

SCRUTINY COMMISSION REPORT 2009

The Scrutiny Commission and its committees have several roles. The first is to review the policies proposed by the Executive and to ensure they will deliver what they are meant to address. Along side this is the work of scrutiny in examining the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. The second is to review the performance of the council and the executive and to hold them to account. This is done through the committee meetings as well as through the informal meetings of spokespersons and officers. The third role is to suggest areas of policy more often than not through short duration panels examining in depth a particular area of concern or interest.

The role of the spokespersons in all of this work is crucial. This year more than ever the spokespersons have ensured the smooth working of the committees, have regulated the agendas and ensured that the panels have achieved their objectives. Spokespersons now hold regular meetings with officers at which members of the Executive are often invited. Finally this work has been recognised in part by the remuneration panel's recommendation to reinstate in part the allowances for spokespersons.

The Commission has monitored the overall performance of the County Council through quarterly reports on the key performance targets and through similar reports on revenue and capital expenditure to ensure that the County Council was providing the right services in a cost efficient way. The Commission has decided to institute a standing panel which will review performance across all areas of the County Council.

An area of Scrutiny that will need to develop is the arrangements of the County Council with other partners in delivering the Multi Area Agreement and other joint working. Progress has still not been made despite the offer of engagement with districts on how this should be achieved. Further attempts will be made later in the year.

A number of panels have met and reported to the Committees and Commission. Many of their recommendations have been proposed to Cabinet and accepted. Two panels of note have been that on the Environment which has had several meetings dealing with differing themes. The panel on the Eco Town met on several occasions and put in an extraordinary amount of work in a short space of time to review the proposals for the Eco Town in Leicestershire. The impartial way they in which they undertook their task has made their recommendations all the more robust.

This year saw the conclusion of the review of Jessica Crowe and Steve Nicklin, their comments and observations were very welcome and many of their suggestions if not already in place have been readily adopted by the Commission and Committees.

Besides all the above, Scrutiny has an important function in giving a useful role in County Hall to those members of the Council, administration just as much as opposition, who are not in the Cabinet. It gives them a reason to meet at County Hall to exchange views and to develop an interest in a specialist area. It would be easy to ignore this aspect of the function of scrutiny and to pare down the scrutiny function so as to eliminate most members from its working. The danger is that this would not only lose an important control on the Executive but also it would leave many members disengaged from County Hall and feeling 'second class' citizens despite being elected by a common franchise.