



Coventry City Council

**DRAFT**

**SCRUTINY BOARDS'  
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE  
CITY COUNCIL  
2004 / 2005**

To be considered at the City Council meeting  
on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2005

---

## **FOREWORD**



In commending this report to Members, I do not intend to reiterate details that it contains.

One thing we have learnt from meeting with other authorities is that everybody's interpretation of what Scrutiny means is different and that we all have a variety of structures to suit our individual needs.

The change in political control of the Council has required Members from all sides to embark upon a steep learning curve. Some Members had no previous experience of Scrutiny, whereas others took time to appreciate that challenging the Executive should not be regarded as an 'act of betrayal' but as an essential part of reaching sensible decisions.

With the criticisms of the CPA in mind, I have been acutely aware of the sensitivities surrounding Scrutiny's political make-up and am grateful that Members have, for the most part, resisted the urge for party political wrangling and started to concentrate on the proposals outlined in Appendix 3.

I'd particularly like to thank the small team of officers – too small in my opinion – who have serviced the Boards. Their skills, effort, determination and enthusiasm to make scrutiny succeed has been inspirational.

It is all too apparent – and this is nothing new – that the Scrutiny process is far short of achieving the high profile that it should have. Both senior officers and, dare I say, some Cabinet Members do not appear to fully appreciate that the Scrutiny system is central to the Council's political process and not just an occasional irritant to be attended to when it suits them.

Whilst the enthusiasm of Members is to be welcomed – and I am more than appreciative of the efforts put in by the majority of Members – we need to be much sharper in scoping reviews, particularly in envisaging outcomes before we embark upon them. It is easy to decide what to do; it is more difficult to decide what not to do.

In conclusion, on the one hand the report demonstrates some positive achievements and some valuable changes to the way we work. On the other hand, it highlights that we have a long way to go to achieve a robust Scrutiny process.

Councillor Tim Sawdon  
Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee 2004/2005

## **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 2004 / 2005, sets out evaluation of their performance and outlines future developments.

## **Background**

This is the third 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 2004, the Council reduced the number of Scrutiny Boards from 5 to 4 and consequently the remits of the Boards (apart from the Board responsible for Health Scrutiny) were different from 2003/2004. Details of the membership of each Board and its allocated Cabinet portfolios are set out in **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 1.2 In general, each Scrutiny Board met monthly, although Scrutiny Boards (2), (3) and (4) also 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, which took into account topics identified by Members, employees, partner organisations and members of the public, were reviewed at each meeting. 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 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 two question and answer sessions with NHS senior officers, one in collaboration with Warwickshire County Council.

Strategic Plans form part of the Council's new performance management process. This 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. The Boards were not afforded a formal opportunity during the year to review the progress of the Strategic Plans. In future years it is intended that the Plans will be produced in June/July, with a formal review 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).**

#### **i. Audit Work**

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

- The Board has received quarterly monitoring reports on the work of the Council's Internal Audit Division.
- The Board has approved the Internal Audit strategy and operational plan for 2005 / 2006.
- The Board held a special meeting to consider the Joint External Audit and Inspection letter for 2003 / 2004, which summarised the issues of significance drawn out by the work of the External Auditors and the Audit Commission's Inspectors. This was the first time that a joint letter had been issued.
- In September 2004, the Board held a training session on the internal audit process, aimed at giving Members (particularly new Members), more knowledge of the process.

#### **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.
- A presentation on the Prudential Borrowing Code.
- A progress report on the Council's new training development and learning strategy.
- Regular reports on the Council's Promoting Health at Work policy, keeping the Board aware of the levels of sickness absence within the City Council.
- Progress reports on Coventry Direct (the Council's programme to deliver its customer services, e-government, and ICT Strategy). Members were particularly interested in the proposed contact centre and decided to visit Manchester City Council's Contact Centre which has been operating for some time. This allowed Members to see at first hand a contact centre in operation and the potential such a centre has for helping to improve service provision.
- An overview of recruitment and retention undertaken by the Human Resources function, which outlined the action being taken to improve this element of the Council's work.

## **Scrutiny Board (2)**

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

The Board met on 13 occasions formally, and held a number of seminars and site visits additionally.

The Board considered a number of major issues over the 2004/05 year including:

Eligibility Criteria / Disabled Facilities Grants – the Board considered proposals for the application of new eligibility criteria to adults requiring Social Services support. The Boards followed up the decision of the Council by receiving a report on the impact of the new changes following the removal of the "part moderate" category.

The Learning Disabilities Partnership Board were invited to attend a special meeting of the Board to look into their work and discuss issues of relevance to people with learning disabilities. The meeting was extremely informative and involved representatives of the PCT, Social Services, carers and significantly service users themselves.

The Children's Act introduced a Government initiative that had been well signposted, to move towards Children's Services Directorates. The Board has twice met with the Chief Executive and other senior officers to discuss the process of change in Coventry, and the Board anticipate holding further meetings on this subject as the move is completed.

Carers' issues were of concern to the Board, and an initial meeting took place with representatives of the Carers' Centre and Crossroads, the two main Carers' organisations in Coventry along with Social Services officers to raise issues related to how the City Council supports carers. A further meeting will be held with a cross-section of carers (including young carers) to develop in detail issues raised at the initial meeting.

The Board also took an interest in the battle against anti-social behaviour, taking a particular interest in the proposed re-configuration of neighbourhood warden services in the City. The Board also considered Government consultations on binge-drinking and prostitution, amongst others.

One Government Green Paper which the Board became involved with, was "Independence, Well-being and Choice". The Director of Social Services arranged for one of the report's authors to attend a consultation event for the various groups interested in the future of adult services, and Board Members took a full part in this.

Lord Laming's Report - The Board co-ordinated visits to the four Children's Locality Services in line with Lord Laming's recommendations and visited the successful Children's Conference.

As part of the consultation on the proposed changes to Brandon Wood Farm, the Board visited this facility, which provides day services for adults with learning disabilities.

The Board also facilitated a group of Members to meet with representatives of the children in the care of the City Council (or "looked after"). This group, now known as "the Voices of Care", has become established and will be a welcome addition to the Council's Corporate Parenting activities.

### **Scrutiny Board (3)**

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

During the 2004/05 civic year, Scrutiny Board (3) held 15 formal meetings and a number of site visits.

The Board spent some time on the introduction of the Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement (DPE) in Coventry. Members established a Working Group to look in detail at the proposals to take over DPE powers, making recommendations regarding on-street parking charges and residents' parking schemes.

The Board maintained an interest in the developing Ricoh Arena, having initially held a site visit to see the early stages of development on the site. The Board also received proposals for the Arena Green Travel Plan, and various proposals for car parking restrictions around the new football ground.

The Board was twice briefed on progress towards the hosting of the International Children's Games. The Business Vitality Programme, a project set up by the City Council and CVOne to stimulate the retail and leisure sectors in the city centre, was also the subject of regular reports to the Board.

In March 2005 the Board held its first meeting outside of the Council House. Members visited the new Arena Library and the recently re-developed Foleshill Library before going on to hold a meeting in the new library at Bell Green. Here Members met with the City Librarian to discuss the plans for developing the library service, and continuing the improvements in performance against nationally set standards.

The Board had a report on the Jacobs Babtie contract referred to it by Cabinet, and in January Members met to discuss the performance of the new "framework contract". Members recommended that the contract be renewed for a year, but that further work be undertaken to establish whether or not the contract was proving to be effective or was providing value for money. This work will be completed in the coming civic year.

Members requested a report from the Director of City Development containing information about empty Council property within the City Centre. This prompted Members to arrange to visit the Drapers' Hall, Whitefriars and the Old Grammar School (which is owned privately). The Board were keen to promote sustainable uses of these historic buildings, and where possible ensure that periods of non-occupancy were kept to a minimum.

The Board received a report on the development of bus services in the City following the publication of the TASS report during the previous year. This work will also be followed up in the 2005/06 civic year.

The Board briefly considered a number of other issues including grass verge policy, cycle ways, traffic calming and the Liveability Agenda project.

### **Scrutiny Board (4) (Health)**

The Board published two formal reports this year:

- Statutory consultation on the development of dental training and specialist dentistry in the West Midlands (published January 2005 – seven recommendations)
- Health and Social Care Services, City Centre – Update (published March 2005 – four recommendations)

The Board considered responses to its reports:

- University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust Emergency Services Consultation (published May 2004, response considered July 2004)
- Statutory consultation on the development of dental training and specialist dentistry for the West Midlands (published January 2005, response considered 30 March 2005)

The Board hosted two question and answer sessions with NHS senior officers, putting questions to officers from Coventry Teaching Primary Care Trust, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority, and Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust. As part of one of these sessions, the Board undertook a tour of the Women's Unit in the new Walsgrave Hospital, held a question and answer session on the A&E transfer, and invited Councillors from Warwickshire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to participate.

The Board initiated or continued with work on the following reviews:

- Review of the distribution of GP services in Coventry (review launched 2003-04)
- Review of increasing the initiation and duration of breastfeeding in Coventry and Warwickshire (review launched 2004-05)

The Board secured £19,700 external funding for this review following competitive selection by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Coventry's application was one of only nine nationally to receive funding. In January 2005 the Board hosted a successful launch conference for this review, which was attended by over 180 delegates and speakers from across the country. This review has included close partnership working with Warwickshire County Council, Coventry University, local NHS organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

The Board received presentations and information on a number of topics, including:

- George Eliot Hospital foundation status application
- Patient and Public Involvement in Health (on several occasions)
- Coventry Local Improvement Finance Trust (on several occasions)
- Renal dialysis services
- School nutrition

The Board agreed a joint response with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust to the national consultation on the future support arrangements for patient and public involvement in health. This was the first joint response to a national consultation agreed between a Coventry scrutiny board and a local NHS organisation. The Chair was in correspondence with the Minister of State for Health on this subject.

Members attended a workshop session in Rugby as part of the Warwickshire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of air quality.

Members attended a meeting of Birmingham City Council Health Scrutiny Committee as part of the statutory consultation on dental education and specialist dentistry in the West Midlands.

Members made visits to the Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service HQ in Leamington Spa and the A&E department at Walsgrave Hospital.

The Board hosted a visit by the NHS Independent Reconfiguration Panel and engaged in correspondence with the National Audit Office.

### **Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee**

This Committee, which is responsible for the overall management of the Scrutiny function, continued to meet weekly in 2004/2005. Its membership is set out in Appendix 1.

The Committee has tried to be more pro-active in its work this year:-

- It looked at the progress made on recommendations from Best Value Reviews and Scrutiny Reviews carried out over the past 3 years and identified areas where action was still needed.
- It was very concerned at the increasing building costs of the Coventry Transport Museum. It therefore undertook a review of this issue, which was frustrated because crucial information was missing. It nevertheless produced a report on its findings, which incorporated two recommendations to the Cabinet.
- It has started a process of identifying issues which Scrutiny Boards could consider.



The Committee has continued to consider call-ins, the number of which has decreased considerably this year from 49 to 22. Of these, the Committee decided that one was "not appropriate" because the issue had been considered by a Scrutiny Board in the preceding 6 months, one was subsequently withdrawn and three call-ins were formally referred back to the Cabinet Member for further consideration. One of these related to the restoration of the Boat House at Coombe Country Park: the Committee visited the Boat House and recommended that the Cabinet Member should identify alternative uses for the building. In addition, they commissioned a breakdown of the funding/income of the Country Park.

### **3. Scrutiny Reviews and Best Value Reviews**

7 Scrutiny reviews have been undertaken this year, some of which are continuing. As last year, different approaches were used to carry out these reviews: some involved the whole Scrutiny Board, others used smaller review groups. External consultants were used to advise on two reviews carried out by Scrutiny Board (4) (Health).

Details of each Scrutiny review topic and its progress is set out in **Appendix 2** to this report.

One Best Value Review has been carried out this year, relating to Community Centres. The membership of the Review Group was as follows:-

Councillor	Asif	Councillor Johnson
Councillor	Benefield	Councillor McKay
Councillor	Bhyat	Councillor Sawdon
Councillor	Chater	Councillor Skipper
Councillor	Dixon	Councillor Stone
Councillor	Johnson	

The Review Group has completed its work, but officers are still working on the final report.

### **4. Budget**

The Scrutiny budget for 2004/2005 was £34,500, which was allocated as follows:-

Each Scrutiny Board	-	£3,000
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	-	£22,500 (to be a contingency, against which Scrutiny Boards could submit bids for additional funding)

Of this sum £11,116 was spent, of which £8,189 was spent by Scrutiny Board (4) (Health).

In addition, Scrutiny Board (4) secured external funding of £19,700 for its review of increasing the initiation and duration of breastfeeding in Coventry and Warwickshire. Of this sum, £7061.51 was spent in 2004/2005.

The budget for 2005/2006 is £35,190, which has been allocated as follows:-

Each Board	-	£ 3,000
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	-	£23,190

The allocation for each Board is intended to cover its general running costs. If a Board wishes to carry out a review, it must obtain approval for additional funding from the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

## **SECTION (II) - Performance Analysis**

### **What has gone well**

1. A number of training /learning opportunities have been provided this year:
  - A training session soon after the May elections (primarily for new Members, but open to all) giving general information about the Scrutiny process and outlining the review process.
  - A workshop led by the Improvement and Development Agency, reminding members of the key roles and principles of effective Scrutiny and considering how the Scrutiny process could be developed and improved in Coventry.
  - A visit to Bristol City Council to look at how Scrutiny is carried out.
  - A workshop on the effective scrutiny of finance, run by the training arm of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.
  - A training session on effective meetings (including questioning) and chairing skills

All of these provided an opportunity for members to increase their skills, although attendance was patchy.

2. Protocols for scoping Scrutiny reviews and for tracking review recommendations were agreed by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.
3. The Chairs and Deputy Chairs of all Scrutiny Boards and all members of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee have met three times this year, giving members the opportunity to exchange information about the work of the Scrutiny Boards and to start to develop ideas of how Scrutiny can be improved.

They also hosted a meeting with elected members of Darlington City Council, who explained how they carry out Scrutiny.

4. Efforts have been made to involve the public and the Council's employees in suggesting scrutiny review topics:-
  - Forms were given out at the Council's Open Day
  - Employees were sent an e-mail encouraging them to suggest topics

- An advertisement was placed in "Smile" (Walsgrave Hospital's patient magazine)
  - The Citizen's Panel was used to identify health topics.
5. External funding (for the Breastfeeding Review) was secured for the first time, following national competitive selection.
  6. Some Scrutiny Board meetings have been held outside the Council House:-
    - At Walsgrave Hospital
    - At the Arena Library
  7. There has been some joint working with other local authorities (on health issues)
  8. A number of visits have been made, to:-
    - Brandon Wood Farm
    - Children's locality offices
    - Libraries in the north of the city
    - Coventry and Warwickshire Ambulance Service HQ, Leamington Spa
    - Accident and Emergency Unit at Walsgrave Hospital
  9. Recommendations from scrutiny reviews have been acted on by Cabinet Members (34 out of 35 relating to the decriminalisation of car parking) and Coventry Teaching PCT (who decided to launch a public consultation on its proposals for city centre health services).
  10. Information about the Scrutiny function, including the reports from past reviews, has been published on the Council's website for the first time.
  11. Officer support has improved this year, but could still be better; most resources continued to be concentrated on supporting Cabinet Members.
  12. Scrutiny Board (4) has carried out some innovative work, details of which are shown earlier in this report.

### **What has not gone so well**

1. Work programmes (particularly for Scrutiny Boards (2) and (3)) have been very full, but have included information items, routine monitoring reports and items aimed mainly at increasing Members' knowledge of topics. The Boards need to prioritise their work and be more focussed in future and investigate and challenge more effectively.
2. The Boards have rarely considered issues prior to Cabinet Members making their decisions, so there has been little scope for their views to be taken into account. Therefore Scrutiny has had little influence on decision-making.
3. Review work this year has been limited and some have not reported on time, largely due to pressures on officers' time. More careful consideration needs to be given to choosing review topics to ensure that they are worthwhile and

likely to add value to the Council's work and to the initial planning stages so that the objectives of the review are clear.

4. Apart from the initial topic suggestion process, there has been little public involvement in Scrutiny's work.
5. In general, the Boards have continued to operate very much like old style committees and have rarely used more innovative ways of working e.g. commissioning research, consultation with stakeholders, surveys, probing question sessions. As a symptom of this problem, the Boards have once again not spent their budgets.
6. Members and officers are still uncertain about the role of Scrutiny and how it can add value to the Council's work.

### **How can Scrutiny improve?**

The Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny Boards and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee have discussed this issue and have produced a document which sets out proposals for improving Scrutiny. **This document is attached as Appendix (3).**

This is a starting point for future developments and can be built on during 2005/2006.

As part of this, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee has already introduced, for 2005/2006, a procedure for considering and approving Scrutiny Boards' proposals for review topics, including the allocation of finance. The purpose of this is not only to ensure that there is no duplication between Boards, but also to commit more clearly financial resources to the major reviews which will be carried out this year.

### **CONCLUSION**

Scrutiny has continued to develop slowly this year and has had variable impact. However, leading Scrutiny Members have acknowledged the need to improve and have identified ways to do this which can be developed over 2005/2006.

**SCRUTINY BOARDS 2004/2005**

	<b><u>CABINET MEMBER</u></b>	<b><u>PORTFOLIOS</u></b>	<b><u>SCRUTINY BOARD MEMBERS</u></b>
SCRUTINY BOARD 1	Councillor Taylor Councillor O'Neill Councillor Ridley	Policy, Leadership and Governance Finance and Equalities Corporate and Customer Services	Chair: Councillor Kelsey Deputy Chair: Councillor Williams Councillors: Charley, Duggins, Harrison, Lee, Mutton, and Nellist
SCRUTINY BOARD 2	Councillor Blundell Councillor Mrs Noonan Councillor Matchet	Children's Services Community Services Health and Housing	Chair: Councillor Field Deputy Chair: Councillor Dixon Councillors: Griffin, Kelly, Lancaster, Lucas, Maskell and Rutter Co-opted Members: L. Wainscot, R. Potter, M. Foster
SCRUTINY BOARD 3	Councillor Arrowsmith Councillor Ahmed Councillor Foster	Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning Adult Education, Libraries and Leisure City Services	Chair: Councillor Harper Deputy Chair: Councillor Basu Councillors: Asif, Auluck, Lee, McNicholas, M. Noonan and Patton
SCRUTINY BOARD 4 (HEALTH)			Chair: Councillor Ridge Deputy Chair: Councillor Reece Councillors: Asif, Bhyat, Hunter, Clifford, Crookes, and McKay Co-opted Members: T. Doyle, D. Hackford, S. Khan, D. Spurgeon
SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE	Chair: Councillor Sawdon	Deputy Chair: Councillor Ridge	Chair: Councillor Sawdon Deputy Chair: Councillor Ridge Councillors: Clifford, Johnson, Mutton and Patton

**APPENDIX 2**

**SCRUTINY BOARD REVIEWS 2004/2005**

<b><u>SCRUTINY BOARD</u></b>	<b><u>REVIEW TITLE</u></b>	<b><u>WHO CARRIED OUT THE REVIEW</u></b>	<b><u>DETAILS OF THE REVIEW</u></b>
SCRUTINY BOARD 1	Debt Recovery Policy	Review Group comprising:-  Councillor Charley Councillor Lee (Chair) Councillor Harrison Councillor Mrs. Johnson Councillor Mutton	<p>The Review Group began its work in December 2004.</p> <p>Its aim was to produce a corporate framework for debt recovery, which would provide a more consistent approach across the Council.</p> <p>The Review Group has taken into account best practice in other local authorities and has consulted appropriate outside agencies and Council employees.</p> <p>The Review Group has yet to report, but has almost completed its work.</p>
SCRUTINY BOARD 3	Decriminalisation of Parking	Working Group comprising:-  Councillor Asif Councillor Batten Councillor Mrs Harper (Chair) Councillor Mrs Johnson Councillor McNicholas Councillor M. Noonan Councillor Mrs Stone	<p>Scrutiny Board (3) was asked to consider various draft proposals for policy decisions to be taken on the introduction of Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement. The Board established a short-life working group of interested Members, which held two meetings in January 2005 and reported to the Cabinet Member for Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning in February 2005.</p>

	<p>Green Spaces in Coventry</p>	<p>Review Group comprising:</p> <p>Councillor Asif  Councillor Mrs Basu (Chair)  Councillor Gazey  Councillor Mrs Johnson  Councillor McNicholas  Councillor Skipper  Councillor Mrs Stone</p>	<p>The Working Group made recommendations on the proposals for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The introduction of on-street parking charges</li> <li>➤ The review of on and off-street parking enforcement</li> <li>➤ The City Council's Car Parking Strategy</li> <li>➤ The introduction and management of Residents' Parking Schemes.</li> </ul> <p>Scrutiny Board (3) will receive an initial review of the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement in September 2005.</p> <p>The Review Group began its work in October 2004, and has held six meetings so far.</p> <p>The Group intended to review the provision of green space in the City, beginning in the City Centre. The Group held two walking tours of the City Centre and met and took evidence from City Development Directorate Officers and representatives from CVOne and English Landscapes regarding related matters.</p> <p>The Group has completed an interim report, specifically regarding the City Centre, and has decided to limit its further work to preparing maps for Members of the City Council which will show the green space and other public open space in their respective wards.</p> <p>The work is expected to be completed later in 2005/2006.</p>
--	---------------------------------	--	---

<u>SCRUTINY BOARD</u>	<u>REVIEW TITLE</u>	<u>WHO CARRIED OUT THE REVIEW</u>	<u>DETAILS OF THE REVIEW</u>
SCRUTINY BOARD 4 (HEALTH)	1. Distribution of G.P. services in Coventry  2. Statutory consultation on the development of dental training and specialist dentistry for the West Midlands  3. Increasing the Initiation and duration of Breastfeeding in Coventry and Warwickshire  4. Health and Social Care Services, City centre - Update	Scrutiny Board 4 (Health)  Scrutiny Board (4) (Health)  Scrutiny Board 4 (Health)  Scrutiny Board (4) (Health)	The review started in 2003, with the intention of finishing during 2004. However, for a number of reasons, the review has not yet finished.  The completion of the review is a priority for 2005.  Response to statutory consultation by South Birmingham PCT  The review is financed by external funding from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.  It started with a launch conference in January 2005 and its completion during 2005/2006 is one of the Board's priorities.  Review of city centre LIFT project



## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF SCRUTINY**

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

#### **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.

#### **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.
- b) In all issues they scrutinise, Boards should identify a realistic time-scale and expected outcomes and ensure that recommendations are followed up effectively.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- f) Conference reports should not be discussed in detail at Board meetings unless particular issues need to be followed up.

#### **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.
- 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.

#### **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.
- 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.

## **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
- How the media might become more involved
- Identifying and progressing issues arising at Area Forums
- Involving partners and outside bodies
- Using experts
- Learning from other authorities