



Ryedale District Council

REPORT TO: Council

DATE: 15 May 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Phil Hancock
Performance Manager

SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

WARDS AFFECTED: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To accept and note the contents of the Annual Report 2007–08 of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

That Full Council:

- a) Accepts the Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- b) Notes the recommendations arising from the Review of the Complaints System; the comments on the implementation of the Council Improvement Plan; the risk management report; the findings from performance monitoring over the past year; and the key actions recommended in the Annual Audit Letter 2006/07.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The Annual Report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (a full copy is available on the Scrutiny Page of the Council website) serves a number of purposes:

- to inform others of the work done by the Committee during the Council Annual Year 2007/08, the work that remains to be completed and a draft work plan for the Council Annual Year 2008/09;
- to acknowledge the good work achieved by staff, Members and others in delivering services to the community of Ryedale;

- to report on any specific matters of concern over the Council's failure to act or where the mis-management of resources, performance, risk or other matters impacts significantly on the delivery of Council services and/or the Corporate Plan;
- to engage the community, other stakeholders and all Members of the Council in contributing suggestions for areas that may need to be reviewed over the forthcoming Council year;
- to help measure the effectiveness of the Committee's work.

4.0 REPORT

4.1 This report highlights the main points contained within the Annual Report.

4.2 **Reviews:** The Complaints Review has been completed. A new two-tier complaints system has been agreed with a new Comments, Compliments and Complaints Form and a revised complaints procedure providing more information to any complainant. A guide for staff has also been produced. A new format for the reporting of formal complaints to Members and to the wider public has been developed in order to provide more information whilst maintaining confidentiality. The main purpose of the reporting change is to identify and encourage opportunities for learning across the Council as a whole.

The Review of Waste Management is in progress and will be reported in 2008/09. Good progress on the accepted recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews has been noted with some recommendations arising from the Leisure Services review to be followed up.

4.4 **Council Improvement Plan:** A Council Improvement Plan was agreed in July 2006, based on the Local Code of Corporate Governance.

As a result of monitoring over the past year the Committee has raised a number of concerns and acknowledges that action has been taken to address these as follows:

- governance issues require a wider review rather than focusing solely on a review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance. As such a comprehensive review of the Council Constitution has been commissioned which will pick up some of the detail included in the improvement plan;
- Members' request for a user friendly summary of the Constitution must await the outcome of the review of the Constitution;
- progress has been made on the VFM strategy and this has been acknowledged in discussion with the Audit Commission for the Council's VFM assessment;
- a decision is required on the need to refresh the Citizen's Panel and a report will be brought to a future Policy & Resources Committee;
- The Council is undertaking a programme of change, including a management re-structure. Particular issues that will need addressing over the coming months include:

- (a) a new approach to staff development review;
- (b) the production of the new Health and Safety Policy;
- (c) any required response to the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007;

An interim Health and Safety Officer has now been appointed and will be dealing with the last two issues;

- the Council's Business Continuity Plan has now been completed to the point it can be tested;
- following the re-structure of the Corporate Management Team, the responsibility for progressing the Risk Management Strategy has been assigned to a member of the internal audit team.

4.5 **Customer Complaints:** The Committee acknowledges the many positive comments received from customers using our services, including the good work of Community Leisure Ltd in managing our leisure facilities.

4.6 **Risk Management:** The Committee have noted through the reports received during the year that action is still required to:

- fully manage the risks associated with strategic partnerships, through implementation of the agreed revised approach;
- complete the emergency and disaster recovery planning work and test the business continuity plan.

4.7 **Performance:** Over the year the Committee has noted the good performance in removing abandoned vehicles, in the time taken to process planning applications, disabled facilities grants, new housing and council tax benefit applications and changes in circumstances, and in the collection of council tax and in dealing with environmental health complaints.

A number of concerns have been raised by the Committee over the past year:

- funding for improvements to baby-changing facilities in public conveniences was referred to and considered by Community Services & Licensing Committee;
- the recovery of outstanding debt. Reminders have been made to staff to ensure that debt action occurs before they are passed to Legal Services for formal recovery action;
- acknowledged weaknesses around indicators measuring equality and diversity in the workforce when compared to the population as a whole and to other Councils. Positive efforts are made to recruit staff from all sections of the community;
- the number of days lost to sickness absence – a revised approach has been implemented that has resulted in improvement during the year.

In terms of the implementation of the Council's Corporate Plan 2006-09 the Committee noted good progress across a range of the Council's objectives. The Council most needs to improve delivery on the following objectives in this final year of the Plan: Objective 1 - Affordable Housing; Objective 13 - Reduce HGVs - Malton & Norton; Objective 14 - Accessible new developments.

Delivery against the Corporate Plan is particularly strong in the areas of: Objective 6 - Community Grants; Objective 7 - Reducing violence; Objective 8 - Anti-social behaviour & nuisance; Objective 9 - Young People; Objective 10 - Household Waste Recycling; Objective 11 - CO2 Emissions; Objective 12 - Clean Environment; Objective 15 - Community Transport; Objective 17 - Electronic channels; Objective 20 - Efficiency gains.

4.8 Audit: The Committee refers Full Council to the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006-07 and the recommendations contained therein from the Audit Commission.

The main messages for the Council contained in the report are:

- our rate of improvement slipped in 2006/07 and our performance within our priority services was variable; we maintained our strong performance in council tax collection and housing benefit administration but the amount of waste collected and our staff sickness levels deteriorated;
- effective partnership working has allowed us to achieve wider community outcomes such as expanding community transport scheme. We are also improving access to services and engagement with 'hard to reach' people, including young people and homeless people;
- a conclusion has been issued on our value for money arrangements to say that we had proper arrangements in place in 2006/07;
- there are opportunities to improve our use of resources assessment. As a relatively small council, the capacity to make sustained improvements remains a key challenge;
- an unqualified opinion has been given on our accounts;
- our overall management arrangements regarding data quality are adequate, although areas for improvement both at a strategic and departmental level have been identified.

The key actions needed by the Council identified in the letter are to:

- examine ways of moving our costs for the levels of services provided to below average costs for District Councils;
- monitor the implementation of the agreed action plan to strengthen arrangements in relation to data quality; and

- explore opportunities to accelerate our rate of improvement across all service areas – especially those service areas that contribute to our key priorities. In particular, focus on those priority areas, such as absence management, where performance deteriorated during 2006/07 and which will have an ongoing impact on our capacity to deliver, until satisfactorily addressed.

Action is already being taken to address these issues so that the Council can continue to improve the delivery of services to the community.

Reports from Internal Audit (the Audit Partnership) found that all the main systems subjected to audit were operating robustly and securely. Some concerns over the handling of housing benefit fraud have been addressed through an arrangement with Scarborough Borough Council. Further reports from the Audit Partnership Manager found few material weaknesses and that where this was the case management action had been taken.

More detail on these and other issues can be found in the full Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, available on the councils website.

The Committee congratulates staff on the work that has been done over the past year and looks forward to further improvement in the coming year.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 That Full Council:

- Accepts the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Notes the recommendations arising from the Review of the Complaints System; the comments on the implementation of the Council Improvement Plan; the risk management report; the findings from performance monitoring over the past year; and the key actions recommended in the Annual Audit Letter 2006/07.

Background Papers:

Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2007-08

OFFICER CONTACT:

Please contact Phil Hancock, Performance Manager, if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Ryedale House on 01653 600666 x296 or e-mail at phil.hancock@ryedale.gov.uk