



## Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2012-13

### **A message from Councillor Doris Hinkley, Chair Overview and Scrutiny Board**

“Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, which explains the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) and its Task and Finish Groups during 2012-13.

Overview and Scrutiny is a vital part of Luton Borough Council’s responsibility to its residents. All non-executive councillors are eligible to participate in the work of scrutiny, to hold the Council’s Executive to account for and help inform its decisions by reviewing and making recommendations to improve Council services.

Overview and Scrutiny also considers and makes recommendations on wider issues affecting the people of Luton. During the year it has worked closely with NHS and other public and private sector partners, who have all contributed to the well-being of the people of Luton. I take this opportunity to thank the great many officers from the Council, as well as

partners organisations, who have, contributed openly and positively to scrutiny.

Finally, I also thank all my fellow Members who have participated in Scrutiny and put in substantial effort during the course of the year.

If you would like to contribute to overview and scrutiny, remember all scrutiny meetings are open to the public. If you would to find out more about overview and scrutiny, the Democracy Team will be pleased to supply you with more information. Contact details are listed at the end of this report.”

Councillor Doris Hinkley

### **Introduction**

The last year has seen a continuation of challenges for local government in dealing with reductions in funding, the impact of new legislation and the changing shape of partner organisations such as the health service and the Police. Scrutiny Councillors have monitored these developments closely and have continued to carry out effective scrutiny.

The activities of the OSB are driven by a work programme, developed and agreed by the Board itself, and is constantly evolving and regularly updated.

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The Chair of the Board in 2012-13 was Councillor Doris Hinkley (Liberal Democrat) and the Vice Chairs were Councillors Michael Garrett (Conservative) and Councillor Aslam Khan (Labour).

## Key Scrutiny Work in 2012-2013

- **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 overview and scrutiny work; these included the former NHS Luton and Bedfordshire, South Essex Partnership Trust, Luton and Dunstable Hospital and the Coroner's Service.

- **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. The Chair also meets on a regular basis with the Leader of the Council, to discuss corporate issues facing the Council. The Executive Member Finance has a standing invitation to attend the Finance Review Group.

## TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The Overview and Scrutiny Board has the power and responsibility to set up time limited task and finish groups that focus on a particular issue and consider it in greater detail than is possible at the Overview and Scrutiny Board. These reviews will typically last around six months and will include a mixture of interviews with relevant Council officers and expert witnesses, research of best practice elsewhere, meetings with service users and community groups and consultation with the wider community. Membership of the task and finish group is drawn from all Members of the Council other than Executive Members and can be extended to include statutory and non-statutory co-optees and experts in the relevant subject area.

Outlined below is a brief summary of the work of the two standing committees – the Finance Review Group and the Health and Social Care Review Group and the two current task and finish groups.

### FINANCE REVIEW GROUP

The Finance Review Group (FRG) continued to sit in 2012/13 as a standing sub-committee of the

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Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB). Its purpose includes:

- Enabling closer scrutiny of the Council's finances;
- Enhancing decision-making process on spending priorities;
- Overseeing public involvement to improve accountability.

During the year, the FRG continued to focus on and made comments and recommendations to the Executive on key aspects of the Council's Transformation Programme and budget performance around contingency reserves and risks, particularly on a number of high level capital projects. It also reviewed the Council's 'Community Debate' public consultation programme to obtain the views of residents on proposals to achieve unprecedented levels of savings required in its budget to 2015/16.

The FRG reported and made comments and recommendations to the Executive on a number of occasions, which was mostly noted and/ or accepted, to help them make well informed and transparent decisions. A recommendation to re-invest savings on front line services was not approved, as was unlikely to generate sustainable savings to balance the medium term budget.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE REVIEW GROUP**

The Health and Social Care Review Group (HSCRG) continued to sit in 2012/13, as a standing sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was the Council's arrangement for scrutinising how

health and social care services were provided and developed for the community, holding NHS organisations to account and requiring them to listen and respond.

Its responsibilities include:

- Overseeing NHS and social care reforms in Luton;
- Holding decision-makers to account for commissioning decisions;
- Undertaking health and social care topical reviews and making recommendations for improvement;
- Dealing with consultation by NHS organisations, to ensure proposals for substantial service variation or development were in the interests of local health services.

In the last year, the HSCRG reviewed and commented on diverse matters, including the following:

- Progress of NHS and social care reform;
- Proposals for reforming social care services to make savings in the light of Council budget reduction by the Government, e.g. the Supported Living Review Phase II;
- Funding of mental health services;
- The procedures and practices of the Coroner's and associated services dealing with sudden deaths in non-suspicious circumstances, which attracted a lot of interest from Elected-Members, the public and community representatives with

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bad experiences of the system. Eight main recommendations for the Coroner, NHS bodies and the Council were made and supported by the Executive. A co-ordinated response to the recommendations was awaited at the time of writing.

Three Members of HSCRG represented the Council on the sub-regional joint health scrutiny committee, set up to scrutinise the 'Healthier Together' review of acute health services across the South East Midlands.

In August 2012, after consideration of Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy, HSCRG proposed task & finish reviews into Discharge from hospital and Infant Mortality, which were both ongoing at time of writing.

## **INFANT MORTALITY TASK AND FINISH GROUP AND DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

### **INFANT MORTALITY**

- The Infant Mortality Task and Finish Group started in March 2013 and is scheduled to run until the end of the calendar year;
- The Review Group comprised 7 Elected-Members and 1 co-opted member from Healthwatch Luton and is chaired by Councillor R. Whittaker.
- The purpose of the Review was to identify and consider factors and causes of high infant mortality in Luton and make

recommendations to enable the Council and NHS partners to develop evidence-based interventions to help reduce the Infant Mortality Rate in Luton;

- At the time of writing, the Task and Finish Group was at the evidence gathering stage, having received information from Council Officers and external witnesses, from NHS partner organisations.

## **DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL**

- The purpose of the Discharge from Hospital Task and Finish Group was to review partnership strategy and performance issues relating to hospitalisation and discharges from hospital, so as to understand Luton patients' needs and identify policy and practice issues and concerns and their effects primarily on patients' experience and to advise/ make recommendations for improvements.

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- The Task and Finish Group started in February 2013 and is scheduled to run until August 2013.
- The Review Group comprised 5 Elected-Members and 1 co-opted member from Healthwatch Luton and is chaired by Councillor K. Gale.
- The Review Group received evidence from Council Officers and external witnesses from NHS and voluntary organisations;
- At the time of writing, the Task and Finish Group had concluded evidence gathering and was considering its final report and recommendations.

The Finance Review Group will continue to focus on the Council's strategy for re-structuring services in the face of continuing reductions in funding from central Government.

As Health and Social Care reform begins to bed in, the Health and Social Care Review Group will build on work already under way to establish constructive working relationships with NHS partners, to ensure it has an early influence on proposals for re-structuring services in Luton.

## CALL-INS

There were two call-ins during 2012-13, which were considered and dealt with by the Overview and Scrutiny Board relating to the following issues:

- Direct Debit and Arrangement Fees; and
- Provisional Revenue outturn 2011/12 and proposed carry forwards

## CHALLENGES FOR 2013/14

The Overview and Scrutiny Board will continue to focus on the big issues affecting the town and to raise the profile and awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny process with our partners and Council Officers, to encourage participation and involvement and help identify key issues for its work programme.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**EXECUTIVE** - The Executive is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Executive Members have specific areas of responsibility eg: Housing, Environment, Adult Social Care.

**CALL-IN** - this is the process by which the Overview and Scrutiny Board considers whether a decision has been properly taken or is the right decision.

**TASK AND FINISH GROUPS –**  
Time limited groups set up by the OSB to focus on a particular issue, either Council responsibility or other partner agencies such as Health Trusts, and to make recommendations to Executive. Whilst the Executive is not obliged to support the recommendations, it has been shown that effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Executive support for reviews undertaken.

## CONTACT

If you want to know more, or have any suggestions for scrutiny, contact us in the Democracy Team on 01582 546041 or email [scrutiny@luton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@luton.gov.uk).