



# Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2010/11





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## Chairman's Foreword



**Cllr James Hockney**  
Chairman  
Scrutiny and Overview Committee



**Cllr Bridget Smith**  
Vice-Chairman  
Scrutiny and Overview Committee

2010/11 has been a very full year for the scrutiny and overview committee, and we have achieved a great deal, both in the way we work and in the impact we have had on policies and services in South Cambridgeshire.

Two of our most significant projects will continue into the summer of 2011, looking at planning services and customer contact services. Both projects have entailed wide ranging consultation with residents, planning agents, parish councils, district councillors and staff as well as visits to other service providers to learn from good practice.

Although these reviews are not yet finished they are already making a difference. The customer contact review has provided evidence that will help the council to obtain customer service excellence accreditation. The evidence gathered regarding planning services is already leading to improvements to the new IT system and the pre-application process.

We completed two other large projects during the year, reviewing value for money in the Housing service and the Council's use of performance management. Both were accepted in full by the Cabinet and are now leading to service improvements.

We have summarised each of these reviews in short booklets as a way of communicating what we do, and ensuring that our findings and recommendations are remembered and actioned.

At our regular committee meetings we continued to provide robust scrutiny and challenge on issues such as community safety, community transport, council finances, customer service excellence, economic development, engaging with children and young people, partnership working, recycling and the staff appraisals system.

We used our call-in power to successfully challenge a decision regarding the sale of some land for housing. Following our recommendation and further local consultation, the Housing Portfolio Holder decided not to dispose of it on the open market but to a registered social landlord, which was welcomed by residents.

We also continued to send monitors to portfolio holders' meetings to provide timely scrutiny and identify any ways in which we could contribute further as a committee.

This report contains examples of several tangible outcomes as a result of our work. I hope you will enjoy reading it and finding out more about our achievements this year, and our plans for 2011/12.

## What is Scrutiny?

The Local Government Act 2000 requires councils to have at least one committee with the power to review or scrutinise decisions or actions affecting the authority's area or its residents.

The Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gave further powers and duties to scrutiny committees, such as the duty to scrutinise crime and disorder at least once a year, and the right of any councillor to bring an otherwise intractable ward issue to the committee.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 added the power to hold the Council's most senior officers to account; and the responsibility to ensure petitions are dealt with correctly.

2011 saw the introduction of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which is now making its way through Parliament. This will aim to increase the local accountability and transparency of public services, as well as the involvement of local service users. Scrutiny committees are well placed to support these aims.

A growing number of service providers have a duty to cooperate with scrutiny committees, and take account of their recommendations. However, many other organisations voluntarily embrace scrutiny, without the need for legislation.

The aim of a scrutiny committee is to provide an open and transparent forum in which to examine whether policies and services meet the needs of local people. The committees cannot make decisions or policies themselves, but they have the power of influence; they make evidence-based recommendations that are informed by stakeholder and public opinion, performance comparisons, best practice and expert advice.

## Complementing the work of the Council

Effective scrutiny provides an additional, independent resource for reviewing council decisions and policies without being divisive or confrontational. Scrutiny councillors are in a unique position to influence policy, contribute to decisions and champion local issues of concern.

When working well, overview and scrutiny can help to

- raise the quality of local debate
- get to the heart of complex issues
- develop new ideas
- engage and provide a voice for the local community and key stakeholders
- improve decision-making
- strengthen accountability
- contribute to policy development
- monitor and improve performance

## Scrutiny at South Cambridgeshire District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council has one scrutiny committee, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, which has thirteen members drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole.

Another aspect of scrutiny is delivered by members of the committee who act as scrutiny monitors at Portfolio Holders' decision-making meetings which are held in public. Here scrutiny members develop greater knowledge in an area of the Council's work and therefore offer well-informed and timely challenge and influence.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work falls into five broad areas:

### **Pre-decision scrutiny:**

- considering an issue about to come before the Council, Cabinet or Portfolio Holder and providing a forum for cross-council debate based on a range of evidence.

### **Policy or Performance Reviews:**

- a detailed inquiry into a topic, drilling down to the basics and producing a report with evidence-based recommendations for improvement. This can relate to any local service, whether provided by the Council or not and is usually led by a time-limited task and finish group. Such a group can include any non-Cabinet councillor; it can also co-opt residents or members of partner organisations.

### **One-Off Reviews:**

- a single-meeting review of a topic, usually inviting Cabinet members, officers or external agencies to come and speak to them about a service or policy area before making recommendations for improvement, if applicable.

### **Performance Scrutiny:**

- monitoring financial and service performance to ensure the Council is meeting, or exceeding, its targets and objectives. This is primarily delivered by scrutiny monitors at Portfolio Holders' meetings.

### **Call-in:**

- the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee or any 5 councillors can, in certain circumstances, 'call-in' a decision which has been made but not yet implemented. The Committee can then interview the relevant Cabinet member(s) or officers, examine the evidence and suggest improvements to the decision, or refer it to the full Council.

## How do the committees decide what to scrutinise?

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee sets its own work programme and the topic suggestions come from many sources:

- Residents' surveys
- Cabinet Members' forward plans
- Customer Complaints system\*

- Councillors
- Local petitions
- Local Strategic Partnership members
- Officers
- Residents\*
- Portfolio monitors
- The Council's Forward Plan of key decisions

\*The Committee does not normally scrutinise individual complaints as there are other ways to resolve these; but it would consider any underlying trend or policy where there might be a number of similar cases.

Programme planning takes place at the start of the civic year although additional topics can also be added during the year as they arise. These will be a mixture of one-off topics and some more in-depth reviews.

When selecting topics for scrutiny, councillors use a scoring system to assess whether they are:

- Of significant local public concern
- Relevant to the Council's corporate objectives
- Capable of being influenced and
- Not being scrutinised already by another body

# Overview And Scrutiny Achievements 2010/11

## I. Scrutiny and Overview Committee

**Chairman:** Councillor James Hockney

**Vice-Chairman:** Councillor Bridget Smith

### **Councillors:**

Cllr Richard Barrett (from Sept 2010)

Cllr Jose Hales

Cllr Roger Hall

Cllr Tumi Hawkins

Cllr Liz Heazell

Cllr Mark Hersom

Cllr Peter Johnson

Cllr Mike Mason

Cllr David Morgan (until Sept 2010)

Cllr Tony Orgee

Cllr Ben Shelton

Cllr Bunty Waters

The following councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

Cllr Val Barrett

Cllr David Bird

Cllr Lynda Harford

Cllr Deborah Roberts

Cllr Nightingale

Cllr John Batchelor

Cllr Hatton

Cllr Edd Stonham

The following additional councillors joined task and finish groups:

Cllr Nigel Cathcart

Cllr Cicely Murfitt

Cllr Peter Topping

Cllr John F Williams

## Task and Finish Group Reviews

### **Performance Management**

**1.1** A task and finish group started work in June 2010 with the following terms of reference:

- *To examine performance management at South Cambridgeshire District Council and the extent to which it drives service improvement*
- *To recommend how performance management could be used more effectively*

**1.2** This review was initially seen as a timely opportunity to review the usefulness of CorVu, the performance management software that had been introduced two years



earlier. But with the coming of a new Government and a new approach to performance targets, and the arrival of a new Chief Executive, the review expanded. It became an opportunity to look at performance management more widely, and its role in helping the council to achieve efficiency and value for money.

- 1.3** From the outset it was clear that the Council's performance management systems were working extremely well, as evidenced by top quartile performance in many services, a comparatively lean workforce and low rate of council tax.
- 1.4** The task and finish group visited three other councils, heard from an expert witness and interviewed several officers and members before making twelve recommendations for improvement. These centred on making better use of CorVu and existing internal mechanisms; improving staff appraisal and recognition; and consulting and communicating more effectively with residents.
- 1.5** The review and action plan were accepted in full by the Cabinet in January.
- 1.6** We received an update in February on staff appraisal rates and during 2011/12 we will continue to monitor progress on this and our other recommendations.

### **Value for Money in the Housing Service**

- 1.7** A second cross-party task and finish group was established in June 2010 with the following terms of reference:
  - *To examine requirements of the new regulatory framework regarding value for money of the Housing service*
  - *To recommend a draft Value for Money (VfM) strategy to the Cabinet*
  - *To recommend how this might be rolled out across the Council*
- 1.8** This group included three tenants, who brought with them valuable experience and an element of external challenge.
- 1.9** The review used a toolkit published by the Housing Quality Network to systematically examine VfM in the housing service. One of the many positive findings was that the service was already meeting around 80% of the toolkit's criteria, indicating that the Council has robust systems in place corporately for measuring and improving value for money.
- 1.10** The review group recommended a draft VfM strategy and action plan which the Cabinet accepted in March. The Cabinet also agreed with the recommendation that more publicity be given to the impressive value for money already being achieved by the housing service.
- 1.11** The group's final recommendation was that the VfM toolkit that they had used should be adapted for use by all other service areas within the council. This will complement the higher level VfM template already in use for service planning.

### **Customer Contact**

- 1.12** A third task and finish group started work in December with the following terms of reference:
  - *To examine options open to the Council for providing a modern, integrated customer contact service*

- *To make recommendations to the Cabinet for improving customer contact service standards and efficiency*

- 1.13** This task and finish group is working alongside an officer-led project team to augment their work. The councillors also provide cross-party challenge regarding potential changes to customer contact services.
- 1.14** This project was initially intended to examine the options for 2012 onwards when the current contract expires with the Contact Centre. The Contact Centre deals primarily with telephone enquiries. However, residents are increasingly using email or the website, rather than the telephone; and so it was clear that the review should be more all-embracing.
- 1.15** While it will always be important to provide a telephone enquiry point, the council needs to offer other routes, especially those which could be more cost efficient.
- 1.16** The group has visited the council's contact centre and made comparison visits to four other councils. It has viewed technical demonstrations, met residents, held a staff focus group and issued a survey to customer groups, parish councillors and residents.
- 1.17** Their aim is to find out how customers prefer to contact us and be contacted by us and whether the Council should be using new channels such as social media and webchat. Inevitably some feedback has touched on issues of customer care and this information has been passed to the Customer Service Excellence team.
- 1.18** The task and finish group is expected to make its final report during the summer of 2011.

## **Planning Services**

- 1.19** This review was initially suggested by the scrutiny monitor for the planning portfolio. He and the scrutiny committee chairman had become aware of performance issues that merited scrutiny. Previously exemplary service standards had suffered during the introduction of a new IT system, and staff reorganisation.
- 1.20** The chairman of the scrutiny committee worked with officers to agree an approach which would not further burden staff, nor duplicate an internal audit that was underway. They agreed that a task and finish group should begin work in January 2011 with the following terms of reference:
- *To examine performance in the Planning Service at SCDC from internal and external customers' perspective and any barriers to service improvement*
  - *To examine best practice*
  - *To recommend how performance could be improved within the Planning Service*
- 1.21** The task and finish group has held focus groups for parish councils, planning agents, district councillors and staff, attended customer forums, and issued surveys. The group is also working with planning applicants to understand the 'customer journey' and find ways to improve it in future.
- 1.22** This group is expected to make its final report during the summer of 2011.

## Scrutiny and Overview Committee

- I.23** Apart from these task and finish groups, the Committee has also sought to add value on several other issues facing the Council in the past twelve months, as follows.
- I.24** Scrutiny of the 2011/12 budget in February was preceded by an all-councillor workshop which provided an opportunity to develop questions which we followed up at the meeting. Our subsequent statement to the Cabinet expressed a number of concerns regarding proposed spending cuts. Specifically we questioned the potential effect on service levels.
- I.25** Earlier in the year we had monitored the updated medium term financial strategy and examined the potential impact of legislation being discussed by the new Government.
- I.26** One of the council's major objectives for 2011 has been to achieve customer service excellence accreditation and so we have monitored this project and provided an element of challenge to the self assessment process. We recommended that customer facing staff be empowered to deal directly with complaints without the need to refer to a manager. We also identified the need for dealing well with internal customers; and the need to improve the consistency with which the council identifies complaints.
- I.27** When examining the Council's draft economic development strategy we heard concerns that on occasion, planning decisions had not given adequate consideration to the need to support economic development in the District. Our Planning Services task and finish group is returning to this issue.
- I.28** We met with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to examine progress on their rolling plan for community safety. We made recommendations aimed at: reducing domestic violence; preventing theft; influencing the rehabilitation process; improving perceptions about community safety, enabling councillor involvement with the police; and improving data-sharing.
- I.29** We interviewed the Leader of the Council regarding the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) one year after the merging of South Cambs' LSP with that of Cambridge City. We heard that the loss of government funding had changed the purpose of the LSP. It was no longer a vehicle for distributing reward grants. The coming year would be an opportunity for reviewing the role of the LSP, which would need to be more about inter-organisational and collective influence.
- I.30** The Council's ability to engage effectively with children and young people has been of ongoing interest to the Committee, since it was first highlighted by last year's task and finish group on this issue. We continued to focus on this during 2010/11, beginning with a workshop in June for pupils from three local village colleges. This contributed to the development of a draft youth engagement plan, which we scrutinised and helped to refine in January.
- I.31** At that meeting we decided that the template for all future reports to the Committee should be amended to address the need to consult children and young people. This has now been implemented.
- I.32** During 2010/11 the Council introduced a Blue Bin service aimed at improving the district's already impressive recycling performance. The chairman kept a watching brief on this new service and asked for a performance report after six

months in operation. This revealed that the service was working well and had led to an overall increase in recycling rates.

- I.33** We made three recommendations for further improving the service: to include paper caddies with the black bin collection; to sensitively ascertain whether assisted collections are still required; and to develop more discrete collection methods of yellow contaminated waste bags. We will monitor this service again next year.
- I.34** Progress on the council's community transport action plan was monitored in February. We were very satisfied with officers' work; our only recommendation was that they ask hospital and health providers to work more collaboratively to ease the burden on community transport schemes. This is now being progressed.
- I.35** We have looked at the council's complaints process during each of the past three years, contributing to its increasing robustness. This year we made additional recommendations aimed at further improving the speed and efficiency of the process and developing the council's ability to learn from complaints.

## Monitoring portfolios

- I.36** South Cambridgeshire District Council has been praised for its innovative practice of holding meetings in public for each portfolio holder to discuss and agree decisions within their service areas. These meetings also receive quarterly reports on spending and service delivery and aim to increase their policy development work. The scrutiny committee sends at least one monitor to each meeting, as follows:

Portfolio	Services / Cross-cutting themes/ Council Priorities	Monitor
Leader	Partnership working, Local Area Agreement, Community Safety), Council values	James Hockney
Environmental Services	Environmental health, environmental operations, street cleaning, recycling, licensing, public health, private sector housing and Home Improvement Agency, land drainage, Member training and development	Jose Hales Mike Mason
Finance and Staffing	Finance, support services (including Elections), staffing, asset management	Roger Hall Tumi Hawkins
Housing	Housing strategy, housing advice and options, housing landlord services, equality and diversity, Gypsies and Travellers	Liz Heazell Ben Shelton
New Communities	Development of new communities, planning policy, arts and sports, sustainability, climate change, London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games	Bridget Smith
Northstowe	Northstowe, improvement and communications, risk management	Mike Mason Bridget Smith Bunty Waters
Planning	Development control, design and conservation, building control, economic development, transport initiatives, procurement and efficiency, business and employment, Travel for Work	Roger Hall Mike Mason
Policy and Performance	Policy development, information and communications technology (ICT), performance management, customer services, value for money	Mark Hersom

- I.37** These monitors act as a bridge between the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Cabinet, promoting constructive dialogue and timely scrutiny that adds value to the work of each Cabinet member.
- I.38** During 2010/11 we have improved our feedback mechanism; scrutiny monitors write a short report after each Portfolio Holder's meeting, briefly summarising their input and influence. The reports are also sent to the portfolio holder which has been welcomed.
- I.39** Examples of successful scrutiny input at portfolio meetings included:
- a. calling for benchmarking data regarding charges for the street-naming service
  - b. highlighting the increase in litter connected to the new blue bin scheme
  - c. suggesting that reintroduction of a down-sizing incentive be investigated to reduce the number of homes that are under-occupied
  - d. ensuring that equality and diversity are fully considered on every report
  - e. improving communication on key projects such as the remedial works in Hauxton
- I.40** It was following feedback from a monitor that we agreed to examine the ongoing performance of the Council's planning service, and set up the task and finish group mentioned above.

## Call-in

- I.41** Call-in is used a last resort, when other means of influencing decision-making have failed. Nationally, councils have an average of 2 call-ins per year; and around a quarter result in an amended decision.
- I.42** We used the call-in procedure twice in 2011/12 and both resulted in a change to the original decision.
- I.43** The first call-in was of a decision made by the Housing Portfolio Holder to dispose of a piece of land in Balsham at an open market value in order to generate an income for the Council and to secure some affordable housing units.
- I.44** This decision was called in by members from all three political parties represented on the Council, who felt that the decision had not been based on adequate consultation.
- I.45** The committee met in Balsham, which enabled local residents to attend. They expressed their preference for the land to be developed by a social landlord and requested time to conduct more consultation. The Portfolio Holder agreed and in light of subsequent responses, he agreed to dispose of the site to a registered social landlord.
- I.46** The second call-in was made regarding the Planning Portfolio Holder's decision to support the County Council's emerging Transport Plan and endorse the District Council's statement for inclusion within it. The committee felt that insufficient effort had been made to consult councillors about the statement. We discussed possible improvements to the statement, which the Portfolio Holder agreed to make.
- I.47** We also recommended that decision makers should take more active steps in future to consult councillors and other interested parties on important decisions, rather than relying on them to be aware of agenda items listed for Portfolio Holder meetings.

## Monitoring previous reviews and recommendations

- 1.48** At each meeting the Committee received ongoing progress reports on previous recommendations and we were pleased to find that the vast majority had been accepted and actioned in a timely way.
- 1.49** In November and March we monitored progress on recommendations made by last year's Finance task and finish group and were pleased to hear about improvements to internal processes. There had also been improvements to the way information is communicated. However, we continue to look for further improvements to the way in which the Council consults people about spending plans.
- 1.50** We would like to see more use made of online consultation tools such as YouChoose, a free product for members of the Local Government Association, especially at village colleges to support their curriculum and allow the council to benefit from consultation with young people.
- 1.51** We restated our recommendation that the council should continue to publicise through the South Cambs magazine, the council's headline value for money messages and how the council tax is spent.
- 1.52** We also looked at the council tax leaflet again and recommended that officers continue to work with the County Council, Police and the Fire and Rescue Service to make it more attractive and fit for its audiences.
- 1.53** In March we revisited our review of Orchard Park (formerly Arbury Park) and received a progress report which showed how the learning from that review has informed the other developments now underway on the fringes of Cambridge.
- 1.54** We heard that the County Council had also conducted a review of children's services in new communities and we recommended that this be presented to Cabinet or Council.
- 1.55** We made three other recommendations: that should a boundary review happen, the City Council be approached about Orchard Park; that the council help parish councils in fringe areas to access funds from the residual Cambridgeshire Horizons budget; and that parishes have one named point of contact for each large new development. This last recommendation had been made in our original report but appeared to need restating.

## Health Scrutiny

The Council contributes to the scrutiny of health services in the county. Councillor Roger Hall is a member of Cambridgeshire County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee, and Cllr Bridget Smith is his named substitute.

Over the year, the Committee

- responded to the Government's proposals for the health service
- scrutinised the County Council's adult social care budget and plans for 2011/12
- scrutinized performance against the 2010/11 adult social care plan
- considered NHS Cambridgeshire's forward plan

- examined Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust plans for mental health services, both in general and in relation to changes to older people's mental health services in Huntingdonshire and Fenland.
- maintained a watching brief on service changes and the implications of the forthcoming franchise arrangements at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital
- examined the development of continuing care and rehabilitation services, changes to dermatology services, and plans to reduce nursing staff at Addenbrooke's Hospital, all of which were of particular relevance to residents of Cambridge City and S Cambs.

In addition to his contribution to the overall work of the Adults Wellbeing and Health Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Hall was a member of the Committee's liaison group with NHS Cambridgeshire and a link between the Committee and Addenbrooke's Hospital.

### **Joint Accountability Committee**

The work of Cambridgeshire Together, the county's Local Area Agreement Board (LAA), has been scrutinised by a Joint Accountability Committee (JAC) comprising members of the county and district councils.

However, 2010 saw the disbanding of Cambridgeshire Together, in favour of a more streamlined and flexible 'task and finish group' arrangement and so the JAC was also disbanded. Once the new partnership arrangement is underway, a corresponding scrutiny system will be established, again involving at least one representative from South Cambridgeshire District Council.

## Evaluating Overview And Scrutiny

**2.1** In the 2009/10 annual scrutiny report we set out the areas in which we wanted to make improvements in 2010/11. Our progress is shown below.

Focus on outcomes and explicit recommendations	The chairman and vice chairman have focussed very effectively on this, which has led to a marked increase in the number of recommendations made	☺
Ensure a realistic agenda length for each meeting	The chairman now interviews officers well in advance of meetings to ensure that reports will be concise and correctly focussed, This also allows unnecessary items to be deleted	☺
Encourage greater participation by all committee members	More members are contributing but there is a need for further improvement	☺
Improve visitors' and witnesses' experience of the meetings	A who's who photo list is provided at each meeting Greater attention is paid to thanking visitors and witnesses	☺
Increase officers' and Members' understanding of scrutiny	A suite of leaflets has been published setting out what the committee has achieved through the member-led reviews	☺
Continue to build a constructive relationship with the Cabinet	The chairman and vice chairman met with the Leader and Cabinet twice during 2010/11 and continued to develop an increasingly useful role for the scrutiny committee	☺
Improve constitutional arrangements for call in	Experience gained via our August call-in informed improvements to the call-in process which the Council agreed in September	☺
Further develop our questioning skills	Question-planning has greatly improved due to pre-meeting sessions and tailor-made training activities	☺

**2.2** The committee has a number of ways of measuring its own effectiveness and performance. We annually survey portfolio holders and this year they said that we had improved in all aspects: holding the executive to account; securing the cooperation of witnesses; adding value to and being valued by the authority.

**2.3** They said we had improved our questioning skills, communication and profile.

**2.4** They also gave us some constructive suggestions about areas for improvement, for example:

- respond to the localism agenda, especially helping parishes
- do a few things well (rather than lots of things less well)
- increase scrutiny of external organisations
- spot complaints trends
- add value on cross portfolio issues
- increase joint scrutiny with other organisations



- 2.5** The Council's Executive Management Team was also consulted and they commented on the work of the current task and finish groups. They cautioned that the Planning Services task and finish group needed to work with partners in a constructive way to get the scope of this and other reviews correct from the outset. They felt that the Customer Contact task and finish group was already adding value.
- 2.6** Another measure of our effectiveness is the percentage of our recommendations that are accepted. In 2010/11 more than 90% were accepted, which is on a par with last year.
- 2.7** Towards the end of 2010, we held a workshop facilitated by Local Government Improvement and Development to evaluate our performance. We asked ourselves:
- Does our work have impact?
  - How well do we communicate with and involve the public, partners, etc?
  - Is the style of working open, effective, efficient, unbiased, innovative?
- 2.8** We identified the following aspects of our work as having gone well in 2010/11
- call-in reaching a unanimous and successful recommendation
  - involving residents, especially young people
  - productive task and finish group reviews
  - service improvements such as to financial processes
  - working well as a team
  - improved profile, especially via small leaflets for each review
- 2.9** We also identified some areas for further improvement in 2011/12:
- achieve even greater public involvement
  - make more use of performance information
  - further develop our questioning techniques
  - encourage greater participation by all committee members
- 2.10** We will develop a plan of action to address the areas for improvement, and for this we will draw on the support of the Cabinet and officers, the advice of external trainers, and the experience of other councils.



## **Training and development**

- 2.11** During 2010/11 Committee members received both in-house and externally provided training to improve our scrutiny skills. This was in the form of short courses, conferences, bulletins about good practice and observation visits.
- 2.12** At the start of the year we had an induction session run by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). This was particularly useful for the many new councillors on the committee; it also helped with team building.
- 2.13** The incoming chairman and vice-chairman attended the annual conference of the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This provided an excellent opportunity for developing their vision for the committee's work in 2010/11.
- 2.14** As last year, two of our members and the scrutiny officer attended a parliamentary seminar to observe the select committee system at Westminster. This provided an insight into scrutiny at the highest level, and an opportunity to reflect on how difficult scrutiny can be for those who are new to it (the new Government had been formed only weeks before).
- 2.15** Mid-year, a trainer from Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) helped us to refresh and improve our general scrutiny skills and identify our goals for the short and medium term. Feedback from this event showed that Members found it very useful.
- 2.16** In December and February we held two very successful in-house workshops on financial scrutiny. These gave us the confidence and understanding to formulate questions for scrutiny of the 2011/12 budget.
- 2.17** Finally we ran a cross-county event titled Questioning Skills for Better Scrutiny. This was delivered by officers from the Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Network and twenty members signed up from five councils. Again the feedback was very positive.

## **Networking**

- 2.18** We continue to benefit from an officer-led scrutiny network in Cambridgeshire. During 2010/11 this enabled officers to share the learning from various training sessions, as well as good practice and experience.
- 2.19** Officers also belong to a scrutiny network for the whole of the Eastern Region. This is supported by an extranet, for exchanging work programmes, examples of best practice, training resources and offers of help or advice.

## What Are Our Plans For 2011/12?

- 3.1** The profile of Scrutiny is changing nationally and much is expected from us in response to the localism agenda: community involvement; scrutiny of and with partners; scrutiny of crime and disorder issues and supporting the scrutiny of health services.
- 3.2** We would like our 2011/12 work programme to continue to drive value for money. We would like to support the Cabinet in horizon-scanning and ensuring robust performance management.
- 3.3** Two task and finish groups will complete their work in the summer of 2011: reviewing planning services and customer contact services.
- 3.4** We have begun to develop a programme of work which we will finalise at our first meeting in 2011/12. Topics already identified for possible inclusion are:
  - Blue bins - review of first year
  - Community Engagement
  - Council budget
  - Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership performance
  - Customer Service Excellence
  - Localism and Decentralisation Bill/ Act
  - Performance Improvement Action Plan
  - Sheltered Housing
- 3.5** We will also monitor progress following the reports of the 2010/11 task and finish groups: Performance Management and Value for Money in the Housing Service.
- 3.6** Other topic suggestions will be considered and evaluated at the first meeting of the 2011/12 Scrutiny And Overview Committee in June 2011.

## How to get involved

The process of scrutiny is strengthened by involving partners, residents, service users and so on. They bring expertise, local knowledge, fresh ideas and an element of external challenge.

If you would like to know more, please ring the Scrutiny Development Officer, Jackie Sayers on 01954 713451 or email [scrutiny@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@scambs.gov.uk)

**Scrutiny Development Officer**

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