

## **Report of the Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

# 6

In compiling my final report on the work of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee I feel I should start with a thanks to the tremendous work that Beverley Ireland has provided to support myself and the Committee in our work. I would also extend the Committee's thanks to officers in the Departments of Highways, Transportation and Waste Management, and Community Services for their reports and information in support of our scrutiny function.

The Committee has dealt with a huge array of issues and topics over the year; among them were the ongoing issue of Waste, major transport scheme developments, such as the Earl Shilton Bypass, Grass Cutting, Local Transport Plan 2, street lighting and the County Councils Environmental policies.

### **Waste**

The ongoing issues surrounding waste are rightly topics to be covered by the Committee and I am grateful for the input of senior officers and members to provide updates on the issue of the procurement of long term waste treatment facilities.

The Committee has also continued to receive regular updates on the Landfill Diversion 'Financial Incentive Scheme', aimed at maximising recycling and composting by the District Councils, to monitor the uptake and progress of the scheme, which is funded by the County Council.

### **Major Transport Scheme Developments**

The Committee receive regular updates on the progress, costs, etc of the Council's major transport schemes, such as the Park and Ride Schemes, the Earl Shilton Bypass and the Loughborough town centre transport schemes. In particular, the Earl Shilton Bypass, a project beset by both amphibians and amphibian related comments from members, has been an issue that the Committee reviewed previously due to delays and cost related implications – and has continued to monitor this year.

### **Grass Cutting Panel**

Following service delivery issues in the early part of the 2008 season, a Scrutiny Review Panel was established to review arrangements for grass cutting across the County. I am grateful to members of the Panel for their recommendations which have highlighted areas for improvement, which I am pleased to say, have been accepted by the Department of Highways,

Transportation and Waste Management. Whilst it may seem like a trivial issue the work done on this subject led to recommendations to improve the award and management of contracts in services areas across the Council and to the Cabinet agreeing funds for an extra three urban cuts and one rural cut per season, starting in 2009.

### **Street Lighting**

In the autumn, the Committee received an update on progress with the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Panel on the Management and Maintenance of Street Lighting. In order to follow up on concerns of residents, members and officers on the issue of street lighting and the role of energy companies, the Committee welcomed representatives of the energy company EON to its meeting in October to explain the industry view. I feel that this is an issue that we are only at the beginning off and it will undoubtedly be pursued by the next chairman. It is important that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to bring in external organisations that can provide alternative views and extra evidence to the wider scrutiny process.

### **National Forest Line**

The Committee considered this matter at two meetings over the year and of particular interest was the information we received from a representative of Network Rail, which suggested that the conversion of the National Forest Line to carry passenger as well as freight traffic was 'technically possible' – this is of importance as part of an ongoing process of locating alternative means for transporting an increasing population without reliance upon the road network. However, it was also noted that, as well as a significant initial capital investment to bring the line up to standard, a large, ongoing, subsidy would be required to cover the operating costs.

### **Environment Policies**

Over the past year, the Committee has received a further four reports from the Scrutiny Review Panel on the County Council's Environment Policies and Programmes covering: Climate Change issues; Biodiversity and Water; Carbon Management and the Energy and Water Strategy; and the County Hall Waste Audit Action Plan. The valuable work of this Panel has been a major contributor to the Environment Strategy and Action Plan recently approved by the full County Council.

As an innovation for this year, and in recognition of the wide scope of the Committee's remit, the Committee has received a number of briefing papers to update members on issues as diverse as the Bull in the Oak Crossroads, Workplace Travel Plans and Transport Accessibility for Young People.

There was also, in May 2008, very informative All Member Briefing on Developer Contributions, provided by the Developer Contributions Officer, which arose out of the work of this Committee.



Mr. G. 'Bill' Boulter