

Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2005/06



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Foreword



“As Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board this annual report outlines the work my Board and the other five Scrutiny Boards have been doing during the Civic Year 2005/06. It sets out the achievements and future development of scrutiny here in Solihull Council.

Since the government introduced the new executive arrangements for local government, overview and scrutiny has become central to the modernising agenda for local councils. I consider overview and scrutiny to be key to improving the Council's policies and performance ensuring that services meet residents' needs, respond to community priorities and are efficient, cost-effective and easy to use.

The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the Scrutiny Boards' Councillors, with the help of co-optees, has ensured that Solihull's Cabinet has taken decisions in the light of non-Cabinet members' informed views. We have benefited from input from internal and external expertise, residents and other stakeholders. This is the fourth year that Solihull Council has operated scrutiny. During this time we have been focusing on a number of key activities which are highlighted in this report.

Scrutiny's power lies in influencing decision makers and holding them to account. Our success depends upon achieving credible findings based on high-quality research and evidence-based conclusions, together with active community involvement and support, throughout the Scrutiny process. A key contributor to the success of scrutiny in Solihull Council has also been the willingness of all political parties to work together on making positive proposals for change.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all non-executive Councillors who have engaged in the function of Overview and Scrutiny in the Civic Year 2005-06 and Council staff who have contributed to and supported this function.”

The Role of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) co-ordinates the work of the Scrutiny boards and currently comprises of nine members.

Each Board has its own Terms of Reference and is made up of non-executive Councillors, chosen to represent the political balance of the Council. The Education and Children, Regeneration & Community Safety, and Health Scrutiny Boards have co-opted representatives as members.

The Boards carry out reviews and other scrutiny projects and report to the Cabinet and/or full Council on their findings. The Boards can set up time-limited Task and Finish Groups and informal Scrutiny Panels, or Scrutiny Working Groups to carry out specific projects and report back to the Board.

The Scrutiny Boards categorise their agenda items as one of the following:

Policy Development which can involve

- The analysis of the council and cabinet budget and policy framework
- Conducting research
- The analysis of policy issues and possible options through community and other consultation
- Specific tasks required by their programme of work
- The use of new ways of encouraging community participation in their work
- Asking questions of members of the cabinet and supporting officers
- Reviewing partnership working with external agencies.

Scrutiny which means

- The Review cabinet decisions
- Making recommendations to the cabinet/committee/council on outcomes from a scrutiny review
- The review and scrutiny of the performance of other public bodies in the area
- Questioning and gathering evidence from any person (with their consent).

Management of Performance which can involve

- The review and scrutiny of the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas
- The review and scrutiny of the performance of other public bodies in the area
- Questioning members of the cabinet and chief officers about their decisions and actions taken

Board management which covers

- Responsibility for the work programme of the officers employed to support the Overview and Scrutiny function
- Responsibility for the finances made available to Overview and Scrutiny Boards
- Reporting annually to full Council on their Boards' workings and making recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods as necessary.

A Scrutiny Handbook is available which provides a framework within which Overview and Scrutiny can add value to the Council's activities. It defines the roles of the various people who have a part to play in the scrutiny process and gives practical advice and guidance on the Overview and Scrutiny function to all those who may be involved in conducting a scrutiny review. The Handbook also contains materials to aid project planning and advice for Members on techniques for involving external witnesses in reviews so that they can take account of the views of local communities and service users.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Legislation made in 2000 altered the way that decisions are taken in Local Government. As a part of these changes, Solihull Council appointed an Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and five Scrutiny Boards.

In brief, the function of Overview and Scrutiny is to:

- Hold the Cabinet to account
- Ensure Corporate priorities are met
- Review and development of policy
- Carry out external scrutiny of other local organisations
- Conduct performance management and review (including Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment)
- Examine matters of particular concern either within the Council or the community
- Identify best practice and ensure that it is shared throughout the Council

Overview and Scrutiny Boards also monitor the decisions of the Cabinet, individual Cabinet Members and officers. They can 'call-in' a decision which has been made but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision has taken into account all appropriate matters and processes. They may recommend through the call-in procedure that the decision maker reconsider their decision on any specific issue.

The Overview and Scrutiny structure aims to support the Council in making its Vision a reality and achieving its objectives and priorities. Its purpose is to examine how well the Council is performing, adopting a 'Critical Friend' relationship with the Cabinet and concentrating on outcomes for local people. It is a powerful tool in supporting the Council's community leadership role, by reviewing matters of concern to the community, and getting local people and organisations involved in its work.

Its focus should be on strategic issues and the community perspective rather than day-to-day operational matters.

Members involved in the Overview and Scrutiny Boards and Task and Finish Groups work to promote an open, transparent Council and democratic accountability.

Overview and Scrutiny offers local people a direct route to get involved in the work of the Council through scrutiny reviews into matters of public concern.

How is Scrutiny different from the previous Committee system?

- The agenda is quite different and councillors may now decide on the areas that they wish to review and challenge.
- The Board may meet in an informal atmosphere.
- The Board may invite those who it believes can help with their investigations to give evidence.
- The Board may invite members of the public attending its meetings to participate in asking questions.

How does Overview and Scrutiny fit into the decision making process?

The new political arrangements introduced under the Local Government Act 2000 mean that the decision making functions of the Council were allocated to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members, either individually or collectively, as well as the Council itself (which sets the overall Budgetary and Policy Framework). It is an important function of Overview and Scrutiny Boards to oversee these decisions to ensure that they are fair, practical and being made in the public's best interest. Overview and Scrutiny Boards can put forward their own ideas/recommendations for improvements, and influence the decisions being made.

The membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Boards is cross party and reflects the political balance of the Council. No Cabinet member is allowed to be a member of a Scrutiny Board although Cabinet members may be invited to attend specific meetings where an issue is being discussed which fall within the Cabinet members' portfolio. The meetings are generally open to the public unless than issue being considered is confidential or falls within a category of exempt information as defined by the Local Government Act.

What does Overview and Scrutiny not do?

They do not take on board individual complaints. The Boards are primarily concerned with the wider issues of Council policies, practices and procedures. Solihull Council already has a complaints procedure in place.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact:

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Overview & Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB)

Chairman Councillor Mrs Kate Wild



“This annual report describes the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Boards of Solihull Council. This was the fourth year of the new political management arrangements and it would be true to say that we are continuing to learn from new experiences. There is a great deal of scope for further developing our councillor-led approach to scrutiny. I am particularly pleased with the work that the Board has done in overseeing the performance of the Council through monitoring the Top 40 Performance Indicators. The Board has also concluded work on the detailed consideration of how scrutiny itself is performing. I would like to thank all Board members and officers who were involved in supporting the

work of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during my time as Chairman.”

What the Board does?

The Board meets on a monthly basis and the main scope of the Board is:

- To approve the work programme of Scrutiny Boards.
- To resolve overlaps and disputes between Scrutiny Boards.
- The Council’s budget, the management of its budget, capital, revenue borrowing and assets and its audit arrangements.
- The development of the Community Plan for promoting economic, social and environmental well-being.
- To receive requests for reports from Scrutiny Boards and allocate them if appropriate to one or more Scrutiny Boards

Board Membership:

Chairman:

Cllr. Mrs K Wild

Board Members:

Cllr. N Davies, Cllr. K L Hawkins, Cllr I Hedley, Cllr H Hendry,
Cllr Mrs S Pittaway, Cllr J W Potts, Cllr. M Robinson (Vice Chairman), Cllr J Windmill

Work in 2005/06

The Board has scrutinised the following issues during the municipal year:

- **The Strategic Priorities Programme 2006-9** – The Board was involved in the three-year renewal of the Community Strategy. The Board allocated work for each Scrutiny Board and suggested that all use the “State of the Borough” report as a tool to ensure consistency. Ultimately, the Board received the suggested priorities of the other Scrutiny boards from which a short list of priorities was agreed.
- **Top 40 reports to OSMB** - The need for effective corporate performance management arrangements has been raised previously by the Council’s auditors and was identified as an area for improvement arising from the Council’s Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The Board set criteria to identify issues of concern. Where any top 40 Performance Indicator appeared unlikely to reach the set target by a margin of ten% or more, then a supplementary report would be requested along with the attendance of the relevant Corporate Director or nominated Senior Manager. During the year the Board made some amendment to

the performance indicators appearing in the Top 40. Several indicators were subject to detailed scrutiny during the year.

- **Value For Money project update – annual efficiency statement** - The Board was given background information as to potential efficiency savings. The Board noted that, amongst others, efficiency savings had been made in the reduction of the number of polling stations and changes to the commissioning arrangements for domiciliary care.
- **OSMB review of scrutiny** - The Board concluded its review of scrutiny. Having received a report from the appointed working party conducting the review, the Board recommended the following to the Cabinet :-

(Note: Cabinet subsequently supported these recommendations)

Setting the Work Programme

- R1 Scrutiny Work programmes should reflect the Council's priorities and each Board's programme should include one item for scrutiny per year drawn from the Council's objectives
- R2 To encourage more proactive working, each Board should monitor that part of the Cabinet Forward Plan relevant to their remit, selecting items for scrutiny as appropriate
- R3 Scrutiny Boards should develop a 'Cabinet style' forward plan to be reviewed on a quarterly basis
- R4 The outgoing Boards should set a provisional work programme for the newly appointed Boards for the first quarter of the forthcoming year

Ways of Working

- R5 Scrutiny Boards should use the Scrutiny review scoping template to identify the objective of a review and define the way they wish to look at issues under review
- R6 Before each Scrutiny Board agenda is prepared the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Spokespersons should meet with the Scrutiny Officer to determine the structure of the meeting
- R7 To promote all party working in Scrutiny, any alterations to the Work Programme and pre-agenda meeting preparation will be decided by the Chairman in consultation with the Vice-Chairman and Group Spokespersons and facilitated by the Scrutiny Officer
- R8 Task and Finish Groups/ Working Groups should have a start and end date planned at the time of project initiation and must have a clearly stated objective
- R9 All Scrutiny Boards should be encouraged to experiment with different ways of working and develop and disseminate examples of good practice to other Scrutiny Boards
- R10 Individual Scrutiny Councillors or small working groups should be nominated to lead on specific items for scrutiny, working independently or with officers between meetings, so that they can report back to the Scrutiny Board. This could be an oral report, a presentation or a written report

Relationship with the Executive

- R11 It should be adopted as good practice that Scrutiny Chairmen are able to present their Boards' reports and recommendations to Cabinet at the appropriate time
- R12 Quarterly meetings should be held between the Cabinet and Scrutiny Chairmen to encourage collaborative working

Engaging the Public and Partners

- R13 There are examples of good practice of holding meetings away from the Civic Suite to make them more accessible to people; this good practice should be continued where appropriate
- R14 Opportunities should be sought, during the scoping of scrutiny reviews, to involve members of the community in the scrutiny process
- R15 Ad hoc co-option should be considered on a subject-by-subject basis as appropriate
- R16 External organisations that deliver or provide services to Solihull residents should be scrutinised

Support and Training

R17 The Group recognises that there is an ongoing need for training and awareness raising among both Members and officers, and recommend that training is provided in conjunction with the Member Development Programme

- **State of the Borough: a place which respects difference and diversity** – The Board held a single-issue meeting and gave in-depth consideration to progress made by the Local Strategic Partnership. Several recommendations were made as to potential improvements.
- **Shirley Town Centre** – The Board held another single-issue meeting on the future redevelopment of Shirley Town Centre. The main purpose of the meeting was to consider the extent to which the developers' proposals satisfy the terms of the Development Agreement.

Whilst, in the main, the Board felt able to confirm to Cabinet that the proposals satisfied the Development Agreement, two areas were of concern, namely, the relocation of existing Council tenants and the detail of the material improvements to the park.

The Cabinet's decision on this issue was called-in and the four grounds for the call-in were considered by OSMB. In the end the majority of members supported the fact that the Cabinet's decisions had been properly made.

- **Strategic risk – budget pressures in education and children's services** - The Board considered the strategic risk in respect of budget pressures in Education and Children's Services. The Corporate Director reported on the two key overspends, namely, services for children with special education needs and placements for looked after children. The Board considered a detailed report on measures to reduce the Council's net risk but recognised that there were no short term solutions given the legal framework and responsibilities of the Council in respect of looked after children.
- **Financial implications of implementing the whole life cycle costing of assets (WLCCA)** - The Board considered a report outlining the financial implications for Solihull Council in adopting the Whole Life Cycle Costing of Assets (WLCCA). (A technique used to establish the total cost of ownership of an asset over an anticipated economic life span).

The exercise showed an estimated investment gap of £9.2m over ten years. A Task and Finish Group has been set up to review the Council's use of its assets in the southern part of the Borough. (Assets in the north of the Borough will be considered as part of the regeneration proposals.)

- **Use of consultants** – The Board considered a report on the use of consultants in 2004/5 where £10,000 or more was spent on a single consultant. As a result more detailed information was sought and the Board has recommended a procedure and checklist for engaging consultants. The Board intends to review this issue in 12 months time.
- **One Front Line (1FL)** - The Board considered a detailed report on progress to date on the 1FL Project. A number of issues were raised:-
 - It was important that complaints received were used as learning points.
 - The commercial use of the services was discussed. The primary objective at this point was to secure benefits to the Council rather than to market services to others but, where possible, capacity was being built in which might enable commercial uses in the future.
 - The 1FL model was intended to be flexible to take account of structural changes in the provision of services in the future.

- Members felt it was important, where contractors ran customer call centres, that these linked appropriately to the Council's contact centre (Solihull Connect).
- The Board felt it important that the key dates for 1FL achieving savings were tied in with the Board's future scrutiny programme.

Education and Children Scrutiny Board (E&CSB)



Chairman: Councillor K L Hawkins

“This is my second year chairing the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board. It was both challenging and enjoyable. I take this opportunity to thank all members of the Board for their commitment to Solihull's children and young people and the manner in which scrutiny was undertaken. The year's work programme was varied in its content and brought about some good examples of scrutiny particularly the review of primary school places in the Shirley East and West planning zones”

What the Board does?

The Board meets every two months and the main scope of the Board is:

- Children's welfare services;
- Family support services and the provision;
- Planning and management of education; and
- Training, arts and culture.

Board Membership:

Chairman: Cllr K L Hawkins.

Board Members: Cllr. G Allport, Cllr K Allsopp, Cllr B F Burgess, Cllr M P Corser, Cllr H M Cox, Cllr G A Craig, Cllr L Cresswell, Cllr D Elsmore, Cllr B Harber, Cllr A Mackiewicz, Cllr M Robinson and Cllr Mrs T Tedd.

Co-optees: 2 Co-opted voting church representatives Father G Murray, Mr J B Hall and 2 Co-opted voting parent governor representatives Mrs S Weaver and Mr D Rhind.

Work in 2005-06

The Board has focused on the following issues this year:

- **Performance Review** – the Board received regular reports on the key performance indicators for Education and Children's Services. This enabled Members to monitor the Council's performance in key areas. This work was helped by regular reporting of the summaries of school Ofsted reports during the year.
- **A review of the Community Strategy** – the Board held a single-issue meeting to review the Community Strategy from its perspective. The Board felt that the following priorities should be given greater attention:
 - Development of Special Education Needs provision;
 - Improvement to partnerships in some areas;
 - Greater recognition of the role of the voluntary sector and support for the voluntary sector infrastructure within the Borough;
 - The issue of funding for adult learners.

- **Review of primary school places in the Shirley East and West planning zones** – The Board received a report from the Admissions and School Places Task and Finish Group which had considered the following options:-
 - No Action
 - Change St James CE Junior School to a one form of entry primary school
 - Link Woodlands Infant School with St James CE Junior School as a feeder infant school
 - Close St James CE Junior School

The Scrutiny Board recommended that:-

- the Cabinet Member should proceed with statutory consultation on the last three options with the inclusion of school Governors in the list of consultees;
- no change be made to the organisation of school places in Shirley East and Olton Zone;
- a working group be appointed by the Board to consider the outcomes from the consultation and recommend to the full Board whether it would be appropriate or not to hold an additional meeting, to hear views from key parties.

Based on the outcomes of the consultation exercise, demographic and other evidence the Board recommended that the Cabinet commence the statutory process to close St James CE Junior School.

- **School funding** – The Board considered a report on significant developments in education funding for 2006-07 and beyond, setting out the current issues and priorities affecting Solihull.

The Board asked that its concerns, listed below, about the proposed funding arrangements be reported back to the Cabinet Member for Education and Children:

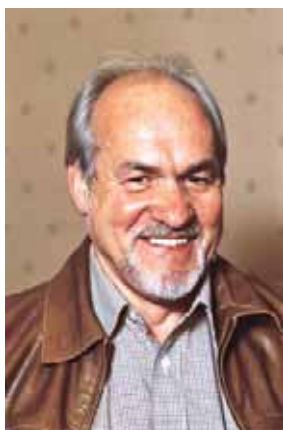
- The future role of education in local government;
- Procurement issues and the impact on flexibility;
- The resource implications for Special Education Needs funding;
- The impact on the affordability of buy-back services for schools;
- The exclusion of elected members from the membership of the School Forum and the implications for democratic accountability.

- **Proposal to locate a nursery at Hatchford Brook Junior & Infants (JI) School** – the Board considered the outcome of public consultations on the proposal to locate a nursery unit at Hatchford Brook JI School. The Board noted concerns over traffic and parking issues but felt that these would be considered as part of any planning application.

Concerns were also expressed over the type of building to be used i.e. temporary or adaptation to the existing building. The Board noted that the proposal had been widely supported by local schools and parents and expressed its full support for the proposal.

- **Exclusions and attendance** – the Board considered a report on school attendance. The Board was informed that school attendance within the Primary Sector has risen substantially over the last five years, whilst attendance within the Secondary Sector had also shown an increase over a number of years.

The Board felt that the “multi-agency” approach in combating truancy and behaviour, whilst practiced to a degree, could be followed to a greater extent.



Social Care Scrutiny Board (SCSB)

Chairman: Cllr Corser

“Scrutiny, adopted and implemented properly, provides members with a deep insight into the decisions to be made. It can only be effective and used as part of the decision making process if members have open and receptive minds to the evidence presented. The work of this Board covers a number of services that are provided in partnership. One of the key pieces of work during the year was the review over the proposal for further integration between health and social services”

What the Board does?

The Board meets every two months and the main scope of the Board is:

- Social care responsibilities within National Service Frameworks [older people, mental health, long term conditions, and Valuing People [learning disability]];
- Supporting People Initiative
- Commission for Social Care Inspection Performance Assessments and progress of social care components within the Council Plan
- Partnership working with health, housing and with education
- Strategic and Operational Social Care Commissioning and provision of social care; including Direct Payments
- Carer Support, User and Carer involvement, consultation and feedback
- Delayed Transfers of Care and intermediate, rehabilitative and transitional care
- Single Assessment
- Local social care strategies
- Long Term Care Charter and information services for users, carers and the public.

Board Membership:

Chairman: Cllr M Corser

Board Members: Cllr B C Harber, Cllr Dr P Lea, Cllr A M Mackiewicz, Cllr S Pittaway, Cllr J W Potts, Cllr R W Reeves, Cllr S Reeve and Cllr Mrs K Wild

Work in 2005/06

The Board has scrutinised the following issues during the municipal year:

- **Better Together - Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council & Solihull Primary Care Trust -** The Board received a presentation outlining the Care Trust consultation. A significant majority of those responding to the consultation were in favour of further integration between health and social services. The proposal to establish a Care Trust and further integrate the functions of the PCT and Adult Social Services in Solihull was seen as a logical development of services and would improve the service user’s experience.

On the basis of this support, the Board recommended to both the Council and to the Solihull PCT Board that they jointly agree to submit an application to establish a Solihull Care Trust.

- **“Commissioning a Patient-Led NHS” - Stakeholder Pre-consultation Paper** – Following on from the previous item, the Board considered this pre-consultation paper and decided:-
 - The Board noted the outcome of the Care Trust consultation;
 - The Board recommended the rejection of any proposal that seeks to move away from a Solihull focussed PCT, not consistent with the interests of Solihull residents and Care Trust model;
 - The Board recommended progression of the Care Trust application as soon as possible;
 - The Board was dissatisfied with the Strategic Health Authority stakeholder pre-consultation process on the “Commissioning a patient-led NHS”, with regard to the time scale given for responses.

- **Mental Health Integration** - The Board received a presentation on the progress made and responses to the process of integrating mental health services for working age adults within Solihull. The next stage was a formal consultation with staff and their representatives, to allow staff to express their opinion about closer integration and provide a formal framework for them to understand the effects of TUPE and what it would mean for them. The Board supported the continued integration of Mental Health Services across the Health and Social care economy.

- **Long Term Health Conditions** - The Board received a presentation on the approach being taken for the development of strategies for supporting people with Long Term Health Conditions. The Board noted that Health and Social Care partners were engaged in the Chelmsley Wood Integrated Care Team Project to develop an integrated team approach to community health and social care. The new Team offered a fully integrated approach to service users, with the aims of enabling speedier access to assessment, a single assessment process, a reduction in delay and speedier access to a range of services across health and social care, an improved experience for both service users and staff, and a reduction in preventable hospital admissions.



Local Services Scrutiny Board (LSSB)

Chairman: Councillor J Windmill

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Board for their commitment and dedication which saw the work undertaken by the Local Services Scrutiny Board achieve a balance between being the executive’s critical friend, and praising positive service improvements. A significant piece of work during the year was the street scene and future contract procurement.”

What the Board does?

The Board meets every two months and the main scope of the Board is:

- All of Council's functions in relation to leisure, sport and recreational activities to enhance the quality of life for local people.
- The provision and management of leisure centres, swimming pools, parks and open spaces, allotments, libraries and other similar facilities.
- Operational highways and transport matters

Board Membership:

Chairman: Cllr J Windmill

Board members: Cllr B F Burgess, Cllr I Chamberlain, Cllr G Craig, Cllr S Davis, Cllr D J Elsmore, Cllr P Hogarth, Cllr O M Hogg and Cllr Mrs S Pittaway

Work in 2005/06

The Board has scrutinised the following issues during the municipal year:

- **Complaints and service requests - case studies and future scrutiny involvement** - The Scrutiny Board had requested a sample of complaints and service requests from the Community Services Directorate. The report, which was taken as read, was intended to give a snapshot of actual and typical complaints/service requests that were logged within the Directorate. To assist in its performance monitoring role the Board asked to receive an annual report of complaints for the Community Services Directorate.
- **Public library service standards and impact measures** – A report was submitted on this topic to enable a review of performance against those standards and to consider future priorities for action. The Board noted that there were a number of areas where Solihull did not meet the standards. The Board identified “Customer Satisfaction” and “Stock Replacement” as standards which should be prioritised for improvement; there should be ongoing promotion of the Library Service by further close working relationships with the Council’s Communications Team and requested that the Library Service should promote, on a regular basis, the benefits and awareness of the library and its current services to key stakeholders, the community and other interest groups.

- **The street scene and future contract procurement** – The Board considered a report on the current Streetcare contract and, in particular;
 - expectations on how the service would be delivered in the future
 - current legislation and standards of service delivery
 - recently published DEFRA report depicting Solihull as being a model for best practice in the delivery of elements of its street care services
 - future aspirations to join together the Street care and the Strategic Highways Contract.

Amongst other things, the Board recommended that officers should explore the synergies between street care and elements of strategic highways work having regard to future contract procurement; respond to several issues raised at the meeting over littering and explore initiatives to address vehicular parking on verges.

- **Local Public Service Agreement, Transport (road safety)** The Board considered a report on this subject and noted the progress made in reducing road casualties and that Solihull was amongst the highest performing local authorities for casualty reduction. The Board also endorsed the on-going programme of initiatives aimed at further casualty reduction. The Board suggested that the role of Community Police Officers should be explored to see whether it could be widened to take the important message of road safety to schools.

Following this, the Board asked for an update from the Police as to their perception of road safety initiatives. With the Police in attendance at a further meeting, the Board welcomed the support for road safety activity from the Solihull Road Policing Unit (RPU); it expressed concern at the level of Police resources available (Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers) and asked for a report in six months time to evaluate the support of the RPU (post restructure).

- **Local Transport Plan capital programme monitoring report 2005/06** – The Board considered reports on this issue on three separate occasions during the year. On the last occasion the Board noted that it was projected that all of the Local Transport Plan allocation for 2005/2006 would be spent.

Regeneration and Community Safety Scrutiny Board (R&CSB)



Chairman: Councillor Alf Hill

“If any council had to give an example of best practice Scrutiny, Solihull Council would have some very good and clear examples. The membership of the Regeneration and Community Safety Scrutiny Board demonstrated the effective capabilities of cross party working to achieve consensual decision making, different modes of working and proactive responses to community concerns. Major pieces of work during the year have included the Birmingham International Airport (BIA) Draft Master Plan consultation and anti social behaviour”

What the Board does?

The Board meets every two months and the main scope of the Board is

:

- **Regeneration**
 - Social inclusion and the Council's specific initiatives to promote it
 - The physical regeneration of the area including economic development
 - Assisting in the development of the Council's planning policies including the development plan and other plans for the use and development of land.
 - Strategic highways and transport matters

- **Housing**
 - The ALMO monitoring group
 - The management of the Council's housing stock
 - The development of partnerships with external organisations to meet housing needs and rejuvenate unsatisfactory housing.
 - The improvement of private sector housing
 - Relationships with the housing corporation
 - Grants and loans to owner-occupiers, tenants, landlords and/or developers
 - Homelessness and rehousing
 - Special needs housing
 - Community safety matters
 - Youth offending services

Board Membership:

Chairman: Cllr Hill.

Board Members: Cllr J Bramham, Cllr I Chamberlain, Cllr J Gandy, Cllr R Hall, Cllr J Hawkswood, Cllr J Reeve, Cllr M J Robinson and Cllr Mrs T Tedd

Work in 2005/06

The Board has scrutinised the following issues during the municipal year:

- **State of the Borough: A place to feel safe from crime and disorder** - At a single-issue meeting the Board looked at the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), with specific emphasis on the Community Strategy aim “A place to feel safe from crime and disorder”. The Board concentrated on anti social behaviour.

In considering this issue the Board suggested that the LSP should consider providing demonstrable evidence to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership that police activities actually reduce crime; focus on anti social behaviour and wider issues such as fear of crime.

The Board also recommended that the following priorities be considered over the next three years:

The LSP should develop mechanisms for Ward Councillors to have links with partner agencies dealing with anti social behaviour; and the LSP should work to ensure crime and disorder issues are designed out of regeneration areas.

- **Councillors interaction with the reporting mechanisms of anti social behaviour –** Another single-issue meeting addressing anti-social behaviour, in particular how the police resources dealing with anti social behaviour can best respond to and communicate with Ward Councillors as local community leaders within their constituent wards. As part of this work the Board addressed several questions to police representatives. On the topical question of liaison with ward representatives, the Police stated that monthly e-mail reports to Ward Councillors from Beat Officers should have been received but this was not working. The Chief Superintendent had instructed that neighbourhood policing in Solihull would replace sector policing. This would give ownership of a locality to the police officer and encourage the building of a working relationship between the Ward Councillor and the neighbourhood police officer.

As a result of these discussions the Board made several suggestions

- the Neighbourhood policing areas should be coterminous with the Solihull Council wards
 - Solihull Council and the Police need to work together to give each Ward Councillor the mobile phone number for their Neighbourhood Police Officer covering their ward area
 - Solihull Council and the Police need to work together to ensure that each Ward Councillor who reports an ASB issue is provided with feedback by email as to the outcome
 - the issue of youth services and activities be referred to the appropriate Scrutiny Board to investigate how to rebalance resources to deal proactively with the prevention of younger people ASB, rather than reactive protection against younger people ASB
 - support the introduction of the Neighbourhood Policing Model.
- **Affordable housing** - The Board considered a report providing information on the need for, and provision of, affordable housing in Solihull. This included a presentation from the Chief Executive of Solihull Community Housing explaining that there was currently 5890 people on the Housing Register; there was a social housing short fall as a direct result of the of the number of people exercising the right to buy, in relation to the smaller number of social housing actually being built. In 2005 this trend had reversed with the total number of social housing units being built outnumbering the number of houses being purchased under the right to buy scheme, with the addition of ten social dwellings being added to the current stock.

The Board also discussed the temporary suspension of building affordable housing in the North of the Borough regeneration development project.

The Board recommended that their concerns over the initial shortfall of Social Housing Stock be referred to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and that an options appraisal exercise be carried out dealing with the consequences of the 3 year temporary suspension of building affordable housing in the North of the Borough regeneration project

- **Birmingham International Airport (BIA) Draft Master Plan consultation** - The Board held a single-issue meeting on this subject taking evidence from relevant Council officers, elected representatives (MPs, Borough Councillors and interested groups/associations). Having considered all the evidence placed before them the Board recommended that Council respond to the Draft Master Plan as follows:-
 - Welcomes the fact that the BIA had responded to the Secretary of States' invitation to produce a draft Master Plan and notes that it has been prepared and accords with National and regional policy
 - Welcomes and recognises the improvements to previous proposals;
 - Is disappointed and concerned at the absence of appropriate details on surface access arrangements and proposed impact and mitigation. BIA were urged to consider these issues without delay and encouraged to talk with other relevant parties in order that a comprehensive response can be given;
 - Is extremely concerned that there are a number of aspects of environmental impact and mitigation that need further detailed consideration and requests BIA to look further at these urgently;
 - Notes the continuing inadequacy of the proposed arrangements for compensation schemes and asks BIA to discuss with the residents again and reconsider this matter;
 - Asks BIA to progress the proposed work on the Health Impact Assessment swiftly to further inform their proposals;
 - Is disappointed that background technical documents which would have helped a more detailed and informed response have not been made available by BIA; and
 - Instructs Officers to work with BIA in these matters in the context of the Balance Package to further develop more detailed proposals.

- **Housing Scrutiny Panel**

The Board agreed that Councillors Hill, Reeve and Robinson serve on the Housing Scrutiny Panel for 2005-06.

The Housing Scrutiny Panel has been set up to monitor the performance of the Arms Length Management Organisation (Solihull Community Housing). The Panel receives written and verbal advice from SCH and Council officers; it must report back to the Regeneration and Community Safety Scrutiny Board; it has the power to call the ALMO Board members to Panel meetings to give evidence. It was agreed that the Panel should have one non- voting co-opted tenant representative.



Health Scrutiny Board (HSB)

Chairman: Councillor Honor Cox

“I wish to thank my fellow members of the Health Scrutiny Board for their hard work over the last year. It was a productive year for Health Scrutiny. We scrutinised a wide range of issues and this significantly increased the knowledge of members about the numerous health issues in the Borough.”

What the Board does?

The Board meets two months and the main scope of the Board is:

- Statutory health scrutiny and response to consultation by health bodies.
- The Council's Environmental Health Function.

Board Membership:

Chairman: Councillor Honor Cox

Board Members: Councillors R Hall, K L Hawkins, Dr. P Lea, S Reeve, Mrs K Wild, N Stephens (Vice Chairman).

Non-voting co-opted Member: Delia Zeuthen, Chairman, Birmingham Heartlands NHS Trust PPI Forum.

Work in 2005/06

The Board has scrutinised the following issues during the municipal year:

- **Care Trust** – The Board considered further the proposed development of a Care Trust for Solihull. This was an issue that was also of interest to the Social Care Scrutiny Board. As part of the consultation process the Board submitted the following issues/concerns:-
 - The importance of ensuring wide public awareness and involvement in the consultation process;
 - Accountability issues – how will the new organisation be accountable to local elected members and will there be a mechanism to allow councillors to take up issues on behalf of constituents, given that the organisation will be external to the local authority;
 - How will decisions be made in relation to representation on the Care Trust Board, and in particular, what will be the political balance of the 3 councillor representatives on the Board;
 - Is it possible to confirm any planned efficiency savings and would such savings be reinvested to improve front line services;
 - Concerns about the implications for the Council in terms of staff costs in monitoring the management agreement and for those staff working in support services.

Following the consultation exercise the Board reconsidered this issue it was noted that the majority of responses had been positive and supported the concept of a Care Trust. There

were some specific issues raised about the proposals with differing views from various stakeholders. The Board noted that attempts had been made to ensure a thorough consultation, with all key stakeholders and the public encouraged to respond. The Board was disappointed with the limited success of some elements of the consultation, particularly the public events and drop in sessions.

The Board noted that members of the public tended to be more concerned with the end service they received, rather than what are seen as organisational issues around the management of services and that this was probably reflected in the consultation results.

- **Consultation on the smoke free elements of the Health Improvement and Protection Bill** - The Board considered and formulated a response to the Bill. The consultation response answered 16 questions, including the definition of those places where smoking would be prohibited.
- **Healthcare Commission - the Annual Health Check** - The Board considered a report which set out the mechanism being introduced by the Healthcare Commission to assess the performance of NHS bodies.

The Board noted the role of Health Scrutiny Boards within the new system and the opportunity they will have to submit a commentary on the performance of individual NHS Trusts in their area, based on evidence gathered during their work.

- **Preparedness for a Flu Pandemic** – Given the heightened public awareness surrounding this issue, the Board received an update from the Director of Public Health on the risks of a Flu Pandemic, the action being taken to minimise those risks and the contingency plans put in place in case of a pandemic occurring.

The Board noted that the Civil Contingencies Act had been helpful in directing preparations to be made involving all key partners.

- **Visit to Heartlands and Solihull hospitals** – The Board visited these two hospitals and time was scheduled to consider outcomes from the visits. With regard to Heartlands hospital, some Members of the Board were disappointed that they had not been able to visit all of the wards that they would have liked to have seen.

The Board referred to recent media coverage regarding the resignation of a consultant at the hospital who had raised concerns about the cleanliness of the hospital and MRSA rates. The Board agreed to seek the views of the hospital on this issue.

As for the Solihull hospital visit, Members had found the visit useful and had been made to feel welcome by hospital staff. Members had also been impressed with cleanliness levels in the areas visited and had received positive feedback from patients and visitors.

- **Proposals to develop a Forensic Medium Secure Unit in Birmingham** - The Board considered a report and the consultation document on the proposals to develop a Forensic Medium Secure Unit in Birmingham on the site of the former Yardley Green Hospital. The Board favoured the development on this site as it was in a derelict state. There were some concerns about security and the Board stressed this need given its close proximity to the main hospital site.
- **Bereavement Services** – The Board considered a report setting out the main activities and issues for Bereavement Services, together with a detailed breakdown of the service's budget. There was discussion on several aspects of the service:

- the need for long term planning to ensure the supply of burial spaces
- the need to maintain reserves for possible future land acquisition
- the services provided under the various maintenance and street care elements of the budget

The Cabinet Member responsible for the Social Care and Health Portfolio was asked to consider setting aside a greater proportion of the budget surplus on Bereavement Services each year, for future provision.

Following concerns raised by a number of funeral directors, representatives were invited to a Meeting of the Board. The funeral directors explained the difficulties that they had experienced with the service, and summarised the circumstances that had led them to complain. They commented that since raising their concerns, the Head of Environmental Health had acted promptly to deal with the problems.

The Board felt that communication should be improved and it was agreed that twice yearly meetings would be held between senior managers of the bereavement service and representatives of local funeral directors

- **Commissioning a patient-led NHS** - The Board considered a report and consultation documents on the proposals for configuration of Ambulance Services in England and for the New Primary Care Trusts Arrangements in Birmingham and The Black Country. The Board was pleased to note that the Strategic Health Authority now proposed that Solihull PCT would remain in its current configuration, as this was the preferred option for Solihull.

The Board wrote to the Strategic Health Authority

- Confirming that the Health Scrutiny Board accepts the proposals in the consultation document 'Primary Care Trusts Configuration' and
- Expressing the Board's view that any savings made by changing the configuration of the Ambulance Service should be used to improve service delivery and equipment.

- **NHS Direct Out of Hours service** – The Board received a presentation on the operation of the NHS Direct Out of Hours Service, including performance information.

The Board noted that the out of hours service for Solihull PCT was currently provided as part of a consortium arrangement, however Solihull PCT intended to leave the consortium during 2006, and expected to be able to provide a better quality service, more sensitive to local needs, via an alternative provider.

It was noted that current performance was that 80% of calls were answered within 60 seconds, against the NHS Direct target of 95%. This was to be addressed by the recruitment of additional call-handling staff.

The Call-in Process

Under the Council's call-In procedure, Cabinet decisions, or key decisions made under delegated powers by Officers, may be called in for review.

A call-In request may be made by the Chairman or any three members of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Board (within whose remit scrutiny of the particular decision would fall), and must be made to the Chief Executive within five working days of the publication of the decision, setting out the reason for the request. This halts the decision until the Scrutiny Board is able to meet and consider the issue.

During the 2005-06 civic year, there have been two issues subject to a call-in request. In both of the cases the relevant Scrutiny Board did not support the grounds for the call in and were therefore satisfied with the original decisions.

For further information about this annual report or any aspect of scrutiny work in Solihull please contact:

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Council House, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 3BR
Email: reaton@solihull.gov.uk

All scrutiny reports are available to the public from all Solihull MBC libraries or on request to Democratic Services.

We are always happy to talk to you about what is happening in scrutiny. If you have any comments, topics for future scrutiny work, or are interested in getting involved with a scrutiny board, then please do get in touch.

You can also "Submit your views" using the form on our website at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/survey.asp?survey=51>

What scrutiny doesn't do:

The Scrutiny Boards do not deal with individual complaints. The Boards are primarily concerned with the wider issues of council policies, practices and procedures. Solihull Council has a complaints procedure in place.

If you are not satisfied with a service received from the Council, you are welcome to use the Council's complaints procedure. Either contact Solihull Council Complaints Team on: **0121 704 8296** or drop into the Solihull Connect on the Ground Floor of Solihull Central Library. You can also complain directly through the Council's website: <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/survey.asp?survey=127&catid=200228&docid=691>

Scrutiny does not undertake consultation exercises on behalf of Council Directorates. You will see adverts in the local press asking you to give the Council your views on a whole range of matters, or you may receive a consultation document directly.