



NORWICH
City Council

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REVIEW NORWICH CITY COUNCIL 2011 – 2012

Introduction by the chair of scrutiny

The scrutiny committee has this year introduced a tracking system in order to better monitor the actions taken following the committee's recommendations. This has proved to be a very useful tool which I hope will be given a more prominent home on the council's website over the next year.

A highlight of the committee's year was questioning training which we received as a group. Committee members were able to develop relevant skills together and through this become a more cohesive team which raised the standard of scrutiny carried out by the committee.

A joint workshop for scrutiny members, cabinet members and senior officers in September was very helpful and I'd like to thank non-scrutiny members for their co-operation. Participants' experience and knowledge of scrutiny was varied and showed that the profile of the scrutiny function needs to be raised throughout the organisation. I hope that the year to come will see overview and scrutiny firmly embedded within the culture of Norwich City Council and accepted by all officers and members of the council as a legitimate and valuable part of the democratic process.

During the last year, the committee has examined the consultation which went out to Norwich residents and members were pleased to see some of our recommendations taken up. Asset management is another area which the committee has examined over the year and the committee's recommendations included informing ward councillors in advance of assets being put up for sale and acknowledging the social and historical value of property.

Throughout the year, the increased involvement of ward councillors and local communities has been a recurrent theme of scrutiny meetings. The committee has recommended the use of ward councillors in the process of area based commissioning exercises. The committee is also aware that the localism act will affect the council, councillors and residents.

The committee has dealt well with challenges such as delayed reports, on ICT and 'the future priorities and shape of the council' for example, and was able to usefully scrutinise these topics within the civic year, in part by examining the council's new partnership with Local Government Shared Services (LGSS). Although the time was not considered right to examine the council's environmental strategy in September, before it went to cabinet, the later call-in

of this document answered some important questions and allowed some members to have more confidence in the strategy.

It was unfortunate that joint work with Broadland District Council could not go ahead, despite volunteers from the city's scrutiny committee putting themselves forward, but I hope we will be able to make use of appropriate joint working in the future as necessary resource costs could then be shared with other councils.

The current scrutiny review of community centres is a positive piece of work which should help shape policy and assist with the development of assessment criteria to guide the future use of these centres. I hope that briefings on the community safety partnership, in particular the creation of the police and crime panels, which have been requested throughout the year will similarly be of use.

The work of the scrutiny committee should also be improved in future years due to the committee's request to examine the corporate plan one month in advance of the draft budget and to receive quarterly performance data in conjunction with the budget monitoring report for that period.

I look forward to another fruitful year and anticipate that scrutiny within the council will continue to grow in value and effectiveness.

Councillor Claire Stephenson – Chair of the scrutiny committee.

Why overview & scrutiny matters

Scrutiny is the name given to the process whereby councillors investigate, scrutinise, and oversee the work of the council. More specifically the scrutiny committee pays particular attention to; decisions made by the cabinet and delegated officers in relation to council policy and decisions.

The guiding principle of local government scrutiny is to provide effective challenge to those who exercise executive power, and spend public money.

There is also scope for local authority scrutiny committees to review the work of other agencies that affect the lives, health and wellbeing of their residents.

Scrutiny involves elected members who represent the diverse groups that make up local communities. Work carried out by the scrutiny committee assists the council in delivering services and outcomes that take into account and understand local needs.

Who can sit on the scrutiny committee and public involvement

The scrutiny committee is politically balanced and is made up of councillors from all three of the political parties of the council. Only non – cabinet 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 cabinet 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.

Call – in and pre-scrutiny

As well as holding decision makers to account by asking questions as part of scrutiny reviews, local government scrutiny committees can call – in certain decisions made by the cabinet and delegated officers.

Call – in is the term used in describing the process whereby non –cabinet members can request the cabinet 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 cabinet with or without scrutiny recommendations.

Once back with the cabinet, 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.

Pre-scrutiny work is usually when a topic is destined for a cabinet decision. The scrutiny committee sometimes selects issues from the forward work programme of the cabinet for pre scrutiny or sometimes this can happen as a result of a request from a cabinet member or lead officer. An example of pre scrutiny can be found below in the section dealing with priorities and budget overview and scrutiny where the scrutiny committee considered the report to cabinet after the public consultation exercise.

The work of the scrutiny committee 2011 - 2012

There have been a number of areas of work carried out by the scrutiny committee over the year:

- Holding the cabinet to account
- Priorities and budget overview and scrutiny
- Quarterly performance monitoring
- Pre – scrutiny
- Time limited task & finish review work
- Consultation

Minutes and reports of the scrutiny committee meetings can be found on the council's web-site at <http://www.norwich.gov.uk/CommitteeMeetings>

Holding the cabinet to account

Members called in one decision made by the cabinet over the 12 month period that this report covers. The call – in was of the decision to approve the new environmental strategy 2011 – 2014.

As a result of the call – in the progress made on reducing carbon emissions would now be included as part of the budget report to council in future years and a copy of the environmental strategy was sent to the Norwich Independent Climate Change Commission for comment. All points raised by the discussion at the meeting were reported through to the cabinet. Once clarifications were gained, the scrutiny committee endorsed the strategy which is now currently in use by the council.

Priorities and budget overview and scrutiny

Throughout the year the scrutiny committee was used as a consultative body in forming a picture of how the council might be shaped. Members took into account the needs of the city and its residents, along with acknowledging the pressures that the council was under to balance the budget in light of funding reductions and the future reshaping of local government finances.

The scrutiny committee fed into the pre consultation and consultation process for the public consultation on the priorities and future shape of the council. In doing this, the scrutiny looked at the consultation process and document and the committee held a pre – scrutiny of a cabinet report that looked at the results of the consultation process and the recommendations on how to proceed.

The five draft priorities for the council that took shape as a result of the consultation then formed the basis for the new corporate plan:

- Safe and clean city
- City of character and culture
- Prosperous city
- City with decent housing for all
- Value for money services

The savings options that were taken forward on the basis of the results of the consultation were then fed into the budget process.

As part of the committee's scrutiny of the budget setting process a budget scrutiny café was held for the second time. Members and officers were able to explore ideas around the setting of budgets while considering the pressures facing each service.

The scrutiny committee then pre-scrutinised the draft policy framework and budget prior to the formal budget meeting of the cabinet and the meeting of the full council that agreed the policy framework and budget for 2012 /13.

Quarterly performance monitoring

The council's programme of meetings is set so that the scrutiny committee sits to coincide with the quarterly performance reporting to cabinet as this allows for pre-scrutiny to take place. This enables the scrutiny committee to bring to the cabinet's attention any issues that may require closer scrutiny.

A copy of member questions on the council's performance over the last quarter and the responses are circulated prior to the meeting. This enables scrutiny member's questions to be answered as fully as possible prior to the meeting, leaving more time to focus on any key areas that may need scrutiny attention at the meeting.

Specific performance monitoring work carried out by the scrutiny committee this last year has included keeping a watching brief on the progress of the work being carried out with Norfolk property services on the service improvement plan and the performance of the revenue and benefits service.

At its February 2012 meeting, the scrutiny committee resolved that all future quarterly performance reports, to scrutiny, needed to be considered jointly with a budget monitoring report for the same period.

Scrutiny members have also suggested the inclusion of some further context within future quarterly performance reports. This is to illustrate how services are actually measured. Officers have taken account of this in the preparation of the new corporate plan, with a proposed new format for the quarterly performance report and a document to show how the new performance indicators are being measured due to be presented to scrutiny.

Other topics covered by the scrutiny committee 2011 – 2012 include:

- Commissioning framework
- Community safety
- Asset management

Task & finish groups

To support the scrutiny committee in delivering its functions it has the ability to appoint ad-hoc/time limited scrutiny task and finish groups. Should the need arise for a task and finish group the scrutiny committee has the ability to co-opt other councillors who are not members of cabinet to support the group in considering a specific topic.

Currently the committee has one task and finish group operating which is carrying out a review of community space in Norwich. The scope of the review is regarding the 'distribution, social benefit and the council's role in the provision of community space', and to assist in the drawing up of assessment criteria.

The scrutiny committee should be receiving a report from the task and finish group in the late summer/early autumn.

Members of the scrutiny committee for 2012/13

Councillors; Claire Stephenson – Chair, Patrick Manning – Vice Chair, David Bradford, Caroline Brimblecombe, Sally Button, Lucy Galvin, Graeme Gee, Jennifer Lay, Judith Lubbock, David Rogers, Mike Sands, Mike Stonard and Jo Storie.

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

stevegoddard@norwich.gov.uk

01603 212491

Steve Goddard, scrutiny officer, Norwich city council, city hall, St Peters street, Norwich NR2 1NH

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/>



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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



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