



Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2010-11

Introduction

Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, which explains the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and its Task and Finish Groups during 2010-11.

The scrutiny process changed in 2009, following a review by the Council that led to a one-committee scrutiny system, with the power to set up time-limited task and finish groups. The Overview and Scrutiny Board oversees and manages the scrutiny process at Luton and has parity with the Executive. The Board is the Council's main body for public accountability and strategy development.

The Chair of the Board in 2010-11 was Councillor Barry Neale and the Vice Chairs were Councillors Norris Bullock (Labour) and Michael Garrett (Conservative).

At the Centre for Public Scrutiny Annual Conference 'Good Scrutiny Awards' in 2010, the work of the Overview and Scrutiny team and Non-Executive Members at Luton received recognition, being shortlisted in the 'raising the profile' category. We were awarded a 'Commendation', Luton's Overview and Scrutiny's greatest achievement, given the line up of other Councils on the shortlist, e.g. Birmingham City Council and the London Assembly.

Key Scrutiny Work in 2010-2011

- **Working with External Partners and Local Communities**

Throughout the year, the Board received a range of reports and presentations from organisations and individuals from outside the Council to assist with the overview and scrutiny work; these included NHS Luton, South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT), NHS Bedfordshire, Professor Preston Shoot (Chair of Safeguarding Board), and the Heads of Integrated Services at the Council, who updated the Board on Luton's Safeguarding children and adult services arrangements.

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- **Working with the Executive/Portfolio Holders**

The Board has continued to be actively involved with the work of the Executive, regularly scrutinising the Executive's Forward Plan, which remains a standing item on the work programme. Monthly meetings are also held with the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Leader of the Council, to discuss corporate issues facing the Council.

- **Task and Finish Groups**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board has the power and responsibility to set up task and finish groups that are Member led. The task and finish groups manage reviews of issues that are of public and corporate interest, research and take evidence and produce the final report with recommendations. Membership of the task and finish group can be extended to include statutory and non statutory co-optees and experts in the subject area.

Following consultation on items for the work programme, the Board set up four task and finish groups in 2010-11 to look into priority issues identified by Luton residents and Council partners. Outlined below is a brief summary and findings of each of the task and finish groups:

- **Finance Review Group**

The Finance Review Group (FRG) was set up as a standing sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to:

- enable closer overview and scrutiny of the Council's finances;
- enhance the decision-making process for setting the 2011/12 budget;
- manage the public consultation and engagement process;
- improve transparency and accountability, to help ensure the Council's decisions about use of taxpayers' money is in the best interests of the residents of Luton.

The FRG oversaw an extensive public consultation, involving over 750 residents, many putting forward suggestions on the budget proposals.

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The consultation highlighted areas such as: adult social care, children's social care, waste and education that needed to be protected in the budget for 2011-12. The rationale for this was to ensure service levels are maintained to meet increased demands and costs. Suggestions for efficiency savings spread across Council's services, including cultural services, planning and regeneration, and democracy/central services.

In total, the FRG made eighteen recommendations to the Executive, of which fifteen were accepted and reflected in the budget for 2011-12. Two of the recommendations were outside the remit of the Council's Executive and one failed to receive support from the Executive.

The Council's budget for 2011-12 was balanced and achieved £20 million in savings – a reduction of 12 per cent. The council tax for Luton was frozen and there was a two million budget increase for essential social services for elderly and disabled people; and a one million increase for children in care. Of the 400 jobs lost, many through natural wastage, less than 1.5% involved front line staff, minimising the negative impact on Luton's citizens. A forecast overspend of £800,000 was turned around to deliver a balanced budget.

Review Outcomes

- The work of the FRG led to priority services being protected during the enforced spending cuts;
- An extra £2 million was found by the Executive to support essential social care services for the elderly and disabled people, and an extra £1 million for children in care;
- The Executive's decision was influenced by the findings of the consultation, where recurring themes from residents found that, "*above all the services for the most vulnerable members of society should be protected*", which is supported by statistics from the focus groups, where 52% of residents wished to protect adult social care and 49% wished to protect children's social care;
- The Executive decisions directly benefit Luton's most vulnerable residents, as without the clear mandate given to the Executive through the FRG consultation, the Executive would have found it difficult to divert funds from back office functions into areas such as adults and children's social care.

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- **NHS Developments and Savings Review Group**

This Task and Finish Group examined NHS Luton's plan to make efficiency savings and the impact this would have on services. An effective and constructive working relationship was established between the review group and NHS Luton, leading to a number of recommendations to address concerns identified during the review, which were all accepted by the Trust.

Review Outcomes

- The review group made five recommendations to NHS Luton and one to the Overview and Scrutiny Board;
- NHS Luton valued the findings of the review group and accepted all five recommendations, which included maintaining dialogue with Overview and Scrutiny and undertaking public involvement and equality impact assessments on future proposed changes and protecting much needed services at the Luton Walk-in Centre and in mental health.
- The review enhanced the constructive working relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and NHS partners, ensuring ongoing engagement and evidence-based interventions, to influence decision-making on service developments and variations, to secure improvements in the quality of healthcare and improved health outcomes for the people of Luton;
- The review group also recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Board established a Health and Social Care Review Group, to oversee and influence the shape of NHS reforms locally, as well as scrutinise NHS Luton's continuing savings programme, and hold commissioners and providers to account

- **Tackling Alcohol-related Crime and Disorder**

This task and finish group highlighted the problems of excessive alcohol consumption and its links to crime and disorder, that has a damaging effect on behaviour and tarnishes the town's image and prevents visitors and other residents coming into the town at night. The review found the main clientele at night in the town centre were students, those on a low income and the unemployed. The final report produced ten recommendations that were accepted by the Council's Executive and the Community Safety Executives, and are being addressed by the relevant partner agencies and departments in the Council with community safety, licensing and enforcement responsibilities.

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Review Outcome

- The work of the review group led to a more focused approach and commitment from the Council and the Community Safety Partnership, to work together and be more proactive to prioritise the needs of the Town Centre, change perceptions of the poor image of Luton and to encourage visitors and a diverse clientele into the town centre at night;
 - The review group's recommendations were prioritised and included in Luton's Community Safety Partnership Plan. The Council's Executive have pledged to continue to fund the ongoing reduction initiatives that have proven to be successful in helping vulnerable users of the night-time economy and reduce crime and disorder in the Town Centre.
- **Job Creation and Economic Growth**

The aim of the task and finish group was to develop a future vision of Luton concentrating on two themes:

- Attracting Business to Luton;
- Quality of Jobs.

The review found Luton to be competitive, trading on its cheap land values and strategic transport links to draw businesses from London and abroad. The companies providing good quality jobs for local people would be encouraged to remain and expand, whilst the education providers in the town would train local people for a variety of skilled, professional and management work, using their links with local businesses to make sure people can take up the jobs locally without having to commute to London.

The review group evidence gathering also found that good, strategically valuable work is being done in the town by Barnfield College, Adult Community Learning and the University, the Council's Regeneration department and partners, and Job Centre Plus.

The review Group was aware that the public sector cuts will have a detrimental affect in Luton, with a reduction in government grant amounting to over 5% of spending power in the next year. There are also limitations caused by the lack of available building sites in the town, and planning restrictions placed around Junction 10a of the M1 by the Highways Agency.

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Review Outcomes

The final report produced eighteen recommendations that were submitted and accepted by the Executive and will be monitored by the Board at regular intervals.

Call-ins

There were no call-ins during 2010-11.

The Future

The Board will continue to focus on the big issues affecting the town and are planning an away day on 17th September 2011 that will continue to raise the profile and awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny process at Luton with our partners and council officers, to encourage participation and involvement and help identify key issues for its work programme.

Following re-structuring the overview and scrutiny function was merged with the Council's Democratic Services in April 2011 to provide integrated support for both committee administration and scrutiny.