

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
ANNUAL REPORT
2007-2008



SCRUTINY

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT: MUNICIPAL YEAR 2007/2008

Introduction

This is our third report of the new Overview and Scrutiny Structure as instituted by the Full Council in April 2005. The Committee is charged with reviewing Cabinet decisions, the Corporate Strategy, the Council's financial performance and also scrutinising the performance of the public bodies active in the District by inviting reports and presentations from them.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of four Standing Panels this year and four new Task and Finish Panels.

A review session was held for Overview and Scrutiny members in September 2007 in which they reviewed the current O&S arrangements. This has led to a more professional and comprehensive examination of the areas they were asked to scrutinise.

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny in local government is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised. The purpose of scrutiny in practice is to examine, question and evaluate in order to achieve improvement. The value of scrutiny is in the use of research and questioning techniques to make recommendations based on evidence. Scrutiny enables issues of public concerns to be examined. At the heart of all the work is consideration of what impact the Cabinet's plans will have on the local community. However, the overview and scrutiny function is not meant to be confrontational or seen as deliberately set up to form an opposition to the Cabinet. Rather the two aspects should be regarded as 'different sides of the same coin'. The two should compliment each other and work in tandem to contribute to the development of the authority.

The 3 key principles of effective scrutiny in practice are:

- Scrutiny as "critical friendship" through constructive but robust internal challenge;
- Scrutiny as evidence based research and analysis using expert witnesses and public consultation;
- Scrutiny as a strategic programme investigating key council priorities and reflecting the concerns of the local community.

Scrutiny at Epping Forest utilises the 'PICK' system when setting its priorities. PICK stands for:

P = Public interest: the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen;

I = Impact: issues that make the biggest difference to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the district;

C = Council Performance: areas in which the Council and other agencies are not performing well;

K = Keep in Context: need to avoid duplication and wasted effort in identifying issues.

Alongside its challenge role, the scrutiny function has also continued to engage positively with the Cabinet and there continues to be cross party co-operation between members on all panels.

Scrutiny has continued to provide valuable contributions to the Council and the Cabinet remained receptive to ideas put forward by Scrutiny throughout the year.

At the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2007 the committee reviewed their procedures and agreed the membership of panels.

Members were reminded that under the arrangements Scrutiny Standing and Task and Finish Panels had been established to undertake scrutiny reviews. The Committee had been tasked with agreeing the Membership of these panels, their terms of reference, work plans and reporting deadlines. Although the panels have no powers to make decisions they can put forward recommendations for consideration, either by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Cabinet or Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the need for the continuation of Standing Panels prior to the end of the Council Year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee coordinated with the Cabinet about their work plans for the year and pre scrutinised their reports at its meetings a week before Cabinet would meet. Liaisons with the Cabinet would take place to discuss the wider work programme that would be approved and reviewed annually. This acted as a troubleshooting exercise, finding out problems before they arose.

The Committee also engaged with external bodies in order to scrutinise parts of their work that encroached on the District and its people.

The Committee received one call-in this year (for details see Scrutinising and Monitoring cabinet Work on page x). This was on the Cabinet decision on the release of restrictive covenant, Loughton Hall.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership consists of 12 Councillors who were appointed at the Annual Council meeting.

Standing Scrutiny Panels

A Lead Officer was appointed to each panel to facilitate its process. Members liaise on a regular basis with the relevant Chairman to agree terms of references of panels and priorities of reviews and their work plans.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the work programme and terms of reference for each of the Panels on the basis of a rolling programme. The Standing Panels have a 'rolling programme' and would consider ongoing and cyclical issues. Four standing Scrutiny Panels were established, dealing with:

- i. Housing
- ii. Constitution and Member Services
- iii. Finance and Performance Management
- iv. Environmental and Planning.

Standing Panels reported regularly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress with the work they were carrying out.

Task and Finish Panels

The Task and Finish reviews are restricted to dealing with activities which are issue based, time limited, non-cyclical with clearly defined objectives on which they would report responses and set a deadline to report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Four Task and Finish Panels were established during the year, they were:

- i. Leisure Task and Finish Panel;
- ii. Crime and Disorder Task and Finish Panel;
- iii. Town Centre and Car Parks Task and Finish Panel;
- iv. Provision of Value for money with Planning Services Task and Finish Panel.

The Task and Finish Panels on Crime and Disorder, Town Centre and Car Parks and Leisure that had begun during the municipal year 2006/07 carried on in this year.

Task and Finish Panels are required to regularly report to the Committee on progress with the work they are carrying out.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Introduction by the Chairman:

"This is the third year of the Council's new scrutiny system, breaking down the topics being scrutinised into Standing and Task and Finish Panels and the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee, enabling a larger workload to be tackled and scrutinised. This way of working has proved to be a successful way of getting through the large amount of topics that a Council's Scrutiny structure is asked to consider over an average year.



As the Overview and Scrutiny Committee we have taken on numerous topics, including looking at the London Underground facilities in the area, the proposed application for Foundation Trust Status by the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trusts. Also, a few days before each Cabinet meeting we meet to pre-scrutinise their agenda, enabling us to pre-empt any decisions and if need be, invite that member of the Cabinet to attend our meeting to answer any questions or concerns that we have about a particular report.

I would like to take this opportunity to give my personal thanks to all the people from outside organisations who visited our Committee and Panels during the last year and gave us the benefit of their expertise and answered our questions. We were very grateful that they took the time to help us out.

This year, our long-standing champion of Scrutiny, Joint Chief Executive, John Scott, retired after serving 29 years at the Council. I know the members of the Committee will miss him, his advice and his sense of humour.

Derek Macnab, the Deputy Chief Executive took on this difficult role and we wish him the very best and look forward to working with him in the years to come.

I would also like to express my thanks to my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Ken Angold-Stephens, the members of the O&S Committee, all the Chairmen of the Standing and Task and Finish Panels, the members of those panels and of course all the officers who support the Panels and my Committee."

Councillor Richard Morgan
April 2008

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Morgan (Chairman)
Councillor K Angold-Stephens (Vice Chairman)
Councillors D Bateman, R Church, M Colling, R D'Souza, Mrs A Haigh, Mrs H Harding, J Hart, D Kelly, G Mohindra, and Mrs P Richardson.

The Lead Officer was John Scott, Joint Chief Executive (Community Services), he retired in July 2007 and Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive took over from August 2007.

Terms of Reference

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's main functions are to monitor and scrutinise the work of the executive and its forward plan, external bodies linked to the District Council and the Council's financial performance. It is tasked with the consideration of call-ins, policy development, performance monitoring and reviewing corporate strategies.

The Committee's workload over the past year can be broken down as follows:

(a) Scrutinising and monitoring Cabinet work

The Committee reviewed and commented on the Cabinet's Forward Plan and work programme where they identified areas for further consideration. The Committee has a proactive role in this area through carrying out pre-scrutiny work. This involved receiving and considering the Cabinet agenda prior to the Cabinet itself.

The Committee considered one call-in this year; this was over a Cabinet decision on the release of a restrictive covenant on Loughton Hall, Epping Forest Collage, Loughton. The Committee was asked to consider this cabinet decision taken in October 2007 regarding the release of a restrictive covenant to enable a provisionally arranged sale at Loughton Hall for use as a residential care home to proceed and that the Council would not exercise its right of pre-emption to purchase Loughton Hall and/or the library site adjoining Epping Forest College. After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed with the Cabinet decision and did not support the call-in.

(b) Standing Panels work programme monitoring

The Committee received regular updates from the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels to report on the progress made with their current work. This has allowed the Committee to monitor performance, prioritise work and when necessary adjust their work plans to take into account new proposals and urgent items.

(c) Items considered by the committee this year

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received presentations on, and considered such topics as:

(i) A presentation from London Underground Limited who came in June 2007 to update the Committee on various topics that effect the District in relation to the various London Underground stations and car parks in the district. The Committee and members took the opportunity to question the representative on various related topics.

(ii) In December 2007 the Committee received a presentation from the Chairman of the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust who reported on their application for Foundation Trust Status. Also in attendance were the Chairman of the West Essex PCT and the Vice-chairman of the west Essex Public Involvement Forum who gave their views on the proposal. After debating the matter fully, the Committee expressed it's full support for the application by the Princess Alexandra Trust for Foundation Trust status.



(iii) In April 2008 the Committee received a Presentation from the Police; Superintendent Ashton and Inspector Fox. They addressed the Committee on the Police's current work and issues of the District, especially where it concerned the neighbourhood and partnership side of Policing. The Superintendent is also responsible for all uniformed Police Officers and PCSO who deliver neighbourhood policing across the district. Following their presentation the Committee and other members present took the opportunity to question the officers on aspects of policing that affected the District and their wards.



(iv) Highways Presentation.

(v) LUL Presentation

(vi) The Committee considered a report from the returning officer, which came to the Committee via the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel reviewing the 2007 elections that took place in May.

(vii) The Committee held a special meeting in August 2007 to consider the continuation of the Council's webcasting trial. The Committee received a report evaluating the webcasting pilot period during which, not only council meetings but also notable civic events were webcast. The Committee concluded that the continuation of webcasting should be endorsed and the webcasting of council meetings be made permanent. We are pleased that the Cabinet have subsequently endorsed our view.



(viii) The Cabinet came to the Committee's July 2007 meeting to present their plans for the year ahead. The Committee considered the schedules with a view to selecting issues for pre-decision scrutiny and have played their part in scrutinising their plans in the past year.

(ix) The Committee agreed in October 2007 that the Task and Finish Panel on Town Centre and Car Parks be disbanded. Outstanding work was added to the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel.

(x) The Committee also reviewed the recommendations made by the 2006/07 Task and Finish Panels to check on how they had progressed since they had been disbanded.

(xi) They considered the outcomes from the Overview and Scrutiny review seminar held in September 2007. This Seminar made several small improvements in Overview and Scrutiny procedure that was endorsed by the Committee.

(xii) In January 2008 the Committee scrutinised and endorsed the draft Portfolio Holders Budgets for 2008/09.

(xiii) The Committee also reviewed the need for an increase in the number of area planning sub-committee, increasing the frequency of the meetings from a four-week cycle to a three-week cycle. This was part of a package of measures designed to improve the planning performance. After fully debating this proposal the Committee agreed to recommend to Council that provision be made for a meeting of the Area Plans Sub-committee every three weeks.



STANDING PANELS

1. HOUSING STANDING PANEL

Introduction by the Chairman:



"This is my third year as Chairman of the Housing Standing Panel and yet again we have had a busy year, carrying out the important role of scrutinising the Housing Services of Epping Forest District.

As always I would like to thank the officers who have put in time and energy to help make this Scrutiny Panel run smoothly. I would like to add my thanks to my vice chairman and other members of the panel who have played a full part in the important scrutiny role we carry out. My special thanks to Mrs Molly Carter, the Chairman of the Tenants and

Leaseholder Federation who also attends our meetings as a member of the Panel."

*Councillor Stephen Murray
April 2008*

The Housing Standing Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor S Murray (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs R Gadsby (Vice Chairman)
Councillors K Angold-Stephens, Mrs P Brooks, K Chana, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs P K Rush and J Wyatt.

The Lead Officer was Alan Hall, Director of Housing Services. The Panel also appreciated the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor D Stallan, attending the meetings to help them with their deliberations.

Mrs Molly Carter, the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation, who attends the meetings as a non-voting co-opted member to provide the views of residents and stakeholders, assisted the Panel.

Terms of Reference

The Housing Standing Panel is tasked to undertake reviews of a number of the Council's public and private sector housing policies and to make recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or cabinet as appropriate. They also undertake specific projects related to public and private sector housing issues, as directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

i) The Choice Based Letting Scheme – the Panel were kept abreast of the latest developments in this scheme during the year.



ii) Private Sector Housing and Empty Property - The Panel received a presentation on the implementation and action plans of private sector housing and empty property strategies.

iii) Housing Service Strategy on Rent arrears - The Panel reviewed the Housing Service Strategy on Rent Arrears. The Panel considered this strategy on the Council's approach to the recovery of rent arrears. The control of rent arrears is considered by the Housing Services as one of the key elements of its performance. This strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered. The Panel asked that the proposed three-day notification period be reconsidered and extended appropriately; with this comment the Panel endorsed the strategy.



iv) Housing Service Strategy on Anti-social Behaviour - The Panel considered and endorsed the Housing Service Strategy on Anti-Social Behaviour. This set out the Council's approach to the policies and procedures in relation to anti-social behaviour on housing estates. The strategy sets out how this element of the service is delivered by Housing Services and includes links with other services both internally and externally by Housing Services and includes links with other services both internally and externally.

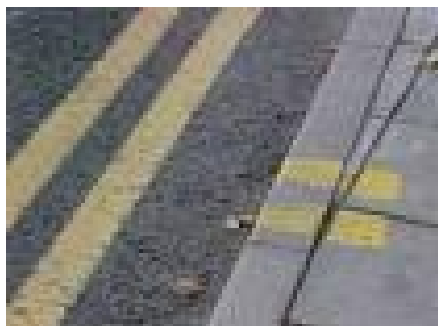
v) Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency – the Panel considered and endorsed the strategy on energy efficiency. They noted that the government is committed to energy efficiency in housing and so is the Council and that Council homes must meet the thermal comfort and heating criteria in the Decent Homes Standards by 2010. Currently the Council is focusing on the following improvements: low energy lights; increase in loft insulation; cavity wall insulation; boilers changed to Grade 'A' rated ones and to install double glazing for all windows.

vi) Housing Strategies on Tenant Participation and Housing Information – the Panel reviewed and agreed these strategies. These replaced the existing strategies and would take the Council to 2010.

vii) Housing Service Standards - The Panel reviewed and agreed the Housing Service Standards for 2007/08 – this brought together for the first time all the Housing Service Standards relating to the service it provides to its customers (tenants, leaseholders and housing applicants).

viii) Review of the Allocations Scheme – the Panel noted that the Council is legally required to have an allocations scheme, setting out the procedures for

allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords. The Panel endorsed the scheme but requested that the scheme be expanded to enable it to be offered to anyone who wished to downsize to any size property, providing the downsized property is in accordance with their needs.



(ix) Unauthorised Parking on Housing Estates

- The Panel considered a report on unauthorised parking on Housing Estates. Problems had been identified with parking and increased congestion on Housing Estates. Many of the Housing Estates were built during the 1940s and 1950s. with the subsequent growth in car ownership, residents are experiencing severe parking problems on estates where parking both on and off road is at a premium. In addition, due to the introduction of permit parking, many side

roads are becoming further congested (possibly by commuters) particularly in the Debden and Epping areas with vehicles being forced onto grassed verges. The Panel considered if the council should take enforcement action and force people to park elsewhere (and therefore increase congestion); they also considered whether the Council should spend more on off street parking schemes and if the current policy of permitting a maximum of 6 metres to be covered over to construct a vehicular cross-over over a grass verge to their front gardens should be raised to 12 metres. They provisionally endorsed these recommendations pending a full member consultation.

(x) Housing Revenue Account - At their last meeting in March 2008 the Panel considered the Housing Revenue Account Business Panel for 2008/09. this was required by the Department of Communities and Local Government that all local authorities produce an annual Business Plan. The Panel After careful consideration they recommended the report to the Housing Portfolio Holder for adoption.

2. CONSTITUTION AND MEMBER SERVICES STANDING PANEL

Introduction by the Chairman:



"This is my first year as Chairman of this Panel and a most interesting and enjoyable year it has been.

During the year we looked at a variety of topics including reviewing the Council's ability to make decisions in emergency situations, how a member's planning application should be decided by a planning committee and whether the Planning Sub-committees should go from a four-week cycle to a three-week cycle. We also examined the ramifications of the new Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which will affect many aspects of Local Authority activities.

I would like to express my thanks to my Vice Chairman, Councillor Richard Morgan for his valuable support over the year and of course, to the members and officers of the panel for their important contributions."

Councillor Robert Church April 2008

The Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Church (Chairman)
Councillor R Morgan (Vice Chairman)
Councillors J Demetriou, R D'Souza, D Jacobs, J Markham, Mrs M McEwen, T Richardson, B Rolfe, D Stallan and Mrs J H Whitehouse.

The Lead Officer was Ian Willett, Head of Research and Democratic Services.

Terms of Reference

To undertake reviews of constitutional, civic, electoral and governance matters and services for members on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Council and the Cabinet with recommendations on matters allocated to the Panel as appropriate.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

(i) Review of May 2007 Elections – The Panel reviewed the May 2007 elections and feedback their findings and views to the Returning Officer and the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They made several suggestions on the running of

elections and the count generally for consideration by the Returning Officer, some of which were taken up.

(ii) Council Business - Arrangements for Emergency Situations – the Panel considered a report on Council decision making in emergency situations and changes to cover such circumstances where a large proportion of the Cabinet, Regulatory Committees or the Council itself are unable to take part in decision making by virtue of illness, death or other extreme circumstances. These issues stemmed from an Emergency Planning exercise on Pandemic ‘flu and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which placed a duty on the Council to improve resilience to allow the continuation of services during emergencies.

(iii) Protocol on Partnerships and other External Organisations – the Panel was asked to review this protocol and was designed to regulate the relations between the Council and external partnerships and other outside bodies. They considered and revised the Protocol and submitted their recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

(iv) Review of Polling Stations – The Panel noted that the Electoral Administration Act 2006 placed a duty for all Polling Districts and Places to be reviewed by the end of 2007. The Panel reviewed the polling districts and submitted their recommendations straight to Council.



(v) Cabinet Operations in Emergency Situations – this protocol was designed. To cover two situations: Local Emergencies and National Emergencies situations declared by the Government. It was focused on the role of the Leader in such circumstances and provided a definition of both types of emergencies, explained the circumstances in which one should be declared, who would be tasked with doing this, the emergency procedures available for dealing with such situations, how long such rules could be for when and how they could be revoked.



The Panel's comments were submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for endorsement.

(vi) Determination of Members Planning Applications – the Panel considered constitutional changes to enable a planning application submitted by a member to be

determined by members and not under delegated authority. These would normally be considered by a Planning Sub-committee. However this could often result in a number of prejudicial interests being declared and as a result the Sub-committee might not be in quorum and considerably delay the process. In view of these issues it was recommended that the terms of reference of Area Plans Sub-committee and the District Development Control Committee be amended so that any planning applications submitted by, or on behalf of a Councillor be submitted to the District Development Control Committee for consideration and not to the Area Planning Sub-committee.

vii) Review of Meeting Cycles of Area Plans Sub-committees – The Panel

considered whether the cycle of Area Plans Sub-committees should be revised so that there was one meeting of each Area Planning Sub-committee every three weeks. On consideration of the report the Panel recommended that a three weekly cycle for the Area Planning Sub-committees to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee but only after Local Town and Parish Councils and all members had been consulted.



viii) Local Government and Public Investment in Health Act 2000 – the Panel considered a report on the Local Area Agreements and Community Strategies. They also considered the possible new executive arrangements that an authority could operate when the new act came into force. After consideration the Panel recommended that the option of Leader and Executive be endorsed for this Authority.

4. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STANDING PANEL

Introduction by Chairman:



"This Panel's task is to keep a watchful eye on the Council's finances and its performance. We have also found our workload heavily influenced by the need to tick Audit Commission boxes. The Panel has also taken over some of the residual work left over by the Customer Services and ICT Standing Panel that was dissolved at the beginning of the year, which has led to some heavy agendas.

This year we have had some of our meeting webcast, which has brought our work to a wider audience.

I would like to thank my vice Chairman Gagan Mohindra for the support he provided during the year and, of course, the lead officers for their invaluable help and advice."

*Councillor Jon Whitehouse
April 2008*

The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel consisted of the following Members:

Councillor J M Whitehouse (Chairman)
Councillor G Mohindra (Vice Chairman)
Councillors R Bassett, J Hart, M Colling, D Jacobs, R Morgan, Mrs Richardson, Mrs P Smith and A Watts.

The Lead Officer was Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive.

Terms of Reference

To review Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) and Local Performance Indicator (LPI) outturns for the previous year at the commencement of each municipal year, and to determine the following on an annual basis:

- (a) The criteria for deciding which BVPIs and LPIs should be formally monitored by the Panel throughout the remainder of the year, based upon the 'traffic light' system of performance reporting, Comprehensive Performance Assessment improvements, and existing council and member priorities;
- (b) A 'basket' of priority BVPIs and LPIs, performance against which will be reported to the Panel throughout the year;

- (c) The monitoring frequency of those priority BVPIs and LPIs identified by the Panel;
- (d) Arrangements for the wider member reporting and monitoring of performance against those BVPIs and LPIs that are not contained in the Panel's 'basket' of high priority indicators;

To consider proposals and make recommendations for corrective action in relation to poorly performing BVPIs and LPIs;

To consider and make recommendations as appropriate on the format and content of the Council's annual Best Value Performance Plan;

To undertake a full review of the existing Council Plan and to make recommendations to the Cabinet on the overall strategic vision to be adopted, within the context of how the authority intends to prioritise resources and develop services in the medium term;

To develop arrangements to directly engage the community in commenting on and shaping the future direction of services to make them more responsive to local needs, including the development of proposals for effective consultation through an annual community conference;

To annually review the consultation exercise undertaken by the council over the previous year;

To consider draft budgets for each portfolio and in so doing to evaluate and rank proposals for either enhancing or reducing services. Members will need to ensure consistency between wider policy objectives and financial demands;

To consider financial monitoring reports on key areas of income and expenditure for each portfolio;

The Panel to consider feedback from the Customers Services Working Group to ensure that the Panel is kept up to date on current customer service activities across all service areas; and

To monitor and review progress on the implementation of all major ICT systems.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

i) The Key Performance Indicators for 2007/08 - The panel scrutinised 52 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2007/08, suggesting that 75% of these KPIs achieve top quartile as the previous target of 50% was met last year. The Panel kept these indicators under review on a quarterly basis throughout the year;

ii) A Value for Money Sub-group was established and suggested that a special Task and Finish Panel be set up to carry out a detailed service review. The Service chosen was Planning and Economic Development. Following this recommendation a Task and Finish Panel was set up by the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee to do just this;

iii) Best Value Review of Leisure Management - The Panel received a report arising from the Best Value Review of Leisure Management. This report reviewed Leisure services for the District detailing whether their key objectives had been met and value for money achieved. The Panel concluded that the Council's aims and objectives had been met and that Leisure Services were to be congratulated for this success story;

iv) Council Plan 2006-2010 - The Panel reviewed the Council Plan for 2006-2010 Annual Review. The Panel received the Council Plan monitoring report, the Local Area Agreement for Essex monitoring report and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan monitoring report;

v) Council Consultation Plan - The Panel received a report on the Council's Consultation Plan for 2007/08. The Consultation Plan resulted from an Audit Commission suggestion on improving our approach to Public Consultation, particularly in respect of ensuring engagement with minority communities and other hard to reach groups. The Consultation Plan was to be developed as part of the annual business planning process from 2006/07 onwards;

vi) Local Area Agreement and the CPA Improvement Plan - The Panel considered the Performance monitoring report on the Local Area Agreement and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan, keeping a check on the objectives and the Council's ability to meet them. An update would go to the Panel on a six-month basis;

vii) Financial Monitoring Report - The Panel also considered (on a quarterly basis) the quarterly Financial Monitoring report, keeping them up to date on the key areas of income and expenditure for each portfolio.;

viii) Fees and Charges - The Panel considered the annual report on Fees and Charges as part of the budget setting process. The levels of fees and charges are considered for the forthcoming financial year. The Panel expressed concerns that the charges were rising dramatically for people on limited income and asked that the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee to be given a fuller explanation on the background to this increase;

ix) Land and Property Assets - The Panel received a report from the Principal Valuer and estate Surveyor on Land and Property assets Review. The Council has an above average portfolio of property. A large sale had just been successfully completed and the future use and occupation of all four depots were currently under review;

x) Portfolio Holders Budgets - An entire meeting was devoted to the draft detailed Portfolio Budgets, containing the breakdown of individual Portfolio Holders budgets for 2008/09. The Panel's recommendations would go to their parent overview and Scrutiny Committee and then on to the cabinet with their comments on the budget. The cabinet would then recommend a budget and Council Tax to Council for approval;

xi) Use of Resources Assessment - reviewing the Use of Resources Assessment – Auditor Judgement 2007 report the Panel noted that the Council had made good improvements having improved from an adequate level 2 to a good level 3; and

xii) New National Outcome Indicators - The Panel noted the new National Outcome and Indicator Set to be introduced from April 2008. This was introduced by the Department for Communities and Local Government as a set of new national indicators to replace all other performance indicators including Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). The Panel also considered which, if any, of the Councils current BVPIs should be carried forward into the new regime as they may prove to be useful. Several were chosen to be carried on into the new regime.

xiii) Race Equality and Gender Equality – The Panel reviewed and endorsed the reports on the current position of the Council on their Race Equality Scheme and Gender Equality Scheme.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING SERVICES STANDING PANEL

Introduction by Chairman:

"As we scrutinised the Environment and Planning issues for the Council, we shaped policy on some of the most significant issues facing the local community. We considered the Nottingham Declaration and recommended that the Council sign up to it. We focused on one particular area of the District, Nazeing, and produced, along with outside partners, an action plan for the area.

I would like to thank my Vice Chairman (Councillor Bateman) for all his help during the year and of course the Lead Officers for this Panel, especially Ian White for all his efforts on the Nazeing Focus Day. I would also like to thank all the representatives from outside agencies, local interest groups, the Local Councils and members of the public who attended our meetings and contributed to the discussions "



*Councillor Mrs Penny Smith
April 2008*

The Environmental and Planning Services Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor Mrs P Smith (Chairman)
Councillor D Bateman (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Mrs A Cooper, R Bassett, R Frankel, P House, J Knapman, G Pritchard, Mrs P Richardson, H Ulkun, Mrs L Wagland and M Woollard.

The Lead officers were John Gilbert, Director of Environment and Street Scene and John Preston, Director of Planning and Economic Development

Terms of Reference

1. To keep under review the activity and decisions of the West Essex Joint Waste Committee.
2. To consider what changes are practical and desirable to Council policies concerning the reuse of redundant and other buildings in the Metropolitan Green Belt.
3. To consider the arrangements by which the new Local Development Scheme is being brought into operation.

4. To consider matters which arise through the process that the Government is driving to bring in an East Of England Plan.
5. In the context of the DERA 'Cleaner Neighbourhoods Consultation document' to consider the viability of employing uniformed wardens, the formulation of a response to the document and the financial consequences of these matters.
6. In relation to Traveller issues to consider and monitor:
 - (a) the measures previously agreed by the Council to secure the clearance of the top level of the sites at Paynes Lane and the actions agreed for Birchfield;
 - (b) the position regarding tolerated sites and;
 - (c) the management of travellers who enter onto land within the district with a view to unauthorised encampments;
 - (d) Government's guidance on the needs of travellers in the context of the Council's review of its District Local Plan and the Essex Housing Needs Assessment;
 - (e) the results of the Commission for Racial Equality's study on traveller issues once published;
 - (f) That the draft list of current and past sites within the District produced by Planning Services be completed and updated and made available to the Environmental and Panel Services Standing Panel.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

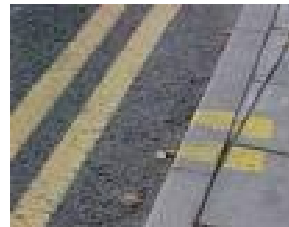
i) Nottingham Declaration - The Panel considered a report on the Nottingham Declaration. This was designed specifically for local authorities to enable them to show their commitment to the issue of climate change. It set out a series of actions for the Council to pursue. About 200 local authorities have signed the declaration so far. The Panel recommended that the Council (who have since become a signatory to the declaration) be governed by the further actions of the awareness of climate change and acted on accordingly.



ii) Nazeing Focus Day - The Panel received a report on the Nazeing Focus Day, which had been considered by a couple of sub-groups and whose combined efforts had produced an action plan. Outside groups had also been consulted on this plan, which was acknowledged as an evolving working document and the implications of it are ongoing. It may be premature to expect results so soon.

The Essex Freight Strategy is still awaited and this will have some bearing on the proposals for Nazeing.

iii) Street Parking and the Highways Local Services Agreement - The Panel considered an interim report on street parking and the Highways Local Service Agreement. They resolved to ask the West Area Highways Manager to attend a future meeting to answer relevant questions on parking in the district. They noted that the district does not have any direct management control in respect of Highways maintenance since the Agency reverted back to County control in April 2005.



iv) Clean Neighbourhoods Sub-group - The Panel set up a sub-group to consider and report back on the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and the Rogers Review on Enforcement Priorities. They made recommendations on how they could be pursued. These recommendations eventually went to the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments and agreement

v) West Area Joint Waste Committee - The Panel received on a regular basis the minutes of the West Area Joint Waste Committee. This was so that they could be kept up to date on the district's waste management issues.

vi) Highways Services Presentation - The Panel received a Highways Services Presentation from the Area Highways manager for West Essex. He reported on District Parking issues and then answered questions from members on local issues of concern.

vii) VOSA Presentation - The Panel received a very informative presentation from a Senior Team Leader from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA). He took the Panel through an overview of what VOSA does and what powers they have, or lack. The Panel and officers present questioned him closely, and his contact details were publicised in the member's bulletin for other members to make use off.

TASK AND FINISH PANELS

1. LEISURE TASK AND FINISH PANEL

This panel was set up to consider the four topics for Review as identified by Overview and Scrutiny Committee i.e.

- i) Future management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre;*
- ii) Feasibility of alternative Arts Development and Delivery for the District;*
- iii) Evaluation of the Youth Initiatives Scheme; and*
- iv) Review of the opportunities presented by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.*

Under the Chairmanship of Councillor Mrs Harding, they gathered evidence and information in relation to the four topics through the receipt of data, presentations and by participation in fact finding visits.

They consulted with Partners, Agencies, Stakeholders and Users of the services under review. They established key issues and future needs and evaluated all relevant facts in relation to the topics under review in an objective way and to produce recommendations for future action. They sought to establish whether there are any resource implications arising out of the topics under review and advise Cabinet for inclusion in the Budget Process.

The Leisure Task & Finish Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor Mrs H Harding (Chairman)

Councillor K Chana (Vice Chairman)

Councillors Mrs P Brooks, Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs A Haigh, Ms J Hedges, P House, S Murray, G Pritchard, B Rolfe Mrs P K Rush, P Turpin and H Ulkun

The Lead Officer was Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive.

The Panel was a continuation from last year's leisure Task and Finish Panel. Two of their four topics for consideration this year were carried over from last year. They were the Future Management option for Waltham Abbey Sports Centre and the review of Future Arts Development in the District. There were two new topics added to their programme, one was to evaluate the success of the Council's Youth Initiative Scheme and to review the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



Presentations Received/ Consultation undertaken

1) The Panel received a presentation from the Council's Community and Cultural Services Manager on the proposed major collaborative projects to celebrate the Olympic Games in the District involving Children and Young people. The Panel agreed that there would be an annual programme within the existing leisure budget, plus two large spectator events at an estimated expenditure of £20k in year 1 for a launch event and £50k on year 5 for a mini Olympics;

2) The Panel received a presentation from the Policy and research officer on the Youth Initiative Scheme explaining that it was initially set up to reduce anti-social behaviour. The Panel noted that there was a need for indicators to measure the success of the policy;

3) The Panel received a short presentation from the Community and Cultural Services manager on the overview of the current work of the Council's Arts Service. This brought the Panel up to date with what the Council's Arts Service were currently engaged on and gave them the background for their review;



4) The Panel held one of its meetings at the Waltham Abbey Sports Centre and were also given a tour of the facilities by the General Manager of the Centre;

5) The Panel reviewed and commented on the proposed key objectives for the Arts Development Review. They wanted the objectives broadened to include such things as crime and disorder and health issues. The Panel also received a presentation on the future development of the arts in Epping Forest. They considered in detail the various avenues that the services could take in the future. Officers ran through the pros and cons for each option. They noted that arts will have a wider agenda that will include youth and health and that this could be brought into a central service under one service head. The Panel concluded that the Council currently got very good value from its arts services and was highly regarded by other authorities;

6) The Panel were updated on the latest developments in the Legacy Action plan for the 2012 Olympics.

7) The Lead Officer also met separately with the Head teacher of and School Bursar of King Harold School to iron out details for the future management of the Waltham Abbey Sports centre. They were keen to stress that no 'education expenditure' could be used to subsidise community use of the centre.



OUTCOME:

1. Future Management of the Waltham Abbey Sports Centre

1. The Panel recommended that a holding agreement be entered into with the King Harold School for the future management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre, up until 31 March 2009.
2. That, dependent on the outcome of the feasibility of the provision of a new Sports Hall at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, the Council should either
 - (a) Decline to enter into a new long term Dual Use Agreement for Waltham Abbey Sports Centre, and withdraw from the site at the time of any new Sports Hall at the Swimming Pool becoming available; or
 - (b) (i) That a new Dual Use Agreement is entered into with King Harold School for the future management of Waltham Abbey Sports Centre.
 - (b) (ii) That the Council seek an external management contractor to undertake their management responsibilities under the new Agreement.
 - (b) (iii) That the Contract period be in line with the existing contract for the Council's other four Centres.

2. Review of Arts Development in the District

1. That in future the Key Objectives for the Council's Arts Services should be: -
 - (i) To ensure that the Arts Services make a contribution to wider social objectives, including crime and disorder and health improvement.
 - (ii) To continue to promote and deliver the Council's adopted Arts Policy.
 - (iii) To increase access to and participation in the Arts, for people of all ages and abilities;
 - (iv) To ensure that the current strong and effective network of partnership working is retained.
 - (v) To ensure that equality of access to the Arts is maintained and that targeted work is continued with groups at risk of social exclusion.
 - (vi) To ensure that the Arts Service is delivered by the most cost effective means possible and that Value for Money is optimised whilst maintaining a creative and forward thinking arts programme.
 - (vii) To ensure that the District continues to benefit from investment in the Arts through the maximisation of External Funding opportunities.

2. That the transfer of Community and Cultural Services (including Arts) as a result of Senior Management Restructuring, to a more Corporate position under the Deputy Chief Executive, is the most efficient means of delivering the Key Objectives, outlined in Recommendation 1.
3. That whilst a transfer of responsibility for Arts Development to a third party is not recommended, this should not preclude the pursuit of further opportunities for joint working and the sourcing of external funding.

3. Monitoring of the Youth Initiatives Scheme

1. That the overall success of the Youth Initiatives Scheme be noted.
2. That the following specific areas for improvement be taken on board with respect to further phases of the scheme.
3. That the evaluation of the 2007/08 schemes be carried out in the autumn of 2008 and thereafter the outcome reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
4. That the 10 Year Play Strategy produced to support the successful “Big Lottery Fund” funding application, be used to identify priority for future investment in outdoor facilities, over the period 2007-2017.
5. That the next two financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10, the Play Strategy external grant-aid of £244,000 be utilised to continue the programme of playground improvements.
6. That a future Capital Bid be made for 2010/11 to fund a further phase of the youth initiatives scheme, for the period 2010-2013, at a level to be determined by the circumstances prevailing at the time.
7. To look at all possible avenues of funding and not just to constrain ourselves to the £244,000 already identified.

4. Legacy from the Olympic / Paralympics Games

1. The Council facilitates a District-wide “Cultural Olympiad” to run from 2008-2012.
2. That the “Cultural Olympiad” is a celebration of Life in Epping Forest, incorporating activities, and programmes of work with people of all ages and abilities, within local communities in the District, culminating in a “mini-Olympics” for young people in May 2012.
3. That a DDF Bid of £50,000 be made for 2012/13, to support the funding of the Epping Forest Cultural Olympiad.
4. That the Council welcomes the construction of the White Water Canoe Course in close proximity to Waltham Abbey, and seeks to maximise the

economic legacy benefits to the locality, as well as the benefits for sports participation.

5. That a corporate Working Group be established, with participation by relevant external stakeholders, to keep abreast of opportunities to bring benefit to the District from the 2012 Games.
6. That the Council's Economic Development Staff, in conjunction with Business Link East, continue to promote opportunities for local companies to bid for games related business/contracts.

For more information see the report produced by the Task and Finish Panel.

2. CRIME AND DISORDER TASK AND FINISH PANEL

This Panel had continued on from last year. A preliminary report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2007 detailing progress made on the Panel's work. The Committee acknowledged that the Panel's work could not complete its work until the government rolled out the changes it wanted. Unfortunately the government has not yet issued any guidance and therefore the Panel has not met this year.

3. TOWN CENTRE AND CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH PANEL

This is another Panel that was carried over from the last year so that it could complete its work programme. However, work could not be progressed on its remaining topic. Therefore, this Panel was disbanded and the outstanding work on Anti-social Behaviour in Car Parks added to the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Panel.

4. PROVISION OF VALUE FOR MONEY WITHIN PLANNING SERVICES TASK AND FINISH PANEL

This Panel started late in the year, its first meeting did not take place until October 2007 when they identified their terms of reference and work programme.

The Provision of Value for Money within Planning Services Task and Finish Panel consisted of the following members:

Councillor Mrs L Wagland (Chairman)
Councillors R Bassett, M Colling, R Frankel, D Jacobs, P McMillan, G Mohindra, R Morgan, Mrs P Richardson and H Ulkun.

The Lead officer was Jon Preston, Director of Planning and Economic Development.

The Panel agreed to consider in detail the provision of value for money within the following planning services, focusing specifically on:

- Development Control (including Appeals)
- Forward Planning
- Building Control
- Enforcement
- Administration and Customer Support
- Economic Development
- Environment Team

The Panel is currently halfway through its evidence-gathering phase.