

Scrutiny Annual Monitoring Report 2009-2010



Sixth Annual Monitoring report July 2010

Introduction

Chairman - Cllr Marsden



"The Scrutiny Committee has an important role to play in Council business by ensuring that policy decisions by the Cabinet and the functions of the Council are closely monitored. It is the eyes and ears of residents making sure that policy decisions are genuinely made on their behalf and for their benefit. In that respect the Committee may hold hearings and investigate any matters relating to the delivery of Council services.

The annual programme included two reviews of different sections of Council services as well as two seminars which examined progress towards achieving corporate aims in the Council's Budget and other Financial Matters and Community. It also receives regular reports on the performance of the Council. A recent addition to its responsibilities has been to scrutinise the work of those involved in Crime reduction across the town.

As Chairman I would welcome any comments on the work of the Council where you, as residents, believe that performance is less than might be accepted as reasonable. This could lead to the Committee setting up a review of that service in order to ensure improvement. All members of the Committee are keen to improve the process of checks and balances to Council decision making sure that it is always carried out in the best interest of the residents of Eastbourne."

About Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny is still a comparatively new function for local authorities. It has been introduced as part of the modernisation agenda for local government and the Local Government Act 2000 requires Council's to have at least one scrutiny committee.

What is Scrutiny?

There is no single definition of overview and scrutiny. It therefore should be viewed as an umbrella term covering a wide range of possible roles. However, the four key legislative roles are:

- holding the Executive to account
- policy development and review
- best value reviews
- External scrutiny.

This suggests an emphasis towards:

- acting as a watchdog for Executive decision-making
- checking on whether existing policies are effective and helping to shape new ones
- contributing towards the continuous improvement of Council services
- reviewing or investigating matters of particular concern either within the Council or within the Community.

The scrutiny role also provides new opportunities for public involvement and debate. This can support elected members in taking a community-orientated approach and brings new ideas

and experience to scrutiny. Above all, the process needs to be firmly focussed both on matters of importance, and in making a difference, as this will be key to scrutiny reaching its potential and being of value to the Council and to local people.

The main role

The main role of Scrutiny is to help improve the council's performance through monitoring and review; to examine the Cabinet's decisions and challenge where necessary; and to help in the development and monitoring of the council's policies and strategies. The Committee can also look at the effectiveness of outside organisations and the council's external partnerships.

Scrutiny's approach is loosely based on the model of Select Committees at Westminster.

It is one of the most effective ways in which councillors who are not on Cabinet can independently challenge and influence those making decisions.

How does it work?

The Scrutiny Committee meets in public and members of the public are encouraged to take part and join in the discussion.

The Committee can invite Cabinet Members, Council officers and representatives of outside organisations to discuss how things are currently being done and how they can be improved.

Scrutiny Committee can also gather evidence in other ways, for example public consultation.

The Scrutiny Committee has a work programme that sets priorities for the coming year.

How do Scrutiny Task Groups operate?

Scrutiny task groups meet in an informal atmosphere. They invite those who they believe can help with their investigations to come along to a task group meeting to provide information or views about a particular issue – and usually working through a list of questions prepared in advance helps to do this.

What powers do Task Groups have?

Scrutiny task groups, like the main scrutiny committee, cannot automatically change earlier Cabinet decisions or alter the way services are provided. A task group's recommendations go to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration and possible amendment. They then go to the Cabinet and Council for evaluation.

Recommendations arising from reviews are monitored and reported back to the main committee at a later date.

How can I find out more?

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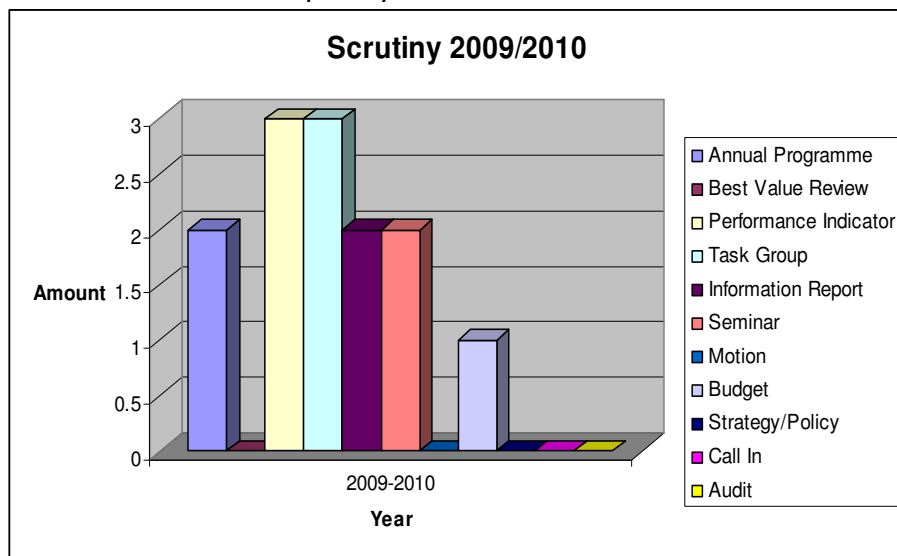
www.eastbourne.gov.uk

Review of the Annual Programme 2009-2010

At its meeting on 4 July 2005, Scrutiny agreed that an Annual report would be produced detailing the work of the Committee, the reviews conducted, the outcomes of each review and the work programme for the forthcoming year. This is the sixth annual monitoring report.

Review of the 2009/10 Programme - Items considered.

The table below details the actual items Scrutiny have considered over the past year.



(These items have been grouped to enable easier analysis, for example there have been 2 items for Task Groups, which covers the formulation of the Groups and includes the final reports).

Performance Indicator Reports

For 2009/10, the Council's Corporate Plan contained a combination of National and Local Performance Indicators alongside projects and actions in order to measure progress against the 6 key priority themes. Targets were set for all these indicators and performance in year was monitored alongside relevant financial reporting.

National Performance Indicators were to be a key part of evidencing our improvement journey following the result of the 2008/9 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). However, since the recent abolition of CAA, the future of the National Indicator Suite in its current form is still uncertain.

A full report against the 2009/10 actions and indicators has been developed using the Council's new Covalent performance management system. This system will be used to standardise the management and reporting of performance, projects, risks, feedback etc as it becomes developed and embedded over the coming year.

Scrutiny Seminars

Members agreed that the committee would receive presentations based on two of the Council priorities each year giving the members the opportunity to discuss and review progress. The presentations highlighted the actions and activity including information on the National indicators listed for each area, and the Council's performance for the two priority areas so far.

The development of seminars on Corporate Priority areas enables greater involvement of Scrutiny at an earlier stage than in previous years – allowing the Committee to further influence process rather than merely comment.

2 November 2009 - Stabilising Finances 2009/10 Medium Term Financial Strategy Budget 2010/11

The first of this year's seminars was held on Monday 2 November 2009 and was based on the Priority Policy - Finance.

The Seminar covered an update on Corporate Plan Actions, what the Council has achieved and what the Council were still aiming to complete in 2009/10, the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – the starting point, Where the Council could go – scenarios, MTFS – main assumptions, the savings, challenges and the Risks and Opportunities the Council faces.

8 March 2010 - Community

The second of this year's seminars was held on Monday 8

March 2010 and was based Priority Policy 4 - Community.

Topics covered included; Delivering the targets within the Housing and Homelessness Strategies, Delivering Decent Homes, Delivering over £1 million private sector housing improvements, Creating a safer environment working through CRP and stronger relationships with the police, Delivering a community led Cultural Strategy, Developing free swimming for older people, Increasing activities for Young People, Delivering the Devonshire Neighbourhood Action Plan, Developing and improve 6 play areas and the Benefits Service Improvement Action Plan.

Officers and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder were in attendance to answer member's questions for both seminars.

Following the presentation a background report and slides were circulated to those members who were unable to attend both seminars. For copies of these please contact Katie Armstrong, Scrutiny Co-ordinator 415023 or Katie.armstrong@eastbourne.gov.uk.

Monthly meetings

As part of the continuous development of the scrutiny function a monthly meeting was introduced for the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee giving members an opportunity to consider the Cabinet forward plan. In addition the Councillors can request updates from officers on various issues affecting the Council. During 2009-10 members considered the following:

May 2009

Airbourne Business Plan – Members discussed the air displays, allocations of planes for the displays, programme sales, project team meetings, retiring collection methods and the budget allocation for the forthcoming event.

July 2009

Members received an update on the Councillor Call for Action legislation and discussed the development of a Scrutiny Road show.

August 2009

Crime Reduction Partnership – Members discussed the forthcoming presentation and the information the committee would like included.

Finance Seminar - Members discussed the forthcoming seminar and the information the committee would like included.

Gypsies and Travellers – Members discussed the developing strategy for the provision of accommodation for

Gypsies and Travellers in East Sussex and the requirements for Eastbourne. A report was presented to Cabinet in September 2009.

National Indicators – Members were advised that very little information was available, there was concern nationally regarding the new regime and reporting methods as a large amount of data was unavailable.

September 2009

Household Waste – Members discussed the award of recycling credits and the potential for a cross council contract – a report was presented to Cabinet in September 2009.

Food Service Plan – Members discussed the Food Service Plan, food standards in restaurants, and recruitment and retention within the department. A report was presented to Cabinet in October 2009.

Eastbourne Park Action Plan – Members were advised of the consultation process for the options for the Eastbourne Park management Plan. A presentation was made to Scrutiny in December 2009 with a full report to Cabinet in March 2010 expected.

October 2009

Manor House, Gildredge Park – Members were advised of the ongoing discussions with the current owner of the Manor House and actions taken to secure the property and prevent further damage / vandalism. A report was presented to Planning

in August 2009 detailing the efforts so far.

November 2009

Outsourcing of some PR activities – Members were advised of the preferred candidate and next steps. A report was presented to Cabinet in September 2009.

December 2009

Petitions scheme – Members were updated on the Council's new petitions scheme which was expected to go live as of 15 June 2010. An e-petitions scheme would be available later in the year.

Organisational Performance – Members were advised of the overhaul to the current system, a full report on the CAA judgement was available on the one place website. Members requested a greater input into improving the current assessment, and suggested a task group be set up.

Scrutiny Road show – Members reviewed the proposed scrutiny posters and agreed how the Road show would be staffed.

January 2010

Petitions – Members discussed the response the consultation on the proposed scheme.

National Indicators – Members received an update on the current position.

Community Seminar - Members discussed the forthcoming seminar and the information the committee would like included.

February 2010

Towner - Members discussed the variations in the Towner Budget between 08/09 and 9/10.

Pressures and overspends included:

Front of house costs:

- Exhibition halls
- Evening opening hours
- An increase in opening hours
- Job evaluations and increased responsibilities
- Additional staffing on exhibitions

March 2010

Devolved Budgets – Members received an update on the amendments and improvements to the Devolved Budget Scheme.

Environment Seminar – Members received an update on progress on last years Environment Seminar. A report was presented to Scrutiny Committee in April 2010.

April 2010

Petitions – Members received an update on the petitions scheme and progress so far.

Infrastructure – Members received an update on Agile Working, the development of project boards for each of the 15 projects and their timescales, delivery, budgets and risk assessments. Members requested regular updates at future monthly meetings.

Scrutiny Reviews 2009/10

During 2009/10 the Scrutiny committee conducted two reviews Drainage and Flooding in Eastbourne and CAA improvement. The outcome of each review is detailed below.

Drainage and flooding

The aim of the review was to develop and produce an action plan detailing the condition and responsibility for the drainage systems within Eastbourne which would facilitate a multi agency approach should flash flooding occur.

Members were advised that Eastbourne Highways team under the terms of the Highway Management agreement with East Sussex County Council maintain the highway network within the Borough area and this includes cyclic cleaning of highway gullies.

The County Council policy is for gullies to be cleansed once per year and the town is divided up into 26 areas with two additional areas covering Sovereign harbour north and south to come on stream in the near future, the presently adopted areas being done within the adjacent existent area.

There are some 13,500 gullies of various types, with the majority discharging into the Southern Water main sewers while in some areas the gullies discharge into soakaways, these will be found in drainable material areas like parts of Old Town and the whole of the harbour area, being on shingle.

There have always been problems in some of the busier areas in gaining access to carry out the

cyclic maintenance operation and we have been in talks with the County's term maintenance contractor to look at the issues in an endeavour to improve matters and to this end further experiments using signage will be utilised. Residents and car owners have ignored signage before and have moved cones out of the way. Removing cars currently cost approximately £70 and at a cost of £4.29 to clean a typical gully this is not a financially viable operation, except in special circumstances.

In addition to the mechanical cleansing of gullies and especially where access has been a problem some gullies are dug out by hand. An annual programme of highway passageway gullies, road channel plates and drainage grips on the downland areas takes place as well as a yearly programme of jetting of the drainage slotted drains of the type like the ones running through the pedestrian precinct in Terminus Road, there are many such drains located around the Borough.

To assist the drainage contractor we have supplied maps of the areas, a detailed inventory and have paired difficult and easier areas. In the future the County Council may move towards a performance gully cleansing operation where the frequency of gully cleansing is based on site locations, conditions and need based rather than the current used, as on newer modern developments drainage systems could cope with a less frequent clean in order that other areas could be attended to more often.

This review is ongoing – East Sussex County Council is working

towards developing a Surface Water Management Plan across the County with input from officers from all authorities.

Further updates on the development of the plan would be reported to future meetings of the committee.

CAA

The scope of the review was as follows:

- To analyse the result of the organisational review in the context of the detail contained in the Audit Commission report and other available data
- To work in partnership with officers on preparation for re-assessment in 2010 and plans for strategic performance management improvements for the future.
- To clarify the role of members in achieving improved performance management and improve Member confidence in target setting and clarity of process.

A report on the outcomes would be presented to Scrutiny on 5 July 2010 and Cabinet on 14 July 2010.

In 2009, the Council was subject to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for the first time. The assessment process considered the performance of the Council during 2008/09 and was in two parts, namely 'Use of Resources' and 'Managing Performance'. Although the Council scored a rating of 2 out of 4 for Use of Resources, the subsequent rating of 1 out of 4 for Managing Performance

brought the Council's overall score down to 1 which was considered "Poor".

The overall organisational assessment of the Council on its 2008/09 performance indicated that, whilst delivery of many of our front line services was good, there was a need for significant improvement in the effectiveness of our strategic planning, performance management, and associated community engagement activity.

The assessment suggested that we had been relatively weak in our ability to demonstrate that we could set strategic priorities based upon robust evidence and intelligence. It also points to an associated weakness in our ability to demonstrate robust performance management and effective outcomes resulting from our actions.

The Council had moved to quickly identify the key areas of weakness that needed addressing. Broadly, these could be summarised in the following 8 key bullet points:

- Our "community" and "place" knowledge and evidence base.
- How we demonstrate robust priority setting based on evidence.
- How we engage with the community in setting and validating priorities.
- How we reflect our evidence, priority themes and key actions in corporate planning.
- How we use service and financial planning to reflect that our operational resources and activities are

primarily focused on our corporate priorities and delivered in the most cost effective ways.

- How we manage our progress and performance against our target measures.
- How we obtain feedback in order to measure the impact of our outcomes.
- How best we are able to present our priorities, targets, outcomes, and impact in a way that is clear and robust for external inspection.

Full details for all the reviews and previous reviews conducted can be found on the Council's website;

www.eastbourne.gov.uk)

Following the assessment, the Council had embarked on a substantial programme of change in order to address our weaknesses in managing performance. This programme had been undertaken principally to improve the Council's prospects for re-assessment of the 2009-10 year, although it was now known that CAA had been ceased (see paragraph 10 of the report). However, an equally key ambition set out in our recently approved 2010/11 corporate plan within the priority theme of "Sustainable Performance" is for Eastbourne Borough Council to become a high performing local authority evidenced by sustained improvement against any regulatory frameworks and inspection regimes in the future. On this basis, the investment made to date has been fully justified as necessary to make the Council a more effective organisation.

(extract from Scrutiny report 5 July 2010, further details can be found at www.eastbourne.gov.uk)

Scrutiny Road Show

For the first time this year members held a series of 'Road Shows' in Eastbourne. The first was held at Langney shopping centre on 3 February 2010, Councillor Marsden and Stanley attended to give members of the public the opportunity to learn more about the scrutiny process.



The second Road Show was held in the Arndale Centre in the Town Centre, and was held on Friday 5 February 2010, Councillors Marsden and Belsey attended to answer questions and promote Scrutiny to the residents of Eastbourne. The second Road Show received a much better response from the public and Councillors decided to hold future regular Road Shows in the town centre in the forthcoming year.

Scrutiny Objectives

To support the Council in achieving its vision for the Borough through its key aims and priorities.

To promote open and transparent decision-making, democratic accountability and to hold the Cabinet to account for its actions.

To promote continuous improvement, best practice and innovation within the services, functions and policies which the Council has responsibility for or influence over.

New Developments for Scrutiny for 2010/11

A number of new ideas have been included this forthcoming year:

- The introduction of a petition scheme, details of which can be found at <http://www.eastbourne.gov.uk/council/petitions/>
- The introduction of regular updates Devolved Budgets and Neighbourhood Panels – Ward Councillors will be invited to monthly meetings to provide regular updates to the committee.
- Introduction of a Budget Workshop each year to enable earlier input by Scrutiny into the Budget process.

- Scrutiny Road Show – these will be held two times a year in the Arndale Centre.
- The continuation of seminars on the Corporate Priority areas.

Conclusion

The aim of the report is to provide a factual review of the items that have been discussed during the monthly meetings and by the Committee over the past year, with particular attention to the reviews that have been conducted.

In addition, the report provides a means of monitoring the Scrutiny Committee's activity year on year.