

Overview and Scrutiny



**ANNUAL REPORT
of
OVERVIEW and SCRUTINY
2009-2010**



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT - 2009/10

1. FOREWORD

Welcome to our annual report for 2009/10.

2009/10 was another interesting and positive year for overview and scrutiny in North Lincolnshire. This report aims to provide a brief summary of work carried out by our overview and scrutiny panels and achievements made in the last council year. It also highlights challenges for 2010/11 and beyond.

Our overview and scrutiny panels continue to meet every two weeks, usually in public, enabling councillors (who cannot be members of the council's decision making cabinet or executive) to examine, review and suggest improvements to council policies/services or those shared or operated by our partners, the police and health trusts for example. As part of the council's democratic process the panels also hold the executive to account for decisions taken or to be taken. This work and achievements are summarised by the chairs' of each of the four themed panels over the next few pages.

Particular attention this year has been given by panels to monitoring and challenging the performance and targets of the Local Strategic Partnership which affect local people. Information examined on a quarterly basis has led to adjustments and review of policy of areas under performing and added value to those making a difference.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Panel continued to manage and co-ordinate the four themed panels and the development of overview and scrutiny in North Lincolnshire. Additional responsibilities and working practices introduced by legislation for the 'Councillor Call for Action' and the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel becoming the council's designated 'Crime and Disorder Committee' were implemented. The panel initiated training for councillors on these. The panel also considered two executive decisions 'called in' (examination of decisions taken prior to any adjustments or implementation) as part of the council's democratic processes.

Throughout the year overview and scrutiny panels have focussed upon how they could involve and engage our partners and members of the public in their work. Partner and public consultations have been used through specific open forums, paper and e-surveys, public requests to speak at meetings and site visits to various service provider buildings and venues. Although these have been valuable it is our aim to continue increasing this essential involvement to understand the public's and customers' needs and continue recommending improvements. (How to get involved? – see page 12)

Finally, I must thank all members of our overview and scrutiny panels for their hard work and commitment over the year. Also to partners, agencies and officers of the council for their co-operation, assistance and the information provided.

We look forward to another busy year for overview and scrutiny, which will no doubt provide new and additional challenges (see page 11) with the expected budget reductions and legislative changes already highlighted by the new coalition government.

Councillor Andrea Davison
Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Panel.

2. WORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

2.1. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL



Throughout 2009/10 the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel carried out a variety of work including important and interesting reviews. In particular, the scrutiny panel completed its review into 'School Absences in North Lincolnshire'. Our report and recommendations aimed to help all those involved in educating our children to reach a common understanding of the problems likely to be experienced during their development if they are often absent from school. It also aimed to clarify the current law for holidays in term time and its consistent interpretation and application. The panel's report highlighted to all involved that developing and encouraging student and parental aspirations improves attendance and attainment. The panel found some good examples of this across North Lincolnshire where schools effectively promote the importance and legal requirement of good punctual attendance of pupils supported by their parents/carers. The review was timely as it also contributed to the ongoing local and national debate on this subject.

Our scrutiny panel also started a review which all its members considered to be very important, 'Corporate Parenting' in North Lincolnshire. The aim of this review is to examine the role of the council and its partners, with a view to making recommendations on how effective the current practices and procedures are, and to investigate if the council is clear about its Corporate Parenting responsibilities and how they are implemented. It is envisaged that this review will be completed in the autumn of 2010. Corporate parenting is a duty that all our members and officers should take responsibility for. The panel believe that Corporate Parenting and associated issues faced by our looked after children and young people should be at the very heart of the council's and its partners' work. They are some of our most vulnerable people and the panel hopes that this review will help cement and add value to some good work that is already being carried out.

During the year the panel also regularly held the council's Executive to account, discussing and questioning cabinet members and senior officers on issues and decisions taken regarding Children and Young Peoples services. We often held question and answer sessions and requested updates on issues affecting local services. The panel also continues to invite local health partners to attend meetings when items relating to children and young peoples' health services are of concern or changes are proposed. We look forward to this partnership developing further in the future.

It also remains the panel's responsibilities to keep an overview of how the Children and Young Peoples Service is performing. On a quarterly basis we have successfully received, questioned and monitored performance indicators and service delivery targets of the Children's Board, suggesting improvements if and when required.

Finally, I would like to thank all members, individuals and organisations who have taken part or contributed to the work of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel throughout 2009/10. The willing participation and co-operation from many people always adds significant value to the work scrutiny carries out.

Councillor Stuart Wilson
Chair, Children and young Peoples Scrutiny Panel.

2.2. HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL



It was a very busy and productive year for the Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel. The majority of the panel's time was spent on two major pieces of work, but members also examined a significant number of other health and social care issues affecting the people of North Lincolnshire.

The panel prepared a comprehensive report into promoting the health and wellbeing of the council's staff. This piece of work identified ways of getting the best out of our workforce through ensuring their physical and mental health, whilst also identifying potential annual savings of £2.25 million.

The panel was also fortunate to be awarded some external funding from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to conduct a piece of innovative work aimed at tackling inequalities and ensuring social cohesion. Members chose to conduct a review investigating whether there was an "inverse care law" in healthcare in North Lincolnshire. An inverse care law exists where services tend to be of a poorer quality in areas of higher deprivation and greater need. Following input from colleagues across the health field in North Lincolnshire, and a full statistical analysis of the available data, the panel made nine recommendations to ensure budgets were fair and proportionate. The panel also re-visited previous reviews into community equipment and adaptations and discharge arrangements from hospital to ensure progress continues to be made.

As part of its regular work, members play a key role in ensuring that services are appropriate, accessible and are performing well. For instance, the panel sought assurances from the Primary Care Trust that preparations for a potential outbreak of pandemic 'flu were well-developed and sufficient to the level of need.

The panel arranged a number of these briefing and questioning sessions with various colleagues, covering topics such as pharmacy services, NHS dentistry, safeguarding vulnerable adults,

midwifery, heart attack and stroke care, IVF, emergency planning and older people's support services.

Local health bodies are required to consult with the scrutiny panel where they propose to make substantial changes to local services. Members were involved in a number of these throughout the year, including discussion on the draft dementia strategy, Community Services and a forthcoming consultation on adult mental health. As part of our preparations for adult mental health, we visited the current facilities at Scunthorpe General Hospital and Great Oaks.

Finally, the panel forged some closer links with key partners over the year. Most notably, we welcomed a new Director of Public Health who we worked closely alongside throughout the year. We also met regularly with the hospital trust, ambulance service and mental health trust to discuss their future direction, quality of services and any local issues that arose over the year.

Councillor Trevor Barker
Chair, Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel

2.3. SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL



The Municipal Year 2009-10 was extremely rewarding for the members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel. The scrutiny panel became the first in England to respond to the scrutiny recommendations contained in Sir Michael Pitt's final report into the floods of 2007 and early 2008. This saw the scrutiny panel conduct a review into 'the local action taken to manage flood risk in North Lincolnshire'. The review saw the members speak to twenty-two experts in the field of flood prevention, as well as hold three workshops with victims of the summer floods of 2007 and 2008. In addition, a workshop was held with a selection of town and parish councils to gauge their response to the floods. In total, the scrutiny panel made 33 recommendations, which it hopes will make a real difference to the lives of those people affected by the summer floods of 2007 and 2008.

The members also re-visited their 2007 review into 'domestic violence – service provision and areas of vulnerability'. Along with the other members of the panel, I took great delight in hearing of the excellent work that Safer Neighbourhoods had undertaken in order to implement all the scrutiny panel's recommendations to help the victims of domestic violence in North Lincolnshire.

In accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006, local authorities now have the power to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership in their area (in North Lincolnshire this is the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership) and make reports and recommendations to the council and the partnership. In North Lincolnshire, this is undertaken by the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel, which has been designated the "Crime and Disorder Committee" under the Act. To allow the members to undertake their role and responsibilities a protocol has been produced between the council, the scrutiny panel and the respective partners comprising the North Lincolnshire Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership.

So far, the protocol has allowed the scrutiny panel to discuss the issue of a budget reduction and its impact on Humberside Probation Trust, as well as respond to local residents concerns over the potential loss of Police Community Support Officers in the Westcliff, Riddings and Manor Farm Estates in Scunthorpe.

Members of the panel should also be commended for the excellent relationship they have developed with Humberside Police Authority over the previous year, which includes consideration of the inaugural Citizens Panel results.

The scrutiny panel has also successfully fulfilled its role with regards to performance monitoring and holding the Local Strategic Partnership to account for the three thematic partnerships that fall under its terms of reference, namely the Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board, Community Resilience Board and Environment Board.

In addition the scrutiny panel held the Adult Services Cabinet Member and Service Director Adult Social Care to account for the performance of the North Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board - 1 April 2008 to -31 March 2009.

On behalf of the members of the scrutiny panel, I would like to thank all members of the public, witnesses and officers for their contribution towards a rewarding and productive year.

Councillor Andrea Davison
Chair, Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

2.4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CORPORATE ISSUES SCRUTINY PANEL



On behalf of the former Chair, Councillor Smith, I take great delight in presenting this annual report on behalf of the members of the Economic Development and Corporate Issues Scrutiny Panel.

The first part of the municipal year saw the scrutiny panel complete its review into North Lincolnshire Markets. Its report saw members make 25 recommendations to assist the council to develop and modernise its market facilities. The review saw members visit markets in neighbouring Grimsby and Gainsborough, as well as visits to Scunthorpe, Brigg and Ashby markets. Focus groups were also held with market traders and service users. Our panel waits with interest to see if these suggested improvements to the markets are made.

An important role for scrutiny is to keep an overview on previous scrutiny reviews carried out, and to establish if recommendations have been acted upon and where appropriate implemented. The panel along with the other panels re-visit previous reviews on a regular basis. In 2009/10 our panel re-visited the 'Sickness Absence in North Lincolnshire Council' review. The re-visit highlighted that the council's was still struggling to reduce significantly the level of sickness absence in North Lincolnshire Council. The panel made various recommendations largely directed at achieving greater consistency and a more corporate approach to managing attendance, with managers being held more accountable. As a panel we hope to see sickness levels gradually fall and will continue to re-visit this subject on an annual basis.

The panel also revisited the 2006 scrutiny report 'Greening the Workplace' which examined the council's environmental roles and responsibilities. The panel decided to conduct this piece of work as there are now major financial implications arising from effective carbon management through trading agreements. A full report is expected to be published in the Autumn of 2010.

The scrutiny panel has also successfully fulfilled its role with regards to performance monitoring and holding the Local Strategic Partnership to account for the two thematic partnerships that fall under its terms of reference, namely the Economic Board and the council's Corporate Quarterly Performance Review. Members also put procedures in place to ensure more effective scrutiny of the council's budget.

I would like to thank the previous chair and all members of the panel, together with officers and participating partner organisations for their cooperation and work over the year.

Councillor Ishaq Jawaid MBE
Chair of the Economic Development and Corporate Issues
Scrutiny Panel

3. FUTURE CHALLENGES

The council's Scrutiny Co-ordinating Panel continues to manage and co-ordinate the development of overview and scrutiny in North Lincolnshire.

At the time of writing, the panel has already started to consider the possible impact of announcements made by the new coalition government on local government and its partners. Proposed future changes to the delivery and management of health services and public health and wellbeing, together with proposals to make the police more accountable to local people are likely to impact upon local democratic processes including overview and scrutiny. Influencing and responding effectively to these changes and potentially new roles following expected legislation is likely to be overview and scrutiny's most significant challenge over the next few years. Also, the expected and well publicised local government budget reductions, which we await the detail, will also require overview and scrutiny to participate in adding value for money to services and suggesting efficiencies and cost reductions where appropriate.

In addition, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Panel has initiated more immediate action which aim to introduce over the next year or so –

- Improved overview and scrutiny of council budgets;
- Introduction of the concept and disciplines of 'Total Place' scrutiny;
- Developing more meaningful performance monitoring;
- Continue improving public engagement and participation in overview and scrutiny – including a new, concise and informative report writing format, and
- Raising member awareness, knowledge and understanding of expected new legislation, associated guidance and budget implications.

4. HOW TO GET INVOLVED ?

If you would like to suggest to the council's overview and scrutiny panels what they could focus on in the future, or you would like to comment on current topics, speak to panels or require any information, please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team on the following

- email address scrutiny@northlincs.gov.uk or
- write to them at Legal and Democratic Services, Pittwood House, Scunthorpe, DN16 1AB (Freeport RLUH-LCZK-KKYH)
- or by telephone on the numbers below

The Scrutiny Team is –

- Tanya Davies – Scrutiny Officer
- Dean Gillon – Scrutiny Officer
- Matthew Nundy – Scrutiny Officer

(01724 – 296236 / 296356 / 296014 / fax 01724 281705)