

Overview and Scrutiny

in 2010-11



Welcome

It's been an exciting and productive twelve months for Overview and Scrutiny at Lincolnshire County Council and I'm delighted to be able to report to you on some of this year's highlights. This year has seen us scrutinise some really important issues for the people of Lincolnshire, speak to more members of the community than ever before and increase awareness of the work of scrutiny both inside and outside the Council. Over the next few pages I will outline some of the key developments during the year but if you would like to know anything more then we would be delighted to talk to you. At the back of this report are contact details for the Scrutiny Team and you can find out lots more about our work by visiting our website at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Councillor Howard Johnson
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

All of Lincolnshire's **77 county councillors** are committed to improving the well-being of the people of Lincolnshire. Ten of these councillors work in the Executive. The other 67 councillors are non-executive councillors. They investigate important issues that affect the people of Lincolnshire through the overview and scrutiny process. Joining them to scrutinise particular issues are six Added Members (parent governors and church representatives) and councillors from the County's district councils. Issues under investigation can be to do with Council services or wider matters affecting the community as a whole. Whatever the issue, councillors make sure they speak to the people that matter, the people providing the services and, most importantly, the people of Lincolnshire, the people who use our services.

How Does Overview and Scrutiny Work?

The Council's **nine overview and scrutiny committees** are made up of non-executive councillors who consider services provided by the council and, in some cases, services provided by partner organisations. These committees consider new policies that are being developed, existing policies to see how well they are working and performance information to check that we are meeting the standards we have set ourselves.

Each of these committees is also able to establish time-limited **Task and Finish Group reviews** that focus on a particular issue and consider it in greater detail than is possible at Committee. These reviews will typically last around six months and will include a mixture of interviews with relevant council officers, research of best practice elsewhere, meetings with service users and community groups and consultation with wider parts of the community. Committees can also establish **Rapid Reviews** that contain some but not all of the elements of Task and Finish Group work but which are completed in only six to eight weeks due to the urgent nature of the issue.

Task and Finish Group Activity

I am very pleased to report that more councillors than ever have been involved in Task and Finish Group work over the last year. For me, this is clear evidence that scrutiny is identifying the right issues to review and that the reviews themselves are meaningful and stimulating to those involved. These reviews always contain recommendations for improvements to policies and services and the vast majority of recommendations suggested to the Executive this year have been accepted and are in the process of being implemented.

Services to reduce alcohol harm has been an area under review this year and a final report has just been completed. This review has considered the mis-use of alcohol around the county and the services available to help those people who drink to excess, either on an occasional or regular basis. One of the outstanding activities in this review has been for members of the Group to accompany the Lincoln Street Pastors on Friday and Saturday nights as they provide support to people who have made themselves unwell or vulnerable as a result of consuming too much alcohol.

The relationship between the County Council and town and parish councils in Lincolnshire has also been under review and councillors have recognised how important this relationship is to the well-being of our local communities. Hearing the views of parish and town councils was essential to this review and we were able to engage with representatives from the majority of these councils either through face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews or an extensive survey that was undertaken.

In these difficult economic times it is inevitable that locally-run businesses will face considerable challenges and a review has been carried out that considered existing and future **Support to local businesses in Lincolnshire**. Over 500 local businesses were contacted through a web-based survey as part of this review and face-to-face meetings took place with a representative sample of respondents.

Other Task and Finish Group reviews during the year have included a Rapid Review of the **Council's Web Service** and a joint review with district scrutiny councillors looking at the work of **Procurement Lincolnshire**. The review of the Council's Web Service was a very useful exercise that enabled a group of councillors to gain a greater understanding of the power of websites and the vital role that the Council's website can play both as a means of communicating Council messages and as a way for people to access council services on-line. The review of Procurement Lincolnshire has also been very positive and has led to a series of recommendations about how to further improve this shared service. The recommendations covered all aspects of the service including governance, charging and target setting.

The final part of any review process is to track the outcomes of our work. For example, we previously looked at **Personal Budgets** for adult social care users and scrutiny recommendations have led to improvements in the way the Council communicates with new and existing personal budget holders. We suggested that the process for applying for a Personal Budget should be made more streamlined and officers are currently reviewing the application process. We also reviewed **winter maintenance** of the County's roads and a recommendation from our work has led to the introduction of a new policy to determine where grit bins are situated around the County.

Other Successes

This year has seen the launch of a new scrutiny committee dedicated to issues relating to flood and drainage management. The **Flood and Drainage Management Scrutiny Committee** is comprised of both county and district councillors and will scrutinise the new responsibilities of the County Council and its partners in relation to flood and drainage management. This new committee is one of the first of its kind in the country and is a good example of the innovative and forward-looking approach taken by scrutiny here.

I take great pleasure in reporting that one of our County Councillors has been recognised for his work in relation to Value for Money scrutiny at the County Council and his mentoring work with scrutiny councillors elsewhere. Councillor Robert Parker, Chairman of the **Value for Money Scrutiny Committee**, won the Scrutineer of the Year Award at this year's Local Government Information Unit Councillor Achievement Awards.

The work of the **Adults Scrutiny Committee** has also been recognised and the County Council was invited to make a presentation to a national scrutiny conference on scrutiny review work relating to how councillors engage with adult social care issues and the introduction of Personal Budgets. The presentation was well received by all those attending and provided an excellent opportunity to showcase some of the good work going on here.

Finally, I must say a quick word about the new scrutiny newsletter, better known as **The County Scrutineer**. This quarterly publication provides a brief snapshot of our recent activity and allows us to keep everyone both inside and outside the Council fully informed. The newsletter is also cost-effective as it only ever runs to two pages, is produced in-house by the Scrutiny Team and is primarily delivered in electronic form by e-mail.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year we will continue our good work and a review is already underway that is looking at **Post 16 Learning Provision**. Further reviews will commence in due course and a review of Personal Budgets for those who care for adult social care users has already been suggested. New legislation is also likely to have an impact on the work we do and both scrutiny councillors and officers here at the County Council are well-placed to respond to this changing landscape.

Contact Us

If you want to know more about our plans or about the work we have done then please contact the Scrutiny Team using the details below.

David Hair – Scrutiny Team Leader
01522 552080
davidr.hair@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Tracy Johnson – Scrutiny Officer
01522 552164
tracy.johnson@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Simon Evans – Scrutiny Officer
01522 553607
simon.evans@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Liz Jones – Scrutiny Officer
01522 552102
liz.jones@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Or write to us at The Scrutiny Team, Lincolnshire County Council, Room 15, County Offices, Lincoln, LN1 1YL