

**Audit Committee – 25 October 2010**

**Summary of Outcomes from Scrutiny Panel Reviews**

**Summary of report:**

To provide Audit Committee with a summary of outcomes from scrutiny panel reviews.

**Background papers:**

Scrutiny Annual Report

**Recommendation:**

That the summary of outcomes from scrutiny panels be noted.



**Rory Borealis – Executive Director (Resources)**

**11 October 2010**

**Background**

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.

As part of its function, the Audit Committee is tasked with providing independent assurance that there are adequate controls in place to mitigate key risks and to provide assurance that the authority, including the scrutiny function, is operating effectively.

This report is brought before members to provide assurance that Scrutiny continues to add real value to the decision making process in Walsall, as well as contributing to the Councils key priorities.

Appended to the report is the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2009/10. The Annual Report provides evidence of a number of scrutiny panel reviews, together with outcomes achieved. Issues covered include amongst others:-

- Services and support for dementia sufferers and their families;
- Alcohol related anti social behaviour;
- The Councils use of Bryntysillio Outdoor Education Centre
- Housing;
- Street Cleanliness

### **Resource and legal considerations:**

Scrutiny Panels and any subsequent working groups are co-ordinated and facilitated by the Constitutional Services. There are no direct implications for the team arising from this report.

### **Governance Issues/Citizen Impact**

An effective Scrutiny function ensures that a wide range of policies are reviewed and the Executive held to account for their decisions. This provides reassurance to the public that governance arrangements within Walsall are robust and transparent with an overall aim of improving services for local people.

### **Performance and risk management issues:**

None arising directly from this report.

### **Equality Implications:**

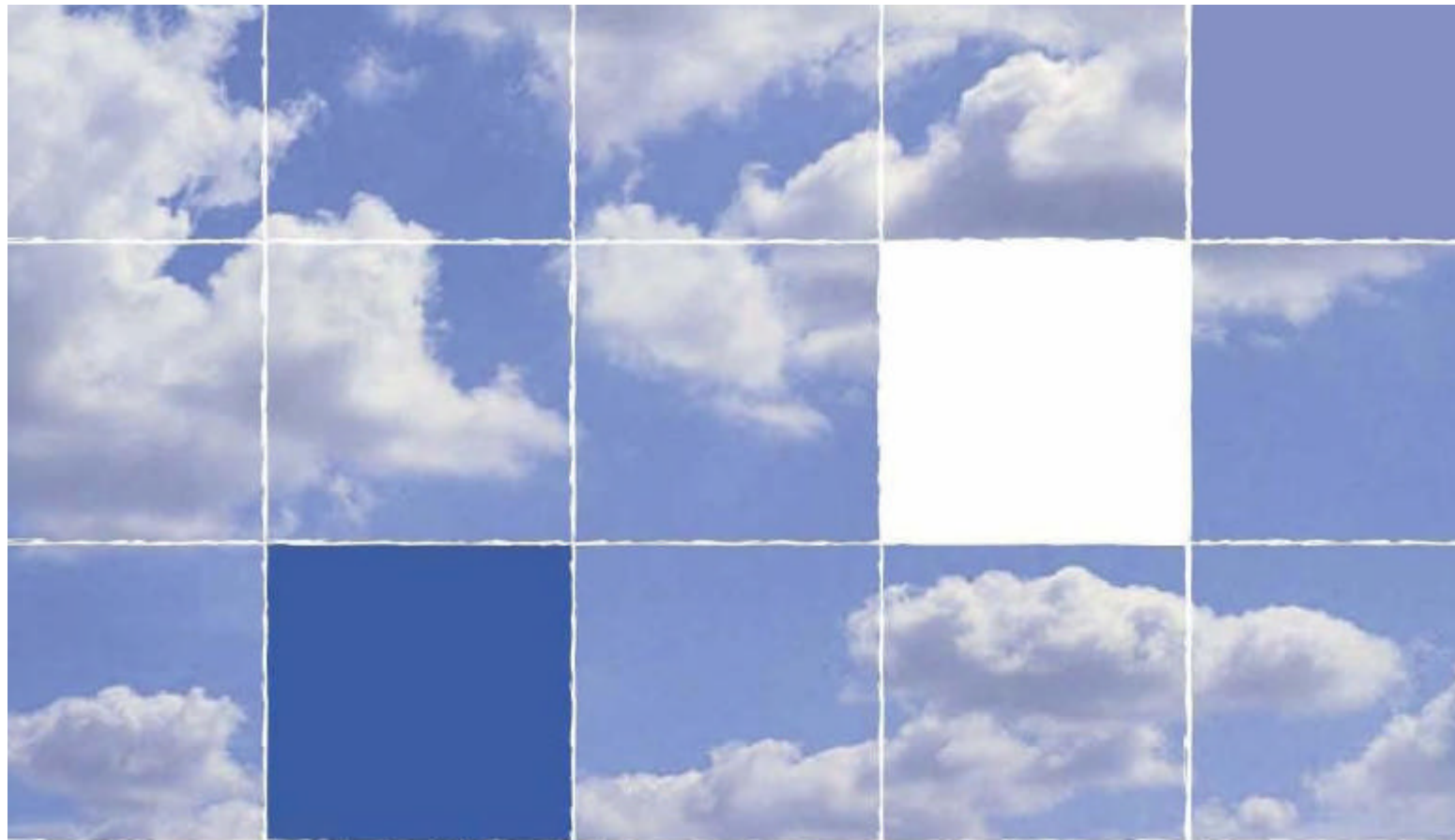
None arising from this report.

### **Consultation:**

This report is produced in accordance with the agreed work programme for the Audit Committee as agreed at its meeting on 14 June 2010 in the report 'The Roles and Responsibilities of the Audit Committee'.

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# **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10**



**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. Issues such as Affordable Housing have seen constructive challenge culminating in improved solutions that benefit Walsall's residents, whilst service reviews such as that of Shopmobility or Development Control have helped drive forward the efficiency agenda.

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. 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.



**Paul Sheehan**  
**Chief Executive**



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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](http://www.walsall.gov.uk/scrutiny).

At its annual meeting in May 2009, Council set the Scrutiny panel structure and remit for the year ahead which included 7 panels:

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

In addition, during the year a Joint Committee was established with Dudley Council to look at the new Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust. Taken together, this represents a significant increase in the number of meetings reflecting Members' commitment to this valuable role.

This report details how the work of Scrutiny and Performance panels during 2009/10 has 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](#).

# Citizens are healthy

## What the Corporate Plan says

Despite extensive work carried out in the borough in recent years, the scale and persistence of health inequalities in Walsall remain major challenges to the council and our partners...by building on the work already established in the borough and to address the significant geographic divide between the health experiences of those living in the east of the borough and those in the west. Also, through our Children & Young People's Plan we are developing services for children and young people and families.

## What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?

This year the council's scrutiny and performance panels have supported 'improving health' by discussing:

- Mental health services
- GP provision
- Performance of local health organisations
- Health inequalities
- Infant mortality
- Air quality on the M6 corridor

## Case Study

The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel's work in relation to services and support for dementia sufferers and their families has made a significant impact in contributing to improving health in Walsall.

## Issue

Evidence from the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority indicates that up to 40% of the population over the age of 65 may have undiagnosed dementia whilst those diagnosed have usually had the condition for three years. Currently it can take 12 weeks from first assessment to receive a diagnosis of dementia through the Walsall memory service.

The panel received information detailing the council's response to the national dementia strategy, 'Living Well with Dementia', and how this would be implemented locally. The panel considered this to be a topic which required detailed consideration and in January 2010 the panel established a working group to consider the issues in depth.



## Key Findings

The working group found that a health needs assessment, gap analysis and mapping of dementia services had identified six priority areas within 'The journey to improved dementia services in Walsall' which were:

1. Early intervention and diagnosis
2. Community and carer support
3. Acute hospital care
4. Living well in care homes
5. Prevention and health promotion
6. Planning for and end of life care

The working group welcomed the development of the six priorities which structured the way forward for tackling dementia in Walsall. Members learnt that progress is planned through service redesign.

The main theme that emerged within these priority areas was that people were scared of dementia and in order to reduce this fear, people's understanding of the illness needed to be improved. The review also showed that although some documentaries had highlighted bad practice in dementia care nationally, there were examples of good practice in Walsall.

## Outcomes

The working group engaged with the council's Communications team to discuss strategies to assist the priority around 'early intervention and diagnosis' by improving public awareness and understanding of dementia. The working group expressed the wish to promote a Walsall wide conference on dementia once progress has been made on the six identified priority areas. This proposal was recognised at the 'better together board', and it is hoped that a Black Country dementia awareness raising conference will be organised through the Health Scrutiny Panel in 2010 – 2011.

The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel have recommended that this working group investigation continues into 2010/11 to afford greater time and opportunity to consider this important area moving forward. With Walsall's elderly population set to grow rapidly in the future it is important that this issue is tackled now. In the annual scrutiny survey one member commented that the working group's task '*was about raising awareness of the massive problem and to look for answers*'.

## Citizens are safe and secure

### What the Corporate Plan Says

The fear of crime [and anti-social behaviour] remains a key issue for local communities. Safer Walsall Partnership is tasked with ensuring a multi-agency approach to tackling crime and the fear of crime, and through this partnership, the council works to support both local people who are vulnerable and those at risk of being drawn into crime, particularly through drug and alcohol abuse. We want to create an environment that reduces crime and enables people to feel safe.

### What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?

The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel is the council's designated 'crime and disorder' committee with responsibility for overseeing the work of the Safer Walsall Partnership and its members. During the course of the year the panel has considered and commented on:

- The Community Safety Plan
- The Crime and Disorder Strategy
- The Community Payback Scheme
- Domestic Violence

The key piece of work undertaken by the panel in this important area was an investigation into alcohol related anti-social behaviour.

### Issue

Alcohol related anti-social behaviour in Walsall was identified as a potential scrutiny topic by the former Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel during 2008/09. The topic was picked up by the succeeding Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel who set up a small working group of councillors and a Police Authority Member to investigate this important issue.

The working group recognised that alcohol related anti-social behaviour was a large area so chose to narrow down the brief to consider alcohol related anti-social behaviour in and around licensed premises.

### Key Findings

Members found that while there was plenty of good work being undertaken by the council, its partners and local businesses to tackle alcohol related anti-social behaviour there was still room for improvement in some areas.

The working group found that there were 763 premises with a licence to sell alcohol in Walsall and that Walsall town centre's late night drinking

establishments targeted young people. Members also saw evidence that young people were 'pre-loading' with cheap alcohol at home before they went out. Alcohol related harm was found to be high in Walsall with alcohol related mortality and hospital admissions all significantly higher than the England average. This level of harm was of serious concern to the working group.

*Operation Be Safe*, a partnership operation for preventing night time alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour, was found to be successful with statistics showing reductions in violent crime across the life of the operation.

Premises management was considered sound and there is an annual awards evening called 'Best Bar None' to reward and encourage good practice amongst publicans. There is an active Pubwatch scheme for the town centre which is set to extend across the rest of the borough. Members did comment that Pubwatch could be more active in terms of banning troublemakers from the town centre.

Members found ample evidence of good practice implemented elsewhere that should be considered for introduction locally. For example, a number of areas operate a form of pastoral care in the town centre on weekend evenings, whereby a pro-active approach to preventing late night alcohol related problems is undertaken by non-emergency services personnel. This type of service can have a positive effect as it reduces the draw on the emergency services and often helps prevent difficult situations occurring.

Partnership working was found to be effective but members felt improvements could be made to sharing operational data. Members found that different council departments and partner organisations used different IT packages and recommended that work should be undertaken to address this in order to assist with greater collaborative working.

## **Outcome**

The outcome of the investigation was a series of cross cutting recommendations which are set to be considered by Cabinet, the Safer Walsall Partnership and others in the near future. A Member commented in the annual scrutiny survey that multi-agency work had been a particular success during consideration of this topic.

It was hoped that the recommendations will result in improvements to the way that alcohol related anti-social behaviour is dealt with in Walsall. The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel will monitor the implementation of its recommendations moving forward.

Looking to the future Members have also proposed completing a new piece of work on alcohol related problems in Walsall to further address this important problem on behalf of local people.

## Citizens are aspiring and achieving

### What the Corporate Plan says

The key to the future success of our children and young people, and for Walsall to be a successful economy that attracts investment and employment, is well educated, qualified and skilled young people who are ambitious to improve themselves and their communities. Increasing aspiration and attainment is a priority which we will address by improving school standards and working with our partners across the borough. We will encourage our young people, parents, families and communities to have higher aspirations and help them to achieve qualifications and access higher education. We will promote life-long learning and widening participation into training, learning and educational opportunities in local areas. We recognise that some families and communities find it hard to access all the benefits of living in Walsall, and therefore we will strive to ensure equality of opportunity and community cohesion and to reduce health inequality.

### What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?

Members have contributed to this important priority across a range of the council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels. Items that have been considered include:

- Neighbourhood management
- Welfare advice
- Responding to the recession
- Personalisation
- Safeguarding children
- Integrated Young Peoples Support Services

A key topic considered during the year under this priority was the council's use of Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre.

### Issue

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre is located in Llangollen, North Wales and delivers outdoor educational activities such as canoeing, rock climbing and orienteering for Walsall school children of all ages. Members were concerned that the use of the centre cost the council £500,000 per year when there were alternative facilities available through other local authorities that could be provided at no cost to the council.

### Key Findings

The working group adopted a partnership approach and engaged with both council officers and the trust responsible for the centre. Members found that Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre provided an excellent



residential outdoor education experience to thousands of Walsall children each year and was held in high regard by school children, teachers and former visitors. However the working group recognised that the use of the centre could not just continue as it was at high cost to Walsall taxpayers.

While the working group were pleased that the centre was held in such high regard it is essential that the centre provides good value for money as credible and cheaper alternatives to delivering outdoor education are available.

From their investigation it was clear to the working group that the centre needed to improve its financial position by restructuring its operations, increasing its income streams and developing a business plan to drive the centre forward. Members recognised that in the current financial climate the council simply could not afford to subsidise the centre by £500,000 each year.

## **Outcome**

The work of Scrutiny helped to bridge the gap between the council's executive and the trust and improve partnership working. The working group recommended the centre continue on the condition that a number of changes were made to its operation. Cabinet considered the working group's final report and recommendations in February 2010 and accepted the overall recommendation that the council should continue to utilise Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre. However, Cabinet did not accept the recommendation to double capacity at the centre; rather Cabinet chose to partially increase capacity at the centre to test the market for new places before taking any final decisions on capital investment. Unfortunately this increase in capacity did not generate sufficient demand to increase the number of children attending the centre and Cabinet took the decision to close the facility in June 2010.

The working group also made a number of recommendations that were for the attention of the trustees of the centre.

In the annual survey the working group's investigation was singled out as the most successful piece of scrutiny undertaken during 2009/10 by respondents. One Member stated that the working group had been successful because of *'visits to Bryntysilio and meeting with both trust and council officers to identify problems'* this approach had led to the development of *'good options to move forward'*.

## **Citizens are free from discrimination or harassment**

### **What the Corporate Plan says**

Walsall is a borough of contrasts: there are particularly deprived areas in the western and central areas of Walsall, whilst generally, the east is more affluent. The borough has made significant steps in recent years to address inequalities through, for example the quality of housing, health improvements, education standards and crime reduction. Regeneration in neighbourhoods and our town centres can improve the quality of life of Walsall residents and to bring more skilled employment opportunities to the borough. Whilst our borough is seen as a place where people get on well together, our Community Cohesion Strategy sets out a range of far reaching and cross cutting issues which the council, and our partners, must address, to ensure that all residents – individuals, families, communities - are free from discrimination or harassment, and able to share in our common vision for the future.

### **What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?**

Housing has been a key area for scrutiny during the last year. Responsibility for the lead of scrutiny in this area transferred from the Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel to the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel during the summer of 2009. The two panels already have a history of closely working together on this important issue as the case study below illustrates. In addition to the case study housing related topics considered by Scrutiny and Performance Panels in 2009/10 include:

- Sub-regional choice based lettings
- Single conversation with Homes and Communities Agency
- Strategic Regeneration Framework

### **Issue**

The Affordable Housing working group investigated issues concerning housing strategy, sustainability and choice as well as progress to date by Walsall Housing Group (WHG) in terms of meeting their initial five year targets and promises as set at the time of the housing stock transfer.

### **Key Findings**

The working group agreed that WHG had met its promises and that services had been significantly improved, including the quality of housing stock being judged as higher than the Decent Homes Standard and tenant participation in key decisions. The working group also recognised that WHG was ahead of the 2010 deadline set for achieving

decent homes standard. WHG explained that a number of specific transfer promises that have been met including; a seven year major works investment programme; rent guarantees for five years; and community-based trusts.

However, Members also identified a number of areas for improvement:

- 19.1% of all dwellings in Walsall live in fuel poverty
- Improvements to community engagement regarding housing were desirable
- Work to tackle long term void properties is required
- An approach to tackling garage sites and off street parking is required
- Entrenched anti-social behaviour is a problem in some areas.

## **Outcome**

The working group made a number of recommendations to tackle the problems that they identified including:

- Increasing the heating and warmth packages for elderly residents
- Addressing issues with regard to long term void flats
- Developing a strategy to deal with limited off road parking
- Addressing issues related to entrenched anti-social behaviour
- Improving community engagement
- Meeting the demand for social housing for rent in the borough.

In December 2009, Cabinet commended the working group for their report, supported their recommendations and requested that registered social landlords in the borough promote the working group's recommendations in their future business plans and monitor progress through Walsall Housing Partnership. The operational sub-group has included the six recommendations within its work plan for 2010/11 and will be generating a performance report in October 2010 and March 2011. The partnership has already been able to demonstrate some improvements especially in work to increase heating and warmth for elderly residents. For example, Accord Housing has spent around £133,532 in planned works on thermal comfort across the borough (heating, windows and insulation measures) with special emphasis on the homes of the elderly including Old Rectory Gardens, a sheltered housing scheme in Aldridge.



## **Citizens are enjoying a high quality of life - clean, green and mobile**

### **What the Corporate Plan says**

A high-quality environment improves our quality of life and helps to make us feel proud of where we live. Local people want to take pride in their environment, their parks and open spaces, their streets, and their public buildings. Concern about litter and graffiti is matched by concerns on a national and global level, and the council will work reduce our impact upon the environment to more sustainable levels. Mobility is a key factor and the council's aim is for Walsall to have an efficient and reliable transport system that is able to adapt and respond to future demands, meeting the challenge of safeguarding our mobility and our economic development, while managing demand for transport and maintaining or even improving quality of life.

### **What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?**

Scrutiny and Performance Panels have contributed significantly to the achievement of this key aim during the last year. Related items considered by Members include:

- Air quality in the borough
- Integrated transport
- Walsall Regeneration projects
- Waste management

A key piece of work undertaken during the year was an investigation into street cleanliness.

### **Issue**

In July 2009, a working group was initiated to examine the Street Cleansing Service and identify areas for improvement. This was a priority for Scrutiny as when residents are consulted clean and safe streets are consistently cited as a significant concern. Although residents give a high priority to street cleansing, public satisfaction has historically been lower than the national average in this area. The working group identified priority areas of work including enforcement, graffiti, trade waste and litter and sought to make recommendations that could be taken forward to Cabinet as part of the 2010-11 budget consultation. To fully investigate the priority areas, the group utilised a variety of methods for collecting evidence, including a tour of the town centre and identification of litter "hotspots", a visit to the Greenstar Recycling facility in Aldridge and meeting with officers from Street Pride and Public Safety to discuss concerns and formulate recommendations.

### **Key Findings**



Street cleanliness affects everyone who lives or works in Walsall as well as visitors to the borough. Although the working group felt that there were areas of good practice, there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed, including:

- Graffiti and nightclub stickers on utility boxes
- Trade bins left outside designated storage areas
- Graffiti along Butler's Passage
- Litter, in particular fast food cartons, discarded next to litter bins
- Litter in privately owned areas of the town was concerning, particularly the river near Bradford Place

Members felt that a trial involving litter bins without a lid could help alleviate the litter in problem areas, alongside increasing the number of litter, chewing gum and cigarette bins across the borough. The working group also felt that an increase in numbers of cleansing operatives and expanding litter hit squad arrangements would address high intensity problem areas. In terms of graffiti, the working group recommended that a trial of free graffiti removal on private homes be carried out to improve levels of graffiti, as it was felt that the existing charge to do so was discouraging to residents.

## Outcome

Several of the working group's recommendations were included in the full panel's response to the budget consultation for 2010-11. As a result of this, the following were approved in the budget process:

- Introduction of an additional litter hit squad
- Introduction of additional barrow rounds
- Trial and provision of extra litter bins
- Provide graffiti cleaning to private residents
- Introduce night time cleaning team on the ring road and red routes

Further recommendations made by the working group, alongside recommendations from a consultant's review into the service have been plotted into an improvement action plan, which will be monitored by the panel during the 2010-11 municipal year.

*'The increased workforce and priorities by Cabinet'* was identified by one Member in the annual scrutiny survey as a particular success of this working group.

The work by the scrutiny panel compliments some excellent work by the Street Cleansing service over the last 12 months which has seen significant improvement in street cleanliness performance including:

Litter:	58% improvement on the previous year
Detritus:	50% improvement on the previous year
Graffiti:	43% improvement on the previous year

## **Citizens are active – contributing to their communities**

### **What the Corporate Plan says**

Strong and prosperous communities are created by active citizens who engage with local democracy to help shape places and lives. Walsall communities have laid the foundation for building a borough where everyone can have a great life and a prosperous future. We will work with local people - individuals, families, groups, neighbourhoods and communities - enabling our citizens to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and to shaping their future. We acknowledge the immense value – in time, experience, and commitment - that volunteering brings to economic, social and environmental regeneration of our borough.

### **What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?**

This priority has seen activity from the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel and the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel during the last year. The panels have considered items on:

- Responding to the recession
- Working Neighbourhoods Fund
- Partnership approach to tackling worklessness
- Partnership approach to enterprise
- Positive activities for young people
- Building Schools for the Future
- Exam results and pupil attainment

The Positive Activities working group is one example of where scrutiny has had a significant impact in contributing to this important area.

### **Issue**

The working group was established to investigate the delivery of positive activities for young people in Walsall. Objectives included seeking to ensure that the range and quality of positive activities is as good as it can be in Walsall and the role of young people in designing and delivering new opportunities and effective promotion of activities.

### **Key Findings**

The working group heard that much of Integrated Young People's Support Services (IYPSS) provision related to young people's participation in positive activities, which was defined as any group activity led by an adult outside school lessons (such as sport, arts, or a youth group).

The working group heard that the council led the introduction of IYPSS in November 2009 which restructured the provision of services. IYPSS provides a range of activities for young people aimed at increasing their level of responsibility, being valued members of their communities and encouraging them to plan for their own futures.

Members visited the Young Persons Information Centre (YPIC) in Blakenall. Members heard that the YPIC was a fun, educational and an important facility serving 11–19 year olds. Young people play an active role in the operation of the centre. Young advisors and outreach workers provide critical support for those who are unemployed and often suffering from a lack of motivation.

The working group heard the process of measuring the quality and success of positive activities was challenging with limited evidence available. However, some of the statistics collected include the number of people who have participated in positive activities and have achieved an accredited outcome, for example, the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The outturn for 2008 for publicly funded Youth Service work is set out below:

<b>Participation</b>	<b>6075</b>
<b>Recorded Outcomes</b>	<b>2457</b>
<b>Accredited Outcomes</b>	<b>473</b>

The working group heard that there is substantial anecdotal evidence of the impact of positive activities in reducing anti-social behaviour.

## **Outcome**

The working group report was presented to the panel at its meeting in April 2010. The panel voted unanimously to endorse the report and recommended its proposals to Cabinet. A Cabinet response to the report is anticipated during the new municipal year.

The working group has made recommendations, amongst other things, in relation to the following areas:

- The importance of outreach work and the use of mobile units to engage young people, including targeting areas with limited provision
- The effectiveness of the YPIC and a wish to see it continue
- Importance of avoiding duplication of effort and services
- That all opportunities are used to promote IYPSS to young people, including council and partner managed websites and social media.

## **Citizens are financially and materially secure - achieving economic well-being**

### **What the Corporate Plan says**

Walsall's future depends on developing our people. Our aim is that all of our residents, families, communities and neighbourhoods reach their potential and become confident, self-motivated learners who will enable the borough to be a great place to live, work and invest. We will improve the facilities and opportunities available in schools and encourage life-long learning for everyone, to ensure that we have a local workforce with the right skills, expertise and knowledge for the local economy. Working with a range of partners, we will link new job opportunities to local residents and communities. We aim to procure products and services locally to enable local businesses to take advantage of expenditure taking place in the borough. A more prosperous economy will lead to other improvements such as better health and improved well-being, lower levels of crime and greater educational achievement.

### **What has Scrutiny done in 2009/10?**

Increasing enterprise and making Walsall a vibrant borough has been tackled across several Scrutiny and Performance Panels during the last year. Topics considered include:

- Integrated transport
- Highways maintenance
- Economic regeneration
- Street cleanliness
- Health inequalities
- Welfare advice

A key piece of work undertaken by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel was how the council and its partners were responding to the impact of the recession.

### **Issue**

The recession has had a huge impact on Walsall during the last 12 months. As the panel responsible for overseeing economic development the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel considered what work the council and its partners had undertaken to help local people and businesses during this tough period.

### **Key Findings**

Members found that unemployment in Walsall had risen by 75% since the start of the recession. The recession had affected the

manufacturing, automotive and construction industries most and there had been several large scale redundancies by Walsall employers.

The panel learnt that Walsall Partnership had convened its membership and developed a 'Credit Crunch Action Plan' which set out the range of actions that the Partnership would implement for the benefit of the local area including:

- Speeding up invoice payments from 28 to 14 days
- Increasing use of local suppliers where possible
- Increasing job opportunities including apprenticeships, work experience and training opportunities
- Business support packages were developed including direct support to employers
- Support packages for individuals were developed including a mortgage rescue scheme, rent guarantee scheme and increasing benefits advice.

Members were reassured that there was a genuine multi-agency approach to tackling the recession in Walsall which was further supported by additional plans on tackling worklessness and developing enterprise.

### **Outcome**

The panel was pleased with the response of the council and its partners to tackling the effects of the recession in the local area. Support to businesses and individuals had been provided when it was needed most.

The panel noted that Walsall and the West Midlands region are performing worse than the national averages regarding unemployment and therefore it was important that work to tackle this problem continues into the future. With this in mind Members have identified economic regeneration as a key area for the panel's work programme in 2010/11.





## Effective use of resources

### What the Corporate plan says

Effective use of resources is about achieving value for money, ensuring that council services are provided in a cost effective manner, and that the council makes best use of its resources – in terms of employees, buildings and other assets, and finances, whether from council tax, fees and charges, or government grant. This requires good governance structures – financial, legal, risk management, performance, partnerships – and a thorough understanding of the needs of the community, now and for the future, based upon technical expertise and an up to date knowledge of the views, concerns and expectations of local people.

## Delivering quality services and meeting customer expectations

### What the Corporate Plan says

Local people want council services to be available in the right way, the right place and at a time to suit them. Our citizens want to sort out their business with the council simply and quickly - with one visit to the council's offices, or one phone call, rather than several, and without being passed from pillar to post. We need to redesign how we provide services so that we put the customer at the heart of what we do. Our Customer Services Strategy will ensure that we meet our goal of providing high quality customer services through an organisation that listens, respects and values local people – our 'customers', protects their privacy, and provides information at the right time. To meet citizens' expectations of our services, we need to work with people who use our services, listen to their concerns, and set standards which reflect local needs and priorities.

## Taking forward the transformation agenda

### What the Corporate Plan says

The council will be a lean, flexible, responsive, forward looking organisation, successfully meeting the needs and expectations of the citizens and community of Walsall. Central to our transformation agenda are three programme, focussing on the *customer experience*, working with services to develop standards for customer care and service level, and delivering improved processes and front-line systems focussed on the needs of our customers; on *adaptive working*, focussing on our working practices, and the *people and change* programme focussing on our workforce, ensuring that our employees have the right skills for the council's future needs.

## What Scrutiny has done in 2009/10?

2009/10 has seen a number of Scrutiny Value for Money reviews, using a toolkit developed by Members to assess the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of services. The experience of customers has been key to a number of these investigations.

Services assessed this year include Procurement, Print and Design, Shopmobility and Development Control. Each of these was led by an individual member from the relevant panel who worked through the toolkit with officers. The toolkit pulls together data and information about different aspects of the service, including costs, performance and customer satisfaction and compares this with other organisations. Whilst officers will often carry out this kind of benchmarking activity for themselves, scrutiny involvement allows Members to act as a critical friend and challenge the assumptions that are being made about the data from a lay perspective whilst also bringing greater transparency to the process.


## Key Findings

**Procurement:** Whilst the small procurement team is generally offering good value for money, the council needs to develop a clearer vision of the role of procurement and commissioning across the council and embed a more consistent structure to deliver this vision. The service also needs to develop ways of measuring outcomes from procurement and commissioning activity to enable both councillors and officers to measure the impact and identify further improvements.

**Print and Design:** Councillors felt that the existing team were delivering a good and improving service that generally represented value for money. They were encouraged by recent successes in selling services to other organisations and were keen to see this developed further.

**Shopmobility:** Members were pleased with the efficiency and effectiveness of the current service but felt the longer term issue of sustainability needed to be addressed. The review took on board the findings of a survey of service users and the Chair of the local disability forum. They recommended pursuing links to Working Neighbourhoods Funding, combining premises with Walsall Centre for Independent Living to provide a better location for both services and exploring charitable status in conjunction with the Centre for Independent Living.

**Development Control:** The Development Control Service was found to be generally delivering an efficient and effective service at a cost below the average of the council's statistical neighbours. A focus group event with service users took place which provided valuable feedback from the customer perspective that the service could use to improve its



external dealings. Recommendations were made to monitor future spending to ensure budgets meet local need as well as other suggestions to improve and simplify the communication process with external customers by increasing the use of electronic delivery methods and reviewing customer service arrangements with the First Stop Shop.

### **Outcomes**

The Value for Money toolkit has been well received by Members who are keen to see more reviews carried out next year. In the annual scrutiny survey one member commented that *“it generated a sense of greater member engagement that was meaningful to them.”*

All reviews have resulted in a number of recommendations for improvement, some of which have begun, or been implemented, and others will require further consideration by the Executive. The implementation of recommendations, and their impact, will be monitored in the coming year.



## Annual Scrutiny Survey 2009/10

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 plus non-voting co-opted members, with the option of completing the survey online also available. A total of 16 responses were received including 8 electronically. The total response rate was 27% compared to 23% last year.

A range of questions were posed focusing on different scrutiny themes:

### Successful topics

Consideration of Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre was the most common answer with five Members identifying it as a success. This was followed by budget setting which four Members noted as a success. Members attributed the success of these topics particularly to *“raising awareness of key issues and being able to recommend priorities to Cabinet”*.

### Topics for 2010/11

An extensive range of potential topics were identified for the forthcoming year. These included; educational attainment of Looked After Children, waterways, the Common Assessment Framework (standardised approach to assessing children’s additional needs and how to meet them), a review of leisure facilities, the council’s response to local social care needs and single status.

### Performance

81% of Members were at least fairly satisfied with the results of scrutiny.

### Satisfaction with scrutiny

The majority of Members were reasonably satisfied with the structure, work programmes, frequency of meeting and effectiveness of panel/ working group meetings and Cabinet/ Portfolio Holder involvement.

### Budget scrutiny

56% of Members were at least satisfied with scrutiny’s overall participation in the budget setting process, with 36% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, with 6% not expressing a view.



## Future budget scrutiny

The majority of Members suggested that scrutiny's participation in budget setting should commence each June. It was noteworthy that a mixture of views were expressed regarding the best way for scrutiny to participate in the budget process. Seven Members felt that all Panels should consider the budget setting process for a number of reasons including, *"all Members should have the opportunity to feel engaged in the process"* and, *"there are implications for all areas of Council services"*. One Member felt that a single panel *"focussed on the overall budget will make for a better process"*. A total of eight Members felt that a specialist working group should consider the budget setting process, with views expressed including, *"it would provide a degree of independence"*, and given *"the complexity of the budget process and the need to have a deep understanding of the issues"*.

## Officer Support

The majority of Members were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with officer support from various council directorates and partner organisations.

## Member Development

Members identified a range of training they had received over the last year. This included; Development Control, an Audit Committee workshop, scrutiny, equality and diversity and risk. In terms of how training had assisted Members in carrying out their duties responses included, *"knowledge of improving efficiency in Highways procurement"*, *"knowledge of challenges facing Looked after Children"*, and *"a broader understanding of the Equalities and Diversity agenda"*. Members also recognised that development took place outside of the training room in their day to day roles and pointed to the knowledge and skills they have developed through involvement in working groups, value for money reviews and other scrutiny and wider council activity.

Members also commented that the training they had undertaken had contributed to the full range of corporate priorities. 75% of Members also felt that the training and development they had participated in had helped to improve the overall service they provide to the community.

Members identified a range of areas in which they would like to receive training or development during 2010/11. This included information technology, including social media, and guidance on how the council prioritises services.

# **SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANELS**

**2010/11**

## **FORWARD LOOKING STATEMENTS**



## CHILDREN'S & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Eddie Hughes**

Chair: Councillor E. Hughes  
 Vice-Chair: Councillor B. Cassidy  
 Membership: Councillors: A. Paul, K. Chambers, D. Shires, R. Martin, B. Thomas, O. Bennett, L. Beeley

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

<b>Improving health</b>	The Panel have established a working group to consider the health inequality issue of childhood obesity. Health Panel Members will also be invited to participate in the working group.
<b>Reducing crime &amp; feeling safe</b>	<p>This year a working group will consider Safeguarding, which will include educational attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) and the Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) process.</p> <p>Members will be considering progress towards the Children's Trust Board (CTB) becoming a statutory body and the implementation of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) by April 2011.</p>
<b>Improving education &amp; skills</b>	<p>The Panel will be continuing its involvement in ensuring education provision for pupils in relation to the staged closure of Sneyd School.</p> <p>The Panel will also be monitoring the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, with options for its future currently being considered by the Government as part of wider national funding decisions.</p> <p>The Panel will be considering education contract performance during the year. Serco, who provide education services in the borough on behalf of the council, will be presenting performance information related to different elements of the contract.</p>
<b>Working Smarter</b>	The Panel will also be considering the impact of budget reductions on service provision for local residents.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



Chair: Councillor L. Harrison  
 Vice-Chair: Councillor S. Coughlan  
 Membership: Councillors: O. Bennett, P. Bott, C. Creaney, R. Martin, G. Perry. K. Sears and D. Shires

**Louise Harrison**

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

<b>Reducing crime and feeling safe</b>	<p>The Panel will review progress with work towards implementing recommendations made by two previous working groups on anti-social behaviour (ASB) and on alcohol related ASB.</p> <p>Members will consider action undertaken by the Council and its partners to reduce perceptions of ASB.</p>
<b>Developing strong and dynamic communities</b>	<p>The Panel will consider work being undertaken to achieve poorly performing local area agreement targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.</li> <li>• the percentage of people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.</li> <li>• overall/general satisfaction with the local area.</li> <li>• creating an environment for a thriving third sector.</li> </ul> <p>Members will review the new neighbourhood management arrangements later in the year.</p>
<b>Improving the quality of our environment</b>	<p>Following a presentation to the Panel last year Members will monitor progress with the introduction of the community gardens scheme.</p>
<b>Improving health</b>	<p>A working group has been established to investigate and make recommendations on a future leisure centre strategy for the borough. Members will also be investigating activity taking place to achieve national indicator 8 adult participation in sport.</p>
<b>Improving education and skills</b>	<p>The challenging financial picture presents an opportunity to review the Councils library service to ensure a modern and sustainable operating model.</p>
<b>Working Smarter</b>	<p>A key piece of work identified is a review of Council public service outlets across the borough to try and identify more efficient ways of engaging with local residents.</p> <p>The budgets of services within the Panels remit will be monitored throughout the year.</p>



## CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Marco  
Longhi**

Chair: Councillor M. Longhi  
Vice-Chair: Councillor M. Nazir  
Membership: Councillors: R. Burley, M. Flower, A. Griffiths, L. Jeavons, J. Rochelle, I Shires, D Turner.

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

<b>Working Smarter</b>	<p>The Panel plan to leave capacity within their work programme to respond to any potential requirements of the new Government.</p> <p>The Panel will review progress to date with work towards implementing recommendations made by previous value for money reviews on;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• payroll and pensions,</li><li>• communications,</li><li>• print and design,</li><li>• procurement.</li></ul> <p>The Panel agreed to consider the working smarter programme i.e. the case for change towards new ways of working for the whole council. Members considered this crucial in the current financial climate to ensure that services were improved and efficiencies were achieved. Previous consultation work has shown that ensuring the Council provides value for money services and the Councils budget are important issues for local residents. In connection to this the panel will consider the Councils response to the spending transparency proposals.</p> <p>In light of national and local budget pressures the panel will also consider the efficiency of partnership arrangements and the value for money being delivered through the thematic groups under the Walsall Partnership arrangements.</p>
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## ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



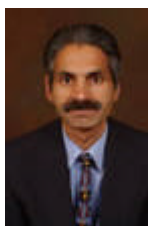
**Les  
Beeley**

Chair: Councillor L. Beeley  
 Vice-Chair: Councillor K. Chambers  
 Membership: Councillors: D. Anson, C. Bott, R. Carpenter,  
 J. Cook, A. Griffiths, B. Tweddle and M. Yasin

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

<b>Improving the quality of our environment</b>	<p>This is the top priority for the Panel in the year ahead.</p> <p>A working group has been established to investigate plans and strategies to reduce dog fouling in the local area. Previous consultation work has shown this is an important issue for local residents.</p> <p>Waste management will be an important part of the Panels work programme with items on the replacement bins policy, Project W2R and the waste strategy review planned.</p> <p>The Panel will be considering activity towards achieving national indicator 182 'per capita CO2 emissions' which is currently under performing in the Local Area Agreement.</p> <p>Members will also monitor implementation of the recommendations the Panel made last year on street cleansing.</p>
<b>Increasing enterprise and making Walsall a vibrant borough</b>	<p>Car parking is an area that the Panel plan to investigate this year. There are a number of separate areas to look into:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking in the town centre</li> <li>• Residents parking zones</li> <li>• Parking in residential areas</li> </ul>
<b>Improving health</b>	<p>Members will also be monitoring air quality across the borough as the area is air quality management area. This links with work being undertaken by the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel.</p>
<b>Developing strong and dynamic communities</b>	<p>Members will monitor work undertaken following the recommendations of the Integrated Transport Working Group which sought to improve ways the boroughs transportation systems linked together.</p>

## HEALTH SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Mohammed  
Yasin**

Chair: Councillor M. Yasin

Vice-Chair: Councillor V. Woodruff

Membership: Councillors M. Ahmed, I. Azam, O. Bennett, C. Creaney, K. Sears, I. Robertson, R. Thomas.

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

### IMPROVING HEALTH

In light of the current financial situation the Panel will assess the impact of proposed budget cuts on the NHS budget in Walsall and consider the impact on service delivery. Previous consultation work has shown that delivery of health care services (e.g. GPs, Dentists, ambulance service, hospital) is an important issue for local residents.

Following on from the dementia working group in the previous municipal year, the Panel will be involved in the launch and delivery of the dementia strategy.

The Panel will consider a range of performance information, namely:

- Red rated national indicators related to the panels remit. These indicators are 'participation in sport' (NI 008), 'childhood obesity' (NI 56) 'teenage conceptions' (NI 112), and 'all age all cause mortality rate' (NI 120)
- West Midlands Ambulance Service performance times
- Complaints to NHS Walsall and Walsall Manor Hospital
- Infection rates at Walsall Manor Hospital
- Performance information relating to Dudley Walsall Mental Health Partnership Trust

In addition to this work the panel will respond to those consultations which NHS Trusts feel the panel can add value to, such as the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, and Foundation Trust applications.



## REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Des  
Pitt**

Chair: Councillor D. Pitt  
Vice-Chair: Councillor D. Anson  
Membership: Councillors: M. Ahmed, I. Azam, D. Coughlan, S. Coughlan, L. Harrison, I. Shires, B. Tweddle.

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

<b>Reducing worklessness and creating opportunity and potential</b>	<p>The Panel will be focusing their efforts on key economic issues in order to help local residents affected by the recession. This will include monitoring activity to tackle worklessness and assist local businesses and encourage enterprise.</p> <p>Later in the year Members are keen to consider the outcome of Walsall's first Local Economic Assessment and look forward to shaping future service delivery.</p>
<b>Increasing enterprise and making Walsall a vibrant borough</b>	<p>To help deliver this key priority the Panel will take an overview of key regeneration projects in the borough such as the Walsall Gigaport and the development of the town centre.</p> <p>Key changes have been announced to regional and sub-regional working so the Panel will play a role in considering how important strategic issues will be taken forward in the absence of bodies, such as, Advantage West Midlands.</p>
<b>Improving housing choice</b>	<p>Housing in the borough is an important topic to local residents. Members will consider issues surrounding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Void properties</li> <li>• Energy efficiency in new homes</li> <li>• Housing allocation policy</li> <li>• Housing allocation policy 2011-2014</li> </ul>
<b>Developing strong and dynamic communities</b>	<p>The succession strategy for the New Deal for Communities scheme will be reviewed to help ensure that the benefits of the scheme continue to be felt in the New Deal area after Government funding ends in 2011.</p>
<b>Working smarter</b>	<p>Members will monitor the budgets of services within remit throughout the year.</p>

## SOCIAL CARE & INCLUSION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL



**Tim  
Oliver**

Chair: Councillor T. Oliver  
Vice-Chair: Councillor A. Paul  
Membership: Councillors: B. Douglas-Maul, A Griffiths, J. O'Hare, D. Turner, J. Barton, M. Hurley, V. Woodruff

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:

<b>Improving health</b>	<p>A working group to consider the introduction of Personalisation in Walsall has been re-established from the previous municipal year. The Panel considered this important as the programme, which is aimed at providing individuals with greater control over the type of support services they receive, is now moving into its implementation stage.</p> <p>Members will be participating in the development of a retail model for the provision of equipment and adaptations for service users. The objective of this approach is to enable individuals to have greater flexibility over the purchase of equipment, with many high street retailers now stocking these products.</p>
<b>Reducing worklessness &amp; creating opportunity &amp; potential</b>	<p>The Panel will be continuing its involvement in the restructuring of the council's Links to Work service. This is a work preparation and supported employment service for people who have a disability or are disadvantaged by society.</p>
<b>Developing strong and dynamic communities</b>	<p>This year a working group will consider activity underway to deliver in house homecare, neighbourhood community officers and community alarms in partnership with the Police and Fire Service to deliver a multi-level response across the borough for vulnerable adults.</p> <p>Members will be considering the progress and activity of Walsall LINK (Local Involvement Network), the organisation which enables residents to participate in decision making in relation to local health service provision. This follows the introduction of a new host organisation and the election of a new LINK board.</p>
<b>Working Smarter</b>	<p>The Panel will also be considering the impact of budget reductions on service provision for local residents.</p>