

Nottingham City Council Overview and Scrutiny in Nottingham Annual Report 2007 - 2008

**Spotlight on the City
Focus on improvement**

May 2008

What is Overview & Scrutiny?

**Overview -
general survey**

**Scrutiny -
critical gaze; close examination or investigation of details**

Oxford English Dictionary

www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/overviewandscrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007 - 2008

Foreword from the Chairs

Last year continued to be a busy year for Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) as we worked to keep a close eye on the issues that we know are important to the citizens of Nottingham. The election saw a number of new Councillors taking part in O&S and seeing the importance of its role in improving services for the city.

Our thanks go to all those members of the public, people from other organisations, members of staff and fellow Councillors for helping O&S members to gain a good understanding of issues under review and for supporting the scrutiny process; it has been very much appreciated.

O&S Councillors, supported by their officer team, continue to play an important part in delivering the best possible public services for the people of Nottingham by spotlighting areas of concern and focusing on ways to improve services. Councillors get to the heart of an issue, learn from experts and best practice, gain understanding from people who both deliver and receive services and then use the evidence to make recommendations on how to make services better.

This report summarises what we did in 2007/08. Last year's major Corporate Performance Assessment confirmed that the O&S process is performing well in Nottingham. We have made some big differences to the way the Council and its partners work, but we are not complacent and continually review our own practices and processes in order to ensure that we do add value to the services of the Council. We have commissioned an external review of our Overview and Scrutiny function, which has helped us to prepare for new roles and responsibilities coming out of legislation, particularly the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, and to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of our approach. The first part of the review was completed in time for a new structure to be planned for the 2008-09 municipal year which will address the new O&S responsibilities.

We are looking forward to fresh challenges as we move into a new era for overview and scrutiny and anticipate continued progress over the coming year.

Councillor Malcolm Wood, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny: **Councillor Penny Griggs**, Chair of Performance & Resources Panel: **Councillor Dave Liversidge**, Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel: **Councillor Emma Dewinton**, Chair of Regeneration & Sustainability Panel: **Councillor Ginny Klein**, Chair of Serving the Adult Community Panel: **Councillor Mick Newton**, Chair of Children and Young People Panel

Introduction

Focusing on improvement . . .

Overview and scrutiny (O&S) activities spotlight areas of concern and focus attention on ways in which services can be improved. Through this kind of work, Councillors can get to the heart of an issue, learn from experts and best practice, gain understanding from practitioners and service users and then devote time to deliberating on the evidence in order to make recommendations aimed at improvements.

The aim of Overview and Scrutiny Members and their officer support team is to promote the principles of good public scrutiny and to continue the development of a robust and effective overview and scrutiny function focused on adding value to the work of the Council and the life of the City and all its communities.

This year O&S Members and officers have been preparing for the implications of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006, both of which will expand the role of O&S, particularly in relation to our work with partners. The changes include a responsibility to scrutinise the actions and decisions of the authorities responsible for crime and disorder issues and to engage with those partners who are contributing to the achievement of Local Area Agreement targets.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny . . .

Overview and Scrutiny members:-

- Support the achievement of the best possible services for the people of Nottingham; and for those working in and visiting the City
- Contribute to policy development and help to shape major plans and strategies
- Publicly hold the Executive to account for delivering on the Council's priorities and for the decisions they make
- Review issues of concern or particular interest to the people of Nottingham
- Examine matters of wider public interest which are not necessarily the responsibility, or sole responsibility, of the Council, but which affect the well-being of the City and its people
- Have a statutory role in scrutinising substantial developments or variations in National Health Services in the area

Adding value to the work of the Council . . .

By taking time to look at issues and problems in depth, speaking to all the necessary people to get a rounded understanding and using all this evidence to come up with solutions which can be recommended to the decision makers, Councillors significantly contribute to the work of the Council.

O&S has influence across the Council and with partners through the detailed work it undertakes and the evidence based recommendations it makes. Although not a decision making function, outcomes of O&S can be directly attributed to action taken to implement its recommendations and there are also positive outcomes from Councillors' investigations and interest whilst undertaking a piece of work, through influence, through raising the profile of services and by bringing service providers together.

To ensure the greatest value arises from the activities of O&S, the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny addresses the Council's corporate priorities and those shared with its partners in the City. It also aims to reflect concerns and issues identified through Councillors' constituency work, consultations, surveys and complaints and the outcomes of external or internal inspections.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the O&S Panels . . .

The O&S Committee undertakes a management role for the whole function and has responsibility for involvement in and scrutiny of major corporate plans and policies. It also establishes Task and Finish Panels consisting of a small number of Councillors to undertake reviews on specific subjects – this year these have included reviews of debt collection, neighbourhood policing and information rights.

As well as the main O&S Committee, there are five O&S panels, each with its special area of responsibility. They are:-

- Children and Young People Panel which looks at all issues concerning services for children and young people
- Health Scrutiny Panel concentrating on health provision in the City and the plans of NHS trusts such as Nottingham Primary Care Trust - for NHS issues which affect the wider conurbation there is a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, with members drawn from the City and County Councils
- Performance and Resources Panel which uses performance information from Council departments to spotlight areas for review where performance may not be up to the required standard and also considers all resource matters, financial, personnel and property, and the Council's equality and diversity activity
- Regeneration, Infrastructure and Sustainability Panel with responsibility to scrutinise such things as transport, inward investment, the built environment and the Council's role in leading the response to climate change and sustainability
- Serving the Adult Community Panel, looking at services which are provided in our communities such as libraries, leisure centres and open spaces, and also services which are provided for the more vulnerable adults in our city

Because of new responsibilities, the structure for O&S will change in May 2008 and details of the changes are available at the end of this report.

Ways of working . . .

It very much depends on the topic to be scrutinised or the piece of work in hand – ways of working can include:-

- **Major Reviews** – in depth investigations into specific issues or services which may take several months to complete and which usually involves inviting a wide range of experts to give information. This includes hearing from our partners and other organisations or agencies, as well as from Council officers and, as often as possible, from service users as well. It may also involve site visits and focus groups to ensure Councillors have a full picture of the issue. The evidence collected forms the basis of a final report, with recommendations made to support improvements, which are then presented to the appropriate member of the Executive or, in the case of services or responsibilities of other City organisations, to non-Council bodies.
- **Spotlight Reviews** - less wide ranging than major reviews, members choose focused topics from performance or other information to conduct a spot check. This usually requires officers to provide information and explanations about the service's performance. Councillors will normally make recommendations for improvements as a result of the review.
- **Monitoring Activity** - this can be looking at the performance and financial management of Council services; or of action planning following inspections; or of progress in the implementation of recommendations made in O&S members' own reports.
- **Holding to account** - Overview and Scrutiny members do not make decisions themselves, but their role includes satisfying themselves that the decisions taken by the Executive are in the best interest of local communities, council tax payers and other key stakeholders and in line with approved policy.
- **Call-in** – non-Executive Councillors can require the Executive Board or one of the portfolio holders to give further consideration to a decision which they have made. This may happen if a number of non-executive members are not entirely satisfied with the decision or feel there is information which hasn't been taken into account. If there is a call-in, the decision will not be implemented until further deliberation by the decision makers has taken place in light of the representations; but so far call-in has not been used in Nottingham.

All non-executive Councillors have the opportunity to take an active part in O&S activities and, in line with the spirit of overview and scrutiny, O&S Councillors in Nottingham aim to carry out their activities in a consensual environment where party politics take a less prominent role. There are many ways in which individual members can participate, for example by making suggestions for topics to be scrutinised, by

contributing to the questioning of witnesses as a member of an O&S panel and suggesting and debating recommendations. Councillors from all the three main political parties have at some time chaired panels, which gives them an extra, in depth involvement in the work in hand.

It is extremely satisfying to learn that many who take part in our activities find the process useful and interesting. This year once again we have benefited from the input of many of our partners and local organisations and thanks are extended to all of them.

Highlights and Achievements of 2007/08

There were elections to the Council in May 2007 which resulted in a slow start to O&S activity. However, a lot has been happening during the year since then, some of which is set out below: much of the fruits of O&S work will be apparent later in 2008 when decision makers report on how they are responding to O&S recommendations.

Improving Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities - Public Transport

Work has continued with Nottingham City Transport (NCT) to improve the experiences of adults with learning disabilities who use public transport. In November Councillor Klein, the Chair of the Serving the Adult Community (SAC) Panel 2007/08, and Councillor Sutton, who chaired the panel in 2006/07, were invited to take part in NCT's disability awareness training for new drivers. They concluded that NCT's commitment to raising awareness of disabilities and training its drivers to provide a positive service to all of its customers is very clear and to be applauded. Taking this to the next stage, ie achieving a culture change within the organisation and impacting on the experience of service users, is the next challenge. NCT continues to develop its training programme for drivers and has also made contact with representatives of Speaking Up, a charity which provides independent advocacy to vulnerable people. It has been agreed that NCT will take a bus with trainers out into the community to give adults with learning disabilities an opportunity to familiarise themselves with buses, ask what questions they wish and practice using the bus in stress free circumstances. Both representatives of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board (LDPB) and NCT will be invited back later in 2008 to report on how this new approach progresses and impacts on the experiences of service users.

Cycling in the City

This year the Regeneration, Infrastructure and Sustainability Panel initiated action to make Nottingham more cyclist friendly. This included a cycle tour of the city to see how easy, or not, it was to get around. Members of the Panel, officers at all levels, including the Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration, Pedals Local Cycling Organisation and other partners including the PCT, all took part in the ride to highlight some of the problems faced by cyclists. A working group was set up to assist with the further development of a cycling action plan for the City and this was then taken to the Panel for its views and endorsement.

Transition

Continuing with the theme of improving services for adults with learning disabilities, the SAC Panel carried out a spotlight review of the support provided to young people with learning disabilities and complex needs at the point of transition from Children's to Adult Services. Members focused their considerations on joint working by Children's Services and Adult Services and other relevant agencies and how both transition planning and continuity of care and support can be improved. Members of the panel had also had the opportunity to visit three day centres and to discuss provision with members of staff. They identified particular areas of concern which included: the difficulties of meeting the expectations of parents and carers once individuals transfer from Children's to Adult Services because of the reduction in resources available; the need for community locality based centres, with longer opening hours and more flexibility; the need for improved access to leisure facilities; the negative impact of reduced funding for courses suitable for young people and adults with learning disabilities; the limited access to further education opportunities in general; and the need to be responsive to the very varied and differing levels of need of young people with learning disabilities. The panel made a number of recommendations to improve services to young people with learning disabilities and complex needs at the point of transition and is currently awaiting responses to these.

Relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Overview and Scrutiny recommendations were taken into consideration during the restructuring of support for the voluntary and community sector and this section is now called the Community Development Service. An additional post was created to manage the programme of grant aid for voluntary and community organisations and two new posts to lead on improving the Authority's engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector and the development of a Compact website. O&S was influential in ensuring the full engagement of the V&C Sector in the development of the Compact.

Focusing on the Priorities and Challenges for 2007-08

At the beginning of the municipal year, the O&S Committee and all the O&S Panels requested that the appropriate Executive portfolio holding Councillors attend early meetings of each O&S body in order to set out their priorities and challenges for the coming months. This allowed O&S to tailor their work programmes to include some of the items highlighted by Executive Members – work arising from this included spotlight reviews on Closed Circuit Television and Homelink, the choice based lettings system.

Section 106

Last year the Performance and Resources Panel (P&R) carried out a review of the use of Section 106 money - funding received from developers as part of planning agreements to ensure that communities are not negatively affected by new developments. The panel wanted

to be sure that Section 106 money was being used to achieve the maximum benefit for local communities, that decision making processes for the use of the money were transparent and mechanisms for approving Section 106 decisions were robust and members made a number of recommendations to achieve this. This year the panel invited relevant officers back to a meeting to talk about the progress that they have made. It's clear that the review has raised the profile of Section 106 and has made a real difference to the way that the authority works to co-ordinate and report on Section 106. A senior lead officer has been nominated, who ensures that all relevant departments liaise with each other, that the Executive Board receives regular reports on Section 106 funded projects and that 106 income and expenditure and links with area committees are being strengthened.

Community Centres

The SAC Panel carried out a review of community centres this year to see if they could add anything to the developing Community Centre Asset Management Strategy. Members were particularly keen to see that, in recognition of the value of volunteers to the management and delivery of services from community centres, priority continues to be given to the provision of high quality training, development and support for community associations and organisations, based on nationally agreed standards. They also wanted to be sure that the contribution made by community centres to community cohesion and engagement is properly recognised and, therefore, recommended that a smart system of collecting data be agreed and implemented with the full involvement of community associations and organisations. It was agreed that these matters would be included in the strategy.

Gating Orders

The RIS Panel has been monitoring the implementation of Gating Orders, a power under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 to gate footpaths, bridleways and other public rights of way to reduce crime or antisocial behaviour. In 2006 the Executive agreed that Area Committees should decide where Gating Orders were needed but put a restriction of one order per year per Area Committee. The Panel this year reviewed the scheme after its first twelve months and recommended that the Executive give more flexibility to the one Gating Order only each year ruling and this was agreed by the Executive.

Working with our Partners and the Community

Good scrutiny relies on good relationships with our partners and our local communities. We want scrutiny to add value to the work of the Council and to help shape services to meet needs. In 2007/08 we saw more developments in this area of our work, some of which are set out in the paragraphs below.

The Local Area Agreement – O&S role

2007/08 saw continued monitoring of Nottingham's Local Area Agreement (LAA) – the LAA is an agreement between Nottingham and central government to improve the lives of people in Nottingham. This is done by working together with partners on a range of different projects and actions. Targets have been set, which all partners have to work towards, for example, to reduce crime, to improve school exam results, to decrease the incidence of teenage pregnancies. The government will provide a financial reward for some targets if they are met. Overview and Scrutiny Councillors have met regularly with partnership representatives to discuss progress, what is being done to address those targets which are not currently being met and to check that everything possible is being done to achieve good outcomes. Again, this is O&S activity which often leads to further work and may result in recommendations to support improvements: for example, spotlight reviews have been undertaken on standards of street cleansing in disadvantaged wards and how people feel about their ability to influence decisions following consideration of LAA progress: these have resulted in a number of recommendations support improvements.

Equality and Diversity and the Community Equality Forum

O&S has continued to monitor how the Council responds to equality and diversity issues. The Council has a duty to ensure fair treatment of people and to value people's differences. Scrutiny work includes looking at what is being done to reach level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and to monitor the Disability, Gender and Race Equality Schemes. The Community Equality Forum (CEF), made up of representatives of a range of organisations who have come together to ensure the mainstreaming of equality and diversity in the Council's work, has continued to maintain an interest in the O&S work of the Council. In 2007/08 a joint way of working was agreed between O&S and the CEF to ensure that the Council's O&S work and the CEF's work support one another and lead to the best results for everyone who receives Council services.

Listening to local communities and local people

While carrying out reviews this year we have tried to engage with local communities to hear their views about the issues under scrutiny. The Review of Neighbourhood Policing (due to be completed in May 2008) and the Review of the Provision of Services for Young People 14-19 (due to be completed in July 2008) have both involved talking to local people in a range of settings to establish their views, experiences and ideas.

Participation in O&S reviews

Members of the Youth Council have not only been sitting on the Children and Young People Panel to hear the evidence for the review, but they have also submitted their own evidence and gathered other evidence for the panel by carrying out a youth survey on gaps and barriers

to provision and by delivering a presentation on the Youth Bank and how it allocates funding for youth projects. This review has been used as a pilot to support the development of a protocol for future working of the Youth Council with O&S.

The Regeneration, Infrastructure and Renewal Panel has again asked representatives from organisations outside the Council to sit on the panel for its major review this year - looking at the City's Economic Activity Rate and what the Council and its partners are doing to help people into work. Representatives of NECTA and of the GNP are sitting with the Panel to give their advice on the issues.

Although not quite complete yet, the Neighbourhood Policing review has provided a positive opportunity to work closely with the Council's Neighbourhood Management officers and with the Police, as well as engaging local communities to tell us about their experiences and put forward their views and ideas.

The Joint Health Scrutiny Committee brings together a partnership of local authorities and health partners and the Health Scrutiny Panel has continued to work closely with the City PCT Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forum – it now looks forward to building a similarly productive relationship with the new Local Involvement Network (LINK), which replaces the PPI Forums from April 2008.

We have also begun to put the O&S relationship with the Local Strategic Partnership, One Nottingham, on a firmer footing by beginning discussions with representatives of the Theme Partnerships on ways of working together to improve the understanding they have of O&S and how their contributions to the work of O&S can influence the improvement of services.

We would like to thank all of our partners for their contribution towards O&S in Nottingham and look forward to continue to develop and build relationships, not only to meet the requirements of new legislation, but also in recognition of the significance of the role of strong partnership working in delivering comprehensive, coherent and outcome focused services to the citizens of Nottingham.

Resources

The Council's budget allocation for overview and scrutiny covers the salaries and on-costs of the Overview and Scrutiny Team, support for reviews, the costs relating to expert witnesses, visits and other special events. Set out below is the expenditure against the budget in 2007-08.

Overview and Scrutiny resources 2007-08

<i>Description</i>	<i>Expenditure 2007-08</i>	<i>Budget for 2007-08</i>
	£	£
<i>Employee costs</i>	208,233	206,760
<i>Running costs</i>	9,765	13,360
<i>Budget to support the function</i>	5,676	29,000
Totals	223,674	249,120

The future...

This year, as mentioned above, we have seen the introduction of new legislation and our own commissioned external review, which have influenced our decision to restructure O&S for 2008/09.



** ad hoc panels

The new committees will draw up their work programmes for 2008/09 over the first few meetings of the new municipal year. We also ensure that the work programme is flexible enough to include issues or concerns which arise through the year. Further information on the work programme will be available on the website or through the Team as it develops.

Contact details for more information

We are always happy to speak to local people and community groups / organisations about what the panels do. If you have any comments or queries, or would like to suggest topics for future work please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team.

Phone

0115 9154511

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Our website contains up-to-date information about the work of O&S Councillors. You can also look back at previous work and download copies of published reports – see the topics overleaf.

www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/overview_scrutiny.htm

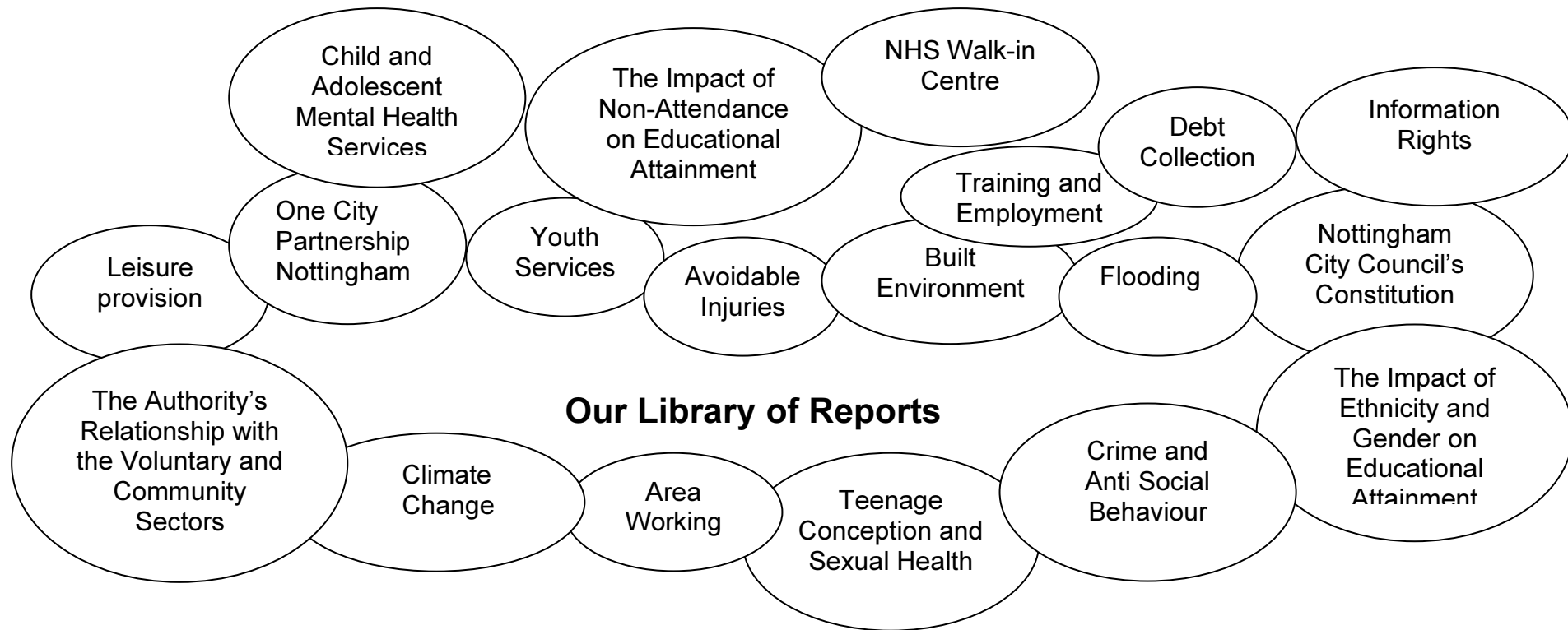
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Views on how our service can be improved are always welcome.

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