

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



ANNUAL REPORT 2008 - 2009

Scrutiny Matters



2002-2003
Crime Reduction in Rural Areas
2004-2005
Services for Older People
2007-2008
Emergency Planning



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This year has seen some really positive developments for the **Overview and Scrutiny Committees** and this report provides a summary of what we have done and how we have made a difference.



Councillor Paul Smith
Chair, Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Chris Brine
Chair, Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

We have adopted a Scrutiny Action Plan which is helping us take the Committees forward and 'raising the bar' in overview and scrutiny at Stroud. Good progress has been made and the work undertaken this year demonstrates the value and influence that overview and scrutiny has on key decisions made by the Council.

Since our last report we have undertaken a number of inquiries, many of which are still ongoing. Some of our Members continue to take forward and develop projects and report on areas of work that they are involved with.

There is now the opportunity to involve more Councillors in scrutinising the work of the Council and contributing to its improvements. There has been a number of wide ranging reviews undertaken, ranging from Council housing and contract management

through to reducing waste and village shops. Inquiries have also been set-up to maintain an oversight of the canal development and the leisure services provided to the district.

As part of our monitoring role we will continue to look at performance in a number of areas including service plans and carbon reduction, ensuring that they meet locally and nationally agreed performance indicators.

Looking forward we will be exploring ways to become more involved in policy development at an earlier stage as well as monitoring and reviewing existing policies. The committees will continue their role as 'critical friend' and help the Executive in shaping and delivering local services using best practice and innovation. Ensuring good governance and placing the interests of the community will be at the heart of our work.

Role and Function of Overview and Scrutiny at Stroud District Council

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 and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

The main role 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 next (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*
- *Undertaking inquiries*
- *Call-in of Cabinet decisions*
- *Performance monitoring*
- *Cabinet referrals*

Training and Development

Councillors are encouraged to undertake scrutiny and performance training to support them in their roles.

Some of our Overview and Scrutiny Councillors have joined other local authorities for training to develop their knowledge and share experiences. This year, Overview and Scrutiny Councillors, together with Cabinet Councillors, were invited to attend a Gloucestershire Authorities Scrutiny Conference attended by speakers from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and from Councils outside of Gloucestershire, who presented examples of successful scrutiny reviews and the latest national developments. Individual Councillors have also received training in relation to their particular overview and scrutiny roles and responsibilities. For example performance monitoring (Excelsis) training and on service plan reviews. Officers are also available to guide and support us as required. It is important that we continue to receive training and support



to enable us to develop and improve our roles and meet our responsibilities within overview and scrutiny.

As part of its ongoing development, the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive training on how best to deliver its financial and audit responsibilities. This will take place prior to each Committee meeting.

In order to raise awareness of the role and function of Overview and Scrutiny within the Council, some Overview and Scrutiny Councillors attended a series of staff briefing sessions known as 'Proud of Stroud' to talk to staff about the work of the Committees, their individual involvement in particular areas of work and to share their experiences of scrutiny. It is intended to arrange further follow up sessions in the future, to demonstrate how Overview and Scrutiny has added significant value to a particular area of work.

The Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees



The Committees have adopted a Scrutiny Action Plan as a means to take Overview and Scrutiny forward within the Council. The progress of this is monitored by each Committee. In addition, each Committee has its own business plan, agreed annually, which sets out their work programme and timetable for the forthcoming year. These are kept under continual review. Business Plans are available to view on the Committees' webpages at www.stroud.gov.uk under Council and Democracy.

As it suggests, the **Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee** considers matters of a broad strategic nature, including carrying out reviews and inquiries, which reflect the concerns of the public, Councillors and the Council as a whole. Inquiry teams, comprising Councillors and Officers, are set up to look at the topics identified and meetings are held as required during the course of the review or investigation. Once the review is complete, the inquiry team will produce a final report and recommendations for approval and submission to Cabinet. Examples of some of the work that the Committee has been involved with are referred to later in this report.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees aim to respond to the needs of the local community as much as possible by engaging with the public, Parish Councils, Ward Councillors and other community bodies.

The focus of the **Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee** is on all aspects of Performance Management. This includes delivery of the Council's Corporate

Delivery Plan and the Forward Plan, which are monitored at intervals throughout the year. Whilst we have made some progress in these areas, we will be looking at ways in which we can be involved in policy development at an earlier stage and how best to monitor and review existing policies.

This year, the Council consolidated the responsibility for scrutinising the budget within the terms of reference of the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will therefore consider the budget proposals of the Cabinet before they are approved by the Council. An example of how we have provided challenge during the course of the budget setting process is referred to later in this report.

Our work in this area also includes consideration of reports around the Council's audit responsibilities and functions and arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.

Councillors are assigned to service areas to keep a check on how these are performing. This action inputs to our responsibility for overseeing service reviews, monitoring and validating both the process and the outcomes, and providing challenge where appropriate.

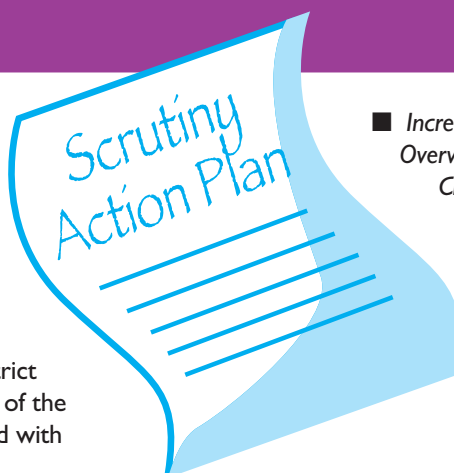
Whilst we have the ability to 'call-in' decisions taken by the Executive, which we may have considered inappropriate, or not within the Council's policy framework, we use this as a last resort, preferring to work with the Executive to take matters forward. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees have not called any matters in this year.

Work Undertaken During 2008-09

■ Scrutiny Action Plan

Each of the Committees, since undertaking training in February 2008, have made real progress in developing and implementing some of the actions contained within the Scrutiny Action Plan. The Action Plan was designed to 'raise the bar' and develop the Overview and Scrutiny function at Stroud District Council. This has included frequent discussion of the Action Plan with the Leader of the Council and with Cabinet Members. Key developments include:

- *Proposals to deliver regular audit training immediately prior to each meeting of the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee*



- *Increased discussion and ongoing development of the Overview and Scrutiny function with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and the Leader of the Council at quarterly meetings and with the full Cabinet bi-annually*

- *Cabinet Councillors and Scrutiny Councillors are encouraged to meet jointly with Heads of Service to consider service plans*

- *Non Cabinet Councillors are to be invited to participate in Scrutiny inquiries*

- *Proposals to create job roles for Overview and Scrutiny Councillors are to be agreed and implemented for the next Civic Year, which will clearly define what is expected of an Overview and Scrutiny Councillor.*

■ Contract Management at Stroud District Council

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commissioned an inquiry into the Council's procurement and management processes relating to the Council's contracts with external providers.

The Inquiry team agreed the following areas as the basis for its inquiry. It undertook a desktop exercise to examine them, and also held interviews with Heads of Service at quarterly service plan meetings.

- *Is there a system for raising contracts which is used across all Council service teams?*

- *Is there a system for monitoring contracts? How are contracts managed towards successful completion? Do contracts deliver what was contracted in time, quality and cost?*
- *What action is taken in the event of contract failure?*
- *Is contract procurement used to pursue the Council's environmental and sustainable community strategy?*
- *What level of experience/qualifications are staff engaged in contract management expected to hold?*
- *Is there a public record of the Council's contracts? Is it kept up to date?*

A final report with recommendations was presented to the Committee in February 2009. It was agreed that a report on the performance management of the street cleaning sections of the environmental services contract will be presented to the Committee within 6 months, together with 6 monthly reports detailing the Internal Audit reports issued throughout the year. The inquiry group is satisfied that the measures taken to address the points identified in the original scope and agreement of the aforementioned recommendations will close the inquiry.

The Councillors involved with this inquiry are Councillors **Sarah Lunnon** (lead Councillor), **Keith Pearson**, **Brian Tipper** and **Harry Carr**.



Work Undertaken During 2008-09

■ Housing Assets/Decanting

'Decanting' is a legal definition used to explain the process where tenants are required to move from their homes because either their landlord or an authority with compulsory purchase powers has redevelopment plans for their home. These plans may involve demolition or major repair or improvement to the property and will require the tenant to move out, either temporarily or permanently, for the works to be completed.

The matter of decanting Council tenants became prominent during the period December 2007 to February 2008 when a number of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) sites were put forward for potential re-development. The aim of the proposals was to create much needed capital that could be used to bring properties up to the standards required by the Decent Homes Standard and also provide additional affordable homes. However, there had been adverse publicity in the local media concerning a number of sites, which had been fuelled by tenant disquiet over the need for 'decanting' and resettlement. Consequently, the proposals that had been through Housing Management Forum and Cabinet were withdrawn at the Council meeting on 21 February 2008, where they were due to be considered. It was made clear at the Council meeting that the proposals would be brought back to Council in due course.

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee has expressed concerns over the sensitivity with which tenants, particularly older ones, have been decanted by this Council to allow for the redevelopment of their homes. The Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the Council's performance around decanting, with a view to producing recommendations on how the Council could provide better support to tenants faced with decanting.

Having looked at existing Stroud District Council policy and practice and similarly for other authorities and agencies, the Committee made a number of recommendations for improvement to the Cabinet meeting on 24 July 2008. The recommendations will be considered at future meetings of the Housing Management Forum and Cabinet. In any event the Committee will review the progress of its recommendations by no later than its 26 March 2009 meeting and will issue a final report once it has had the Executive's (Cabinet) response to its recommendations.

This Committee has also agreed to continue to maintain an oversight of the Housing Revenue Account position and the application of the new HRA Asset Management Strategy.

The Councillors taking this inquiry forward are Councillors **Linda Townley, Keith Pearson, Chris Brine** and **Karon Cross**.

■ Reducing Waste

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed to examine waste reduction and minimisation from retail activities in the Stroud district, with the focus on increasing recycling and minimising food waste. An inquiry team has been established to take this forward and will start the inquiry by looking at the various initiatives already underway within the county.

The inquiry team has met on a number of occasions and have agreed to pursue the following areas:

- *Continue to compare and contrast the Stroud district waste production and disposal data with county and national sources*
- *Engage a local supermarket in order to help the sub-group better understand the issues facing major users of packaging*
- *Consider food as an issue from 'excessive' packaging and general 'wastefulness' perspectives and start to develop a view of the differences in approach between major retailers and local shops*
- *Start to build an understanding of what marketing and publicity approaches are most effective at causing behavioural change amongst the general population in terms of waste minimisation and recycling*



The inquiry team will visit two local supermarkets to discuss and examine the reasoning behind the packaging used for food products, to look at current policies and any future proposals for change, to enable comparisons to be made. Some members of the inquiry team have undertaken their own individual waste audits to analyse what they have purchased, identifying the place of purchase, the packaging of their products and how they disposed of their packaging. Publicity during Zero Waste Week (26 January 2009 – 2 February 2009) resulted in 5 households participating in a waste audit in late February 2009.

The outcomes of the above visits and waste analysis have been reported to the Committee and it is expected that a final report and recommendations will be considered in July 2009 with recommendations to Cabinet.

The Councillors taking this inquiry forward are Councillors **Chris Brine, John Fowles, Paul Hemming, Linda Townley** and **Martin Whiteside**.

Work Undertaken During 2008-09

■ Business Support Programme for Village Shops and Post Offices

Towards the end of the last Civic Year, the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee received presentations from the proprietors of two quite different post office establishments – a community shop enterprise and the operation of an ‘outreach’ model, where the Postmaster was legally responsible for the operation of more than one post office.



The presentations enabled the Committee to understand the issues affecting rural post offices faced with potential closure under the Post Office Ltd's Renewal Programme and it was hoped that the information would better inform the Council to enable it to provide further assistance to village shops and post offices.

The Cabinet was asked to consider the inquiry held by the Committee and to bring forward proposals to support village shops, post offices and other community services.

■ Forward Plan Process

An investigation into the operation of the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions was undertaken, which included a look at the operation of Forward Plans within other local authorities.

The statutory requirement for the publication of the Forward Plan is that it shall contain certain details of all matters likely to be the subject of key decisions made by the Cabinet for a period of four months. The Plan is updated on a monthly basis and includes outstanding items contained in the previous Plan together with any new items.

Following a meeting between the Chief Executive, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs, and the Executive, it was agreed to publish a list of forthcoming Council decisions, including recommendations from the Cabinet. This development should support the achievement of the Committee's overall aim, which is to identify major policy decisions earlier, providing a better opportunity for undertaking overview and scrutiny activities.

The inquiry was conducted by Councillor **John Fowles** of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

■ Budget Scrutiny

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for considering the budget proposals of the Cabinet before they are approved by the Council. The Cabinet met on 11 December 2008 when the budgetary proposals for 2009/10 were considered and subsequently agreed by the Council on 21 January 2009.

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 October 2008 referred two subject matters and associated key lines of enquiry to the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee for it to pursue with the Executive through scrutiny of this year's budget. The following areas and key lines of enquiry were agreed to be pursued with the Executive.

■ Carbon Reduction

To be considered in terms of the achievement of the Council's carbon reduction targets for its own operations and those of the community



■ Affordable Housing

To be considered in terms of the achievement of the Council's affordable housing target, to provide at least 790 new affordable homes between 2004 and 2011

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee questioned the Cabinet Member for Finance and Business Support and the Cabinet Member for Housing at its meeting on 15 January 2009, to establish how these areas had been addressed by the Executive in consideration of its budget proposals.

In addition, and at the request of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed to monitor the key carbon reduction indicators on a quarterly basis through the monitoring of service plans.

Performance Monitoring

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for the Council's performance management and audit responsibilities and functions.

Councillors are assigned to particular service areas and hold quarterly meetings with Heads of Service or Unit Managers. The purpose of these meetings is not only to monitor service plans against locally and nationally agreed performance indicators, but to give Councillors a greater understanding of what the services do and how they could be improved or developed. Any specific issues raised are investigated further and concerns are brought to the attention of the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This year the Council has welcomed the introduction of a new performance management system known as 'Excelsis' to be used by Officers and Councillors. Excelsis is used for monitoring the performance of individual service plans, to assist with the assessment of risk and to ensure that services are meeting the Council's priorities as set out within the Corporate Delivery Plan.

Councillors are able to access the information at any time to check on performance in advance of meeting with their respective Heads of Service and reporting to Committee. Both Councillors and Officers have received training on the use of the system and the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee has set up a sub group to meet on a one-off basis to produce user guidance to help Councillors access and navigate various elements of the system.



It is hoped that the system will enable Councillors to become more proactive and focus intently on performance, drawing out key issues to be focussed on each quarter. This approach will make better use of the Committee's time around performance matters so that real issues of concern can be raised and considered.

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee also receive a six monthly update on performance at the Stratford Park Leisure Centre in Stroud.

Audit

The Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive the annual report on the internal audit work undertaken during the course of each year.

Councillors receive information around the Council's systems for internal audit of its accounting records and on its system of internal control. The Committee's agenda is structured to identify and separate audit items from performance and scrutiny matters.

In considering the Council's Annual Report on Treasury Management, the Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Business Support on the position and impact of the collapse of the Icelandic Banks, which had affected numerous organisations globally. Stroud District Council had investments totalling £3million with the Glitnir Bank, who had

gone into receivership and was unable to pay back its creditors. This investment was reported 'at risk' and it would be reasonable to assume that the Council would be unlikely to receive any interest on its investments. The Council is currently working with other local authorities and the Local Government Association to recover its deposits.

The Chief Executive commissioned an internal audit review as a consequence of the collapse of the Icelandic Banks and the global banking crisis and the Council has subsequently approved changes to its treasury management reporting arrangements. This now includes a further role for the Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor and keep under review the Council's treasury management systems and processes.

Overview and Scrutiny Updates

■ Canal Development

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee established an inquiry team last year to follow through the canal restoration process. The decision taken by the Council at its Extraordinary Meeting of 5 June 2008, took into account the report and recommendations of the Canal Inquiry Team, as a result of the Canal Inquiry day held on 25 March 2008.



The Committee discussed the project at its 12 June 2008 meeting and agreed that Council had adequately addressed the recommendations of the Canal Inquiry Team, with the exception of two areas where information was sought in relation to the recruitment of the interim and permanent Project Managers and clarification was required on the employment figures for the Brimscombe Area Action Plan. An Extraordinary meeting of the Council took place on 16 December 2008 where Councillors overwhelmingly agreed to proceed with the canal restoration project.

The Canal Inquiry team have since met with Officers and an update has been given to Councillors around the appointment of the Canal Project Manager; how the project would be managed, progress with the development of Brimscombe Port and governance arrangements and structures for the Stroud Valleys Canal Company, who would be responsible for the operation, repair and maintenance of the canal. The Committee receives updates at its meetings as appropriate and is looking forward to meeting with the Canal Project Manager in due course.

An oversight of the project will be maintained by the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

■ Leisure Services

Last year 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 early stages of re-letting the Stratford Park Leisure Centre contract, which has an end date of 31 October 2011. A 'soft-market testing exercise' was undertaken to gather information on what appetite existed in the commercial/trust sector for this type of contract. The results of the soft market testing have been collated and clarification is required on a number of outstanding legal, financial and timetable implications. Arrangements are being made to involve all Councillors in consultations and to feed into the details of any suggested approach to go forward for consideration by the Cabinet.

Scrutiny Councillor Energy Champion

Councillor Patricia Carrick continues in her role as the Council's Scrutiny Councillor Energy Champion. She receives training to raise awareness about fuel poverty and to encourage the scrutiny of Council decisions in a way that takes affordable warmth issues into account.

Councillor Carrick has provided updates on issues of fuel poverty, the causes of fuel poverty, key outcomes on affordable warmth strategies, aims of the project, activities undertaken to date and general energy and grant advice, including ongoing projects to provide information to the elderly and vulnerable on affordable warmth issues and incentives.

Stroud District Council has recently been declared the regional winners of the South West Region National Energy Action Award Scheme for its briquette project, winning a prize of £2,000. The project uses recycled wooden briquettes made from waste wood from furniture making at Leyhill Prison, as an affordable supplement to solid fuel. The project has benefited the local community and the environment through the provision of a locally sourced, recycled and sustainable solid fuel supplement and has helped to establish links between Leyhill Prison and Stroud district residents.

Councillor Carrick also presented an overview of her role and achievements to Council staff earlier this year at a 'Proud of Stroud' session, to raise awareness of affordable warmth issues and the assistance available.

In acknowledgment of the hard work and commitment of Councillor Carrick, the Cabinet has endorsed the recommendation of the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to continue to support her and develop her role as the Council's Scrutiny Energy Champion. An evaluation of the project from the National Energy Action charity has also supported the continuation of the Champion initiative in the Stroud district.



Health Overview and Scrutiny in Gloucestershire

Councillor Ray Apperley continues to represent Stroud District Council on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Gloucestershire), for which he is also Vice-Chair. This is a County Council Committee, comprising County Councillors and Councillors from each of the district councils within Gloucestershire.

The Primary role of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to focus on health improvement by working in partnership and bringing together the Council's responsibilities for well-being and reviewing, whilst also, constructively challenging and monitoring local services provided and commissioned by the NHS, including equality of provision.

Councillor Apperley provides the Committee with regular updates of the work being undertaken and issues arising from the County Committee. This year he has had a significant

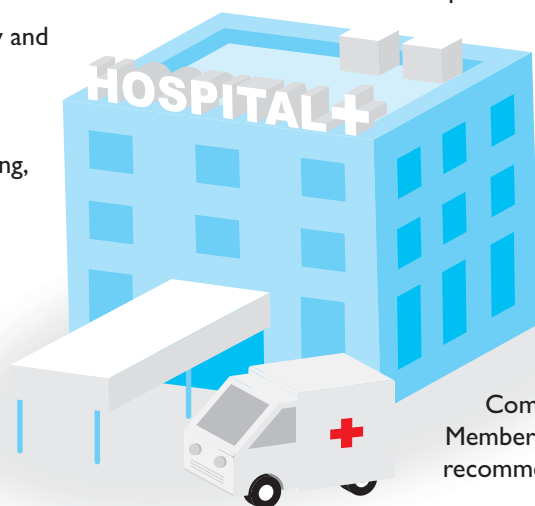
involvement in the review of the Great Western Ambulance NHS Trust. He is Chair of the Stroud Sub Group, which comprises District Councillors Christine Headley, Linda Townley, Loraine Patrick and Patricia Carrick. The Sub Group has addressed a number of objectives within its area of

responsibility to assist the Trust. He has reported to

the Committee on the progress of the review and on any particular issues that have arisen throughout. The findings of the Great Western Ambulance Joint Health Scrutiny Committee have been published in a report dated October 2008, which has been forwarded to the Great Western Ambulance Service and to the Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust for a response. The report was considered by the Gloucestershire

Health Overview and Scrutiny

Committee on 19 January 2009, when Members generally supported the recommendations.



Future Developments

The Committees will continue to develop the Action Plan and undertake the work within their respective Business Plans.

Government guidance is awaited on the implications of the 'Councillor Call for Action' and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which will

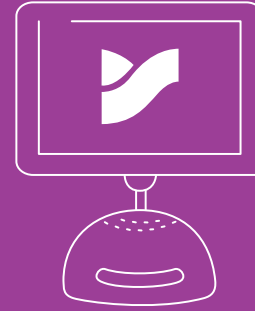
commence in April 2009. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has drafted best practice guidance on the issues relating to the local authority scrutiny function, including the Councillor Call for Action, arrangements for the scrutiny of partners, and arrangements around joint committees and district councils.



Watch Scrutiny in Action!

We welcome the attendance of the public at our Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, but if unable to attend, the meetings are also available to view 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 and presentation slides are also available as part of the webcast. See the Council's webcast page on the website for more details.



www.strouddc.ukcouncil.net/site/index.php



Your Overview and Scrutiny Councillors

Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors:

- Chris Brine (Chair)
- Martin Whiteside (Vice-Chair)
- Ray Apperley
- Tim Archer
- Philip Bevan
- Pat Carrick
- John Fowles
- Paul Hemming
- Graham Littleton
- Loraine Patrick
- John Stanton
- Linda Townley

Performance and Audit Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors:

- Paul Smith (Chair)
- Sarah Lunnon (Vice-Chair)
- Philip Booth
- Harry Carr
- Nigel Cooper
- Karon Cross
- Stephen Glanfield
- Keith Pearson
- Chris Routledge
- Alex Stennett
- Brian Tipper
- Tom Williams

Scrutiny Matters