



“Keeping Councillors, staff and partners informed about Scrutiny”

Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter

Issue 2, October 2009

“ Have Your Say - What You Said! ”

You may remember that in the last edition we reported on the work programme event in May, where Councillors, Senior Officers and key Partners suggested topics to be included in the Scrutiny work programme which were subsequently prioritised at the workshop and used as a starting point for consultation.

All of the suggested topics were scored according to priority. Having considered the findings, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed the work programme for the coming year.

Young People and Alcohol

The Environment and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee have set up a Task Group to examine the factors which influence young people's use and misuse of alcohol and work being undertaken by a range of agencies to tackle the misuse; they are being assisted by representatives from St. Helens Police and Halton and St. Helens PCT.

Private Landlords

Senior Officers, Landlord representatives and the Community Empowerment Network are assisting Members of the Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of private landlords within the Borough. They will be examining the performance and operation of housing management in private rented sector accommodation in St. Helens and assessing the impact this is having towards providing sustainable communities within the Borough.

Under One Roof

The Under One Roof Choice scheme is also being looked at by Members of the Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny

Committee, who will be looking to assess what impact the choice-based lettings scheme has on contributing towards providing sustainable communities for the residents of St. Helens.

Obesity

The Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee have established a Task Group with Members of Halton and St. Helens PCT which will be looking at ways to encourage opportunities for greater physical activities by examining the environments and cultures within the Borough's workplaces and schools.

Activities for Young People

Members of the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be undertaking a review of activities for young people within the Borough. During their next Committee meeting, they will be receiving a presentation from the Council's Extended Services Schools Development Manager and will explore the direction the review will take.

Future Reviews

Future issues to be reviewed by Scrutiny include: teenage pregnancy, mental health services, employment opportunities for vulnerable youngsters, looked after children, use of parks and open spaces, and strategic management of the town centre.

Non-Executive Members interested in being involved in any of the Task Groups are more than welcome to assist. Please contact the Scrutiny team for further information.



St. Helens
Council



What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny looks at the services and issues that affect people living in St.Helens. There are six Scrutiny committees which can request independent research and expertise to help with their enquiries as well as questioning members of the Council's Executive and Chief Officers from the Council and other organisations. These enquiries lead

to reports and recommendations that advise the Council and other organisations on what improvements to services can be made.

This newsletter gives an update of our recent Scrutiny projects along with contact details, should you want to find out more information or get involved.

St.Helens Local Involvement Network (LINKs)

Members of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been building a good working relationship with St.Helens Local Involvement Network (LINK). LINKs have been set up to give communities a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered. People who become involved with LINKs have an interest in local health and social care services from a patient's, service user's or member of the public's perspective, whereas elected Councillors serving on Committees fulfil their role within the wider context of the Council's corporate objectives and external partnerships. However, when considered together, we can begin to identify how LINKs and Overview and Scrutiny Committees can use their roles and powers in partnership to improve local health and social care services.

Burns Care Reconfiguration Proposals

A Joint Scrutiny Task Group, made up of elected Members from St.Helens, Knowsley and Halton Councils and supported by St.Helens LINK, has been established to examine proposals by the Northern Burns Care Network to establish a Supra-Regional Centre in Manchester. All three Councils are concerned about the impact this will have on patient care and upon the newly built burns unit at Whiston Hospital and Alder Hey Children's Hospital and will be taking evidence from the Hospital Trust, Halton and St.Helens PCT and the Northern Burns Care Network.

The Scrutiny Task Group is exploring the adequacy of the business case being put forward by the Northern Burns Care Network and is providing a briefing to MPs on all progress.

Helena Partnerships' Board

The Council recently referred an approach from Helena Partnerships to amend the size of the Partnerships' Board to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Committee will now consider the proposal and produce a report with their views for Council. Helena Partnerships have also proposed the introduction of a formal annual Scrutiny review, which would report to the Committee on achievement and performance, plans for the next 12 months and longer term aspirations.

Strengthening Local Democracy

Scrutiny Committee Members have participated in consultation on the Government Green Paper 'Strengthening Local Democracy'. The paper outlines plans to increase the scope of Scrutiny and extend its powers to scrutinise all local partners, including: fire & rescue authorities, probation authorities, public transport, Jobcentre Plus and utility companies.



Scrutiny Councillor Profile –

Councillor Steph Topping

Councillor Steph Topping is Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Chairs the Audit and Financial Monitoring Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is also a Member of the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1) What does being a Chair of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee involve?

The Chair leads and co-ordinates the Committee, ensuring the Committee has all the information it needs to do its Scrutiny work. The Chair liaises with Scrutiny link officers to set the agenda and determine who the Committee needs to interview and what questions need asking. The Chair arranges interviews and helps pull all the information together into a report with recommendations for improvements, which is presented to the Executive for consideration.

2) What challenges you most about your role in Scrutiny?

Scrutiny has no official powers. It cannot, by itself, sanction change. It can only make recommendations, so if a Scrutiny committee wants its Scrutiny work to have meaning and to be of value, the committee has to produce a good report with persuasive recommendations. This can be challenging.

3) What do you consider most rewarding about your Scrutiny work?

When Scrutiny is done properly with recommendations for improvement of a service or issue being persuasive, and backed up by a good in-depth report, it can effect big changes and that is very rewarding.

4) Why do you think that Scrutiny is important?

Scrutiny is important because it gives all stakeholders and service users a chance to look at and comment on something that affects them. We all recognise the fact that often something looks good and appropriate in theory, but, in practice, it doesn't work as well as it should. By examining comments from stakeholders and service users, Scrutiny can make recommendations to improve or fine-tune these issues and that is of value.

5) What do you think has been the most successful piece of Scrutiny work in which you've been involved?

I think that has to be the work I was involved in together with Councillors from St.Helens, Halton and Warrington as part of the Joint Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee, which was scrutinising the Five Boroughs Trust's proposals for changing Adult Mental Health services. I think they ended up amazed at how well we knew our communities and understood their needs, and how dogged we were about fighting to ensure that the issues we considered important were taken into consideration.

6) When you're not attending to your Council work, what do you do to relax?

I love to read. I am an avid reader, as is all my family. My 5-year-old nephew recently counted that we have over 700 books in all the rooms in our house! I have recently started reading books in the German language once more, as I have discovered a German author whose books I really enjoy. I love to listen to music. When I feel a little stressed or tired I love to listen to Enya, as I find her very relaxing. I have all her CDs. I also enjoy gardening. 5 years ago, my husband Steve and I totally transformed our garden into the beautiful haven it is today and I love it. Above all, I love to spend time with my family.



Who's who on Scrutiny Committees?

There have been some changes to the Scrutiny team this year, take a look at the table of Chairs and Vice-Chairs below:

Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Chairman:
Councillor
Marie E. Rimmer



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Stephanie Topping

Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure



Chairman:
Councillor
Andy Bowden



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Ken Knowles

Adult Social Care and Health



Chairman:
Councillor
Joe Pearson



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Janet Sheldon

Audit and Financial Monitoring



Chairman:
Councillor
Stephanie Topping



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Barry Grunewald

Children and Young People's Services



Chairman:
Councillor
Eric Smith



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Neil Taylor

Environment and Safer Communities



Chairman:
Councillor
John Beirne



Vice Chairman:
Councillor
Linda Maloney

If you would like further information or have general enquiries about Overview and Scrutiny, you can email: scrutiny@sthelens.gov.uk or call **01744 676276** or **676277**.

Alternatively, you can write to:

Scrutiny

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