



Scrutiny at Lewes District Council

Annual Report 2011/2012

For more information visit www.lewes.gov.uk/council/16163.asp

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Foreword by Councillor Sarah Osborne, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to the first Annual Report of the new Scrutiny Committee at Lewes District Council.

The Committee undertook a diverse programme of work during 2011/12, ranging from individual service benchmarking and freedom of information to an in-depth review of the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the community, Parish Councils and stakeholders for taking the time to contribute to this very important review into rural housing. I am looking forward to extending it into how we can improve our provision of affordable housing in urban areas in 2012/13.

This was my first year as Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, and it is a role I really enjoy. I am pleased that other members of the Scrutiny Committee seem to enjoy it as much as I do, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work over the previous year. I think it is great that all members of the Committee are able to work together in a non-political way in order to do what we can to improve the lives of residents in the District.

I would also like to thank Councillor James Page, Leader of the Council and the Cabinet, for the support they have shown Scrutiny over the last year. I am happy that we are able to work collaboratively to make Lewes District a great place to live and work.

We would welcome more interest by the public in what Scrutiny is doing. If you think there is an issue which we should examine, please let us know. Also, why not come along to a Scrutiny Committee meeting and see it in action? Our meetings are open to the public and you would be most welcome.

Message from Councillor Page, Leader of the Council

Scrutiny has worked on a different level in the last year, especially in its work on important issues such as affordable housing. It has really shown how pre-decision work can complement what Cabinet does, in both programmed and ad-hoc work. This year we have already made great progress, such as the joint work Councillor Osborne and myself undertook concerning The Crest in Newhaven. This really demonstrated how scrutiny works well as a critical friend to the Cabinet, a role which I know will continue.

Scrutiny is a key element of the "One District One Council" approach that I want the Council to take, and I am really pleased we have been able to invest further in the scrutiny structure, such as increasing the size of the Committee to eleven. The statistics in this report clearly show how it has encouraged participation across the District with members of the community and stakeholders.

I would like to thank the Chair and the other members of the Committee for their advice and hard work during the last year. I look forward to continuing the positive work started and working together to create a great District to live and work in.

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a key part of any local authority and Scrutiny Committees are in place to ensure that the Council's policies, plans, decisions and actions are being made in the community's best interest. Scrutiny functions were created as a result of the Local Government Act 2000.

Lewes District Council has one Scrutiny Committee which consists of eleven Councillors who are not on Cabinet to influence decisions and ensure the views and needs of local people are taken into account. This enables non-executive members to influence decisions and ensure the views and needs of local people are taken into account. It's about being a 'critical friend'.

Changes at the Council

There have been three major changes to Scrutiny at the Council during 2011/12:

- In May 2011, the Council had a change of Administration following the District Council elections, which led to a change of Chair for the Scrutiny Committee. The Chair for this year was Councillor Sarah Osborne.
- The Committee had 9 members during the 2011/12 year, which has since increased to 11 members (as of May 2012). The increase in size was an endorsement of the good work undertaken, and the plans for future work in coming years,
- The Committee was given a dedicated budget to undertake Scrutiny Reviews for the first time, allowing for greater community engagement opportunities and the ability to undertake site visits.

Data Set

The main Scrutiny Committee met 7 times in 2011/2012. Separate Panels to undertake Reviews met a further three times.

The following performance measures were put in place in 2010:

Performance Measures

Measure	2010/2011	2011/2012
Members of the public attend Scrutiny Committee	2	0
Mentions of Scrutiny (local/national press)	0	3
Members of the public/stakeholders attend Scrutiny Panels as witnesses, co-optees or experts	1	18
Instances of scrutiny reporting to, or being reported at or in regional, national forums or publications	0	1
% of suggested review topics put forward by Councillors or members of public	55%	90%
Website hits to Scrutiny page on website (unique users)	3	78
% Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee agreed by Cabinet	n/a	80%

What has been scrutinised?

Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas

A major review was undertaken by a Panel of five Councillors to examine the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. Councillors co-opted a representative from Action in Rural Sussex to the Panel, and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and residents in order to examine this issue in more detail. One stakeholder said:

“As a local employer in a rural area I was pleased to be asked to take part in the scrutiny review on affordable housing and I welcomed the opportunity to discuss this with councillors, officers and other interested parties. I was given plenty of notice prior to the event, good information about the content of the meeting and made to feel very welcome on the day itself. This was followed up with a prompt set of minutes after the day, clearly showing that everyone had contributed to the effectiveness of the day. A good experience”.

The Panel made a series of recommendations that were taken to Cabinet in April 2012. These recommendations are being developed into a more detailed work programme by members of Cabinet and the Chair of the Panel. An update will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

This review was entered into the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s awards scheme and has been peer reviewed by Scrutiny experts across the Country.

For more information, or to read the whole Report visit:

<http://cmispublic.lewes.gov.uk/Public/CommitteeDetails.aspx?committeeID=191>



*Members of the Scrutiny Panel :
Councillor Phil Howson, Councillor
Eileen Russell, Councillor Elaine
Merry, Councillor Stephen
Gauntlett, Tom Warder (Action in
Rural Sussex), Councillor Sarah
Osborne and Councillor John
Stockdale.*

Benchmarking across the Council

Benchmarking was considered at every Committee covering many different services within the Council, such as Parking, Tourist Information Centres, Legal and Democratic Services and Emergency Planning. Consideration of the services led to a series of recommendations being taken to Cabinet.

This was year two of a three year programme to examine benchmarking data across the Council.

Procedure at Meetings of the Planning Applications Committee

Following a Complaints Panel at the Council, the Committee considered the procedure at the Planning Applications Committee, specifically the public engagement element of the Committee meeting and made a series of recommendations to Cabinet for approval.

E-Petitions

The Committee examined the recent e-petitions facility that had been introduced at the Council. Prior to this, the Council had not received any e-petitions, therefore the Committee recommended an extensive promotion campaign of the facility, which led to the Council receiving two petitions over the Summer of 2012.

Annual Budget

This is considered every January in order to feed into the budget consideration for the Council.

Freedom of Information

The Scrutiny Committee considered the level of freedom of information requests at the Council, and made recommendations to Cabinet in order to ensure that freedom of information was working effectively.

Training

The new Committee undertook training in scrutiny skills run by South East Employers. This was attended by all the Committee members, Cabinet members, other councillors and senior officers.

How have we engaged the local community?

A number of measures were put in place in the last year to increase the level of community engagement in Scrutiny at the Council. These included:

- Publicity material in District News and LDC News
- Meetings taking place outside of Lewes town

- Increased use of social media
- Development of a dedicated scrutiny webpage
- Consultation with Town and Parish Councils
- Engagement with local networks
- Direct invitations to groups and members of the community to engage with reviews
- Increased use of co-opted members on Panels.

The performance measures above demonstrate the success of some of the community engagement activities. Future plans include the increased use of social media, and the holding of further meetings outside Lewes town and at different times of the day.

Looking Forward to 2012/2012

The success of the recent review on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas has led to the review being extended to urban areas which will be completed in early 2013. Other suggestions for work, as well as ongoing projects have been approved, see Appendix A for the Committee's current Work Programme.

The Committee members will be undertaking further training in Scrutiny, including how to run an effective review, as well as the ability to run concurrent reviews now the Committee membership has increased to eleven.

Appendix A

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

Parks and Open Spaces Contracts	Report to Scrutiny Committee November 2012. Parks and Open Spaces contract is up for renewal in 2014.
Value for Money, Benchmarking Reviews	Agreed a timetable and programme for reviews at June 2010 meeting.
Working with the Voluntary Sector	Report to Scrutiny Committee - November 2012.
Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas	Scoping Report agreed and Panel established, first meeting September 2012.
How the Council communicates with the Public	Report to a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee.
Review of The Provision of Children's Play Areas in Urban and Rural Areas	Report to a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee (2013)

ONGOING MATTERS

Quarterly Performance Indicators Cabinet Report	Committee to refer to reports when setting Annual Work Programme.
Topics for Council-wide seminars/presentations	Committee to recommend topics for future seminars/presentations.
Councillor Call for Action	Councillors to bring any future issues to Committee.

ANNUAL FIXED POINTS

June	Chair of the Council's Business Report, Consider Work Programme and Councillors' Training Requirements.
September	Consider Annual Report and fix Work Programme (to September Council).
January	Consider budgetary matters (to February Cabinet).
February	Consider crime and disorder matters that the Committee needs to review in consultation with the relevant partners on the Crime Reduction Partnership.
April	Councillors, CMT, Chairs of Area Partnerships consulted re. suggestions for following year's Work Programme.