



**st albans**

# annual report 2007/8

of the Overview  
and Scrutiny Committees

**city and district council**

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## Foreword

We are pleased to present to you the Annual Report for Overview and Scrutiny of St Albans District Council for the municipal year 2007/08.

Overview and scrutiny is a vital function in a modern local council. Councillors involved in overview and scrutiny can review policies, make suggestions for change and improvement and examine decisions which are made. The aim of this activity is, ultimately, to improve the way the Council works and makes decisions for all residents in the District.

We hope you find this report interesting. If you wish to know more about the scrutiny function or the content of this report, please contact the Scrutiny Support Officer, Claire Cowley, on 01727 814606 or [scrutiny@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@stalbans.gov.uk).

Councillor Paul Foster, Chair, Enterprise and Civic Environment Committee (2007/2008)



Councillor Julian Daly, Chair, Community Services Committee (2007/08)



Councillor Roma Mills, Chair, Corporate Services Committee (2007/08)



Daniel Goodwin, Chief Executive





## Overview and Scrutiny (Community Services) Committee

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1** Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Community Services) Committee for the 2007/08 municipal year was determined at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2007.
- 1.2** The Committee of ten Members was chaired by Councillor Daly, with Councillor Lusby as Vice-Chairman. The Committee held five meetings in 2007/08 from the first on 23 May 2007 until the final one on 15 January 2008.
- 1.3** The remit of the Committee may be summarised as performing the Overview and Scrutiny role in relation to the following functions:
- 🔍 homelessness, housing allocation, housing strategy, tenant services;
  - 🔍 community safety and disorder;
  - 🔍 poverty / deprivation, asylum seekers and refugees, social inclusion;
  - 🔍 youth;
  - 🔍 community learning;
  - 🔍 health, health improvement, health strategy;
  - 🔍 consumer protection, environmental protection, licensing and markets;
  - 🔍 waste and recycling;
  - 🔍 cemeteries, parks and green spaces commons;
  - 🔍 public conveniences;
  - 🔍 leisure and recreation;
  - 🔍 Agenda 21 / EMAS;
  - 🔍 financial support to the community;
  - 🔍 emergency planning.

## 2 Deprivation

- 2.1** The last two meetings of the Committee saw the previously completed scrutiny review on deprivation followed up regarding progress made. The Committee was involved in tracking actions from the report and heard that new posts had been put in place in the Council to help progress actions. Actions arising from the report had been identified as high/medium/long term priority.
- 2.2** At the Committee's last meeting on 15 January 2008 these priorities were debated. Issues raised concerned the following areas
- 🔍 grant aid to community groups and how the grant funding process aided groups focusing on issues concerning deprivation;
  - 🔍 provision for young people/youth service (including Big Lottery, Play Strategy, sports facilities. different types of provision needed for different ages/circumstances);
  - 🔍 support for tackling deprivation including placing officers in post;
  - 🔍 effect of appearance/aesthetics and links to streetscape/public realm work;
  - 🔍 access to (council and private) services in different wards across the District;
  - 🔍 provision of services to different communities and groups including black and minority ethnic communities;
  - 🔍 crime and policing issues;
  - 🔍 partnership working including the Children's Trust Partnership.

## 3 Young people's provision

- 3.1** The Chair of the Young People's Provision Working Party, Councillor Rowlands, presented the final report of the Working Party on provision for young people in the District at the 23 May 2007 meeting. The Working Party had gathered evidence from various sources including District Council officers, the County Council, St Albans District Council and youth workers.
- 3.2** The review of youth provision looked at youth participation in community activities and the extent of existing provision. This included financial support given for existing services.
- 3.3** The Working Party's report set out a number of recommendations covering the need for a focus on partnership development, communication, venues and travel and lead officer support for children's and young persons' issues.

- 3.4** The Committee supported the recommendations of the working party, and resolved that Cabinet be recommended to approve the recommendations of the report.
- 3.5** Many of the discussions in the remainder of the municipal year concerning provision for young people were to do with follow up and implementation of the working party's recommendations.
- 3.6** December 2007 saw the issue of community use of schools highlighted as having arisen from the working party. The Committee was informed of the ongoing initiatives in the county, under the Government's Every Child Matters policy, to extend school activity and resources into communities. Among other aims, this was to provide greater levels of information to parents and to reach excluded families.
- 3.7** Community school use was also linked to the Hertfordshire Sports Partnership – a voluntary organisation lobbying for increased access to and uptake of sports in the county. The Council has established a school sport partnership in the district to progress activity in this area.
- 3.8** Among the activities supported by the sports partnership include access to sports and exercise for older people (over 55), joint work with health and social service providers across the county and within the district.
- 3.9** The Committee asked to be kept informed about the following issues:
- 🔍 a list of extended school activities in district and how to access the information on them
  - 🔍 good practice in Herts regarding use of community schools
  - 🔍 external funding sources for such activity
  - 🔍 further/continued briefing on St Albans Children's Trust Partnership
  - 🔍 communication of the various extended schools services to the public
- 3.10** Further issues arising from the young people's work have been progressed through the development of the St Albans Play and Free Time Strategy – which supported an application for Big Lottery Funding. Specifically, extra funds for children's play areas (under 12s) are being sought and plans for a play partnership being explored.

## **4 Housing and homelessness**

- 4.1** Housing and homelessness issues were considered by the Committee for a considerable period of time during 2007/08.

- 4.2** In May 2007 the Committee heard a report on a joint protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds – giving details of a cross agency approach on homeless prevention initiatives.
- 4.3** Tenant participation was also reviewed throughout the year – that is, ways in which tenants in council accommodation can get have their say about services they receive, and get involved in decision making about their housing. Officers reported to the Committee that tenants in St Albans were more satisfied than they had been in the past with opportunities for participation in decision making, but that the Housing Department was monitoring further possibilities for tenant involvement, and developing policy around tenant involvement through a working party.
- 4.4** At a later meeting in 2007, on 5 December, the Committee were told of specific options for improvement and development of opportunities for participation including a tenant management organisation, estate management board, tenant inspections, ways of developing social capital and cohesion through initiatives linked to social housing and a tenant compact. These new ideas were to be examined as part of a project to review the role and structure of tenant meetings and the housing consultative forum. The working party on tenant involvement was to continue its discussions on these matters.
- 4.5** At the Committee's 13 November 2007 meeting, councillors considered the outcome of the Council's review of temporary accommodation available for those applying to the Council as homeless. The issue was called-in following its consideration at Cabinet, as relating to the redevelopment of the Westminster Lodge leisure site. After discussion of the issues arising, the Committee resolved that a recommendation be made to Council – namely that "this Council reiterates its long held policy that capital from the sale of housing assets be used to fund housing schemes". Put to the vote at Full Council on 28 November 2007, this vote was lost.
- 4.6** Also in November, the Committee examined the process surrounding the Council's review of sheltered housing, and in particular the consultation process concerning this issue. The review concerned specific options concerning the future of sheltered housing – of either transferring occupied sheltered homes to a Housing Association or transference of empty flats only. The Committee considered the consultation process surrounding the review, and expressed some concern about the proposals, regarding, for example, separation and break up of communities. The issue was referred as discussed by the Committee to the Council's cabinet, and a working party on the sheltered housing review set up for councillors to give consideration to the issues arising.

- 4.7** Other issues concerning social housing strategy included the Council's approach to choice based lettings (at the January 15 2008 meeting) – a new system of housing allocation for social housing, including both Council and Housing Association properties, where applicants bid for available properties rather than them being allocated. Officers reported progress to members in introducing the system. The matter was to be reported giving more detail at a future meeting of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **5 Leisure services**

- 5.1** The 23 May 2007 meeting of the Committee considered the proposed development of new Leisure Facilities at the Westminster Lodge site, with monitoring of the plans including proposed new facilities, schedule and funding strategy ongoing through the 2007/08 Municipal Year. The meeting of 11 September 2007 in particular examined the proposed funding for this development.
- 5.2** The Committee also considered the “Sports in the Parks” and play scheme initiatives for Summer 2007 at this meeting.
- 5.3** Councillors were also updated during this municipal year on the Council's Green Spaces Action Plan – including the fact that increasing numbers of Green Flag Park applications were being progressed and awarded in the District. A strategy was being developed with proposals for consultation on this in Summer 2008.

## **6 Future democratic arrangements**

- 6.1** The Committee considered, at several meetings during the municipal year, the Review of Democratic Arrangements for the Council itself, including a restructuring of the Overview and Scrutiny function. The purpose of this review was to streamline the business of the Council and to reduce the numbers of corporate meetings.
- 6.2** The Committee reviewed the proposals for renewal of arrangements at its meeting on 15 January 2008 and asked for clarification on a number of issues concerning the proposals for a City Forum and proposed numbers of meetings.
- 6.3** The Committee also recommended to Full Council that the transfer of resources for working parties be carried out to host departments. This recommendation was subsequently accepted at the meeting of Council on 23 January 2008.

## **7 Grants to voluntary organisations**

- 7.1** In May 2007, the Committee was updated on the process and communication of grant giving to voluntary organisations. The Committee suggested that more clarity about the differences between service and grant aid funding was needed, and also that grants available to organisations were more widely communicated to the organisations themselves, and Councillors and interested parties more generally.
- 7.2** In subsequent consideration of this issue at Cabinet (on 4 September 2007), proposals for the development of the grant giving process to community organisations, aimed to address these concerns, were approved.

## **8 Finance/budget**

- 8.1** Through the municipal year, the Council's revenue budgets and capital programmes were reviewed by the Committee, as relating to Community Services including the following areas:
- 🔍 Housing Investment Programme – HIP (including the relationships between HIP and General Fund Revenue account);
  - 🔍 Housing Revenue Account (including long term business planning, amounts transferred into the Government's capital receipts pool, amounts due to the Council through the HRA annual settlement).

## **9 Service planning and performance**

- 9.1** At the May 2007 meeting, the Committee reviewed the draft Corporate Plan for 2007-2010. The Committee also reviewed the Council's key performance indicators for services at regular intervals through the year.
- 9.2** The work of the Committee included the following areas:
- 🔍 meaningfulness and utility of particular performance indicators;
  - 🔍 scrutiny of targets and performance indicators;
  - 🔍 scrutiny of detail of the draft Corporate Plan;
  - 🔍 missed targets and the reasons behind these.

## **10 Other Community Service issues – monitoring and overview**

- 10.1** The Committee received the Minutes for the Community Safety Sub Committee, which included an overview of crime figures and detail on Designated Public Place Orders. Councillors monitored actions arising from other Consultative Forums, joint and management committees within its remit throughout the year.
- 10.2** Councillors also monitored the following issues through the year, among others:
- 🔍 progress on communication and implementation of the Council's new waste collection strategy
  - 🔍 the Council's revised Statement of Licensing Policy
  - 🔍 youth service provision including specific sites in the District.



# Overview and Scrutiny (Enterprise and Civic Environment) Committee

## 1 Introduction

**1.1** Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Enterprise and Civic Environment) Committee for the 2007/08 municipal year was determined at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2007. The remit of the Committee can be summarised as performing the Overview and Scrutiny role in relation to the following areas:

- 🔍 the built environment;
- 🔍 physical regeneration;
- 🔍 economic development, tourism, business links;
- 🔍 transport, highways, car parks;
- 🔍 planning and building control, regional planning;
- 🔍 conservation and heritage (excluding museums);
- 🔍 town centre management and marketing;
- 🔍 arts and culture, including museums.

**1.2** The Committee of ten Members was chaired by Councillor Foster, with Councillor Edleston as Vice-Chairman. The Committee held six meetings in 2007/08 from the first on 23 May 2007 and the final one on 15 January 2008.

## 2 Planning and development

**2.1** The Committee examined the planning call-in process at its 4 June 2007 meeting. “Call in” describes the system where Councillors can ask that consideration of a planning matter that might normally be delegated to officers can be considered by the relevant Development Control Council Committee.

**2.2** The system had been found to have weaknesses and had been subject to an internal audit inspection.

**2.3** Scrutiny of this matter resulted in a range of recommendations to Council being made concerning internal processes, including

- 🔍 that where there was a clear failure of process resulting in a report to Cabinet, Internal Audit should be immediately invited to review the matter.

- 🔍 that the Council be asked to consider making policy recommendations, or changes to the Constitution, to better protect the rights of individuals when these were in conflict with the corporate interests of the Council.
- 🔍 that the Council consider the urgent implementation of a robust call in process for Planning Applications to reduce the possibility of human error.

**2.4** These motions were carried at the 20 June 2007 meeting of Full Council, and an additional one made and carried, namely

**2.5** “That the outcome of consideration of the above issues by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Conservation be reported to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny (Enterprise and Civic Environment) Committee to be held on 5 September 2007.”

**2.6** During the municipal year, the Committee also monitored progress on the local development framework for the District, Audit Commission reporting on the planning service concerning equalities and diversity (for example, reaching out to excluded groups, community cohesion issues including the provision of community facilities) and the planning improvement strategy.

### **3 The built environment**

**3.1** The Committee considered and monitored a number of issues relating to the built environment during the year, including transport and design standards and leadership for the District.

**3.2** The roles and responsibilities of Historic Environment and Design Champions for the District were discussed.

**3.3** Councillors monitored the progress of the development of a Streetscape Design Manual at two meetings on 7 November 2007 and 9 January 2008.

**3.4** At the 7 November meeting, councillors considered the need for the Design Manual to guide the work of council officers at both District and County levels, and therefore be developed together with these officers; for strategic issues and links to County policies to be considered, as well as parish and town councils, and relevant documentation from organisations such as English Heritage.

**3.5** Related issues were raised at the 9 January meeting, along with discussions about how the Streetscape work would link to separate projects around a City Centre Vision for St Albans (with the aim of co-ordinating activity on city centre management and regeneration).

- 3.6** The distinction between Streetscape (static environment and aesthetic of street furniture) and Public Realm (use of public space and surrounding buildings) was highlighted by the Committee and work to examine the development of a Public Realm Strategy for the District was initiated.
- 3.7** The Committee was also involved through the year in monitoring issues concerning Hertfordshire Highways, including performance and residents' views and satisfaction with roads and pavements generally, and upkeep and maintenance of these in particular (potholes and road repairs).
- 3.8** A particular issue of interest was the recently laid paving in St Peter's Street which was subject to ongoing discussion as to quality of materials laid and cleaning regimes.

## **4 Travel and transport**

- 4.1** At the 22 May 2007 meeting, the Committee considered the Council's Transport Best Value Improvement Plan, and in particular, non-car travel and the Council's consideration of green issues.
- 4.2** The Committee also looked at the Council's Plans for Green Travel and a draft Walking Strategy at this meeting.
- 4.3** At a subsequent meeting, on 18 October 2007, the Committee received a report and presentations on contract bus services in the District, from District Officers and representatives of University Bus and Centrebus.
- 4.4** The report included information on the following areas:
- 🔍 working in partnership to deliver services (including the Intalink partnership);
  - 🔍 the Local Transport Plan for Hertfordshire;
  - 🔍 performance indicators for bus services including passenger numbers, vehicle miles travelled, numbers of employees, reliability and punctuality, which are reported to Hertfordshire County Council;
  - 🔍 concessionary fares and funding of these by both County and District;
  - 🔍 financial support from Local Authorities including St Albans District Council's discretionary support to bus services, and the funding agreement between County and District;
  - 🔍 Section 106 Funding of bus services including a new service between London Colney and St Albans funded by such monies;

- 🔍 traffic congestion and its negative effects on some services, including withdrawal of services in some cases;
- 🔍 bus service reliability;
- 🔍 the potential for paying bus fares via “smart” cards;
- 🔍 consideration of alternative “green” fuels for buses;
- 🔍 Intalink and community involvement;
- 🔍 timetable publicity.

**4.5** At a subsequent meeting of the Committee on 7 November, a range of these issues were discussed in depth, including:

- 🔍 ways of working and partnership in the future including publicity;
- 🔍 effects of traffic flow/congestion in the District on bus services;
- 🔍 community engagement and bus transport.

**4.6** Recommendations were made to Cabinet on the following issues:

- 🔍 communication of performance indicators to District Council members;
- 🔍 maximising the effect of Section 106 monies;
- 🔍 adoption of Green Fuels and Smart Cards for buses.

**4.7** A Council response to Hertfordshire County Council’s consultation on the Area Bus Review network was formed with particular reference to the above recommendations, and subsequent discussion at Cabinet in December 2007, and was considered at the 9 January 2008 meeting of the Committee.

## **5 Car parking**

**5.1** The Committee considered car parking in the district, in particular examining the size and scope of the Harpenden Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ), at its meeting on 5 September 2007.

**5.2** The Chair of the Committee called in a key decision on this matter as it was considered that a decision made as to roads included in the CPZ had been made by an officer under delegated powers without taking due regard of the views of the Harpenden CPZ Working Party which had met on 25 July 2007 to consider the expansion of the CPZ.

- 5.3** Scrutiny of Council practice and protocols surrounding this issue at the September meeting included examination of the role of working parties and the relationships between such working parties, officers and executive members.
- 5.4** A report was subsequently developed covering guidelines and protocols for Member/Officer Working Parties. The report and guidelines were included in the Council's Review of Democratic Arrangements, adopted by the Council and included in the Constitution.

## **6 Review of democratic arrangements**

- 6.1** The Committee considered, at several meetings during the municipal year, the Review of Democratic Arrangements for the Council itself, including a restructuring of the Overview and Scrutiny function. The purpose of this review was to streamline the business of the Council and to reduce the numbers of corporate meetings.
- 6.2** The Committee reviewed the proposals for renewal of arrangements at its meeting on 18 October 2007, in conjunction with recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate Services) colleagues.
- 6.3** The Committee made a number of recommendations concerning purpose and scope of the proposed St Albans City Forum, and value of existing local consultative arrangements. At a later meeting on 9 January, the Committee considered a further report on these arrangements and made further recommendations to the Council regarding membership and costs of the St Albans City Forum and seat allocation and implementation dates for the arrangements as a whole.
- 6.4** Full Council on 28 November 2007 approved New Democratic Arrangements including a City Forum, with detailed proposals further developed and debated in subsequent Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council meetings up to early 2008.

## **7 Review of complaints**

- 7.1** Committee members monitored complaint levels and details at the meeting of 7 November 2007, including numbers by department and common themes of complaints (including lack of response to communications), and new arrangements to monitor complaints received by the Planning Service. Levels of compliments were also reviewed.

## **8 Revenue and capital budgets**

- 8.1** The Committee was involved in reviewing and monitoring revenue and capital budgets through the year, including identification of specific funding for projects concerning enterprise/civic environment issues.

## **9 Other Enterprise and Civic Environment issues – monitoring and overview**

- 9.1** A range of service areas were subject to monitoring and review over the municipal year 2007/08 including the following issues:

- 🔍 performance reporting including planning applications within 8 week limit;
- 🔍 corporate plan;
- 🔍 minutes of working parties and panels which had links with the work of the Committee (including Planning Policy Advisory Panel, Car Parking Working Party, Highways Partnership Joint Member Panel);
- 🔍 licensing – review of application in the district;
- 🔍 economic development (including the Council's Economic Development Strategy, expenditure on economic development, links with local businesses, plans to introduce an award for independent retailer of the year);
- 🔍 gypsy and traveller sites and concerns about East of England Regional Assembly recommendations as to allocation of further sites;
- 🔍 green travel plan;
- 🔍 purchase and contract arrangements surrounding street nameplates;
- 🔍 taxi vouchers;
- 🔍 bus shelters.



## Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate Services) Committee

### 1 Introduction

1.1 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate Services) Committee for the 2007/08 municipal year was determined at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2007. The remit of the Committee may be summarised as performing the overview and scrutiny role in relation to the Council's internal services, including the following areas:

- 🔍 resource management (finance, Council Tax, budget, managed property and human resources);
- 🔍 member training and development;
- 🔍 procurement;
- 🔍 audit (both internal and external);
- 🔍 electoral services;
- 🔍 contract monitoring.

1.2 The Committee of ten Members was chaired by Councillor Mrs Mills, with Councillor Green as Vice-Chairman. The Committee held six meetings in 2007/08 from the first on 27 June 2007 until the final one on 22 January 2008.

### 2 Scrutinising the financial health of the council

2.1 At its first meeting of the municipal year 2007/08, and in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, the Committee considered the Council's **Statement of Accounts for 2006/07**. The Committee asked a number of questions of detail relating to the accounts, which were answered by the officers present. It was agreed that it would be helpful to hold an informal briefing for Members in June 2008 prior to a meeting of this Committee in order to explain how the Accounts were compiled. Subject to audit, the Committee approved the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2007, and they were signed by the Chairman to that effect.

- 2.2** The Committee considered the **Statement on Internal Control**, which was intended to provide assurance that the systems operated by the Council were robust, thereby underpinning the delivery of its corporate aims and objectives. The Statement also highlighted significant control issues that had been identified. The Committee agreed to note the Statement on Internal Control which Cabinet had approved for inclusion in the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts.
- 2.3** The Committee was advised of the work being undertaken to ensure that there would be an **integrated corporate, budget and service planning process** for 2008-11 onwards, including the proposed timing of reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 2.4** The Committee agreed to support the proposals regarding an integrated corporate, budget and service planning process. Officers were asked to report back to the Committee on 10 October 2007 on the need for either an additional meeting or to bring forward to December 2007 (after Cabinet had met) the meeting scheduled for 22 January 2008, in order to allow more timely consideration of the draft budget for 2008/09. [Note: In practice, there was neither a special meeting of the Committee held in December 2007 nor any change to the scheduled meeting date on 22 January 2008.]
- 2.5** The Committee noted that the **approved vision and aims of the Council** had been reaffirmed by the Cabinet. Committee also noted that the financial parameters for developing the corporate/service plans were intended to lead to an increase in Council Tax no greater than inflation between 2008 and 2011.
- 2.6** The Committee was provided with an update on the draft **General Fund Revenue Budget 2008-11** at its final meeting. Following detailed questions to the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Efficiencies and officers, the report was noted.
- 2.7** The Committee noted the contents of two reports which had been presented to the Cabinet meeting on 16 January 2008 regarding these matters.

### **3** **Overseeing electoral procedures**

- 3.1** The Committee reviewed the results of the annual Electoral Registration canvass that had been undertaken during Autumn 2007. The Committee was advised that the Service Plan for Legal and Democratic Services had included a target to increase the number of households responding to the canvass year on year by 1%. In the event the response rate in 2007 had actually decreased by 1.1%, although the number of registered electors had increased by 1,276 to 101,668.

- 3.2** Councillors queried why officers intended to write to each household in the District to notify the occupiers of the Electoral Registration entry for that address, when it might prove more effective to target only those Wards with the lowest percentages of registration. In reply the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that he had a personal duty to ensure that as many eligible adults as possible were included in the Electoral Register and that it would be wrong to exclude any parts of the District by limiting the distribution of rolling registration forms. He proposed to report to Members in due course on the outcome of the notices sent to all households.
- 3.3** In noting the report, the Committee recommended that once it has been established, the new Overview and Scrutiny (Internal Performance) Committee should consider the outcome of the 2007 Electoral Registration canvass in greater detail.

## **4 Scrutinising the performance of the council**

- 4.1** The Annual Report for 2006/07 on **Complaints and Compliments** indicated that the number of formal complaints investigated at Stage 1 of the process had increased to 138 from 122 in 2005/06. However, the Committee noted that of those 138 complaints, 35 concerned a single issue of price increases throughout leisure centres in the District.
- 4.2** There had been a slight decrease in the number of complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman in 2006/07 and no findings of maladministration against the Council. The number of complaints against the Council was exceeded by the number of compliments received.
- 4.3** In noting the report the Committee was pleased to receive assurance that complaints to the Council were viewed by officers as being a welcome opportunity to review and improve their services. The Chairman stressed the importance of Members being advised of complaints made about services which the Council either commissioned or outsourced.
- 4.4** At a later meeting of the Committee, Members noted the details of those complaints and compliments which had been received by the Council in the first six months of 2007/08.
- 4.5** The Committee monitored reports on a quarterly basis regarding the Councils' **service plan work programme updates** and performance towards **key performance indicator targets**.

## 5 Overseeing Human Resources issues

- 5.1 The Committee was advised of the progress of the Job Evaluation Project which had been reported to Cabinet on 8 January 2008. The revised and updated Strategy for Developing Human Resources was also submitted.
- 5.2 The Committee noted the progress of the Job Evaluation Project and asked that the Strategy for Developing Human Resources be forwarded to the Joint Consultative Committee and Cabinet for adoption and distribution to staff via the Human Resources Intranet site.

## 6 Performing the audit function on behalf of the Council

- 6.1 At the first meeting of the Committee in municipal year 2007/08, the District Auditor and Relationship Manager attended in order to formally present the content of the **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2005/06** and supporting documents and provide answers to the four questions which had been asked in her absence by the Committee at their previous meeting.
- 6.2 In response to questions the District Auditor confirmed that the Audit Commission would discuss with officers how the Council might integrate efficiency review into the performance management framework and ensure consistent consideration of value for money in service delivery. Discussion would focus on target setting and related resource implications. There was a need for the Council to integrate performance monitoring with the available financial information and to review them concurrently. The Council had begun to use value for money assessments as part of its budget process but the application of this tool was inconsistent. The “key services” referred to in the Direction of Travel report were chosen by the Audit Commission from all of the nationally-used performance indicators to reflect the priority areas of housing benefits, crime and disorder and homelessness.
- 6.3 The Audit Commission recognised that the Council was one of the most improved District Councils in the country, with 77% of key performance indicators improving since 2003/04, compared to a District average of 58%.
- 6.4 A suggestion that the Council might include the cost of dealing with planning applications as a local performance indicator would be a matter for the Council itself to consider. An assessment in May 2006 that the Council’s planning services had “uncertain” prospects for improvement had led to the production of a proposed action plan, copies of which were available for Members.

- 6.5** In relation to Key Lines of Enquiry which underpinned the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements, the Audit Commission would shortly be assessing the performance of the Council from September 2006 to March 2007 in order to determine whether there had been any change from the current assessment of the Council being at Level 2. The District Auditor undertook to provide evidence to Members to support the finding in the Direction of Travel report that community leadership had improved in 2005/06. She also confirmed that the Council's Internal Audit section delivered its work to the standard set by CIPFA and that it had the appropriate status within the Authority. The Audit Commission would be further reviewing Internal Audit during 2007/08.
- 6.6** The Committee noted the contents of the reports provided and the comments of the External Auditor.
- 6.7** There is a statutory duty on local authorities to review annually the **effectiveness of their system of Internal Audit** and for the findings of that review to be considered by either full Council or a Committee. That duty was last performed by this Committee, which considered a report at its meeting in June 2007.
- 6.8** Members commented favourably on an improved level of Internal Audit having taken place since the current Head of Service had joined, the production of clearer reports and the independence of the Internal Audit function. However, any unplanned additional tasks for the section did sometimes result in delays to its work programme. Additional resources might allow an extra Auditor to be employed, thereby enabling Internal Audit to undertake other work such as value for money investigations.
- 6.9** The Committee endorsed the effectiveness of the Internal Audit section of the Council.
- 6.10** On a quarterly basis the Committee has monitored the **progress made by Internal Audit on various audit projects** and noted the Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit for 2006/07 at its meeting in June 2007.
- 6.11** The Committee received confidential reports of the Head of Internal Audit on various subjects during 2007/08 and, at its first meeting of the municipal year, agreed a revised procedure. This required the appropriate Head of Service to attend future meetings of the Committee whenever an Internal Audit report on one of their service areas was being discussed in order that Councillors could question them directly.

## 7 Scrutinising internal changes within the Council

- 7.1** The Committee received details of the decision of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 June 2007 in relation to progress in determining the second stage of changes to the **Council's structure**, which had been called in by the Chairman of this Committee with the support of four other Councillors. Following discussion, the Committee recommended to Cabinet that any decisions on structural issues should be taken by full Council and not by the Appointments Committee acting under delegated authority.
- 7.2** The Committee also received a report that was due to be considered by the Cabinet in July 2007 which proposed a new structure for the Council, presented the results of consultation and set out a plan for implementation. It was agreed that Cabinet should be requested to consider the views of the Committee before making any recommendations to full Council.
- 7.3** At its meeting in October 2007, the Committee considered the proposals for a **revised committee structure** within the Council and resolved to pass its views to Cabinet and full Council for consideration before any final decisions were made.
- 7.4** On 22 January 2008, the Committee had a final opportunity to comment on the proposals, which had been considered previously by Cabinet in December, and would be considered by Council on 23 January. The Committee agreed to note the report on Future Democratic Arrangements which had been considered by the Cabinet, the resulting recommendations to Council and the views expressed subsequently by the other two Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee also requested that during their next review of the Scheme of Members' Allowances, the Independent Remuneration Panel should be asked to reconsider the data now available regarding attendances at meetings in order to encourage Member accountability.

## 8 Overseeing the member training and development programme

- 8.1** The Committee noted the Member training programme which had been arranged for the municipal year 2007/08 and details of a proposed programme for 2008/09.

## 9 Contract monitoring

- 9.1** The Committee re-established the Contract Monitoring Group (CMG) of six Members for the municipal year 2007/08. The Minutes of each of the three subsequent meetings of CMG were submitted to the parent Committee and were noted.
- 9.2** At its first meeting in October 2007, CMG agreed:
- 🔍 To elect Councillor Sinfield as Chairman and to note their terms of reference;
  - 🔍 To note the progress of the replacement Financial Management Systems (FMS) and the Local E-Government Support and Capacity Grant;
  - 🔍 To invite the Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate Services) Committee to recommend to full Council some revised wording of Contracts Procedure Rule 6;
  - 🔍 To note various reports under the Capital Projects Protocol.
- 9.3** At its second meeting on 27 November 2007, CMG agreed:
- 🔍 To note the progress of the replacement Financial Management Systems (FMS) and the Local E-Government Support and Capacity Grant;
  - 🔍 To note various reports under the Capital Projects Protocol;
  - 🔍 To ask the Asset Manager to convey to the contractors currently refurbishing the kitchens and bathrooms in a programme of 707 properties the thanks of the Chairman for the exceptionally high standard of their work, attention to detail and customer care;
  - 🔍 To ask the Asset Manager to provide for the next meeting details of the key performance indicators which had been set for the contractors in each of the first three years of the project mentioned above and the scores they had achieved;
  - 🔍 That in relation to the completed project at Cotlandswick, London Colney officers be asked to prepare a brief report on leasehold charges, with some examples of the amounts charged and also summary information on total charges and their recovery.
- 9.4** At its final meeting in January 2008, CMG noted various reports under the Capital Projects Protocol. **[Note:** Following the Council's decisions on future democratic arrangements which were made at its meeting on 23 January 2008, the functions of CMG are now being exercised by the newly established Audit Committee.]