

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT: MUNICIPAL YEAR 2010/2011

Introduction

Welcome to the sixth report of the Overview and Scrutiny Structure of Epping Forest District Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels are 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.

At the beginning of the 2010/11 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of five Standing Panels and one Task and Finish Panel for the year.

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 compliment 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.

This year the rules of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been altered so that members of the public have the opportunity to address the Committee on any agenda item.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee coordinated with the Cabinet about their work plans for the year and pre scrutinised their agenda and reports at its meetings the week before Cabinet would meet. Liaisons with the Cabinet would take place to discuss the wider work

programme that would be approved and reviewed annually. 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.

Four call-ins were received this year (for details, see Scrutinising and Monitoring Cabinet Work on page X). These were on the Housing Portfolio Holders decision on the adoption of the standard caravan site licence conditions for permanent residential sites; the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holders decision on the suspension of the new sports hall at the Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool site; the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder decision for a £35,000 reduction in the Community Arts budget; and the Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holders report on the discontinuance of the Town Centre Officer Post.

Standing Scrutiny Panels

A Lead Officer was appointed to each panel to facilitate its process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the terms of reference for each of the Panels on the basis of a rolling programme. The Standing Panels have a 'rolling programme' to consider ongoing and cyclical issues. Five Standing Scrutiny Panels were established, dealing with:

- i. Housing
- ii. Constitution and Member Services
- iii. Finance and Performance Management
- iv. Safer Cleaner Greener.
- v. Planning Services

Standing Panels 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 with clearly defined objectives on which they would report responses and set a deadline to report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Only one Task and Finish Panel was established during the year and that was the 'Provision for Children Services Task and Finish Panel'.