

meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 19<sup>th</sup> May 2011

agenda item number **14a**

## REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

### Scrutiny Annual Report 2010-11

#### Purpose of the Report

1. To present the annual report on the work of Nottinghamshire County Council's Scrutiny Committees.

#### Information

2. The following reviews were undertaken or are still ongoing:

#### Overview Committee

3. Budget Process and Consultation: The Overview Committee makes an annual examination of budget consultation issues. The prominence given to the consultation and high response rate were seen by the committee as evidence of the Authority's commitment to the challenge of meaningful public engagement. Members also noted the effective use of the Leader in explaining the proposals. The committee considered that while Portfolio Holders had also been involved publicly there is an opportunity for them to be used further. Following the examination of Budget Process and Consultation the committee made three recommendations in relation to: providing up to date information to Members, public engagement and partnership working; all of which were accepted by the Cabinet Member.
4. Domestic Violence: This review highlighted the complexity of services provided by a range of different providers and how they have to compete for funding. The review's final report emphasised the need to have a smaller number of organisations providing county-wide services and recommended more integrated and coherent funding streams in order to reduce duplication and inefficiency.
5. Partnerships: This review focussed on how the County Council should be involved with partnerships and if they provide value for money. The review discovered that it is not possible to show whether reported improvements stem solely from the partnership or partners working

together to carry out activity that they would have otherwise undertaken.

6. Petitions: Members of the Overview Committee also undertook the development of the scheme for the response to petitions which provides clear guidance to members of the public.
7. Decision Making: this review examined the information that is available to the public when the County Council takes decisions. The review identified inconsistencies in the information that was made available. Councillors recommended that every decision be based on a publicly available report with exempt information tabled separately.
8. In May 2011, Members of the Overview Committee will commence a review of Shared Services.

### **Communities and the Environment Standing Committee**

9. Highways Maintenance: Focussed on improving highway maintenance e.g. the timely and appropriate repair of potholes. The review also highlighted the crucial issue of the proper reinstatement of the road surface by utilities companies. The committee gathered information and evidence from Staffordshire and Leicestershire County Council and plans to continue to campaign for utilities companies to be made responsible for the long term maintenance of sections of the highway where their trenching work has served to reduce the lifespan of the road surface – to this end the Chair of the Standing Committee and the Cabinet Member for Transport and Highways have jointly written to the Secretary of State for Transport asking that the relevant sections of primary legislation be brought into force thereby compelling utilities companies to take long term responsibility for the damage that they do to the highway; this is particularly timely since the Local Government Association have also called for utility companies to pay a bond in advance of roadworks to make it easier for councils to recoup the cost of inferior repairs.
10. The review's recommendations regarding training for highways officers and the operation of area based budgets were accepted; in addition, many other recommendations – including ones relating to the clustering of repair work and liaison with Member Forums were partially accepted.
11. Conservation and Heritage: the committee is examining the complex area of conservation and heritage issues across the county (including buildings at risk). This review will view to feed into the development of a heritage protocol which will help to define how this authority works with partners and landowners. Members have already gathered a great deal of firsthand experience of the issues by visiting Rufford Country Park, Southwell Roman site, Bestwood Engine Winding House and Beauvale Priory. The committee has also heard evidence from the regional director of English Heritage.

12. Road Safety Around Schools: concluding May 2011, this review is examining the effectiveness of 20 mph limits around schools, School Travel Plans, walking buses and other methods of ensuring the safety of school children.
13. Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment: the committee has also fed its view into the Authority's Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA). The PFRA is a high level screening exercise to identify areas where flood risk is significant.
14. Dog Deaths caused by Seasonal Canine Illness: the committee has just embarked on an examination of dog deaths that have occurred on Forestry Commission and other land over the last two years; in order to ensure that sufficient partnership working is taking place to address this difficult problem.

### **Education Standing Committee**

15. Apprenticeships: This review highlighted that opportunities within the County Council for apprenticeships are extremely limited. The review recommended that Managers should be actively encouraged to consider all vacancies for the feasibility of apprenticeships and that a co-ordinated work experience programme be developed – this recommendation was partially accepted. The review also made recommendations regarding information and advice, the development of the apprenticeship scheme and guidance to schools which were fully accepted by the Cabinet Member.
16. Cross Border Admissions Review: This review focussed on the movement of Nottinghamshire pupils to schools in neighbouring local authorities. The review specifically examined the extent of pupil movement in Newark, identified the influences on parents making secondary school choices and areas for development which might mitigate the trend of movement out of the county.
17. Inclusion: The purpose of this review was to examine the benefits of inclusion for Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils and consider if the policy is in the best interests of all children, young people and staff in mainstream schools. Nottinghamshire is different from many local authorities as it does not use a statementing process to allocate funding for pupils with a SEN. Consequently it issues a lower number of statements than many other local authorities; it does however use them when a child needs to use special school provision or where there are particularly complex needs that need additional specialist support and monitoring. Members learnt that the expertise and confidence of practitioners in mainstream settings has increased opportunities for pupils with special needs to be educated in mainstream schools. The review made a number of recommendations, which included:- the 'whole town' approach for the collaboration and allocation of funding adopted by Newark schools should be considered

by other clusters and families of schools. In addition, the Members considered that, ideally, no young person should remain in the Nottinghamshire Learning Centre for more than one term. Alternative specialist provision should be available for those young people who cannot be swiftly reintegrated back into mainstream school.

18. The next issue for review will be the recruitment and retention of school governors.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

19. From Care to Independence: This review focussed on the support that should be provided to young people leaving care. Young people leaving care are some of the most vulnerable in society. It is widely recognised that they are more likely than other young people to have obtained fewer GCSEs, be unemployed, make up a disproportionate number of the prison population and have mental health issues. There are around 600 children and young people at any one time in the care of the County Council who, for varying reasons, are no longer able to live with their families. The County Council and Councillors have a duty to act as the 'corporate parent' for these children and young people, which means the local authority should look after these children in a responsible and supportive way, much as any other parent would look after their children – supporting them as they move into adulthood.
20. NHS Services in Newark: The Health and Wellbeing Committee undertook an examination of changes to NHS Services in Newark which concluded in March last year. The review emphasised that Newark Hospital is held in great regard by the people of Newark and emphasised expectation that the promised additional services would be provided there for the foreseeable future and expanded to meet the additional demand for proposed future growth. Further to a presentation by the 'Save Newark Hospital' campaign group to the Health and Wellbeing Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> April this matter has been referred to the Secretary of State for Health for examination by the independent reconfiguration panel. The issue will not, therefore, be further considered by the Health and Wellbeing Standing Committee at this time.
21. NHS Walk-in Centres: A sub-committee of the Health and Wellbeing Standing Committee considered the proposals for changes to Walk-in centres in Stapleford and Kirkby-in-Ashfield. The review found that the consultation feedback demonstrated the significant challenges facing the NHS in communicating the availability – and ensuring access to – primary care services in the communities served by the current walk-in centres. The review also considered that there was insufficient public assurance in place to address the concerns raised through the consultation and therefore it is not possible to determine that the proposals are in the interests of the local health service. Further to a decision made at a meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011, changes of service at the Stapleford and Ashfield Walk-

in Centres have been referred to the Secretary of State for Health for examination by the Independent Reconfiguration Panel. This issue will not, therefore, be further considered by the Health and Wellbeing Standing Committee at this time.

### **Recommendation**

22. It is recommended that the annual report for Scrutiny be received.

**Councillor Joyce Bosnjak, Chair of Overview**  
**Councillor Sue Saddington, Chair of Communities and the Environment**  
**Councillor Liz Yates, Chair of Education**  
**Councillor Ged Clarke, Chair of Health and Wellbeing**

### **Legal Services' comments (SLB 10/05/2011)**

County Council is the appropriate body to consider this report. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution states that the Overview Committee must report at least annually to Full Council.

### **Background papers available for inspection**

None

### **Electoral division(s) affected**

Nottinghamshire