

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Introduction by the Chairman:

" To be confirmed "

Councillor Richard Morgan
April 2009

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Morgan (Chairman)
Councillor K Angold-Stephens (Vice Chairman)
Councillors M Colling, A Green, J Hart, D Jacobs, G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson, B Rolfe, Mrs L Wagland and Mrs J Whitehouse.

The Lead Officer was Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive.

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 the Housing Portfolio Holder's decision on the 'Council Call for Sites' seeking land that may have potential for development over at least the next fifteen years. The Committee was asked to consider this decision taken in August 2008. The Councillors calling this in thought

that the sites under consideration for further development were chosen to the exclusion of any other sites in the district. After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that the decision be referred back to the decision taker for further consideration, taking into account the specific concerns raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(b) Standing Panels work programme monitoring

The Committee received regular updates from the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels reporting on the progress made with their current work. This had 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:

Presentations:

(i) A presentation from Catherine O'Connell of the West Essex Primary Care Trust who came in June 2008 to consult the Committee on their proposals to develop a GP led Health Centre for West Essex and to improve health services in Chipping Ongar. The Committee and other members present took the opportunity to question Ms O'Connell on this and other various related topics.

(ii) In July 2008 the Committee received a presentation from Lonica Vanclay, the county officer responsible for youth provision in the district. She explained how the provision of youth services in the district was structured and how they fitted in with other voluntary groups in the district. The Committee and members present took the opportunity to question her on various aspects of youth provisions in the district.

(iii) In November 2008 the Committee received a Presentation from Ms Alison Cowie, the Director of Public Health of the West Essex Primary Health Trust. She addressed the Committee on the Health Profile of the Epping Forest District and the reasons for it's established health patterns. She gave a picture of health in the district. There were established health iniquities for a variety of reasons which included age differences between groups and diabetes, however, some differences could not be properly accounted for. Following the presentation, the members discussed the issues raised.

(iv) In December 2008 the Epping Forest Youth Council gave a short presentation to the committee on their first year as a body. This was the first ever Youth Council for the District and they had a lot that they had wanted to do. They had identified their broad priorities as being as activities and things to do for young people; safety and social issues relating to young people; transport; the environment and stereotyping of young people. This gave the committee a good opportunity to question the youth councillors on their first year in office.

(v) The new Principal of Epping Forest College, Peter Sadler, came in December to inform the Committee on the strategic direction of the College, its vision for the future and its relationship with the community. The college had been through a great deal recently and there was a history of under performance. Mr Sadler was able to reassure members that there was a robust plan in place to rebuild the college and

put in place remediation policies to improve management, meet local needs and support local schools. The principal will be invited back to address the committee again in September 2009 to update them on progress made.

(vi) In January 2009 the Committee welcomed County Councillor Norman Hume, the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport. The Committee spent some time questioning him about the rural bus services, concessionary fares, youth travel issues and diverse highways issues that affected the district.

(vii) **LSP in March 09**

Other topics considered:

(i) The Cabinet came to the Committee's July 2008 meeting to present their plans for the year ahead. The Committee considered the schedules with a view to selecting issues for pre-decision scrutiny and have played their part in scrutinising their plans in the past year.

(ii) The Chairman of the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel came to the Committee in August 2008 to present a report on the government consultation document on the date of the European elections and the possibility of synchronising the County and European elections. They also reviewed the District's previous elections that took place in May 2008.

(iii) In November 2008 the Committee received a report on "the making and enforcement of bylaws – consultation". This was to allow local authorities to deal with enforcing of bylaws through a fixed penalty mechanism rather than prosecution through the Magistrate's Court.

(iv) The Committee also reviewed two other government consultation documents in November 2008. One was on weekend voting and the other was about communities in control setting out a range of policies with a view of returning power to local communities.

(v) In December 2008 the Committee received the final report of the Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panel. The Panel looked at the Council's reception and other customer contact areas, the Council's internal communications and the telephone operators, the Council's website and the Council's magazine 'The Forester'.

They concluded that the reception areas should be reorganised along with the telephone centre and that a Customer Relationship Management system be developed to improve the Council's services and help meet the requirements of National Indicator 14. They also recommended that the an additional two website support officers be recruited at an estimated cost of £48,860 and that the Forester be reviewed.

The Committee endorsed the recommendations and submitted it to Cabinet for adoption.

(vi) The Committee also considered the possibility of setting up a joint Primary Care Trust scrutiny in West Essex. This was proposed by Harlow Council, to be held in conjunction with Uttlesford Council and ourselves on a service level basis. On consideration the Committee were content, in principle, to consider a joint health

review with Harlow and Uttlesford Councils. This is yet to be arranged formally and should be up and running in the new municipal year.

(vii) In January 2009 the Committee considered the councils draft budget for 2009/10. this had already been considered in detail by the Finance and Performance management Standing Panel. The Committee noted that it was a difficult year to construct a budget because of the 'credit crunch' facing the country. The committee endorsed the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel's recommendations on the budget and report this to Cabinet.

(viii) The Civic Ceremonial arrangements were also reviewed in January 2009 along with the annual review of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and a review of the Executive Constitution.

(ix) Also in January the Essex County Council – Forest Transportation Consultation was considered. Essex County Council had wished to improve the transport network in and around Epping Forest. It was hoped that people would consider both sustainable transport alternatives as well as providing a safer and more accessible environment.

The Epping Forest Transport Survey contained a series of measures to reduce the impact of traffic and to address the protection of the forest landscape. It offered a package of inter-related measures that aimed to restore some of the rural character to the roads in and around the forest.

The Safer Cleaner greener Standing Panel had already considered this in detail and the Committee endorsed their conclusions.