

Slough Borough Council

**Annual Scrutiny
Report
2010 / 11**



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1. Foreword by Chair

It gives me great pleasure to introduce for the second year running, the Annual Scrutiny Report. This report highlights some of the key outcomes and achievements from the year and maps out some of the main areas on which we intend to focus on in the year ahead.

Nationally and locally we are faced with difficult economic times. In particular, the impact of the Government's spending cuts is still being assessed. Scrutiny's role over the coming months will be to ensure that it continues to be involved in decisions concerning spending and that every effort is made to ensure that we arrive at the best possible outcome for council services and our residents.

To this end I am particularly proud of the strong challenge that we presented to the Office for National Statistics with respect to the upcoming Census. All local authorities rely on census population figures to get the government funding needed for public services. Like many authorities, Slough believes that there is an under-estimation in the population numbers and that the council is catering for the needs of a far larger and more diverse population than that suggested by official sources. The 2011 Census represents, therefore, an opportunity to set right the population and profile of Slough's residents.

I am proud of our strong track record in Health Scrutiny and the continued robust challenges that the panel presents to our local Health partners across primary and acute healthcare. In particular the consultation process on Inpatient Mental Health care has caused great concern amongst elected members, representatives from Slough LINKS¹ and local residents. The Health Scrutiny Panel used its powers to intervene and monitor closely the consultation process. The Panel will continue to monitor the outcomes from the consultation this year.

The scrutiny review into NHS car parking arrangements across East Berkshire mentioned in last year's Annual Report was completed this year. As well as the robust recommendations and challenges that flowed from the report, the Review had other positive outcomes. These included the benefits of working collaboratively with our counterparts from Bracknell Forest Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, in bringing a controversial piece of work into the public domain.

¹LINKS – Local Involvement Networks are an independent network of individuals, organisations and community group representing patients who work together to improve local Health and Social Care Services

We have also undertaken work on key issues of concern for Slough residents and I am particularly pleased at the public turnout over the matter of Foster Care payments. This issue was raised as a result of a member call-in and illustrated the potential of the scrutiny process to challenge and change a proposal presented to Cabinet.

Furthermore, the Committee was instrumental in ensuring that members of staff with learning disabilities at Wexham Nursery should be granted a period of 9 months support (rather than the 6 months proposed) to assist them with future employment opportunities. This was in light of the decision to close Wexham Nursery due to the council's budget pressures.

The Communities, Leisure & Environment and Neighbourhoods and Renewal Panels joined forces to look at Eco Homes. Through Scrutiny we were able to promote the positive initiatives in Slough with respect to sustainability and carbon reduction.

As you will see we have looked at a range of issues and I would like to thank my fellow Vice-Chair, Councillor Tony Haines for his support and leadership throughout the year. My thanks too to each of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the standing panels who have shown great stewardship in driving the work programme forward.

2. Scrutiny in Slough

Overview & Scrutiny was introduced as part of the modernisation of local government and derives its powers from Section 21, Part II of the Local Government Act 2000. This requires local authorities operating under executive arrangements (i.e. leader and a cabinet) to create at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) consisting of non-executive (i.e. non-cabinet) elected members.

The OSC's function is to review and scrutinise the decisions and actions of the Executive or the authority and to make reports or recommendations accordingly. OSC may also make reports and recommendations on matters affecting the local authority's area or its inhabitants.

The OSC at Slough Borough Council appoints a series of Standing Panels enabling greater focus on specific subject matter. SBC currently has four Standing Panels each working to a thematic agenda:

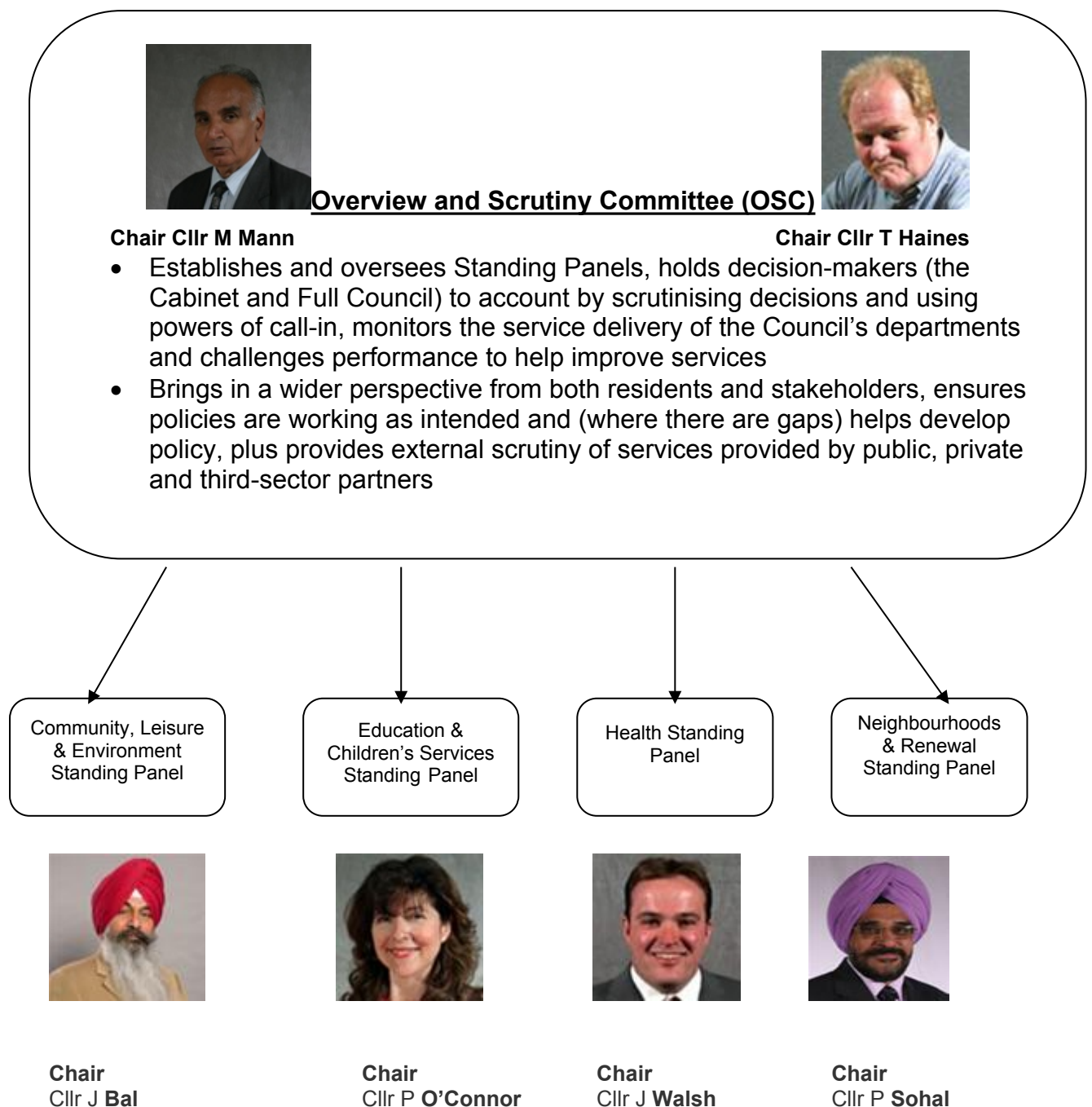
- Community, Leisure & Environment
- Education & Children's Services
- Health
- Neighbourhoods & Renewal

The Health Scrutiny panel is established to carry out the statutory functions of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (Section 7) which requires review and scrutiny of local National Health Service (NHS) provision as well as wider health issues. With the responsibility of public health and health improvement returning to the

local authorities in 2013, however, health scrutiny will need to adapt and shift its focus accordingly.

Scrutiny also has powers to examine current local improvement targets (LAA targets), require information from partner organisations signed up to LAA targets and require those organisations to have regard to Scrutiny’s recommendations which relate to relevant local improvement targets. As the new Decentralisation & Localism Bill is still passing through Parliament, the future of the LAA and associated targets remains unclear.

2.1 The structure of Overview & Scrutiny Committee at Slough Borough Council





3. Census 2011

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee having acknowledged for some time, the poor response rate across the borough at the time of the 2001 Census were concerned with progress for the upcoming Census 2011. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) was requested to appear before the Committee to answer member concerns on the preparations and commitment to an accurate Census in Slough.

In September 2010 Mr Glen Watson, ONS Census Director, Helen Bray, Head of Communications ONS and Richard Giel, Census Area Manager, attended the Overview and Scrutiny to provide an update on the 2011 Slough Census.

The Committee was advised that it was estimated the national population would have grown by 3 million since the last Census and in Slough the response rate for the last Census was 84.9%, being the lowest response rate outside of London. The objective for the 2011 Census was to achieve an overall response rate of 94%.

Members of the committee were concerned that the particular challenges in Slough were not being addressed by the ONS such as problems associated with a high number of annexes, difficulties due to Slough's diverse community and the nature of the town's transient population.

There was a particular concern regarding "hot bedding" when households were occupied by two sets of residents who worked different shifts. If the information was not collected correctly then people would be using Slough's services but the Council would not receive sufficient funding.

The Committee made a number of recommendations following members concerns that sufficient resources were not being provided for Slough given the issues that it faces currently.

Summary of Recommendations

- That the Area Manager focuses his effort and time on the Slough area, in particular due to the extra ordinary circumstances of the resident and transient population of the area
- That additional questionnaires are issued to, and followed-up with, houses of multiple occupations (HMO's)
- That the ONS makes it clear to Slough residents that any data provided by them to Census 2011 is supplied to the ONS on a confidential basis
- That the ONS monitors responses during the return period and adjusts the workforce, collector activity and the publicity awareness campaign accordingly
- That ONS works with officers and elected members of the Council to locate, in particular, those residing in HMO's, those that "hot-bed", those in "sheds" and also potential illegal immigrants

Cllr Tony Haines states *"we wanted to ensure that we maximised responses to Census 2011 so that a true reflection of the population of Slough was obtained to ensure fair funding from national government in the future.*

It was important to lay down some strong recommendations so that we secured firm commitment from the ONS."

3.1 Outcome

As a result of scrutiny the ONS agreed to provide additional support and give priority to engage with local community groups. The arrangements and resourcing of completion events (events held in community venues across Slough to assist residents with their Census forms) would also be examined. In particular hard to count classifications such as Houses with multiple occupations, annexes, hot bedding would be supported with extra questionnaires and follow up resources where appropriate. *(The ONS has allocated 8,000 hours for follow up in Slough – a four fold increase from 2001).*

The intervention of Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made a marked difference in the way that the ONS now responds to Slough Council. The additional resources that have been provided by the ONS for Slough although not comprehensive are to be welcomed. The Committee continues to follow the progress of the Census operation and looks forward to a positive outcome.

4. Proposals to re-site Slough Inpatient Mental Health Services

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT) launched a consultation in August 2010 on the future of Inpatient Mental Health services in East Berkshire. The background to this was that the Trust was faced with making savings and was considering three options:

- Option 1** All beds to be relocated to Prospect Park Hospital in Reading
- Option 2** Beds for older people to be at St Mark's Hospital in Maidenhead and for working age adults in Prospect Park
- Option 3** For the 2008 decision of a new unit on the Upton site to proceed

This issue was one followed very closely by the Health Scrutiny panel, given the impact that a relocation of mental inpatient care from Slough would have on patients and families in Slough.

Overall members felt there was a lack of transparency and detail in the consultation paper and the impact and benefits to the community were not made clear. Justification for the loss to services in Slough and how they would be covered needed to be made clear in terms of number of beds, and transport arrangements for those displaced. It was also felt that there was a heavy bias towards Option 1 – the relocation to Prospect Park.

Members of the panel made clear throughout the year that Option 1 would be at the detriment of Slough residents; that even if supported with a transport scheme, however comprehensive it would not be able to serve adequately those needing inpatient care.

Through close scrutiny, members identified that there were two sets of questionnaires in circulation, one of which was biased towards one end of the response spectrum and was accepted as such by the Trust. Members insisted that the questionnaire would need to be re-issued.

Scrutiny twice questioned the accuracy of the Travel Survey being used for and referred to within the consultation. The panel pressed the Trust for clarity on this issue and a number of other points.

The results of the consultation are now known and the Trusts Boards have stated their preferred choice for Option 1, with a final decision being made in June 2011.

4.1 Outcome

Cllr James Walsh Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel states

“Health scrutiny has extensive powers – if consultations or reconfiguration of services lack transparency, the matter can be referred to the Secretary of State for Health. In this case we found there to be many questions. Due to our intervention, Berkshire Health NHS had to re-issue their consultation and provide a lot more information on specific questions. Despite Option 1 being preferred, there are still some unanswered questions and we will continue to investigate until we are confident that each option has been considered fully.

5. Zero Carbon Homes - Greenwatt Way, Chalvey

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Property and the Research Project Leader from Scottish and Southern Energy Group (SSE). The presentation advised of the SSE’s commitment to sustainability and the ethos behind the project to build a zero carbon housing development on part of the former depot in Chalvey.

The homes were rented by SSE and Slough Borough Council Staff. The Panel were given further information on the zero carbon features including the energy centre which was designed to look like other homes and provided heating and hot water.

Members were advised that the building cost of the properties related to a traditional build and were advised that the new venture costs were higher in monetary terms than those for a normal house. However the project’s focus was on learning and it was hoped that valuable lessons would be learnt about how the next generation of houses could be built.

Members were informed also that the SSE was reasonably confident that the cost of maintenance would show a positive reflection against more traditional homes. There would certainly be cheaper electricity costs although the whole point of the project was to provide a learning opportunity for future home development.

SSE explained that tenants were sought through SSE and Slough Borough Council Employees and not through the council’s housing list as tenants needed to remain in the properties for a fairly long time and participate in the recording of energy consumption. Tenants paid slightly below market rent to reflect their additional commitment.

The Panel was informed that there was a lot of monitoring equipment in place and electricity was monitored across half hour intervals and water use across five minute intervals. Further information was also collected from tenants on their lifestyles for example, if they had visitors staying. Many factors were taken into account such as body heat from occupants and appliances.

Members were keen to know SSE's plans for housing projects in future and the future of the development in Slough. It was noted that with regards to the houses in Slough anything was possible at present in terms of future use, including the potential of offering them to current tenants for sale. In terms of future projects SSE would possibly be looking at retro fitting schemes for existing housing stock.

Members of the Joint Panel noted the excellent work by SSE on the project and looked forward to visiting the development.

A tour of the development took place on 25 October 2010.



From left to right Cllr Robert Plimmer, Andrew Millard (Interim Scrutiny Officer), Cllr Mewa Mann, Cllr Raja Zarait and Cllr May Dodds – on their tour of Zero Carbon Homes in Chalvey.

6. Foster Carer Allowances – Member Call-in

Call In

Any Member of the Council or any Co-opted Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Panel may request that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider

(i) Any decision/proposed decision of the Cabinet....

In September 2010 the **Education and Children's Scrutiny** panel considered a member Call-in on Foster Care Allowances. Councillor Maclsaac's Call-in was submitted in response to the proposal to reduce the fees paid by the Council to foster carers.

There were several concerns: Councillor Maclsaac emphasised that by reducing the fees, the Council would not be able to sustain current levels of foster carers or recruit additional foster carers to meet targets to reduce dependence on independent fostering agencies. It was felt that Slough was more comparable to London areas and accordingly, the fees paid by the Council should be examined in relation to Slough's statistical rather than geographical neighbours. Councillor Maclsaac supported Slough's Foster Carers' alternative proposal that the fee for the first Looked After Child placement (LAC) be reduced to £300 rather than £200.

In support of the Call-in, foster carers Eugene Travers and Zareen Keeton were invited to address the panel and speak on behalf of Slough's Foster Carers. The committee was asked to understand the highly difficult and 24/7 nature of the role of foster carers and that it was no ordinary job. The representatives highlighted that the Council wanted professional foster carers and had previously encouraged foster carers to become full-time and give up other employment.

Further to this, it was emphasised that foster carers did not receive sick pay, or other such employee benefits. It was felt that the care offered to LAC would be affected if foster carers were required to subsidise their income with alternative employment. However, in recognition of the difficult financial situation faced by the Council, an alternative proposal was suggested which limited the reduction from £400 to £300 for the first LAC placement for each carer.

Members discussed the issue and debated at length. With respect to recruitment, members were advised that there was currently a shortage of foster carers. The fees paid to foster carers had originally been increased to the current

rate partly to attract a greater number of new foster carers to the service. However, it was emphasised that despite a small initial increase, this level of recruitment had not been sustained and it was evident that motivations for becoming a foster carer were complex. The Council intended to recruit sufficient foster carers to reduce the number of LAC Placements met by independent fostering agencies. Members were keen to know more about what action was being taken to meet this target and was advised that Slough was running an ongoing recruitment campaign but that the assessment process was lengthy.

Members of the Panel also considered the option of maintaining the fees at the current levels for existing foster carers but that the lower fees be applied to any foster carers recruited subsequently. A number of Members acknowledged the merits of this proposal but the Panel agreed that it would lead to the creation of an inequitable system.

Having considered the representations of the foster carers, and the cost implications outlined by Officers, the Panel resolved to endorse the alternative proposal put forward by Slough's foster carers that the fee paid for the first child in placement be reduced to £300 per week.

It was resolved that the Cabinet be advised that the Education and Children's Services Panel endorsed the proposal put forward by representatives of Slough's Foster Carers - that the allowance paid for the first looked after child for each carer be set at £300, a reduction of £100 from the current allowance provided. All other allowances paid to Foster Carers should remain at the current rate.

6.1 Outcomes

In evaluating the outcomes, Councillor Patricia O'Connor, chair of the panel says "This is a clear example of how by using the call-in process, scrutiny can ultimately influence and challenge a decision or proposal made by the cabinet and how scrutiny can be strengthened by the participation of residents and service users becoming involved in our work".

7. Scrutiny Review – Car parking charges at NHS establishments

The Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JEBHOS)² completed their scrutiny review into car parking at the area's hospitals.

The issue of hospital car parking had been identified by elected members as a key public issue relating to the accessibility of an essential public service. In June 2009, members of the JEBHOS put forward a proposal to set up a Working Group to investigate the arrangements around car parking in more detail.

The initial view of the Committee was that there were serious concerns about the existing contractual arrangement and investigation was necessary as to how income from car parking charges was being utilised, availability of parking spaces and level of information for the public on exemptions.

The review, which started in 2009, looked at five NHS sites across East Berkshire: The five considered in the Review were:

Community hospitals, not offering Accident and Emergency (A&E)

- **King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor**
- **St Mark's Hospital, Maidenhead**
- **Upton Hospital, Slough**

Acute hospital (with minor injuries unit)

- **Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot**

Acute hospital (with A&E)

- **Wexham Park Hospital, Slough**

The two Car Park Operators responsible for the management of the Car Parks sites contributed to the Review: CP Plus for HWPB Trust and Berkshire Shared Services (BSS) for BEPCT.

As the Review progressed, the Group focussed on the charges levied, the different charging mechanisms employed, the methodology and rationale behind exemptions, how exemption refunds are obtained and, ultimately, how the money raised through car parking charges is used.

In summary the Review made the following recommendations to the Trusts.

- a) Undertake a complete review of car parking provision and practices across each of their individual sites to ensure alignment of the key principles and incorporate the specific operational recommendations contained within the Review
- b) Introduce and implement Green Transport Plans at each of the five sites without further delay to introduce a fair payment scheme for staff car-parking, reduce on-site congestion and reduce CO2 emissions all of which will help contribute to the area's climate change strategy and National Indicators 185, 186 and 188
- c) Create a separate per site security budget, fully costed and fully funded independently, to provide the necessary security to ensure all five sites are safe and that security is not subsidised either now or in the future by car parking charge revenue
- d) Introduce a clear, consistent and significant set of exemptions and discounts for car park charging to ensure that car parking charges are substantially reduced (by at least 50%) for patients and visitors who attend hospital regularly and that parking is not charged to those who must attend on a daily basis for acute and/or long-term conditions

- e) Once the above four recommendations are complete, if minimum key performance indicator standards are not being achieved there should be an opportunity to give notice to break existing contracts and invite tenders for the management and operating of car park services and the provision of facilities; this should include the possibility of the relevant local authorities in their areas being invited to tender and possibly run and manage such car parking provision in the future particularly due to their expertise in this area

Councillor Plimmer, from Slough Borough Council who chaired the working group says:

“Most of us have had first hand experience of using the car-parks either as patients or visitors and it is often a time of heightened stress.

The review enabled the group to unpick some of the issues around car-parking and as a result we have made some very clear recommendations.

The study is valuable because it takes the ordinary person’s experience, looks at the facts and makes recommendations that really could make a difference in the future.

“I hope both the PCT and Heatherwood and Wexham trust look seriously at the issues and recommendations we have raised and improve the service for their residents.”

In their formal response, Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (HWPH Trust) accepted that the provision and practices across the two sites should be aligned and supported the Group’s recommendation that more work was required around the display and communication of exemptions, stating that whilst “the existing arrangements broadly comply with the recommendations, greater provision should be considered for those visiting patients over an extended number of days, possibly weeks, and this will be a consideration in a forthcoming internal “review” that they will be undertaking.

The Trust advised that they had introduced a new Green Transport plan in February 2011 and were confident that this would have a significant beneficial impact including on car parking demand.

The Trust, however, was unable to agree to creating a separate security budget. The current car parking arrangements were based on a “widely accepted model” which did not allow identification of component factors. The Trust was further satisfied that the terms, obligations and performance of their contract with CP Plus met the necessary service levels. No further comment was made with respect to conditions around length of break clause, key performance indicators and future tenders for the contract.

Berkshire East PCT agreed to adopt a clearer policy on exceptions and to publicise the policy more widely. New car park machines and the use of smart phone technology may be considered in the future. Similarly, the PCT ruled out the creation of a separate security budget stating that “a budget to provide security separately would ultimately come from a clinical service allocation,

therefore NHS Berkshire East do not agree to fund security separately". They also state that future tenders for the management of the Car Parks would be viewed in line with their policy, benchmarking and market testing of tendering support services.

7.1 Outcome

It was hoped from the outset that clear recommendations would flow from the Review which might benefit patients and visitors, the health providers concerned and other stakeholders. It is clear that the review has been successful in digging deeper into the issues resulting in some very positive recommendations.

The full report may be viewed at www.slough.gov.uk

²JEBHOS comprises representatives, including elected members from Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Slough Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It was established to enable the authorities to meet and jointly respond to health related issues arising in the region.

8.0 Looking Forward

Given the financial climate, the current scrutiny arrangements have also been examined for efficiencies. The Committee has recommended that the number of Standing Panels will be reduced from four to three by combining the Community Leisure & Environment and Neighbourhood & Renewal panels. The proposed name for the new Panel is Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

Further, the Scrutiny Officer will now be responsible for clerking the two non-statutory Scrutiny Standing Panels in the form of factual listing, bullet points and recommendations/resolutions for each meeting with no summary of debate.

The Annual Report has shown that the Committee and its Standing panels have examined some important issues and have had a strong impact in those areas. In the year to come, the financial challenge facing the council and its partners is clear. But there are other important challenges many, stemming from Central Government. As power is passed from central government to local communities and inspections and performance targets are reduced, local accountability mechanisms such as Scrutiny and self regulation will become increasingly important.

In the future, the way public services are delivered and the degree to which local communities and groups are involved in them could also change. Through scrutiny, members will be well placed to influence these changes to gain the best outcomes for their residents, ensuring also that safeguards are in place to make sure that no groups of society become unequally excluded in the process.

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill 2010 is in the final stages before it becomes law. As new Police and Crime Panels are established and Police Commissioners are elected, local scrutiny will be in a good position to understand

and bring together the different threads of accountability and ensure arrangements are coherent and not duplicated.

Similarly the Health and Social Care Bill 2010 is gathering pace through the House of Commons and soon will be enacted. This legislation will bring new commissioning arrangements through the NHS Commissioning Board and GP Consortia. This too requires that existing Health Scrutiny Panels are ready to monitor the transitional and shadow arrangements as well those in the future.

Closer to home, the externalisation of transactional services is a huge change for the authority but what will it mean for the ordinary resident? Scrutiny has a key role in ensuring that we take account of the social value of services when making decisions about savings and improvements taking care that our most vulnerable are not forgotten. Through scrutiny we need to challenge the cabinet to ensure that it looks at the cumulative effect of their decisions on our residents in Slough. I hope that Overview and Scrutiny keeps oversight over our priorities and ensures that an assessment on the impact on poverty runs through each and every priority.

Finally, I look forward to the challenges that lie ahead and hope that scrutiny continues to make a difference. I commend this Annual Report to the Council.