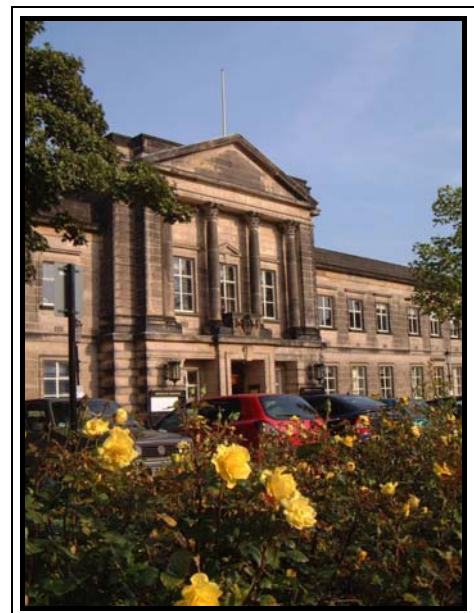




*Overview and Scrutiny  
Combined Annual Report  
2003/04  
2004/05*



## Foreword by the Chief Executive



**Mick Walsh**  
**Chief Executive**

Welcome to the second annual report on the work of the three Overview and Scrutiny Commissions and Coordinating Board at Harrogate Borough Council. The report is a combined annual report for the two-year period from May 2003 to June 2005.

The last two years have seen significant changes in Overview and Scrutiny within the Authority. A comprehensive review has been undertaken to fulfil the Authority's commitment to the development and improvement of the process. This has led to both changes to Commission structures and Chairmanship and also to improvements in processes and procedures.

There has also been a restructure within the authority that has seen the creation of a new Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement. The Authority took the opportunity to move the Overview and Scrutiny function to this new Department where it is now a central part of the Council's change and improvement agenda.

The changes that have taken place addressed concerns arising from the CPA process regarding Member engagement in the Overview and Scrutiny process and also issues arising from the review regarding the overall effectiveness of the process. These changes will take time to take effect but early indications are that they are already starting to make a difference to the effectiveness of the process.

In the last two years the Commissions have undertaken a wide variety of work ranging from consideration of external organisations to examination of Council services, policies and procedures. This work has required a substantial amount of time and effort from both Members and Officers but I feel that this

commitment has been worthwhile. I was particularly impressed with the examination of the events surrounding the Harrogate International Centre's Breakout Space at the request of Full Council that led to significant changes to Council policies and procedures relating to contract management. Work has also been undertaken regarding the community use of the Royal Hall that has been used to inform the Heritage Lottery Fund Business Case and also at the request of Friends of the Earth and local residents there is work being undertaken to examine the implications of declaring the Council to be GM free. These are only a few examples of the hard work that has been carried out and I know that there are numerous others being undertaken that will have similar beneficial outcomes.

The Council recognises the importance of Overview and Scrutiny and will continue to examine how we can improve the process to build on the success that has already been achieved. There are still a number of actions to be implemented resulting from the review and I feel that we should continue to improve in engaging the public in the work of the Commissions and also equip Members with the skills they need to fulfil their role.

**Mick Walsh**  
**Chief Executive**

## Introduction by the Chairman



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

The last two municipal years have seen Overview and Scrutiny at Harrogate District Council develop with improvements that have been made. I consider now that Members are growing more accustomed to their roles and more aware of the tools available to them.

When I took over as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Board it was my aim to lead improvements to the Overview and Scrutiny process. As part of the work to achieve this aim a review was undertaken that has been central to the development of the function. It is fair to say that the results highlighted that there were problems with the process but these were those that were commonly associated with Overview and Scrutiny nationally. Appropriate improvements have therefore been developed to address these issues.

This annual report is in the form of highlights from each Commission demonstrating the hard work of the Members serving on them. Members have gained experience as each piece of work has been undertaken and this has been supplemented by appropriate training.

As part of the changes that have been made to the Overview and Scrutiny process the Commissions have been encouraged to focus their work on the Council corporate priorities. This process has required the Commissions to work with Departments and Cabinet Members to identify the most significant issues facing the Authority that could be included in the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes.

Another key change to the Overview and Scrutiny process has been to develop protocols that ensure that any Overview and Scrutiny work 'adds value' to the work of the authority and has a real benefit. It is the responsibility of the individual Chairmen to ensure that their Commission gives a priority to any work it agrees to include in its work programme. Where the volume of work proposed exceeds the resources available to deliver it, it is the Coordinating Board's role to determine priorities between the Commissions. This requires a balancing act between the interests of individual members and

the overall need for effective scrutiny of the Council's priorities and objectives.

Over the last two years the Scrutiny Officer Mark Codman has continued to develop an improved Member training programme, including Overview and Scrutiny training generally, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen training, Budget training, Communications Skills/Effective Questioning techniques and specific training for individual Members as required.

The Authority has also benefited from establishing links with other similar Authorities such as Maidstone Borough Council (one of the recognised leaders in Overview and Scrutiny) who came to share their experience in Overview and Scrutiny. It is anticipated that learning from other similar Authorities will be a continuing feature of Member training and development in 2005/2006.

As a result of the changes that have taken place in the last two years the Cabinet now has a much more positive attitude towards Overview and Scrutiny. It is viewed much more as a "critical friend" supporting its work for the benefit of the Authority rather than the adversarial, political, process it was perceived to be previously. This has been demonstrated by more regular attendance by Cabinet/Cabinet Member(s) at Commission meetings and a willingness to bring forward topics they would like the Commissions to investigate. My intention for the future is that this change in perception will now be replicated throughout the Authority.

I consider that Overview and Scrutiny has come a long way in Harrogate in a relatively short period of time and with the work that I know is to be progressed I am confident that it will continue to develop over 2005/2006.

**Cllr Caroline Bayliss  
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny  
Co-ordinating Board**

## 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 also 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 think again. 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. This can include gathering varied forms of evidence to form a rounded picture of a situation

## 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

## 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. 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"> <li>• <b>Coordinates the work of the three Overview and Scrutiny Commissions</b></li> </ul>



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"> <li>• <b>Managing The Council</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Customer care, reception, telephones</li> <li>▪ Electronic service delivery</li> <li>▪ Elections &amp; electoral registration</li> <li>▪ Asset, estate &amp; building management</li> <li>▪ Community engagement &amp; the media</li> <li>▪ Mayoralty &amp; member services</li> <li>▪ Central transport</li> <li>▪ Corporate policies and best value</li> <li>▪ The budget, internal &amp; external audit</li> <li>▪ Competitiveness &amp; procurement</li> <li>▪ Support services inc. HR &amp; equalities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>The Use of Information and Communication Technology</b></li> <li>• <b>Taxation and Benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Council Tax</li> <li>▪ Non Domestic Rates</li> <li>▪ Council Tax &amp; Housing Benefits</li> <li>▪ Cashiers &amp; Cash Collection</li> <li>▪ Council Tax &amp; Housing Benefits</li> <li>▪ Cashiers &amp; Cash Collection</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Takes an overview concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Health and Protection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Health</li> <li>▪ Food Safety</li> <li>▪ Health and Safety</li> <li>▪ Licensing</li> <li>▪ Dog Wardens</li> <li>▪ Health Promotion</li> <li>▪ Markets</li> <li>▪ Taxi Licensing</li> <li>▪ Public Conveniences</li> <li>▪ Pest Control</li> <li>▪ Pollution Control</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Local Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contaminated Land</li> <li>▪ Sustainability</li> <li>▪ Refuse Collection</li> <li>▪ Recycling</li> <li>▪ Trade Waste</li> <li>▪ Development Services</li> <li>▪ Building Control</li> <li>▪ Land Charges</li> <li>▪ AONB</li> <li>▪ Planning Policy and Information</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Highways and Traffic</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Highways Agency</li> <li>▪ Traffic and Transportation Management</li> <li>▪ Concessionary Fares</li> <li>▪ Street Amenities</li> <li>▪ Street Cleansing</li> <li>▪ Car Parking</li> <li>▪ Cycling</li> <li>▪ Road Safety</li> <li>▪ Street Amenities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Local Economy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ HIC</li> <li>▪ Tourism (TIC's)</li> <li>▪ Economic Development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Takes an overview concerning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Culture</li> <li>▪ Parks and Open Spaces</li> <li>▪ Sport and Leisure</li> <li>▪ Bereavement Services</li> <li>▪ Taxi Licensing</li> <li>▪ Public Conveniences</li> <li>▪ Pest Control</li> <li>▪ Pollution Control</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Housing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Affordable Housing</li> <li>▪ Private Sector Housing</li> <li>▪ Public Sector Housing</li> <li>▪ Housing Advice</li> <li>▪ Homelessness</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Community Safety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community Safety Partnership</li> <li>▪ CCTV</li> <li>▪ Section 17 Work</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 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
- Examination at each meeting of all the Cabinet’s decisions and delegated decisions made by Officers

## The Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission



**Chairman- Councillor  
Andrew Jones**



**Vice Chairman - Councillor  
J M Fox**

## Commission Members 2003/2004 2004/2005

Chairman: Councillor A F Skidmore	Chairman: Councillor Andrew Jones
Vice Chairman: Councillor D G Simister	Vice Chairman: Councillor J M Fox
Councillors:	Councillors:
Andrew Jones	J Clark
R F Nash	M Harrison
N Simms	Elwyn A Hinchcliffe
Mrs D Smith	N Simms
J A Smith	S F O Theakston
S F O Theakston	P G Freeman
P A Broadbank	B Hoult
M A C De Courcey-Bayley	Peter Philips
J M Fox	Charlie Powell
S R Macare	
G F Webber	
M J Newby	
Charlie Powell	

## Responsibilities

In addition to the responsibilities listed previously the Council Resources Overview and Scrutiny Commission was given the added function of being the Authority’s Audit Committee in March 2005. This role will ensure that the Council has an adequate system of internal control that enables the effective provision of its functions. The Commission therefore will consider the Audit Commission Annual Management Letter, the Annual Statement on Internal Control (including reports concerning risk management, financial management and performance management as appropriate) and other reports from Internal Audit and the Audit Commission. It is due to meet for the first time as an Audit Committee in June 2005.

## Key highlights of the Work Undertaken 2003/2004 and 2004/2005

During 2003/2004 the Commission held 11 meetings and during 2004/2005 it held 8 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included:-

- Scrutiny of the Council's Performance Plan
- An in-depth Scrutiny investigation into the HIC Breakout Space scheme on behalf of the Council leading to the Identification of the need for improved project management arrangements within the Council and making appropriate recommendations for change that were accepted by the Cabinet.
- The continued in-depth investigation into recruitment and retention issues facing the Council leading to improvements in recruitment and retention practices and policies, both whilst the review is progressing and when the final report is produced. This also includes improvements to other existing and developing policies as a result of the Scrutiny-led Staff Opinion Survey
- It is anticipated that work for 2005/2006 will include the development of the Audit Committee role and having a significant role in ensuring that corporate governance arrangements are appropriate within the Council

### The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Commission



**Chairman-  
Councillor Heather  
Adderley**



**Vice Chairman-  
Councillor S J Hawke**

### Commission Members 2003/2004 2004/2005

Chairman: Councillor L T Ellington  
Vice Chairman: Councillor M Bean

Chairman: Councillor Heather Adderley  
Vice Chairman: Councillor S J Hawke

Councillors:

Councillors:

Mrs M E Atkinson  
Heather Adderley  
Robin Adderley  
Mrs D Smith  
J A Smith  
F G Willis  
P G Freeman  
B Hoult  
Anne Jones  
R Marsh  
J P B Wren  
M J Newby  
S J Hawke

Mrs M E Atkinson  
Robin Adderley  
J A Smith  
C W Trotter  
R Grange  
P A Broadbank  
S R Macare  
R Marsh  
M J Newby

### Key Highlights of the Work Undertaken 2003/2004 and 2004/2005

During 2003/2004 the Commission held 12 meetings and during 2004/2005 it held 8 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included:-

- Commencing on a review of the implications of declaring the Council to be GM free. This was at the request of Friends of the Earth and has included a public meeting involving leading experts and interested national and local organisations
- Undertaking an in-depth review of waste transfer and recycling issues
- External scrutiny of Yorkshire Water and future proposals for its activities within the District
- Successful use of the Call-In procedure on behalf of concerned Members regarding the Public Conveniences Service Improvement Plan requiring the Cabinet Member to reconsider appropriate decisions

taking into account the concerns of the Commission.

- It is anticipated that work for 2005/2006 will include the conclusion of work to consider traffic problems along Wetherby Road/Skipton Road with a second public meeting being held at a suitable venue in the area

### The Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Commission



**Chairman- Councillor  
Chris Lewis**



**Vice Chairman-  
Councillor D G Simister**

### Commission Members

#### 2003/2004

Chairman: Councillor A Williams

Vice Chairman:  
Councillor K B Hawkins

Councillors:

C J Bayliss  
Mrs M E Atkinson  
L T Ellington  
S P Fawcett  
R Grange  
Mrs D Smith  
A F Skidmore  
F G Willis  
Joan Crowther  
Chris Lewis  
Pat Marsh  
Dr K Rothwell  
S A Martin

#### 2004/2005

Chairman: Councillor Chris Lewis

Vice Chairman:  
Councillor D G Simister

Councillors:

Anthony Alton  
Mrs M E Atkinson  
S P Fawcett  
Mrs D Smith  
N Wilson  
A M Goss  
K B Hawkins  
Pat Marsh  
Charlie Powell

### Key highlights of the Work Undertaken 2003/2004 and 2004/2005

During 2003/2004 the Commission held 12 meetings and during 2004/2005 it held 11 meetings. Highlights of the work of the Commission have included:-

- Consideration of major housing issues affecting the authority such as, Progress Towards the Decent Homes Standard, Housing Allocations Policy – Eligibility Criteria and the Housing Options Appraisal. The Review of the existing Department of Health and Housing Management Structure was also considered.
- Consideration of the resources reallocation work within the existing Department of Leisure and Amenity Services that included site visits to Council-run facilities
- Follow up work to the in-depth review of the community use of the Royal Hall that ensured the Commission would be involved in the development of the revised Business Case to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- At the request of concerned Members a review of the proposals to restore the Valley Gardens was undertaken. This included a site visit and a close working relationship with the Cabinet who had agreed to defer this issue pending consideration by the Commission. As a result of the review the Cabinet accepted the Commission's Findings for inclusion in an amended bid for Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Funding.
- It is anticipated that work for 2005/2006 will include a review aimed at improving attendances at Council-run leisure facilities.

## The Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Board



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

### Board Members

#### 2003/2004

#### 2004/2005

Chairman: Councillor  
C J Bayliss

Chairman: Councillor  
C J Bayliss

Councillors:

Councillors:

A F Skidmore  
D G Simister  
L T Ellington  
M Bean  
A Williams  
K B Hawkins

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

### Key Achievements of the Work of The Board 2003/2004 and 2004/2005

In January/February 2004 the Coordinating Board led the planned review of the arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny within the Council. This review also addressed issues arising from in the CPA Peer Group assessment

The review addressed not only known issues at Harrogate Borough Council but also national problems commonly associated with Overview and Scrutiny All Members, appropriate Officers and members of the public (where possible) were consulted with a significant participation rate for Members of 66%.

In response to the results from the review an Action Plan was agreed. The actions that have been implemented to date include a reduction in the numbers of Members on each Commission from 15 to 11, a requirement to have the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for each Commission to be from different political groups, changes to the format of minutes and agendas, changes to the procedures for

progressing reviews and the provision of more effective training.

The Board is intending that all actions in the Action Plan will be implemented in 2005/06

The main aim of the Board for the last two years has been to develop a focus for the Overview and Scrutiny function, ensuring that the three Commissions work to the same protocols and procedures. It recognises that for Overview and Scrutiny to be effective it must "add value" to the work of the authority and has therefore ensured that the actions progressed through the review Action Plan will achieve this aim

Emphasis has also been placed on learning from other authorities and this has resulted in Overview and Scrutiny procedures being developed from good practice at other authorities including a recent successful presentation from Maidstone Borough Council to Harrogate Borough Council Members and Officers.

### 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 Authority considers that the Overview and Scrutiny function is central to the achievement of these aims and will play a key role in their delivery. This change in

emphasis for Overview and Scrutiny will enable Members to participate more effectively in decision-making and Policy development within the Council leading to increased Member engagement and participation in the process.

It is anticipated that significant changes to reporting procedures, corporate planning processes (including the Budget), performance monitoring and corporate governance issues will result from this move making the Overview and Scrutiny function more effective ie “adding value” to the work of the authority.

### **Overview and Scrutiny looking to the Future**

This report has provided some highlights of the work that the Commissions have undertaken in the past two years. There are areas for improvement within the Overview and Scrutiny process and work for the future includes encouraging Member engagement and developing the new change of emphasis for Overview and Scrutiny that has been introduced with the move of the function to the Department of Corporate Policy and Improvement.

Another issue for Overview and Scrutiny that will be addressed in the future is that of involving the public. From work that has been undertaken by the Commissions it is evident that members of the public will take an interest in issues if they are of interest. There have been successful public meetings concerning Memorial Safety, GM Food and traffic issues along Skipton Road/Wetherby Road, the latter being particularly successful as it was held at a venue near the area of concern. Public participation at the present time is encouraged through agendas and the notification of meetings that are always displayed at the Council Offices prior to any meeting and specific issues being advertised in the local press. Consultation has also been undertaken for particular issues using questionnaires

or focus groups as appropriate. A feature of future Overview and Scrutiny work will be to develop this process further including interactive web pages on the Council website and the possible publication of newsletters and leaflets. Ultimately it is intended that there will be a commitment by the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions to investigate issues identified by the public and an easy method available for members of the public to be able to suggest issues for investigation and receive feedback.

The Commissions are determined to develop their lead role in the Council’s change and improvement agenda, to continue to 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. This will be undertaken with the commitment to develop Member engagement and public participation in the process.

#### ***Additional Information can be obtained from:***

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