



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

AGENDA ITEM: 10

DATE OF MEETING: 25TH MARCH 2010

REPORT AUTHOR: MARK FARMER (SCRUTINY MANAGER)

SUBJECT: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL WORK REPORT 2009-10

PURPOSE:

1. To report to Council on the work of the new Overview and Scrutiny Board.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2. That the Board:
 - (i) Agrees the content of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Board report to Council and refer the report for inclusion on the agenda of the next Full Council.
 - (ii) Delegates authority to the Scrutiny Manager to make any amendments deemed necessary before publication and submission of the final version to Full Council.

REPORT:

3. The Council's constitutions under Article 6, section 6.2.6, requires the Overview and Scrutiny Board to make an annual report Full Council, on the workings of the Overview and Scrutiny process. A further report to Full Council from the Chair of the Board, will be submitted in September, that will outline any changes that may be needed to the new Overview and Scrutiny function, following the formal review of it that will begin in the Spring. The proposed report to Council:

Luton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009-10

4. Following a major review of the scrutiny process, which was completed in September 2009, the three political parties represented on Luton Borough Council agreed that the old six-committee scrutiny system be replaced with a new Overview and Scrutiny Board with the power to establish dedicated task and finish groups.

5. It was agreed that the new purpose for overview and scrutiny would be to help Luton's public bodies understand, plan and provide the best outcomes for local people, and that this would be done by:
- Examining and holding the Executive and named partners to account for their performance
 - Reviewing key issues and making clear recommendations for improvement
 - Consulting and involving local people
 - Influencing strategic policies that deliver on the Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy
 - Examining and responding to petitions, referrals from the Local Involvement Network and Calls for Action from councillors.

6. **Overview and Scrutiny Board**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board, was established as the overarching body of councillors which oversees and manages the scrutiny process, has parity with the Executive. It is the Council's main body for public sector accountability and strategy development. The Chair of the Board has regular meetings with the Executive Leader to discuss issues of importance.

Councillor Barry Neale (Liberal Democrat) was elected Chair of the Board, with Councillors Michael Garrett (Conservative) and Waheed Akbar (Labour) as Vice Chairs.

7. **Task and Finish groups**

Task and finish group reviews are selected from issues which the Board considers important to the people of Luton. Task and finish groups are led by Councillors, statutory co-optees and other co-optees who have expressed an interest in a particular subject. They are responsible for managing each review by gathering and taking evidence. At the end of the review they present their findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval. Training has been provided for those Councillors taking part in Task and Finish groups, with only those being trained being able to Chair a group. This training has been the most successful in recent times with over 20 elected members have attended one of the three sessions.

8. **What has Overview and Scrutiny achieved?**

The new Overview and Scrutiny function has become Member-led, focused on the major issues affecting the town. Improved working relationships have been developed through comprehensive engagement with local residents and a emphasis on achieving better outcomes from all local service providers.

9. **Member-led working across political parties**

Following the Council's decision to waive political balance rules and appoint a Chair from a minority party, Members from across the political parties have been leading the scrutiny process. It is the Members who decide which issues come before the Board, and, using set criteria, those which warrant examination by a task and finish group. All four task and finish groups established so far have been led by a Member of a minority party, and all but one have featured Members of all three political

parties. This has led to Members putting aside political differences and strongly committing to the work undertaken and recommendations made.

10. Focusing on the big issues affecting the town

Having reflected on the key issues facing the town, the Overview and Scrutiny Board has appointed task and finish groups to look into: the Council's budget for strategy 2010-11; the fear of crime; development of the Aquatic Centre, and day care opportunities for disabled and other vulnerable people, including the elderly.

Other issues which the Board has reviewed include: tackling health inequalities; the urgent need to expand the number of primary and secondary school places; and plans for improving the Council's housing service. It has also reviewed two decisions of the Executive which were called in by Councillors, the closure of Sherd Lodge, Older Peoples Home and the decision to proceed with the construction of the Luton-Dunstable bus way.

11. Championing the voice of the people of Luton

Overview and Scrutiny now seeks to carry out more comprehensive and effective engagement with the public. A task and finish group led the Council's consultation on the budget strategy for 2010/11, asking Luton residents for their views via both the Citizen's Panel and Lutonline, the Council's newspaper. This resulted in the highest response ever to consultation on the budget, with more than 400 opinions gathered. As a result of this feedback, one of Overview and Scrutiny Board's recommendations was to increase investment in job creation, with the result that an additional £200,000 was targeted towards this policy objective.

Additionally, two of the task and finish groups decided that they wanted to reach deeper into the local community. Accordingly, Members of the fear of crime task and finish group will be meeting with people from areas which have reported particular concerns to find out what is driving the fear of crime, while Members reviewing day care opportunities will be visiting a day care centre to meet with users and carers and find out what they want from a new care and support service.

12. Easier to understand

The Overview and Scrutiny Board, and its associated task and finish groups, have committed to producing simpler and clearer reports, with the aim of making their work and recommendations easier to understand.

13. Learning from elsewhere

Overview and Scrutiny Members want to learn from best practice ideas nationwide, and to this end visited Maidstone Borough Council in February to exchange ideas on engaging with the public. They further looked at how a Councillor's Call for Action can be most effectively put into practice, and observed a committee meeting during which a private sector railway business was scrutinised.

A visit to the London Borough of Merton in late March will include talks with Members and officers about their own successful review into the fear of crime.

14. **Plans for the future**

To ensure that its performance continues to develop, the Board will be launching in late Spring, an evaluation of the new overview and scrutiny process, to identify and address any areas of weakness, and build on its strengths. Findings and recommendations for change will be reported to the Council in September.

Work is already under way to further strengthen engagement with the public. In particular, web pages will be revamped to provide opportunities for members of the public to put forward topics for review, and to participate in current task and finish group reviews. Other plans include a presence on the social website Twitter.

Meanwhile, the Overview and Scrutiny team will be rolling out further training for Council officers and partners to develop their understanding of how Overview and Scrutiny operates, how they can contribute to its success, and how they want to gain benefits to themselves and their organisations.

In conjunction with colleagues from the Legal and Democratic Services, work is also continuing to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny meets ever-changing legislative requirements. In 2009-10, Overview and Scrutiny has been given powers to hold partners to account for their performance delivering the Local Area Agreement, and also to scrutinise the work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. A statutory scrutiny officer position has also been established.

Government proposals for forthcoming legislative change impacting on Overview and Scrutiny include:

- Powers to hold any local public sector body accountable on any issue affecting the town
- Powers over petitions and call-to-account meetings, at which members of the public can question named senior officers
- Statutory officer powers to ensure that sufficient and identifiable resources are in place for the effective operation of Overview and Scrutiny.

15. **Contact**

Telephone Overview and Scrutiny on 01582 546805, or email scrutiny@luton.gov.uk

You can also write to: Scrutiny Team, Town Hall, 1st Floor Annex, Luton, LU1 2BQ.

More information on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and its task and finish groups is available at www.luton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Agendas and minutes are available at www.luton.gov.uk/cmisis