

Scrutiny Boards' Annual Report to Council 2009/2010

To be considered at the City Council meeting
on 14th September, 2010

Scrutiny Boards' Annual Report to Council 2009/2010

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Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/2010

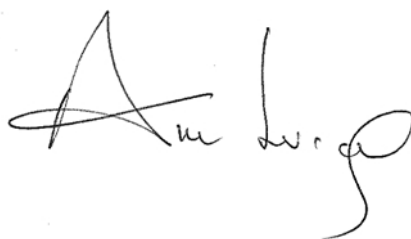
Introduction by Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

In May this year the Council appointed me as Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee. This is a role which is new to me, although I have many years' experience as a member of various Council committees and more recently as a Cabinet Member and a Scrutiny Board member. I am very keen to use the opportunity my appointment gives me to help to steer the development of Scrutiny during the coming year.

Scrutiny has developed steadily over the years since it first began in 2000 and now looks very different from those early days. Last year continued this development and some good work was done across a wide range of issues. This report summarises just a few examples which illustrate the breadth of issues covered by the Boards and the report provides links to more information about the rest of Scrutiny's work during the year.

Deciding priority issues for their work programmes, and achieving the right balance across Cabinet portfolios, is a continuing challenge for the Boards. This is especially the case in the current economic climate in which local government and its partners face some very difficult decisions. However, I believe that Scrutiny has an important role to play in this process, helping to make sure that the best possible decisions are made for local people.

I am looking forward to working with all my Scrutiny colleagues, and others who express an interest in being involved with particular issues, to continue to increase the effectiveness of Scrutiny in improving the Council's performance and influencing the development of policy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Lucas'.

Councillor Ann Lucas
Chair, Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Remit

In 2009/2010 the Committee continued to be responsible for the overall management of the Scrutiny function (including call-ins), consideration of cross-cutting issues and oversight of the portfolio of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance).

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Arrowsmith, Charley (up to December 2009), Clifford, Crookes (Deputy Chair), Duggins, Maton, Mutton, Reece (from December 2009), Ridge (Chair).

Co-opted members for education matters: Mrs. D. Beech, Mrs. S. Hanson, Mrs. R. Hickingbotham, Mr. R. Potter and Mrs. L. Wainscot (1 vacancy).

Activities and outcomes

Scrutiny Management issues

The Committee received regular reports from Scrutiny Chairs on the work of their Boards. Detailed information about these can be found in the regular Chairs' reports for:

[June to September](#)

[October to December](#)

[January to March](#)

which are available on the Council's website.

The Committee also received reports on urgent issues and outside bodies (the external organisations to which the Council appoints representatives).

There were no valid call-ins made in 2009/2010 and during the year changes were made to the call-in procedure to make it more streamlined.

Cross-cutting issues

The Committee were given quarterly progress reports on the work of the Transformation Partnership. It also considered the Council's pre-Budget report, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and a report on the Council's charging policy.

Two summaries of work undertaken by the Committee in 2009/10

Performance Issues

The Committee considered a number of reports relating to different aspects of performance – Cabinet Member Plan reviews, progress on the Local Area Agreement and the outcome of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. The Committee ensured that priority issues where performance was not progressing to target were being addressed in the work programmes of the Scrutiny Boards.

Scrutiny of Coventry Partnership



The Committee scrutinised the work of the Partnership by asking the individual Scrutiny Boards to question relevant Theme Group Chairs and Advisors, as well as itself questioning the Chair and Manager of the Partnership. The Committee was particularly keen to understand achievements, challenges and barriers to partnership working and the added value being achieved by working together.

The [final report](#) is available on the Council's website.

Customers, Communities, Finance and Workforce Scrutiny Board (1)

Remit

In 2009/2010, Scrutiny Board 1 was responsible for scrutinising the Finance and Value for Money, Customer, Workforce and Legal Services and Neighbourhoods and Community Safety portfolios. It was also designated as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, responsible for the scrutiny of the Coventry Community Safety Partnership

Membership

Councillors Arrowsmith (Chair), Auluck, Bains, Charley, Kelly, Lapsa, Nellist and Smith (Deputy Chair).

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues which fell within its remit and details of these are set out in the regular reports to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee highlighted on page 4.

Three summaries of scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2009/10

Review of Alcohol Licensing Enforcement

The Board identified alcohol licensing enforcement as an issue for detailed discussion because of its potential for helping to reduce the levels of violent crime and anti-social behaviour in Coventry. It took evidence from a police representative and from Council officers about how arrangements work currently and how they might be improved. It also approved (and considered the results from) a questionnaire which was used to gauge the views of managers and owners of licensed premises about the current arrangements.



The Board made three main recommendations, including establishing a team comprising all the agencies involved in the licensing enforcement process and delivering training to a range of officers, councillors and other agencies involved in that process. The Board asked for a progress report in six months' time on the implementation of these recommendations.

Helping to Reduce Sickness Absence Levels

The Council has been concerned for some time about high levels of employee sickness absence and the Scrutiny Board has worked for a number of years to help to reduce them.

In 2009/10 the Board continued its work of questioning the heads of those service areas where sickness levels are particularly high. This led to it recommending the introduction of two pilot schemes for nurse-led sickness reporting by employees, which would also incorporate a round-the-clock facility for employees to seek medical advice.

The Board monitored the progress of these schemes and were informed that since the introduction of one of them in the Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance teams in December 2009, there has been a 24% reduction in short-term frequent sickness absences. In addition, employees have said that they value the facility for obtaining medical advice.

Overall, the Board's work has helped to raise the profile of sickness absence, which has contributed to a gradual reduction in levels, although there is still further work to be done.

Customer Services Strategy

The Board were asked to contribute to the development of a Customer Services Strategy for the Council. It set up a small Task and Finish Group to do this work, which made a number of suggestions about what should be included in the final version of the Strategy. The Group's [report](#) is available on the council's website.

The Board asked for a report on the implementation of the Strategy after its first year of operation.

Children, Young People, Learning & Leisure Scrutiny Board (2)

Remit

In 2009/10 the Scrutiny Board was responsible for scrutiny of the Children, Learning and Young People and Culture, Leisure and Libraries Portfolios.

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Andrews, Crookes (Chair), Field, Kelsey, Lucas, Mutton, Ruane, Waters.

Co-opted: Mr Potter (Roman Catholic Church), Mrs Wainscott / Mrs Hanson (Church of England), Mrs Hickingbotham (Primary Parent), Mrs Beech (added Governor non-voting).

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues which fell within its remit and details of these are set out in the regular reports to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee highlighted on page 4.

Three summaries of scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2009/10

Safeguarding

Over recent years the Scrutiny Board has dedicated two meetings annually to Safeguarding. This has been in response to the annual performance assessments of Children's Services in the City (with Safeguarding receiving a lower assessment than the other Every Child Matters assessments) and also additional concerns by Members following the Baby Peter case.

In the first meeting (in November 2009), the Board met with local partners (from West Midlands Police, local NHS agencies and the voluntary sector) to discuss the range of different activities in the City to protect children and young people. The follow up meeting in March focused more specifically on the role of Safeguarding in Education, the work of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the role they play in Safeguarding and issues around training, most specifically for teachers and governors.

During the year, the work of the Board was featured in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's guide to Scrutiny's role in safeguarding children.



Safeguarding children
scrutiny guide



[cfps Safeguarding children scrutiny guide](#)

Transfer of Learning and Skills Council Planning and Funding Responsibilities / Apprenticeships and Work-Based Placements

Following consideration of a report into the transfer of funding responsibilities for 14-19 education from the Learning and Skills Council, the Board resolved to express concern at the current position regarding apprenticeships and work-based placements available within the City Council. Members were extremely concerned that with the traditional patterns of employment in the City shifting away from manufacturing, new emphasis was needed from the Council and other public sector employers to find new opportunities for apprenticeships and work-based training.

The Board requested the Director of Customer and Workforce Services to report on current levels and plans to respond to the changing shape of the local jobs market.

Children's Transport

A review group was established to consider home to school transport, as the budget had been exceeded for many years. The Board decided to concentrate initially on transport for children with special educational needs and commissioned information, considered a number of policy options and made seven recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People). These were aimed at balancing the provision of safe and reliable transport services with the need to promote young people to be independent and to go on to lead fulfilling lives as adults.

The Cabinet Member accepted the majority of these recommendations and during the course of 2010/2011 the Scrutiny Board intends to review how these have been implemented and their impact.

Economy and Environment Scrutiny Board (3)

Remit

In 2009/10 the Scrutiny Board was responsible for scrutiny of the City Development, City Services and Climate Change, Housing and Sustainability Portfolios.

Membership

Councillors Adalat, Andrews, Auluck, Lakha (Deputy Chair), Lancaster, Lucas, Mulhall, Reece (Chair) and Ridge.

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues which fell within its remit and details of these are set out in the regular reports to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee highlighted on page 4.

Three summaries of scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2009/10

Ironmonger Square

The Board had been involved with the Ironmonger Square plans since their inception and welcomed the opportunity to comment on the revised plans. The Board undertook a visit to the undercroft, which enabled them to see the structural issues. The press were also invited to visit which led to a two-page spread in the local paper showing the people of Coventry the reason for the delays in completing Ironmonger Square. The Board asked the Cabinet to consider the implications of the revised scheme and the safety of pedestrian access from West Orchards to the new square, which will be picked up in the capital programme for 2010/11.



Members of the Scrutiny Board Members visiting the undercroft below Ironmonger Square

Primelines

The Primelines project has been considered twice by Scrutiny Board 3 during 2009/10. Members were invited on a bus tour of Coventry which used two of the main Primeline routes. This helped to inform the discussion in the meeting, as Members had been able to see at first hand the benefits of the scheme. It also enabled them to understand and question areas of the scheme which did not seem to work as anticipated. At the follow up meeting, a representative from National Express, Coventry was present to give an operator's perspective on the scheme, as well as key City Council employees. The Board noted the significant increase in bus user satisfaction following the delivery of Primelines and the delivery of the key outcomes. However, the Board were not satisfied that all outcomes have yet been delivered and will continue to monitor progress with CCTV cameras, bus traffic light priority, and real time information on bus stop boards.

The Winter Blues – Potholes and Gritting

The Board were given the opportunity during August, to observe the Nu-Phalt road repair system in action to enable them to see how new technology can be used to repair potholes (see pictures below). This gave Members a better understanding of the work involved. The visit was opened up to all Members of the Council to maximise involvement, which resulted in a good turn out for the demonstration. This helped to inform a subsequent item on potholes which was brought to the Board following concerns from Members and from the public about the increased numbers of potholes following the extended cold weather conditions during January and February.

The Scrutiny Board were provided with an update on the situation regarding the problem of potholes and asked a number of questions about the repair options and how holes were being prioritised for repair, given the extent of the problem and the resource available to tackle the issue.

The Board also asked officers a number of questions about gritting and decided it should be involved in the future review of the gritting network and that the Director of City Services and Development be requested to give consideration to publicity to encourage the public to make use of the grit in the salt bins when it has snowed.



Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (4)

Remit

In 2009/10, Scrutiny Board 4 was responsible for scrutinising the Community Services portfolio, and was additionally the City Council's designated Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee under the Health and Social Care Act 2001, incorporating scrutiny of local NHS services.

Membership

Councillors: Councillors Adalat (Deputy Chair), Asif, Clifford (Chair), Gazey, Matchet, Mrs M Mutton, Sweet, Windsor

Co-opted: David Spurgeon (representing Coventry LINK).

Activities and outcomes

The Board scrutinised a range of issues which fell within its remit and details of these are set out in the regular reports to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee highlighted on page 4.

Three summaries of scrutiny work undertaken by the Board in 2009/10

Building on Experience

In 2007 the Board had commissioned a successful piece of work investigating the experiences of older people before and after discharge at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW) 'Learning from Experience'.



Researchers from the project

Last year the Board responded to concerns from the Physical and Sensory Impairment Partnership to commission a further study of the experiences of older people with a physical or sensory impairment. 'Building on Experience' contrasts the responses of patients to questions about their care whilst in hospital and following discharge and resulted in a number of recommendations being made to UHCW about patient inclusion, temperature and noise on wards, food, complaints processes and the discharge process itself.

Chief Executives' Question and Answer Session

The Board annually takes the opportunity to invite the Chief Executives of the main health bodies serving Coventry to a meeting to answer the Board's questions on issues relating to the Coventry population's health.

In January the Board met with the Chief Executives of NHS Coventry, UHCW and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust plus a senior Director from the West Midlands Ambulance Service to discuss issues including:

- Urgent Care Pathways and pressure on Emergency Services
- End of Life Care
- Immunisation and Vaccination levels
- Transforming Mental Health
- Partnership working and links to the Fire Service.

The meeting was a major part of the Board holding local NHS managers to account and contributed towards greater collaboration between the City Council and local agencies and a better understanding for the Board of current NHS priorities.

Joint Director of Public Health Annual Report

Directors of Public Health have a statutory power to issue reports regarding the public health of the areas they serve. Coventry's Joint Director has adopted this practice over recent years and these reports have helped to shape the direction of service reform to respond directly to the public health needs of Coventry.

In response to concerns that some recommendations were recurring in 2009/10, the Board decided that it would formally request local agencies to respond publicly to the Director's recommendations regarding the 2009/10 report '*Coventry Time Bomb*' which focussed on the diseases which are most likely to increase as the population ages. The Board promptly received responses from all local health services and the Council's Director of Community Services to confirm that individual recommendations were being progressed or adopted.



More information on Scrutiny at Coventry City Council is available on the Council's website at www.coventry.gov.uk/scrutiny or from:

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