

Council – 21 April 2008

Annual Scrutiny Report 2007/08

Portfolio: Performance Management – Councillor Arif

Service: Corporate Performance Management

Wards All

Summary of report

This is the annual report to Council outlining the work of scrutiny in 2007/08. The report provides an overview of the work undertaken during the municipal year by each of the panels and their respective working groups.

Recommendations

Council are recommended to:

- (1) note the annual scrutiny report for the 2007/08 municipal year (annexed) and that this will inform the further developments of the council's scrutiny function.

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.

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

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.

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 Scrutiny 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 Scrutiny 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 Scrutiny to take a risk based approach to the development of their 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.

Equality implications

This report details all of the work that Scrutiny has been involved with 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.

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 prior to publication.

Vision

Effective Scrutiny will touch on each of the priorities identified within the council's vision. These priorities are all considered during the scoping exercise of establishing of a work programme. Outcomes identified within this report and delivered through Scrutiny can help the council to achieve its stated ambition of becoming an excellent authority.

Background papers

Scrutiny Annual Report at **Appendix 1**.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tim Johnson', is written over a vertical line.

Tim Johnson – Executive Director
11 April 2008

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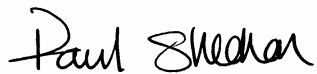
Walsall
Council

Foreword

Walsall Council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels make an important contribution to the decision making process.

During the last year Scrutiny Members have considered topics around strategic transportation, welfare rights, affordable housing, school attainment, obesity and the Illuminations. These examples show the diverse contribution that Scrutiny Members make to Walsall and its residents.

The opportunity now exists to further develop this vital field of Member work. Particular opportunities include the examination of Council policy and the policy and performance of some of our partner agencies.



Paul Sheehan
Chief Executive

Contents

Introduction	4
Issues across all Panels	7
Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel	9
Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel	13
Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel	17
Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel	21
Health Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel	27
Health Sub-Panel	31
Scrutiny Working Group	39

Introduction

Scrutiny is about helping the Council achieve its priorities and making the Council more accountable for the decisions they make on behalf of the local community by questioning key decisions made by the council's executive (cabinet) and officers.

Scrutiny provides the opportunity for councillors to examine the various functions of the council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and make recommendations to this effect.

Scrutiny panels can invite those who they believe can help with their investigations to give 'evidence' and the public attending are welcome to participate in asking questions of those making submissions to the panel. Scrutiny needs to be fully focussed on those things that matter most and on outcomes that make a real difference to local citizens.

Scrutiny and performance panels carry out their role through:

- Monitoring of Cabinet decisions and challenging Cabinet Members as to why they have taken a particular decision and, if not satisfied, asking them to think again.
- Undertaking investigation into specific service areas or issues. These can be in-depth inquiries into specific subjects, leading to substantial recommendations for how things need to change.
- Making recommendations to Cabinet/Council.
- Contributing towards policy development and scrutinising draft policy and project plans before they are implemented by the executive.
- Health consultations – by law we have a responsibility to respond to the NHS when they are proposing changes to health service delivery.
- Monitoring the financial and service performance of the Council.

- Tracking progress in implementing approved scrutiny recommendations.

Further information on the role of scrutiny in the authority can be found in our "Tool-Kit for Scrutiny" which can be requested from our scrutiny team (see contact details on rear).

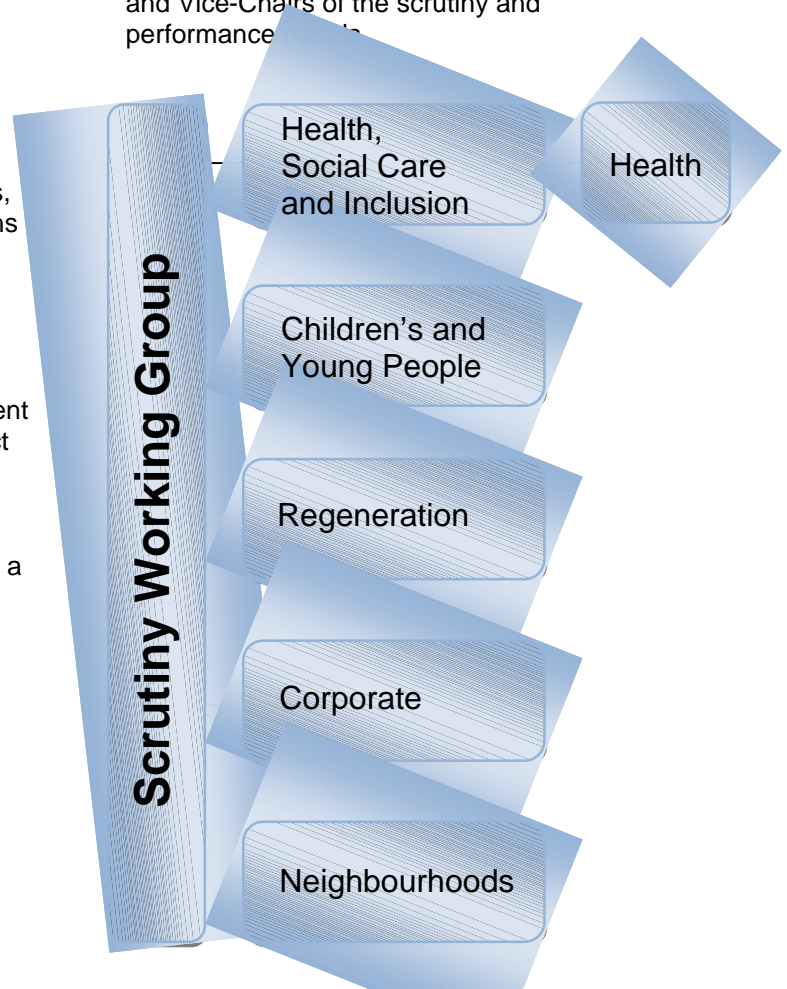
Structure of Scrutiny

Walsall has five scrutiny and performance panels, each one shadowing a strategic theme of the Council's work.

The panels are:

- Children's and Young People
- Corporate
- Health, Social Care and inclusion – the Health Scrutiny Panel operates as a sub-committee of this panel.
- Neighbourhoods
- Regeneration

The panels are overseen by a Scrutiny Working Group, consisting of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the scrutiny and performance panels.



Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

There were a number of issues considered across all five of Walsall Council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels during the last year. For completeness commentary on these issues has been amalgamated.

**Issues across
all Panels**

Budget

All scrutiny and performance panels considered the budget options for their service areas for 2008/09 over two rounds of meetings that led to a number of recommendations being put forward to Cabinet.

During consideration of the budget options a number of panels made comments about the timing of the budget exercise. The corporate scrutiny and performance panel felt that it would be beneficial in future to hold its budget scrutiny meetings after the provisional financial settlement had been received from the Government. This led to the panel calling an extra meeting to reconsider their initial recommendations following receipt of the additional information from Government. This suggestion has been passed onto the Scrutiny Working Group for its consideration.

The regeneration scrutiny and performance panel reconvened to receive further details about the services that recommendations were being considered on after their first budget meeting to enable considered recommendations to be made. The panel also made a recommendation to the scrutiny working group to consider alternative methods for scrutiny to become involved in the budget setting process.

A series of recommendations from the majority of the scrutiny and performance panels was submitted and considered by cabinet to assist in the drafting and preparation of the 2008/09 Walsall Council budget.

Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) was considered by all scrutiny and performance panels at a number of meetings during the last year.

Members were informed on how the SCS was to be the vision for Walsall until 2021 and that its aims and priorities would be fed into the new Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Panel were pleased to hear that the council's priorities were to match those expressed in the SCS.

Following a suggestion from the corporate scrutiny and performance panel copies of the draft SCS were circulated to every library in the borough.

All panels were informed of the development of the new LAA for Walsall. Members were informed that it Walsall was going to have fewer than the maximum 35 indicators in its LAA to ensure greater focus on the indicators that were chosen.

Forward Plan

Each of Walsall Council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels receives the latest version of the Forward Plan at each of its meetings. It is used to identify future key decisions that could of interest to scrutiny.

Following comments from Members about the Forward Plan the following actions have been taken:

- David Martin, Interim Chief Executive, requested that all Officers submitting items to the Forward Plan contained sufficient detail as to what the decision related to and entailed
- Scrutiny Officers are monitoring the Forward Plan before agenda planning meetings to ensure that potential issues for scrutiny are identified as soon as possible

The result of these actions will be monitored quarterly.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“An interesting year, particularly our examination of the new initiatives on waste and recycling, working with partners to bring in the lease arrangements for the Community Associations and monitoring the arrangements for the introduction of de-criminalised parking in June 2008”

Councillor Chris Towe.

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel



Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor Towe (Chair)
Councillor Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Mushtaq
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Beilby
Councillor P Bott
Councillor J Phillips
Councillor Sears
Councillor Woodruff

Walsall Illuminations 2007

During the course of the last year the Panel regularly considered the Walsall Illuminations.

Four Illuminations steering groups were formed and met. They were:

- Marketing
- Links with the town centre
- Development
- Investment

A corridor of lights was planned but there were some technical and resource issues associated with this as the lampposts were not owned by the council. An agreement with the contractor Amey to put lights up on Lichfield Street and the Civic Centre, had been reached as part of a long term programme growing year on year.

The Arboretum User Group was been involved at all stages to ensure the environmental impact of the Illuminations had been assessed. Members were also informed that bids had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for restoration of the Arboretum which will make the environment impact more subtle.

Members were informed that the dates for the Illuminations had changed and would now be open 19 October – 2 December; the move in schedule would also allow the illuminations to open earlier as it would be darker.

Members were advised that a business manager had been employed to increase the income potential of the illuminations and the panel was kept in touch with the development, marketing and sponsorship of the event.

Following a proposal by Members Travel West Midlands agreed to provide free buses to the Arboretum. However, take up of the service was poor. Members felt that it should be trialled again in 2008 when awareness had been improved.

The Panel were informed that initial Illuminations surveys were good. 25% of visitors were new, 8.2 out of 10 visitors gave a positive perception of price and venue and 8.5 out of 10 were positive about the food. 88.5% said the event met expectations and was correctly promoted. 70% would visit again

the following year. 95% said they came to the town solely to visit the illuminations. The website proved popular with over 1million hits.

However, visitor numbers at 120,000 was less than the expected 180,000. Compared to 160,000 the previous year, this gave an overall shortfall of £217,000.

The Panel was informed that the plan for 2008 was to base all budgets on visitor numbers of 150,000, to reduce expenditure and to look at all ways of increasing the levels of sponsorship.

The Panel suggested holding the Illuminations earlier so that it ran during school half-term holidays and Halloween and with potentially better weather. These recommendations were contained within a report to Cabinet on 6 February and were agreed.

The panel agreed to support an on-going, but scaled down, development of the Illuminations for 2008.

Car Park Strategy

The Panel considered their involvement in decriminalised parking during the previous municipal year. Members were informed that the responsibility for parking enforcement will be coming to the Council in April 2008. A key requirement of this was that a formal car park strategy was in place. Members were informed that the Council had recognised that a more comprehensive strategy was required to allow it to consider the way parking was managed in the future, and in addition to this disabled parking needed to be improved. Members were asked to provide their recommendations on the strategy.

Decriminalisation of this activity would mean the council would have responsibility for managing compliance with waiting restrictions and could direct resources to help control this. At present around 60% of councils have responsibility for de-criminalised parking. The Panel were advised that it has significant financial implications, particularly in the early years.

The implementation has now been changed to June 2008.

The Panel were advised that there is currently a review of existing traffic regulation orders for ongoing relevance, whilst noting locations where potential new orders may assist with the management of traffic congestion in the future. Prior to any new orders being implemented, a full and thorough consultation exercise would be undertaken with local residents. Implementation of new traffic regulation orders has to be done within a legal framework that includes an invitation to object to the proposal.

Community Association Leases

Recommendations due to go to Cabinet had initially been delayed to give the changed administration more time to understand the wider implications. Developments nationally with the Quirk Review meant that there was government incentive (via lottery funds) to transfer community association buildings into a third party trust. There was, however, still an issue of maintenance and specifically how the council could bring the current buildings up to an acceptable standard prior to transfer.

It was recommended to Cabinet that the overview of the bid process for community associations is overseen by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel. Due to the short timescales for submitting a bid for the first round, it was not possible to pull an application together. It is expected that further rounds will be announced.

The Panel look forward to considering the issue in the future following a further review by Cabinet.

Highway Maintenance

The Panel continued to monitor arrangements for the procurement of a new 'Highways Repairs and Maintenance Partnership'. Members were advised that a project board had been established and Knowles Legal Services had been appointed to provide specialist procurement advice. Members were also advised that arrangements had been put in place to keep staff, and unions informed about progress.

The panel discussed how updates would be received, and decided that regular updates would be provided to the panel and a special meeting could be arranged if necessary to update the panel and seek their views.

Members considered the items for inclusion on the work programme for the municipal year.

Waste Management Working Group

At this meeting on 2 August 2007 the Panel established a Waste Management Working Group to consider the range of changes that the council would be required to make if it was to meet the challenging landfill diversion targets being introduced by the Government.

The working group considered the results of the waste management options consultation and made a range of recommendations that were submitted to Cabinet,

The working group has recently considered the Waste Management Implementation Plan and a proposal for Walsall Council to supply residual waste to a planned Energy from Waste facility in Staffordshire and is set to review a wide range of the council waste management policies during the coming months.

Community Call for Action (CCfA) Working Group

The introduction of a Community Call for Action followed the introduction of Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and led to NSPP to establish a CCfA Working Group.

Members and officers discussed the background to Community call for Action (CCfA) from both The Home Office and The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Members agreed that Walsall Council should consider the development of a set of guidelines and procedures even though The Home Office version of CCfA had been paused following the Flanagan review and that guidelines for the DCLG version were still being developed. It was acknowledged that changes to the original proposal from the Home Office had already been proposed including the removal of the right of appeal which now brought the two versions much closer in terms of process.

The working group have recently participated in a consultation from DCLG on CCfA. The results are expected during the summer and will be considered by the working group in due course.

Environmental Enforcement

The Panel heard how substantial progress had been made in tackling environmental crime and how the council was working effectively with other agencies to combat the issue.

The Panel's input was sought prior to the Environmental Enforcement Improvement Plan going to Cabinet and the Safer Stronger Communities Board. The cabinet subsequently approved an action plan to increase environmental enforcement activity and also to try to increase public awareness of the scheme.

The report to Members revealed that a number of changes had been made within the relevant departments to increase enforcement action in relation to dog fouling, fly tipping, graffiti and littering.

The Panel also heard how the council had successfully bid for local area agreement funding which enabled a 'litter hit squad' and 'graffiti removal team' to be established within Street Pride.

The report also revealed to the Panel that revenue raised through issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for littering and environmental crimes would be spent on educational campaigns and to assist in environmental enforcement.

Bereavement Services – Review of Fees and Charges

At the request of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel, Neighbourhoods SPP monitored the fees and charges of the Bereavement Services.

An overview was given of the costs of the service and the proposed increases and provided a comparison with charges levied by neighbouring council's.

In addition to items already detailed the Panel considered the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the outcome of the Street Trading Review consultation, Community Safety and the Performance of the Neighbourhoods Directorate.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“A really pleasing year which has seen the development of positive, strong cross party working relationships across all panel members. This has been reflected through some very complimentary comments in the annual scrutiny survey. During the past year the panel has considered in detail, amongst a number of issues, the future management options for the Welfare Rights Service and contributed to the development of a new council procurement strategy through the procurement working group.”

Councillor Marco Longhi.



Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor Longhi (Chair)
Councillor Nazir (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bird
Councillor Cook
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor J Phillips
Councillor Sarohi
Councillor Towe
Councillor Turner

Welfare Rights Service

The panel first started investigating the possibility of the Welfare Rights Service (WRS) becoming a charitable trust during the last municipal year following a resolution from Council.

During consideration of this area the panel received a report it commissioned from the Institute of Revenues and Ratings (IRRV) on the WRS and potential future options. The report identified a number of questions that needed to be addressed before a Trust could be created. Members felt that a trust was still the right option for the WRS so following consideration of the IRRV report it was requested that a draft business case be written for the creation of a charitable trust.

The panel considered this briefing case and recommended it to Council for endorsement. The report was considered by Council and passed onto Cabinet. Cabinet considered the recommendations of the panel as well as the IRRV report and draft business case and decided to retain the service in house for the time beginning whilst potential future service delivery models were considered.

Budget

The panel considered the budget options for 2008/09 over four meetings that led to a number of recommendations being put forward to Cabinet.

During consideration of the budget options the panel made a number of comments about the timing of the budget exercise. The panel felt that it would be beneficial in future to hold its budget scrutiny meetings after the provisional financial settlement had been received from the Government. This suggestion has been passed onto the Scrutiny Working Group for its consideration.

Electronic Document Management System

Following research undertaken by the Revenues and Benefits Working Group last year on potential Electronic Document Management Systems (EDMS) the panel reviewed the implementation and performance of the newly implemented system.

Members were pleased by the successful implementation of the new system in record time and the benefits that it had delivered and recommended that it be considered for use across other council departments.

Performance Information Management System and Data Quality

In recognition of the important role that performance data plays in assisting service delivery the panel considered the Performance Information Management System (PIMS) that is used to monitor overall performance and safety measures that are put in place to ensure data quality.

Members were happy with the range of systems in place and felt that the more easily accessible and up-to-date performance information was available to Members and Officers the better.

Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) was considered by the panel at a number of meetings during the last year.

Members were informed on how the SCS was to be the vision for Walsall until 2021 and that its aims and priorities would be fed into the new Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Panel were pleased to hear that the council's priorities were to match those expressed in the SCS.

Following a suggestion from the Panel copies of the draft SCS were circulated to every library in the borough.

Information Security at Walsall Council

Following recent high profile losses of data by the Government Members wanted to research what efforts the council was making to ensure that the valuable data it holds on local citizens and employees was protected.

The panel reviewed the current information security and were informed that this it was being revised in light of a recent audit. The panel were pleased to note that it was the intention for the council to achieve ISO 27001 standard on information security.

Corporate Services Performance

In addition to the issues already reported the Panel, along with all other Scrutiny and Performance Panels, have monitored the performance of those council teams and functions within their remit.

Forward Plan

Each of Walsall Council's Scrutiny and Performance Panels receives the latest version of the Forward Plan at each of its meetings. It is used to identify future key decisions that could of interest to scrutiny.

During the course of the year a number of suggestions have been made for improvements to the format of the Forward Plan. These were:

- No ambiguous key decision headings
 - Further details about the nature of each decision be included
 - A date where each item could potentially come to scrutiny be included
-

Procurement Working Group

The panel established a working group to consider the important issue of procurement within the council. As procurement is included in the remit of the children and young peoples scrutiny and performance panel the chair of that panel, Councillor E. Hughes, was invited to and joined the working group.

During the course of their work the working group have considered the range of areas where the council is seeking to make procurement savings and has considered and commented on the councils procurement strategy before it was approved by cabinet.

The working group is nearing the conclusion of its considerations but still has some important areas to investigate including future plans for now the council and its partners can engage with local businesses and the council's mobile phone contracts.

A full report on the working group's considerations and its recommendations will be made to the panel during the next municipal year.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“A really productive year were Members have considered and contributed to the development of a new transport strategy for Walsall.

The panel has been, and will continue to be involved in, the regeneration of Walsall Town Centre and the relocation of Walsall Market.

I would like to thank everyone for their positive contribution towards a successful year.”

Councillor Des Pitt.

Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel



Membership for 2007/08:

Cllr D Pitt (Chair)
Cllr Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Ansell
Cllr Anson
Cllr G Clarke
Cllr Flower
Cllr I Shires
Cllr Wilkes
Cllr Yasin

Walsall Market (budgets analysis)

Following on from its work in previous years the panel has considered a range of issues concerning the relocation of Walsall market at panel and working group level throughout the year.

Members first considered the principle of relocating the market including the identification of a preferred new location. Evidence was received from an independent consultant, Walsall Market Traders Association and Walsall Small Business Alliance. After much debate and stakeholder engagement a range of recommendations were submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

After this Members moved to consider the future financial and management options for the new market.

Strategic Transportation

The panel continued its valuable work on strategic transportation issues by establishing a working group to assist in the development of a transport strategy for the next 15 years.

The working group undertook a wide ranging questionnaire style consultation exercise with a variety of partners, stakeholders and local interest groups asking for their views on draft aims and priorities that had been developed. This led to a productive focus group meeting of a selection of the consultees which fed into the working groups conclusions which were approved by the panel and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

Past and Present Use of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

At its meeting on 27 September 2007 Council resolved for the panel to consider a report from Cabinet on the past and present use of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF).

Members considered the matter at a special meeting in late December and in addition to the Cabinet report heard evidence from the Director and Chairman of Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership and the former Head of Programmes.

After a long debate the panel resolved that although there had been problems with the administration of NRF in its early years these problems had been addressed and that the money had been clearly spent and accounted for.

New Deal for Communities

The panel considered the New Deal for Communities (NDC) scheme that was delivering a community regeneration programme within an area that covered Bloxwich, Bloxwich East and Leamore Wards.

Members considered the scheme to be a success upon hearing of the many initiatives that the NDC was working on. The important issue was that this work was sustained once NDC funding ended in 2011. The panel was assured that long term succession planning was already being considered.

The long term sustainability of the NDC's priorities will be considered by the panel in the next municipal year.

Regeneration Projects

During the last year the panel have considered the various regeneration schemes that are taking place in Walsall town centre and across the borough as well as the Single Regeneration Framework.

This has included regeneration work in St. Matthews Quarter, Darlaston SDA, Walsall Gigaport and Office Corridor, Waterfront North and South and Walsall First.

Managing and Monitoring Section 106 Planning Obligations

The panel learnt how the council was using section 106 of the town and country planning act 1990 for certain works or contributions in accordance from developers for issues related to the unitary development plan.

The number of agreements has increased in recent years which has lead to the employment of a monitoring officer to oversee and ensure compliance with the agreements made.

The panel expressed concern about the perceived lack of understanding that surrounded section 106 agreements particularly concerning the restrictions that existed on how monies raised could be spent.

Regeneration Performance Monitoring and Finance Update

The panel have monitored the performance of the Regeneration Directorate over the course of the last year.

Members were pleased to hear that overall performance in the directorate was high and that all identified problem areas were being addressed.

Budget wise the only area of concern was with markets which was failing to meet its income generation target. This issue was considered as part of the budget setting process.

Urban Design Guide/Conserving Walsall's Natural Environment

Two supplementary planning documents have been considered by the panel during the last year.

Members learnt that the Urban Design Guide had been developed to support policies in the unitary development plan that related to:

- Urban Design
- Landscape Design
- Public Art

Members were supportive of the document and expressed their concerns about the high level of apartments that were being constructed.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“The panel has had a very successful year which has included very strong involvement in overseeing the negotiation of the new education contract. This included two panel members sitting on the Education Contract Project Board. The panel has completed some excellent investigations through the Safeguarding and Property Services Working Groups. I would like to add my thanks to Councillor Gary Perry for his engagement with the Safeguarding Working Group.”

Councillor Eddie Hughes.

Children’s and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel



Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor E Hughes (Chair)
Councillor E.E Pitt (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Mushtaq
Councillor Bird
Councillor Cassidy
Councillor Chambers
Councillor Khan
Councillor Martin
Councillor Micklewright

Education contract

The panel received updates on the progress of the recommissioning of the education contract at each panel meeting, and had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the contract. The panel acknowledged the tight timescales within which the Council was operating was pleased to note that contingency plans were in place and commended the procurement process to date which is being overseen by the Education Contract Project Board. The panel considered it beneficial that two members of the scrutiny panel are also members of the Project Board.

Following the award of the contact, members were involved in discussions with officers about the negotiation points of the contract. The client management structure will be considered by the panel in the next municipal year.

Joint Area Review (JAR)

An overview of the JAR process was given to the panel, including the project management arrangements in place. This presentation informed the panels work programme for the year.

The final JAR inspection report will be considered by the panel in the next municipal year.

Youth Service

At its meeting on 23rd April 2007 Council resolved for the panel to consider the duty under section 6 of the education and inspections act and investigate the provision for positive activities for different age groups.

The panel were given detail on the action that was being taken to meet the requirements. A progress report was sent to council detailing work completed to date. It was agreed that the motion from council would be considered through a working group, this commenced in January 2008.

School standards summary table

The panel received overarching results for each curriculum stage from foundation stage through to A-levels, and the 2003-07 picture.

A more detailed analysis of the attainment information will be presented at the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 17 April 2008.

Sustainable Communities Strategy

The Sustainable Community Strategy has been developed by Walsall Partnership and aims to influence the plans of organisations in the borough, and deliver positive and sustainable outcomes for the community.

The development of the Sustainable Community Strategy was presented to all Scrutiny and Performance Panels. The Sustainable Community Strategy was subject to a 12 week public consultation. The Scrutiny and Performance Panel was invited to make comments on the strategy and feedback.

Section 106 contributions

This stream of work was carried over from the last municipal year; section 106 contributions attempt to alleviate the impact of new developments, in terms of additional pressure that it would place on existing educational provision by requiring developers to make reasonable contributions to the Council for any additional capacity required.

The panel were concerned that if the Council did not spend the money within the requirements of section 106 there was provision for the developer to claim the money back. The panel were assured that the Council had a substantial amount of time (until 2011) to spend the most recently received money. Based on the consideration of this item, the panel now consider a quarterly spreadsheet detailing the breakdown of education contributions received from section 106 monies.

Teenage pregnancy update

The panel were informed that government targets existed to reduce teenage pregnancy by 2010, which would be a challenge in Walsall. 'Hotspots' in Walsall would be targeted to raise aspirations and achievements. The panel received information on the development of supported accommodation for teenage mothers, and requested further information when this had been progressed.

Print and design options appraisal

The panel were concerned that the print and design unit were contributing to the overspend in the Children's services directorate, and requested that the print and design options appraisal was taken to scrutiny prior to its submission to Cabinet. Members challenged the processes, including the status of leases for equipment, staffing issues and trading account information.

Corporate financial overview and Draft C&YP budget 2008/09 proposals

Members received information on corporate pressures and residents opinions on how the Councils money should be spent.

Based on the information available to the panel, members did not express any significant concerns or objections to the budget options contained within the savings options and welcome the proposed investment option for additional child care workers to support the development of localised integrated working.

6 Monthly Performance Update

The panel have monitored the performance of the Children's Directorate over the course of the last year.

Members were pleased to hear that overall performance in the directorate was high and that all identified problem areas were being addressed.

Progress of children who have moved schools due to closures

Following concerns raised by parents about the closure of a local primary school, the panel requested information on the educational attainment of those children who had moved schools due to the closure. The panel were reassured that consideration had been given to how the curriculum's of the two schools compared, how pupils would be affected by the move and which members of staff needed to be involved to ensure that children were supported. The panel were informed that the progress of the pupils was good and there seemed to be no detrimental impact on their educational attainment as a result of the move.

As a result of the information received, a letter of thanks was sent to the head teacher at the primary school thanking them for their hard work and commitment.

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check update

In the last municipal year the panel recognised the importance of CRB checks for all elected members, and sent a recommendation to Cabinet on 1 March 2006, that all elected members should receive a CRB check. The panel have monitored the number of elected members who have been CRB checked and provided information through the panel to facilitate this process.

The Chair of the scrutiny panel sent a letter to each political group leader urging them to encourage members to complete their CRB forms.

Local Area Agreement

The panel received an update on progress made in developing the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Walsall; members were informed of the shortened 'long-list' of indicators submitted to Government Office (GOWM) on 25 January 2008; and it outlined the next steps in reaching a 'near final' version which will be taken to Cabinet for approval on 19 March 2008.

Adoption inspection feedback

Members were informed that the adoption and fostering feedback had deemed the service to be satisfactory with no inadequate areas, and an action plan would address areas that needed improvement.

Connexions report

A government decision has been made to channel the funding for Connexions Services through local authorities from April 2008. Members were informed that the main focus of Connexions Services is to support young people, through transition, into positive post 16 outcomes – reducing NEET group (not in Employment, Education or Training). It also has statutory obligations – to assist young people in education and to decide on employment and training opportunities.

The panel considered the best option for the delivery of this service in Walsall to be that the existing provider continues to deliver the Connexions Service for a specified period, in consideration of other Black Country local authority arrangements.

Safeguarding Children Working Group review

The Safeguarding Working Group conducted a review of how children were being safeguarded in Walsall; its work streams were;

- Domestic violence
- Bullying, and
- Safer recruitment

It considered evidence under these work streams and produced a review document, which was approved by the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel. It has made a number of recommendations which will be monitored by the Children's and Young Peoples Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Property Services Working Group

The group received an overview of property services, and considered officer presentations on areas for which they had responsibility. The initial remit of the working group was to consider property services, and buildings within education premises, and children's services. Members drafted 5 objectives for which they would consider evidence to ensure that the Council was achieving value for money in its investments.

Its findings were:

That processes were in place to prevent projects going significantly over budget and a quantity surveyor was employed in projects and design and also in procurement, but that also an external quantity surveyor could be used. Members were pleased that there was no longer a backlog in the priority one maintenance schedule. Members received a major project update including photographs of Joseph Leckie School. The working group went on a visit to the new Mary Elliott School site.

The group wanted to ensure that processes are in place to allow major work to be done during the school closure period and to improve communication between the estates and asset management office and elected members. Issues around this and solutions were discussed.

Positive Activities Working Group

This working group was set up to consider the **Council motion on the Youth Service (23rd April 2007)**

As from 8.1.07 under section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are expected to secure access for young people to “positive activities” including youth clubs, sports facilities and arts projects. “Positive activities might include sports clubs, cultural events, volunteering schemes or arts projects but the scope is broad and activities can be educational or recreational – so long as they contribute to young people’s well being”. Projects should be delivered in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

This Council therefore requests the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel to consider this duty and investigate the provision for positive activities available to different age groups. Furthermore, the responsible Cabinet Member provides a report together with any recommendations from Scrutiny to full Council (within six months) as to the implementation of the requirement of the 2006 Act.

The working group is proposing considering the following;

- The existing youth offer
- Engagement of vulnerable groups LAC, C&YP with learning and physical disabilities
- Current compliance with legislation (Education Act 2006)

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“Health and social care is an absolutely crucial service for our local communities and families, young and old. Our job as a Scrutiny Panel is to promote the best possible quality of life and independence for local people at difficult and stressful times in their lives. We know there is much excellent work done, but also that there are enormous challenges across the social care and health economies”

Councillor Tim Oliver.



Health Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor Oliver (Chair)
Councillor Ault (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Barton
Councillor Bird
Councillor Micklewright
Councillor Paul
Councillor D Pitt
Councillor Robertson
Councillor Woodruff

Disabled Facilities Grant

The panel considered the disabled facilities grant at a number of meetings throughout the year and had a number of concerns about the proposals suggested by cabinet.

The panel appreciated the need for the council to work smarter with their resources but were concerned about a ceiling being applied to grants and the length of time it took for facilities to be in place for all applicants. This was particularly true for those residents who required minor adaptations who were waiting significant amounts of time for minor aids to be installed. Over the course of the year Members heard that changes were being made to how waiting lists were tackled that would ensure that residents with a variety of needs were assisted.

The panel were keen to see additional resources made available to this service so that residents could receive the aids and adaptations that they were in need of.

As part of their consideration of this issue the panel instigated its own benchmarking work with Walsall's statistical neighbours.

Hollybank House Reprovision

The reprovision of Hollybank House was considered by the panel following a call-in of the cabinet decision. The decision was called-in as it was felt that as the cabinet report identified a preferred option, it implied a decision had already been made before consultation with the scrutiny panel and residents of Hollybank House.

Following recommendations by the panel it was confirmed by Cabinet that no decision had yet been made and that all options were still open for consideration. Cabinet also confirmed their wish for scrutiny to be fully involved in monitoring all future issues with the reprovision of Hollybank House.

Further consideration of the issue led the panel to consider the consultation process that was taking place on the possible changes to the services provided by Hollybank House.

Community Meals Gateway

The panel considered the issue of community meals and expressed their desire to cabinet for the supply of daily freshly produced or regenerated meals. The panel felt this issue had not been considered as part of the tendering process for the new contract and asked that cabinet investigate methods of including these sorts of meals in the new deal.

Local Involvement Networks (LINKS)

LINKS has been an issue that has been monitored by the panel throughout the last year.

LINKS is to be the body that replaces the Patient and Public Involvement Forum's for health and social care issues. In order to establish a LINK a local host organisation needs to be appointed. The panel have monitored the procurement of the host organisation throughout the year and look forward to engaging with the LINK when it is established.

Supporting People Inspection and Supporting People Improvement Towards Excellence Plan

The panel heard that the supporting people inspection had not identified any weaknesses that the council was not already aware of and addressing. Service improvements could be achieved by the embedding of national practices locally. The nature of these improvements led to the development of a 'Towards Excellence Plan' rather than the usual style improvement plan.

The panel have monitored the implementation of this plan on an exception basis.

Registered Social Landlord Void Turn Around Times

Members were informed that the void turn around period for registered social landlords was improving well. The turn-around time had been an area of concern in 2005/06.

Performance Monitoring

The panel have, along with officers, developed their own performance scorecard to monitor the performance of the Social Care and Inclusion Directorate, this scorecard is reported quarterly to the panel, with commentary on all red measures, including planned corrective action.

Affordable Housing Working Group

The panel established a joint working group with the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel to consider the issue of affordable housing in Walsall.

The working group have considered a range of issues during their work including the legislation that exists around housing, including a draft supplementary planning document, and heard evidence from Officers from Strategic Housing, Regeneration and Development and Control as well as considering the national perspective by receiving information from Housing Justice.

In addition to these issues the panel have also considered the Older Peoples Action Plan, the Homelessness One Offer Policy and monitored the budget of the Social Care and Inclusion Directorate at Walsall Council.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“The health panel has had a very busy, productive and proactive year. We had the challenge of forming a joint scrutiny committee with Dudley about the configuration of mental health services. We have also been closely evaluating the development of the PFI at the Manor Hospital, hospital discharges, commissioning of services in the tPCT, as well as participating in a substantial task in completing the Annual Health Checks on the Hospital Trust, tPCT and Ambulance Service. I was especially pleased how the obesity working group participated in looking at accessibility and types of activities available in order to help people become more active in losing weight therefore changing their lifestyles. I would also like to thank the Director of Public Health for his help and support.”
Councillor Val Woodruff.



Health Scrutiny Panel

Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor Woodruff (Chair)
Councillor Paul (Vice Chair)
Councillor Micklewright
Councillor Roberson

Health representatives:

Dr Sam Ramaiah – Director of Public Health
Mr Jim Weston – Patient Forum
Mrs D Russell – PALS (NHS)
Mrs Cath Boneham – PALS (PCT)

Future Configuration of Mental Health Services in Walsall and Dudley

Issue

Mental health services are currently provided by integrated Council and PCT Services in the Borough areas of Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton and by the Sandwell Mental Health NHS and Social Care Trust for people resident in Sandwell.

In January 2005, senior officers from the Black Country PCT's, local authorities and the Sandwell Mental Health Care Trust formed a Project Board to review the current configuration of mental health services. The creation of a single mental health trust providing specialised mental health care was recommended by the Project Board, but both Wolverhampton and later Sandwell opted not to join. The Boroughs of Dudley and Walsall then agreed to further explore the option of a single mental health partnership trust.

The proposal was to bring together these services into a Dudley-Walsall NHS Partnership Trust by April 2008. This proposal was supported as the preferred option by senior officers in the Local Authorities and PCTs in Walsall and Dudley.

The Secretary of State issued a direction about joint health overview and scrutiny committees in July 2003 relating to consultations by NHS bodies, where people from more than one local authority area may be affected by proposed variations or developments to NHS Services. Those health overview and scrutiny committees that consider proposals to be substantial must form a statutory joint overview and scrutiny committee to deal with the consultation and to respond on behalf of their communities.

The Health Scrutiny Panel in Walsall received reports at each panel meeting on the future configuration of mental health services in Dudley and Walsall. The proposal to create a Dudley-Walsall NHS Partnership Trust was considered to be a 'substantial' variation by the Health Scrutiny Panel in Walsall on 6 November 2007. The establishment of a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee between Walsall and Dudley and its terms of reference was

agreed by the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee in Dudley on 22 November 2007 and the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel in Walsall on 13 November 2007.

Options for the future of mental health services in Dudley and Walsall was subject to a public consultation, which took place for 13 weeks, commencing on 26 September 2007. The joint committee met on 11 December 2007 to respond to this consultation.

Findings

Social Care in Mental Health services is the responsibility of the Councils in the Boroughs concerned. Approval of the Cabinet in each Council would be required for Social Care services to become part of the new Partnership Trust, including arrangements for the secondment or transfer of staff. In September 2007, the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) approved the outline business case for the new Mental Health Trust.

On 11 December 2007, at the joint meeting of Dudley and Walsall Health Scrutiny Panels, the Joint Committee considered the consultation document 'A better idea' and the reconfiguration business case prepared by the Walsall/Dudley Mental Health Partnership. To support this documentation a presentation was given by the interim Chief Executive and Project Lead.

It was suggested that a larger partnership trust would be financially stronger than separate Borough organisations, would deliver economies of scale and would be better equipped to take forward significant improvements in mental health services, in particular specialist services, whilst still being local enough to offer people services close to home.

Members were reassured that the partnership trust would provide all current mainstream health and social care services for mental health in Dudley and Walsall – primary care, community mental health, social work, day care, therapies and care in hospital.

The Joint Committee agreed with the proposal to create a single NHS Mental Trust for Dudley and Walsall. From the evidence presented to the Committee, it appeared that the proposals offered an opportunity to improve the level of service provision through further development of specialist care, skills, enhanced knowledge and opportunity for greater autonomy. The proposals would allow the Trust to apply for Foundation Status enabling it to develop greater freedoms. This would also reduce the likelihood of the acquisition of current services by another Trust which would otherwise inhibit the contribution of local involvement in shaping services. A joint response was agreed and submitted on 25 January 2008 and a response was received from the Walsall and Dudley PCT Chief Executives.

At the Health Scrutiny Panel on 31 January 2008 members were informed that the SHA had given their support for proposal and it was with the Secretary of State for his decision.

Future Provision of Community Health Services

Issue

On 19 July 2007 the panel were advised that the tPCT were proposing that it became a commissioning body, which fitted in with the direction of travel for PCTs, and the SHA considered it to be a positive direction of work.

Findings

An external facilitation group found that staff considered the most important factor in the future provision of services to be that the quality improved. Members were informed that options needed to be further considered.

Members were informed that this would be subject to public consultation.

On 17 March 2008, the panel received a report from the tPCT on the development of Arms Length provision of Community Services. It has been decided that a formal internal separation (APrO) will take place and is on target to be achieved by 1 April

2008. Disruption to services will be avoided, as there are no physical changes to the location or other arrangements of the services.

The panel requested that they be kept informed of progress with this issue.

Hospital Discharges

Issue

Members were informed about the 'Discharge from Day One' programme which planned to increase the number of safe discharges, decrease a patient's length of stay in hospital and improve patient satisfaction and treatment.

Findings

The impact of the improved process has created an increase in patient referrals which had offset the reduction of inappropriate referrals. In order to process the additional referrals two temporary social workers had been employed. It was noted that one third of the hospital social care team had been lost compared to the original proposal to delete the entire team.

The Panel expressed concern at social worker shortage at the hospital given that a number of posts were deleted this year and especially as the budget reductions had gone ahead against the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny Panel's recommendations. The Panel were further concerned by the employment of agency staff and the additional cost this created.

Current hospital questionnaires did not cover the discharge process as patients would not have been discharged at the time questionnaires regarding their stay were issued. Therefore a way of asserting the views of patients was required. The PALS were noted as a potential group to assist in this process. The return rate of questionnaires was high.

The target to reduce the number of overall beds at the hospital would be created by a reduction in bedtime for patients. Current figures showed lengths of stay for general and geriatric patients as 6.7 and 9.1 days

respectively. This could be improved by holding patients in hospital no longer than necessary. This may require an increase in social care services within the community.

Members were informed that often relatives of patients complained that their family members were not receiving the right amount of care they thought they needed. This was often an issue of perception rather than genuine cases of unsafe discharge. In the current climate of MRSA and other superbugs hospitals were not always the best place for patients to receive treatment. In addition to this a patients overall recovery was increased by shorter stays in hospital.

The tPCT would rearrange resources to fund growth areas created by the improved hospital treatment of patients. This would affect patients but only positively.

Patients were now assessed using a method known as 'Streaming' rather than 'Triage', which involved the assessment of patients by a wide range of doctors in a short time period upon their arrival at hospital.

Improved hospital discharges were expected to impact on the council's aids and adaptations service. The major risk of delayed discharge is when a patient with a high level of need would require major adaptations to take place to their place of residence. This may sometimes include the building of a new extension. It was confirmed that patients waiting for discharge from hospital are a high priority for work to be completed.

As it takes time to plan and deliver major adaptations, patients who could not return home would be encouraged to move into respite care, however, not all patients wanted to do this.

At a subsequent meeting on 31 January 2008, the panel were informed that there had been a 20 – 30% increase in the number of social care assessments that had been required. In part this was because better processes were in place for identifying individuals requiring social care. In the future the Hospital social care team and the tPCT discharge liaison team would be fully integrated into a 24 hour service.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) at the Manor Hospital

Issue

Under PFIs, a private company fund the redevelopment of hospital projects and the Hospital pays off the cost over a 20 to 30-year period. Skanska Innisfree were evaluated as the preferred bidder to complete the project at Walsall hospital. The contract has been signed and funded, it is planned that new facilities will be handed over in 2010. In the period running up to this, the hospital will need to ensure that services are as modern and streamlined as possible.

Findings

At its meeting on 31 January 2008, the panel were informed that the hospital is currently a high achieving Trust, with every patient receiving treatment within 18 weeks of referral and these times were the shortest in the West Midlands. Also as a result of the new modular blocks, staff morale had increased as the buildings were an improvement on those previously used. In the whole year there had only been two cases of MRSA and the hospital were proud of the reduction in the number of C-diff cases.

As a result of the PFI, the Manor Hospital would have a mortgage of £12 million a year. In terms of foundation trust status for the Manor hospital, 'Monitor' – the regulator of NHS foundation trusts, had concerns about the 34 year mortgage that the PFI bought with it, but the hospital was working to demonstrate that this was affordable. If the Hospital could not meet the £12 million mortgage a year, the Hospital could be at risk of being taken over by another Trust. The panel were reassured that the hospital were financially healthy. In order to be in financial surplus and meet the mortgage repayments the hospital will be:

- Reducing length of stay to close unnecessary beds, or use them to bring in new income
- Streamline the workforce to reduce staff costs
- Eradication of waste to improve quality of services and reduce costs

The panel requested that the Health Scrutiny Panel receives regular updates on the PFI in the future.

Performance information from West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS)

Issue

The ambulance service aims to respond to 75% of category A calls within eight minutes or less. Members were informed that in a compact area like Walsall, the ambulance service would expect to respond to 78% of category A calls within eight minutes or less.

Findings

In 2006/07 the Ambulance Trust responded to 75% of category A calls within eight minutes or less; however during November/December 2007 the Ambulance Service did not achieve this level of performance within Walsall.

The reasons given for this were;

- 20% increased demand (which had not continued into January)
- Severe problems with ambulance turnaround at hospital trusts

Although, Members were reassured that higher levels of performance resumed in January 2008. The panel were informed that the service worked closely with the Manor Hospital and they worked very well together.

At its meeting on 31 January 2008, West Midlands Ambulance Service response times for the postcode 'WS8' were highlighted due to low levels of performance April – December 2007. The panel expressed concern that the ambulance service had consistently failed to meet targets in the postcode of WS8 and had not put remedial action in place sooner. To rectify this situation the introduction of response cars in this area would improve response times, which would be operational within 2 – 3 weeks, and would be a 24 hour facility in areas of predicted activity. Also that it had taken time to gain more financial support from commissioners to increase resources as the arrangement between the

ambulance service and commissioners was unusual in that there was no recognition of volume or targets, and that this was a historical position.

In the future the Health Scrutiny Panel considered the further advancement the skills of ambulance staff to allow the treatment of patients at home to be an important way to improve the service. Although the panel noted that there was not any resource allocated for this purpose.

A letter was sent to Peter Arch at the tPCT to raise the issue of how the ambulance service is commissioned, and to highlight that the further advancement of the skills of ambulance staff as being integral to improving the healthcare services through the treatment of patients at home.

Performance information from Manor Hospital

Issue

Members requested information on how the hospital was performing to inform the third party commentary that the panel would be providing to the healthcare commission. The panel have received information on complaints to the hospital plus MRSA and C-diff figures.

Findings

The panel found that the hospital had very low rates of MRSA, and this was due to the infection control measures implemented at the hospital. To deal with MRSA, C-diff and other hospital acquired infections an outbreak committee had been set up to implement successful initiatives. Members were informed that the standard treatment for C-diff was a dedicated control unit with very high standards of care.

The panel found that the Manor Hospital was used as a role model nationally for its infection control measures. The Patients Forum representative gave evidence to the panel that the hospital was vigilant in its cleanliness.

The panel found that most complaints were received in relation to poor attitude and communication from staff. Members also found that there had not been a significant increase in complaints about car parking from patients but that this was an area of concern for staff.

Performance information from tPCT

Issue

Members requested information on how the tPCT was performing to inform the third party commentary that the panel would be providing to the healthcare commission. The panel have received information on complaints to the tPCT.

Findings

Members found that a large number of complaints were received about care and treatment, and it was likely that a large number of these complaints were about chiropody, but that significant actions were in place to address this.

Obesity Working Group

Issue

The Obesity Working Group was first established in the 2006/07 municipal year by the Health Scrutiny Panel and was re-established in the 2007/08 municipal year. There is a rising prevalence of obesity in England and Walsall has some of the worst obesity levels in the West Midlands. The Health Scrutiny Panel considered it important to consider obesity in adults as a working group, with a focus on encouraging Walsall Council and NHS to set the example as leading employers.

Findings

Members considered the provision of leisure centres to be an important tool in assisting local people to get healthier, achieve and maintain weight loss. Through discussion with officers, the group found that there was currently no discount system for Council employees however, Human Resources and Development were developing a handbook which included various offers, which could include vouchers for several free activity taster sessions.

Members undertook a series of visits to all local authority owned leisure centres in Walsall and concluded that the Council had five good leisure centres but that Willenhall was in need of investment. The group were informed that a consultation on the review of leisure centres would take place during 2008/09.

In order to fully consider access to leisure provision in Walsall, the group considered opportunities for activity that were not provided through leisure centres but through the Walsall Community Activity Network and exercise on referral. The working group found that awareness and capacity of this service needed to be improved to give more people the opportunity to access the provision.

A toolkit for evaluating Walsall's progress in addressing overweight and obesity was developed which was intended to gather best practice in this area through the use of National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance. Using the toolkit, the group recommended that an audit of policies relating to obesity across the tPCT, Hospital and Council be carried out and that a needs analysis of employees was required to determine the level of support required to improve their health.

More detail on the findings and recommendations of the Obesity Working Group are available in the "Obesity Working Group – A review by the Health Scrutiny Panel 2007/08"

Goscote Hospital

Issue

The panel requested information on the developments taking place at the Goscote Hospital site concerning the transfer of urgent care services to the Manor Hospital and the development of a dementia care and palliative care unit at the Goscote site.

Findings

On 17 March 2008, the panel received a report on plans for a dementia care unit and palliative care centre at the Goscote Hospital site. The panel learnt that planning permission has been granted to build these facilities and the first phase of design work has been completed. A business case has been developed and pending approval from the Strategic Health Authority (SHA), a full business case will be made, with plans for the facilities to be operational during 2010.

The development of the dementia care unit and palliative care centre at the Goscote Hospital site has resulted in the need for the provision of urgent care services to be transferred to another location. The panel were informed that plans were out for consultation on the transfer of urgent care services from Goscote Hospital to the Accident and Emergency department of Walsall's Manor Hospital. Members noted that this would lead to more closely integrated services, all available within the same location and; although initially this would be an out of hours service, if successful, there would be the potential for it to be expanded to a 24 hour provision.

As part of the work programme for the 2008/09 municipal year, the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel have requested a report on the results of the consultation on the transfer of urgent care services from Goscote Hospital.

Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check

Each financial year, the Healthcare Commission is required to review the provision of healthcare across England and publish a performance rating of all NHS organisations in England that commission and provide healthcare. The annual health check is designed to answer two questions:

- Are healthcare organisations getting the basics right?
- Are healthcare organisations making and sustaining progress?

The teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT), Hospital Trust and Ambulance Service all produce a self-assessment on performance against core standards set by the Healthcare Commission. The Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel has responsibility for producing a "third party commentary" on each of the trusts self-assessments. Throughout the 2007/08 municipal year, the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel has received regular performance updates from each trust, based on a selection of the core standards. This has enabled the Panel to provide an informed and useful commentary, which will help to substantiate the self-assessments of the trusts.

Recommendations

The Health Scrutiny Panel continues to receive information on the progress of the Dudley-Walsall partnership Trust in the 2008/09 municipal year.

The Panel expressed concern at social worker shortage at the hospital given that a number of posts were deleted against the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny Panel's recommendations in the 2006/07 municipal year. These issues should be highlighted to Cabinet.

The Health Scrutiny Panel receives regular updates on the PFI in the in the 2008/09 municipal year. *(suggestion that this is in relation to financial situation i.e. affordability of mortgage and action taken to ensure that)*

Performance information on response times of the West Midlands Ambulance Service in Walsall (by postcode) is taken to the Health Scrutiny Panel in the 2008/09 municipal year.

Selected performance information on the Hospital is received as part of the Health Scrutiny Panels work programme in the 2008/09 municipal year to inform the panels third party commentary to the healthcare commission.

Selected performance information on the tPCT is received as part of the Health Scrutiny Panels work programme in the 2008/09 municipal year to inform the panels third party commentary to the healthcare commission.

Scrutiny Annual Report

2007/08

“The Scrutiny Working Group is a useful forum for reviewing the work of Scrutiny and bringing forward new ideas for future years”
Councillor Chris Towe.

Scrutiny Working Group



Membership for 2007/08:

Councillor Towe (Chair)
Councillor D Pitt (Vice-chair)
Councillor Ault
Councillor Coughlan
Councillor Creaney
Councillor E Hughes
Councillor Longhi
Councillor Nazir
Councillor Oliver
Councillor E Pitt

Scrutiny Working Group

The Scrutiny Working Group was established, in place on the Scrutiny Management Board, by Council at its meeting on 23 May 2007, by the following resolution:

'That a scrutiny working group be established for the municipal year 2007/2008, the composition to be determined by the Chairs of the Scrutiny and Performance Panels.'

Following the initial appointment by Council of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel Chairs to the Working Group, the Working Group appointed Councillor Chris Towe, Chair and Councillor Des Pitt, Vice-Chair. In addition to this the Working Group decided to extend the membership to include Scrutiny and Performance Panel Vice-Chairs.

The Working Group has shared information throughout the year regarding the work programmes of individual scrutiny and performance panels and have drafted and delivered a work programme that has included:

Consideration of Scrutiny Involvement in Budget Setting Process

Early in the municipal year the Working Group met with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Personnel and Senior Finance Officers to review the way that scrutiny and performance panels were engaged in the budget setting process.

The outcome was for the working group members to agree and recommend to all scrutiny and performance panels they represent a change to the process so that all scrutiny and performance panels were represented at the final corporate scrutiny and performance panel meeting that considered the budget options across the whole Council.

Following completion of the scrutiny of the budget setting process feedback has been received through individual panels and the scrutiny survey

Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

The Working Group have monitored the progress of the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in its progress from white paper to legislation. The Act contains several sections that link to powers of overview and scrutiny committee.

Members heard now the Act received Royal Assent on 30 October 2007. However, the sections relating to overview and scrutiny provisions have not been issued commencement dates at the current time.

The Working Group heard now the Call for Action featured in this Act and the Police and Justice Act were being considered by a Working Group of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel. The Neighbourhoods Working Group is considering the local implications of the new legislation. Full details of this work stream can be found in the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel section of this Annual Report.

Comprehensive Area Assessment

The Working Group considered the implications of the change from Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Members fully understood the importance of greater emphasis on partnership working for the new inspection regime and the 'duty to co-operate' principles as outlined in the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The Working Group also noted the important role that was necessary in monitoring the outcomes of the new Local Area Agreement and the links between this and changes to grant regimes, for example the end of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the start of Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

Future of Scrutiny in Walsall

Members considered the range of scrutiny structure models that were in use at other local authorities. This included the current service based model, as used at Walsall Council, a Local Area Agreement focused model and another model based around one formal scrutiny panel which appointed working group to complete more detailed tasks.

The Working Group considered the range of options available to them and discussed them with the new Chief Executive. The possibility of a bi-annual meeting with Cabinet was discussed.

Members also considered the remits of the various scrutiny and performance panels and have provided feedback on the potential changes to panel remits that will be used to influence any future decisions.