

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2005/06



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1.0 Foreword By The Executive Director, Department Of Corporate Policy And Improvement – Kevin Douglas



Executive Director, Department of
Corporate Policy and Improvement
Kevin Douglas

With the restructuring of the Council in April 2005 and the transfer of the Overview and Scrutiny function to the new Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement it has been a year of transition and change whilst still delivering important outcomes for the Council.

The transfer of Services and Scrutiny recognised the key role that it has in shaping future policies and driving improvement throughout the Council and this has been seen in the last 12 months work by all the Commissions.

However, it was important that the structure of the Commissions reflected this emphasis on the Review and subsequent proposed changes, now give Members even greater opportunities to scrutinise the Council's performance, our work with Partners and the development of new policy.

The Annual Report highlights the successes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions over the past twelve months and these results are due to the hard work of the staff, particularly Mark Codman, the Scrutiny Officer; the Chairs of the Commissions and Members involved.

The next twelve months with the new structures in place will see the Commissions build on this success and make an even bigger contribution to the work of the Council.

Kevin Douglas
Executive Director
Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement

2.0 Introduction by the Chairman



Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny
Co-ordinating Board Councillor C J Bayliss

This has been an important year in the development of Overview and Scrutiny. As I said last year, the Executive now sees the Commissions as an integral, and very useful, part of the Council's political process.

The Commissions have been delighted that this year Cabinet Members have brought work to them for guidance before taking decisions. This discussion of policy has been very useful to Executive and non-Executive Members alike. Whilst hoping this will gain pace, the next stage is for the Commissions to feel that officers hold their work in the same high regard.

With the Commissions only having the dedicated support of one officer we often need help from other officers. The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Board would like our work to be seen as a higher priority but acknowledge this can best be done by gaining respect through the value of our reviews.

Excellent work was achieved in a range of reviews, including Recruitment and Retention, Housing, Traffic Management and the Voluntary Sector. This standard must continue next year, with emphasis on work that helps to deliver the Council's improvement agenda.

There have been no call-ins this year. Whilst this may be due to the excellence of the Executive decisions, call-ins are an important aspect of Scrutiny's role in holding the Executive to account. The Board will be reviewing their procedures this year to make sure this is achieved.

As noted below a series of changes has taken place in Commission working which the Board will review as the coming year takes shape. We also need to build on the training programme established in 2005/2006. Finally can I thank all those who have contributed to good scrutiny this year – members, officers, experts and of course the general public.

Cllr Caroline Bayliss

Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Board

3.0 Overview and Scrutiny

In the Local Government Act 2000 the Government introduced plans to reform and modernise the way local authorities operate. This was designed to streamline and improve decision-making, make elected members more visible and accountable and in the end improve services. In particular the proposals required local authorities to replace its Committee system with either a Leader with Cabinet, Elected Mayor and Cabinet or Elected Mayor and Council Manager system.

Harrogate Borough Council chose the Cabinet system. In a 'Cabinet' system, a small number of Councillors are responsible for most day-to-day Council decisions, which should make it easier for people to see who is responsible for things. As part of the checks and balances to these changes the government required Councils to establish at least one Scrutiny Committee that would be formed from Members who were not part of the Cabinet. The role of Scrutiny is to review decisions and policies considering if they are right for the Harrogate District. Not only does it provide a means to review the Council's own achievements against its planned targets but it enables reviews to be carried out in relation to services provided by other public organisations on issues causing concern.

The Overview and Scrutiny process provides the opportunity for Councillors to examine the various functions of the council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and make findings to this effect. It provides the opportunity for councillors to champion issues of local concern to residents and to participate in the development of new policy.

Scrutiny Committees can discuss the Cabinet's decisions before they are implemented. Scrutiny may suggest a different approach or ask the Cabinet to re-think. Scrutiny Committees can pursue such a course of action if, for example, proper consultation has not taken place. The Cabinet will be obliged to formally consider what scrutiny has said. Meetings are held in public and people and organisations are invited to comment on the way things are currently done and how things can be improved.

4.0 The Aims of Overview and Scrutiny at Harrogate Borough Council

The aims of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions are to some extent dictated by the government. We feel, however, that if we carry out our role effectively this can help lead to: -

- Improved policies and services from the Council that meet people's needs better
- Improved policies and services from other organisations that affect the quality of life in the borough
- A Council that measures its own Performance, initiating improvements where appropriate and regularly reports in public on how well it is meeting its promises
- Better joining up of public and other services
- A Council that continually works to improve efficiency and provide value for money for the services it provides
- More openness and accountability about the way decisions are made
- A Council that holds to account the Cabinet and those officers responsible for implementing and delivering services

5.0 The Overview and Scrutiny Structure

Harrogate Borough Council has established 3 Committees called Overview and Scrutiny Commissions that cover all of the Council's services, functions and partnerships.

Each Commission is responsible for its own work programme and priorities for the forthcoming year. These programmes include holding the Cabinet to account, consideration of the budget, performance management, policy review and development as well as individual reviews of areas of concern for the services and functions within their remit. The Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission is also

the Council's Audit Committee responsible for corporate governance issues generally. More detail on the work of each Commission is given later in the report under the achievements of each Commission. The work of the 3 Commissions is co-ordinated by the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Board. The Board is made up of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Commissions together with and a Board Chairman who is the lead Member for Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinates the work of the three Overview and Scrutiny Commissions



Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission	Environment Overview and Scrutiny Commission	Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Commission
<p>Takes an overview concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Managing The Council ● The use of Information and Communication Technology ● Taxation and Benefits ● This Commission also acts as the the Authority's Audit Committee 	<p>Takes an overview concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public Health and Protection ● Local Environment ● Highways and Traffic ● Local Economy 	<p>Takes an overview concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culture ● Housing ● Community Safety

6.0 The Overview and Scrutiny Commissions

The Overview and Scrutiny Commissions each agree their own work programmes for the civic year but there are certain items of work that all Commissions will undertake within the year. This work is usually associated with “holding the Cabinet to account” for its decisions and actions and is crucial to the performance management processes within the Council. These work items include:

- Interviewing relevant Cabinet portfolio holders/chief officers on their priorities and activities relevant to the Commission areas of responsibility
- Scrutiny of the Budget at all stages of preparation
- Consideration of quarterly performance reports highlighting successes and areas for improvement. There has been a significant improvement in performance management by the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions due to the consideration of performance information prior to Cabinet to enable more timely remedial actions.
- Examination at each meeting of all the Cabinet’s decisions and delegated decisions made by Officers

7.0 The Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission Members 2005/06



Chairman Councillor
Andrew Jones



Vice Chairman –
Councillor J M Fox

Councillors: Phillip A Broadbank
J Clark
M Harrison
Elwyn A Hinchcliffe
N Simms
S F O Theakston
Peter Phillips
J P B Wren
Charlie Powell

FACTFILE

• Reviews	2
• One Off Issues	11
• Performance Management Consideration	8
• Consultations	5
• Call – Ins	0
• Meetings	9

7.1 Key highlights of the Work Undertaken 2005/06

During 2005/2006 the Commission held 9 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included: -

- The completion of the in-depth investigation into recruitment and retention issues facing the Council leading to improvements in recruitment and retention practices and policies. It has also led to improvements generally as a result of the Scrutiny-initiated Staff Opinion Survey
- As a result of a previous investigation the Commission considered changes to the Council's Project Management Code of Practice for major construction schemes ensuring that recommendations made had been incorporated
- Scrutiny of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy setting out the financial parameters that will form the basis of the budget for 2006/2007

- Scrutiny of the Council's Performance Plan
- Development of the Audit Committee role including scrutiny of the following:
 - Internal Audit Outturn Work Plan 2004/2005 and Work Plan 2005/2006
 - The Audit Commission Annual Plan 2005/2006
 - The Audit Commission Interim Audit
 - The Corporate Risk Management Strategy 2005-2008

8.0 The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Commission Members 2005/06



Chairman Councillor
Heather Adderley



Vice Chairman
Councillor S J Hawke

Councillors: Mrs M E Atkinson
Robin A Adderley
John Smith
C W Trotter
R Grange
Pat Marsh
Steve Macare
R Marsh
M J Newby

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8.1 Key Highlights of the Work Undertaken 2005/06

During 2005/2006 the Commission held 10 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included: -

- Completing a review of the implications of declaring the Council to be GM free. This was at the request of Friends of

the Earth and included a public meeting involving leading experts and interested national and local organisations and led to the development of a new Council policy

- External scrutiny of Craven and Harrogate Rural District PCT proposals for merger and future developments
- The completion of work to consider traffic problems along Wetherby Road/Skipton Road involving two public meetings and significant consultation leading to changes in traffic management measures

9.0 The Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Commission Members 2005/06



Chairman Councillor
Chris Lewis



Vice Chairman
Councillor D G Simister

Councillors: Anthony Alton
S P Fawcett
Diana Smith
F G Willis
N Wilson
A M Goss
T J Chapman
Bill Hoult
Charlie Powell

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9.1 Key highlights of the Work Undertaken 2005/06

During 2005/2006 the Commission held 9 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included: -

- Consideration of major housing issues affecting the authority such as, the housing needs of rural communities, young

people and key workers and the Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

- Consideration of the review of the Council's work with the Voluntary Sector and the Council's responsibilities under new legislation for children from birth to age nineteen
- The Commission commenced work on a review to improve attendances at Council-run leisure facilities. This has involved working with Sport England and appointing an external consultant to undertake detailed research and analysis

10.0 The Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Board



Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny
Co-ordinating Board Councillor C J Bayliss

Councillors: Andrew Jones
J M Fox
Heather Adderley
S J Hawke
Chris Lewis
D G Simister

FACTFILE

- **One Off Issues** 1
- **Development Issues** 4
- **Management Issues** 5
- **Training Issues** 3
- **Meetings** 5

10.1 Key Achievements of the Work of The Board 2005/06

The work of the Coordinating board in 2005/2006 has focused on development and management issues for Overview and Scrutiny. The Board has developed processes and protocols within the authority regarding performance management and Overview and Scrutiny responses to corporate issues such as the Budget and formal Audit Commission inspections. This has resulted in the Commissions receiving performance information, in most cases prior to consideration by Cabinet in order that Scrutiny has the opportunity to respond in a timely manner.

The Coordinating Board has also encouraged the use of pre-decision scrutiny prior to decisions being taken and this has contributed to the existing good working relationship with the Cabinet and also the fact that there have been no Call-Ins in 2005/2006.

The main item of work for the Coordinating Board in 2005/2006 has been the development of a new structure for the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions. The structure and remits of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions have not been reviewed since they were introduced in 2000. Since then issues have arisen such as the most efficient use of resources, additional responsibilities for Overview and Scrutiny, Audit Commission comments, etc, that only a review of the current structure and remits could address.

The Coordinating Board therefore developed options in consultation with Overview and Scrutiny members and recommended appropriate changes to Council. These changes will provide a more structured approach to performance management and corporate governance issues within the Council with the creation of separate Overview and Scrutiny Panels. It will also provide the opportunity for the Commissions to consider corporate and improvement issues more effectively as well as Scrutiny of health and partnerships (not previously included within any Commission remit). It is anticipated that these changes will be approved and implemented in August 2006.

11.0 Overview and Scrutiny 'Behind the Scenes'

In 2004/05 there was a major change to the Overview and Scrutiny support function when it was transferred to the newly created Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement. It was previously located within the Internal Audit Section of the Department of Finance.

The new Department was created to achieve significant improvement within the Council, developing and assisting the Authority to deliver an agreed Strategic Plan and a Corporate Improvement Plan whilst also operating as an internal consultancy

resource on a number of policy and improvement projects. The transfer of the Overview and Scrutiny support to this Department has enabled Overview and Scrutiny to have an effective involvement with key corporate improvement initiatives and also raise the profile within the authority.

An important development this year has been the review of the current structure of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions. This was led by the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating board and was considered necessary to address issues that had emerged since the structure was introduced in 2000.

The review recommended changes to the structure to provide separate Panels to consider Governance and Corporate Performance issues as well as reviewing the remits of all Overview and Scrutiny Commissions. It is anticipated that the changes will be agreed and implemented by August 2006.

One of the key issues for 2006/2007 will therefore be to ensure the new arrangements are working effectively and that Overview and Scrutiny Members have appropriate training.

An issue identified for improvement in the last annual report was to involve the public in the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Work to develop this has continued with successful public meetings such as the meeting regarding traffic along Skipton Road/Wetherby Road. Work for this year has also included developing interactive web pages on the Council website including a facility to enable members of the public to be able to suggest issues for investigation and receive feedback. The Council's District Panel of 1500 residents has also been consulted regarding participation and areas to be considered for review. The results from both these initiatives will inform future Overview and Scrutiny work.

This report has provided some highlights of the work that the Commissions have undertaken in the past year. There have been a number of successes leading to change within the authority including the development of new policies and specific actions to address problems facing the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny

structure has also been reviewed to improve the Council's performance management and corporate governance arrangements as well as providing the opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny to have real influence in developing corporate improvement and other initiatives. Work to involve the public has also been developed particularly regarding views on future Overview and Scrutiny work and this work will be developed further in the next year.

The Commissions will continue to develop their lead role in the Council's change and improvement agenda challenge decisions where appropriate and review and develop policies with the aim of ensuring that Harrogate Borough Council delivers services that make a difference to the people of the District. Work for 2006/2007 will include ensuring that the new structure is effective in achieving this and that Members have the appropriate training. This will be undertaken with the commitment to develop public participation in the process.

12.0 Useful Contacts

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