

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 9 JUNE 2010

ANNUAL REPORT – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSIONERS

Purpose

1. Under the terms of the Constitution, Overview & Scrutiny Committees are required to report annually to Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods.
2. This report sets out in brief the new structure adopted by the County Council following the elections in 2009, the challenges faced in making the structure work, the work undertaken by the various Committees and scrutiny panels and the efforts to improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny process.

Structure of Scrutiny

3. Members will be aware that following the elections the structure of Overview and Scrutiny was reviewed in line with a manifesto commitment of the Administration to make it more streamlined and effective. A revised structure was agreed by the County Council in September 2009 and is shown in diagrammatic form in Appendix 1 to this report.

Work undertaken by Scrutiny

4. Attached as Appendices are reports from the Chairmen of Scrutiny bodies setting out the work undertaken during the last year.

Scrutiny Commission	Appendix 2
CYPS	Appendix 3
ASCH	Appendix 4
Budget and Performance	Appendix 5

Also set out in **Appendix 6** is a summary of completed Scrutiny Review Panels and a brief outline of Panels still in progress.

Key Achievements

5. The revised structure and the number of newly elected posed both a challenge and an opportunity to make a fresh start.

- i) Members are now taking a proactive role in identifying issues for scrutiny and the agenda is now less officer driven. More needs to be done to ensure that there is a clear understanding as to why issues appear on agendas or why a scrutiny panel is being established;
- ii) A greater number of backbench members are now engaged in scrutiny. There are 42 members who are not on the Cabinet and of these 34 have participated in some scrutiny activity (i.e. 80%). A recent workshop on assessing the effectiveness of scrutiny was well attended and the key conclusions will now be discussed with the wider scrutiny membership and, where appropriate, with the Executive. ;
- iii) There has been a tightening up of the process of scoping scrutiny reviews so that there is a clear understanding at the outset of the review of the expectations and parameters within which the review is to be conducted. Panels are also urged to be clear in their recommendations so that appropriate monitoring arrangements can be put in place. Henceforth Scrutiny Panel Chairmen will be charged with ensuring that they monitor the progress and implementation of their Panel's findings;
- iv) The introduction of 'light touch' reviews which involves one or two members rather than a Panel looking at an issue has proved successful and it is intended to develop further this form of working;
- v) Monitoring the Executive is a key task for scrutiny and to do this it is essential to have in place robust performance monitoring arrangements. A start has been made through the Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel and over the coming months the focus will be on ensuring that areas at risk of underperformance are identified and closely monitored;
- vi) Working in partnership is key to successful scrutiny. The co-option of two district council representatives on the Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel which has responsibility for scrutiny of the LAA is a start. Panels are encouraged where appropriate to engage with partners and examples include the involvement of districts and parishes in the winter maintenance review, and of Severn Trent, the Environment Agency in the review of Flooding. Joint scrutiny also offers opportunities for reducing costs by avoiding duplication of effort.

Conclusions

- 6. The new structure has been operating for 10 months. It is important that the progress made to date is maintained. The outcomes from the workshop will need to be looked at. Key amongst these will be to make sure that scrutiny engages with the public and makes itself more accessible.
- 7. Given the difficult and financially challenging times ahead scrutiny will have a key role to play in ensuring that the Council continues to provide high quality services and delivers value for money to the people of Leicestershire

Simon Galton

Kevin Feltham

Richard Blunt