

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT: MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/2016

Introduction and Welcome from the Chairman

Welcome to the eleventh report of the Overview and Scrutiny Structure of Epping Forest District Council. After an 11 month long review into the Overview and Scrutiny functions we have established a new way to conduct our business. This year we have established four Select Committees in place of the old Scrutiny Panels structure we have had in previous years. These Select Committees were roughly aligned with the new Directorate structure the Council had put in place.

As always, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the new Select Committees were charged with reviewing Cabinet decisions, the Corporate Strategy, the Council's financial performance and also scrutinising the performance of the public bodies active in the District by inviting reports and presentations from them. The bare bones of scrutiny had not changed, only the way we carried it out.

At the beginning of the 2015/16 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of four Select Committees for the year; no Task and Finish Panels were commissioned, but the already established Grant Aid Task and Finish Panel and the Youth Engagement Task and Finish Panel continued their work from the previous year.

During the year we received numerous presentations from outside bodies including the Epping Forest College, Barts Health NHS Trust, and the Epping Forest Youth Council.

My thanks go to the Chairmen and members of the four new Select Committees and the members and officers of the Task and Finish Panel, and my special thanks go to my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Angold-Stephens for all his help and support through the year.

And of course, I would like to thank all the officers that have worked so hard to keep the Committee members informed and supplied with the background information that they needed to carry out their investigations.

Cllr Richard Morgan
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

What is Scrutiny?

- Scrutiny in local government is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised.
- The purpose of scrutiny in practice is to examine, question and evaluate in order to achieve improvement.
- The value of scrutiny is in the use of research and questioning techniques to make recommendations based on evidence.
- Scrutiny enables issues of public concerns to be examined.
- At the heart of all the work is consideration of what impact the Cabinet's plans will have on the local community.
- However, the overview and scrutiny function is not meant to be confrontational or seen as deliberately set up to form an opposition to the Cabinet. Rather the two aspects should be regarded as 'different sides of the same coin'. The two should complement each other and work in tandem to contribute to the development of the authority.

Alongside its role to challenge, the scrutiny function has also continued to engage positively with the Cabinet and there continues to be cross party co-operation between members on all panels.

Scrutiny has continued to provide valuable contributions to the Council and the Cabinet remained receptive to ideas put forward by Scrutiny throughout the year.

The rules of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also allow members of the public to have the opportunity to address the Committee on any agenda item.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee coordinated with the Cabinet and pre scrutinised their Key Decision list (their forward plan) on a meeting by meeting basis. This acted as a troubleshooting exercise, unearthing problems before they arose.

The Committee also engaged with external bodies in order to scrutinise parts of their work that encroached on the District and its people. They also received stand alone reports from officers and reports from the Select Committees on the work they carried out during the year.

Select Committees

A lead Officer was appointed to each Select Committee to facilitate its process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the terms of reference for each of the Committees on the basis of a rolling programme to consider ongoing and cyclical issues. Four Select Committees were established, dealing with:

- i. Housing
- ii. Governance
- iii. Neighbourhoods and Communities
- iv. Resources

The Select Committees reported regularly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress with the work they were carrying out.

Task and Finish Panels

The Task and Finish reviews are restricted to dealing with activities which are issue based, time limited, non-cyclical and with clearly defined objectives on which they would report, once completed, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Two Task and Finish Panels were established last year, both finishing this year. They were the Youth Engagement Task and Finish Panel, and the Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel.