

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT: MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013/2014

Introduction and Welcome from the Chairman

Welcome to the ninth report of the Overview and Scrutiny Structure of Epping Forest District Council. This may be the last time we carry out scrutiny at EFDC in this format as we have just finished an 11 month long review into the organisation, principles and structure of the Overview and Scrutiny functions. That, as well as the reorganisation of the directorate structure of the authority will mean that we will be looking at fundamental changes in the new municipal year.

At present, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels are charged with reviewing Cabinet decisions, the Corporate Strategy, the Council's financial performance and also scrutinising the performance of the public bodies active in the District by inviting reports and presentations from them. The bare bones of scrutiny will not change in the new year, only the way it will be carried out.

At the beginning of the 2013/14 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of five Standing Panels for the year, no Task and Finish Panels were commissioned.

We received a call-in in the summer, for which we held a special meeting to hear the arguments for and against; this is detailed further on in this report. During the year we received numerous presentations from outside bodies including the Essex Children Services on corporate parenting, the Local Strategic Partnership, Health and Social Care issues, the local Citizen Advice Bureau and the Essex Probation Service.

My special thanks go to the Chairmen and members of the various Scrutiny Panels and especially the members and officers of the Task and Finish Panel that reviewed our Scrutiny arrangements and reported back in November 2013.

And of course, I would like to thank all the officers that have worked so hard to keep the Panel members informed and supplied with the background information that they needed to carry out their investigations.

Cllr Richard Morgan
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

What is Scrutiny?

- Ø Scrutiny in local government is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised.
- Ø The purpose of scrutiny in practice is to examine, question and evaluate in order to achieve improvement.
- Ø The value of scrutiny is in the use of research and questioning techniques to make recommendations based on evidence.
- Ø Scrutiny enables issues of public concerns to be examined.
- Ø At the heart of all the work is consideration of what impact the Cabinet's plans will have on the local community.
- Ø However, the overview and scrutiny function is not meant to be confrontational or seen as deliberately set up to form an opposition to the Cabinet. Rather the two aspects should be regarded as 'different sides of the same coin'. The two should complement each other and work in tandem to contribute to the development of the authority.

Alongside its role to challenge, the scrutiny function has also continued to engage positively with the Cabinet and there continues to be cross party co-operation between members on all panels.

Scrutiny has continued to provide valuable contributions to the Council and the Cabinet remained receptive to ideas put forward by Scrutiny throughout the year.

The rules of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also allow members of the public to have the opportunity to address the Committee on any agenda item.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee coordinated with the Cabinet and pre scrutinised their agenda and reports at its meetings the week before Cabinet would meet. This acted as a troubleshooting exercise, unearthing problems before they arose.

The Committee also engaged with external bodies in order to scrutinise parts of their work that encroached on the District and its people.

Only one call-in was received this year (for details, see Scrutinising and Monitoring Cabinet Work on page?). This was on the Cabinet decision on the review of North Weald Airfield regarding the options to be considered for North Weald Airfield as part of the Local Plan process.

Standing Scrutiny Panels

A lead Officer was appointed to each panel to facilitate its process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the terms of reference for each of the Panels on the basis of a rolling programme. The Standing Panels have a 'rolling programme' to consider ongoing and cyclical issues. Five Standing Scrutiny Panels were established, dealing with:

- i. Housing
- ii. Constitution and Member Services
- iii. Finance and Performance Management
- iv. Safer Cleaner Greener.
- v. Planning Services

Standing Panels reported regularly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress with the work they were carrying out.

Task and Finish Panels

The Task and Finish reviews are restricted to dealing with activities which are issue based, time limited, non-cyclical and with clearly defined objectives on which they would report, once completed, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. No Task and Finish Panels were established during the year, but one late starting Panel was carried over from the previous year and finished its work in October 2013.