

Council – 11 July 2011

Annual Scrutiny Report 2010/11

Service: Legal and Constitutional Services

Wards All

1. Summary of report

This is the annual report to Council outlining the work of scrutiny in 2010/11.

The report provides a case study analysis of the work undertaken during the municipal year by the panels and their respective working groups aligned to the Council's corporate priorities along with a forward looking section that provides an overview of Scrutiny and Performance Panel work programmes for 2011/12.

A copy of the annual report is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Recommendations

Council is recommended to:

Note the annual scrutiny report for the 2010/11 municipal year (annexed) and that this will inform the further developments of the council's scrutiny function.

3. Resource and legal considerations

Scrutiny is a key aspect of the governance framework and an integral part of how the council makes effective decisions. Good scrutiny can help to inform policy making and help ensure that decisions taken by the cabinet are in effectively considered prior to implementation. The role of Scrutiny is defined in Walsall's constitution, Article 6.

4. Citizen impact

Effective scrutiny enables the public to fully engage in the topics under review. Ensuring that the items for consideration are effectively communicated via the council's website and public notice boards encourages citizens to become involved in the scrutiny process. Any potential work item that will have citizen impact will be fully scoped and include the opportunity for public involvement.

5. Environmental impact

The work of scrutiny picks up on a range of environmental factors across the whole borough. There are no direct environmental considerations as a result of this report.

6. Performance and risk management issues

The role of Scrutiny is fundamental in ensuring that the most effective and informed decisions are taken whilst delivering value for money for residents.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Performance Panels which helps to achieve these objectives.

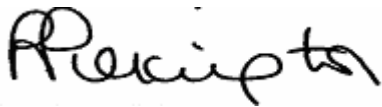
Asking members to recognise and review past achievements and consider the potential items to scrutinise helps to ensure that the Scrutiny and Performance Panels focus their attention on the main issues that have strategic relevance and importance to the council as a whole. Incorporating an effective scoping process enables a risk based approach to be taken in the development of potential work programmes; focussing on the key issues that affect the performance of the council, impact on service delivery or potentially result in service delivery that does not meet resident expectation or offer value for money. The Council's priorities and pledges are all considered when looking at potential work programmes for the following year and frequent performance monitoring reports are presented to individual Scrutiny and Performance Panels.

7. Equality implications

This report details all of the work that has been across the whole borough. Scrutiny Members represent a number of wards across the borough and actively work with residents to best represent their views at Scrutiny.

8. Consultation

Individual panels have sought the expert opinion and views from witnesses to ensure that a balanced perspective is provided against any of the work topics under consideration. This year, evidence has been brought to the panel by officers, members of the public, officers from other authorities, independent experts and consultants. In addition the specific panel input from the end of year report had been considered by each panel's Chair prior to publication.



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24 June 2011

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Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11

and Forward looking Statements



Walsall Council

Foreword

This annual report reflects an increasingly confident and effective scrutiny process that is adding real value to the decision making process in Walsall. Facilitating genuine partnership working between Members, officers and external agencies, Councillors of all parties are driving improvement across the organisation and in the wider borough. For example, an investigation into safeguarding services for vulnerable children resulted in a strengthened role for members as corporate parents. Elsewhere a working group is to be established in 2011/12 to consider the development of the 'Big Society' in Walsall and develop a series of policy recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.

The next few years will be extremely challenging for the whole of the public sector up and down the country as tough decisions are taken in the light of diminishing public finances. This, together with the potentially far reaching affects of the Localism Bill will result in a substantial period of change. In this context, it is encouraging to see an improved scrutiny function that will be able to play a central role in assisting the council and its partners meet this challenge. I am also confident that further improvements can, and will, be made, to which end Members will continue to have the full support of all council officers.



Pauline Pilkington
Executive Director – Children's Services and
Statutory Scrutiny Officer

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Introduction

Scrutiny and Performance Panels are made up of non-executive members from across all political parties and they exist to provide accountability to the council. They have four key roles:

- Holding the Executive to account for their decisions;
- Scrutinising local partners (e.g. NHS Walsall);
- Reviewing and developing policies and making recommendations to Council and Cabinet on these; and
- Reviewing services to ensure they are providing value for money and meeting local needs.

They also have a vital role in enabling the voice of local residents through community engagement. All meetings are open to the public to attend (except in exceptional circumstances where something has to be taken in private session). The public can also suggest items for scrutiny to consider. More details on the role of scrutiny can be found on our website www.walsall.gov.uk/scrutiny.

At its annual meeting in May 2010, Council set the Scrutiny panel structure and remit for the year ahead which included 7 panels:

- Children's and Young People
- Community Services
- Corporate
- Environment
- Health
- Regeneration
- Social Care and Inclusion

This report details how the work of Scrutiny and Performance panels during 2010/11 supported the achievement of the Council's key priorities set out in the [Corporate Plan](#). It is not an exhaustive account of the work Members have undertaken but gives an overview of the wide variety of work that has taken place throughout the year. There are many other issues that have also been looked at that are not mentioned here but details of all meetings can be found on the [council's committee website](#).

Improving Health

What the Corporate Plan says

Recognising that the health of people in Walsall is below the national average and that children face a number of conditions that adversely affect their health we will continue to work with other organisations to provide safe, accessible services that encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce inequalities.

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel has specific powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2001. This places a duty on the NHS to consult with health scrutiny committees on changes to service delivery (substantial variations). If the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel consider that proposals for health services are not in the interests of local people they have the power to refer them to Secretary of State or to 'Monitor' (independent regulator of NHS foundation trusts) in order for a final decision to be made.

During the 2010/11 municipal year the Walsall Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel has received and responded to a number of consultations including; -

- Review of Children's Congenital Cardiac Services in England
- Transforming Community Services
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment
- Health White Paper: Equity and Excellence
- Liberating the NHS and Local Democratic legitimacy in Health – a consultation on proposals
- West Midlands Ambulance Service Foundation Trust Status
- Emergency Dental Care in Walsall.

The Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel also established a working group to consider the issue of childhood obesity.

Issue

Members were highly concerned regarding the alarming rise in the numbers of overweight children in Walsall, together with a rise in associated health issues including an increase in the incidence of type 2 diabetes (NHS Walsall December 2010). It was also acknowledged that this will cause a significant rise in ill health for this group in later years.

There were also overriding concerns regarding the impact of obesity and the associated health problems on a child's ability to participate fully in critical aspects of the curriculum including physical education (P.E.), as well as classroom-based learning.

Key Findings

The working group sought to focus its investigation on work currently being undertaken to tackle obesity. It also accessed activity undertaken elsewhere and which could have a positive impact if introduced in the borough.

The working group found that local partner organisations had established a strong correlation between deprivation and levels of obesity within Walsall. Members also noted a similar link between obesity and incidence of children being underweight and undernourished.

The working group were impressed with the success of the Food Dudes initiative in other areas. Members noted that the scheme had resulted in achieving long-term changes in the diets of children, including a significant increase in the consumption of fruit and vegetables, through a programme of incentives and rewards. It was a key recommendation of the working group that all opportunities to introduce Food Dudes in Walsall were explored.

Other activity the working group considered was the A* STARS Active School Travel and Road Safety Scheme which was a project targeting schools suffering from high levels of childhood obesity and the lowest levels of walking and cycling in areas of high deprivation. The working group were impressed with success of the scheme in combining road safety education with sustainable travel, including walking buses. Members urged consideration of opportunities to fund the scheme beyond the end of the 2010/11 academic year as well explore options for making the scheme more sustainable, such as the establishment of a training centre.

The working group received evidence from Head and Assistant Head teachers from both primary and secondary schools within the borough. Work undertaken included seeking to make schools meals more visually appealing to pupils. Other activity included exercise classes.

A further concern that the working group sought to address was the impact of take-aways that operated near schools. Members identified the importance of schools being advised when applications were received for take-aways within 400m of school premises.

Outcome

The outcome of the investigation was a series of recommendations which are set to be considered by Cabinet.

It was hoped that the recommendations would result in significant reductions in the levels of childhood obesity within the borough, as well as the establishment of long-term healthy lifestyles.

Looking to the future Members have also proposed completing a further review of childhood obesity in the new municipal year which looks to address other contributing factors.

Reducing Crime and Feeling Safe

What the Corporate Plan Says

Through valuing and supporting our communities, developing district and local centres and providing stimulating activities that help address worklessness we aim to reduce all crimes and perceptions of crime and create a community focussed public safety service.

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

Reducing crime and feeling safe has been a key priority for Walsall Councils Scrutiny and Performance Panels during 2010/11. To assist with the achievement of this priority Members have considered the following issues:

- Walsall Community Safety Plan
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Alcohol related Anti-Social Behaviour
- Multi-agency preventative working

In addition to the above the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel established a working group to consider the issue of safeguarding services for vulnerable children.

Issue

A working group was established when the Panel became aware of particular pressures faced by Children's Specialist Services. These pressures were a result of an increase in referrals which subsequently led to more Initial Assessments, a rise in the number of Child Protection Investigations, a corresponding increase in the number of Looked After Children (LAC) and Child Protection Plans. At the same time the workforce was becoming less experienced, compounded by difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers. As a result of these issues, there were a number of LAC and Children in Need without an allocated social worker. It was apparent that established working methods were not delivering the required outcomes.

Key Findings

The working group identified a number of key concerns. These included high workloads experienced by social workers and corresponding high sickness and absence levels. In addition, the workforce was less experienced than previously, with the majority of social workers having less than 2 years post-qualification experience. Other challenges experienced by the service included the need to streamline paper work and improve the health and safety of social workers when making visits to the homes of clients.

The working group also received guidance in relation to the potential complexity of child protection cases which, it noted, placed further pressures on the workforce.

Outcome

The working group identified the importance of focusing on the early intervention agenda. It was anticipated that in doing so, it would be likely to contribute to preventing children entering the care system and thus reduce the number of referrals and subsequent pressures on the social work staff.

A number of key issues were resolved during the life of the working group. For example, non-specialist support staff were utilised to provide ongoing support for LAC cases which were established and stable. These staff had access to a social worker where required. The working group heard that this approach had been approved by Ofsted. This approach enabled social workers to focus on more immediate and demanding cases. Other improvements included a new approach to the identification of poor practice and the establishment of career pathways. A resolution was also achieved in respect of issues of limited LACs/ vulnerable children interview room space via the re-arrangement of existing office space.

The working group's recommendations focused on supporting the improvements made and also on strengthening the role of Members as corporate parents, enabling them to participate in Children's Specialist Services visits. The recommendations were approved by Cabinet on 13th April, 2011.

Since the recommendations were made, early progress has included Members participating in specialist services visits. Some Members have also agreed to be key links with council children homes and a number have been identified from each of the main political parties to sit on the Corporate Parenting Board. In terms of working smarter, reshaping of services continues and includes more manageable workloads for social workers. As a result, all looked after children have access to a social worker and all in need of one have a protection plan allocated. Managers are also being trained in a leading supervision best practice model as part of efforts to strengthen the risk assessment process.

Developing Strong and Dynamic Communities

What the Corporate Plan says

Recognising the diversity of our communities we aim, through closely working with local people and partners, to implement a new model of community engagement and neighbourhood management, provide the support to create a thriving third sector and tackle poverty via support to businesses, activities to address worklessness and help people to live independently in sustainable fit for purpose homes.

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

Developing strong and dynamic communities is essential if Walsall is to grow and prosper now and in the future. This has been recognised by Scrutiny and Performance Panels and the following issues have all been considered:

- Creating business in Walsall
- A vision for libraries and leisure centres
- Anti-social behaviour
- Community asset transfer
- Low carbon retro fit for housing

One area which the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel focused on was the development of the Governments 'Big Society' proposals.

Issue

Creating the 'Big Society' is one of the key aims of the coalition Government. The principle of the idea is that there will be a large shift in control and responsibility from the state to local people and groups. The Council is a key enabler in creating the 'Big Society'. This was recognised by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel who considered the issue at three meetings to help develop some initial priorities for developing the 'Big Society' in Walsall.

Findings

The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel, with support from the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel, have considered how to develop the 'Big Society' in Walsall at several meetings this year. This included holding a facilitated workshop session considering key questions.

In considering the issue the Panel found that a multi-faceted approach was required to develop the necessary 'ingredients' to create the 'Big Society' in Walsall. The most important aspect of this was creating a dynamic and capable voluntary and community sector that was ready and able to take on responsibility for important community functions.

Members felt that after creating the necessary capacity there would be a need to develop stringent safeguards such as what would happen if the

organisation failed, if community groups are to be responsible for delivering services to the local community.

The prospect of transferring council owned assets to local community groups was recognised for its potential in assisting voluntary and community groups achieve their aims and objectives. However, any transfers would need to take place with clear agreements around ownership and responsibility including a plan of what would happen to the property should the voluntary and community sector organisation face unexpected difficulties.

Members felt that if volunteers were to be used by the Council then this should be to add value to existing services rather than in place of paid staff.

The Panel felt strongly that if the Council outsourced services as part of creating the 'Big Society' then these services should be outsourced to voluntary and community groups and not to multi-national private companies for profit.

Outcome

The Panel recognised that this was an important topic that would benefit from further detailed work being undertaken. Therefore at the 7 April 2011 meeting of the Panel it was resolved to establish a working group in 2011/12 to consider the development of the 'Big Society' in Walsall. The aim is to build upon the principle areas identified so far and develop a series of policy recommendations that can be used by Cabinet to implement this important Government policy in the borough.

Improving Education and Skills

What the Corporate Plan says

The foundation for future success lies in how we build an infrastructure that ensures all local people and especially children and young people fulfil their potential with the right skills, learning, environment and opportunity to maximise their achievements and the contribution they make to their community.

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

Scrutiny and Performance Panels have been working hard to improve education and skills in Walsall during 2010/11. Topics considered have included:

- A vision for libraries
- Creating business in Walsall
- Tackling worklessness
- Consideration of the Serco Contract themes

Issue

Members were keen to gain a greater understanding of the performance of the education contract by Walsall Children's Services (WCS) – Serco and how it was contributing to educational attainment in the borough. The Panel heard that WCS – Serco act as a strategic and corporate agent on behalf of the Director of Children's Service and Walsall Council. As part of this role, they have, "responsibility and accountability for the provision of high quality, innovative, future focused, and cost effective education within Walsall Children's Services".

The Panel were keen to understand the support provided to children and young people at the commencement and towards the conclusion of their education in the borough.

Two main issues were considered:

- Support for Post 16 Education
- Early Years in the Maintained Sector

Support for Post 16 Education

The Panel were keen to learn more about local activity to support post 16 education and training in further improving participation rates and levels of achievement. Members heard that 3,500 young people complete year 11 each year and are able to access a wide range of opportunities for further education and training. The choice in Walsall includes school and academy sixth forms, other further education colleges and apprenticeships. In November 2011 a total of 1322 young people age 16 – 19 were in

employment and around 8% were not involved in employment, education or training (NEET), while the remainder were unknown. To try to increase participation in further education information about courses are available at each provider for all young people and their families. An on-line prospectus was also available to young people. The Economic Wellbeing Services team based within WCS – Serco sought to improve participation and attainment. This team supports the 14 to 19 partnership, which includes all providers involved in providing education and training. The 14-19 Partnership Participation Steering Group coordinates work on increasing participation, including participation in apprenticeships.

During their investigations the Panel discovered and welcomed the fact that the Head teacher of Aldridge School was the lead for the Strengthening Walsall's Achievement at Post Sixteen (SWAPS) initiative. This initiative involved ten schools and Walsall College. The planned scheme would, for example, enable a pupil at Aldridge School to pick from a menu of forty-six courses offered across the various educational establishments.

Key Findings

The Head of Aldridge School agreed with the Panel that schemes such as Strengthening Walsall's Achievement at Post Sixteen would encourage students to remain within the education system. There was also collective agreement that given the anticipated increase in the cost of higher education it would be important for young people to receive appropriate guidance and support regarding education and training options.

Early Years in the Maintained Sector

A further key theme considered by the Panel was early years in the maintained sector. Members were keen to understand the type of advice, guidance, support and challenge that is provided for schools, governors and other partners.

The Panel found that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced in 2008 and is the statutory framework within which all early years learning, development and welfare requirements are set. It sets the standards for all practitioners working with children from birth to five and covers four overarching principles which structure the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- the unique child
- positive relationships
- enabling environments
- learning and development

The Panel also heard that all 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to access up to 15 hours per week in an early years setting from the term after their 3rd birthday, although attendance is not compulsory. In Walsall 6,704 eligible children take this entitlement through the maintained sector. This represents around 85% of all 3 and 4 year olds in Walsall. There are 127 schools, made up of 8 Nursery schools and 119 infant and primary schools with a nursery class, where Early

Years Foundation Stage learning is provided. Of these providers 75% are graded by Ofsted as delivering good or better early years provision.

A range of support and challenge was provided by WCS - Serco to early years settings. This includes the provision of training sessions to schools and other support by Early Years Consultants and Improvement Officers. Training for School Improvement Partnerships and Children's School Improvement Advisors on EYFS enabled them to provide effective challenge to Heads and Senior Leaders regarding the types of provision delivered.

The key indicator nationally is the percentage of pupils achieving 78 points at Foundation Stage. The 3 year trend for Walsall shows a 9% improvement in the number of children reaching this milestone at the end of Foundation Stage. Walsall exceeded the target agreed with National Strategies by 1% in the previous year. The Panel expressed concern that Walsall remained in the lowest quartile for pupils achieving 78 points and also that attainment in the borough was below the national average for pupils studying reading at Foundation stage.

Key Findings

The Panel heard that reductions in government grants and changes to education policy would lead to a reduction in the education contract. This led to concern that it could result in a reduction in support for much of the Early Years activity. It would therefore be important that good practice was shared between different learning settings and that centres of excellence were established to act as satellite providers of services.

Improving Housing Choice

What the Corporate Plan says

Provision of quality and fit for purpose homes that meet the needs of our communities and are well served by local amenities will support the development of district and local centres and help people to live independently.

What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?

Improving housing in the borough is an important aim that will benefit local communities. This priority has been reflected by Members on Scrutiny and Performance Panels by consideration of the following issues:

- Low carbon retro-fit for housing
- Planning enforcement
- Void properties
- Black Country Core Strategy

Linked to the achievement of this important area the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel established a working group to consider the issue of community-based support services for vulnerable adults.

Issue

A working group was established to consider a number of issues related to the introduction of restructured community-based services by the council and local partners. These services are aimed at the delivery of a multi-level response service across the borough for vulnerable adults. The working group investigated a number of issues such as the Community Alarm System (CAS). This was in part prompted by Member concerns regarding the risk of individuals not receiving telehealth care where obsolete Community Alarm Systems (CAS) had been removed, as well as instances where difficulties had been experienced by residents in receiving a replacement pendant system. The working group also considered the proposed changes to the council's in house home care and Neighbourhood Community Officer (NCO) services.

Key Findings

The working group considered the management of Community Alarm Schemes (CAS) between the council and whg. A number of issues were identified including delays in the installation of CAS and difficulties experienced in completing individual social care assessments. However, the working group noted that key challenges had begun to be addressed. For example, where there was difficulty in contacting an individual, whg advised the council who would then contact the individual. The working group identified effective interaction between whg and the council as key to minimising risks to individual service users, particularly in the context of the strategic objective to move all users to the newer pendant system. This was reinforced by the completion of a revised protocol.

The working group's review of ongoing activity to restructure in house home care and Neighbourhood Community Officer (NCO) services saw them broadly in support of the proposed improvements to services. These included extending services to those from 18+ and the focus on critical need and pathway to re-ablement. The working group also welcomed the structured consultation with staff. However, they also met with union representatives and shared the view that a well-developed in house service should be retained.

Outcome

The outcome of the investigation was a series of recommendations which were accepted by Cabinet. Cabinet shared the view of the working group that effective joint working between whg and the council is critical in ensuring that local need is met. Cabinet also agreed with the working group regarding the importance of retaining effective provider services, including Neighbourhood Community Officers (NCOs) and home care assistants.

Improving the Quality of our Environment

What the Corporate Plan says

Ensuring the highway network and public transport services are well managed and maintained is key to supporting businesses, the transformation of the Town Centre and district centres and improving the quality of the environment. In addition keeping streets free from litter and detritus and managing the impact of waste through increasing recycling, reducing our impact on the environment and managing issues associated with contaminated land and air quality are key to improving our environment.

What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?

This priority has seen activity from the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel during the last year. The panel has considered items including:

- Air Quality Action Plan
- Provision of Residents Only Parking Zones
- Winter Maintenance
- Dog Fouling
- Town Centre Parking
- Replacement Programme for Wheeled Bins

The Town Centre Parking Working Group is one example of where scrutiny has had a significant impact in contributing to this important priority.

Issue

A working group was established to consider a number of issues relating to the provision of car parking within the town centre. It was identified on numerous occasions by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel that the provision and management of car parking facilities have a significant impact on the vitality of the town centre. The quality, price and location of car parking facilities all influence travel patterns, traffic congestion and demand for parking. Ensuring that there was sufficient parking also played an important part in ensuring that the highway network was clear and well managed.

Whilst considering the quarter 2 financial monitoring position for 2010/11 (at their meeting on 16 November, 2010) members also noted that there was a potential risk relating to the level of income received from car parking and enforcement thereof.

Key Findings

The Working Group undertook a thorough review and received evidence from witnesses including Officers from Regeneration, Planning Policy, the Town Centre Manager and external business representatives. In each case an open exchange of ideas and frank discussions on the issues faced took place.

Having regard to all of the submissions, members of the working group were able to identify key areas which would assist all parties. Members identified that certain car parks were vastly under-utilised due to their location and also noted that the distance people had to walk into town from such car parks was not reflected in the level of charges applied.

Members further established that the smarter workplace initiative (a fundamental review of the councils future accommodation needs) could have an impact upon occupancy rates within the town centre and recommended that a review of the staff parking scheme be undertaken once the impact of the smarter workplace initiative had been established.

An important discussion was held with regard to the parking problems experienced in and around the Premier and Crown Wharf business parks. The area was problematic as businesses require parking and access for delivery vehicles. Members of the public also parked there as did residents of nearby residential developments with further residential developments being erected.

Further key findings included the fact that the 4 hour charge was under-utilised and ineffective. Members also considered the possibility of introducing charges on off street parking for blue badge holders after seeing evidence of this system operating in other authorities.

Outcome

All but two of the thirteen working groups recommendations were approved at the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel held on 16th June, 2011. These recommendations are to be considered by Cabinet on 27th July, 2011. If approved, this could result in a number of changes which would improve the quality of the environment for businesses and members of the public alike.

Reducing Worklessness and Creating Opportunity and Potential

What the Corporate Plan says

The huge challenge of the current economic situation requires a response of equal significance. Building on current activity we will continue to support local people through the provision of activities that will help address Worklessness. Whilst a key priority is to reduce Worklessness it is just as important that we continue to ensure our services are accessible, support all and are socially inclusive if opportunities for everyone are to be created. As important is valuing and supporting our young people, our businesses and our communities

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

Reducing worklessness and creating opportunity and potential is key to improving the long term prospects of the borough. This has been recognised by Scrutiny and Performance Panel Members who have considered the following issues:

- Responding to the recession
- Tackling worklessness]
- Black Country Core Strategy
- Community Asset Transfer
- Serco education contract
- Under 18 teenage pregnancy
- Creating business in Wasall

Creating opportunity and potential for the future is key to regenerating the borough. Libraries are one service that provides education and learning opportunities for all residents. The future of the library service was considered in depth by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Issue

The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel completed a key piece of work this year to assist Cabinet in developing a future vision for Libraries and Leisure Centres for the borough. To complete this piece of the work the Panel established a working group.

Findings

The working group completed an interesting piece of work that included speaking to national and regional experts as well as site visits to libraries in and out of the borough.

Members concluded that the library service provided a valuable and important service to all members of the local community regardless of age, gender,

ethnicity, disability and social background. Libraries were not just about providing books but about providing learning opportunities for people of all ages from all backgrounds.

Libraries were increasingly becoming an access point for computers and the internet. It was recognised that this demand was only likely to increase in the future and that the library service should prepare for and embrace fully, the digital revolution.

Accessibility to local libraries in local neighbourhoods for all residents was important and it was recommended that opening hours should be increased to suit local residents needs. Members further recommended that the existing network should be maintained where possible and that libraries be located so that every resident had a library within 2 miles from their homes. This should include opening at evenings and weekends. The need to implement this work during a period of reducing resources was recognised and the working group made suggestions to Cabinet on how it could be undertaken. This included the use of self service machines for book loans, using volunteers, sharing buildings with other services and entering into regional partnerships with other local authorities.

Outcome

The working groups report and recommendations was approved by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel and presented to Cabinet in November 2010.

In the Cabinet response to the working groups recommendations it is reported that that issues highlighted by the group such as the use of self-service machines, increased use of volunteers and regional partnerships with other local authorities were being considered for implementation.

As part of agreeing the budget for 2011/12 a significant sum for the introduction of self service machines was approved by Council. However, this was coupled with the announcement of a review of the library service with the aim of making substantial savings – to which the working group's recommendations should help frame and develop the reconfiguration of the service in these tough economic times.

Increasing Enterprise & Making Walsall a Vibrant Borough

What the Corporate Plan says

A key part of making Walsall a great place to live and work is connected to ensuring there are firm foundations for building capacity in the town to increase enterprise which will assist in addressing issues such as Worklessness, health inequalities and poverty. Central to this is developing a highway network that attracts businesses and employers to the borough whilst also supporting existing businesses and attracting more visitors to the borough because of the ease of access and the quality of facilities available.

What has Scrutiny done in 2010/11?

Increasing enterprise and making Walsall a vibrant borough is important to all local residents. During 2010/11 Members have considered the following areas to assist in the achievement of this priority:

- Responding to the recession
- Black Country Core Strategy
- Anti-social behaviour
- New Deal for Communities – Exit Strategy

In terms of increasing enterprise the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel completed an important piece of work on 'Creating Business in Walsall'.

Issue

The Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel identified economic development as a priority area for 2010/11. An issue with the number of business start ups and survivals compared to regional and national figures was identified in January 2011. A working group was established to investigate the issue and report back with findings and recommendations on the future direction of business start up support.

Findings

In 2009 there were 720 new enterprises established in Walsall but 1,005 businesses ceased trading, giving a net loss of 285 businesses. This was clearly the effect of the recession as the numbers of businesses dropped nationally. In addition to this, business density in Walsall is low with 50 businesses per 1,000 of the working age population compared to 58 businesses regionally and 64 nationally. Walsall requires over 1,200 additional businesses to reach regional levels of business density and over 2,000 to reach national levels. These statistics demonstrate how weak the Walsall economy is compared to other areas.

In investigating this issue it was established that business start ups were an important part of the mix that drove the local economy. There was a wide

range of good support available but some of this was due to change and many packages were grant funded. It was important that business start up support continued moving forward. Small start up grants, business training programmes and ongoing advice and mentor support were identified as the key areas of business support that should continue.

One key issue to developing local businesses was through providing suitable premises in the borough. There is a distinct lack of start up space for new businesses. To this end it was recommended that incubation units with cheap and flexible leases be developed in the borough to support new and start up businesses. Ideally these premises should come with integrated business support facilities such as mentors and professional meeting facilities. The lack of business start up premises was in addition to the general lack of suitable employment land in the borough identified by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel in recommendations to Cabinet in February 2011.

In the future regional economic policy will be managed by the 'Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership' (LEP) which is a public and private sector partnership. Members felt that the LEP should include supporting business start ups as one of their priorities moving forward.

Outcome

The final report and recommendations was presented to the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel in April 2011 and will be presented to Cabinet in July 2011.

As highlighted above the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel have previously identified the lack of employment land in Walsall and made recommendations to Cabinet about this in February 2011. Cabinet accepted the Panels recommendations that there was a need in the borough for new employment land and that economic development and its sustainable development should be a priority of the Council and its partners.

Working Smarter

What the Corporate plan says

Through established business solution techniques we will empower services to achieve greater efficiencies and improved quality by challenging existing processes and adopting more effective ways of working that place the customer at centre of all activity.

What Scrutiny has done in 2010/11?

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel has focussed its attention on areas including spending transparency procedures, progress made by the communications service following a best value review in 2009 and the Working Smarter Programme. This is in conjunction with being consulted twice in respect of the 2010/11 budget proposals. The Panel has also recognised the need to invest in the council website and background IT, to allow more services to be delivered online.

The Corporate Scrutiny Panel also received reports advising on actions carried out in respect of Value for Money Reviews on Communications and the Payroll and Pensions Service. Consideration was given at the meeting to various options in relation to the delivery of the payroll service.

The Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel also took a keen interest in the smarter workplace initiative which was a substantial review of the Council's future accommodation needs.

Issue

Working Smarter is a substantial change programme having widespread impact on the council's organisational design and service delivery mechanisms. It is a means of securing the required budget savings over the next few years. The programme has a number of projects including:-

- Area partnership implementation
- Smarter Workplaces
- Council system design – Delivering Right, Fast and Simple
- Resource allocation project
- Service redesigns

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel has been keen to ensure that the programme delivers as it suggests and has, and will continue to oversee the programme. Monitoring reports have been considered at each of its meetings.

Outcome

The new Corporate Plan revolves around the working smarter change programme and it is anticipated that Corporate Scrutiny will continue to play an important role in overseeing this important area of work.

In terms of the smarter workplace initiative the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel made recommendations to Cabinet to substantially reduce the Councils office accommodation over the next few years consider revised working arrangements for staff to reduce office needs furthermore in the long term.

Annual Scrutiny Survey 2010/11

An annual scrutiny survey is undertaken each year to seek the views of Members on the successes and areas for improvement in scrutiny over the last 12 months.

This year the survey was sent out to all 60 Members with the option of completing the survey online also available. A total of 8 responses were received including 4 electronically. A range of questions were posed focusing on different scrutiny themes:

Successful topics

Consideration of issues by working groups, specifically Obesity, Dog Fouling, Alcohol Related Anti Social Behaviour and the Review of Safeguarding Services for Vulnerable Children was the most common answer with 71% of respondents identifying the work as a success. Members attributed the success of these topics particularly to *“good officer support and the opportunity to address specific issues in depth”* and *“very good stakeholder involvement”*.

Topics for 2011/12

An extensive range of potential topics were identified for the forthcoming year. These included; Working Smarter, the impact of the Health and Social Care Bill, the impact of Benefit Based Charging, the performance of Serco and Walsall Housing Group and Educational Attainment.

Performance

87% of respondents were at least fairly satisfied with the results of scrutiny.

Satisfaction with scrutiny

The majority of respondents were reasonably satisfied with the structure, and frequency of meetings. The effectiveness of working group meetings were identified as very good or good by 71% of those returning the forms.

Budget scrutiny

37% of respondents were at least satisfied with scrutiny's overall participation in the budget setting process, with 25% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 25% were fairly dissatisfied with 12% not expressing a view.

Future budget scrutiny

It was noteworthy that a mixture of views were expressed regarding the best way for scrutiny to participate in the budget process. 62% of respondents felt that all Panels should consider the budget setting process for a number of reasons including, *“Each Panel will have some specialist knowledge of the demands of their own service area. This would be watered down if one panel scrutinised the budget process or if a specialist group was set up to do so”*.

25% of Members felt that a specialist working group should consider the budget setting process as it would enable them to gain a deep understanding of the issues.

Officer Support

All of the Members which completed the survey were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with officer support from the Scrutiny Team.

SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANELS

2011/12

FORWARD LOOKING STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
B. Cassidy**

Chair: Councillor B. Cassidy

Vice-Chair: Councillor E. Hughes

Membership: Councillors J. Barton, O. Bennett, K. Chambers, R. Martin, A. Paul, D. Shires, R. Thomas, together with representatives from Lichfield Diocesan Education, Archbishop of Birmingham, three parent governors, one primary education teacher and one secondary education teacher

This year the Children's & Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities:

Impact of legislative changes in local schools
Update where school state status had changed e.g. academy
Children's Safeguarding services update
Provision of special educational needs (sen) support
Child poverty
Quarterly Financial Monitoring
Performance monitoring
The School's Forum
Budget Planning
Impact of budget reduction on services
Role of school Governors
Monitoring of school performance
Serco contract themes
Sneyd School and UTC
Delivery of services for children with disabilities
Darlaston school cluster activity
Framework for Inclusion
Guidance regarding the new framework for school building maintenance
Free school meals and the school's meal service
Safeguarding services for vulnerable children working group
Education developments
Childhood obesity working group

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
L. Harrison**

Chair: Councillor L. Harrison

Vice-Chair: Councillor C. Creaney

Membership: Councillors I. Azam, S. Coughlan, L. Rattigan, K. Sears, I. Shires, F. Westley, A. Young

This year the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities :

The Big Society
Green Spaces strategy
Area Partnerships review
Library service consultation
Monitoring the recommendations from the Libraries and Leisure Centres Working Group
Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill
Crime and community safety in Walsall
Home Office consultation on anti-social behaviour tools and powers “more effective responses to anti-social behaviour”

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
S. Coughlan**

Chair: Councillor S. Coughlan
Vice-Chair: Councillor M. Flower
Membership: Councillors: K. Hussain, G. Ilmann-Walker,
M. Longhi, M. Murray, M. Nazir, J. Rochelle, D. Shires

This year the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities :

Working Smarter
Benefits Service
Welfare Rights Service
1 st Quarter Finance Monitoring Report (to include post –audit Outturn report)
Finance Direct
Social Media
Resource Allocation 2012 – 13
Delivering Right, Fast and Simple for Support Services
Pay and Grading
Walsall Council Website
Elections

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor R.
Carpenter**

Chair: Councillor R. Carpenter
Vice-Chair: Councillor F. Westley
Membership: Councillors: C. Creaney, B. Douglas-Maul, S. Fitzpatrick, G. Illmann- Walker, M. Munir, J. Murray, V. Woodruff

This year the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities:

On Street Parking
Waste Management
Winter Service
Littering
Flood Risk Management
Quarterly Financial Budgeting
Monitoring of Progress with Town Centre Parking Working Group Recommendations

HEALTH SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
M. Longhi**

Chair: Councillor M. Longhi

Vice-Chair: Councillor V. Woodruff

Membership: Councillors R. Carpenter, S. Fletcher-Hall, R. Martin, I. Robertson, E. Russell, H. Sarohi, D. Turner

This year the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the Councils corporate priorities :

Mortality rates at the hospital
Care of the elderly (vulnerable elderly) in hospital
PCT system plan – to allow any potential areas for health scrutiny working groups to be identified
Dudley Walsall Mental Health Trust Joint Committee
Health and Social Care Bill
Vascular Surgery reconfiguration
West Midlands Ambulance Service response times

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
I. Shires**

Chair: Councillor I. Shires

Vice-Chair: Councillor I. Azam

Membership: Councillors D. Anson, R. Carpenter, B. Douglas-Maul, S. Fitzpatrick, D. James, L. Jeavons, M. Munir.

This year the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas that will assist with the delivery of the following corporate priorities :

Business Working Group
Workforce Working Group
Key Changes in Regeneration

SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Councillor
T. Oliver**

Chair: Councillor T. Oliver

Vice-Chair: Councillor A. Paul

Membership: Councillors: D. Barker, R. Burley, D. Coughlan, A. Ditta, B. Douglas-Maul, L. Rattigan, D. Turner.

This year the Social Care & Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel have identified key areas to consider that will assist with the delivery of the following corporate priorities:

Changes to Social Care Legal framework
Changes to Social Care Financial framework
Budget Planning 2011/12
Performance: Service outcomes
Domiciliary Care Procurement
Personalisation – working group
Benefits Based Charging - working group
Statutory Complaints
Impact of financial changes on services
Aids & Adaptations
Learning Disability Specialist Health Services
Quarterly financial monitoring
HealthWatch
Taste4Life Scheme
Links to work