

**Principle 4: Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.**

- The Constitution acts as the guide for the operations of the council and identifies the roles and responsibilities of the executive, officers and Members. The Constitution also identifies the delegation of responsibilities for Council Functions through Committees and sets out how decisions are made. All executive and officer decisions are published in a weekly e-bulletin, which is distributed to all Members, staff and the 90 parish councils within the Council's area.
- The Council has a Scrutiny and Overview Committee with terms of reference and operating procedures set out in the Constitution. The committee can call in for review any decision made by the Executive, Individual Portfolio Holders or key decisions made by officers. The Committee uses task and finish groups to carry out specific pieces of work. A timetable for scrutiny programme planning sets out deadlines and an annual Scrutiny and Overview Committee report is produced to the annual meeting of Council.
- During 2010/11 task and finish groups covered performance management, planning services and customer contact. Evidence for these groups was provided through focus groups of residents, planning agents, parish councils and staff. The groups also visited examples of good practice within neighbouring counties. Scrutiny has been further strengthened by training and development and a summary report of training is included in the Annual Report for 2010/11.
- Portfolio Holder meetings are open to the public and, wherever possible, decisions are taken at these regularly scheduled meetings, in line with the Constitution, and are published in a weekly e-bulletin which is distributed to all Members, co-opted members, staff and parish councils and the media. Matters decided outside of the formal meetings, for reasons of urgency, are published on pro-forma decision sheets. Portfolio monitors appointed by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee are invited to attend all portfolio holders meetings.
- Forward plans showing all decisions coming up are produced for meetings of executive portfolio holders, the Cabinet, the Council and senior management team. These plans are published on the website.
- All agendas and reports plus relevant supporting documents are available on the website in compliance with the statutory deadline for publication of five clear working days.
- The Corporate Governance Committee takes responsibility for all governance arrangements within the Council and undertakes the core functions of an Audit Committee, as identified in CIPFA's "Audit Committee – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities".
- The Council has a corporate complaints procedure in place. Complaints are reported to the Senior Management Team and Portfolio Holders on a quarterly basis. ~~Complaints are also reported to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.~~—The complaints policy was reviewed during 2009/10 and incorporates complaints, compliments and comments. A "Learning from complaints" form was also introduced in 2009/10 and the Council will review its Compliments, Complaints and Comments Policy as part of the wider review of Customer Service Standards during 2011. Complaints about member conduct are received and

#### **Principle Four: Key Outcomes identified during 2010/11**

- Outcomes s demonstrating effective scrutiny and constructive challenge
- Decisions bulletin supplied separately
- Enhanced customer service through improved handling of complaints and demonstrable learning from complaints – revised and improved processes.
- Basic principles of decision-making covered as part of new member induction and as part of the ‘Working in a political environment’ section of officer induction.
- Improved decision-making training offered to members and officers
- Successful remediation of risks re equity share scheme, HRA financial position and embedding values.
- The legal team has ensured it has been consulted at the outset of major procurement projects this year and has received very positive feedback from those instructing them on the value and rigour they have added to the process by early involvement.

#### **Principle 5: Developing the capacity and capability of Members and officers to be effective.**

- An induction programme is in place for newly elected members. An Induction Pack is also provided to all new Members. In addition, members are provided with a copy of the Member Toolkit which contains more detailed information about standards expected of councillors, and includes vital documents such as the Code of Conduct.
- The Member Development Strategy 2008-2011 and the emerging Member Development Strategy 2011-13 require all members to own the member training process and to carry out an annual self-assessment of their training needs. The results from the self-assessment are built into the member training and development programme. This will assist members to build their skills to enable them to play a full part in the work of the Council and in leading their communities.
- The Member Development Training programme for 2010/11 included specific skills and knowledge, the local and national context, corporate governance, technical skills and Personnel Support to enable Members to challenge and scrutinise as part of their roles. Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee receive monthly training inputs which include bulletins, self-led learning, observation visits and trainer-led activities.
- Upon appointment, new officers attend an induction session with the Chief Executive followed by a formal half-day induction and an in-service induction programme with their line manager.
- Ongoing training and development needs are identified through the staff Performance and Development Review (PDR) scheme, from which all staff have personal development plans.

guidance.

- Social Media Training delivered in response to Members' Communications Needs Survey
- Decision-making training for members and officers delivered twice during the financial year
- Finance briefings organised during the budget preparation period for members generally and specifically for members of Scrutiny and Overview Committee.
- Questioning Skills ~~for scrutiny~~ workshop ~~carried out~~ provided for scrutiny members from SCDC and four nearby councils
- Increased management capacity and skills level leading to better decision making, efficiencies/VFM services
- On 11 November 2010, the Council signed up to the East of England Quality Charter for Elected Member Development
- Improved customer service and service delivery (VFM)
- The workforce plan ensures that the Council has the right people with the right skills to deliver the Council's Objectives, leading to improved customer satisfaction and public perception
- The Constitution Review Working Party will be considering the impact of amending Standing Orders to allow the public to film / tweet / blog during public meetings. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2011 the Planning Enforcement Sub-Committee decided to suspend Standing Order 21.4 for the duration of the meeting to allow television cameras to record proceedings.
- Public questions scheme reviewed during 2010/11 and adopted by Council to create a more thorough framework through which members of the public had a greater opportunity to have questions answered at the meeting and to ask supplementary questions, rather than receiving a written answer within a week of the meeting.
- Improved staff satisfaction rates
- The Council has revamped and relaunched its Employee and Team Recognition to recognise outstanding customer service, thus enhancing performance and morale.

**Principle 6: Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.**

- The terms of reference for the Scrutiny and Overview Committee include consideration and implementation of mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy options. Stakeholders are invited to attend meetings and contribute to the Committee's work programmes including co-option onto panels where appropriate. ~~Most meetings are taken out to the community to encourage participation.~~
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee has undertaken a training programme to build its skills base and ability to perform effectively as a team in scrutiny of the Council's policies and performance.
- Stakeholders are invited to attend meetings and contribute to the committee's work programmes, including co-option on to panels as appropriate. In 2010/11, the task and finish group reviewing VFM in the housing service was supported by three tenants. Two

other task and finish groups held focus groups for staff, members, planning agents and parish councillors.

- A timetable for scrutiny programme planning is used that sets out deadlines and an annual Scrutiny and Overview Committee report is produced to the Council. The website includes information on scrutiny and a hand out is provided to residents, partners and witnesses who attend Scrutiny meetings.
- The Scrutiny Development Officer attends team meetings and staff induction to explain what scrutiny is doing and how it affects employees, partners and customers.
- A scrutiny annual report is produced by the Chairman and Vice ~~chairman~~ Chairman which covers positive the outcomes which the committee has contributed to through its work programme and recommendations, options for improving the effectiveness of the committee itself, progress being made by the executive and conclusions.
- Each completed scrutiny review is published in a booklet format designed to communicate achievements in plain language and ensure that findings and recommendations are remembered and actioned.
- All Council, Committee, Cabinet and Portfolio meetings are held in an open environment. The right to attend and speak at meetings is enshrined within the Constitution and guidance regarding public speaking is made available on the website. The Council's Planning Committee meetings include the opportunity for public speaking by applicants and objectors in accordance with a protocol.
- All agendas and minutes of meetings are on the website together with a forward plan and record of decisions made.
- The Council's website contains information on all Council services and provides for feedback to be given. A recent development is the inclusion of a 'Get involved' section.
- The Community Engagement Strategy to meet the new duty to involve (as set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) was implemented in 2009.
- South Cambs Magazine is distributed to every home in the district four times a year and published on the Council's website. It is also sent to partners on request and to all parish councils who wish to receive an individual copy. The Council Tax leaflet for 2010/11 has been developed in conjunction with a focus group of residents.
- Briefings are held with the local media on average 6 times a year to enhance communications and maximise coverage on service issues.
- The Council continues to ensure that all communications with the public are accessible to all by providing translation, large print, standard phrase descriptions and Braille.
- The Council's current Sustainable Community Strategy, agreed in March 2008, outlines the LSP's long-term vision for a sustainable South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City as well as its three year objectives and priorities. The Council has consulted upon, and in July 2011 plans to adopt a joint Sustainable Community Strategy covering the period from 2011-2014 with Cambridge City, which outlines the long term vision for a sustainable South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City.

- Other achievements include:
  - The Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Local Strategic Partnership Board has met regularly during the year to discuss progress against indicators and targets.
  - A Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy has been adopted
  - A Community Transport Plan to engage those in rural areas has also been adopted
  - A comprehensive equalities policy has been produced with an action plan, and the Council has agreed a Single Equality Scheme setting out its responsibilities and key priorities in respect of all equality characteristics, for consultation and adoption during 2011-12.
- Liaison with Parish Councils has been improved by the introduction of 6-monthly meetings and quarterly parish planning meetings.
- The Corporate Plan published annually includes a review of performance during the last year and plans for the following year. Performance and value for money information is provided in the Council Tax leaflet which has been enhanced and improved.

**Principle Six: Key Outcomes identified during 2010/11**

- Evidence of leading on public engagement: an off-site workshop for pupils from 3 schools involved young people in developing the Youth Plan now out for consultation; three tenants took part in the Housing VFM review and attended its presentation to Cabinet
- Constructive relationship with chair of CDRP is enabling chair of scrutiny to pursue outstanding actions awaited from police colleagues
- 2009/10 annual report [and booklets about scrutiny reviews](#) enabled new members to understand the role of the scrutiny committee sufficiently to volunteer to join in
- South Cambs Magazine is distributed to every home in the district four times a year and published on the Council's website. It is also sent to partners on request and to all parish councils who wish to receive an individual copy
- High satisfaction levels, generally with the accessibility of the Council's services, and specific e.g. South Cambs mag and Reception surveys.
- The local media are regarded as a key communication channel with local residents, as well as stakeholders in their own right. Regular briefings are held on key areas of interest, as and when needed (roughly six times a year). Regular informal meetings are held with a local newspaper editor to build the relationship.
- SCDC is currently rolling out its social media channels. Twitter (@southcambs) has been operating since January 2011 and Facebook (/South Cambridgeshire) has since been launched. Internal consultation was held before doing this and extensive research went into the (draft) social media policy and strategy. Members have received social media training.
- Media monitoring takes place on a daily basis and is collated into a spreadsheet and sent to

all of Cabinet, SMT, EMT and key others within the council, and now communicated through the Weekly Bulletin to all members, officers, parish councils and media contacts.

- Annual calendar of meetings now prepared early each calendar year for adoption and publication in March / April before the start of the new civic year.
- Consultations are undertaken with lead members, EMT, neighbouring authorities and the Council's other partners to minimise diary conflicts and ensure an effective use of member and officer time
  - Council's 'Achieving' equalities submission identifies positive outcomes relating to equalities and inclusion. The Council has agreed a Single Equality Scheme setting out its responsibilities and key priorities in respect of all equality characteristics, for consultation and adoption during 2011-12.
- Targeted consultation of key Council Actions for 2011-12 with all residents, including our Gypsy and Traveller Community and young people.
- Service improvements informed by specific customer feedback e.g. blue bin scheme
- Media, online and South Cambs magazine channels are used to publicise consultations and to feedback results and actions arising from those results
- Customer satisfaction and other feedback demonstrates that customers consider they are listened to

Positive feedback from customers regarding the Council's transparency arrangements, measured through compliments, informal comments, satisfaction survey results etc.

#### **4. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS**

South Cambridgeshire District Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control.

This review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Audit partner's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates, including the Audit Commission.

The following actions and processes have been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework over the last twelve months:

**The Council and its Senior and Executive Management Teams** have developed and implemented a number of policies and corporate documents as well carrying out a number of actions, as follows: -

- The Corporate Plan 2010/11 was agreed setting out the priorities for the year and how these will be delivered.
- The Council's Constitution has been reviewed throughout the year to reflect key changes in policy.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy has been reviewed and updated and is embedded in the business planning process.

- Updated financial position relating to the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Expenditure
- Finance monitoring report including position statement and efficiency savings
- Review of Health & Safety Policy / Corporate Business Continuity Plan / Emergency Planning
- Regular CORVU monitoring
- Efficiency savings projects – updates and performance
- Review of Complaints and Compliments policy and performance and an overview of the Customer Services Excellence (CSE) project
- Financial impact on the Chancellor's Budget
- Information Governance Strategy project
- Asset Management Strategy / Corporate Asset Management Plan approval
- Asset Utilisation and Sustainability Policy Approval
- Member Development – Charter Status
- Customer Contact Strategic Review
- Project Management Database tracking and evaluating key corporate projects.

#### **The Corporate Governance Committee:**

- Monitored performance of the Internal Audit function through quarterly reports
- Approved the Internal Audit Strategic Plan
- Reviewed the Assurance Framework and Annual Governance Statement
- Reviewed the Local Strategic Partnership - Governance Arrangements – this was done by Cabinet.
- Reviewed the Executive's management of the Strategic Risk Register on a quarterly basis and approved a revised Risk Management Strategy.
- Approved the Statement of Accounts for 2009/2010

#### **The Scrutiny and Overview Committee:**

- ~~Reviewed~~ Examined the Council's Use of Resources Improvement Plan ~~by reminding the Committee that its objective was to examine the Plan~~ and considered which issues, if any, should form part of their Work Programme for 2010/11.
- Reviewed the ability of the Housing Service to measure and demonstrate value for money using a national toolkit
- ~~Agree~~ Monitored the recommendations communication plan proposed by the Finance Task and Finish Group to be carried out within existing resources.
- Reviewed the compliments and complaints handling performance in ~~2009/2010~~ 4011
- Review ed the performance of the Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership
- ~~Formal~~ Review ed of the Council's draft Economic Development Strategy ~~in early October~~
- Updates on the Scrutinised Integrated Business Monitoring Reports at relevant Portfolio Holder meetings
- Received updates on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and scrutinised the proposed Budget in February 2011
- ~~Information on~~ Considered the potential impact on South Cambridgeshire residents of Government Policy proposals and Spending Decisions

- Receive report from the Performance Management Task and Finish Group, which highlighted the performance management techniques used by the Council and made a number of recommendations for the Committee to consider
- Updates on the Contact Centre Strategic Review and the expansion of this project to include all forms of customer contact.

There are a number of specific examples of where Scrutiny has made a difference this year (specific pieces of work or particular achievements):

- Use of the call-in procedure leading to reversal of an executive decision ~~which was reviewed~~ in response to local concerns;
- Driving the development of a comprehensive Value for Money toolkit for the Affordable Homes service
- Organising engagement and consultation as part of the development and subsequent adoption of a Young People's Plan for the district
- Involving customers and staff in reviews of the Development Control Planning Service which will ultimately lead to tangible service improvements and better customer relations.
- An enhanced role for the Performance Improvement Group in driving performance improvement across the organisation.

#### **The Standards Committee:**

- Officers received the internal audit manager's report, which demonstrated that:
  - The Council can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage its corporate governance and ethical standards arrangements are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.
  - the Whistleblowing Policy was working and that people were aware of it, and also that the anonymity of whistleblowers was protected
- The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided a training session on the Code of Conduct for the nine new district councilors in mid-May 2010
- Continued to offer advice to District and Parish Council Members in relation to the Members Code.
- Held discussions around the operation of the application of the Code of Conduct and other Statutory functions of the Monitoring Officer
- Received updates on the application of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and its operations across the Council
- Reported on the future of standards following the publication of the Localism Bill on 13 December 2010. The Bill was still in its early stages and substantial changes could be made before it became law sometime in late 2011 or early 2012. The Standards Committee has established a Future of Standards Working Group to make recommendations to the Standards Committee and full Council on the adoption of a voluntary local code of conduct and associated framework for handling any complaints, to determine the wording for such a code and to establish the complaints handling process. The Future of Standards Working Group includes representatives of all political groups on the Council, and the non-group members, as well as co-opted independent (lay) and parish council members to represent the District's residents and parishes.