



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny at Lewes District Council

Annual Report 2013/2014

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Foreword by Councillor Sarah Osborne, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to the third Annual Report by the Scrutiny Committee at Lewes District Council. This year, the Committee undertook a diverse programme of work, ranging from urban housing, tree management and cemeteries to examining the provision of play areas throughout the District. I was pleased to see Cabinet's agreement of all the recommendations from the urban housing scrutiny review and look forward to hearing how they have been implemented. There are also some really interesting topics on the 2014/15 Work Programme which include business rates and how we can encourage more people to vote and stand as councillors in the elections next year.

I am especially proud of the Scrutiny Review which examined how we can work better with the voluntary and community sector. The voluntary and community sector work really hard in Lewes District, and I was delighted to see that Cabinet approved all the recommendations. Officers are planning to ensure that these are implemented, thank you to Councillor Stephen Gauntlett for chairing this review so well.

I would like to take this opportunity to also thank all the members of the community, Town and Parish Councils and stakeholders for taking the time to contribute to these reviews.

We have also undertaken a period of reflection this year. As we come towards the end of a four year term, we have been examining all the recommendations the Committee has made since June 2011, and the influence scrutiny had had across the District. I am really pleased to see the change it has made to such a wide variety of topics.

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.

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 being a 'critical friend'.

Data

The main Scrutiny Committee met eight times in 2013/2014. Separate Panels to undertake Reviews met a further four times and there was one call-in. The following performance measures were put in place in 2010:

Measure	11/12	12/13	13/14
Mentions of Scrutiny (local/national press)	3	7	4
Members of the public/stakeholders attend Scrutiny Panels/events	18	50	80
Instances of scrutiny reporting to, or being reported at or in regional, national forums or publications	1	1	1
% of suggested review topics put forward by Councillors or members of public	90%	90%	90%
Website hits to Scrutiny page on website	78	93	109

What has been scrutinised?

Here is a highlight of the most significant topics the Committee has considered in 2013/14

Strengthening our Relationship with the Voluntary Sector

A review was undertaken by a Panel of three Councillors to examine how the Council could strengthen its relationship with the voluntary and community sector. Councillors consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and residents in order to examine this issue in more detail, including an event held at Newhaven Fort in July 2013 attended by over forty organisations.

The Panel made a series of recommendations that were accepted by Cabinet on 24 April 2014. These recommendations are now being progressed by officers.

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

<http://cmispublic.lewes.gov.uk/Public/CommitteeDetails.aspx?committeeID=243>

Annual Budget

This is considered every January in order to feed into the budget process at the Council. This led to a series of recommendations for the Cabinet to examine some areas in further detail, specifically the use of the Council's reserves to ensure those monies can support Council projects.

Provision of Burial Space

The Committee considered the provision of burial space in cemeteries within the District, specifically the lack of burial space in some cemeteries. Councillors felt that the lack of burial space should be highlighted to Cabinet, this now been undertaken as a piece of work by officers.

Urban Housing

Although most of the work was undertaken in 2012/13, it was in July 2013 that Cabinet considered the series of recommendations that came out of this review. All the recommendations were agreed by Cabinet, and an update will be brought to the Committee in October 2014. Once the recommendations are implemented, this should lead to more residents being able to afford housing in the urban areas of the District.

Play Provision

Councillors examined play provision within the District. This led onto more detailed work examining the use of "Home Zones" and the potential for schools to open up their facilities out of school hours to the public. Work continues to progress in this area.

Tree Management

The Committee received details of how the District Council managed its trees, and suggested that a Tree Management Policy was put in place. Officers will be coming back to the Committee to inform Councillors of the results of the Tree Survey.

Monitoring

A major piece of work undertaken this year was the establishment of a system for monitoring recommendations that the Committee had made from June 2011. Over 200 recommendations had been made, either to officers or bodies such as Cabinet or Council. Very few had been rejected or not acted upon, and work will continue into 2014/15 to request that officers and Cabinet Members attend Scrutiny Committee to give updates on particular pieces of work. Separate meetings are currently being set up to discuss the recommendations from the three major reviews the Committee have undertaken.

How have we engaged the local community?

Work has been undertaken this year to increase the engagement of the community in the scrutiny process, especially in terms of reviews. Through the increased use of the web, particularly social media, a record number of people were engaged in the Voluntary Sector Scrutiny Review. This also received a good level of press coverage.

Although the performance measures demonstrate the success of some of the community engagement activities, especially in terms of reviews, it is still a challenge to get people to attend the main Committee. This may be because it is easier to engage residents on particular issues, but more work could be undertaken to publicise the issues that are considered at individual Committee meetings.

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 2014/2015

At present, the Work Programme is being put together (see Appendix A). Major pieces of work include car parking, business rates and plans to encourage more residents to vote and stand as candidates in the May 2015 elections.

As per the Council's Petitions Scheme, the Committee will also be considering all petitions that have more than 750 signatures, which includes a petition about the use of the Thebes building in Lewes at the September meeting.

Councillors will also be looking back on past reviews and getting updates from Cabinet Members on the development of the agreed recommendations.

Appendix A

Work Programme 2014/15

May 2014	No meeting
June 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examination of the proposed Business Rates scheme 2. Chair of the Council's Annual Business Report 3. Consider Work Programme 4. Consider Councillors' training requirements 5. Home Zones and the Use of school fields 6. Off Street car parking in Lewes
July 2014	No meeting
August 2014	No meeting
September 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report detailing the Council's responsibilities for encouraging more residents to vote and stand at local elections and suggestions for improvements 2. Consider Annual Report and fix Work Programme 3. Consider petitions regarding Thebes (as per Petitions Scheme)
October 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revisit the Urban and Rural housing Scrutiny Reviews
November 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report detailing car parking in the District
December 2014	No meeting
January 2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider budgetary matters and report to Cabinet
February 2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider crime and disorder matters
March 2015	No meeting
April 2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consult relevant bodies for suggestions for 2015/16 Work Programme

To be Scheduled – Potential for 2015/16 Programme

Aging Population Strategy
Performance Measures
Equalities
Voluntary Sector Monitoring

Ongoing Matters

Monitoring of Recommendations
Councillor Calls for Action
Call-in