

## Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/12

Copied below is Overview and Scrutiny Committee's contribution to the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2011/12.

### 2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### Membership:

Councillor Mark Watkin (Chair)

Councillor Steve Rackett (Vice Chair)

Councillors Nigel Bell, Sue Greenslade, Kareen Hastrick, Peter Jeffree, Stephen Johnson, Rabi Martins and Kelly McLeod

#### 2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2011/2012

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on seven occasions this year. This included one meeting to consider a call-in of a Cabinet decision. The Scrutiny Committee received reports on the following subjects –

- **Outstanding actions and questions** became a regular report to the Scrutiny Committee after the first meeting. The report included all the actions and questions which had been raised at previous meetings. The actions and questions remained on the report until Overview and Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the response and it was agreed the actions had been completed.
- **Performance updates** were presented on a quarterly basis. It reviewed the performance of the Key Performance Indicators and other performance measures identified by the Scrutiny Committee for review. At the meetings Members discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas. A particular area of concern was the performance of the Benefits Service. The Scrutiny Committee has monitored this service throughout the year and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services provided regular updates.
- **Forward Plan** was reviewed in line with the Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference. Members noted the additions and changes to the Forward Plan since the previous meeting.
- **Task Groups** – the Scrutiny Committee considered proposed topics for Task Groups and the responses from Heads of Service. Three Task Groups were established during 2011/12, two of which completed their review. Further information is available in Section 4.
- **Review of previous reports** Throughout the year the Scrutiny Committee received responses from Cabinet and checked the progress of recommendations from previous reviews. In some cases Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a further review in the future and in other cases Members agreed that the recommendations had been met. The reviews carried out in 2011/2012 were –

Voluntary Sector Task Group (Cabinet response)  
Affordable Housing review (Cabinet response)

Public Pride (review update)  
Services for the Deceased (review update)  
Future of the Colosseum (review update)  
Green Spaces review (review update)

## 2.2 Call-in

There had been one Executive decision called in during 2011/12. Three non-Executive Councillors called-in Cabinet's decision regarding the "Review of three year grant funding programme to achieve savings", which had been discussed at the meeting held on 5 December 2011. Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 22 December 2011 to review the decision. It was chaired by Councillor Steve Rackett, the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following the discussion the Scrutiny Committee agreed to uphold Cabinet's decision. It was also agreed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would examine the long-term impact on the four organisations which would be subject to the largest grant cuts. It was also agreed that Members would be involved in the development of the new Commissioning Framework for the voluntary and community sector.

## 2.3 Chair's commentary

The report above describes the work the Committee has carried out this year. What it does not tell you is that this year the way that scrutiny has been performed in Watford has been completely changed. We have introduced a new structure based on an Overview Committee overseeing task groups supported by a new team of excellent officers. Our brief has been to monitor performance and initiate task group based reviews which should be able to span both performance and policy issues. We also scrutinise the work of other bodies where it is of public interest to the residents of Watford. I am pleased to report that under this new scheme scrutiny in Watford Borough Council has been generally successful.

The committee reviewed and amended all the systems and services that were in place. We now have a rolling programme of scrutiny work that stretches into the future; there is a much tighter system of review of the impact of our past reports; we are looking critically at the indicators we use to monitor the performance of the Council's services to ensure that they are relevant and comprehensive; a bit like a super tanker, we took time to get underway and initiate task groups as we got to grips with our new way of working but those that have operated have produced excellent work.

I am particularly pleased that our major piece of work for this year, looking at how the Council will be accountable democratically as it introduces new ways of delivering its services, was requested by the Managing Director. I hope that other members of the senior leadership team and officers in the council will follow his example and propose areas for review particularly where new policy is being considered.

The Committee has three major challenges for the forthcoming year:

1. Greater range of topic subjects – by actively encouraging people from all areas including the general public or associated organisations to propose topics for scrutiny.

2. Keep the recommendations clear - be sure that topic reports generate recommendations that can be tested for their success in the future.
3. Broaden the membership of the task groups - we need to attract more non-executive members who are not on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to work on task groups and participate in the scrutiny process.

I would like to end by thanking all the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for adjusting so well to their new role; the chairs and members of all the task groups, including specifically the Community Safety Partnership for the great work they carried out; all the officers in Legal and Democratic Services for their dedicated hard work, superb advice and support and their sheer professionalism when approaching this new role for all of them; and all those who contributed to the work of the committee and task groups in providing evidence, information or advice.

Councillor Mark Watkin  
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2011/12