

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Draft to Scrutiny and
Overview meeting
of 29 March 2012

**Overview and Scrutiny
Committee
Annual Report 2011/12**

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



Councillor James Hockney
Chairman
Scrutiny and Overview Committee



Councillor Bridget Smith
Vice-Chairman
Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Welcome to our annual report and I hope you will enjoy reading about the many projects we have been involved in during 2011/12 and our aims for 2012/13, as we strive to help safeguard and improve the services provided for residents of South Cambridgeshire, whether or not they are provided by the District Council.

Two of our most significant projects were carried forward from last year, looking at planning services and customer contact services. Both projects are already making a difference. The customer contact review recommended that the contact centre service should be brought back in-house, saving the Council £250,000 and achieving a more flexible service. Plans are now underway for this to happen by December 2012. That review also provided evidence that helped the council to obtain customer service excellence accreditation in June 2011.

The review of planning services led to improvements to the new online system and the development control service. It also triggered an officer review of the enforcement service.

We completed another large project during the year, regarding the sheltered housing support service. The service needed to be redesigned in view of externally imposed funding changes and our concern was to preserve the quality of the service for those who needed it most.

A one-day review looking at learning from customers' feedback is already leading to improvements in the ways which residents can provide feedback, and the Council's ability to learn from it and make service improvements. Another one-day review helped to develop a new corporate communications strategy, aiming to improve the Council's two-way dialogue with staff, councillors, partners and local people.

At our regular committee meetings we continued to provide robust scrutiny and challenge on issues such as community safety, community transport, council finances, economic development, localism and recycling. We also continued to send monitors to portfolio holders' meetings to provide timely scrutiny and identify ways in which we could contribute further as a committee.

I want to sincerely thank all the councillors who have worked so hard on the scrutiny activities described in this report. My thanks also to the scrutiny officer and indeed the many officers throughout the Council who have helped us this year to make well-informed, evidence-based recommendations that will benefit everyone in the District.

Cllr James Hockney
Chairman of Scrutiny and Overview Committee

What is Scrutiny?

The aim of a scrutiny committee is to provide an open and transparent forum in which to examine whether policies and services are meeting the needs of local people. The committee cannot make decisions or policies, but it has the power of influence; it can make evidence-based recommendations that are informed by stakeholder and public opinion, performance comparisons, best practice and expert advice. It can be described as a 'critical friend'.

The committee can also challenge Cabinet decisions. The Chairman of the committee or any five 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 or officers, examine the evidence and suggest improvements to the decision, or refer it to the full Council.

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 issues
- develop new ideas
- engage and provide a voice for service users
- improve decision-making
- strengthen accountability
- contribute to policy development
- monitor and improve services

Scrutiny at South Cambridgeshire District Council

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

Scrutiny is also 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.

How does the committee 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

- Partner organisations
- Officers
- Residents*
- Portfolio monitors
- The Council's Forward Plan of key decisions

* The Committee does not 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, the key question to ask is whether any scrutiny input would add value or make a difference. Then councillors use a set of criteria to help decide which topics to pursue:

1. **Public Interest:** the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen
2. **Ability to change:** priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence
3. **Performance:** priority should be given to the areas of poor performance
4. **Extent:** priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the District
5. **Replication:** work programmes must avoid duplication or wasted effort
6. **Strategic priorities:** scrutiny work should relate to the Council's priorities and vision.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACHIEVEMENTS 2011/12

1. Scrutiny and Overview Committee Members

Chairman: Councillor James Hockney
Vice-Chairman: Councillor Bridget Smith

Councillors:
Cllr Richard Barrett (from November 2011)
Cllr Alison Elcox (from September 2011)
Cllr Jose Hales
Cllr Roger Hall
Cllr Tumi Hawkins
Cllr Liz Heazell
Cllr Clayton Hudson (until November 2011)
Cllr Mervyn Loynes (until September 2011)
Cllr Mike Mason
Cllr Ted Ridgeway Watt
Cllr Bunty Waters
Cllr David Whiteman-Downes

The following councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

Cllr Val Barrett
Cllr John Batchelor
Cllr Lynda Harford
Cllr Sally Hatton
Cllr Charlie Nightingale
Cllr Deborah Roberts
Cllr Ben Shelton
Cllr Edd Stonham

The following additional councillors joined task and finish group projects:

Cllr Nigel Cathcart
Cllr Cicely Murfitt

2. Task and Finish Group Reviews

- 2.1 Some of our most useful work has been achieved away from the main committee, in small task and finish groups. Perhaps this is because the more informal approach and reduced time pressure allow us to really get to the facts. Five task and finish reviews were completed in 2011/12.

Customer Contact

- 2.2 In June 2011 we finished a review of customer contact services. This looked at where and how best to provide contact services following the expiry of the nine-year call-centre contract with Cambridgeshire County Council in December 2012.
- 2.3 Working alongside an officer-led project team we visited other councils; surveyed residents, staff and partners; and researched new methods and technologies.
- 2.4 Our research showed that people increasingly wanted to shift from telephones and correspondence to emails, webchat, smartphone apps, texting and online self-service. And recent developments in technology were making this increasingly cost efficient.

- 2.5 While the existing contact centre was achieving high customer satisfaction and comparatively good value for money, it was not planning to upgrade its technology.
- 2.6 Visiting other councils, we saw that on-site call-handlers integrated better with the back-office. They also had the opportunity to combine with reception services and even create a pool of bank staff who could reduce the council's use of agency workers.
- 2.7 Our recommendation, accepted by the Cabinet, was to bring the customer contact service in-house and on-site, saving the Council around £250,000 per year and providing customers with the more modern and flexible service that they wanted.
- 2.8 The task and finish group made other recommendations that have also now been implemented: improving the reception area; training staff and councillors in customer care; and considering inclusion of the post service team within the new service area.

Other achievements during the review

- 2.9 During the review the task and finish group shared evidence with the Cabinet to support closing the contact centre on Saturday afternoons; and this took effect in June 2011.
- 2.10 Also, feedback from residents and partners informed the council's Customer Service Excellence project and its work on setting performance standards. The Council gained Customer Service Excellence accreditation in the summer of 2011.

Planning Services

- 2.11 A second review completed in June 2011 looked at the Council's Planning service from the customer's perspective. Again, taking this customer-focused approach contributed evidence towards the council's Customer Service Excellence accreditation.
- 2.12 The scrutiny committee had found that the planning department's previously exemplary service standards had suffered during the introduction of a new IT system, and staff reorganisation. Customer satisfaction was causing concern.
- 2.13 A task and finish group met and surveyed parish councils, planning agents, district councillors, staff and planning applicants.
- 2.14 The recommendations from this group were accepted by the Cabinet in July 2011 and added to an ongoing improvement plan already developed for this service area. They included the need for more systematic and efficient communication, which included more opportunities for two-way dialogue that could inform service improvements.
- 2.15 The group found that the historic buildings service needed to work more seamlessly with other teams. They needed to take a more flexible approach that was more proportionate to the size and significance of applications.

- 2.16 Other recommendations addressed the need for strong leadership, performance management and training in customer service, appeals-handling and presentation skills. Staff training and recruitment of a new Head of Planning are now underway.
- 2.17 Other outcomes include -
- improvements to the pre-application service, which have drawn positive feedback
 - immediate use of the advice provided at the presentation we arranged from English Heritage
 - Parish councils helping to refine the new software and map based information
 - a staff organisation chart now added to the council's website.
 - (awaiting Q3 update to PFH 13 April 2012)
- 2.18 The scrutiny review also led to an operational review of the Council's enforcement services, which will lead to further improvement and efficiency.

Sheltered Housing Support

- 2.19 In July 2011 we set up a small cross-party task and finish group which included four tenants, to review the sheltered housing support service. The group was asked to look at a fresh approach to delivering the support service in response to externally imposed funding changes.
- 2.20 We learned in the autumn that in 2012/13, Cambridgeshire County Council would make a 34% reduction in the Supporting People grant. They also planned to put the support service out for competitive tendering, with a new contract starting in April 2013.
- 2.21 It was not clear how the County Council had reached the funding decision, whom they had consulted, whether an impact assessment had been completed nor where the redirected funding would be spent. The group met with the County portfolio holder and it was clear that the decision would go ahead, and the support service would need to be re-designed within a greatly reduced budget. The group's final report included recommendations that the County Council should address the issues of consultation and impact evaluation, which they accepted.
- 2.22 The group looked at the results of a recent survey of the sheltered housing residents. A 91% return revealed that more than half did not regard their daily visit as important. It seemed that their decision to move into the sheltered housing might be based more on the wish to be near family, to downsize their home, to live in a quiet purpose-built environment and to have access to a pull-cord alarm.
- 2.23 Whilst the task and finish group agreed that work should continue towards increasing efficiency and value for money in the sheltered housing support service, the main recommendation was that the quality of the support service should be preserved for those residents who did need it.
- 2.24 The group developed a set of core values that the future support service should encompass: community links, dignity, human contact, local hub, mutual support, and prevention of poor health. It also endorsed a basic model upon which the

future service should be built, incorporating the best of the existing service, and seeking to correct any existing shortcomings.

- 2.25 Finally, the group recommended that future consideration could be given to developing a set of paid-for optional support services to be offered in addition to services already provided.
- 2.26 The portfolio holder expressed sincere thanks for the work of the task and finish group and the service is now being redesigned based on our recommendations.

Learning from Feedback

- 2.27 The Scrutiny and Overview Committee has regularly looked at the Council's complaints process, and over the years this has contributed to a policy and processes that are now working well. In October 2011 we decided to explore the underlying culture - was feedback actively encouraged and seen as a positive opportunity? Was the Council learning from this feedback and sharing the lessons across the Council?
- 2.28 We also wanted to know whether learning was being captured from other forms of feedback, and whether it was being used to inform service-planning and improvement.
- 2.29 We held a one-day event run by a small cross-party task and finish group, attended by portfolio holders and senior managers. This one-day format was an innovation for us and proved successful.
- 2.30 The task and finish group's first recommendation was that no more time should be spent on categorising feedback as a complaint, comment or compliment. It was all feedback and should all be dealt with to the same high standard. They felt that the expression 'customer feedback' would be more neutral and customers might find this more comfortable too.
- 2.31 The chief executive told the group that she was aiming to build a culture where staff took a holistic view of the customer. She wanted simple methods for communicating "you said, we did" messages. A new leadership programme was equipping managers to develop a no-blame culture where staff would feel empowered, trusted and supported – and where customers' feedback was seen as an opportunity to learn and improve services. The group found that managers shared this vision and were beginning to succeed.
- 2.32 The task and finish group also explored the role of Councillors: the scrutiny committee provided a forum for using customers' experiences to inform service design and improvement; and portfolio holders received quarterly reports. However, there was a need for Councillors' induction and training to include the importance of passing on feedback; conversely staff needed to ask Councillors for their local customer insight.
- 2.33 The group felt that the best placed vehicle for improving learning from feedback was the Executive Management Team (EMT) who had taken on the role of the former Performance Improvement Group in sharing learning across the council.
- 2.34 They recommended that EMT should develop: new methods across the council for collecting and sharing feedback using a 'whole customer' approach; ways to communicate the outcomes from feedback; and ways to ensure that feedback informed service design and improvement.

- 2.35 These recommendations were accepted by the Portfolio Holder who will now monitor progress.

Communications

- 2.36 Another one-day review looked at the council's communications strategy. This needed to be revised to reflect the latest media channels available, and the growing need for transparency and effective engagement.
- 2.37 At the outset, the review group recognised the high volume and standard of work being achieved by the small corporate communications team which had only recently returned to full complement. As recommended in last year's work on value for money, we identified the need for a benchmarking exercise to establish whether the team was adequately resourced.
- 2.38 We found that there was a need to further develop council-wide ownership of a corporate approach to communication. One work area had a communications champion and the group recommended that other areas should also appoint champions. This was especially important for the new customer contact team who would be able to spot trends in customers' concerns.
- 2.39 Based on examples of good practice, we recommended that communication should be defined as a two-way dialogue, rather than simply putting out information. And strategies and plans - corporate and project specific - should be designed from the perspective of the customer, or other end user; rather than to meet internal management objectives. They should also be written in plain language, and in a short leaflet format.
- 2.40 Surveys had shown that residents preferred to find out about the Council via the magazine and website, although a growing number were using social media channels. Again we recommended that our approach to social media should be based on users' needs which should be identified through well-targeted consultation.
- 2.41 Finally, we made recommendations about the role of councillors. As in the review of Learning from Feedback, we identified the need for them to maintain a two-way dialogue with officers. This would support their advocacy work for residents and for the Council. There was also a need for regular media skills training.
- 2.42 These recommendations were developed with the agreement of the portfolio holder and we will monitor outcomes during 2012/13.
update following Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting of 29 March

3. Scrutiny and Overview Committee

- 3.1 The Committee has also sought to add value on several other issues facing the Council in the past twelve months, as follows.
- 3.2 Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in December and February was preceded by all-councillor workshops – a practice we established two years ago. This provides an opportunity to develop questions to follow up at the meeting. The council's corporate plan underpins financial decisions and is therefore scrutinised alongside it.

- 3.3 In December we recommended that the council should review, formalise and publicise how it consults with young people, businesses and the community when setting the budget. In February the portfolio holder responded that consultation had concentrated on the corporate aims, approaches and actions (3As), but not the financial aspect as the 3As were to be carried out within existing resources. The committee is likely to return next year to community engagement in financial planning.
- 3.4 In September 2011 we met with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, to examine progress on their rolling plan for community safety. They explained that their funding, and therefore role, was reducing. However a new tasking and coordination group had been set up to address local priorities at a practical level.
- 3.5 In November we revisited the Council's community transport plan. We wanted to explore the impact of the County Council's Cambridgeshire Future Transport project, specifically their franchising pilots. We raised concerns with the County portfolio holder about the limited consultation carried out amongst residents and relevant parish councils. We also recommended that, in light of our loss of national funding, he consider disseminating the Government's £258k community transport grant to SCDC. This recommendation was not accepted.
- 3.6 We also invited the County portfolio holder to return in March to update us on the pilot schemes, lessons learnt and the resulting plan of action. He declined but invited us instead to join a County-led review of the Cambridgeshire Future Transport project in 2012/13. We plan to return to this topic in 2012/13.
- 3.7 During 2010/11 the Council introduced a Blue Bin service and so we received two updates on performance in 2011/12. We found that, while recycling was now approaching the 65% target, the dry summer had reduced green waste. We accepted that, as stated in the corporate plan, the focus should move to waste minimisation.
- 3.8 At our last meeting of the year we considered localism. At a scrutiny network meeting in February, scrutiny chairmen had discussed their councils' various initiatives and so the Committee invited our Leader to discuss the opportunities that localism may present for South Cambridgeshire. **update after 29 March**

4. Monitoring portfolios

- 4.1 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 policy development.
- 4.2 The scrutiny committee sends at least one monitor to each meeting, offering constructive input and timely scrutiny that adds value to the work of each Cabinet member. The monitors write a short report after each portfolio holder's meeting, summarising their input and influence, and raising any issues which the committee might like to discuss further. They also consider whether there is evidence that each item includes:
- sound data
 - stakeholder involvement
 - risks addressed
 - link to corporate priorities
 - equality and diversity considerations

- 4.3 The monitors' reports are circulated to members of the Committee and to the relevant portfolio holder.
- 4.4 The economic development portfolio holder had only one public meeting - to consider the 2012/13 Service Plan. As he is not required to make decisions, he instead made quarterly updates to Cabinet. It would not be appropriate for the scrutiny monitor to provide input at Cabinet meetings and so the portfolio holder attended a meeting of the scrutiny committee in November to set out the issues he would be working on during 2011/12.
- 4.5 The scrutiny monitors were as follows:

Portfolio	Services / Cross-cutting themes/ Council Priorities	Monitor
Leader	Lead on strategic partnerships, grants coordination and delivery	James Hockney
Finance and Staffing	Finance, support services, staffing, risk, procurement, vfm/efficiency	Roger Hall Tumi Hawkins
Environmental Services	Environmental health, environmental services, public health, private sector housing, land drainage, Member training and development	Richard Barrett Jose Hales Mike Mason
Housing	Housing strategy, housing advice and options, housing landlord services, home improvement agency, equality and diversity	Jose Hales Liz Heazell Bunty Waters
Northstowe and New Communities	Northstowe, Planning Policy, Development of new communities, arts and sports,	Alison Elcox Mike Mason
Planning and Economic Development	Lead on economic development and transport, the LEP, business support, climate change and sustainability, development control, design and conservation, building control	Jose Hales Tumi Hawkins Ted Ridgway Watt Bridget Smith
Policy and Performance	Policy development, information and communications technology (ICT), customer services, community safety	Roger Hall Bridget Smith

- 4.6 Examples of successful scrutiny input at portfolio meetings during 2011/12 included:
- a. contributed to the discussion formulating an SCDC response to the Government's draft Planning Policy Statement "Planning for Travellers"
 - b. the Portfolio Holder agreed that accepting cheque payments for pre-planning application advice was inefficient and asked for a review.
 - c. challenged a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment by the County Council, leading to a call for it to be re-presented; this will happen in June 2012.
 - d. the portfolio holder agreed to the monitor's suggestions for: allowing retrofitting of energy efficiency measures and renewables in conservation areas; and for a report on how to finance conservation area appraisals
 - e. the portfolio holder agreed to ask for a review of street naming & numbering charges

5. Call-in

- 5.1 Call-in is used a last resort, when other means of influencing decision-making have failed. Nationally, councils have an average of two call-ins per year; and around a quarter result in an amended decision.
- 5.2 We did not have occasion to use the call-in procedure in 2011/12.

6. Monitoring previous reviews and recommendations

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 The Planning service reported good progress on the action plan developed following our review. A review of the enforcement service had also been carried out and would lead to further improvements.
- 6.3 An update on last year's Performance Management review showed that progress had been less noticeable, although the chief executive said there were many examples of the executive management team (EMT) having acted to improve performance. It was intended that EMT would use the 'task and finish group' model to address underperformance; the scrutiny committee will maintain a watching brief.

7. Health Scrutiny

- 7.1 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 (AWHSC), and Cllr Bridget Smith is his named substitute.

Over the year, the Committee

- developed links with the emerging GP commissioners and shadow Health and Wellbeing Board
- reviewed and made recommendations to the NHS and County Council on access to support and advice on diagnosis of dementia
- reviewed and made recommendations to the County Council on the quality and cost effectiveness of home care services for older people throughout the County jointly with Peterborough examined Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust plans for major changes to mental health services
- scrutinised the County Council's adult social care budget and 2012/13 plans
- scrutinised performance in relation to quality of care and budget against the 2011/12 adult social care plan
- considered NHS Cambridgeshire's forward plan
- maintained a watching brief on service quality, and established relationships with Circle, which has been contracted to manage Hinchingsbrooke Hospital

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

- 7.3 A discussion paper to Cambridgeshire's shadow Health and Wellbeing Board in February 2012 recognised the likely need for both joint and complementary working between County and District scrutiny committees on issues such as locality based commissioning and district level strategies and actions.

8. EVALUATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 8.1 In the 2010/11 annual scrutiny report we set out the areas in which we wanted to make improvements in 2011/12. Our progress is shown below.

do a few things well (rather than lots of things less well)	Most meetings limited to 3 substantive items; Only one long-term task and finish group	☺
further develop our questioning techniques	improvement noted by Cabinet	☺
encourage greater participation by all committee members	All members of the committee have played their part during 2011/12	☺
increase joint scrutiny with other organisations	Members of the County Council contributed to scrutiny of Community Transport and Sheltered Housing Support	☺
increase scrutiny of external organisations	We scrutinised the County Council's transport programme. Scrutiny of the CDRP and its tasking and coordination group is ongoing	☺
make more use of performance information and complaints data	Scrutiny monitors use PI data to inform their input at Portfolio Holders' meetings The Scrutiny Officer supplies Corvu data as appropriate for meetings Our review of customer feedback led to recommendations that will help to ensure that the council learns from customer feedback	☺
add value on cross portfolio issues	Our reviews of Learning from Customer Feedback and corporate communications touched on all areas of the Council	☺
achieve even greater public involvement ... achieved 59 in 10/11	89 participants: 85 on the planning review and 4 tenants on the sheltered housing task and finish group	☺

- 8.2 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 completed some useful work on economic development, finances and community transport.
- 8.3 They had noticed improvements in our questioning techniques and the levels of involvement by all committee members.
- 8.4 They also suggested some areas for improvement, for example:

- Scrutinise finances and the corporate plan together – and all scrutiny members should aim to attend the preparatory finance workshop
 - Consider inviting one portfolio holder per committee meeting to examine and challenge their work programme
 - Identify what makes task and finish groups successful
 - Add value by researching and evaluating alternatives before making recommendations
 - Consider more joint scrutiny work with partners
- 8.5 Senior officers were also consulted and most respondents felt that the work of the scrutiny committee, especially via task and finish groups, was having an impact. Scrutiny monitors' attendance at portfolio holders' meetings was valued.
- 8.6 Some suggestions for improvement were also offered:
- need to focus on key issues, not get bogged down in minor issues or red herrings: tease out the facts and develop recommendations; chairing is key
 - work could be targeted more at members and their role
 - more could be done via social media and innovative ways to engage with a wider audience; need to raise awareness amongst staff too.
 - scrutiny of partners should be done carefully, to preserve ongoing working relationships
 - task and finish work could be more "innovative"
- 8.7 In March 2012, we held our annual workshop to evaluate our performance. We identified the following aspects of our work as having gone well in 2011/12:
- task and finish group projects
 - robust scrutiny of County-led projects – community transport and Supporting People
 - good progress on our improvement areas - as listed at 8.1 above
- 8.8 We also identified some areas for further improvement in 2012/13:
- the need to pursue lines of enquiry more rigorously
 - possibly taking more topics out of committee and into a half- or one-day task and finish group
 - improve scrutiny monitors' reports
- 8.9 Another measure of our effectiveness is the percentage of our recommendations that are accepted. In 2011/12 more than 90% were accepted, which is on a par with last year.
- 8.10 We will develop a plan of action to address the areas that we want to improve, 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.

9. Training and development

- 9.1 During 2011/12 Committee members received both in-house and externally provided training to improve our scrutiny skills. This was in the form of short courses, conferences and bulletins about good practice.
- 9.2 In September we held two workshops on skills for successful scrutiny. The first covered the basics and the second focussed on questioning skills. The sessions

were attended by scrutiny councillors from across the county which enable delegates to share their experiences and good practice.

- 9.3 In November and February we held two in-house workshops to prepare for scrutiny of the corporate plan and medium term financial strategy.
- 9.4 In January two members attended a national workshop looking at the impact of the new legislation: Localism, Police and Crime and Health Reform.
- 9.5 In February the scrutiny officer attended a Home Office roadshow about Police and Crime Commissioners and Panels. This helped us to see that 2012 will be a time of change in this area of work.

10. Networking

- 10.1 We continue to benefit from an officer-led scrutiny network in Cambridgeshire, which provided a forum for sharing the learning from good practice and experience. The network also ran two county-wide training sessions for scrutiny councillors, and a meeting for scrutiny chairmen to discuss potential joint working and opportunities arising from the latest legislation.
- 10.2 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.

11. What are our plans for 2012/13?

- 11.1 The profile of Scrutiny is changing nationally and much is expected from scrutiny members in response to the Localism Act, the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act and the Health and Social Care Bill.
- 11.2 The Local Government Association also feels that scrutiny now has a greater role to play in helping councils to demonstrate openness and accountability, given the reduction in external audit and inspection and the growing emphasis on sector-led self-regulation.
- 11.3 We will continue to have responsibility for: community involvement in scrutiny; scrutiny of and with partners; and supporting the scrutiny of health services. We will still have an annual statutory duty to scrutinise crime and disorder although we have yet to see how this will operate alongside the new Police and Crime Panel arrangements.
- 11.4 We would like our 2012/13 work programme to continue to: drive value for money; support the Cabinet in developing policies and services that meet the Council's aims; and contribute to robust performance management.
- 11.5 We have begun to develop a programme of work which we will finalise at our first meeting in 2012/13. Topics already identified for possible inclusion are:
 - community transport
 - Corporate Plan and medium term financial strategy
 - community engagement
 - grants
 - mental health services for young people

- street scene
- 11.6 We also plan to invite one portfolio holder per meeting, to scrutinise their work programmes and explore any areas for further scrutiny input.
- 11.7 Other topic suggestions will be considered and evaluated at the first meeting of the 2012/13 Scrutiny and Overview Committee in July 2012.
- 11.8 We will also monitor progress following the reports of the 2011/12 task and finish groups: customer contact, planning service; learning from customer feedback; sheltered housing support service.
- 11.9 Finally, we intend to play a full part in joint scrutiny initiatives such as the proposed scrutiny of the Local Enterprise Partnership with CCC, Peterborough, all five Cambridgeshire district councils, Forest Heath, North Herts, Rutland, St Edmundsbury, Uttlesford and West Norfolk.

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