take place earlier to allow Cabinet advanced detail of for discussion
- All directorates to provide link officers to scrutiny unit
- Chairs to take proactive role in providing leadership for their committees
- Increase in Overview and Scrutiny training for Members
- Committees to focus on priority areas

This report will detail the topics that were subject to review by the Overview and Scrutiny function in 2009/10.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to look at the services and issues that effect the lives of the people of Swindon.

Its about listening to the concerns of local people and to check how the Council and other organisations are performing and where necessary seek improvement.

Scrutiny and the council structure

The Overview and Scrutiny committees support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as well as numerous other public services such as the NHS, the Primary care Trust and the Police. They allow the community, via their Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Ward Councillors and Connecting People Connecting Places Cluster Groups to have a greater say in council matters by making enquiries into matters of local concern.

These enquiries lead to reports and recommendations that advise the cabinet, the council and partners and stakeholders on policies, budget and service delivery. Scrutiny committees also monitor decisions of the Cabinet. They can call in a decision that has been made by the Cabinet or an individual member of the Cabinet, but not yet implemented.

This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Cabinet or individual member of the Cabinet reconsider the decision. The Cabinet or the council may also consult Scrutiny on forthcoming decisions in the development of policy.

What are the aims of Overview and Scrutiny?

- To hold the Cabinet and officers to account
- To ensure that Council services provide value for money
- To review issues and topics that impact on the lives of the people of Swindon
- To scrutinise partners such as the NHS, PCT, Police and others
- To actively engage the public in the political process

What type of work do Overview and Scrutiny committees undertake?

Overview and Scrutiny aims to reflect the voice and concern of the public, therefore it aims to select topics that the people of Swindon are concerned about. The public are encouraged to make suggestions for topics to Overview and Scrutiny throughout the year and these suggestions are then considered by Councillors.

What doesn't Overview and Scrutiny do?

- Make decisions about Council policies and services or those of partner agencies, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees can only make recommendations for service improvements to be considered by Cabinet or Council or our partners such as the Police or NHS.
- Deal with individual queries or complaints.
- Overview and Scrutiny can not review regulatory decisions such as those taken by the Planning or Licensing Committee.

How can Members of the public get involved in Overview and Scrutiny?

The people of Swindon can get involved in Overview and Scrutiny in a number of ways:

- Attending Overview and Scrutiny meetings
- Suggesting a topic or issue to be reviewed
- Giving evidence to an Overview and Scrutiny review
- Sending in comments and questions via scrutiny@swindon.gov.uk

Details on the Overview and Scrutiny function, meetings and topics that can be reviewed are available by visiting the Council's webpages:

www.swindon.gov.uk/yourcouncil/scrutiny.htm

You can also contact Swindon's Overview and Scrutiny unit for more information and guidance at:

Overview and Scrutiny
Swindon Borough Council
Civic Offices
Euclid Street
Swindon Borough Council
SN1 2JH
Tel: 01793 463109 or 463412
scrutiny@swindon.gov.uk

Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Derique Montaut
Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Holding the Executive to account

The Cabinet, led by the Leader of the Council, is responsible for the service delivery and the performance of the Council and Council services. The Scrutiny Committee is responsible for ensuring that the Leader and his Cabinet are performing on behalf of the people of Swindon. The Scrutiny Committee does this in a number of ways, by:

- Questioning decisions made by the Cabinet and Cabinet Members
- Holding individual Question and Answer sessions with each Cabinet Member on their performance
- One off reviews of specific topics or issues

The Scrutiny Committee held the executive to account in 2009/10 on a whole range of topics, these included:

Leader of Council Annual Presentation Benefits Service

In Swindon the Leader of the Council is required to come before the Scrutiny Committee and give an assessment of council performance and outline the objectives and aims of their administration in the coming year. Six months later the Leader is required to come before Scrutiny again to be questioned on the progress of delivering the objectives and aims that the administration had identified as goals for that year.

The Leader identified regeneration as a key issue in the coming and future years.

Following an Audit Commission inspection which rated the Benefits Service as 'poor' the Scrutiny Committee called the Cabinet Member responsible to attend a question session on what was being done to improve the service.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Benefits was questioned on the action plan to improve the benefits service and the reasons for the poor inspection. The Committee focused on ensuring the action plan addressed the backlog of claims and the speed and accuracy of the service. The Committee were satisfied that the Cabinet Member were ensure that their concerns would be addressed in the action plan.

Consideration of Cabinet Decisions

The Scrutiny Committee has a duty to review the policies, process and

implications of Cabinet decision making and the way in which those decisions are made. Therefore all decisions that are taken at Cabinet are automatically referred for review to the Scrutiny Committee. The role of the Scrutiny Committee is to ensure that decisions have been taken in accordance with the following principles:

- Proportionality (the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome)
- Due consultation has been taken along with professional advice from officers
- Respect for Human Rights
- A presumption in favour of openness
- Clarity of aims and desired outcomes

In addition the Scrutiny Committee has a role to ensure that Cabinet fully understands the implications of the decision that it has taken. If the Committee feels that a decision has not been taken in accordance with the above principles it can send it back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

Notably in 2009/10 the Scrutiny Committee held a number of meetings on the Cabinet's decision to enter into a loan agreement with Digital City UK Ltd to deliver a Wi-Fi project across the Borough, this was in response to a significant number of public questions on the topic. Through scrutiny of the decision making process a number of anomalies were identified and corrected in the loan process.

The Committee also referred the issue of changes to town centre car park charges to the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further investigation.

Cabinet Member Q&As

In Swindon we have adopted the practice of holding every Cabinet member to account directly on performance within their portfolio. This is done through a question and answer session with each Cabinet Member where the Scrutiny Committee can focus on the performance of services, the budget positions and any future plans and emerging policy changes.

The Cabinet Question and Answer system ensures that Cabinet Members are held publicly accountable for the services that they are responsible for providing.

Economic, Environmental & Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Justin Tomlinson
Chair of Economic, Environmental and Sustainability
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to review and develop evidence based policy proposals, scrutinise performance and provide advice to the Cabinet and our partners on topics that fit under economic, environmental and sustainability.

In order to do this the Committee will question witnesses to review how a service is delivered and is performing, ensure public concerns are raised and take evidence from relevant parties to see if improvements can be made.

Local Area Agreement

The Committee has a role in scrutinising the delivery of the Environmental Sustainability and the Economic Development and Enterprise Blocks of Swindon's Local Area Agreement.

The Chair of each of the Blocks came before the Committee and were questioned on performance against the agreed targets and indicators within the Block. As a result of these discussions the Committee agreed to include the LAA target regarding CO2 Reduction and Sustainability on its work programme.

Developing the Library Strategy

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Corporate Affairs brought a report to the Committee on the developing Library Strategy and asked the Committee for their assistance in its development. The Deputy Leader presented a review of the Council's Library service undertaken by ERS Consultancy which concluded that the Council required a vision and strategy for Library services.

The Committee questioned the Deputy Leader around library provision, community involvement and use of library facilities and attempts to modernise our library services.

Town Centre Regeneration

The Committee questioned representatives from the New Swindon Company on matters relating to Town Centre Regeneration, with a focus on plans for

improving the public realm in the Town Centre. The New Swindon Company was formed by the Council to attempt to stimulate investment and co-ordinate the revitalisation of the Town Centre.

The Committee focused its questions around the consultation exercise with the public on proposals to improve Regent Street and the details of the proposed improvements themselves.

As a result of the discussions the New Swindon Company agreed to ensure that information about the regeneration plans was visible to town centre shoppers who may wonder what was going on along with historical information about the areas being regenerated.

Waste and Recycling

The Committee held a question and answer session with the Deputy Leader of Council, the Group Director for Environment and Leisure, the Head of Streetsmart and the Head of Waste Management on the Council's waste and recycling services.

The Committee reviewed the recycling figures for the Borough along with the various services that the Council provides such as recycling collections, recycling centre's, use of wheelie bins, fly tipping and the waste wardens service. In addition a number of public questions were asked in regards to the services provided, the Deputy Leader and the officers present provided responses to those questions.

Steam Museum

The Committee held a meeting at the Steam Museum on performance of the museum, the changes and improvements being implemented and the way the management structure and commercial direction of the museum had changed. As part of the meeting Members and any public attendees were given a tour of the museum and examined the progress made in improving the grand hall.

The Committee questioned the Cabinet member for Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development and the Manager of Steam on the subsidy given to the museum and the revenue that the museum generated. The Committee closely examined the issue of cost per visitor to the Council which had been considerably reduced since 2005 due to improvements that made the museum a more attractive visitor destination and the improved conferencing facilities that the museum had to offer.

The Committee resolved that the Steam museum staff should be congratulated for the improvements that have been made and that a more detailed scrutiny review of Steam be conducted by the Committee in 2010/11 in order to ensure delivery of the business plan for the museum and identify further ways of making the museum more successful.

Safer & Stronger Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Vera Tomlinson
Chair of the Safer and Stronger
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to review and develop evidence based policy proposals, scrutinise performance and provide advice to the Cabinet and our partners on topics that fit within the remit of the Safer and Stronger Scrutiny Committee. The Committee also has the role of being Swindon's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee which means that it has a responsibility to scrutinise the work and performance of the Community Safety Partnership and any crime and disorder matter within the Borough.

In order to do this the Committee will question witnesses to review how a service is delivered and is performing, ensure public concerns are raised and take evidence from relevant parties to see if improvements can be made.

Local Area Agreement

The Committee has a role in scrutinising the delivery of the Safer and Stronger block of Swindon's Local Area Agreement.

The Chair of the Block came before the Committee and was questioned on performance against the agreed targets and indicators within the Block, as a result of these discussions and the results of the annual work programme exercise the Committee decided to focus its 2009/10 work programme on the topic of alcohol and the affect that it has on the Borough of Swindon.

Alcohol and the affect that it has on the Borough

The Committee, the relevant Cabinet Members, partners and the public responses to the annual work programme exercise identified alcohol as the issue of most concern in the Borough, in response the Committee decided to focus its entire work programme on the topic.

The Committee began its review by scrutinising the Swindon Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for 2008-2010, the Committee learnt that:

- 16% of Swindon people binge-drink
- 7% are dependent on alcohol

- 10% of Swindon's disease burden is alcohol-related, accounting for 468 hospital admissions in 2005 and 20% of A&E attendances
- Alcohol is a factor in 47% of all adult offending
- About 80 deaths per year are directly attributable to alcohol
- The financial cost of the harm caused by alcohol-use disorders is estimated at £66.6 million per year
- Almost 30% of the violent crimes recorded by the police are committed in the town centre, most of them between Friday evening and Sunday morning at times when the consumption of alcohol is at its highest.

The Swindon Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy identified the reasons why alcohol is such an area of concern in the Borough, in order to help improve their understanding of the topic and identify proposals to improve the situation the Committee sought to gain evidence through the following:

- Question & Answer Session with Dr Peter O'Connell, Consultant at Emergency Department of Great Western Hospital
- Visit to Emergency Department of Great Western Hospital
- Question & Answer Session with Swindon & Wiltshire Alcohol and Drug Service (SWADs)
- Visit to SWADs and analysis of services provided by SWADs
- Question & Answer Session with Swindon Borough Council's Licensing Manager
- Question & Answer session with Swindon Borough Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit
- Question & Answer session with Wiltshire Police
- Question & Answer session with the Cabinet Member for a Safer and Stronger Borough

The Committee concluded that the 2010/11 work programme should continue the review into the affect that alcohol has on the Borough in order to allow the Committee to gain more evidence, to examine areas of particular concern such as licensing matters, education, alcohol support services and the developing new alcohol harm reduction strategy in more detail.

Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Peter Mallinson
Chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee is to hold decision makers to account, both within Swindon Borough Council and in the Health Service, and to review and develop policies and investigate issues of public concern that impact Health and Adult Social Care within the community.

The Department of Health summarises the role of Health Scrutiny as “...a lever to improve the health of local people, ensuring that their needs are considered as an integral part of the delivery and development of health services”.

Health Scrutiny can achieve this by scrutinising whether:

- Health services reflect the views and aspirations of local communities
- All sections of the local community have equal access to services
- All sections of local communities have an equal chance of successful outcomes from services

Unlike more general overview and scrutiny, a significant proportion of the work of health scrutiny is externally focussed on such organisations as NHS Swindon, The Great Western Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership and the Great Western Ambulance Service.

Informing the design, development and planning of health and adult social care services

- The Committee endorsed an introduction to a community based tuberculosis service in Swindon.
- The Committee endorsed the improvements to the Glaucoma Pathway.

In relation to Specialised Commissioning, the committee approved substantial changes to the following services across the region:-

- Bariatric Surgery
- Burns Care Services

Scrutinising the Provision of Healthcare and Adult Social Care Services

- The Committee has scrutinised the Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership following the implementation of a Rapid Improvement Plan for failing standards. This review will continue into 2010.
- The Committee was involved in the Consultation process of the Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership's proposals to become a Foundation Trust.
- The Committee has, and will continue in 2010, to look at Health Inequalities and the provision of services in Swindon.

Working in Partnership

- Members of the committee continue to be involved with the Great Western Ambulance Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, continually monitoring the recommendations from the Interim Report. A substantial achievement this year was the Good Scrutiny Award for joint working on the Great Western Ambulance Joint Scrutiny Committee.
- The Chair is a member of the South West Health Scrutiny Network which is leading on developing a consistent process across the South West region to respond to proposals to reconfigure specialised services.

Involving the Community

- The Committee has carried out a joint work with the Swindon Local Involvement Network regarding the Dignity in Care Task Group and it is anticipated that this work will continue throughout 2010 with further reviews planned.
- The Committee investigated the potential health implications of a Borough Wide Wi-fi system and dealt with members of the public, the Health Protection Agency and the PCT in its review.
- Members have engaged with a wide range of community stakeholders during the course of the year including:
 - People in care homes
 - Carers
 - Mental health carers
 - Nursing staff
 - Members of the public

Dignity in Care Task Group

A Dignity in Care Task Group was implemented and Members worked jointly with members of the LINKs. The outcomes of the work were as follows:-

1. That thanks are extended to all of the people who were involved in the Dignity in Care Task Group review.

2. That the LINks Officers continue to review the issue of Dignity in Care in health and social care services across Swindon for a further period of six months, reporting back to the Task Group after this time.
3. Health and Social Care Agencies in Swindon continue to raise the profile of the Dignity Campaign using existing publicity materials and practice guidance.
4. Health and Social Care Agencies in Swindon encourage their staff to become Dignity Champions, thus creating a network of Champions across the Borough.
5. Care Agencies in Swindon to review time allocations per patient, taking into account sufficient time for travelling between patients, so that time for each patient is sufficient for that person to be treated with dignity.

The Task Group will be investigating further the needs of the Carers who are related to the patient; whether they are receiving the right level of support, is this support made known to them; are they made aware of all benefits available to them.

Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Glenn Smith
Chair of the Children's
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee can scrutinise any matter relating to children and young people in the Borough, including education, youth services and children and families services.

The Committee has scrutinised executive policy-makers and decision makers throughout the year through open question and answer sessions with relevant witnesses, on several issues for example:-

- ◆ The educational attainment of students in 2009
- ◆ 13-19 Partnership
- ◆ Safeguarding

Safeguarding

The Committee received a presentation and training that summarised the key activities in relation to Safeguarding within the Local Authority and in conjunction with its partners.

The purpose of the training session was to ensure that members continue to have a good understanding of the core principles, policies and practice in relation to safeguarding, thus enabling effective scrutiny in the future.

Anti-bullying Vision

In June 2009 an Anti-Bullying Open Forum was held under the sponsorship of this Committee following work undertaken by Barbara Parry (Member Champion) and Marie Temple (Behaviour and Attendance Consultant). Following this Open Forum, a Sub-Group was formed comprising attendees representing a wide range of local, regional and national partners, to consider the production of a Swindon Anti-Bullying Vision that organisations within the town could sign up to and support.

Following subsequent meetings of the sub-group, the Anti-bullying Vision was agreed and approved by the Committee, Cabinet, Council and the Strategic Partnership Board (October and November 2009).

A number of schools have joined the Anti-bullying Accreditation Scheme, taking the current total involvement to 33. 5 schools achieved Full Accreditation in November at the Anti-bullying Celebration Event.

Youth Forum

The Committee has continued to take an active role with The Youth Forum. The Youth Forum has now agreed its five priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011. The five priorities are:-

- Improve communication with the older generation
- Improve emotional well being of young people
- Encourage young people to participate in positive activities
- Improve representation of young people in the media
- Reduce obesity in children and young people

Three Committee Members have taken an active role in becoming Youth Forum Mentors in the following three areas:-

- Communications and the media
- Communication with older people
- Emotional wellbeing

The Committee will continue to monitor progress in addressing many of the issues raised by the Youth Forum to determine whether the young people involved are of the view that services have improved as a result.

