

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT: MUNICIPAL YEAR 2012/2013

Introduction and Welcome from the Chairman

Welcome to the eight 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 2012/13 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of five Standing Panels for the year and during 2012 set up three Task and Finish Panel. We also received two call-in's at the beginning of the year, which are detailed further on in this report. During the year we received numerous presentations from outside bodies including the City of London, County Highways and one on broadband connectivity in our district by BT.

My special thanks go to the Chairmen and members of the various Scrutiny Panels and the three Task and Finish Panels that we had convened this year; making it one of the busiest years we have had in a long time. And of course, I would like to thank all the officers that have worked so hard to keep the panel members informed and supplied with the background information that they need to carry out their investigations.

Cllr Richard Morgan
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny

What is Scrutiny?

- Ø Scrutiny in local government is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised.
- Ø The purpose of scrutiny in practice is to examine, question and evaluate in order to achieve improvement.
- Ø The value of scrutiny is in the use of research and questioning techniques to make recommendations based on evidence.
- Ø Scrutiny enables issues of public concerns to be examined.
- Ø At the heart of all the work is consideration of what impact the Cabinet's plans will have on the local community.
- Ø 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.

The rules of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also allow 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 and pre scrutinised their agenda and reports at its meetings the week before Cabinet would meet. 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.

Two call-ins were received this year (for details, see Scrutinising and Monitoring Cabinet Work on page 3). One was on the Asset Management and Economic Development Portfolio Holder's decision on the outline planning application for the redevelopment of Pyrls Lane Nursery for residential use. The second was the Local Plan Cabinet Committee decision on the Statement on Community Development.

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. Three Task and Finish Panels were established during the year; they were the Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel; the Review of Chief Executive Appointment Task and Finish Panel and the Review of Licensing Services Task and Finish Panel.