



Hinckley & Bosworth  
Borough Council

*A Borough to be proud of*

# Overview and Scrutiny

**END OF TERM REPORT**

2007 – 2011

Incorporating Annual report  
May 2010 – April 2011

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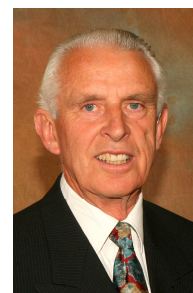
## ***FOREWORD by the Scrutiny Chairman and Vice-Chairmen***



**Councillor M Lay**  
Chairman of Scrutiny Commission



**Councillor Mrs R Camamile**  
Vice Chairman of Scrutiny  
Commission and Chairman of  
Council Services Select  
Committee



**Councillor P Hall**  
Vice Chairman of Scrutiny  
Commission and Chairman of  
Finance and Audit Services Select  
Committee

Welcome to Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's end of term report which encompasses the seventh Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report covering the municipal year 2010-2011. We hope that our report will:

- raise the profile of scrutiny among councillors, officers and the public;
- provide a greater understanding of the role and benefit of scrutiny;
- provide awareness of the role of scrutiny in developing policy and improving performance;
- provide evidence of effective scrutiny of external organisations;
- allow for more effective scrutiny of Executive decisions.

We have an effective overview and scrutiny function that contributes towards the work of the council and its vision. We manage and prioritise the work of overview and scrutiny function through the use of an annual work programme, this also allows the effective 'tracking' of previous decisions. We have received the Forward Plan at each meeting of the Scrutiny Commission, which has assisted us with monitoring the work of the Executive and in many cases has enabled us to be proactive during the policy development stage.

The scrutiny commission continues cross-party working and applies a 'critical friend' approach to scrutiny. An opposition member is chair and has been highly commended by the Centre for Public Scrutiny for his innovative and creative approach to chairing the commission. The Commission has named officer support a dedicated research budget.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank fellow Scrutiny Councillors and Executive members for their support and commitment over the last four years. We would also like to thank officers for their support and hard work. We look forward to building further on our success in the coming year.

### ***Councillor Matthew Lay***

*Chairman of Scrutiny Commission*

### ***Councillor Ruth Camamile***

*Vice Chairman of Scrutiny Commission and Chairman of Council Services Select Committee*

### ***Councillor Peter Hall***

*Vice Chairman of Scrutiny Commission and Chairman of Finance and Audit Services Select Committee*

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **The Role of Overview and Scrutiny**

The objectives of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function are to:

- provide 'critical friend' challenge to the Executive as well as external authorities and agencies;
- reflect the voice and concerns of our public and our communities;
- lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public; and
- make an impact on the delivery of public services.

The above objectives are the "Successful Scrutiny Criteria" adopted as best practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and is used to report achievement in this report.

Further details of the role of scrutiny and the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Commission and the Select Committees are contained in Part 2 Article 6 of the Council's Constitution.

### **The Structure of Overview and Scrutiny**

During the last four years, the length of the current Council, the Council appointed a Scrutiny Commission, of 15 non-executive councillors from all political groups.

The Scrutiny Commission was supported in its role by two permanent select committees:

- Council Services; and
- Finance and Audit Services.

The Scrutiny Commission and Select Committees were also supported by working groups/task groups, during the past four years these have included:

- ICT Panel;
- Scrutiny Environment Group;
- Barwell and Earl Shilton Scrutiny Group;
- LDS Scrutiny Group;
- Civic Facilities Scrutiny Group;
- Rural Areas Review group;
- Scrutiny Transport working group;
- Constitution working group;
- Affordable housing working group;
- Housing task group.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK 2010 - 2011

In November 2005, the Scrutiny Commission reviewed progress of the Overview and Scrutiny Function and in line with best practice, the council's effective scrutiny criteria was refined in line with the principles of Centre for Public Scrutiny's effective scrutiny criteria. We continue to review and improve the scrutiny function to ensure outcomes are achieved and both internal and external scrutiny is effective, a number of workshops have been held during the last four years to offer this challenge.

The following highlights our achievements under each principle across the overview and scrutiny function including the Commission, Select Committees, working groups and panels over the last year.

### **1. PROVIDE 'CRITICAL FRIEND' CHALLENGE TO THE EXECUTIVE AS WELL AS EXTERNAL AUTHORITIES AND AGENCIES**

*Our work this year included:*

- Monitoring annual and monthly **capital and revenue outturn** reports, the Statement of Accounts and Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- Considering the **General Fund Budget Strategy**, ensuring the Council maintains a strong financial position;
- Reviewing the **Housing Revenue Account Subsidy** and making recommendations
- Monitoring the progress of the **Barwell and Earl Shilton Sustainable Urban Extension**
- Completing the review of the service provided by **Registered Social Landlords**
- Making recommendations regarding the future **ICT arrangements** for councillors
- Reviewing the position of the **Special Expenses Area** and related accounting arrangements
- Reviewing the progress and financial accountability of major projects including the **Atkins development, Hinckley Club for Young People, Greenfields, Bus Station redevelopment and Council Offices**
- Approving reports of the **Internal and External Auditors** and recommended action arising

### **2. REFLECT THE VOICE AND CONCERNS OF OUR PUBLIC AND OUR COMMUNITIES**

*Our work this year included:*

- Monitoring the **Borough Wide Anti Poverty Strategy**
- Monitoring the development of a **Credit Union** for Hinckley & Bosworth
- Concluding a review of **Registered Social Landlords**

- Leading to the reduction in waiting times for **disabled adaptations**
- Continuing as a consultee in **health matters** affecting the residents of the borough as part of PCT consultation processes
- Reviewing the impact of the closure of the cash office and restructuring of **payment options** for payments to the council
- Considering the condition and siting of the **Hansom cab** as a local historic attraction
- Having an input into the **Town Centre Masterplan**
- Considering the implications of the **Localism Bill** on the community.

### 3. LEAD AND OWN THE SCRUTINY PROCESS ON BEHALF OF THE PUBLIC

*Our work this year included:*

- Actively managing the Overview and Scrutiny Function **Work Programme**
- Utilising the **research and development** fund of the overview and scrutiny function
- Carrying out a **Rural Areas Review** and setting up a working group to consider requirements in rural areas in light of planning guidelines
- Continuing to act as formal consultee in the **Community Healthcare Review**
- Making recommendations with regard to the implementation of a new **Petitions Scheme**
- Continuing to monitor the performance of the **Community Safety Partnership**
- Reviewing public and green transport in light of the **Local Transport Plan (LTP3)**
- Considering the implications of the **Comprehensive Spending Review**

### 4. MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICES

*Our work this year included:*

- Undertaking a focussed and detailed performance **scrutiny of key front line service areas**, including: street cleansing; planning; leisure centre; Environmental Health; planning and enforcement appeals
- Continuing to monitor progress with the development of people management policies and strategies as the Council moves to **Flexible Working**
- Monitoring **sickness absence** leading to a reduction in working days lost through sickness
- Reviewing **Performance against our stated objectives** in the Corporate Performance Plan and against our key Performance Indicators
- Reviewing the process of **developer contributions** to maximise the impact on improving public facilities
- Reviewing the **disabled adaptations** service.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION** **2007 – 2011**

Over the past four years during this term of office, the Scrutiny Commission has undertaken several reviews. These included reviews of the Hinckley & Bosworth Community Safety Partnership, Poverty in the Borough, the Local Strategic Partnership, East Midlands Ambulance Service, Concessionary Travel, Out of Hours Healthcare, Registered Social Landlords, Affordable Housing, Winter Gritting and the impact of the LDF in rural areas. In addition to these reviews there have been many examples of pre-decision scrutiny and recommendations arising from scrutiny topics which have been adopted and implemented by the relevant decision making body.

Below are some examples of reviews and recommendations which resulted in tangible outcomes and benefits for the community, and show the success of the Overview & Scrutiny function of Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council.

### **Community Safety Partnership**

The first review concluded by the Scrutiny Commission in 2007/08 was a review of the Community Safety Partnership following concern regarding the effectiveness and accountability of the partnership. As a result of the review, which led to a change in structure of the Community Safety Partnership, the Partnership developed priority action plans and became one of the best performing partnerships in the county. The Scrutiny Commission continues to monitor the performance of the partnership and makes recommendations where relevant to ensure the safety of residents of the borough and that work towards reducing crime and disorder continues.

### **East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS)**

In 2007/08 the Scrutiny Commission expressed concern about the plans of the East Midlands Ambulance Service to reduce the number of ambulances operating in the area. Representatives of EMAS were invited to the Commission as witnesses to discuss these plans.

As a result of these discussions, a closer working relationship between the authority and EMAS ensued, resulting in the reinstatement of one of the ambulances and improved healthcare for the residents in Hinckley & Bosworth.

### **Creation of an Anti Poverty Strategy for Hinckley & Bosworth**

During 2007/08 a review into income poverty in the Borough was commissioned following identification of the possibility that whilst the Borough as a whole was not a 'deprived' area, there were particular pockets of deprivation. The Commission's objective for the review was to improve the quality of life of people living in poverty in the area. An initial report was produced which identified areas and types of deprivation within the Borough.

Following this initial report a stakeholder group was created and over several months and Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan was created. Wider stakeholders were

consulted and had an input into the action plan and the Scrutiny Commission monitored its development and implementation in 2009/10.

The review into income poverty and subsequent creation of the Anti Poverty Strategy is a strong example of how the overview and scrutiny function of the authority has brought about improvements for the community. By identifying pockets of deprivation and causes of poverty and bringing together all sectors to agree the multi-agency strategy and actions, the quality of life of residents of the borough has been improved. In undertaking this work, the Scrutiny Commission has left a lasting legacy which will continue to support the community and address poverty issues, which remains a primary concern in the current economic climate.

### **Development of a Credit Union for Hinckley & Bosworth**

As part of the production of the Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2009/10, the Scrutiny Commission identified the need for financial advice and assistance for those on low incomes, particularly due to the concern that many people were victims of 'loan sharks'. Following research and consideration by the Commission, the authority entered into a partnership with Clockwise Credit Union to provide financial advice and services to residents including bank accounts and low cost, safe loans. Clockwise Credit Union was launched on 23 March 2010.

Clockwise now operates part-time from two locations in the borough – one in Earl Shilton and another in Hinckley, providing a valuable service to the community, based within the communities it serves.

### **Disabled Adaptations**

Following referral from the Council Services Select Committee, in January 2010 the Scrutiny Commission received a report on demand and waiting times for disabled adaptations. In some cases the wait was up to 12 months. The Commission recommended that work and spending be prioritised in order to reduce the waiting list to three months in order to provide a more acceptable service to the public. The recommendations were implemented and partly as a direct result of these recommendations the waiting list for disabled adaptations was reduced entirely within just a few months.

### **Parish & Community Initiative Fund**

Each year the Scrutiny Commission has received information on recommended allocations of the Parish and Community Initiative fund before a decision being made by the Strategic Leadership Board. In 2009/10 the scheme, despite receiving applications for more than the amount of funding available, delivered an underspend. The Commission recommended that the underspend be carried over to 2010/11 as the over-subscription had demonstrated increasing take-up of the funding. This recommendation was subsequently agreed and as a result communities within Hinckley & Bosworth will benefit from the opportunity to bid for more funding for community projects.



## **SELECT COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

### **COUNCIL SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE**

Over the last four years the Council Services Select Committee has delivered its planned work programme, which has enabled us to successfully follow up our recommendations and track improvements in performance.

We are keen to ensure that the Council's key services, which affect the quality of life of the Borough's residents, are continuing to improve and that an appropriate balance is struck between quality and cost.

*Our Achievements over the last four years include:*

- Monitoring sickness absence and reviewing the attendance management framework, resulting in a dramatic reduction in the number of days per employee to 6.49 days
- Proactively monitoring and scrutinising the Performance Management Framework
- Receiving front line reports from Streetscene services, Grounds Maintenance, Neighbourhood Wardens, Environmental Health, Housing, Planning, Leisure Centre and Revenues and Benefits
- Actively monitoring performance against the Corporate Objectives contained in the Corporate Plan with regard to Housing
- Reviewing the impact of void council housing and commercial properties;
- Undertaking an annual review of the Children and Young People's Strategy;
- Considering and making recommendations for alternative methods of making payments to the council;
- Referring debate on the waiting lists for disabled adaptations to the Scrutiny Commission, resulting in prioritisation of budgets and reduction in waiting times.

## **FINANCE AND AUDIT SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE**

Finance and Audit Services Select Committee aims to constructively challenge and investigate the financial stability, probity in corporate governance and full consideration of risks, so that the Council is better placed to face future challenges.

During the last four years the Finance & Audit Services Select Committee has considered and reviewed a number of matters relating to the financial affairs of the Council.

As in previous years the Select Committee has provided “back-bench” input into the major financial processes of the Council considering the following matters:

- Statement of Accounts
- Review of Revenue and Capital Outturn
- Capital Programme
- Revenue Budget
- Council Tax proposals
- External Auditors ISA 260 letter
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- Quarterly Budget Monitoring
- Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Policy
- Investment Returns
- Internal Audit plan and reports
- Data Quality Assessments
- Risk Management Framework
- Corporate Governance Statement
- Budget adjustments
- Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Select Committee also received copies of all Internal Audit reports and reviewed the level of Internal Control Assurance that could be derived from each area under audit and monitored the recommendations.

## **FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **Changing times**

With the move towards community-led scrutiny of local decisions there is a need for public scrutiny to evolve. Engagement with stakeholders, including residents, will be essential in order to ensure accountability for the use of public resources. Whilst the Hinckley & Bosworth Scrutiny Commission has been proactive in undertaking external scrutiny and in consulting communities and other stakeholders in internal scrutiny, actions to engage the public and promote democracy will be key to achieving public accountability.

### **The Business of Overview and Scrutiny**

There are a number of ways through which Overview and Scrutiny can carry out its business, which can be constantly developed and utilised, these include:

- conducting research and other consultation to assist with the analysis of possible options;
- encouraging and enhancing community participation in the development of Council policy; and
- liaising with other organisations operating in the area, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.

Scrutiny is not restricted in the way it carries out the above tasks, it may:

- hold inquiries;
- appoint advisers and assessors;
- make site visits;
- conduct public surveys;
- hold public meetings; and
- commission research.

### **Call-in**

The Council's Executive Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers are required to take decisions based on principles set out in Article 13 of the Council's Constitution. Scrutiny has a role monitoring these decisions and should a scrutiny body or an individual Councillor believe that these principles have not been followed then they have 7 working days from the publication of the decision to "call-in" that decision for further discussion by Scrutiny.

Scrutiny can review the decision, the advice given and the process used for making the decision, e.g. consultation, procedure etc. and if it believes that errors were made in the decision making process it can request that Executive reconsiders the decision or that the decision is considered by full Council.

## **Councillor Call For Action**

This new initiative will enable the Commission to take on individual Ward issues to improve things for the public influencing the Executive and Partners to push solutions.

## **Overview and Scrutiny and Community Leadership**

“Overview and Scrutiny is a key mechanism by which a Council can give life to its Community Leadership role and develop imaginative approaches to the use of the well-being power” (ODPM Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government, September 2002). Scrutiny can engage partners and citizens in the work of the Council and find imaginative ways of researching and consulting.

In addition, Scrutiny is able to use these techniques to monitor and evaluate issues of local concern that fall outside the Council’s powers. There are wide ranging provisions to engage with other public bodies, especially relating to health and public safety but also with the voluntary and private sectors. This power gives scrutiny a unique position in terms of being able to inform policy decisions and co-ordinate partnership working on projects, which are important to the Borough as a whole but responsibility for them falls to a wide range of organisations.

## **Engaging with the Public**

The Overview and Scrutiny function needs to improve its dialogue with the public to ensure that future scrutiny is focussed on the needs and views of the public and that communities feel that they have an input into the scrutiny process.

## **CONTACTS**

Scrutiny Commission, its Panels and Select Committees are directly supported by the Corporate & Customer Resources, Scrutiny & Ethical Standards service, which has responsibility for Scrutiny planning, improvement and research support as well as member development and committee support.

### **For more information concerning Scrutiny please contact**

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