

# OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

# ANNUAL

# REPORT

# 2010/11



*Scrutiny Matters...*

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## Foreword



**Councillor  
Chris Brine**

*Chair, Strategic Overview  
and Scrutiny Committee*

**Since last year's report the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have made progress by examining and reviewing the operation of some of the Council's services and have taken on new responsibilities arising from the introduction of new Government legislation. This year's report provides a summary of our key achievements and work undertaken over the past year and outlines some of our future plans.**

Working as a 'critical friend' to assist the Cabinet moving forward with some of its areas of activity, we have undertaken reviews and inquiries into a variety of matters including a review of the Council's Planning Scheme of Delegation, looking at tackling climate change, with the focus on the provision of sustainable energy measures in Council homes, and examining Council expenditure and performance on meeting the Decent Homes Standard. Councillors have also worked with tenant representatives on asset management and the management of void properties, which will inform the Housing Asset Management Strategy and are looking at joint working with partners on the Stroud Safer Stronger Communities Partnership.

**Councillor Chris Brine states** *"As Chairman of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank all the officers of Stroud District Council for the support and guidance given to the Committee over the last year. It has been very pleasing to see members of Overview and Scrutiny playing a more positive and active role. The Council will face some major challenges over the next several years and with a strong and active Overview and Scrutiny Committee I am sure we can help shape the Council for the future"*.

The performance of the Council has also been under the spotlight with the committees considering reports on the performance of the Stratford Park Leisure Centre, the housing service and consequent housing restructure, and the review of the Council's Joint Use Sports Centres.



**Councillor  
Paul Smith**

*Chair, Performance  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee*

The committees will also be looking at future arrangements around performance monitoring following the abolition of national performance indicators.

**Councillor Paul Smith states** *"As Chairman of the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee it would be impossible to achieve what we have without the support and guidance that the officers give to the Committee and the inquiries that the Committee has carried out. Also without the positive and active participation of the Councillors it would not be possible to have completed the work that the Committee has achieved. I would therefore like to thank both the officers, and in particular Democratic Services, and members of the Committee for their work and input over the last year"*.

Discussions continue around the development of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Stroud District Council. Other Councillors who are not on the Cabinet, have also been invited to participate in task and finish groups as new areas of work are identified and planned to go forward.

This year, new Government legislation has led to the Council establishing a scheme for dealing with petitions which will include an opportunity for a person to request evidence to be given to a Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a particular matter. It also enables the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to investigate any request to review how the Council dealt with a petition, if it was felt that it had not been dealt with properly. We look forward to embracing these new areas of work which will expand and develop the roles and functions of Overview and Scrutiny within the Council.

In the coming civic year we will continue to challenge and review policies, performance and processes, in order to assist with improvements to the Council's services and priorities, particularly in light of the current economic climate and the need to work more efficiently. The focus will continue to be on real issues of concern to the Council and to the Community.

## Role and Function of Overview and Scrutiny at Stroud

The Council has two Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each made up of twelve non executive Councillors – **the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

The main role and function of **Overview and Scrutiny** is to act as a ‘critical friend’, adding capacity and value to the work of the Executive, thereby helping it to:

- Improve services it provides to the public
- Promote best practice and innovation
- Pursue wider issues of concern to local people
- Ensure good governance

The **Overview and Scrutiny Committees** can fulfil this role in a number of ways, including:

- Asking questions of Cabinet Members, officers and external partners
- Considering matters before they go to Cabinet (pre-decision scrutiny)
- Undertaking inquiries/reviews
- Call-in of Cabinet decisions
- Performance Monitoring
- Referring matters to the Cabinet

The four principles of good scrutiny as defined by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) are:

- Provides ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy makers and decision makers
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Is carried out by ‘independent minded governors’ who lead and own the scrutiny process
- Drives improvement in public services

### Training

The Council is always looking at means to develop and improve its scrutiny function whether through improvement and development of internal processes and work programmes or through working externally with others. One example of this is attendance at meetings of the Gloucestershire County Scrutiny Lead Member Group, where all of the seven Gloucestershire Councils come together to consider specific issues and to look at opportunities to work jointly and learn from each other’s experiences of overview and scrutiny.

There is recognition that a range of specialist skills are required by overview and scrutiny councillors, for instance effective questioning techniques, skills for effective performance monitoring, chairing skills and project planning awareness. This year councillors have had the opportunity to join other Gloucestershire councils for training and development in some of these areas and they have also undertaken development opportunities to improve the way in which performance of services and priorities is monitored in house, through improved quarterly meeting arrangements.

A development day for all of the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Members took place in February 2011. The development day whilst looking at the national scene and guiding principles of overview and scrutiny, allowed Councillors to consider and discuss local arrangements and experiences and to think about these in planning for future reviews and at taking overview and scrutiny forward.

## The Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Each Committee has a Business Plan and these are available to view on the Committees' webpages at [www.stroud.gov.uk](http://www.stroud.gov.uk) under Council and Democracy/Overview and Scrutiny. The Plans are reported to each of the Committees' meetings and updated as necessary. The plans contain a programme of the work that each Committee intends to cover during the forthcoming year.

**The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee** considers matters of a broad strategic nature. It can set up task and finish groups to carry out reviews and inquiries on a particular issue or topic, which reflects the concerns of the public, Councillors or the Council as a whole. Any Member of the Council can take part in a task and finish group, provided that they are not a Cabinet Member.

On completion of a review, the task and finish group will produce a final report and recommendations for approval by the Committee which will then go forward to Cabinet or to Council. Examples of some of the work that the Committee has been involved with are referred to in later sections of this report.

This Committee has been given the responsibility for looking at issues referred to it under the **Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)**, which allows any Councillor of the Council to refer a matter to this Committee for further investigation if they have been unable to resolve it using existing local mechanisms. The aim of this is to support elected Members in achieving improvements in their local areas.

In addition this Committee has been designated the Council's **Crime and Disorder Committee** with the power to review or scrutinise decisions made or other action taken in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities (district and county councils, the police force and the fire and rescue authority), of their crime and disorder functions.

The Committee will maintain an oversight of community safety issues affecting the district through scrutiny of the Stroud Safer Stronger Communities Partnership (SSSCP). A Crime and Disorder Management Group has been established to look at a work programme to address crime and disorder scrutiny matters at a local level.

A successful 'market place' event was held in November 2010 with some of the groups and organisations that make up the Partnership to enable sharing of information on the organisations and their services. The outcomes from this event will help identify particular areas of focus for the Committee which can then work in consultation with partners to develop and improve their services.

The focus of the **Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee** is on all aspects of performance management, including delivery of the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan and the Forward Plan, which are monitored at intervals throughout the year. The Committee continues to monitor the performance of the Stratford Park Leisure Centre every six months and maintains a continued oversight of progress on the Housing Improvement Plan, which was established following a review of the Council's housing service.

The Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the **budget proposals** of the Cabinet before they are approved by the Council and holds a special meeting for this purpose in January of each year.

Councillors are assigned to service areas to keep a check on how the Council's services are performing by meeting quarterly with Strategic Heads, Heads of Service and Cabinet Members and recording outcomes on the Excelsis performance management system. This enables Councillors to contribute to the Committee's responsibility for overseeing service reviews, monitoring and validating both the process and the outcomes, looking at potential areas of risk and providing challenge where appropriate.

## This Year at a Glance

### A New Toolkit for Planning Scrutiny Reviews



The requirement to work more efficiently as a Council also opens up opportunities for the overview and scrutiny committees to look at more creative and effective ways of doing their work. This year proposals are being developed to look at the way in which planning and preparation takes place for task and finish group projects. This will enable that the work is carried out to be meaningful and focussed and undertaken efficiently, with a view to the groups achieving realistic outcomes that will make a difference and add value to services. To support this, Councillors received guidance on effective scoping of reviews and work programmes during their development day, when they had the opportunity to consider the development and use of a proposed toolkit to help them with this area of work.

### Improved Performance Monitoring Arrangements

The Council strives to deliver its services efficiently and effectively. Recent changes have been made to update and streamline existing performance monitoring arrangements. Scrutiny Councillors continue to meet quarterly but meetings now involve a wider range of officers on a more strategic basis. This year Scrutiny Councillors have held their meetings with Strategic Heads, Heads of Service and the respective Cabinet Members so that issues of performance, risk and good practice can be discussed collectively. The results of these meetings are recorded and actions agreed on the Council's performance management system, Excelsis, which is accessible by all Councillors and officers.

The purpose of these meetings is not only to monitor service plans against agreed performance indicators, but to give Members a greater understanding of what the services do and how they could be improved or developed, and how services support the Council's corporate priorities. Any specific issues raised are investigated further and concerns are brought to the attention of the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee for discussion.



## This Year at a Glance Cont...



### Housing Asset Management Strategy

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee has undertaken work to support the Cabinet in going forward with the Housing Asset Management Strategy for the Council. A task and finish group was set up to consider and identify the most urgent housing issues and to address a number of key questions. The group had concluded that the most urgent issue was to deal with the Council's long term void (empty) properties which had fallen into a poor state of disrepair. To take this work forward the group agreed an asset management appraisal methodology which was supported by the Committee and subsequently approved by the Cabinet.

Tenant representatives are also being invited to work with overview and scrutiny Councillors to develop the approach to decision making on asset management investments. Tenants have joined the task and finish group to look at worked examples of asset management decisions using the recommended approach against sample properties from the Council's void property list.

The Councillors involved with this work are Councillors Gwen Belcher, Chris Brine, Loraine Patrick and Elizabeth Peters.

### New Petitions Arrangements

This year the Council has implemented a petitions scheme, including an e-petitions facility, in line with the requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. E-petitions are petitions which can be created and submitted on-line through the Council's website. This is in addition to submitting paper based petitions. Within the scheme there are two elements that impact upon overview and scrutiny as follows:

- **Officer Evidence** – This is where a petition specifically asks for a senior council officer to give evidence at a public meeting about a matter for which s/he is responsible as part of their job. A minimum of 550 signatures on the petition is required before this can happen. This evidence will be heard by the relevant overview and scrutiny committee.
- **Petition Review** – If a petition organiser feels that their petition has not been dealt with properly, then they can request an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the steps taken in response to their petition.

The above matters can be dealt with by either of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in line with their terms of reference or the areas of work that they cover. Details of the full petitions scheme can be found in Part 2 of the Council's Constitution available on the Council's webpages at [www.stroud.gov.uk](http://www.stroud.gov.uk) under Council and Democracy/Constitution.

## This Year at a Glance Cont...

### Climate Change Inquiry

One of the four key priorities for Stroud District Council is to help the community minimise its carbon footprint, adapt to climate change, recycle more and send as little waste to landfill as possible.

The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Stroud District Council sought an inquiry into what further actions the Council could take in response to issues associated with climate change. An inquiry group was formed under the catchy title: Tackling Climate Change: Financing Domestic Sustainable Energy Measures in the Stroud District. The inquiry group of Councillors Philip Booth, Fi Macmillan, Paul Smith and Mark Rees met on six occasions and made some initial recommendations. Nine out of the ten were accepted by Cabinet in March 2010.

Click on the link to read Councillor Philip Booth's full report on the [Climate Change Inquiry](#) and the recommendations accepted by the Cabinet.

The Committee received a response report from the Cabinet Member for Climate change at its meeting on 9 February 2011, which was accepted. In noting that work was still ongoing around some of the recommendations, the Committee has commissioned a further report on progress for consideration in six months time.

### Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder – Partnership Event

On 17 November 2010, the Council hosted a successful 'market place' event in the Council Chamber at Ebley Mill, with some of the groups and organisations that make up the Stroud Safer Stronger Communities Partnership (SSSCP). The partners came along to provide information and discuss the work of their service or organisation. Those who came along to the event included the public, neighbourhood groups such as residents and tenant associations, the Youth Council and Older Peoples Forum and some elected representatives.

Information from the event, together with issues raised by local Councillors, will be used to identify areas of work to be progressed by the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who will work in consultation with the partners to develop and improve service provision.



### Sheltered Housing Review

Mindful of the Sheltered Housing Review being re-commenced at the end of September 2009, the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a report to examine the processes concerned with the review and the consultation that had been undertaken to date, for consideration at its meeting in September 2010.

Residents of the Stroud District were consulted on four options set out in a document entitled "Sheltered Housing Review Consultation – July 2010", which was made available on the Council's website, together with other relevant documents. The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) was appointed as an Independent Tenant Adviser to help all sheltered housing tenants, general tenants and stakeholders of Stroud District Council understand the changes and options being considered. The consultation concluded in December and a Special Council meeting on 16 December 2010 determined the way forward, with a phased programme of changes to the service to commence from 1 April 2011.

In response to a request, the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee is preparing to undertake a more detailed inquiry to examine further the processes and consultation undertaken during the course of the review.

## This Year at a Glance Cont...

### Housing Improvement Plan

The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its performance monitoring arrangements, is paying particular regard to the progress of the Housing Improvement Plan following a review of the Council's housing service. Regular reports are received by the Committee, in addition to reports being considered by the Cabinet and the Audit Committee. The Committee previously agreed to monitor performance of the plan for a period of not less than two years from the date of its implementation in December 2009.

Now that significant progress has been made to the service through a series of improvements, including the implementation of more robust procedures, the Committee will determine the frequency of future housing performance reporting via the Housing Improvement Plan, at its meetings.

### Review of the Planning Scheme of Delegation

The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a task and finish group to look at the issues raised by proposing to change the scheme of delegation for planning and associated applications. Its specific terms of reference are:

- To investigate how a revised scheme of delegation could improve the speed of determination of planning and associated applications.
- To recommend to the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, measures to improve performance of the Local Planning Authority, specifically in the area of delegation.

Work has continued on the scheme throughout the year and at its meeting on 30 September 2010, Cabinet considered amendments to the Planning Scheme of Delegation which included the recommendations of the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Recommendations proposed by Cabinet and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee were considered by the full Council in November 2010.

At the Council meeting a number of the recommendations of the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which set out to increase the speed and consistency of determining planning applications were approved.

However, the Committee's recommendations to allow the present rules which permit Town and Parish Councils, and Ward Members to call in a planning application to be sent to the Development Control Committee, was defeated at the full Council meeting. The Cabinet recommendation, to only allow Town and Parish Councils and Ward Members to call in planning applications if agreed by the Chair of the Development Control Committee and the Head of Planning, was approved.

It was agreed by the Council that the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee would review the recommendations approved by the Council in twelve months time.

The Councillors involved with this review are Councillors Philip Booth, Harry Carr, Paul Smith and Tom Williams.



### Review of Joint Use Sports Centres

On two occasions the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered Cabinet reports and examined proposals to hand back joint use sites at The Vale of Berkeley Sports Centre, Nailsworth Recreation Centre and Wotton Pool to the host sites. This is as a result of the Council facing increasing pressures on its capital and revenue budgets and needing to prioritise where increasingly scarce resources are to be directed.

Whilst a notice of intent to terminate the joint use agreements was issued, the Council agreed to extend its consultation deadline and hold further discussions with the host sites and other appropriate bodies. This was to assist them to find a way that the services offered could be maintained, but not necessarily funded or operated by Stroud District Council. The Council agreed to make a one-off financial contribution to some of the sites, subject to an acceptable business plan. Reviews on the future management of other joint use sites will also take place in the future.

## Overview and Scrutiny Updates



### Canal Development

In December 2008, the Council agreed to proceed with the canal regeneration between Saul and Brimscombe Port. Since that time a Canal Project Manager and project team has been put in place, together with the establishment of the Stroud Valley's Canal Company, to deliver the Cotswold Canals Development. Phase 1A, the section from Ryeford Double Lock to Dudbridge is the first part of the development being progressed.

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives progress reports at each of its meetings on the implementation programme for the project, which keeps Councillors informed of the timetable, project costs and the top ten risks to the project. Information is also received on forthcoming areas of work and how this is intended to be taken forward.

For the most up to date information on the canal development visit the Cotswold Canals Partnership website at [www.cotswoldcanalsproject.org](http://www.cotswoldcanalsproject.org)

### Leisure Services

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up an inquiry team to maintain an oversight of the options appraisal process for the Stratford Park Leisure Centre.

The Council is currently in the process of re-letting the Stratford Park Leisure Centre contract, which has an end date of 31 October 2011.

A huge amount of work has been undertaken by the Council to progress the leisure services review, including soft market testing, community consultation, and benchmarking, which has followed on from meetings of various corporate and strategic groups and a Policy Seminar attended by Councillors.

A number of options for operating the Stratford Park Leisure Centre contract have been put forward for further exploration and the procurement process examined in detail.

The Committee has received progress reports covering the above at a number of meetings throughout the year. On 1 October 2009, the Cabinet agreed to proceed to tender a contract for the management of Stratford Park Leisure Centre from 1 November 2011. An analysis of the likely costs to Stroud District Council of undertaking an in house bid, with direct operation of the Leisure Management Contract, had proved financially unviable. A decision has been made not to include Dursley Pool in the Leisure Management Contract following analysis of the minimum price savings against the risk of a reduction in service delivery.

The Council undertook an invitation to tender via the competitive dialogue procedure with the three highest scoring compliant bids. Whilst the commencement of the new contract will be 1 November 2011, it has been agreed to extend the present Leisure Management Contract as a contingency measure, for a period of up to 6 months should the procurement process overrun.

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor progress of the process to re-let the contract at its meetings.

## Get Involved!

### How can I find out more about the scrutiny reviews that have taken place?

Each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have pages on the Council's website which allows you to follow the progress of an inquiry/task and finish group, through to the submission of the final report and recommendations to the Committee and any follow up reports. See under 'Council and Democracy'.

### How can I suggest a topic for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to investigate?

If you have a matter which affects/is likely to affect the Stroud District or its residents, that you wish the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to consider, then please put your ideas forward in writing, for the attention of Democratic Services, or by email to [democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk). Your suggestion can then be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in determination of their business plans.

### Feedback

If you would like to comment or provide feedback in relation to any matter featured in this Annual Report, please send your comments in writing to Democratic Services, Stroud District Council, Ebley Mill, Stroud, Glos GL5 4UB or by email to [democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk)

### Watch Scrutiny in Action!

We welcome your attendance at our Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, but if unable to attend, you can watch the meetings as a webcast. If you have a PC and Internet access, you can watch meetings 'live' as they happen over the internet or at a later time (for a period of 6 months from the date of the meeting). Associated meeting papers are also available as part of the webcast. View the meeting via 'Webcasts' on the main page of the Council's website.

[www.strouddc.ukcouncil.net](http://www.strouddc.ukcouncil.net)

## Your Overview and Scrutiny Councillors

### *Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

Councillors:

- Chris Brine (Chair)
- John Stanton (Vice-Chair)
- Ray Apperley
- Gordon Craig
- Paul Hemming
- John Jeffreys
- Alan O'Connor
- Gary Powell
- Alex Stennett
- Brian Tipper
- Len Tomlins
- Martin Whiteside

### *Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

Councillors:

- Paul Smith (Chair)
- Alex Stennett (Vice-Chair)
- Philip Bevan
- Philip Booth
- Harry Carr
- Christine Headley
- Mark Rees
- Nigel Studdert-Kennedy
- Mike Williams
- Tom Williams
- Penny Wride
- Vacancy