

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT ON BEHALF OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BODIES

Introduction

1. The Constitution requires that Overview and Scrutiny Committees should submit an Annual Report to the Council (or the Scrutiny Commission in a single report on their behalf) on their workings. The report may make recommendations about future work programmes and changes in working methods.
2. The Council has received a number of position statements through the course of the year outlining the activities of scrutiny bodies. In addition, the Council at its Annual meeting received and endorsed proposals for the restructuring of scrutiny bodies and how they should operate. In view of this, this Annual report will highlight the key developments and achievements and list in the Appendices to the report, for the record, the activities/issues considered by scrutiny bodies during the year.

Scrutiny Working Arrangements

3. Following the County Council elections in May 2005 the Scrutiny Reference Group and Committee Chairmen decided to review the existing scrutiny working arrangements. The review built on experience gained to date and took account of practice elsewhere. The review identified a range of issues including:-
 - a) the need to identify issues of specific interest and concern to the public;
 - b) the need to be selective about scrutinising and commenting on plans;
 - c) undertaking more work through scrutiny panels;
 - d) Chairmen and Spokesmen to play a more proactive role in keeping abreast of developments and managing their Committee's work programme;

- e) inviting the Leader and Cabinet Members to scrutiny meetings to review progress against targets and objectives for the year and to discuss future work and priorities;
 - f) earlier and greater involvement in policy development including the ability to submit Green Papers on policy issues to the Council;
 - g) acting as the 'champion' of the public in terms of scrutinising activities of external organisations such as public utilities, the post office etc.
4. The success and credibility of the scrutiny process will depend to a large extent on how well members engage in the process and use and develop skills in relation to:-
- researching and analysing issues
 - effectively questioning witnesses
 - being community orientated and involving other bodies;
 - drawing together sensible and well argued conclusions and recommendations;
 - working together without acting in a political way.
5. Training and support for scrutiny members will be important in the coming year. The Scrutiny Reference Group and the Member Training and Development Working Party will have a key role to play in ensuring this is delivered.

Work of Scrutiny Committees

6. As stated earlier, the Council has been updated on a regular basis, by way of position statements, on the work of scrutiny bodies. Appendix 'A' to this report sets out, for the record, the issues considered by the various scrutiny committees in the course of the year.

Scrutiny Review Panels

7. Scrutiny Review Panels are generally seen as the most effective means of engaging members in focused and detailed scrutiny. They also provide an opportunity for individuals and bodies from outside the County Council to be involved in the process. The loosening of the political element in terms of the composition and chairing of Panels has contributed to the success of the review process. Brief details of the reviews completed are set out in Appendix 'B' to this report.

Health Scrutiny

8. The Health and Social Care Act 2001 extended the powers of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review and scrutinise matters relating to the health service. The County Council established a Health

Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four subcommittees scrutinising the activities of the four PCT's which serve the County. In addition a Joint Committee (with Leicester City and Rutland Councils) was established to scrutinise activities of health bodies which serve the area covered by the three authorities.

9. Health Scrutiny is a relatively new function having been in operation for just over a year. In this time the Committee and Subcommittees have established a good working relationship with health bodies in the area. To date much of the work has been focused on responding to proposed developments, monitoring the financial health of the health bodies and assessment of their performance against the Healthcare Commission Standards. Attached as Appendix 'C' is a schedule outlining the issues considered by health scrutiny bodies.
10. As a new function, time and effort has been devoted to briefings to keep members abreast of the key issues and developments in health. It is anticipated that this will continue to be the case in the coming year as the structure and commissioning arrangements are undergoing further changes.

Future Developments

11. New scrutiny structures are now in place. The challenge over the next year is to build on the good work undertaken in the last year and to improve practice. Member involvement and leadership will be crucial to ensuring that the process focuses on what matters to the public and users of Council services.

(Motion to be moved

That the information contained in the report of the Scrutiny Commission on the activities of Scrutiny Committees and Panels be noted.)