



Scrutiny at Lewes District Council

Annual Report 2012/2013

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Foreword by Councillor Sarah Osborne, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to the second Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee at Lewes District Council. The Committee undertook a diverse programme of work during 2012/13, ranging from individual service benchmarking and complaints to an in-depth review of the provision of affordable housing in urban areas and the beginning of a second review into how we work with the voluntary and community sector. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the community, Town and Parish Councils and stakeholders for taking the time to contribute to these reviews. I am looking forward to finishing the voluntary sector review, and working out how we can better work with this sector.

For the first time we have run two reviews concurrently, this is only due to the commitment from members of the committee and I would like to thank them for their hard work. This was my second 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. 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. Also, if you have any suggestions on how to improve public attendance at our meetings, please let me know.

Message from Councillor Page, Leader of the Council

Members of the Scrutiny Committee have continued to work hard this year, especially in relation to affordable housing and working with voluntary organisations. It has really shown how pre-decision work can complement what Cabinet does, in both programmed and ad-hoc work.

Scrutiny is a key element of the "One District One Council" approach that I want the Council to take, and I am really pleased how well scrutiny members have worked with members of the Cabinet. 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'.

Data

The main Scrutiny Committee met five times in 2012/2013. Separate Panels to undertake Reviews met a further nine times and there was one call-in. This is an increase in meetings of 50% from 2011/12.

The following performance measures were put in place in 2010:

Performance Measures

Measure	10/11	11/12	12/13
Members of the public attend Scrutiny Committee	2	0	0
Mentions of Scrutiny (local/national press)	0	3	7
Members of the public/stakeholders attend Scrutiny Panels/events	1	18	75
Instances of scrutiny reporting to, or being reported at or in regional, national forums or publications	0	1	1
% of suggested review topics put forward by Councillors or members of public	55%	90%	90%
Website hits to Scrutiny page on website (unique users)	3	78	93
% Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee agreed by Cabinet	n/a	80%	100%

What has been scrutinised?

Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas

A major review was undertaken by a Panel of seven Councillors to examine the provision of affordable housing in urban areas. This followed on from the recent review into the rural areas of the District. Councillors consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and residents in order to examine this issue in more detail.

The Panel made a series of recommendations that were taken and accepted by Cabinet in July 2013. 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.

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

<http://cmispublic.lewes.gov.uk/Public/Binary.ashx?Document=6356>

Benchmarking across the Council

The Committee completed its three year programme of looking at benchmarking across the Council. It considered benchmarking from environmental health, housing, waste and recycling and human resources. Consideration of the services led to a series of recommendations being taken to Cabinet.

Complaints

The Committee examined data regarding complaints across the Council and made recommendations to improve the process for residents.

Localised Council Tax Support Scheme

The Committee set up a separate Panel which met three times to examine the new localised council tax support scheme that the Council had to implement. The Panel worked closely with members of the Cabinet and officers and was a key consultee for the Leader in establishing the new scheme. This Panel will continue into 2012/13 to help prepare the following year's scheme.

Annual Budget

This is considered every January in order to feed into the budget consideration for the Council. This led to some recommendations for the Committee to examine some areas in further details.

Skate Park Petition

As per the Council's petition's scheme which states that petitions that receive 750 signatures are taken to a Scrutiny Committee, Councillors considered a petition for a skate park in Seaford and made a series of recommendations for the Cabinet to consider.

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
- Consultation with Town and Parish Councils

- Engagement with local networks
- Direct invitations to groups and members of the community to engage with reviews

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. The area which needs growth is attendance by members of the public at the main Scrutiny Committee.

Looking Forward to 2013/2014

The main focus of 2013/14 will be the completion of work with voluntary and community organisations, as well as starting new reviews. Other suggestions for work, as well as ongoing projects have been approved, see Appendix A for the Committee's current Work Programme.

The Committee will also focus on the second year of the localised council tax support scheme.

Appendix A

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

Parks and Open Spaces Contracts	Report went to Scrutiny Committee November 2012. Update Report future meeting. Parks and Open Spaces contract is up for renewal in 2014.
Strengthening our Relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector	Scoping Report agreed and Panel set up. Successful consultation event was held on 6 July 2013. Meeting to agree recommendations in September 2013.
Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas	Report went to Cabinet 11 July 2013. Action plan being put in place.
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 (September 2013)
Ageing Population Strategy	Joint Scoping Report requested by CMT to Autumn/Winter Scrutiny Committee

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.