

This annual report looks at scrutiny reviews carried out by the County Council in the year from May 2009 and considers some of the achievements from reviews where scrutiny has helped to improve the delivery of public services to the communities of Nottinghamshire.

We also consider some of the challenges scrutiny members and officers face in the coming year.

A successful scrutiny review depends on the involvement of a number of different people – Councillors and council officers, expert witnesses and members of the public. We would like to thank everyone for their contribution to scrutiny during the past year.

Nottinghamshire County Council
Scrutiny Team 2010

A new administration, following the county council elections in June, has meant changes to scrutiny at County Hall.

An Overview Committee - chaired by Councillor Joyce Bosnjak - replaced the old Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and three new standing committees have been introduced chaired by Councillors Sue Saddington, Ged Clarke and Liz Yates.

The Overview Committee continues to co-ordinate the programme of scrutiny work with members of Overview reviewing areas that cut across services - such as looking at how key strategies are delivered.

This allows standing committees to concentrate on their areas of influence - in education, communities, the environment, social care and health.

The new system is designed to be more flexible so that more councillors can take active roles in scrutiny, concentrating on areas in which they may have a particular interest, drawing on their experiences to help improve local services.

It provides an opportunity to develop expertise among members too.

Members can now address community concerns as a full committee, or smaller working groups of Members can carry out reviews.

There are other changes too: scrutiny now enjoys a regular slot in full council. This allows the work of scrutiny to be discussed by all county councillors, with the chair of Overview - and the chairs of the three standing committees - able to answer questions about the work they are doing.

Councillors can now put questions to cabinet members in full council about the progress of implementing recommendations that have been made to them.

A Joint Health Committee - made up of councillors from the County Council and Nottingham City Council - continues to examine health issues across the Nottingham conurbation.

- A review into Patient Transport - carried out by the Joint Committee - has been submitted for a national scrutiny award for joint working.

Overview Committee

How have we made a difference?

Grant aid for athletes

We called for a shake up of funding for our talented athletes in Notts. We welcome the County Council's new grant aid programme. 25 elite athletes - our shining stars - and up to 100 emerging talents - our rising stars - will now benefit from a £150,000 pot.

As an ambassador for the scheme, Notts gold medal winner Rebecca Adlington OBE said that 'more local athletes will now be able to follow their dreams.'

Saving the council money

Recommendations in a recent scrutiny report have helped to reduce the number of days lost to sickness absence among County Council employees. A number of

review recommendations have been implemented to improve the management of sickness absence, including senior managers taking more responsibility for action, adopting more flexible working and lowering the sickness threshold for when action is triggered.

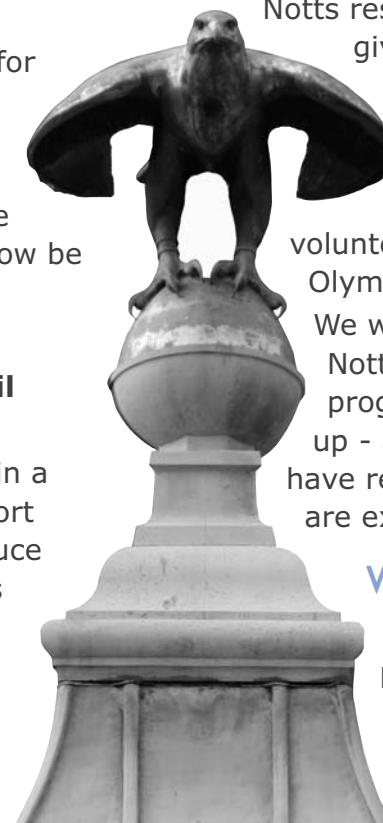
Help for volunteers

We wanted to make it easier for Notts residents who wanted to give up their time to support the community and now they can. We called for support for people wanting to volunteer for the London Olympics.

We welcome the championing Notts volunteering programme that has been set up - already 100 volunteers have registered and many more are expected.

What are we trying to improve?

Members of the Overview Committee are carrying out a review into **partnerships** and



whether they achieve improvements for local communities.

There is concern at the lack of clarity in the County Council's involvement in partnerships and the review is examining whether they provide value for money in delivering improvements.

The County Council is involved with over 300 partnerships and the review may consider whether Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and local priorities, are achievable with fewer partnerships.

Many partnerships operate outside the involvement of a majority of elected Members, and the review will look at how to

improve Member involvement and accountability - such as increasing the influence of Members' Forums in delivering local services.

A small working group of Members has looked at introducing **biomass boilers** into schools.

Instead of using environmentally damaging fossil fuels, biomass boilers burn wood chip or wood pellet. This produces heat for central heating systems and hot water, and helps to counter the impact of climate change.

The review recommended that more schools change to the environmentally friendly boilers as a way of reducing costs and becoming less reliant on oil and gas.

Involving the public in the way the council works - and making it more open - has been a key theme to the Overview Committee's work.

Members have undertaken three short reviews to improve public access to important decisions.

Councillor Joyce Bosnjak chair of the new Overview Committee: 'We are constantly looking to introduce new ways of involving the public in the work of overview and scrutiny.'

Our report on '**exempt information**' seeks to tighten the rules on what information can be withheld when making decisions.

Our recommendations aim to establish an openness in decision making to which the County Council is already committed.

We are also proposing changes to the way the council handles **petitions** to make it easier for the public to submit petitions, including on-line.

The committee has also considered the impact **budget** changes will have on services and how the results of a public consultation were used in the decision making process.

Cabinet has accepted a report into the process of setting the County Council **budget**.

● Members of the Overview Committee: Councillors Joyce Bosnjak (Chair), Brian Wombwell (Vice-Chair), Martin Wright (Vice Chair), Michael Bennett, Ged Clarke, John Clarke, Mrs Sue Saddington, Stuart Wallace, Liz Yates.

'The principal question that should be answered is - "has this work had a positive effect" - on decision-makers and/or on members of the public. This should be the ultimate criterion against which accountability should be judged.'

Accountability Works
Centre for Public Scrutiny 2010



Communities & the Environment

How have we made a difference?

Recommendations from the **Flooding** and **Critical Infrastructure** reviews are being implemented.

Councillors were concerned that a catastrophic event might have a disproportionate effect on the utilities and transport network.

After considering the resilience of the infrastructure – such as energy supply and transport - we said that there should be a systematic audit of possible weaknesses in our critical infrastructure.

We welcome the work by the Local Resilience Forum to minimise the impact of these weaknesses on the people of Nottinghamshire.

Since the review the County Council have introduced better communications to assist the public in responding to a catastrophic failure.

Members of the public can now receive advice on a range of issues such as how to prepare a household emergency plan.

The review also recommended a joint response between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire County Councils to deal with coastal flooding.

The **Flooding (Drainage and Watercourses) review** examined the severe effects of the 2007 summer floods and recommended better maintenance of drains and water courses to help protect properties in the future.

Parishes are now more prepared to respond to events that might affect their communities. We called for parishes to be provided with support to make emergency plans. We welcome plans and advice being sent to all parishes. Already six parishes have made use of this support.

We called for sandbags to be stored closer to possible areas of flooding. Parish stores have now been set up across Newark & Sherwood and Bassetlaw, with more expected to follow.

What are we trying to improve?

Members of the committee have concentrated their attention on

the important area of **highway maintenance** in response to local concerns about potholes and footpath repairs.

The highway network is a crucial part of the local infrastructure affecting all communities. A higher volume of traffic and heavier vehicles means more wear and tear on the roads with damage often caused by accidents, misuse and the effects of the weather - particularly after the recent severe winter.

We are looking at the quality of maintenance, value for money and the criteria for road maintenance, both reactive and planned.

The review will also consider reinstatement of the highway following work by utility companies and insurance claims against the council related to highway defects.

Members are expected to publish their report in the summer.

Councillor Mrs Sue Saddington
Chair of the Communities & the Environment Standing Committee:
'Scrutiny addresses local concerns, gets to the bottom of long standing problems and recommends ways to sort them out.'

The Communities and the Environment Standing Committee scrutinises highways, environment, culture and communities in the county.

- Members of the committee: Councillors Sue Saddington (Chair), Geoff Merry (Vice Chair), Chris Barnfather, Victor Bobo, Stephen Garner, Glynn Gilfoyle, John M Hemsall, Eric Kerry, John Knight, Keith Longdon, Rachel Madden, Thomas AJ Pettengell, Mike Quigley, Kevin Rostance, Parry Tsimbiridis, Gail Turner, Keith Walker.



The Education Standing Committee scrutinises education - mainly in schools and colleges - but also looks at training and opportunities across the county.

● Members of the Committee: Councillors Liz Yates (Chair), John Allin (Vice Chair), Michael Bennett, LB Cooper, Michael J Cox, VH Dobson, Sybil Fielding, Michelle Gent, Rev Tom Irvine, Rod Kempster, Wendy Quigley, Kevin Rostance, Mrs S Smedley, Stuart Wallace, Brian Wombwell, Martin Wright



Education

How have we made a difference?

Our review into **Managing Attendance in Schools** has been accepted by the cabinet member for Children & Young People's Services. Actions are being carried out to implement all recommendations.

Already we are seeing work by the Education Welfare Service to encourage schools to share information and develop joint strategies to address family issues around irregular school attendance.

The review considered the reasons and patterns of absence - as well as the support services that are available to encourage attendance. The review also looked at how other authorities target parents who have children with poor attendance records.

We called for absence to be approached as a family issue,

Councillor Liz Yates Chair of the Education Standing Committee: 'Children and young people need high quality education and training to prepare them for adult life.'

particularly where there may be siblings at different schools.

We recommended in the review of **take-up of school meals**, an in depth analysis of schools where take-up is below 35%. We welcome the suggestion that this should be undertaken in all schools.

We called for each school to establish a 'champion' to promote healthy eating. We welcome the work of the Healthy Schools Programme in supporting this by nominating a Healthy Schools Co-ordinator to encourage healthy lifestyle choices.

We said in the **GCSE Attainment & Deprivation review** that good practice should be shared between schools - a partnership approach to help sustain improvements.

Scrutiny will continue to monitor results to ensure that improvements are maintained.

What are we trying to improve?

A review is examining the current provision of **apprenticeships** to consider if current places meet demand and what can be done to increase numbers and the range of opportunities for young people.

The review is also identifying how young people are encouraged to use the apprenticeship route to gain the necessary skills for employment.

More than 30 employers provide over 2,000 apprenticeships every year in Nottinghamshire - the highest in the region. Our findings and recommendations will be published in June.

Following the review into **school meals** in Notts schools, Members followed up a Cabinet request to consider whether the school food service should be based in one department rather than split between Children & Young People's Services and Communities.

Members have now recommended that all school meal provision be located in the Communities Department to cut duplication and help establish clear lines of responsibility for increasing the take-up of meals.

We hope that this will free up more money for school meals and we expect to hear how this will be taken forward in July.

Health & Wellbeing

How have we made a difference?

We wanted to see service users involved in shaping our safeguarding arrangements. We welcome the awareness raising campaign led by the County Council, Primary Care Trusts and the Police. Thousands of Notts residents have signed a pledge to prevent abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults.

We have protected the needs of some of the most vulnerable service users in Notts. We called for the pace of change to learning disability service residents to be tailored for individual needs. We welcome the work of the County Council, PCTs and Notts Healthcare Trust in providing a team for each individual to plan their discharge and future service needs.

What are we trying to improve?

The **future of health services in Newark** has been a key focus of the committee.

A review group considered whether there has been appropriate patient and public

consultation in proposals from NHS Nottinghamshire County to replace the accident and emergency department in a major shake-up of health provision in Newark.

Newark hospital has no intensive care beds, 24-hour anaesthetics cover, or access to major surgical facilities, which means many emergency patients already have to be transferred by ambulance to other hospitals because their injuries cannot be treated.

NHS Nottinghamshire County consulted on options to replace A&E with a minor injuries unit plus. This will be staffed by GPs or specially trained nurses, with more community care services and outpatient clinics.

Members of the committee want to ensure that there is sufficient emergency care for Newark residents at the busiest times.

The Trust have proposed that patients requiring specialist care such as for stroke, heart attack or major trauma be taken to the Kings Mill Hospital or the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham in a move towards offering patients

the best specialist care at the most appropriate centre.

Members were also concerned that the closure of Friary Ward has meant mental health patients have had to be transferred to the Ashfield Health Village.

Members have called for the trust and the council to look at the need for transport from Newark to hospitals in Mansfield and Ashfield. We expect a response to this in July.

A small working group of Members have reported on **health inequalities and access to GPs**.

The review examined issues relating to access to GP services and considered if there is a link between access and health inequalities.

The committee has also examined the big health issues for Notts and how these are being tackled through the **joint commissioning framework** for key health and social care services and the quality of, and access to, **NHS dentistry**.

Councillor Ged Clarke, Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Standing Committee: 'We have helped to shape the future of health services in Newark.'

The Health & Wellbeing Standing Committee scrutinises adult social care and health and children's health services.

- Members of the committee: Councillors Ged Clarke (Chair), Fiona Asbury (Vice Chair), Michael Bennett, John Clarke, Jim Creamer, LB Cooper, Michael J Cox, Bob Cross, VH Dobson, Rod Kempster, Geoff Merry, Thomas AJ Pettengell, Mrs Wendy Quigley, Alan Rhodes, Keith Walker, Brian Wombwell, Liz Yates.



Joint Health

How have we made a difference?

Over 1000 more patients in Notts have arrived on time for their hospital or clinic appointments following the intervention of the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee.

A review into the poor performance of the **Patient Transport Service (PTS)** revealed that the service was struggling to meet even modest targets for the time taken to deliver patients for non-emergency appointments, with only 37% of patients arriving at the Queen's Medical Centre or City Hospital, within 30 minutes of their appointment times.

Members were also unhappy at the length of wait for patients returning home after a hospital appointment and critical of a lack of information for patients.

The East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) responded to recommendations in the review, and patients have already seen signs of improvement from the

introduction of a 'zoning system' to ensure more patients are picked up and taken to clinics on time, with better communications and improved training.

What are we trying to improve?

As part of a scrutiny review into **dementia care** in Notts hospitals, Members heard about the experience of dementia patients from four carers. They stressed that hospitals are not able to provide the care that dementia patients require.

They described a lack of understanding of the illness among health professionals, operating in an overstretched system lacking the flexibility required to respond to the unique demands of dementia sufferers.

They also felt that the condition of the person they were caring for had deteriorated as a result of the time spent in hospital.

Carers also described the profound and distressing impact on families who often feel isolated from care services.

The Committee also received a report into the healthcare needs of people with **learning disabilities**.

The joint report by local NHS Trusts, the City and County Councils, follows the Ombudsman's response to the healthcare received by six people with learning disabilities in the London Borough of Havering, detailing prolonged suffering and poor care.

Among six areas of concern identified by the Ombudsman are better communications, better relationships with families and carers, and improved advocacy.

Recommendations in the report include 'easy read' information and training of health staff in the specific needs of people with learning disabilities.

Made up of councillors from Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council, the committee ensures accountability and a wider community engagement in health issues across the conurbation. The joint committee scrutinises developments in local NHS services and helps to ensure the delivery of local health services.

- There are 8 county councillors on the 16 member Joint Health committee (the County Council and Nottingham City Council have 8 seats each with the chair alternating each year).

County Councillors: VH Dobson (Vice Chair), Ged Clarke, John Clarke, Stephen Garner, Eric Kerry, Mrs Sue Saddington, Parry Tsimbiridis, Brian Wombwell.

Statement of Accountability 2009-10

Scrutiny holds public service providers in Nottinghamshire to account and makes recommendations for improvement based on public concerns. We can request information from any organisation or service provider, where Members consider a useful contribution can be made to a scrutiny review. Recommendations can be made and organisations invited to provide a response.

In many cases, a review will have legal powers to request information or attendance at meetings, and for an organisation to consider implementing recommendations made to them.

The following organisations have been involved in 2009-10.

Organisations providing information or attending reviews		Organisations responding to scrutiny recommendations	Organisations declining requests for information or to respond to recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Audit Commission ● Bassetlaw PCT ● Doncaster & Bassetlaw Hospital NHS Foundation Trust ● Government Office East Midlands ● East Midlands Ambulance Service ● Learning and Skills Council ● Mansfield Magistrates' Court ● National Apprenticeship Service ● National Grid Gas ● NHS East Midlands ● NHS Nottinghamshire County ● Nottingham University Hospitals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nottinghamshire County Council ● Nottinghamshire County LINK ● Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust ● Nottinghamshire Partnership ● Nottinghamshire Training Network ● Primary Care Practitioners - Newark ● Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire ● Safer Nottinghamshire Board ● Severn Trent ● Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust ● Staffordshire County Council ● Virgin Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Doncaster & Bassetlaw Hospital NHS Foundation Trust ● East Midlands Ambulance Service ● Nottingham University Hospitals ● Nottinghamshire County Council Children and Young People's Portfolio ● Nottinghamshire County Council Finance Portfolio ● Nottinghamshire County Council People and Performance Portfolio ● Nottinghamshire Partnership ● Nottinghamshire County LINK ● Safer Nottinghamshire Board ● Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 	<p>none</p>

Our Achievements in 2009-10

Last year we set out the following challenges for 2009-10. This is what we have achieved:

Engaging with communities and encouraging more community involvement in the scrutiny process, through informal evidence gathering and taking opportunities to hold meetings in the community, listening to community concerns made through petitions and/or complaints, and taking a proactive approach to raise the profile of scrutiny with the public.

Our review of NHS Services in Newark has been predominantly based in the community. Members have made recommendations having viewed the services currently available at the hospital and to ensure that public concern is acted upon. Members recommended specific training to ensure magistrates are fully equipped to deal with complex issues involved in the prosecution of families for their child's non attendance at school. Members recently visited Mansfield Magistrates' Court to see how parents of children with poor attendance records are dealt with by the courts. We are looking at how we can involve the public further through new laws on petitions and have made recommendations on this.

Supporting Councillors following the election so that new members are comfortable in, and knowledgeable of, their scrutiny role. All Members have the opportunity to refine or develop skills, such as questioning that is incisive and inquisitive, but less adversarial.

We held two development events following the election to introduce members to the scrutiny role and to shape our programme of work. Approval has been given for two further events later in the year.

Embedding new powers and developing relationships for effective scrutiny with partners. These powers have already been introduced, but further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that best use is made of them so that Members can provide effective scrutiny of public services across Nottinghamshire.

Scrutiny has worked with a wide range of organisations in 2009-10, with recommendations for service improvement made to a range of our partners, (see our Statement of Accountability for 2009-10 overleaf).

Looking at wider scrutiny issues, such as proposed powers in The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill, developing options for a new East Midlands Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and ensuring the accountability of public bodies across the region.

We hosted the first meeting of Nottinghamshire scrutiny chairs to look at how the county, district and borough councils can work together to hold to account everyone providing services to the public. We are looking at how we can use new powers to do this.

Strengthening performance management, by providing greater accountability for poor performance of local public services, contributing to the Comprehensive Area Assessment, and by further developing the processes for reporting progress against scrutiny recommendations.

Issues of concern are often services with less than satisfactory performance, and scrutiny uses performance management information as part of its reviews and in developing its programme of work. We continue to work with the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Our Challenges for 2010-11

To strengthen scrutiny by promoting the powers that are available to champion improvements in public services.

To further explore options with the borough and district councils and others for more collaboration to provide accountability through scrutiny to public service providers across Nottinghamshire, both formally and informally.



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