

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012

I am delighted to introduce the 2011/12 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for Fenland District Council. The last year has seen significant changes within local Government in particular a reduction in the level of funding we receive, therefore the role of the committee to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of public services for the residents of Fenland is of fundamental importance. This is a challenging and absorbing role for all those involved and it is testament to members' commitment and enthusiasm that we, as a committee, have been able to achieve so much during the past twelve months.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the key achievements of the committee as well as highlighting the focus of the panel during the months to come.

In addition I would like to thank all those who have taken part in the Overview and Scrutiny process this year; it is as a direct result of this input that the committee has been so successful in achieving our objectives. I very much look forward to the coming year and the opportunity to further build on our success, whilst continuing to focus on priority service areas and partnerships to ensure effective delivery of services for citizens of Fenland.

Councillor Pop Jolley
Chairman

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2011-2012



**Councillor Paul (Pop)
Jolley
Chairman**



**Councillor John
Chambers
Vice Chairman**



Councillor Mark Archer



**Councillor Derek
Stebbing**



Councillor Ken Peachey



**Councillor Robert
Scrimshaw**



**Councillor Alex
Miscandlon**



**Councillor Mike
Cornwell**



**Councillor Mrs Virginia
Bucknor**



**Councillor Gavin
Booth**



**Councillor Jonathan
Farmer**

INTRODUCTION

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

The Local Government Act 2000 requires Councils to have a committee with the power to review or scrutinise decisions or actions affecting the authority's area or residents. Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains effective and accountable. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve Council policies.

The power to scrutinise was further expanded by the Police and Justice Act 2006, which provided powers to scrutinise the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides more powers to local government to scrutinise other partner organisations. It also brings in other provisions that affect how scrutiny committees work, including powers over the creation of joint committees.

Recently, the coalition Government's Localism Bill (2010) consolidated the wide range of scrutiny legislation into a single place, largely unamended from previous legislation. This will aim to increase local accountability and transparency of public services as well as enhancing the involvement of local service users

Main responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny

The role of Overview and Scrutiny has five broad functions:

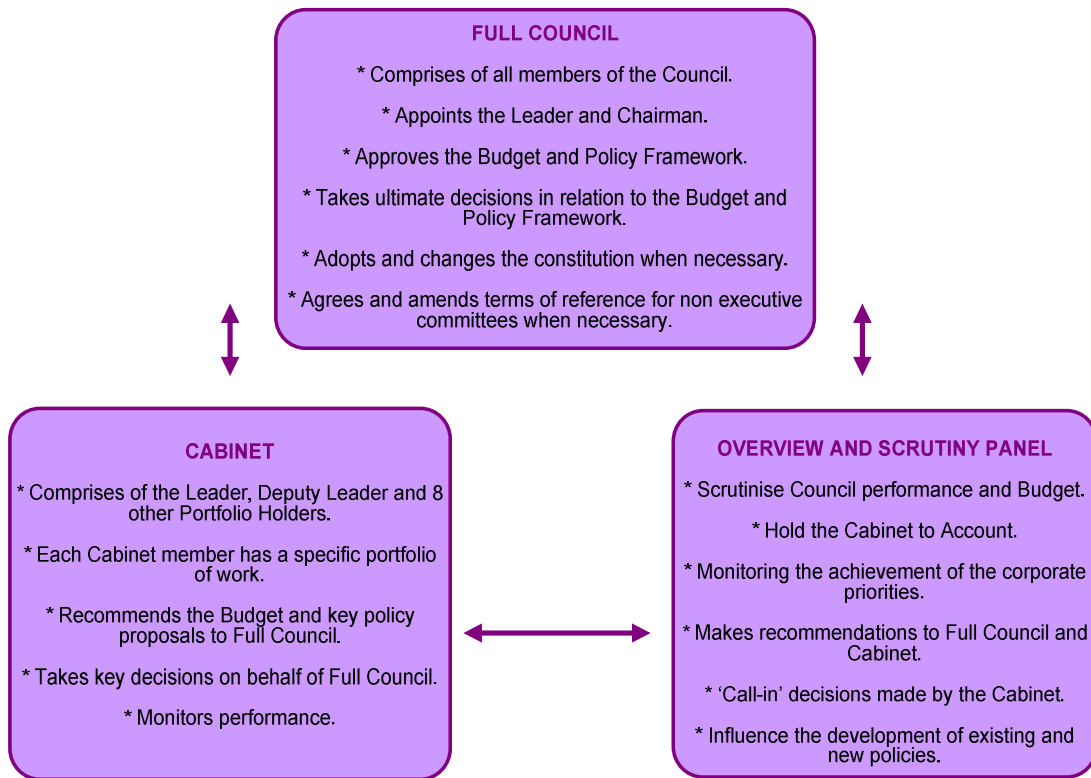
- Holding the Council's Executive and its statutory partners to account in the public interest. This enables more transparent and effective decision making.
- Supporting the development of effective policies and initiatives which have a beneficial impact on the community through policy review and development.
- Contributing to continuous improvement in the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities.
- Having a positive impact on the work and outcomes of external agencies and providers of public services.
- Aiding Councillors in engaging with their communities and undertaking the role of community representatives and leaders.

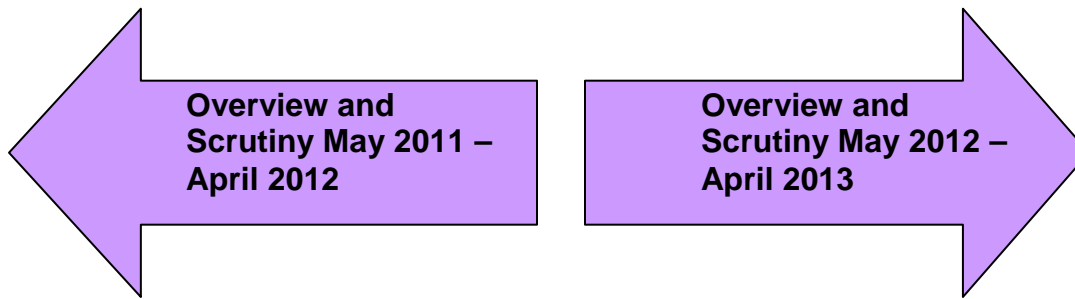
Overview	Scrutiny
Advising on the development of policies.	Ensuring that the Council's policies have been effectively implemented by the Cabinet.
Recommending how the Council's corporate priorities can be delivered.	Helping to monitor and drive improvements within the Council's corporate priorities.
Bringing a wider perspective to problem solving.	Holding decision makers to account
Examining broader issues affecting local communities.	Ensuring all service providers within a local community are providing 'value for money'

Appointing members onto Overview and Scrutiny

During 2011-2012, following a recommendation by the Leader of the Council, it was the responsibility of the full Council to appoint an Overview and Scrutiny Panel at their annual meeting in May. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of eleven members drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole.

Relationship between Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council





A BACKWARD LOOK TO 2011 - 2012

What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel achieved in 2011/2012

External advisors/partners

The panel looked at an array of different topic areas; most could be dealt with by drawing on the knowledge and expertise of Fenland District Council Councillors and Officers. However, sometimes there is a need to call in external advisors to help the panel with their knowledge and to provide a different vantage point.

As will be explained later a greater emphasis has been placed on Local Authority scrutiny, of and with partner agencies. Fenland's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is already undertaking this partnership working in a positive spirit, demonstrating its forward thinking. The table below highlights the external partners the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have already engaged with, when undertaking the scrutiny function during 2011/ 12:

Agenda item	External Advisor/Partner	Organisation
Update on Roddons Housing Association	Christopher Smith	Roddons Housing Association
CDRP (Crime Disorder and Reduction Partnership) Scrutiny: Annual Scrutiny	Mike Winters	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Efficiency Saving Strategy	Graham Stagg	Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

As well as working with individual partners, the panel have also scrutinised other elements of partnership working through each of the respective corporate priority areas. The panel will build on this further in 2012/2013.

How the work of Overview and Scrutiny is linked to the Council's corporate priorities

Fenland District Council's Corporate Plan clearly sets out a series of priorities that will be the focus of the organisation over a 3 year period. To ensure these priorities are correct, deliver on targets and achieve outcomes, the Overview and Scrutiny work programme reflects the Council's priorities to ensure robust scrutiny can be delivered.

The table below illustrates how agenda items link in with Fenland's priorities:

NP – Neighbourhood Planning
OFB - Open for Business
QO – Quality Organisation

SA – Streets Ahead
LO – Localism

Topic/Issue	NP	OFB	SA	LO	QO
Progress against corporate priority: Open for Business					
Update on Roddons Housing Association					
CCC Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee					
Crime Disorder and Reduction partnership					
Progress against Corporate Priority: Localism					
Annual meeting with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive					
Draft Corporate Plan and Budget					
Safer Fenland Partnership: Strategic Assessment					
Progress against Corporate Priority: Streets Ahead					
Progress against Corporate Priority Neighbourhood Planning					
Tourism Update					
Community Transport Provision in Fenland					
Leisure Fees and Charges					
General Fees and Charges					
Older People – future population developments					
Fire Service efficiency plan					
Planning Improvements Portfolio					

Links to other Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Cambridgeshire County Council's Adult Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee consists of twelve County Councillors in addition to five District Council co-optees. The role of the committee is to co-ordinate the scrutiny of adult social care services, health services and other services related to health and wellbeing, and to make reports and recommendations to local NHS bodies, local authorities and other agencies.

The role of the District Council member is to; take a full part in the work of the committee, including committee meetings, reviews, working groups and visits.

During 2011 – 2012 the Adult Wellbeing and Health Fenland District Council representative has contributed to a working group which has focused on the development of new health services and how Overview and Scrutiny can take part in challenging the new processes. The group has considered how Fenland as well as all the other District Councils can scrutinise the decisions of the newly formulated commissioning groups, therefore proactively supporting and engaging with the Health and Wellbeing priority.

In addition the District Council representative has taken part in a member led review of home care services for older people. This included visits to service providers and service users. Further more the representative also participates in a liaison group which regularly brings together NHS Cambridgeshire, representatives of the Adult Wellbeing and Health committee and Cambridgeshire Local Involvement Network to share information and discuss current and emerging issues.

Specific reviews undertaken in 2011- 2012

The Fire and Rescue Service's proposed efficiency savings

During an extraordinary meeting held in July 2011 the committee met with the Chief Fire Officer, Graham Stagg, to discuss the Fire and Rescue Service's proposed efficiency savings and in particular the proposal to close Manea Fire Station. The review of the Fire Services Efficiency plans focused on the potential closure of Manea Fire Station; the potential increase in attendance times and reduced cover due to fewer appliances; the capability of the Fire and Rescue Service to continue to deal effectively with water-related incidents; and the need to ensure that fire appliances were suitably equipped to handle Fenland's rural road network.

Following detailed discussions the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended the following:

1. To endeavour to prevent the reduction in frontline fire and rescue services in Fenland and the surrounding area through the effective review of all other organisational commitments.
2. To keep Manea Fire Station open to prevent future loss of life due to increased response times to incidents.
3. To review the removal of all second appliances to prevent future loss of life due to increased response times to incidents,
4. To review the removal of the Thorney appliance due to high level of attendances at road traffic accidents on the A47 and the increased

response time from appliances coming from Peterborough or Wisbech to serious incidents.

5. To review the equipment and training utilised in Fenland fire stations to incorporate specialist apparatus and knowledge to suit the Fenland environment, especially when responding to water-related incidents.
6. To review staffing schedules to ensure fire stations are staffed in line with high demand for fire and rescue services.
7. To explore all opportunities for shared services to generate efficiency savings to prevent reductions in frontline services.

Domestic Violence

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council embarked on a joint review into domestic violence. This was a really exciting approach to conducting a scrutiny review as it was undertaken as part of a three way partnership. This very much builds on the successes of the joint review conducted with Cambridgeshire County Council during 2010/11 in relation to Educational Attainment in Fenland.

Fenland District Council and the County Council have both identified crime reduction and community safety issues as key priorities for the year. Effective scrutiny can help contribute towards this priority and help achieve outcomes that will have an impact on the quality of life of Fenland communities.

The review group has received information in relation to the county wide arrangements currently provided for tackling domestic violence, analysed statistics relating to domestic violence and its prevalence and the costs associated with the service provision.

The review group have identified that services from statutory providers i.e. the Police and County Council are only available to victims in the highest risk circumstances and usually these services are only provided following police attending an incident involving violence, this is however often the culmination of years of abuse following which there is no support available from statutory services, the only help available at this stage is from the voluntary sector.

Given the importance of Independent Domestic violence advocate service particularly to high risk victims, the review group has made the following initial recommendations:

[1] Cambridgeshire County Council Cabinet to expand resources within the Community Engagement Directorate devoted to addressing DA by using the current IP process

If recommendation 1 is rejected, then the following recommendation applies:

[2] It is recommended that levels of Cambridgeshire County Council funding devoted to DA be maintained within the Community Engagement Directorate at their current levels for the coming financial year

Tourism Review

During 2010/11, faced with a number of financial challenges caused by external pressures, the Council undertook a comprehensive assessment of community needs, functions and priorities. One of the priorities identified by the community was tourism which was the catalyst for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertaking a review of this area. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a wide range of issues in relation to the tourism agenda, as a result the review highlighted the following key issues;

- The importance of tourism to the Fenland economy
- The historic support offered by the Council
- The ongoing strategy currently being implemented
- The development of web based technologies and how they can best be utilised.
- The importance of a positive external brand promoting Fenland and all the attributes of the area
- The importance of partnership working
- The need to engage other agencies in terms of actions
- The development of the role of the One Stop Shops and Contact Centre in relation to tourism
- The most effective ways of engaging with partners and the most effective way of utilising the resources of the Council

As a direct result of the review the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made 8 recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the tourism agenda;

- The Council commits to the continuing development of the tourism website
- Further work is undertaken on the brand that the district uses to promote the area to its fullest potential
- The Council seeks high profile endorsement of the tourism and visitor offer in the area
- The council enters into discussions with relevant authorities to bring forward more signage to better promote visitor attractions

- The Council continues to work with partners to enhance and promote the tourism offer in Fenland
- A press and advertising strategy is developed
- That Cabinet notes the importance of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and that the One Stop Shops should be enhanced to serve as TIC in the 4 market towns, it should also improve the tourism service offered by the Contact Centre to provide a contact point for people outside the district
- That Cabinet creates an overarching Tourism Board for the district.

All of the 8 recommendations proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a result of the Tourism review were adopted by the Cabinet.

Overview and Scrutiny Call – In

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees have the opportunity to scrutinise Executive decisions that have been made, but not implemented through the ‘call-in’ mechanism.

In accordance with the Council’s constitution, decisions of the Executive or a Portfolio Holder decision are published within 3 working days. There is then a further 5 working day period prior to the implementation of the decision in which Members are able to call in the decision. If the necessary number of Members, either the Chairman or Vice Chairman of any panel, or any 3 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any 10 Members of the Council, ask for a decision to be called in for scrutiny, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has to meet within 15 working days to consider the issue. Whilst this process takes its course, the decision taking process is suspended. If no call-in occurs, the decision is adopted.

If, having considered the decision, the Committee remains concerned about it, then it may refer it back to the decision making person or body for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns or, in exceptional circumstances, refer the matter to full Council. If referred back, the decision maker shall then reconsider the matter within a further 10 working days and amend the decision or not, before adopting a final decision. If however the Committee decides not to refer the matter back, no further action is taken and the decision can take effect.

The call-in procedure does not apply where the decision being made by the Executive is deemed to be urgent i.e. where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council’s or the public’s interests. This should be clearly stated in the record of the decision.

Because of the nature of the call-in procedure, it is generally recognised as a mechanism of last resort. Indeed Government guidance states that it would

clearly be detrimental to efficient decision making if every individual decision of the Executive were called in for overview and scrutiny as a matter of course.

The call-in procedure is therefore utilised when other means of influencing decision making have failed. Nationally, Councils have on average 2 call-ins per year and approximately 25% result in an amended decision.

Fenland District Council utilised the call in procedure on 3 occasions during 2011/12 with all 3 matters resulting in the original Cabinet decision being accepted.

The first call-in was of a decision made by the Cabinet in relation to the proposed allocation of the Local Public Sector Agreement (LPSA) reward grant. Following the scrutiny of the Cabinet decision it was agreed the allocation of the LPSA reward grant to the super fast broadband project for the whole of Fenland did set to benefit the whole of the district and was representative of value for money, as a result the Committee agreed with the original Cabinet decision.

The second call-in was made regarding the Cabinet decision to increase Leisure Services fees and charges. The decision was called in as the Committee felt they had given a strong steer to Cabinet not to increase fees and charges in this area, therefore there was uncertainty as to why the increases had been agreed. Following lengthy discussions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed with the original Cabinet Decision as it was felt on balance an increase in charges in this area would lessen the potential impact of charges in other areas which may result in greater numbers of Fenland residents being affected.

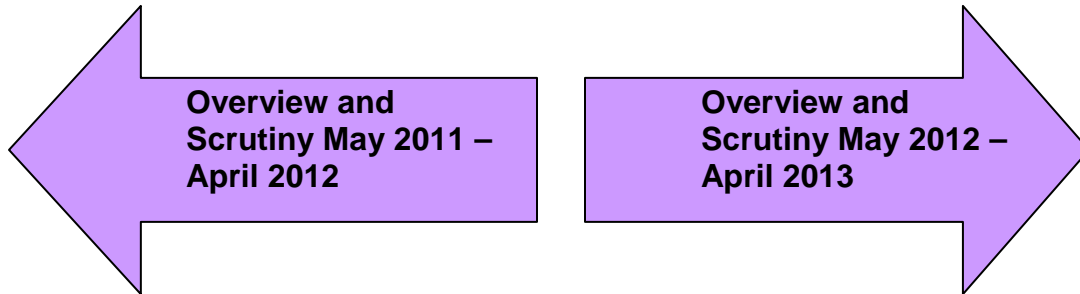
The third call-in was in relation to the Cabinet decision in respect of Community Grants. The decision was called in as there were concerns that the new process could disenfranchise partner organisations in the process as a result of a lack of representation. Following a challenging debate it was agreed the original Cabinet decision be adopted as checks were in place throughout the process to gain the opinions and views of those who represent communities.

Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Network 2011- 2012

The Scrutiny Network devised and implemented a number of development events for Members and officers involved in the Overview and Scrutiny process. The first event, entitled 'Basic Scrutiny Skills', was held on 1 September 2011 at South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The second event entitled 'Questioning Skills' held on 29 September 2011 again at South Cambridgeshire District Council, The afternoon event brought together Overview and Scrutiny Members and officers from all six Cambridgeshire councils to discuss key issues and examine questioning techniques and skills

which could help to challenge and gain greater insight and information about Council priorities.



A FORWARD LOOK TO 2012/2013

Policies and measures affecting scope of Overview and Scrutiny

The profile of scrutiny is changing nationally and as a result much is expected of us in response to the Localism agenda. This could include community involvement, scrutiny of and with partners, scrutiny of crime and disorder issues and supporting the scrutiny of health services.

Overview and Scrutiny amending its role

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee remains committed to achieving value for money and ensuring the Council is efficient and cost effective in the delivery of its corporate priorities.

Fenland's Priorities

In Fenland's Corporate Plan 2012-2015, the Council's corporate priorities are:

1. **Neighbourhood Planning**
2. **Localism**
3. **Streets Ahead**
4. **Open for Business**
5. **Quality Organisation**

It is important that the work of Overview and Scrutiny complements these priorities to ensure services are being delivered to highest quality and any scrutiny work adds value.

What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will achieve in 2012-2013

Strategic Priorities

We will work to raise the profile of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny work by better communicating our successes.

Work Programme

The Overview and Scrutiny work programme is a detailed programme that indicates the topics that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will scrutinise. The work programme will be developed early in the new Council year setting out what the key areas of focus will be. Topics already identified for inclusion include:

- Crime Disorder and Reduction Partnership
- Local Health Partnership
- Middle Level Drainage Board
- Draft Corporate Plan and Budget
- Progress of Corporate Priorities: Neighborhood Planning, Localism, Streets Ahead, Open for Business, Quality Organisation

Specific reviews due to be undertaken in 2012- 2013

- Procurement Review
- Feedback from Outside Bodies

Scrutiny Networks

Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network will continue to meet on a regular basis to exchange best practice, share work programmes and discuss topical scrutiny issues. There are a number of projects that are planned for the network throughout 2012-2013:

- Provide joint development opportunities in relation to scrutiny training and networking within Cambridgeshire
- Continue to attend and represent Cambridgeshire at the Centre for Public Scrutiny National Overview and Scrutiny Forum
- Continue to investigate and develop a regional scrutiny network

CONTACTS

Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is enhanced by the involvement of Fenland residents, service users, our partners and local businesses as they bring an alternative perspective whilst also providing external challenge. If, therefore, you would like further details about any of the work mentioned in this report, or on how residents and partner organisations can contribute to the work of Overview and Scrutiny within Fenland, please contact:

Councillor Paul 'Pop' Jolley, Chairman

PJolley@fenland.gov.uk

01354 688320

Councillor John Chambers, Vice Chairman

jchambers@fenland.gov.uk

01354 696770

Jane Bailey Member Services Officer

jbailey@fenland.gov.uk

01354 622229

Anna Goodall Head of Governance and Legal Services

agoodall@fenland.gov.uk

01354 622357