

Leicestershire County Council

Overview and Scrutiny



It has been a productive year in Scrutiny. We have carried out important review work and continued to hold our Executive colleagues to account on the issues that affect Council Tax payers the most.

The Council faces significant budget constraints and reductions in staffing which will continue to challenge service delivery. It must be recognised that this will also affect Scrutiny and, going forward, we must be both realistic and efficient in where we target our resources.

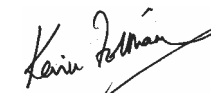
Beyond the financial pressures, Scrutiny faces other significant challenges. The Big Society will bring with it landmark changes in the way services are delivered. Scrutiny must act as a check and balance to ensure that service delivery standards in Leicestershire remain high. Elsewhere, although it is not currently clear how health scrutiny will fit with the new organisations likely to emerge from NHS Transition, such as the GP Consortia, there are exciting opportunities to develop the Overview and Scrutiny role.

We have tried to make our Annual Report a more accessible document and we hope you find it an interesting and informative précis of the workings of Scrutiny this past year.

The Scrutiny Commissioners,



Simon Galton CC



Kevin Feltham CC



Richard Blunt CC

**Annual Report
2010/11**

Introduction

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 10/11

What is Scrutiny?

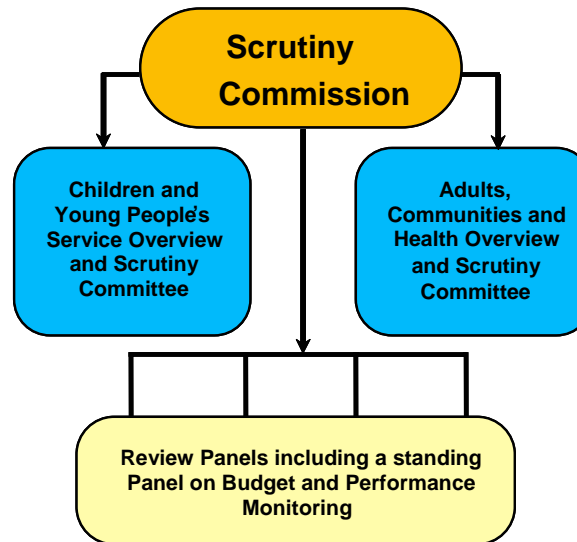
All local authorities operating an Executive and Scrutiny model have an Executive made up of the Leader of the Council and up to 9 members of his Group (known as the Cabinet). All executive decisions (ie. those needed to implement the Policy Framework and Budget approved by the County Council) are taken by the Executive.

Overview and Scrutiny bodies are not decision making bodies but are bodies which monitor and influence those that are. The Overview and Scrutiny role, carried out by members who are not on the Cabinet, is designed to support the work of the Council in the following ways:-

- Reviewing and scrutinising decisions taken by the Executive (sometimes known as acting as a 'critical friend').

- Considering aspects of the Council's performance.
- Assisting in research, policy review and development.
- Involving itself with external organisations operating in the County to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.
- Providing a means of involving the community in the Council's work.

The Structure of the Overview and Scrutiny system in Leicestershire is set out below:



The Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Adults, Communities and Health (ACH) Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinise the Council's functions in relation to the relevant departments. The ACH Overview and Scrutiny Committee also scrutinises the activities of NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland Primary Care Trust which has responsibility for commissioning health care services.

The Scrutiny Commission reviews and scrutinises decisions made or actions proposed in connection with the remaining County Council functions which are not within the scope of either of the above Committees. It also oversees and co-ordinates the work of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The standing Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel receives and considers quarterly performance and budget reports. It also plays a role in the budget setting process.

Review Panels are appointed to look in depth at particular issues and their recommendations which may suggest a change in policy or service provision are submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

Highlights and Achievements

Major Reviews

Quality and Safeguarding in Registered Care

A review was undertaken to ensure that there were good processes and policies in place to ensure that the care provided to older and vulnerable adults was of a high quality.

Winter Maintenance

Following the prolonged period of severe winter weather of 2009/10, Councillors wanted to review how the Council and other agencies had responded, how this could be improved and how the Council and its key partners could be better prepared for such severe weather in future.

Big Society

Following the election of the Coalition Government in May it was felt important for the Council to explore how it could support this emerging initiative which

would change the way in which services are delivered to the public.

Sex and Relationships Education and its Impact on Teenage Pregnancy

Significant concerns for the sexual health of the County's young and vulnerable people led to a review of sex and relationships education which was linked to a target for reducing the number of teenage pregnancies, which was rated as 'red' (ie. below expectation).

Home to School Transport

In response to concerns raised about walking routes to schools, a review was undertaken to investigate how routes were assessed.

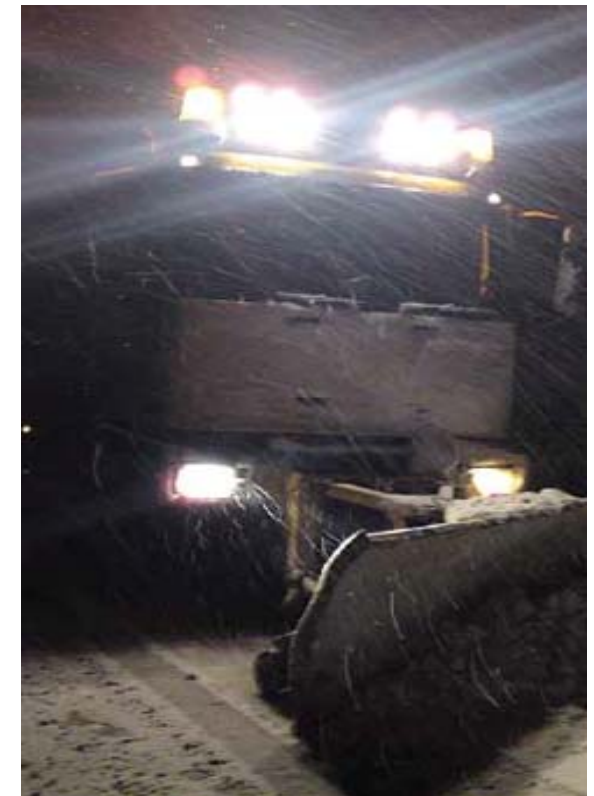
Light Touch Reviews

Forced Marriage

To respond to concerns raised by members regarding the policies and protocols of Leicestershire County Council and partners that relate to the prevention of forced marriages.

Street Café Licencing

Following the launch of a new licencing policy to charge street vendors, a review was undertaken to ensure that the needs of highway users, particularly the disabled, were fully taken account of.



Key Outcomes of Major Reviews

By no means exhaustive, a sample of the key outcomes from Reviews are highlighted below.

Quality and Safeguarding in Registered Care

Improved contract monitoring and the publication of a list of homes where concerns about care had been identified. This would help residents and carers make a more informed choice.

Introduction of a requirement that 80% of staff working in residential care homes should receive safeguarding training that would ensure staff were aware of how and with whom to raise issues of concern.

Winter Maintenance

Information on routes being gritted to be placed in Leicestershire Matters, delivered to every household in Leicestershire, so that in times of bad weather, people were able to safely plan their journeys in advance.

Improving arrangements with key partners, regarding the supply of grit and grit boxes, to allow more localised areas of difficulty to be treated.

Improving joint working arrangements with District Councils with a view to supplying them with salt which would allow their officers to grit more areas of local importance, for example outside shopping centres.

Big Society

It was important that the Council took on a 'facilitation' role in supporting this new policy agenda. The public would need to be empowered to take part.

Monitoring of service delivery standards would be important to ensure that services delivered by the public remained of a high quality. The second stage of the review will commence in July 2011.

Sex and Relationships Education and its Impact on Teenage Pregnancy

A Good Practice Guide for Schools has been produced and common lesson plans for Relationship and Sex Education for years 7–13 made available on the Leicestershire Healthy Schools

website to promote a consistent and appropriate approach in schools. Members of the Panel were pleased to note that, according to figures released in February 2011, the number of teenage girls getting pregnant in Leicestershire fell to one of its lowest levels in 2009 (the latest figures available).

Home to School Transport

The current method for assessing walking routes was reasonable. There should be no fixed minimum width for footpaths.

Arrangements to be made for parents to be informed as early as possible on any changes to bus services in order that alternative arrangements could be made.



Public Involvement

It is important that the public feel able to contribute to the work of Scrutiny. There are number of avenues for this – be it asking questions at meetings, submitting petitions or inspecting papers. Please access the link below to find out more:

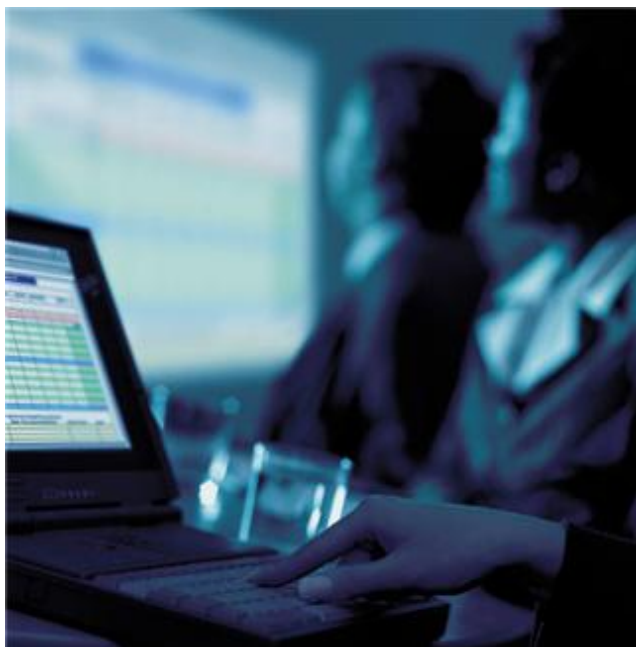
http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/your_council/local_democracy/county_council/council_public_involvement.htm

This last year has been a particularly active time for public involvement with Scrutiny and many petitions and questions have been received which have sparked worthwhile debates with elected members.

In particular, the following petitions highlight Scrutiny's contributions:

- One objecting to plans to increase the licensing fee for on-street cafés sparked a healthy debate at the Commission and led to a review and reduction in charging.
- Amongst the petitions received at CYPs Overview and Scrutiny was one asking “To restore Moira School to full Primary status”. Scrutiny was pleased to see proposals to expand Moira

Infant School, to enable ‘all through’ primary status with effect from 1 September 2011.



Members of the public have also been to meetings to present questions to raise the profile of particular issues and concerns they have. Questions regarding the proposed 24 hour bus lane scheme on the A6 in Oadby highlighted local concerns about the proposals.

It is recognised that the value of Scrutiny is enhanced by the involvement of the

public and external experts in the process. During the course of the year Scrutiny has engaged with a wide range of people including:

- Headteachers, Parents and Governors during the review of Home to School transport.
- Young Parents, teachers, school nurses and faith groups in the review of sex an relationships education.
- The Chairman and representatives of the Leicestershire Youth Council who lobbied during the budget process.
- The Leicestershire Involvement Network (LINK), which comprises volunteers with a particular interest in health matters, was invited to comment on the key proposals put forward by health bodies.

Equally important has been the decision taken to open up the process for undertaking major reviews. These are now held in public and the documents and evidence considered are published on the website at the following link:

http://politics.leics.gov.uk/Published/StdDataDocs/0/6/7/5/SD00005760/ScrutinyReviewPanels_v7.doc



The Budget

Scrutiny of the budget at a time of significant reductions in public expenditure is extremely important, particularly to ensure that the impact of spending reductions on frontline services is minimised by achieving maximum efficiencies. Whilst recognising the difficulties facing the Cabinet in formulating the budget proposals, after representations had been made by Scrutiny, the following changes to the budget were made:

- utilising part of the underspends in the supporting people budget to improve the support given to disabled people, particularly returning servicemen who have been injured and who require specialist equipment and housing.
- reinstating the proposed reduction of £20,000 for 'Scambusters' to ensure that work continues on cracking down on rogue traders.
- reinstating the proposed saving of £50,000 for the IMPACT programme, which plays a key role in supporting local communities to reduce anti-social behaviour.

In addition to contributing to the preparation of the Council's budget, Scrutiny undertakes the important role of monitoring the budget via the consideration Quarterly reports. Arising from consideration of these reports a number of areas have been identified for further investigation including:

- The level of reserves and contingencies and the purposes for which these are held.
- The transition to a new Customer Service Centre and implications for service delivery.
- A re-assessment of the business model for the Enderby Park & Ride service to see how it could be improved.



Holding the Executive to Account

This is a key Scrutiny activity which has been discharged in the following ways:

Monitoring of Performance

Quarterly performance reports are considered in relation to:

- The Local Area Agreement.
- The Council's Medium Term Priorities.

The purpose is to monitor progress being made against set targets and national indicators and where performance is below expectation to seek assurances that action is being taken to ensure, where possible, the achievement of those targets.

In addition to the internally produced performance reports, Scrutiny bodies also consider reports produced by external inspection bodies, such as Ofsted, Care Quality Commission and the Audit Commission.

Looking ahead, the changes resulting from the decision of the Coalition Government to abolish the Audit Commission and the plethora of performance targets will require Scrutiny to consider how best to discharge this duty in future. This offers the opportunity for the Council and Scrutiny to develop performance measures which are perhaps more relevant to the Council and the people of Leicestershire.

Inviting Cabinet Lead Members to account

The Cabinet is the key decision making body and Scrutiny committees regularly invite Cabinet Lead Members to account for their decisions. Apart from questioning Cabinet Lead Members on their budget proposals, other examples of where Cabinet Lead members were invited to account for actions taken or proposed include:

- The Local Transport Plan.
- Youth Justice Plan.
- Voluntary Sector arrangements.

The Leader of the Council was also invited to the Commission to discuss the prospects for the budget arising from the

announcement of the Local Government Finance Settlement in December.



Scrutiny of External Bodies

Scrutiny in Leicestershire is not confined to the activities of the County Council but also focuses on the activities of other public bodies whose activities have an impact on the residents of Leicestershire.

One key areas scrutinised was the arrangements for promoting Leicestershire as a place for business and tourism. With the significant reductions in funding it was apparent that it was necessary to review the activities of the two organisations, Leicestershire Promotions and Prospect Leicestershire, who were undertaking this activity. As a result of this Scrutiny a recommendation was made that the two organisations should be merged, thereby releasing significant backroom savings. This is being put into effect.

The other key area of external scrutiny involved looking at the activities of local health bodies. Much of this work is carried out through a joint committee which includes Leicester City and Rutland County Council. Examples of the work carried out include:

- Reviewing and commenting on the transfer of certain community based health services from the Primary Care Trust (which may soon cease) to the Leicestershire Partnership Trust, with the aim of making sure service levels and quality were protected.
- Commenting on the business plan of East Midlands Ambulance Service within Leicestershire. Whilst there has been criticism of ambulance service standards in the East Midlands, it is pleasing to note that the service standards in Leicestershire have not suffered greatly.
- Assessing the impact of the new Walk in Medical Centre in Oadby and Wigston.
- Expressing Scrutiny's support for the retention of the Children's Congenital Cardiac unit at the Glenfield Hospital.
- Considering and welcoming proposals to improve the provision of short break respite for people with learning disabilities.

Looking to the future, the changes to health scrutiny arrangements will give an opportunity to consider how best that part of Scrutiny's activities can engage the public and their concerns.

How to Contact Us:

For advice about the Scrutiny process or any other matters relating to Overview and Scrutiny meetings, please speak to any of the following officers who will be pleased to assist you:

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