

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Introduction by the Chairman:

"This is the third year of the Council's new scrutiny system, breaking down the topics being scrutinised into Standing and Task and Finish Panels and the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee, enabling a larger workload to be tackled and scrutinised. This way of working has proved to be a successful way of getting through the large amount of topics that a Council's Scrutiny structure is asked to consider over an average year.

As the Overview and Scrutiny Committee we have taken on numerous topics, including looking at the London Underground facilities in the area, the proposed application for Foundation Trust Status by the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trusts. Also, a few days before each Cabinet meeting we meet to pre-scrutinise their agenda, enabling us to pre-empt any decisions and if need be, invite that member of the Cabinet to attend our meeting to answer any questions or concerns that we have about a particular report.

I would like to take this opportunity to give my personal thanks to all the people from outside organisations who visited our Committee and Panels during the last year and gave us the benefit of their expertise and answered our questions. We were very grateful that they took the time to help us out.

This year we had our long standing champion of Scrutiny, Joint Chief Executive, John Scott, retire after serving 29 years at the Council. I know the members of the Committee will miss him, his advice and his sense of humour.

Derek Macnab, the Deputy Chief Executive took on this difficult role and we wish him the very best and look forward to working with him in the years to come.

I would also like to express my thanks to my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Ken Angold-Stephens, the members of the O&S Committee, all the Chairmen of the Standing and Task and Finish Panels, the members of those panels and of course all the officers who support the Panels and my Committee."

Councillor Richard Morgan
April 2008

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Morgan (Chairman)

Councillor K Angold-Stephens (Vice Chairman)
Councillors D Bateman, R Church, M Colling, R D'Souza, Mrs A Haigh, Mrs H Harding, J Hart, D Kelly, G Mohindra, and Mrs P Richardson.

The Lead Officer was John Scott, Joint Chief Executive (Community Services), he retired in July 2007 and Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive took over from August 2007.

Terms of Reference

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's main functions are to monitor and scrutinise the work of the executive and its forward plan, external bodies linked to the District Council and the Council's financial performance. It is tasked with the consideration of call-ins, policy development, performance monitoring and reviewing corporate strategies.

The Committee's workload over the past year can be broken down as follows:

(a) Scrutinising and monitoring Cabinet work

The Committee reviewed and commented on the Cabinet's Forward Plan and work programme where they identified areas for further consideration. The Committee has a proactive role in this area through carrying out pre-scrutiny work. This involved receiving and considering the Cabinet agenda prior to the Cabinet itself.

The Committee considered one call-in this year; this was over a Cabinet decision on the release of a restrictive covenant on Loughton Hall, Epping Forest Collage, Loughton. The Committee was asked to consider this cabinet decision taken in October 2007 regarding the release of a restrictive covenant to enable a provisionally arranged sale at Loughton Hall for use as a residential care home to proceed and that the Council would not exercise its right of pre-emption to purchase Loughton Hall and/or the library site adjoining Epping Forest College. After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed with the Cabinet decision and did not support the call-in.

(b) Standing Panels work programme monitoring

The Committee received regular updates from the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels to report on the progress made with their current work. This has allowed the Committee to monitor performance, prioritise work and when necessary adjust their work plans to take into account new proposals and urgent items.

(c) Items considered by the committee this year

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received presentations on, and considered such topics as:

- i) A presentation from London Underground Limited who came in June 2007 to update the Committee on various topics that effect the District in relation to the various London Underground stations and car parks in the district. The Committee and members took the opportunity to question the representative on various related topics.

ii) In December 2007 the Committee received a presentation from the Chairman of the Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust who reported on their application for Foundation Trust Status. Also in attendance were the Chairman of the West Essex PCT and the Vice-chairman of the west Essex Public Involvement Forum who gave their views on the proposal. After debating the matter fully, the Committee expressed its full support for the application by the Princess Alexandra Trust for Foundation Trust status.

iii) Police Presentation.

iv) Highways Presentation.

v) The Committee considered a report from the returning officer, which came to the Committee via the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel reviewing the 2007 elections that took place in May.

vi) The Committee held a special meeting in August 2007 to consider the continuation of the Council's webcasting trial. The Committee received a report evaluating the webcasting pilot, when not only council meetings but, notable civic events were webcast. The Committee concluded that the continuation of webcasting should be endorsed and the webcasting of council meetings be made permanent.

vii) The Cabinet were invited to present their plans for the year ahead, the Committee considered the schedules with a view to selecting issues for pre-decision scrutiny.

viii) The Committee agreed in October 2007 that the Task and Finish Panel on Town Centre and Car Parks be disbanded. And any outstanding work be added to the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel.

ix) The Committee also reviewed the recommendations made by the 2006/07 Task and Finish Panels to check on how they had progressed since they had been disbanded.

x) They considered the outcomes from the Overview and Scrutiny review seminar held in September 2007. This Seminar made several small improvements in Overview and Scrutiny procedure that was endorsed by the Committee.

xi) In January 2008 the Committee scrutinised and endorsed the draft Portfolio Holders Budgets for 2008/09.

xii) The Committee also reviewed the need for an increase in the number of area planning sub-committee, increasing the frequency of the meetings from a four week cycle to a three week cycle. This was part of a package of measures designed to improve the planning performance. After fully debating this proposal the Committee agreed to recommend to Council that provision be made for a meeting of the Area Plans Sub-committee every three weeks.