



Herefordshire Council Scrutiny Committees Annual Report 2003/2004

- ...**Putting** people first
- ...**Preserving** our heritage
- ...**Promoting** our county
- ...**Providing** for our communities
- ...**Protecting** our future

Quality life in a quality county

FOREWORD

In reviewing the operation of the Council's Scrutiny Committees it seemed opportune and timely to take stock and assess the progress which has been made by the scrutiny function since we became Chairmen in May 2003.

One way of doing this was the preparation of an Annual Report. It seemed sensible that the reporting period should be from 1 May 2003 to 30 April 2004 so as to provide a basis for future comparison and assessment of the function's development.

Scrutiny is not about decision making but about being an effective influencing body which improves the overall decision making of the Council. The function must bear in mind the questions "what difference can we make?" and "what difference have we made?". The evidence shows that the Scrutiny Committees have engaged in a considerable amount of work and begun to contribute to and influence the decision making of both the Council and its partners. The function is developing and some interesting new approaches have been explored. There is scope to share this good practice within the Authority, in addition to continued learning from best practice elsewhere, and so build upon the existing foundations to expand the function and aim to realise the potential of scrutiny in Herefordshire.

Councillor TM James
Chairman of the Strategic Monitoring
Committee

Councillor Mrs MD Lloyd-Hayes
Chairman of the Social Care And housing
Scrutiny Committee

Councillor BF Ashton
Chairman of the Education Scrutiny
Committee

Councillor ACR Chappell
Chairman of the Social and Economic
Development Scrutiny Committee

Councillor JHR Goodwin
Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny
Committee

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES ANNUAL REPORT 2003/2004

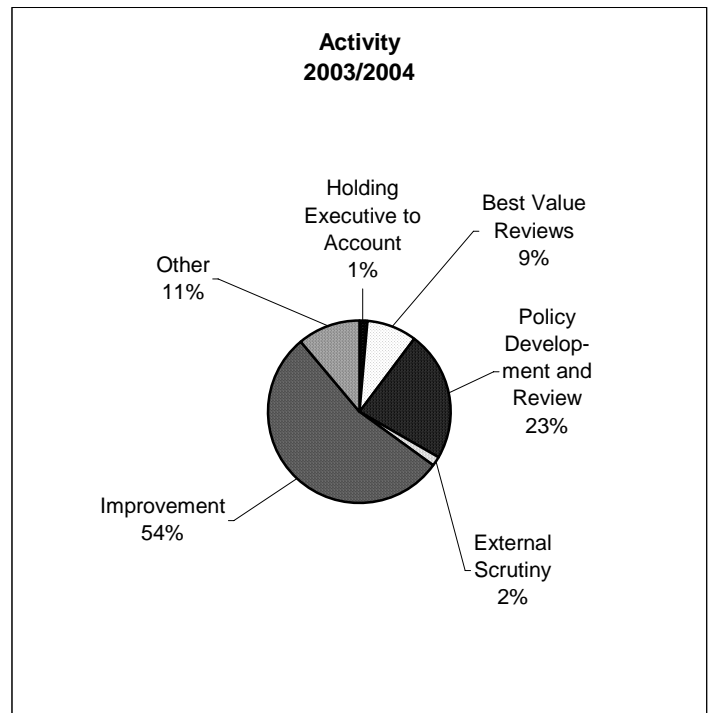
Purpose

1. To review the activity of the Council's Programme Area Scrutiny Committees over the period 1 May 2003 to 31 April 2004.

Introduction

2. Throughout the year the items considered by the Scrutiny Committees have been analysed as far as is practicable under five roles for overview and Scrutiny identified in the report on "The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government" published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in September 2002.
3. The five roles are:
 - **holding the executive to account** (scrutinising decisions before they are implemented, scrutinising decisions after they are made).
 - **policy development and review** (as an integral part of policy review, creating opportunities for non-executive Members to play a substantive role in policy development).
 - **external scrutiny** (examination and investigation of the work of outside bodies and the impact on the community that the Council serves, an opportunity to enhance the community leadership role of local government and the statutory power of well-being).
 - **improvement** (performance management and review) – (monitoring service delivery in order to enhance performance, anticipating and addressing poor performance, playing a role in driving continuous improvement)
 - **best value reviews** (carrying out the Council's best value review programme and recommending options for consideration by the executive).
4. The analysis provides an indication, albeit a rough and ready one, of the focus of the Scrutiny function and allows consideration of whether any change of direction should be considered.
5. A comparison of activity between 2002/03 and 2003/2004, based on the number of reports considered by the Scrutiny Committees, is set out below:

	Total Number of Reports Considered 2003/2004	%	Total number of reports considered 2002/2003	%
Holding the Executive to Account	3	1.25	3	1.25
Best Value Reviews	21	9	49	22
Policy Development & Review	54	23	38	17
External Scrutiny	4	1.75	3	1.25
Improvement (Performance Management & Review)	127	54	117	52.25
Other	25	11	14	6.25



* (The Health Scrutiny Committee was not established until May 2003)

6. This shows that performance management and review continues to form the bulk of the work undertaken. There has been an increase in the focus on policy development and review work. Perhaps to be expected, given the Government's change in emphasis, there has also been a decrease in Best Value review work. Although Cabinet Members regularly attend meetings and answer questions the activity of Committees in holding the executive to account remains low. However, some initiatives have been undertaken.
7. The work of the four programme area Scrutiny Committees and the Strategic Monitoring Committee during the year is discussed below. The work of the Health Scrutiny Committee is the subject of a separate report. Attention has been drawn to areas of work which have contributed to the development of the function and which suggest avenues for further exploration and development.
8. A number of reviews started in 2003/2004 are due for completion in 2004/2005. A full analysis of those reviews will therefore feature in the 2004/2005 annual report.

9. STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

- 9.1 To exercise the statutory scrutiny function in relation to the corporate strategy and finance; audit and performance management and corporate support services programme areas; and, in summary, co-ordinate and oversee the work of the other scrutiny committees.

Meetings

- 9.2 The Committee met five times during the reporting period.

Activity Summary

9.3 The Committee's activity has included:

- Regular performance management and review reports on the capital and revenue budgets, Herefordshire Council Improvement Plan, the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA), Herefordshire Plan and Partnership progress report, the race equality scheme progress report, community safety progress report, information and communications technology improvement plan, audit services assurance report, payment of invoices, corporate health performance monitoring, complaints and compliments monitoring and complaints to the local government ombudsman and complaints panel, external audit and inspection programme, the land charges service and the revenues and benefits service, and the human resources strategy.
- Consideration of policy development in contributing to the Council's review of the constitution and the Prudential Code and its impact on Capital Strategy, and the Risk Management Strategy. The terms of reference and scoping statement of the property management review were agreed and work commenced in December 2003. The Committee has also commissioned reviews of the Council's input into the Herefordshire Partnership and the funding support for Community First within the context of an overall review of the support to the voluntary sector in Herefordshire.
- Co-ordinating the work of the other scrutiny committees, receiving reports on their work programmes and regular reports summarising activity being undertaken.
- Approving with certain observations, the Best Value Review of the Inspection, Advice and Performance Service, and monitoring progress in relation to the Transport Review and the Revenues and Benefits Service Improvement Plan.

Commentary

9.4 The Committee's work to date has to a great extent involved shadowing the work of the Cabinet, in particular in relation to the budget, the local public service agreement and the Council's Improvement Plan.

9.5 The Property Management Review has proved a significant commitment. The review was selected by Members on the basis that it would provide an opportunity to undertake a review of an area which is cross-cutting, an important area of the Council's activity and one of the few areas which had not been subject to review since the Council's formation. The desired outcomes of the review include a strategy for the optimum use of the Council's property in pursuit of its objectives; clear criteria against which opportunities for property disposal or acquisition may be assessed; options for the future delivery of property management which provide clear accountability compared to the existing arrangements; and identification of potential savings in costs.

9.6 The outcome of the Review will be analysed in next year's report.

9.7 The Committee has given careful consideration to the Council's input into the Herefordshire Plan and the need to demonstrate that the work being carried out is delivering practical benefits. The outcome will be analysed in next year's report.

9.8 The Committee has considered improvement in the Council's performance in paying invoices within 30 days. This is an important indicator both in terms of national

assessment of the Council's performance and for the Council's relations with contractors, in particular smaller local businesses. In July 2002 the Committee was advised that performance against this Best Value Performance Indicator was unacceptable across the Council. For 2001/2002 the percentage of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days of them being sent to the Authority was 78.09% against a government target of 100%. It was requested that performance reports were submitted to individual scrutiny committees on a regular basis. In July 2003 the Committee was advised that performance for 2002/2003 overall was 83%, but for the last six months of that year just under 87%. This reflected managerial action and changes to data calculation. The Committee agreed that provided the level of improvement continued performance should in future be reported on an exception basis.

10. EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

- 10.1 To discharge the statutory scrutiny function in relation to the education programme area.

Meetings

- 10.2 The Committee met 5 times during the reporting period

Activity Summary

- 10.3 A great deal of the Education Directorate's work is prescribed by Central Government and the Committee's role has reflected the framework.

- 10.4 The Committee's activity has included:

- Regular performance management and review reports including the post-Ofsted Inspection Action Plan, school results, outcomes of individual Ofsted inspections; Capital and Revenue Budget Monitoring and review of Compliments, Complaints and Appeals, the Education Development Plan; performance indicators, sickness absence, School Opinion Survey, Monitoring of Incidents in Schools in accordance with the Race Relations Act 2000.
- Consideration of a range of policy development issues: the School Organisation Plan; Pupil Admissions Policy, the Standard School year; school workforce remodelling, Training and Support of Governors, Banding in Primary Schools, ICT Technical Support; Service Level Agreements with Schools, Safer Routes to Schools, Social Inclusion Education Policy, Building Schools for the Future and review of a number of Small Schools.
- Initiating a Review of Discretionary Areas of Policy in Home to School Transport, This is an area of significant Council expenditure. An assessment of the Review will appear in next year's report.
- Completion of the Best Value Review of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service and its recommendation to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

Commentary

- 10.5 The Committee has considered and scrutinised a number of significant issues. However, it has done so in a relatively traditional way.
- 10.6 In terms of membership the Committee is currently the largest of the Scrutiny Committees, consisting of 19 people. The Committee is required to co-opt diocesan representatives and parent governor representatives as full voting members of the Committee. Traditionally it has chosen also to co-opt non-voting Head Teacher and Teacher representatives from the primary and secondary sectors and a representative from the special school sector. During the year the Committee reviewed and reaffirmed this arrangement, extending the eligibility for the special school teacher representative to include Head Teachers at special schools and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators.

11. ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

- 11.1 To discharge the statutory scrutiny function in relation to the Environment Programme Area.

Meetings

- 11.2 The Committee met 6 times during the reporting period.

Activity Summary

- 11.3 The Committee's remit affords it an opportunity to address a range of issues of direct interest to the Council's partners and the public.

- 11.4 The Committee's activity has included:

- Regular performance management and review reports on the capital and revenue budgets and human resources, and performance indicators including progress in relation to Good Environmental Management (GEM) performance measures, Herefordshire Plan Ambitions, kerbside collection of recyclables
- Consideration of a range of policy development and review issues: parking enforcement, Parish Council minor highway maintenance scheme, public rights of way service, parking strategy and policy on polytunnels.
- Calling-in the decision of the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) on car parking charges, referring the matter back to him for further consideration and recommending that a full review of the car parking strategy be undertaken.
- Regular reports on progress in implementing the Improvement Plans of Best Value Reviews, which have been undertaken.

Commentary

- 11.5 Two notable pieces of work were commissioned: on the car parking strategy and the review of the Voluntary Code of Practice for the use of Polytunnels in Herefordshire.

Car Parking Strategy

- 11.6 The Committee called-in the decision of the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) on new car parking charges. A meeting was called to consider that one issue. The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member closely on his decision and referred his decision back to the executive recommending in addition that the car-parking strategy should be reviewed. The Cabinet confirmed the original decision of the Cabinet Member on charges but agreed that there should be a review of the car parking strategy.
- 11.7 The Cabinet Member invited the Committee to conduct the review and report back to him. The Committee accepted this invitation and appointed a Working Group to conduct the review. The review is due to report at the end of 2004 and an assessment of the review will feature in next year's annual report.

Polytunnels

- 11.8 In February 2003 Cabinet agreed to adopt a voluntary code of practice to control the use of polytunnels in Herefordshire. The agreed policy provided for the operation of the voluntary code to be reviewed after 12 months. There had also been a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman about the Council's approach to the issue. The Ombudsman indicated that he would consider a review of the current arrangements as a satisfactory settlement of the complaint.
- 11.9 Following discussions between the Cabinet Member (Environment) the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, and the Chairman of the Strategic Monitoring Committee given the review's cross-cutting nature, it was agreed that the review should be conducted by the Environment Scrutiny Committee.
- 11.10 The Committee appointed a Review Group to carry out the review and report back to the Committee. The Membership comprised three members of the Committee and Councillors drawn from other Committees to reflect the cross-cutting nature of the review and the planning implications: the Chairmen of the three Area Planning Sub-Committees and the Vice-Chairman of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.
- 11.11 The Terms of Reference were approved by the Committee and a scoping statement produced in accordance with the Council's approved format, setting out the desired outcomes, key questions and proposed timetable.
- 11.12 It immediately became apparent that the review would be high profile, generating considerable public interest and engaging the attention of both local and national media.
- 11.13 Written evidence was invited by means of press advertisements. A good response was received from both objectors to and supporters of the Code. Two public meetings of the Group were held in March, generating public attendance of 30 and 65 respectively. At the second meeting provision was made for both objectors and supporters to nominate representative speakers, each side being allocated an hour to present its views. This proved a productive approach, providing the Review Group with a clear indication of the level of public interest involved, the strength of feeling on both sides and a considerable amount of evidence to inform the review.
- 11.14 A wealth of information and issues had to be considered by the Review Group and the target date for completion of the Review had to be extended beyond the period covered by this 2003/2004 annual report. A number of lessons have already been learned. A full analysis of the review will appear in the next Annual Report.

12. SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

- 12.1 To discharge the statutory scrutiny function in relation to the Social Care and Strategic Housing Programme areas including scrutiny of arrangements under section 31 of the Health Act 1999 having regard also to links with the Herefordshire Partnership and the Health and Care Partnership and the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Meetings

- 12.2 The Committee has met 5 times during the reporting period.

Activity Summary

- 12.3 The Committee's activity has included:
- Holding the Executive to account: a presentation by the Cabinet Member (Social Care and Strategic Housing) on policy issues.
 - Consideration of the policy relating to provision of extra care housing, an audit of services following the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, policy on delayed transfers of Care and reimbursements, the Green Paper: Every Child Matters, Older People's Business Case, Home Support Staff – Recruitment and Workforce Issues.
 - Regular performance monitoring and review reports, with particular attention being paid to the action being taken to reduce the overspend on the revenue budget, progress in implementing the action plan arising from a serious case review, performance statistics and progress in relation to Herefordshire Plan Ambition Groups, the Better Care Higher Standards Annual Users Report, Home Energy Conservation Act Annual Report, Adoption Service Annual Report, complaints comments and compliments, the Supporting People Inspection and programme, progress report on the Joint Review Action Plan.
 - Progress reports on the Best Value Review programme.

Commentary

Presentation by Cabinet Member

- 12.4 The experiment of inviting members of the Executive to outline their priorities to the Committee has also been carried out by one other scrutiny committee: the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee. This is seen as one way of strengthening links between the executive and the scrutiny function. The question for the Committee is whether it wishes to repeat the experiment and how it wishes to reflect on progress made by the executive during the previous year.

Scoping Day

- 12.5 The Committee has developed its approach to its work by establishing three task groups, consisting of Members of the Committee, to look at the following key service areas: Older People, Children and Mental Health. A scoping day was held at which presentations were given on each of the areas. Detailed scoping work will now be undertaken to select areas for review. This will provide a Member led work programme having regard to the principles for identifying subjects for review

contained in the Council's Scrutiny Handbook.

Development

- 12.6 Members visited an extra-care housing scheme in Wolverhampton to enable them to comment with enhanced authority on the Council's own proposals.
- 12.7 The Committee has also experimented with ways of making meetings more productive by preparing for the meeting as a Group and seeking to identify areas of questioning. This has had some benefits on the occasions it has been used.
- 12.8 The Committee also held two informal meetings to increase its knowledge on particular topics.

13. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Terms Of Reference

- 13.1 To discharge the statutory scrutiny function in relation to the Social and Economic Development Programme Area.

Meetings

- 13.2 The Committee held 6 meetings during the reporting period.

Activity Summary

- 13.3 The Committee's activity has included:
- Holding the Executive to Account: Presentations by Cabinet Members for Community and Social Development, Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings, and Economic Development, Markets and Property.
 - Regular performance monitoring and review reports on performance indicators, revenue budget monitoring, Adult Learning Inspectorate's inspection and re-inspection of the Adult and Community Learning Service, Regeneration Funding Streams, Herefordshire Plan Ambition Groups, Staffing Numbers, Human Resources, progress of the community Youth Service towards new standards.
 - Monitoring of Best Value Review Improvement Plans and progression of the review of Council support to the voluntary sector.
 - Consideration of policy relating to the draft strategic framework for libraries, access to services in Kington and surrounding areas, funding for Festivals, and the economic position of Hereford City.
 - Review of Community and Partner involvement in Scrutiny and the engagement of expert witnesses.
 - A presentation by HALO the Leisure Trust.

Commentary

Festivals Review

- 13.4 The Festivals Review was the first “in-depth review” carried out by this Council along the lines described in the ODPM report.
- 13.5 The Council supports a number of Festivals throughout Herefordshire. The focus of the Festivals varies as does the level of direct support and in kind support the Council makes available. Following issues and concerns raised by festivals which took place in 2003, mainly around funding and investment, the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) approached the Chairman of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee to request that a review of Festivals be undertaken.
- 13.6 The Committee established a Panel of four members of the Committee to carry out the Review on its behalf. General terms of reference were set but not a detailed scoping statement. The objective was to “give guidance to the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) to find common solutions to investment requirements of festivals taking place in Herefordshire.”
- 13.7 The Panel conducted interviews with representatives of the Ross on Wye International Festival, the Herefordshire Photography Festival, Leominster Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival, the Three Choirs Festival and the Hay Festival and representatives of the relevant Local Area Partnerships. Expert advice was also sought from West Midlands Arts and an independent arts expert. Several of the meetings were open to the public, at Ledbury, Leominster and Ross on Wye and advertised in the press. The meeting held in public at a function room in a hotel in Ross-on-Wye drew an audience of some 30 people. There was also local media interest in the Review.
- 13.8 A tight timescale for the review was set and the deadline was met. The review recommended in outline that subject to scaling down of the Ross-on-Wye International Festival to ensure its long term viability, an appropriate amount of funding should be considered for its survival, noting that could be combined with exploring alternative ways of managing the Festival; Town Council involvement and support for festivals, specifically in Ross-on-Wye should be encouraged; formal, regular meetings should be facilitated between the festivals to address options for sharing resources in areas such as marketing, box office and administration, and to exchange ideas and share good practice; that common performance indicators and measures of success should be established with the festivals based on qualitative and quantitative data, and that local authority funding should be put on three year service level agreements, as opposed to annual grants. It was also recommended that consideration be given to supporting the infrastructure on which festivals depend – e.g. a direct rail link from Birmingham Airport to Hereford, increased public transport schemes to support festivals.
- 13.9 The Cabinet Member agreed that all the recommendations in the report should be pursued. The matter is ongoing and the Committee will review progress.
- 13.10 Members of the Panel generally considered the Review interesting and beneficial and worked as a close-knit team. Lessons learned included the benefits of preparation. General areas of questioning had been prepared in advance and notified to the interviewees. Members divided areas of questioning between themselves. Whilst the information obtained was informative it did become apparent that by seeking written statements in advance the Committee would have been able to focus on areas requiring clarification rather than, at times, simply receiving an amount of detailed factual information. A clearer, more detailed scoping statement would also have helped to define and focus the review.

- 13.11 Whilst there were practical reasons for the tight deadline it did place pressure on Members and officers and not all that had been planned was achieved in the time available. It was clear that only a limited number of interviews could be held on any one occasion if concentration was to be maintained and the maximum benefit derived from the process.
- 13.12 The process was also resource intensive demonstrating the importance of carefully establishing the need for reviews of this type and the benefits which it is expected, will be derived from them.
- 13.13 The confidence of the Executive in requesting the Scrutiny function to carry out work on its behalf and the Scrutiny function's considered, evidence-based response to that responsibility is considered to be a model approach. This has been mirrored in other areas, most notably the car-parking review and the review of polytunnels as referred to in the report of the Environment Scrutiny Committee.
- 13.14 The lessons learned from the review have informed other reviews and Scrutiny work as reflected elsewhere in this report.

Consideration of the Economic Position of Hereford

- 13.15 A special meeting of the Committee was held at Maylord Orchard meeting room in the City Centre in January 2004. This was prompted by the fact that 2003 had proved a difficult year for the local economy of the City with job losses at Bulmers following its takeover, reductions in the labour force of other well established businesses in the manufacturing sector; the impact of the outbreak of legionnaires disease in November 2003 and a lack of success with a number of applications for external funding.
- 13.16 It was envisaged that the meeting would provide an opportunity for representatives of the business community in the City centre to give evidence to the Council on the economic impacts of recent events and to make suggestions about initiatives that could be undertaken to improve the situation.
- 13.17 Nominated business representatives including the Manager of the Maylord Orchards Shopping Centre (who was also Chair of the City Centre Retail Group) a representative of small independent city retailers and the Chamber of Commerce Area Manager for Hereford gave their views, following which the meeting was thrown open to the public.
- 13.18 The meeting was well attended with some 40 people present. Contributions were received from the floor. There was also local media interest.
- 13.19 Although the Chairman had explained the Scrutiny Committee's remit and that the results of the meeting will be referred to the appropriate Cabinet Member of the Council for their consideration this was not fully understood. There remains a lack of awareness on the part of the public and the local media on this point. This needs to be borne in mind in any communications with the media to ensure that misunderstandings are avoided.
- 13.20 The issues raised were considered further by the Committee at its meeting in February 2004. The view was that the meeting had generated a useful and constructive debate and had identified a number of key issues. These included the importance of local management in addressing recent crises such as Foot and Mouth

and the Legionnella outbreak and tackling them effectively; the need for the public, private and voluntary sectors in the City to work in a more co-ordinated fashion to promote the County and City as a shopping and visitor location; the need to provide additional capacity/resource to the Hereford City Partnership to enable it to properly fulfil such a co-ordination role in the City Centre; the need to review the range/impact of activity in and around High Town such as Street Trading, Farmers Markets and Fair rides and the importance of the success of the wider economy of the City in driving up income levels, which would support expenditure in the City Centre; and, in particular the essential requirement for a Rotherwas Access Road to ensure the competitiveness of the large number of businesses on Rotherwas Industrial Estate.

13.21 These issues were referred to the Cabinet Members for Community and Social Development; Environment, Economic Development, Markets and Property, Highways and Transportation and Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings. Since then the last three Cabinet Members named meet on a monthly basis as the Economic Development Liaison Group to guide progress on picking up schemes. e.g. Eign Gate refurbishment. A new City Partnership Officer has also been appointed.

13.22 The Committee has agreed to review progress at a future meeting.

Presentations by Cabinet Members

13.23 The Committee was the first to experiment by inviting Cabinet Members to give presentations on their aspirations for their Programme Areas.

13.24 This was informative and a useful way of strengthening links between the executive and the scrutiny function. The question for the Committee is whether it wishes to repeat the experiment and how to reflect on progress made by the executive during the previous year. The experiment also suggested, as with reviews, the importance of giving a clear brief to those appearing before the Committee and for the Committee to be clear as to the outcomes it wished to achieve and how it wished to measure its success.

Expert Advice

13.25 The Committee has for some years co-opted representatives from the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, Chamber of Commerce and the Voluntary Sector. In reviewing representation the Committee decided to co-opt representatives from the National Farmers Union and the Tourism Sector.

13.26 However, it also agreed that a group of local experts should be formed who could be called upon on an individual basis. A group of sixteen people agreed to undertake this role. The extent of their involvement is driven by the issues considered by the Committee and it will take time to assess the effectiveness of this innovation. To date the experts have contributed to a number of debates with a specific contribution being made by the Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council on the adult learning inspection.

Review of Support for the Voluntary Sector

13.27 The cross-cutting review of Council support to the voluntary sector is ongoing and due to be completed in October 2004. Like the property review this has required considerable staffing resource, a major benchmarking exercise and 35 semi-

structured interviews. Whilst the work has been undertaken within the Policy and Community Directorate, as a cross-cutting review the report will be presented to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

14. SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENT WORK

14.1 The following development activities have taken place:

- At their first meetings after the Council elections in May 2003 each Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on the role of scrutiny and the techniques that Scrutiny Committees can use in their work. A seminar in September built on this, focusing on the development of scrutiny in Herefordshire.
- In December 2003 a session was led by Mr Robert Rogers, Secretary to the Commission (House of Commons Commission), on what the Scrutiny function can learn from Parliamentary Select Committees.
- Also in December a presentation was made by the Strategic Health Authority. Whilst open to all members this had particular importance for the Health Scrutiny function emphasising the Government's agenda for the Health Service.
- A session on Chairing skills on 15 March 2004 was also of relevance.
- There is further scope to draw on best practice from a range of sources including both the West Midlands Region Overview and Scrutiny Network and the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
- In September the Council also hosted a visit from the Vale of Glamorgan Council, at their request, which provided a useful opportunity to compare approaches and issues.
- The Scrutiny Handbook – a practical handbook for Councillors was launched in December 2003. This covers the principles, risks and rewards relating to scrutiny and questioning skills. Chairing scrutiny, developing effective work programmes, undertaking in-depth policy reviews, Health Scrutiny, Scrutiny and Best value and sources of further information.
- A series of indicators have been put in place which will be used during 2004/2005 to try to measure the function's development.

15. SHARING GOOD PRACTICE AND DRIVING IMPROVEMENT

15.1 The Strategic Monitoring Committee in its co-ordinating role needs to take stock of the approaches developed by the individual Scrutiny Committees including the Health Scrutiny Committee and form a view on what has worked well and what has not worked so well and whether there is merit in sharing any approaches across the scrutiny function as a whole. It is suggested that one mechanism for achieving this would be for the Chairmen of the Scrutiny Committees to hold regular informal meetings to look at development needs, sharing good practice and improving planning across the function. Issues which it is suggested have arisen from the annual report, having regard to the five principal roles for scrutiny identified by the ODPM and development work are:

Holding the Executive to Account

- The link between the Strategic Monitoring Committee and the Cabinet
- The approach to inviting Cabinet Members to set out their programmes for the year
- The approach to monitoring performance of Cabinet Members in delivering their programmes

Policy Development and Review

- The level of policy development and review work which can be supported
- How to establish clearly the expected benefits of policy development and review work as it is such a resource intensive process
- The link with the executive in identifying areas for policy development and review
- The approach to reviews – scoping, planning, methods of gathering evidence, gathering written evidence in advance, approach to questioning, engaging public and press interest, reviewing outcomes.
- Location of Meetings
- Preparing for Programmed Meetings – planning questions

External Scrutiny

- Ways of developing working relationships with partners and reviewing the effectiveness of the operation of Partnerships
- The extent to which scrutiny of external bodies is to be developed

Performance Management and Review

- The approach to performance management and review and the proportion of the scrutiny function's work it should form.

Best Value

- The approach to the Best Value Review Programme and the monitoring of improvement plans

Development

- Assessment of what future development work is required
- Learning from other authorities
- Learning from Regional and National Scrutiny Centres
- Approach to engaging independent expert opinion
- The scope for continued innovation
- Arrangements for developing and monitoring effectiveness of work programmes

- Analysis of indicators developed to monitor the function's development.



Herefordshire Council Health Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2003/2004

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FOREWORD

In scrutinising the Primary Care Trust the Committee is faced with a task of scrutinising an organisation of roughly the same size as the Council itself. When to this responsibility one adds the responsibility for scrutinising the Hospitals Trust and the Ambulance Trust, and forging links with the Patients Forums the scale of the task facing the Health Scrutiny Committee is thrown into relief. The Committee has sought to discharge its responsibility professionally. It is conscious of the particular responsibilities placed upon it and mindful that it can seek to discharge these effectively by developing and maintaining good working relationships with those whom it has to scrutinise. The Committee is grateful for the considerable assistance provided to it by Health partners in embarking on its challenging task.

Councillor WJS Thomas
Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee

HEALTH SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2003/2004

Purpose

1. To review the activity of the Council's Health Scrutiny Committee over the period 1 May 2003 to 31 April 2004.

Terms of Reference

2. To review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services affecting the area and to make reports and recommendations on these matters; and to focus on health improvement bringing together the responsibility of the Council to promote social, environmental and economic well-being and the power to scrutinise local services provided and commissioned by the National Health Service.

Meetings

3. The Committee has met 5 times during the reporting period.

Background

4. The Health Scrutiny Committee's role is different in some respects from that of the other scrutiny committees, with additional statutory responsibilities being placed upon it. Importantly the responsibility for responding to proposed substantial variations in services by local health bodies rests on the Committee itself rather than the executive.
5. Health Scrutiny powers were conferred on Overview and Scrutiny Committees with effect from 1 January 2003. Initial work was undertaken under the aegis of the Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee. In May 2003 the Council agreed that a separate Committee should be established to be responsible for Health Scrutiny.
6. The Committee's role requires it to form good working relationships with health partners. Before holding any formal meetings the Committee undertook a programme of visits to familiarise itself with the role of key partners including the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and the Hereford and Worcester NHS Ambulance Trust and West Midlands (South) Strategic Health Authority. The visits also provided an opportunity for introductions to be made and for the aims and objectives of the Committee and the role it intended to perform to be explained.
7. There was evidence of some uncertainty on the part of partners as to what direction the Committee might take. Every effort has been made to demonstrate that the Committee wants its impact to be positive and focused on health improvement. At the same time it has made clear that in making its evidence based recommendations not all may be to the Trusts' liking.
- 7.1 It is considered that the approach adopted by the Committee has helped to establish the good working relationships with health partners which have been demonstrated in the Committee's work to date.

Activity Summary

8. The Committee's activity has necessarily involved careful consideration of its work

programme. Following discussions with partners the Committee formulated a Work Programme structured around 3 main areas: Managing Public Expectations and Public Involvement, Improving Public Health and Access and Waiting.

9. The nature of the Committee's role means that its work pattern does not fit so readily into the categories included in the ODPM's report.
10. Activity has included:
 - External Scrutiny - a discussion with the outgoing Chairman of the Community Health Council to draw on his experience in formulating the Committee's approach to those aspects of the Community Health Council's work which are now within the Committee's remit and a briefing on behalf of the Director of Public Health on public health issues and the public health team.
 - Policy Development and Review - Production of scoping statements for reviews of emergency care access, the management of the legionnaires disease outbreak in Hereford City, and consideration of car parking at the County Hospital.
 - Response to consultation on the provision of Ear, Nose and Throat Services.

Commentary

Consultation on provision of Ear, Nose and Throat Services

11. The Committee has submitted its first formal response to a formal consultation exercise. This was conducted by the Primary Care Trust on proposed variations to the provision of Ear, Nose and Throat Services. The responsibility on the Committee is significant and the Committee does have the power to refer matters to the Secretary of State if it is not satisfied.
12. The Committee appointed five Members of the Committee to draft a response for consideration by the Committee. Learning from the experience of a review conducted by the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee the Committee first gathered written evidence. Interviews were then arranged to enable the Committee to seek further clarification. Preparatory work was undertaken to refine the areas of questioning with each Member assigned specific responsibilities.
13. Those interviewed included the Chief Executive of the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust; the Chief Executive, the Director of Operations and the Medical Director of the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust, Consultants involved with the delivery of Ear, Nose and Throat Services at the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, and representatives of General Practitioners.
14. The Committee submitted its response within the Trust's required timescale. In its response the Committee acknowledged the reasoning provided by the Primary Care Trust in support of a Network Option involving Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust working closely with another NHS Trust to develop a joint service. The option envisaged the vast majority of the local service remaining at the County Hospital; however some of the more complex inpatient and all medical emergencies requiring emergency ambulance transport would be transferred to a larger hospital outside of Herefordshire. Amongst other things the Committee did, however, request the Primary Care Trust to confirm that arrangements can be put in place which will address concerns about patient safety. It also asked the Trust to confirm that its objective remained the continued provision of the ear nose and throat service as far as possible within Hereford, and indeed other services, and that it would consider

the scope for developing specialisms within Hereford.

15. The Primary Care Trust commented in its report on the consultation process that, "The concerns raised by other organisations and individuals must be dealt with in the next stage process. In particular the PCT should thank the Health Scrutiny Committee for such a detailed response to what has been the first consultation document that it has had to deal with. The response contains many issues that the PCT will want to be reassured about before giving the go-ahead to a more fully developed option."
16. The Committee will receive further information on the development of the proposals and will monitor their implementation.
17. The Committee has also learned that the preparation of a response to a consultation of this nature does require time. The minimum consultation period recommended in Government guidance is 12 weeks and this is something which it is likely will need to be adhered to in future to allow proper consideration of any substantial variation in service. The importance of preparation and planning was also reinforced. This will inform work on future responses. The benefits of developing a clear protocol on dealing with substantial variations to services have also been demonstrated.

Car Parking at Hereford Hospital

18. The Committee was aware that car parking at the hospital was a matter of public concern. It has considered the problem and received assurances that action is being taken to seek to improve matters.

Development Work

19. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the arrangements for Patient and Public involvement in Herefordshire, Members and Officers attended a development event in February 2004 led by Mr Euan McPherson (Patient Advice and Liaison Service and Involving People Manager for Herefordshire Primary Care Trust) and Stephanie Pennington Patient Advice and Liaison Officer for the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust.