

Delivering for Swindon

Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13

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Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report

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I. Overview & Scrutiny in Swindon

The Overview & Scrutiny function is a process within local government that offers both opportunities and challenges for Councillors to improve the quality and delivery of services that are provided to our local communities. It is the mechanism by which public accountability of the Council and other public service providers is exercised, providing a process of checks and balances, holding to account and contributing to policy development whilst reflecting the voice and concerns of the general public.

Overview & Scrutiny work broadly falls into five key areas, they are...

Policy Review - Detailed evidence based assessment of services and policy is undertaken with the aim of developing recommendations for policy and service improvement.

Scrutiny of Decisions - A review of the process and reasons for decisions taken, primarily by the Cabinet, but also by other public service providers in order to ensure decisions are taken appropriately and deliver public accountability

Performance Review – Review of service performance and the performance of Cabinet Members

Scrutiny of Strategic Documents – Committees review the development, delivery and performance of key strategic documents such as the Council's approach to the budget and Corporate Strategy

One Off Topic Review – Committees as a whole or smaller dedicated task groups may review in detail one off topics in order to seek to address public concern, review approaches being taken and deliver recommendations to deliver greater value for money and service improvement

The Overview and Scrutiny function in Swindon operates through a series of Overview and Scrutiny Committees each of which has its own remit to focus upon.

In Swindon those Committees are:

- The Scrutiny Committee
- The Economic, Environment and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The Children's and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



2. Foreword

An introduction from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, the Leader of Swindon Borough Council and the Chief Executive of Swindon Borough Council.

Councillor Kevin Small, Chair of Overview & Scrutiny

The role of Overview and Scrutiny function is very important within a modern council, when so many decisions are made by just a few elected members who serve on the Cabinet. Our Overview and Scrutiny Committees ensure that all members of the council can make a contribution to council policy, either by reviewing important issues facing Swindon or helping Lead Members in the formulation of policy. Added to this we have members of the Scrutiny Committee holding the Cabinet and leading Officers to account, by examining their decisions and reviewing their activities. I would like to thank my elected colleagues for their contribution during the year and the support we have received from the scrutiny officers over this period.



Councillor David Renard, Leader of Swindon Borough Council

I would like to thank all the councillors who serve on the overview and scrutiny committees. Good scrutiny means that we can deliver better decisions for residents. Good overview means that we can involve a wide range of Councillors in developing new policies. The cabinet-leader executive we have in Swindon is more effective because overview and scrutiny Members continue to act as the Council's "critical friends."



Gavin Jones, Chief Executive Swindon Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny lies at the heart of the Council's democratic process, it keeps a careful eye on the policy decisions of the Council and has a key role advising on policy development for both the Council and our Strategic partners.

The past year has been challenging for local services as the Council adapts to ever increasing budgetary pressures, the Overview and Scrutiny function has had to adapt to this climate and prioritise its workload far more rigorously than in previous years, ensuring that its outcomes add value to the organisation and the Borough where it is most needed.

I believe that the Overview and Scrutiny function plays a vital role in delivering accountability for the people of Swindon and makes an important contribution to the achievement of the aims and objectives of Swindon Borough Council.



3. Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee has had a busy year reviewing the performance of all council services through our Question and Answer session, where every Cabinet Lead Member MUST come in front of the committee so we can review the performance of the services that they are responsible for. As usual all Cabinet decisions came in front of the committee for review before they are carried out, with a small number being sent back to cabinet for further consideration. The committee also set up an important sub committee to review the performance of the new locality groups, and a working group to review Digital City, which will report early in the new municipal year. Finally I would like to thank my Vice Chair Cllr Heaton-Jones who is standing down from this role for his support over the last few years.



**Councillor Kevin Small,
Chair of Committee**

Delivering Accountability

The Scrutiny Committee looks to provide accountability on behalf of the people of Swindon and ensure good governance is delivered by Swindon Borough Council.

This is achieved by the Scrutiny Committee in a number of ways:

- The Leader of the Council reports to Scrutiny twice annually on the administration's aims, objectives and performance.
- All decisions taken at Cabinet are reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee to ensure they are taken in accordance with the Council's principles of good decision making.
- All Cabinet Members are required to come before the Scrutiny Committee to face a question and answer session on their portfolio's performance.

By ensuring that decision makers are held to account the Scrutiny Committee seeks to improve the quality of decisions taken on behalf of the people of Swindon.

The Scrutiny Committee has a number of key roles to fill which make it different from the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees, it has a responsibility to scrutinise the decisions and performance of the Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Committee:

- Evaluates the impact of Cabinet decisions and how those decisions have been made
- Holds the Cabinet and Cabinet Members to account to explain their actions and performance
- Examines key decisions of the Council to ensure that they are compliant with agreed Council policy and plans
- Examines the budget setting process to ensure that it has been conducted in an effective, open and transparent manner

The Scrutiny Committee has the power to ask Cabinet to reconsider a decision it has taken before it is implemented, this is known as 'call-in'.

The introduction of overview and scrutiny is one of the most important local government reforms of this millennium. Scrutiny means that the public can have confidence that the Cabinet's decisions are reasonable, proportionate and are based on sound evidence. The non-partisan way in which the Scrutiny committee tends to work means that all councillors can focus on what is best for the people of Swindon. It is your quality assurance stamp of approval.



**Councillor David Renard,
Leader of the Council**

Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny contributes to Swindon by...

- Providing 'critical-friend' challenge to policy makers and decision takers
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard
- Drives improvements in decision taken, policies implemented and delivery of public services

Localities Scrutiny Sub Committee

The Scrutiny Committee set up a standing subcommittee to review delivery and performance of the Council's new Localities process.

As part of this review the sub-committee conducted a detailed questionnaire with all Councillors and will look to report back to Scrutiny Committee with its findings in the 2013-14 Municipal Year.

Digital City Task Group Review

The Scrutiny Committee created a task group to review the final accounts of Digital City and to scrutinise matters arising from the accounts in response to concerns about the Wi Fi project with Digital City.

This task group is due to report early in the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

4. Economic, Environmental & Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Economic Scrutiny Committee has had an extremely busy and productive year, undertaking a huge range of work and often scheduling extra meetings to do so! As well as the major projects outlined in this report, we have established two sub-committees. One has been seeking a viable future for the Mechanics Institution, arguably Swindon's most culturally-significant historic building. The other has started planning for a landmark anniversary of Swindon's railway heritage and the economic benefits that would bring. It has been a pleasure to Chair the committee for the last two years, and I am sure it will continue to carry out valuable work in a wide range of policy areas.



**Councillor Peter Heaton-Jones,
Chair of the Committee**

Town Centre Master-plan

In 2010 the Committee began a detailed review into how to make Swindon town centre more attractive, successful and competitive. After taking considerable evidence from numerous sources over 2 years the Committee made a submission to Forward Swindon to help shape and develop the Town Centre Master-Plan.

The review conducted by the Committee concluded that...

- A clear vision, flexible and aspirational vision for the future of Swindon is developed and supported by all that fully involves communities, residents, retailers and developers
- The role of Forward Swindon needs to be clarified with Forward Swindon providing a central point of contact for all enquiries
- A successful town centre will not solely focus on retail but also deliver culture and leisure
- The town centre requires a cultural hub, preferably around Theatre Square
- Swindon's art collection needs to be utilised
- A leisure hub, based around the Oasis development needs to be integrated into the town centre

Full details of the Committees review can be obtained from the Scrutiny Unit or seen in Swindon's Town Centre Master-Plan in greater detail.

The Economic, Environmental & Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks to hold decision makers to account and assist in the creation and delivery of policy in service areas within the remit of Economy, the Environment and Sustainability.

Inward Investment Review

The Committee began a review in 2011-12 into the approach taken towards Inward Investment across the Borough. The purpose of the review was to analyse how delivery of Inward Investment into Swindon could be best be delivered and managed.

To date the review has taken evidence from a wide range of sources including major employers such as the Council, Honda and Nationwide alongside evidence from commercial agents operating in the Borough.

The review will report in the 2013-14 Municipal Year.

Delivering Accountability and improved Policy

Throughout the year the Committee has scrutinised the developed of key policy documents in order to ensure that the development process is fir for purpose and inclusive and to ensure the policies intended aims and methods of delivery work in the best interests of Swindon. This year the Committee has held to account and contributed towards the development of...

- The Economic Strategy
- The Core Strategy – Swindon's Local Plan
- Council's approach to recycling, waste management and waste to energy project

The reviews conducted by the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide us with valuable first-hand input from Councillors to important topics that are vital for the town's future economic success. The committee's work draws on evidence from a wide range of stakeholders and it is great that members are provided the opportunity to hear these views.



**Ian Piper, Chief Executive
Forward Swindon**

5. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has had many challenges to face this year, primarily the organisational changes within the National Health Service. The focus in the past year has been on familiarising ourselves with these changes and the implications of these changes to both the people of Swindon and to the role of this Committee. By taking an approach of working towards delivering health accountability for the Borough I feel that the Committee has established itself as a key player in the delivery of health services in Swindon.



**Councillor Claire Ellis,
Chair of the Committee**

Delivering Health Accountability

Working in partnership with our health partners and stakeholders the Committee has sought to provide health accountability on behalf of the people of Swindon. The Committee primarily delivers accountability by holding detailed Question and Answer sessions with health providers on specific health topics as well as reviewing specific health decisions taken by partner organisations and by Swindon Borough Council in order to ensure that those decisions have been taken in the appropriate manner, are taken for the benefit of the Borough and have taken into account all potential implications.

The Committee also hold service providers to account for their performance, in the past 12 months the Committee has scrutinised the performance of:

- Great Western Hospital
- Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership
- SEQOL (Social Enterprise for Health & Social Care Services to Adults)
- Joint Scrutiny of Great Western Ambulance Service

The Health and Social Care Act

In January 2011 the Health and Social Care Bill was introduced to Parliament, it set out some major changes to the health system as we know it. These changes came into being on the 1st April 2013, one of the key changes is how Health Overview and Scrutiny will operate and who the Committee should be scrutinising.

The Committee has spent many hours learning about these changes and the new arrangements that arise from them in order to best place the Committee to fulfil its Overview and Scrutiny role.

The Health & Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee are responsible for scrutinising local health and adult social care matters. It is a lever to improve the health of local people, ensuring that their needs are considered as an integral part of delivery and development of health services.

The Committee is responsible for the overview and scrutiny of Commissioners and health providers, which includes Adult Social Care and Mental Health Services, as well as leisure services which are provided by the Borough.

Contributing to Improved Service Delivery

The Committee seeks to help improve service delivery across the Borough by reviewing the development of key health policies delivered by both the Council and by partner organisations. In the 2012-13 Municipal year the Committee has reviewed and contributed to the development of:

- The Great Western Hospital Discharge policy
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- The Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- The Adult Services Transformation Programme

Public Health Transition

Under new legislation responsibility for overseeing and delivering Public Health services has moved from the Primary Care Trust to Swindon Borough Council. The Committee has sought to ensure that the transition of services has no adverse effect on the public.

Alternative and Complimentary Therapies

The Committee in response to Councillor and public concerns has gathered information on the benefits of Commissioners providing alternative and complimentary therapies. Further review of this topic may take place in 2013-14.

Health & Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Nerissa Vaughn, Chief Executive Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

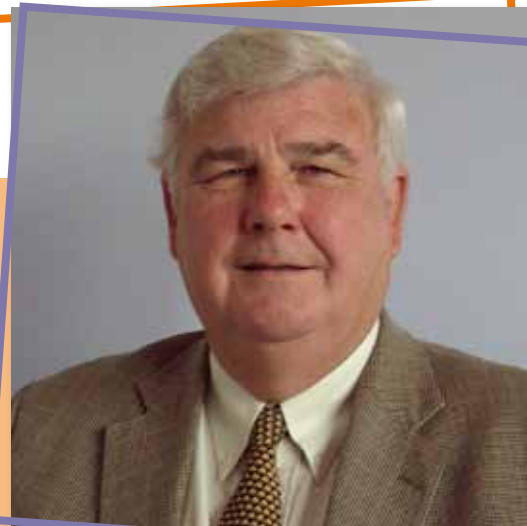


Over the past 12 months we have built stronger relationships with officers and members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has led to much more useful dialogue on issues of real importance to local people. We take our responsibilities to the HOSC seriously and attend meetings and hold additional briefings for Councillors so they are informed about what is happening within the Trust and they are able to offer constructive challenge in return. We make sure we are open and honest briefing on the positive developments and the areas where we are underperforming and we have welcomed the Committee's openness in return.

From a partner perspective it's very important to have people involved in the committee with a deep and genuine interest in healthcare and who are willing to develop greater understanding of the NHS. We've found that with both the Officer and members we are able to build knowledge and understanding which helps inform the decision making of the committee. We aim to continue this positive working relationship with new members of the HOSC in the year ahead.

6. Safer & Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee plays an integral role in ensuring that those who police and protect us deliver public services to a high standard. We question these agencies in a public forum to inform us of those standards and where we deem necessary suggest improvements. If we have concerns we inform and alert the this fact to the organization or body we have concerns about. We also take the matter further with the aim of correcting the situation. The Committee works closely with the Police, stakeholders and the Council to develop further service improvement when required but predominately to act as a critical friend. I am pleased that the Committees relationship with the Police and other outside bodies continues to grow.



**Councillor Brian Ford,
Chair of the Committee**

The Watches

In order to assess the impact of the Localities system on community led support for policing the Committee took evidence from a number of sources to review performance and success of the various 'watch' schemes in operation across the Borough. The Committee reviewed Neighbourhood Watch, Speed Watch, Street Watch and Pub Watch by speaking to those that participate in the schemes, those that support them and those that work alongside them such as Wiltshire Police.

The Committee requested that a detailed assessment of performance of Neighbourhood Watch and Street Watch be reported back to the Committee in the 2013-14 Municipal Year whilst commending all those that took part in the various watch schemes with particular mention to Pub-watch who had played a lead role in helping reduce night time economy violence and crime.

The Safer & Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee look to hold decision makers to account and assist in the creation and delivery of policy in service areas within the remit of Safer and Stronger Communities.

In addition the Committee acts as Swindon's statutory Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee which gives it the role of holding the Community Safety Partnership to account and working closely with Wiltshire Police to ensure the effective delivery of public services.



The Special Constabulary

The Committee took evidence from the Chief Officer of Wiltshire Special Constabulary alongside Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Police in conducting a review into the effectiveness of the Special Constabulary. The Committee concluded that the role played by the Special Constabulary was vital and that their role should be supported by all. The Committee wrote to the Police and Crime Commissioner detailing the review and asking for him to support the work of the Special Constabulary.

Wiltshire's subsequent Police and Crime plan includes plans to increase the number of Special Constables across Swindon and Wiltshire.

Violence

The Committee questioned Wiltshire Police and Swindon Borough Council Officers on the topic of public and private space violence. The Committee concluded that the Council and Wiltshire Police had worked in partnership successfully in targeting night time economy violence which accounted for the majority of public space violence.

Restorative Justice

The Committee reviewed the Neighbourhood Justice Panels (NJPs) in operation across the Borough as part of a Government trial into restorative justice. The Committee commended Officers for their work which had seen Swindon take a lead in delivery of NJPs.

Policing Matters

The Committee and Wiltshire Police agreed to trial Policing question and answer sessions at each meeting in the past year in order to give Councillors and the Public the opportunity to put questions to Wiltshire Police on any policing matters of concern. This item has worked well, providing an additional level of collaboration between the Committee and the Police and providing another opportunity for public participation and accountability.



Gavin Williams, Superintendent Operations Wiltshire Police

"We welcome the opportunity to be held to account by our communities in delivering policing in the Borough. The Committee approach of theming meetings to provide specific focus to topics is effective and provides the opportunity for the public to directly get involved. Wiltshire Police are happy to be part of the Overview and Scrutiny function and provide greater understanding of policing in Swindon."

7. Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has examined a number of issues over the last year, in its role as a critical friend to the work of the Council. Highlights of the year included questioning work around children in care, adoption, youth democracy and representation, academies, school place planning and the proposed University Technical College. We were pleased to continue the tradition of holding a meeting out in the community, at Nythe community/ youth centre to hear from Members of the Youth Parliament, Youth Forum and Young Carers. The most high profile piece of work was the report into opening and closing schools where an independent panel did sterling and balanced work in helping to move forward on this emotive issue.



**Councillor Dave Wood,
Chair of the Committee**

The Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a responsibility for the scrutiny of the Borough's Children's Services Department and the overview of policy development. The committee provides critical friend challenge in order to ensure that Swindon's corporate objectives are met; the services provide value for money and are delivered with the best interests of the young people of Swindon in mind.

Independent Review into Opening and Closing of Schools

In response to public concern the Committee commissioned an Independent Review of the opening and closing of Schools in the Borough, with particular reference to the public consultation that led to the building of the Croft School.

The review has made a series of recommendations for improvement all of which have been accepted by the Committee and will now be referred to the relevant Cabinet Member.

Youth Forum

In continued attempts to engage young people in the political process the Committee held a meeting at THE Swindon 10-18 Project with the Youth Forum, the Children in Care Council and the local Youth MPs.



8. How to get involved in Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny process should reflect the voice and concerns of the public, you can get involved in Overview and Scrutiny in a number of ways.

- **Attend Meetings** - Scrutiny meetings are open to the public, they are generally held in the Civic Centre as well as other locations in the Borough as the work requires.
- **Ask a question** - You can bring items to the attention of Scrutiny by asking a question at the relevant Commission. If Council Officers or Councillors present at a meeting are unable to give you a full answer an Officer will take your contact details and arrange for a response to be sent to you.
- **Consultation** - You could be asked for your views on an issue or be invited to provide specialist knowledge as a witness as part of a Scrutiny review or by becoming a non-voting co-opted member.
- **Website** - Swindon online provides services, information and the opportunity to interact and participate with the Council.
By accessing the scrutiny section of the website you can find out various information on Scrutiny Members, reviews and meetings. Go to www.swindon.gov.uk.
- **Suggest a Topic** - One of the key objectives of Overview and Scrutiny is to reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities, if you would like to suggest a topic for review then contact the Scrutiny Unit.

If you would like to make a suggestion of a topic or issue for review by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee contact the Scrutiny Unit or complete the form on the back page and send to the Scrutiny Unit.



9. The Scrutiny Unit

If you would like to find out more about the Overview and Scrutiny function in Swindon, the work of any of the Committees or details of how to get involved in Overview and Scrutiny please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Unit at Scrutiny Unit, Civic Offices, Swindon Borough Council, Euclid Street, Swindon SN1 2JH, or via Scrutiny@swindon.gov.uk or by using the contact details below.



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Responsible for:

- Scrutiny Committee
- Economic, Environmental & Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Safer & Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Localities Scrutiny Sub-Committee



Sally Smith

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Responsible for:

- Health & Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview & Scrutiny Suggestion Form

Please complete the form below and send to The Scrutiny Unit, Civic Offices, Euclid Street, Swindon SN1 2JH or drop the form into Swindon Borough Council Offices

The Councillors should scrutinise....

Please say why....

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Telephone:

Email:

