



Coventry City Council

**SCRUTINY BOARDS'
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
CITY COUNCIL
2005 / 2006**

To be considered at the City Council meeting
on 12th December, 2006

FOREWORD



The Scrutiny process continues to improve. It is encouraging to see Members working together more effectively and resisting the temptation to score party political points.

Attendance at meetings has, however, been a little disappointing and needs to be addressed.

It is still the case that some Members and officers are yet to appreciate that the Government sees the Scrutiny system as central to the Council's political process and on a par with the Executive as opposed to being second fiddle. If we don't get this balance right then the Audit Commission will no doubt have something to say about it.

The enclosed review of the Boards' work is self-explanatory and demonstrates a much sharper focus on outcomes than in previous years. They have also improved noticeably in being more proactive, but there is still room for improvement in this area. Appendices 3 and 4 demonstrate the progress made and indicate priorities for further improvement.

In conclusion I'd like to thank the small (too small!) band of officers who service the Boards and the majority of Members who have done much in the year to make the Scrutiny process more effective.

Councillor Tim Sawdon
Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee 2005/2006

Recommendation

The City Council are recommended to note this report, which gives details of the work of the Scrutiny Boards and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee during the Municipal Year 2005/2006, sets out evaluation of their performance and outlines future developments.

Background

This is the fourth annual report by the Council's Scrutiny Boards. It is divided into two sections: Section (I) sets out factual information about the Boards and their work, and other areas relating to the Scrutiny function. Section (II) provides an analysis of the performance of Scrutiny.

SECTION (I) - Factual Information

1. General information

- 1.1** In May 2005, the Council again appointed 4 Scrutiny Boards and a Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee with the same remits as in 2004/2005. Details of the membership of each Board and its allocated Cabinet portfolios and of the membership of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee are set out in **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 1.2** Each Scrutiny Board was initially scheduled to meet monthly, but all Boards held additional meetings to enable them both to consider a larger number of topics and to investigate them more thoroughly.

2. Work Programmes

- 2.1** The work programmes initially compiled by each Board were regularly reviewed at Board meetings. Any additional topics identified were added to the initial programme; sometimes this was balanced by the removal of topics which were considered to be of a lower priority.
- 2.2** As last year, Scrutiny Boards (1), (2) and (3) all considered the Strategic Plans of their associated Cabinet Members and held question and answer sessions with them. This provided an opportunity for Board members to find out more about the objectives which the Cabinet Members had set themselves. Scrutiny Board (4) held a question and answer session with NHS senior officers, putting questions to staff from Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust (CTPCT), University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust (UHCW), and Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

Strategic Plans are a major component of the Council's performance management process. 2004/2005 was the first time that they had been produced and this, linked with the later than usual elections (held in June, rather than May) and the change of political control, meant that they were not available until October. In addition, the Boards were not afforded a formal opportunity during the year to review the progress of the Strategic Plans. However, in 2005/2006 the Plans were produced much earlier and were considered by the Boards in July, when Members questioned the Cabinet Members on the Plans' contents. Boards also reviewed progress on the Plans (involving similar questioning sessions) in December/January.

2.3 A brief outline of the work of each Scrutiny Board is set out below:-

Scrutiny Board (1)

(Policy, Leadership and Governance / Finance and Equalities / Corporate and Customer Service) (also acts as the Council's Audit Committee).

The Board held 15 meetings during the year, ten of which were scheduled at the beginning of the year and five were added during the year to accommodate discussions on sickness absence and the Cabinet Members' Plans.

i. Audit Work

A separate report has been produced on the Board's audit work. However, the following is a brief summary:-

- The Board received quarterly monitoring reports on the work of the Council's Internal Audit Division.
- The Board approved the Internal Audit strategy and operational plan for 2005 / 2006.
- In October 2005 the Board considered the External Auditors' Statement of Auditing Standards report on the 2004/5 Statement of Accounts.
- In January 2006 the Board considered the Joint External Audit and Inspection Letter for 2004 / 2005 (which summarised the issues of significance drawn out by the work of the External Auditors and the Audit Commission's Inspectors) and the External Auditors' report on the Council's Best Value Performance Plan.
- The Board has now incorporated in its work the monitoring of the Council's corporate risk register
- In September 2005, the Board held a training session on the internal audit process, aimed at giving Members (particularly new Members), more knowledge of the process.

In future, the Board's audit role will be carried out by an Audit Sub-Group, which was set up in August 2006. This will enable the Board to concentrate on its other areas of responsibility.

ii. Other Work

Apart from the audit work, the main issues considered by the Board, were:-

- Quarterly monitoring reports on the City Council's capital and revenue programmes.
- Quarterly monitoring reports on the progress made on the Housing Benefits Improvement Plan.
- Presentations on the Integrated Human Resources and Payroll IT system and the Gershon Review.
- Quarterly monitoring reports on the Council's Promoting Health at Work policy, keeping the Board aware of the levels of sickness absence within the City Council.

The Board was so concerned at the continuing high levels of sickness absence that it held a meeting on 14th December, 2005, with all Directors, when Members questioned all Directors on the action they were taking to address this issue. Prior to the meeting the Board held an informal planning session to decide its lines of questioning which were passed on to Directors in advance of the formal meeting. This helped to make the meeting more productive, as Directors were able to bring the information Members wanted, rather than having to respond to issues "off the cuff". The Board decided to hold a similar meeting in July 2006 to review progress.

- A number of reports relating to Coventry Direct (the Council's programme to deliver its customer services, e-government, and ICT Strategy). These included reports on the progress of the project as a whole, the One-Stop Shop Strategy, Human Resources Structure, the Service Redesign Process and Customer Relationship Management.

Scrutiny Board (2)

(Children's Services, Community Services and Health and Housing)

In progressing an ambitious work programme for 2005/06 Scrutiny Board 2 held 15 formal meetings plus a number of seminars, site visits and other informal meetings.

With the Council re-organising its structure to account for the Government's "Every Child Matters" agenda, Children's Services was a major part of the Board's 2005/06 work programme. Additional to considering the major issues such as the recent Ofsted and the later JAR Self Assessment, the Board reviewed the Draft Children & Young People's Plan. Conscious of a very wide remit the Board decided at the beginning of the year to concentrate scrutiny of Children's Services issues around the priority areas of Children's Well-Being in Schools and Anti Social Behaviour & Youth Services.

In considering Children's Well-Being in Schools the Board received reports / presentations on

- Attendance & Lateness
- Planned introduction of fixed penalty notices (for parents of truants)
- Disruptive Behaviour in Schools
- Inclusion and Special Needs Services
- Schools' Approach to Young Carers
- Coventry's response to improving the nutritional content of school meals

Following a meeting with young carers the Board requested that officers make special efforts to ensure that schools provided a more co-ordinated and understanding environment for young carers and progress on this was reported at a later meeting.

In the area of Anti-Social Behaviour and Youth Services the Board considered:

- Youth Services Green Paper & the Coventry perspective
- Anti-Social Behaviour issues amongst young people

- Neighbourhood Management / Warden Services
- Designated Public Places Order for Coventry
- It's Your Call (Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline)
- Off-Road Bike Strategy

The Board also focused a number of meetings around issues for Looked After Children (LAC). Over the past few years the Council has successfully maintained the impetus of the Laming Inquiry by undertaking an annual audit of action on the various recommendations contained in Lord Laming's report. The Board asked that future reports include not only the City Council's performance but also that of key partners.

Additionally the Board considered the development of a new Placements Strategy and held a meeting with foster carers and officers involved in the Fostering & Adoptions Service. Following this meeting the fees and allowances for foster carers have been revised.

In the area of social care, the Board discussed proposals for a Mental Health Strategy for Older People, the Government White Papers "Opportunity Age", "Independence, Well-Being & Choice" and scrutinised proposals for an Individual Budget Pilot Scheme.

The Board spent some considerable time examining proposals to develop an education partnership with Henley College based at Brandon Wood Farm. Whilst Members broadly supported these proposals, they had significant concerns regarding support for existing service users, and the viability of alternative day care proposals. A series of recommendations were put to the Cabinet Member, and due to a variety of reasons these proposals were eventually withdrawn.

The Board also considered the City Council's Asylum Seekers & Refugees Strategy, holding a Members seminar on the subject. Members supported the Cabinet Member's efforts to ensure that the City Council played a leading role in any new accommodation arrangements made by the Home Office for new placements to the City.

In the field of Housing, the Board scrutinised the Homelessness Strategy, and made various recommendations to the Cabinet concerning the "Future of the Council's Housing Waiting List". These recommendations were agreed.

The Board established a City Academies Review Group which, despite initial scepticism, broadly supported the proposals for a City Academy at Woodway Park, whilst also pointing out to the Cabinet some areas of concern for them to bear in mind. The Review Group has been re-constituted to consider any further proposals for a second Academy in the City.

Scrutiny Board (3)

(Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning, Adult Education, Libraries and Leisure and City Services)

In a busy 2005/2006 Scrutiny Board 3 held 13 formal meetings plus a number of seminars, site visits and other informal meetings.

The Board continued their interest in a number of issues carried forward from the civic year 2004/05, these included:

- (a) The implementation of the TAS report, and how planning for the future pattern of bus services was being developed. The TAS report, published earlier in the year, proposed radical revisions to bus services, and Members were interested to discuss proposals from Travel Coventry for changes to their services.
- (b) The future of the City's sports and leisure facilities. This was the subject of a consultation, which the Board received and commented upon.
- (c) The related topic of the use of section 106 agreements from housing and other developments. Following the transfer of the Leisure portfolio to Scrutiny Board 1, that Board has developed this work.

Members had expressed some concerns regarding the way the Framework Contract for managing engineering projects had been run. The Board asked for a detailed evaluation and progress report. As a result they found that there had been an ironing-out of some initial teething problems, and that officers were able to report on some considerable progress in managing the contract. Members were further re-assured about the operation of the City Council's contracting arrangements with Jacobs Babbie.

The Board considered a six-month review of the management of the decriminalised parking regime in the City. With the Council having taken the decision to manage this service in-house, Members were particularly keen to ensure that it was being introduced sympathetically and without the controversy that many other authorities have faced. Members were pleased at the success of the first six months and gave officers advice and suggestions regarding the further development of the service.

Related to the above and the Board's interest in the development of the Ricoh Arena, Members also considered the Ricoh Arena Residents' Parking Scheme. They found that this had been also been introduced successfully overall, and though noting some suggestions for further improvements to the Scheme, welcomed its operation to date. In relation to major non-soccer events at the Arena, the Board indicated that they would include this in their work programme for 2006/07.

The Board commenced work on a City Centre topic. This topic, which is continuing into 2006/07, is intended to inform the current debate on the future development of the City and the City Centre's role within this. Members have considered various reports and presentations about master-planning and proposals for development in the City Centre, and these continue.

The City Council's excellent improvements in delivering Libraries Services was considered by the Board in November, when a progress report on Library Standards was submitted. Proposals for the deployment of the new mobile library van were considered in December.

Scrutiny Board 3 also took up an issue which has been of concern to several Members relating to the movement of coaches visiting the Cathedral via University Square. The Scrutiny Board made several recommendations to the Cabinet Member City Services regarding changing the direction of traffic flows and better accommodating modern coaches. These recommendations were accepted.

Various City Services issues were considered as they arose during the year, for example the revision to the Memorial Safety Policy and problems encountered in the refurbishment of the High Street.

The Board also considered a report on the problems associated with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and decided to write to Government to encourage them to ensure that the various planning and licensing laws were consistent.

Scrutiny Board (4) (Health)

There were fifteen formal meetings of the full Board. In addition there were several meetings of the breastfeeding review steering group, and other pre-meeting planning sessions.

The Board published four reports this year:

1. Scrutiny Board 4 (Health) response to the consultation on the smokefree elements of the Health Improvement and Protection Bill (August 2005)
2. Scrutiny Board 4 (Health) response to the Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust consultation, "Coventry City Centre Health Services" (November 2005)
3. Scrutiny Board 4 (Health) response to "Configuration of NHS ambulance trusts in England" (March 2006)
4. Scrutiny Board 4 (Health) and Warwickshire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of services to support mothers in Coventry and Warwickshire who wish to breastfeed (April 2006)

Including three of the reports listed above, the Board responded to eight NHS consultations this year:

1. Department of Health consultation on the smoke free elements of the Health and Social Care Bill (August 2005)
2. Coventry Teaching PCT consultation on Coventry city centre health services (November 2005)
3. Joint consultation "Local Solutions for Complex Needs" on West Midlands medium secure mental health services for men (January 2006)
4. Department of Health/West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority consultation on configuration of ambulance services in the West Midlands (March 2006)
5. WMSSHA consultation on new Strategic Health Authority arrangements in the West Midlands (March 2006)
6. WMSSHA consultation on new Primary Care Trust arrangements in West Midlands South (Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire) (March 2006)

7. University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust consultation "Your Hospital Your Choice?" on the proposed governance arrangements for University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust (April 2006)
8. Joint consultation "Big enough to count, small enough to care" on a proposal to establish a single specialist Mental Health, Learning Disability and Substance Misuse NHS Trust for Coventry and Warwickshire (April 2006)

The Board made submissions to both the draft and formal Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check declarations for CTPCT, UHCW and Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust. Preparation for the declarations included hosting a presentation by a representative of the Healthcare Commission, held at the Clinical Sciences Building, Walsgrave Hospital in September 2005, and attended by representatives of Warwickshire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Patient and Public Involvement Forums for Coventry and Warwickshire.

The Board received presentations and information on the following subjects:

- School nutrition
- NHS dentistry in Coventry
- Coventry and Warwickshire Acute Services Review
- Coventry city centre health services and the Local Improvement Finance Trust
- Proposals for reconfiguration of ambulance services
- Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check
- Smoke Free Coventry
- UHCW Patient and Public Involvement Forum report on infection control
- Foundation Trust status
- Coventry Teaching PCT Local Delivery Plan

Following approval from the Board, the Chair made a representation to the Secretary of State for Health regarding the handling of the consultation on reconfiguration of ambulance trusts in England (May 2006). At the Chair's request, officers made a series of Freedom of Information Act requests to the Department of Health on issues related to the decision to proceed with the reconfiguration of ambulance services.

The Chair and officers attended various meetings in Coventry and elsewhere relating to elements of the health scrutiny board work plan. In November 2005, the Chair attended as an observer an evidence session of the House of Commons health select committee.

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

This Committee, which is responsible for the overall management of the Scrutiny function, continued to meet mainly on a weekly basis in 2005/2006, although some meetings were cancelled if there was insufficient business.

The Committee continued its more pro-active approach to its work this year:-

- it continued the process of identifying issues which Scrutiny Boards or the Committee itself could consider.
- it received quarterly reports from Scrutiny Board Chairs on the progress of their Board's work programmes.
- in October 2005 it held a meeting with a representative of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service to discuss its concerns at the reduction in the number of night-time fire appliances in Coventry.
- it decided how Scrutiny should be involved in the budget-setting process for 2006/2007.
- it discussed how Scrutiny might develop and become more effective. More information on this is included in Section (II) of this report.
- The Committee followed up two issues raised at meetings of the full City Council:-
 - the relocation of the tenants of Cygnet and Orwell Courts (a crucial factor in the major Swanswell re-development project). They gave guidance to officers on how to achieve a solution acceptable to tenants and the Council and received regular progress reports. This work has continued into 2006/2007.
 - The closure of the Whitefriars Housing Association office which served the St. Michael's Ward and changes in the criteria for inclusion on the Association's housing register. The Chief Executive of the Association attended a meeting with the Committee to discuss these issues, which resulted in the establishment of more effective communications between Whitefriars and Council Members.

The Committee has continued to consider call-ins, the number of which has continued to decrease (7 in 2005/2006, compared with 22 in 2004/2005 and 49 in 2003/2004). In two cases a call in led to further work being commissioned and ultimately to additions/changes to the original Cabinet/Cabinet Member decisions i.e.

- University Square – the Cabinet Member agreed to further changes to the traffic system around the Square to facilitate access by coaches.

(note: the call in was made in December 2004, but further consideration of the issues involved was given by Scrutiny during 2005/2006.)

- Brandon Wood Farm – the Cabinet revised the original proposals for providing day opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

3. Scrutiny Reviews and Best Value Reviews

Work has been done on three Scrutiny reviews this year: two of these (relating to Debt Recovery Policy and Services to Mothers who wish to Breastfeed) completed work begun in 2004/2005.

All the reviews made useful recommendations to the Cabinet/City Council/Health Service bodies.

Details of each review are set out in **Appendix 2** to this report.

Although the number of reviews was fewer than last year (when 7 were carried out), Boards carried out detailed work on some topics, for example:

- Scrutiny Board 1 – reducing levels of sickness absence
- Scrutiny Board 2 – young carers
- Scrutiny Board 3 – discussion with Travel Coventry about bus services
- Scrutiny Board 4 (Health) response to “Configuration of NHS ambulance trusts in England” (March 2006)

The Best Value Review relating to Community Centres, which was carried out during 2004/2005, has yet to present its report.

4. Scrutiny Support

4.1 The main support for Scrutiny continued to be provided by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Group (comprising the three Scrutiny Co-ordinators and their Administration Officer).

4.2 In January 2006, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Group transferred from the Legal and Democratic Services Directorate to the Chief Executive's Directorate as part of the Corporate Policy Unit, reporting directly to the Head of Corporate Policy. Since then there has been more management support for the Group and more emphasis on the development of scrutiny.

Officer support from across directorates has continued to improve this year, but could still be better: most resources continued to be concentrated on supporting Cabinet Members.

5. Budget

The Scrutiny budget for 2005/2006 (held by the Head of Democratic Services) was £35,190, which was allocated as follows:-

Each Scrutiny Board	-	£3,000
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	-	£23,190 (to be a contingency, against which Scrutiny Boards could submit bids for additional funding)

Of this sum £8,436 was spent, of which £3,584 was spent by Scrutiny Board (4) (Health).

The budget in 2006/2007 is £36,072, the budget holder for which is now the Head of Corporate Policy.

SECTION (II) - Performance Analysis

1. The Annual Report 2004/2005 included proposals for improving Scrutiny agreed by the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny Boards and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee. These are shown in **Appendix 3**, along with the progress made on each during 2005/2006.

This shows that although some areas showed improvements there were others where more development was needed.

2. During 2005/2006 the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee suggested further ways to improve the way that Scrutiny works. These are shown in **Appendix 4**.

CONCLUSION

Scrutiny has again this year continued to develop slowly. Leading Scrutiny Members have acknowledged the continuing need to improve and have identified further ways of doing this, which have already been started in 2006/2007.

APPENDIX 1
SCRUTINY BOARDS 2005/2006

	CABINET MEMBER	PORTFOLIOS	SCRUTINY BOARD MEMBERS
SCRUTINY BOARD 1	Councillor Taylor Councillor O'Neill Councillor Ridley	Policy, Leadership and Governance Finance and Equalities Corporate and Customer Services	Chair: Councillor Williams Deputy Chair: Councillor Lee Councillors: Charley, Chater, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Lacy, Nellist and Skipper
SCRUTINY BOARD 2	Councillor Bllundell Councillor Mrs. Noonan Councillor Matchet	Children's Services Community Services Health and Housing	Chair: Councillor Field Deputy Chair: Councillor Mrs. Dixon Councillors: Mrs. Griffin, Kelly, Mrs. Lancaster, Mrs. Lucas, Maskell and Mrs. Rutter Co-opted Members: Ms M. Foster, Mr. R. Potter and Mrs. L. Wainscot
SCRUTINY BOARD 3	Councillor Arrowsmith Councillor Ridley Councillor Foster	Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning Adult Education, Libraries, Sport and Leisure City Services	Chair: Councillor Ridge Deputy Chair: Councillor Batten Councillors: Asif, Auluck, Ms McKay, Mulhall, M. Noonan and Reece
SCRUTINY BOARD 4 (HEALTH)			Chair: Councillor Clifford Deputy Chair: Councillor Mrs. Stone Councillors: Ahmed, Bhyat, Crookes, Mrs. Dixon, Gazey and Ruddy Co-opted Members: Mr. T. Doyle, Miss D. Hackford, Ms S. Khan and Mr. D. Spurgeon
SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE			Chair: Councillor Sawdon Deputy Chair: Councillor Ridge Councillors: Clifford, Field, Mutton, Patton and Williams

SCRUTINY BOARD REVIEWS 2005/2006

<u>SCRUTINY BOARD</u>	<u>REVIEW TITLE</u>	<u>WHO CARRIED OUT THE REVIEW</u>	<u>PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW</u>
SCRUTINY BOARD 1	Debt Recovery Policy	Review Group comprising:- Councillor Charley Councillor Lee (Chair) Councillor Harrison Councillor Mrs. Johnson Councillor Mutton	To develop a corporate framework for debt recovery which would provide a more consistent approach across the Council.
SCRUTINY BOARD 2	City Academies	Review Group comprising:- Councillors: Chater, Crookes, Mrs. Dixon, Field (Chair), Gazey, Mrs. Lacy, Ruddy, Mrs. Stone and Williams Others: Mr. J. Vickers , Mr. B Worrall (both representing Secondary Head Teachers) Mr. R. Potter (Catholic representative) Mrs. L. Wainscot (Church of England representative)	(1) To understand the Government policy objectives and framework for academies and other strategies for the future of secondary school provision. (2) To examine objectively the proposals to establish two academies in Coventry (one replacing Woodway Park School and the other replacing Barr's Hill and Sidney Stringer Schools) in the context of Government policy. (3) To form a view on these proposals, including a consideration of alternative realistic and affordable strategies open to the City Council. This would be passed on (via Scrutiny Board (2) and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee) to the

			Cabinet, as Scrutiny's response to the consultation proposals.
<u>SCRUTINY BOARD</u>	<u>REVIEW TITLE</u>	<u>WHO CARRIED OUT THE REVIEW</u>	<u>PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW</u>
SCRUTINY BOARD 4 (HEALTH)	Increasing the Initiation and duration of Breastfeeding in Coventry and Warwickshire	Scrutiny Board 4 (Health)	To establish how services support (or fail to enable) women to breastfeed in Coventry and Warwickshire.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCRUTINY 2005/2006

(Extract from Scrutiny Annual Report 2004/2005 – Progress against action points is shown in bold)

Proposals of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny Boards and all Members of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

1. Key Roles of Scrutiny

- Holding the Executive to account
- Policy Development and Review
- Performance Management/Improvement
- External Scrutiny e.g. Health

2. Scrutiny should be non-political

It is generally acknowledged that Scrutiny works most effectively in a non-political atmosphere and this should be the aim. Appointing co-opted members might help to encourage a non-political approach.

Action:

- a) Chairs should encourage Board members to work collaboratively.

Members work well together, particularly on review work: political points are not often made in meetings and it is rare for a vote to be taken in a meeting.

- b) Each Board should also consider how to involve co-optees in their work (e.g. co-opt for particular issues or for all the Board's work).

Scrutiny Board 2 included two statutory Education co-optees and Scrutiny Board 4 included four co-optees, two of whom represented patient interests. In addition, the City Academies Review Group included four co-optees: two representing Head Teachers and two representing religious interests.

- c) Scrutiny Boards should enable those Members who are not on Scrutiny Boards to participate in their work whenever possible e.g. encourage them to attend Scrutiny Board meetings as non-voting members and consider them for appointment to review groups.

There was a standing invitation for non-Board Members to attend meetings, which at least one Member took advantage of on a regular basis.

- d) Work programmes should be "rolling" programmes which do not end with the Municipal Year. Important issues will continue whatever the political situation.

Boards took account of issues not completed in 2004/2005 when planning their 2005/2006 programmes.

- e) More consideration should be given to creating "cross-Board" review groups, made up of Members who are interested in the review topic and not determined by political balance requirements.

The City Academies Review Group was made up of interested Members, drawn from across the political groups.

- f) Those Members who wish to gain more information on a decision made by a Cabinet Member should be encouraged to do this by discussions with that Cabinet Member and/or officers before the decision is taken, rather than by calling the decision in.

Call-ins reduced from 22 in 2004/2005 to 7 in 2006/2006.

3. Role of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

The Committee should be more involved in co-ordinating the Scrutiny Board's work programmes and deciding what should be dealt with by the Committee and what should be referred to Scrutiny Boards. This could be facilitated either by the Committee membership including all Chairs (whilst still ensuring political balance) or by the Chairs and/or Deputy Chairs attending the Committee's meetings.

In 2005/2006 the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee included the Chairs of all Scrutiny Boards (Scrutiny Board 4's Chair was co-opted). It has agreed and monitored Scrutiny Boards' work programmes and agreed finance for review work. It also suggested some possible issues for Scrutiny Boards to consider.

4. Work Programmes

Boards' remits are wide and therefore they need to prioritise their work if they are to be effective. They also need to be clear about the objectives of their work. Future Comprehensive Performance Assessments will be looking for evidence that Scrutiny is contributing to the effectiveness of Council services.

Action:

- a) Boards should concentrate on review-based work, including short one-session projects, and should produce reports setting out their findings.

There has been less detailed review work than was hoped, particularly since Scrutiny Board 4's programme was skewed by statutory consultations, but Boards investigated a number of topics in some depth (see section 3 in the main report).

- b) In all issues they scrutinise, Boards should identify a realistic time-scale and expected outcomes and ensure that recommendations are followed up effectively.

Boards asked for reports back on the progress of their main recommendations: they need to ensure that they continue to follow these up systematically.

- c) Boards should also evaluate each review, to see whether or not it achieved its objectives and whether lessons can be learned for future reviews.

This did not happen in 2005/2006.

- d) If Boards wish to examine issues which have gone wrong they should be clear about why they wish to do this and should be prepared to recommend improvements.

Boards used a scoping document for reviews, which included a section for identifying the aims of the review.

They were sometimes less clear about the reasons why they wished to examine issues as part of their regular meetings.

They generally made recommendations when they examined issues.

- e) Information briefings should not be given at Board meetings, but at seminars to which all Scrutiny Members could be invited. If individual Members want to increase their knowledge of an issue, they should do this by contacting the appropriate officers to arrange a briefing.

Boards have still had information presentations, but for 2006/2007 a seminar programme has been developed to provide members with information on important issues.

- f) Conference reports should not be discussed in detail at Board meetings unless particular issues need to be followed up.

This was largely the case.

5. Proactive Scrutiny

Scrutiny needs to be more proactive. At present, many of the issues they consider have already been decided by Cabinet Members.

Action:

- a) Boards should be firmer with both Cabinet Members and officers in deciding which issues will be examined and when, at the same time ensuring that work is not being duplicated.

Officers and Scrutiny Board Chairs have been more selective about issues.

- b) Boards should use the Forward Plan, Cabinet Member plans and Cabinet Briefing information to decide which issues they wish to examine before Cabinet Members take decisions. The process in relation to scrutinising the Corporate Plan will need to be discussed further when the Plan has been drawn up.

Individual Scrutiny Boards have not made regular use of the Forward Plan, but the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee have used it to identify issues, some of which were referred to Scrutiny Boards.

Nevertheless there has been a steady increase in the number of issues being considered by Scrutiny Boards before the Cabinet.

6. Officer Resource

Officer resource across the Council is finite. Currently much of their time is taken up by the work they do in supporting the Cabinet and by review work for the two main political groups.

Action:

- a) Scrutiny should emphasise to the Cabinet and Directors that Scrutiny meetings are as important as Cabinet meetings and should be resourced appropriately.

Support improved during 205/2006, but there was still an imbalance between the support for Scrutiny and that for the Cabinet. Scrutiny members have continued to emphasise the need for change.

- b) Political groups should consider whether their review work could be carried out within the formal Scrutiny process.

7. Member Training

Members would benefit from more training, particularly in relation to questioning skills and effective meeting management. This is in addition to training identified through the individual Members' development interviews.

Action:

These training needs should be referred to the Supporting Members Advisory Panel for consideration.

A training session on these particular skills was held at the end of 2004/2005. It was intended to hold a further session in 2005/2006, but this did not happen.

However, the Chair of Scrutiny Board 4 and a Scrutiny Co-ordinator went to observe a Parliamentary Select Committee in action, which reinforced the importance of planning questions in advance of meetings to make them more effective.

8. Other issues

Further consideration should be given to the following:-

- How the public might become more involved in the Scrutiny process, including identifying review topics

The public were invited (via a press advert) to suggest review topics, but this drew little response.

Scrutiny Board 4 have involved the public in a number of the issues they have considered:

- **their breastfeeding review involved focus groups and internet based surveys**
- **their Smoking Policy review involved a survey of public houses in Coventry, with detailed statistical analysis**
- **their response to the Ambulance Service re-configuration involved a joint Coventry and Warwickshire internet-based survey with several hundred responses.**

- How the media might become more involved

Scrutiny Board 4 has been pro-active in issuing press releases about their reviews and consultations, but more work is needed in this area.

- Identifying and progressing issues arising at Area Forums

The whole structure of Area Forums was revised during the year and there has been limited opportunity to progress this.

- Involving partners and outside bodies

Scrutiny Board 2 - has involved partners, other outside organisations and service users in their work e.g. young carers were invited to tell Scrutiny Board 2 about their experiences and the sponsor of the proposed Woodway Park Academy came to speak to the Academies Review Group.

Scrutiny Board 4 has worked closely with health service partners throughout the year and has carried out some joint work with Warwickshire County Council.

The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee discussed with a senior officer of the West Midlands Fire Service their concerns about the reduction in night time fire appliances in Coventry.

- Using experts

The Health Services Research Centre at Coventry University provided extensive and vital support to Scrutiny Board 4's breastfeeding review, while the smoke-free consultation response was based on work by the Research and Strategy Team in City Development. The latter also provided support to the response to UHCW's foundation trust governance consultation.

- Learning from other authorities

Officers and Members attended a number of regional and national seminars on aspects of the scrutiny role, where they heard about best practice and were able to share experiences with other authorities.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board 4 attended (as an observer) an evidence session of the House of Commons Health Select Committee.

Future development of Scrutiny (agreed by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on 24th May, 2006)

1. More focussed approach

1.1. Scrutiny Boards need to be more systematic in establishing their work programmes and should bear in mind the following points when putting together their programmes:-

- (a) The number of issues must be realistic.
- (b) There should be a balance between issues which require lengthy consideration and some "quick wins".
- (c) Issues should not all be centred on one directorate or client group.
- (d) Generally, Scrutiny work should not duplicate work already in hand (although this should not prevent Scrutiny considering issues if they feel it important to do so) or completed.
- (e) Boards need to be clear about why they are looking at issues and what value scrutiny can add.

1.2. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee should ensure that it continues to be closely involved in the Boards' work programmes by :-

- a) Approving work programmes at the beginning of the Municipal Year.
- b) Approving any changes to work programmes which might materially effect the initial programme.
- c) Approving the finance for review work
- d) Monitoring the work of the Boards on a quarterly basis.

2. Meetings

2.1. Hold fewer formal meetings and concentrate more on review work. Currently things still very much resemble old "committee" type meetings. In future these should be restricted to considering "regular" issues (such as monitoring Cabinet Member plans and other strategic plans).

2.2. Put more emphasis on establishing "task and finish" groups, which should be open to all non-executive members and (where appropriate) involve stakeholders and external experts. Members of the public should also be involved more in review work, by asking them to provide information for the Scrutiny Boards to consider, attending meetings to speak to the Boards/Groups or by being co-opted to a review /task and finish group in order to provide specific expertise. Efforts should be made to meet in venues other than the Council House.

2.3. Move away from receiving information by way of officer presentations at meetings and instead produce an annual programme of seminars for all Elected Members, aimed at keeping Members informed about the major issues facing the Council and forming part of members' general training programme.

3. Reviews

3.1. concentrate more on review topics and use the following criteria for deciding to review an issue:-

- a) An important issue affecting many residents or a specific client group.
- b) A poor performance service (using evidence from performance indicators / benchmarking / complaints).
- c) An area where value for money is questionable.
- d) An issue raised by external inspection.
- e) An issue where new government guidelines or legislation is imminent.

4. Officer support

4.1. If Scrutiny is to become more effective and seen as a useful tool in improving the Council's work, it is crucial that it has sufficient officer support across directorates. There are currently 3 officers (part of the Chief Executive's Directorate) dedicated to supporting Scrutiny. This needs to be supplemented by officers in other directorates, so that Scrutiny receives support equal to that given to the Cabinet.

5. "Tracking" Recommendations

5.1. There should be more rigorous follow-up of whether Cabinet Members have agreed Scrutiny recommendations and of whether they have subsequently been implemented. The "tracking" document previously agreed (or something similar) should be used for this where appropriate.