



NORWICH
City Council

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REVIEW NORWICH CITY COUNCIL 2008 – 2009

Introduction by the Chair

I am pleased to introduce the annual scrutiny review of the work and progress that has been made by the scrutiny committee for the civic year 2008 – 2009.

What has been a busy year for scrutiny members began with the three training events last summer which were led by the new scrutiny officer and an external training specialist. The sessions were run as part of the scrutiny committee's development, and to work towards building a scrutiny work programme.

Session one was an opportunity for experienced members and those new to the scrutiny committee to gain and further develop an understanding of scrutiny and how it could operate. The second session looked at what methods could be adopted in developing scrutiny and session three was used as a chance for members to explore the possibilities for developing a relevant work programme and scope scrutiny reviews.

At our September 2008 meeting we carried out a selection process towards the agreement of a work programme for scrutiny against an agreed criteria based template that was developed as part of the training carried out in the summer.

Recent legislative changes out of the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Police and Justice Act 2006 has helped in strengthening the arm of scrutiny.

These include the Councillor Call for Action, powers of scrutiny over partner authorities and the ability to make representation to the County Council regarding Local Area Agreement – Local Improvement Targets, the possibility of setting up joint or area overview and scrutiny committees and the involvement of people in shaping health and social care services and priorities.

CCfA's are also covered under separate legislation in the Police and Justice act 2006. This Act also introduces a statutory role for overview & scrutiny to look at crime and disorder issues and new powers to scrutinize Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. This is an important tool towards encouraging CDRP partners to work together to resolve community safety problems in an open and public forum. Hopefully this should boost public confidence that police and local authorities are acting on crime and anti-social behavior issues.

The scrutiny committee members have built strong relationships with the executive portfolio members who are regular attendees at the scrutiny committee's meetings. This is something that as Chair of the committee I value and wish to continue. In the coming months I would like to introduce regular informal meetings with representatives of the four political parties on the scrutiny committee so that we can discuss issues for scrutiny and to facilitate greater non partisan liaison.

**Councillor Claire Stephenson –
Chair of the scrutiny committee.**

Why do we have scrutiny?

The Local Government Act 2000 brought about the requirement for councils to adopt new ways of working with a move away from the more traditional service based committees that had been operated by most councils since 1974. As a result, new political arrangements have been adopted. At Norwich we have adopted the executive model. The executive is the main decision making body made up of members of the largest party or group on the council. The executive is especially responsible for developing the council's policy and budget framework, and implementing these once agreed by council. The executive does not carry out a regulatory role as these are dealt with by the licensing, standards and planning committees.

A fundamental element to these arrangements is the scrutiny function. This enables the council to ensure that its policies are robust and effective, the decisions made by the executive are in accordance with council policy, and within budget and that services delivered are in line with what the public wants and needs. (The council's constitution further sets out the scope of the scrutiny committee.)

Role of scrutiny, pre scrutiny and task & finish groups

Scrutiny at Norwich city council is the process where, on behalf of the city's residents, councillors investigate, gain an overview and scrutinize the work of the council and its partners.

The role of the scrutiny committee includes looking at the decisions of the executive and officers in relation to key decisions and policies of the council. The activities of the council and its partners are also included in the work of the committee as is the performance of the council in relation to its targets and objectives.

The scrutiny committee has a key role in adding value to the decision making process and in reviewing existing

practices to bring about improvements to the provision of services.

The scrutiny committee's work programme is made up of topics that non executive members of the council feel are of importance, informed by their community and ward member role, as well as their activities on the council. Also, the executive or senior officers can sometimes request the scrutiny committee to undertake a pre scrutiny look at an issue prior to executive consideration.

In addition to this, the scrutiny committee sets up occasional task & finish groups that can be commissioned to carry out issue-specific in-depth studies. Any findings are then reported back to the main scrutiny committee for consideration. The scrutiny committee may then decide to make recommendations to the executive based on the findings of a task & finish group.

Call – in

Call – in is the term used in describing the process whereby non – executive members can request the executive to reconsider a decision it has made. As part of this process the scrutiny committee can act as a forum where the validity and quality of a called in decision can be discussed before it is referred back to the executive with or without scrutiny recommendations. Once back with the executive, those who made the original decision can either change it while taking on board suggestions from scrutiny or they can reject any recommendations and keep the decision as it was. While a decision is called – in, it can not be enacted until the above process has been undertaken.

The performance monitoring role of scrutiny

In October a presentation was given to the scrutiny committee by the deputy chief executive which provided members with an understanding of the links from the appraisal system, up to service plans and beyond to the council's vision and priorities which feed into the community strategy, local area agreement and on to the regional strategy. This was an opportunity to explore the committee's role in the scrutiny of performance data in relation to service plans and the wider suite of the council's strategies and plans.

Scrutiny members have a role in monitoring progress with how the council is meeting its objectives as set out in its corporate plan and in keeping pace with nationally and locally set performance indicators. To aid them they receive on a quarterly basis a clear and concise explanation of arising issues. This helps the scrutiny committee to identify the direction of travel in achieving targets around performance and towards meeting targets.

A similar approach is also employed when the committee are monitoring progress of more service based improvement or action plans.

In highlighting areas of good or poor performance and using the information gained to form recommendations to the executive, the scrutiny committee can assist the authority in improving its performance which should lead to better service provision to the citizens of Norwich.

What have we done this year?

The scrutiny committee work programme was first set in September 2008. However, as the year progressed topics of concern or interest were added along the way. We try to be as flexible as possible as the needs of the council and the residents of Norwich can change very quickly at times.

The scrutiny committee has;

- Examined the implications for scrutiny in the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act
- Appointed a representative and sub to sit on the Norfolk County Strategic Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel
- Considered the role of scrutiny in looking at service plans
- Carried out pre – scrutiny of the council's environmental strategy
- Considered an update on the council's performance in dealing with rent arrears
- Received information on the progress being made on the impact of choice based lettings on housing voids
- Considered the council's performance indicators (this is done on a quarterly basis)
- Examined the performance of the safer Norwich partnership against its targets (this is now done once every six months)
- Carried out pre – scrutiny of an economic development partnership with the University of East Anglia
- Pre – scrutinized the equality strategy level 2

What have we done this year? (continued)

- Scoped an investigation into the safer Norwich partnership's performance in dealing with anti – social behavior incidences in the Castle Gardens (outcome of the committee's monitoring of the performance data of the SNP – CDRP)
- Held an on site meeting with partners and users of Castle Gardens
- Carried out pre – scrutiny of the community engagement strategy
- Pre – scrutinized the review of the independent review of the council's investigations into Greyhound Opening
- Responded to the statutory consultation on the future of Earlham High School
- Considered the budget in the context of the council's corporate plan 08/10, and the draft plans for 09/10 prior to it going to council
- Carried out a pre – scrutiny of a policy on decommissioning of council housing
- Endorsed the Councillor Call for Action protocol for the approval of the executive

Task & Finish Groups – 2008/09

This year four task & finish groups have been set up.

The **allotments task & finish group** was set up to look into the issues that the green spaces team is faced with in improving the service provided to the public. This task & finish group is due to report back its findings to the scrutiny committee in the autumn. One of the main outcomes is likely to be the periodic monitoring of the progress being made by the team in attaining the targets in its action plan.

Members of the task & finish group were pleased to note the improvements already being achieved towards this.

The **city centre toilet provision task & finish group** considered public toilet provision in the city centre. It looked at how this should cater for the needs of the public including people with disabilities and special needs. The task and finish group has completed its examination and will report its work to the scrutiny committee. This is not planned until the autumn because the report will need to be set in the context of a current review by the British Standards Institute about acceptable standards for public conveniences overall. The task and finish group's report will need to take account of BSI findings. Members may then wish to decide how these findings affect toilets; existing, new and any not meeting new standards.

The **cycling task & finish group** was set up by the scrutiny committee to investigate with officers how to encourage more people to cycle as a healthy non polluting transport option. The group has recognised in its work the benefits of encouraging people to cycle by providing them with a safe environment to do so. A final meeting of the task & finish group will make recommendations towards a cycle plan for Norwich.

The **future burial provision task & finish group** has been set up, at the request of the executive, to look at the wider issues relating to future burial provision for the city. This is taking place in the context of current cemetery capacity naturally reducing due to use. The group aims to explore the future provision options for Norwich while giving consideration to the needs of the different religious groups in the city. It is expected that this group will run over the summer making its findings available to the scrutiny committee in the autumn.

Joint or area overview and scrutiny committees

The **Norfolk county strategic partnership joint scrutiny panel** has been established to review and scrutinize the performance of the Norfolk county strategic partnership, as responsible body for the delivery of both Norfolk ambition (the county's sustainable community strategy) and the local area agreement against the agreed performance outcomes and targets.

The panel is made up of 8 members, one from the county council and the others from the seven district/city councils of Norfolk. Membership is drawn from scrutiny committees and each council can also appoint a substitute member.

Norwich city council is represented by; Councillor Claire Stephenson and Councillor Brian Watkins (Sub).

The **Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee** was set up to ensure that the needs and wishes for health and health-related services of all the population (including minorities, socially excluded groups and other targeted equality groups) have been identified towards achieving local health improvement.

The members of the county health overview and scrutiny committee take a detailed look into whether services provided that have an impact on the health of local inhabitants are accessible to, and can be accessed by, all parts of the local community. Also the committee investigates whether the outcomes of intervention (whether through services or other intervention designed to have a positive impact on the health of local inhabitants) are equally good for all groups and sections of the local population.

Norwich city council is represented by Councillor David Bradford and Councillor Brian Watkins (Sub).

The future for scrutiny

As well as the two large issues facing the council at the moment; Improvement of the housing service and the corporate improvement and efficiency programme, the emergence of Comprehensive Area Assessments, the enhancement of the role of scrutiny in community safety issues and the Councillor Call for Action contributes to the ever evolving challenges and scope of scrutiny work.

Guidance for the role of scrutiny committees regarding Comprehensive Area Assessments is due to be published by the IDeA this summer and will include information on the critical friend challenge and local self evaluations. It is thought that this will offer more opportunities for county-wide and sub-regional scrutiny; the city council would welcome further collaboration with other districts and already participates in the Norfolk scrutiny network.

The Councillor Call for Action represents a valuable tool in equipping councilors in their local advocate role for their communities and further strengthens their position of community champions. Although expected to continue to resolve issues informally, where councillors are not satisfied that real action has been taken to resolve the issue that they have raised, resolution may be sought via CCfA. This enables any councillor of the council to ask the scrutiny committee to take a matter further.

The Council's CCfA protocol can be obtained upon request from the scrutiny officer.

In this busy year ahead for scrutiny it should not be forgotten that even though larger corporate issues need attention, the scrutiny committee may have its own agenda at times informed by members' roles within the communities they serve.

Norfolk scrutiny network

Scrutiny always has been an evolving process. Therefore, it is essential that members and officers keep up to date with new developments and legislation. For this reason they are encouraged to attend training and seminars both internally and externally.

The Norfolk scrutiny network is a valuable officer forum for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of knowledge. Over the years the network has helped the officers from the county, city and district councils to co-ordinate scrutiny work and training for members, which also helps to prevent too much duplication of effort around the county.

On a two yearly basis the Norfolk scrutiny network holds a conference for members and scrutiny practitioners. These are a great opportunity to network, share experience and learn. The next one is due to be held in autumn 2009 and details will be made available as soon as they are finalised.

Involving the public in what we do – Castle Gardens & the safer Norwich partnership

An example of how the public have been involved in the work of the scrutiny committee this year can be seen in our examination with our partners at how anti-social behavior can be dealt with in the Castle Gardens. This was an opportunity for us to listen to the views of some of the users and young people who frequent the area.

The Castle Gardens are a safer Norwich partnership (CDRP) priority and the committee were particularly looking at the effectiveness of work that had been undertaken, as well as assessing what could be done in the future to improve the incidences of anti-social behavior on the site.

One of the outcomes of the exercise was that the young people who attended the meeting and the tour of the site wished for a closer relationship with the Castle Mall and Castle Museum security teams as they felt that this would lead to more appropriate future decisions regarding the management of the site. This view was endorsed by the committee along with supporting the county council's consideration of future youth worker provision for the area.

A subsequent article in the Evening News reported a statement from the Chair of the committee who said;

“This is a brand new thing for our scrutiny committee to leave City Hall and to bring back the young people, and it worked really well. It was brilliant to actually hear from them and not just the views of committee officers and people who work for the council.”

“They came up with lots of fresh ideas and different ways of looking at things. They were saying that they perceived the way they behaved in the area in a different way to other people - they said they didn't mean to be acting in an anti-social way.”

Councillor Stephenson said she hoped this was the first of many similar meetings where community leaders and youngsters could come together to help tackle problems.

Scrutiny will be revisiting this topic in the autumn 2009 to monitor any trends and the affect of further safer Norwich partnership attention at the Castle Gardens.

Who can sit on the scrutiny committee?

The scrutiny committee is politically balanced and is made up of councillors from all four of the political parties of the council. Only non-executive members can be on the committee and this allows those councillors to have an active role in the council's decision making process.

Meetings of the scrutiny committee are usually as informal as possible and as

well as scrutiny members, are attended by executive portfolio members, officers, partners and anyone else who can assist with the work and provide evidence for reviews.

Members of the public are also welcome to attend the scrutiny committee meetings and can participate at the discretion of the committee's Chair.

The members of the scrutiny committee

Councillors; Claire Stephenson – Chair, Brian Watkins – Vice Chair,

Roy Blower, David Bradford, Mary Cannell, Keith Driver, David Fairbairn, Andrew Wiltshire, Deborah Gihawi, Samir Jeraj, Anthony Little, Peter Offord, Adrian Ramsay

How to get in touch with the scrutiny committee

If you are a member of the public and wish to find out more about the scrutiny process and the committee or if you have any queries regarding this Annual Review, please feel free to contact the council's scrutiny officer;

Email: stevegoddard@norwich.gov.uk

Steve Goddard, Scrutiny Officer,
Norwich City Council, City Hall, St
Peters Street, Norwich NR2 1NH

If you have any topic suggestions for scrutiny please use the form attached on page 8 and send it to the above address or hand it in at the council's reception – for the attention of the scrutiny officer.

Remember, the scrutiny committee does not just have to examine the council's executive but can also challenge and investigate decisions and policies of other public bodies responsible for delivering services to the people and businesses of Norwich.

Useful website for scrutiny officers and members;

The Centre for Public Scrutiny promotes the value of scrutiny and accountability in modern and effective government and supports non-executives in their scrutiny role.

<http://www.cfps.org.uk/>



If you would like this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact the scrutiny officer by phone 01603 212491 or email: stevegoddard@norwich.gov.uk

Request form to raise an item for Scrutiny Review

Councillors should be asked to carry out the following scrutiny review:

Please give your reasons (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Name:

Address:

Daytime Tel No

Email:

Signature

Date

Please return this form to Steve Goddard, Scrutiny Officer, Norwich City Council, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich NR2 1NH

Email: stevegoddard@norwich.gov.uk