



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2012 - 2013

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



As Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee I am pleased to present the 2012-13 Annual Report. This report details the activity of scrutiny in 2012 and 2013 and includes details of reviews undertaken, organisational considerations, performance challenge and call-in activity.

To begin with I would firstly like to take the opportunity to thank the former Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny, Councillor David Kirkham,

for the work that has been carried in the last 12 months, much of which is reflected in this report.

The work of scrutiny has been supported by officers, partners and external representatives throughout the year and this has helped Scrutiny put forward some evidenced based recommendations aimed at adding value. In addition to this, scrutiny members have also engaged in policy development and holding to account through our performance challenge meetings held on a quarterly basis.

Changes happening at both a national and local level continue to provide challenges for both the Council and the community. The next 12 months will see Members undertaking work to address some of these issues and continue to take up issues of concern.

There will also be a more proactive approach to improve community engagement in the process through greater partnership working, opportunities for involvement and communication enhancement.

I would like the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those people who have contributed to and supported the work of Scrutiny and look forward to working with you during the upcoming year.

COUNCILLOR DON DAVIS – CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

INTRODUCTION

Ashfield District Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and two Scrutiny Panels (A and B). The Scrutiny function has an essential role in the democratic process. It was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000 which placed a requirement on all local authorities to have an Overview and Scrutiny function to hold Cabinet to account.

It is also about listening to the concerns of local people and can review how external partners are performing, recommending improvements where necessary.

The aim of the work of Scrutiny is to ultimately improve services and the quality of life of Ashfield residents. This is achieved in the following ways:

- Monitoring Council and Ashfield Partnership Against Crime (APAC) Performance;
- Developing and Reviewing policy;
- Reviewing issues of community concern;
- External Scrutiny

The Council's Constitution states that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must report annually to Council on its workings and make recommendations for future work programmes (workplan). The workplan is developed in consultation with all elected Members, officers and the community. It has also recently been agreed that it become a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda to ensure that Members are updated on the progress of the reviews and

allowing flexibility for additional items to be added if necessary.

Recent national legislation to strengthen the Scrutiny process has included the following which have been recognised by Scrutiny in Ashfield;

- The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 includes requirements for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive certain petitions and review the Council's responses to petitions at the request of the petition organiser in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme.
- The Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced requirements in April 2009 that all local authorities have in place arrangements, either individually or jointly with other local authorities, for committees which will review, scrutinise, and report on the decisions made and actions taken by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.
- "Councillor Call for Action" (CCfA) was introduced under Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act), and came into force on 1st April, 2009. The statutory requirement applies to all Councils in England (with the exception of Parish Councils) regardless of their Executive arrangements. The Act enables any Member of the Council to refer to an overview and scrutiny committee any local government matter which affects their ward or division. The power to refer a matter is available only where the matter is of direct concern to the ward or division which the Councillor represents.

Overview and Scrutiny Activity

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's main role during 2012/13 has been to oversee, challenge and address performance issues of both the Council and APAC, manage the Scrutiny workplan and the overall activity of the Scrutiny process. The Committee has had 1 call-in during this period and also held a number of meetings to consider anti-social behaviour.

Scrutiny has undertaken a number of key reviews from both the scheduled workplan, issues raised throughout the year by residents of the District and through performance matters.

These reviews have included:

- Personal Debt
- Equalities
- Domestic Violence
- Systems Thinking
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Economic Regeneration
- Third Sector

The reviews undertaken included issues raised by the community, Councillors and Officers and were aimed at adding value to both the community and quality of services delivered by the Council.



Scrutiny Panel A Chair – Councillor Tim Brown and Vice Chair – Councillor Cheryl Butler



Scrutiny Panel B Chair – Councillor Jim Aspinall and Vice Chair – Councillor Keir

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PERSONAL DEBT

A Scrutiny review on personal debt was agreed following concerns about the impact that the economy was having within the district and how the Council was working with partner agencies to provide early intervention and support for people struggling with debt.

In carrying out this review the Scrutiny Panel's objective was to ensure the current provision of debt advice and counselling services within the district was adequate and that the council had the appropriate systems, policies and working practices in place to identify potential debtors at the earliest possible time, and to guide these people towards an appropriate counselling service.

As part of the review process Members engaged with the Ashfield Citizens Advice Bureau, Nottingham Credit Union, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Corporate Manager Finance, Interim Corporate Manager for Revenues & Customer Services and Mansfield and Ashfield Clinical Commissioning Group.

At the first meeting of the Panel, Members discussed the causes and types of debt. These are wide and varied and not necessarily due to irresponsibility, as is commonly assumed.

The Chief Executive of Ashfield Citizens Advice Bureau explained to the Panel that most debt problems arise when people

experience changes in circumstances which leave them unable to meet their commitments. This can be due to the loss of a job, a birth, ill health, a bereavement, etc. The causes of debt can be devastating to people and their families. It can also make people feel ashamed, guilty, frustrated, and angry and can seriously affect both their mental and physical health. On a practical level, clients' liberty, their home, goods and services may be lost or at risk.

The Panel were informed that Ashfield is home to a population of 117,000 people. Average annual earnings in the area are only 75% of the national average at just £21,476 per household.

StepChange Debt Charity state that nearly half of all the debt problems they deal with are caused by work issues such as redundancy, reduced working hours or a pay cut. 'Life issues', such as divorce, bereavement and health issues both physical and mental illness, are also common causes of debt. Whereas overspending is the main cause of debt in only 10% of cases they see.



In considering this issue Members also discussed the health implications relating to debt problems. The Panel were informed that numerous national studies and reports have highlighted the

strong links between debt and mental, physical and social health. It has been highlighted that physical and mental health can not only be a major factor in causing personal debt but can also be the outcome of people who have fallen into debt. Debt isn't just a financial problem, it can cause relationships to break up, people to lose their homes and families to break down. When debt mounts up, so does stress and anxiety.

A 2011 survey by debt counsellors Christians Against Poverty found that 42% of those seeking debt help had been prescribed medication by their GP to help them cope, 78% of those in a couple said debt affected their relationship and 37% had considered or attempted suicide.

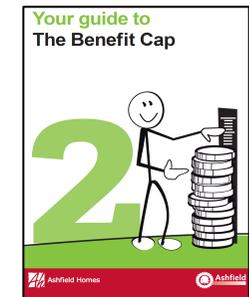
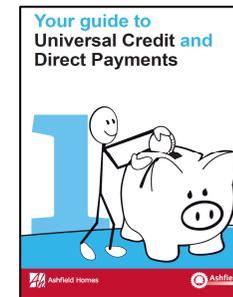
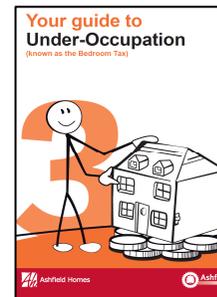
Between 2009 and 2010 the Nottingham East and North Consortium introduced a pilot scheme which allowed a small number of designated practices to access trained advisors provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau to support patients. This service was available in practice premises rather than requiring the client to travel to one of the CAB centres. The aim of this service was to provide an "in-house" service, with clients being referred there by a health care professional. It was expected that referrals into this service would have a positive effect on a patient's health and/or state of mind.

Whilst the introduction of CAB advisors in selected surgeries during this pilot was considered successful with a good number of patients accessing the service, the pilot was not extended beyond the first year due to the financial position of the NHS as a whole.

During the review the Scrutiny Manager and the Chairman of the Panel held a meeting with the Clinical Lead for Mansfield and Ashfield NHS Clinical Commissioning Group to discuss partnership working, initiatives and health implications of debt. It was acknowledged that Health and Wellbeing was a huge area

and issues such as debt, poverty, employment and social opportunities were all factors that could and affect peoples physical and mental health.

Welfare reforms and the creation of the new Universal Credit support was also discussed at length during the review. It was acknowledged that these changes were likely to effect a large number of Ashfield tenants in a number of ways.



Firstly the housing rent element of any Universal Credit payments will in the future be paid direct to the claimant instead of the local authority or landlord. This will place responsibility on claimants to 'pay' their bills and on the Council to 'collect' the housing rent from tenants. This has a number of potential implications which could, in some cases, increase debt, particularly if the claimant has existing financial difficulties or is vulnerable or simply not used to making payments and managing their budgets to accommodate rent (which was previously done automatically).

In addition to this there may be changes to the amount of Housing Benefit a person receives depending on the number of bedrooms in their home and the total overall amount of welfare benefit a household can receive will be capped (or limited) to the equivalent of the national average earnings of a working household after tax.

The Panel also met with Nottingham Credit Union and discussed

possible partnership working and improved signposting that could assist those people who are either in debt or vulnerable to debt in

The Panel concluded that there are many agencies that are currently helping people in the community with debt issues and that by working in partnership and signposting the Council could and does play a part in this support. The Panel made 9 recommendations to Cabinet, these are detailed below

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation 1 - That the Council build and explore future working with and promote the work of the Nottinghamshire Credit Union through its access to residents, signposting and promotional facilities via the information offices and endorsement by the Council as a trusted organisation.

Recommendation 2 - That the products offered by the Credit Unions and their benefits in comparison to high street banks and lenders be explored;

Recommendation 3 - That the service offered by the Credit Union 'rent account' which facilitates payment of the housing element of the universal credit allowance straight to the landlord or local authority responsible for the property be explored;

Recommendation 4 - That the potential for the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to provide funding to the CAB for additional specialist debt counsellors be explored;

Recommendation 5 - That the Council explore working with local schools to teach teenagers/students sound financial management skills and raise awareness of the problems associated with debt;

Recommendation 6 - That the Council acknowledge and discuss the need to address, without delay, the increasing problem of loan sharks and unscrupulous lenders operating within the Ashfield district and profiting from people already in difficulty with debt and its associated problems;

Recommendation 7 - That debt management be raised on Health and Well Being board agenda to consider the links between debt and health and child poverty.

Recommendation 8 - That the Council explore the possibility of establishing a 'Financial Wellbeing Partnership' to endeavour to address some of Ashfield's ongoing debt problems;

Recommendation 9 - That the advantages of the Nottinghamshire Switch 'n' Save scheme be supported and promoted.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This Scrutiny review of domestic violence was added to the workplan to consider the Councils role in supporting victims of domestic abuse and how we work with our partners to do so in the future.

In considering the issue of domestic violence the Panel received information and assistance from representatives from Nottinghamshire Police, Mansfield District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, NHS Mansfield and Ashfield Clinical Commissioning Group and received best practice information from numerous other Councils. This report also details the Councils current position.

Following a previous scrutiny review on this issue to Support a reduction in domestic violence, a Domestic Violence Co-ordinator was employed on a shared basis through a Service Level Agreement with Mansfield District Council up until October 2012.

A service level agreement was entered into on 12th April 2010 for two years, to establish a clear basis for cooperation and joint working to achieve common goals with regards to reducing domestic violence and implementing the delivery plan for the joint ACSP and MPAC Domestic Violence Priority Action Group.

At the joint ACSP and MPAC Strategic Group meeting on the 11th January 2012, it was agreed that the joint Domestic Violence Coordinators post be extended for a further six months and a fixed term contract was issued until 6th October 2012. At the joint Ashfield CSP and MPAC Strategic Group meeting on the 25th April 2012 it was confirmed that the arrangements between ADC and MDC for a joint post will cease on the 6th October 2012.

Following this decision, Members of the Panel commenced a review to ascertain how the council could most effectively work with its partners to continue its work in reducing domestic violence in the district and supporting victims.

As part of the review, Members of the Panel discussed the potential for a revised role. It was agreed that the Councils role in supporting victims of domestic abuse could be facilitated by the introduction of a 2yr fixed term post that would be funded from the existing budget of £17,500 per annum with additional funding provided by the Strategic Housing and Development Sections, 'homelessness directorate fund' to the amount of £13,000 per annum for two years. This amount would be ring fenced from the directorate fund and transferred into the salary budget for the post.

As part of this review Members considered the role of any future domestic Violence Co-ordinator / support post at Ashfield District Council. This included;

- Best use of available resources to support victims and partners on the issue of Domestic Violence;
- Role / job title and objectives of any future position, including consideration of tasks training, awareness raising, accessing external funding, promotion, and signposting;

- Local shared priorities in relation to the Framework, partnerships, Ashfield Homes;
- Strategic support in relation to DV including risk and prevention;
- Consideration of sustainability of any potential post

From the information presented to the Panel, Members were unanimous in their view that Ashfield District Council should introduce a Domestic Abuse Prevention Officer to work actively within both the Council and with partners and the community to help reduce domestic abuse, educate, signpost and support.

In doing so the objectives of this post should be reviewed to ensure that any future role focuses the Council and partner agencies on continuing to recognise domestic abuse as a major problem in our communities, which can have devastating effects both to victims, children and communities.

In considering where this post should be located, Members of the Panel discussed numerous options, including utilising potential resources to work more closely within the partnerships. Following the review, Members agreed that in order to ensure that the post adds value in a co-ordinated approach both strategically and in the wider partnerships that Cabinet should explore the possibilities of the post being located within the Community Protection Team.

This would assist in better co-ordination, communication and reduce duplication, whilst still continuing to carry out some of the core support elements to both homelessness, supporting the MARAC process, Sanctuary and other partnership support and co-ordination.

In concluding this review the Panel made 11 recommendations to Cabinet. These are detailed below

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation 1 – That Domestic Violence Prevention Officer is recruited on a 2 year fixed term contract using existing resources identified in this report.

Recommendation 2 - That Cabinet give consideration to where that post should be located once appointed to ensure a joined up approach with our case workers, Community Safety team and Troubled Families section.

Recommendation 3 - That the role of the Domestic Violence Prevention Officer include the following;

- Support and advise to caseworkers, staff, victims and partners
- Proactive awareness training
- Policy / Strategy development and involvement (including the provision of expert advice to Council Officers)
- Be the lead officer on behalf of Domestic Violence for the Council on Police / Partnership groups and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)
- Proactively engage with targeted communities and partners
- Explore access to external funding opportunities

Recommendation 4 - That the Council's website is refreshed to include more information and better signposting.

Recommendation 5 - That greater consideration should be given on how to encourage people included in the "protected characteristics" definitions to come forward and seek help and support.

Recommendation 6 - That greater consideration should be given on how to encourage men to come forward to seek help and support.

Recommendation 7 - That targeted work with our partners to carry out preventative and educational projects be encouraged and supported by Ashfield District Council including work with Schools and local businesses..

Recommendation 8 - That the Council explore future working arrangements with NHS Mansfield and Ashfield Clinical Commissioning Group in relation to the wider health implications of Domestic Violence.

Recommendation 9 - That consideration is given to the Council's longer term role in prevention of and supporting victims of Domestic violence. This is to include a review once the post has been appointed to establish future options for the continuation of a DV post after the two year fixed term contract ends.

Recommendation 10 - That posters and promotional material are displayed in all Council offices signposting support for Domestic Violence Victims and to raise awareness.

(i) **Recommendation 11** - That Elected Members receive regular updates on the work of and progress of any potential post in relation to supporting victims of domestic abuse.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EQUALITIES

A scrutiny review of Equalities was agreed to ensure that Ashfield District Council has in place the necessary policies, practices and procedures to ensure that it meets the duties placed on local authorities under the Equality Act 2010 and furthermore to ensure that equality and diversity considerations are embedded at the heart of the decision making process.

Scrutiny Panel B held four meetings on the topic of Equalities to consider all aspects of the Council's responsibilities including assessing possible areas of improvement and areas of good practice. As part of this process the Panel has been assisted by the Equality and Diversity Project Officer.

The Panel were informed at the start of the review that Ashfield District Council has committed to implementing and upholding equality and diversity in everything it does. To support this commitment the authority has adopted the Equality Framework for Local Government against which to assess its performance and development in equality and diversity issues.

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act and the public sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Act) came into force on 5 April 2011 and public authorities must have due regard to meet the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between different groups.

The Equality Framework For Local Government is a successful tool that supports organisations to ensure that they meet their public duties. In the current climate this should be an essential part of service delivery and working practices as there has been a predominant change in the level of challenge placed upon local authorities with regard to their decision making process and the impact of this process upon groups representative of the 'Protected Characteristics' as outlined within the new Duty and this report.

Ashfield District Council reached the Developing Level of the Equality Framework in April 2012. To meet this level the Council published its Equality and Diversity position statement that lays down objectives and includes a self assessment at the developing level. It also demonstrated areas of current good practice. The Council has a duty to produce and show progress every 4 years, Ashfield District Council will be doing this annually and reporting on progress quarterly.

A Workforce Information Report was also published which shows the current make up of the organisation and identifies areas for improvement. Findings from this were explored and expanded upon as part of the scrutiny review.

As part of this review Members also considered actions that need to be taken if the Council is to make a formal commitment to meet the Achieving Level of the Equality Framework. These included;

- public consultation data is collated, analysed and used to inform the Council's annual budget setting process;
- public consultation data is continually utilised to assist with the development and improvement of services;
- Equality Impact Assessments are part of the Council's decision making processes;
- Council policies are up to date and firmly embedded in the Council's processes and culture;

- equality actions are implanted in all service area plans and procedures;
- District profiles are current, regularly reviewed and kept up to date;
- Council contracts to contain appropriate equality criteria which are satisfactorily monitored throughout the life of the contract.

Furthermore, the Panel worked with the Equalities Steering Group with comments and suggestions regarding continuous improvements relating to equalities being fed back into the steering group through the Scrutiny Manager, who also sits on the officer group.

In concluding this review the Panel agreed that that good progress had already been made by the Council in meeting its duty, however there is still more to do and this is reflected in the 10 recommendations to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation 1 - That communication and consultation across the Council relating to equality and diversity continue to be improved including consideration of bulletins/newsletter/updates to all employee and Elected Members.

Recommendation 2 - That Interaction and consultation by the authority employees with community groups within the District representing protected characteristic groups be further enhanced in a proactive manner. This could include the establishment of an equalities focus and consultation group.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SYSTEMS THINKING

Recommendation 3 - That all employees (including new) continue to receive equality and diversity training as part of a scheduled approach and this be monitored

Recommendation 4 - That Elected Member training be rescheduled and carried out under existing resources (via the Equality and Diversity Project Officer).

Recommendation 5 - That All Elected Members be strongly encouraged to attend Equality and Diversity Training.

Recommendation 6 - That Consideration be given to online equalities training on equalities for Elected Members.

Recommendation 7 - That contract monitoring through procurement on equality and diversity be reviewed on a regular scheduled basis.

Recommendation 8 - That use of Equality Impact Assessments be continued and promoted to ensure that decisions taken are both considered and lawful.

Recommendation 9- That Unison /GMB be invited to be a member of the Equalities Steering Group.

Recommendation 10 - That the Disability Network Group continue to be supported and promoted across the Council.

A scrutiny review of Systems Thinking was agreed in order to consider the approach currently being piloted in selected areas across the authority and assess its impact on quality, efficiency and effectiveness.

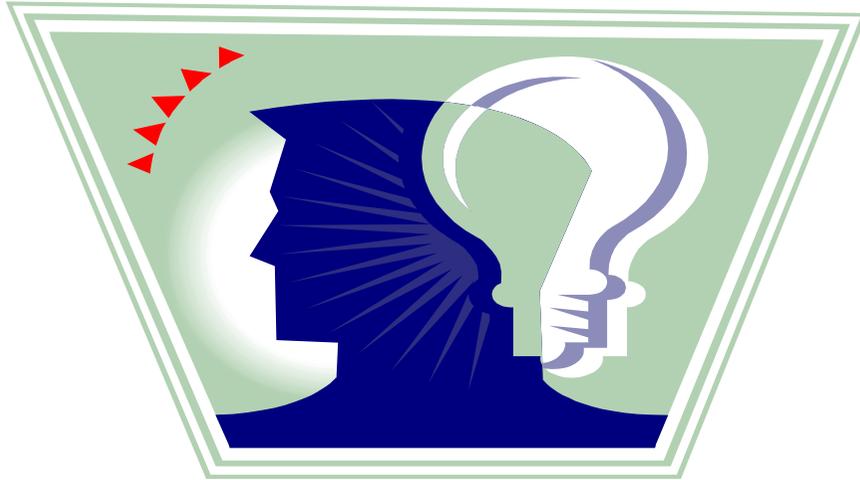
In reviewing this topic Members also considered how the approach was being used by other local authorities and the impact that this has had on services delivered to the customer and on those

In recognising the importance of delivering effective and efficient services that meet customer needs and demands Ashfield District Council engaged the services of Vanguard in 2010 to support organisational development of a Systems Thinking approach. This approach is designed to increase both staff and organisational capacity to deliver greater efficiency and customer satisfaction.

At the beginning of this scrutiny review this approach was being implemented in four areas of the Council to undertake service reviews.

As part of this review, Members considered the impact of the Systems Thinking in these service areas to assess the benefits to the customers, staff and service as a whole.

From the information received both from services using the approach internally and the case study information from other authorities that have adopted the approach, Members of the Scrutiny Panel found that the Systems Thinking approach had the potential to deliver some real efficiency gains both from a financial perspective and a service improvement perspective.



The reviews undertaken by both Neighbourhood Services and Revenues and benefits have both delivered financial savings and produced changes to processes and structures aimed at delivering tangible service improvements for the customer. However it was also highlighted that the process, in its purest form, had the potential to cause delays to reviews if it wasn't structured with defined timelines and milestones. This, the Panel considered, was detrimental to both the customer and staff alike.

In considering this aspect of Systems Thinking, Members were of the opinion that adapting the approach to ensure that reviews were not unnecessarily delayed by the process would be advisable. Members were also in agreement that to ensure the full benefits of adopting Systems Thinking for service reviews were

realised, a consistent approach to the process should be taken by the Council as a whole.

To ensure that the review process remained timely, the Panel discussed the possibility of a standard corporate guide programme being developed that would set out clear guidelines for processes and realistic milestones and deadlines that could be reported on a regular basis to ensure that outcomes and improvements are achieved in a timely, managed process. The outcomes and future objectives could then be tracked to ensure that the customer received an improved service and that the Council recognised and monitored the progress of these changes against performance objectives

Members were particularly impressed with the potential changes resulting from the review undertaken within Neighbourhood Services. The Panel believe that this review demonstrated the service improvements for customers that could be achieved by using the approach to cut out wasteful processes and concentrate on those areas of the service that were beneficial.

Furthermore, the engagement and empowerment of staff both during and after the review was encouraging and this was demonstrated through the ownership of all issues that staff now had instead of just their allocated tasks.

The Panel also recognised that following the Vanguard training, the authority now has staff that are both experienced and skilled in undertaking reviews using the Systems Thinking approach. These staff could and should be used to support, train and advise other areas undertaking service reviews. This would allow good practice to be shared and lessons from previous problems to be learnt from.

To ensure that this happens consistently, Members were of the view that the process for undertaking service reviews using the

approach should form part of a future training and development programme. This would ensure that reviews are undertaken in a consistent manner across the authority.

In concluding this review, the Scrutiny Panel were in agreement that there had been some recognised beneficial outcomes to service delivery as a result of using the Systems Thinking approach to undertake service reviews. This was also demonstrated in case study information from other local authorities using the approach.

The Panel acknowledged and welcomed the savings and benefits that had been achieved thus far. In considering how the approach could be used in future service reviews the Panel concluded that it was imperative that the Council adopted a bespoke best practice approach for Ashfield which ensured that the best possible efficiencies and savings were achieved for the provision of Council services across the District.

The Panel made 10 recommendations to Cabinet, these are detailed below

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation 1 - Ashfield District Council adopt a 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach' to all future service reviews (Check-Plan-Do);

Recommendation 2 - A formal mechanism be established to review and share the lessons learned from each review using the 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach';

Recommendation 3 – That Training be offered across the Authority within existing resources (i.e. utilising staff already trained and expert in the process);

Recommendation 4 – That a guide programme be developed which sets out clear milestones and deadlines;

Recommendation 5 - Once the 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach' is introduced to more services; the importance of achieving improvement in performance against objectives be properly recognised and tracked;

Recommendation 6 - The development of a schedule for delivery of the 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach' across all services within the Authority;

Recommendation 7 - The integration of a future training and development programme for the 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach' to ensure its aims and objectives are fully understood;

Recommendation 8 - Prior to any efficiencies being made as part of the business planning process, the systems thinking/lean principles be fully explored as an initial exercise;

Recommendation 9 - Any cashable savings and efficiency gains from service reviews using the 'Systems Thinking/Lean Approach' be reported quarterly and factored into the Medium Term Financial Strategy;

Recommendation 10 - To consider developing a process to capture new ideas/initiatives from staff across the organisation with the possibility of such a process being linked to an employee recognition scheme.

SCRUTINY OF ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Members considered the Council's approach to anti-social behaviour and were updated on the progress of the ASB pilot scheme and the service review findings.

This topic was considered at two meetings of the Committee in July and September 2013

Last year scrutiny undertook a short review on the Anti Social Behaviour Case Management approach. The issue was reviewed as part of the wider crime and disorder role scrutiny undertakes.

In reviewing this area Members were updated on the Anti Social Behaviour White Paper published on the 22 May 2012 and asked to consider appropriate mechanisms and reinforce an integrated approach to ensure the powers available are utilised effectively to manage and reduce anti social behaviour in Ashfield.

The Committees conclusions were inline with the proposals put forward by the Service Director- Environment in a report to Cabinet on 19 July 2012. They agreed that an integrated Case Management Team within Ashfield District Council would result in a better and more responsive approach to anti-social behaviour, benefitting both victims and communities. This decision was based on both current information and previous evidence gathered during the Scrutiny Review of Community Protection.

This year the Committee held a number of meetings to consider both the review of Community Protection and Environmental Health and the pilot for tackling anti-social behaviour

The meetings outlined the effectiveness of the relationship with Ashfield Homes in dealing with ASB issues and communication issues affecting tenants and key stakeholders including information sharing and access to information. A number of case studies were considered which highlighted some of the outcomes achieved.

During the considerations a number of concerns were raised by Members in relation to the following:

- Capacity issues in respect of the number of cases each case worker has to deal with
- The number of Community Protection Officers "on the street"
- The need to give greater support to victims of anti social behaviour in gathering evidence

At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 10th September 2013, the Committee received a presentation outlining progress of the integrated case management pilot launched on 1st January 2013.

Members concluded by acknowledging the risks associated in relation to the capacity issues faced by the current case workers and the increasing demands of supporting victims to gather evidence.

The Committee supported proposals to mainstream the resources required for the Council to continue delivering case work for housing-related ASB and recognised this would need to be part of the wider service review.

The Committee made 2 recommendations which are scheduled to be considered by Cabinet at a future meeting in conjunction with the service review. These are detailed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Recommendation 1 – Cabinet be requested to fill the vacant post of Community Protection Officer (Kirkby) as soon as is possible;

Recommendation 2 - that Cabinet acknowledge the outcomes of the service review but note the concerns of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to any potential reduction in high visibility patrols or distraction work

SCRUTINY CONSIDERATION OF REFRESHED ICT GOVERNING SECURITY POLICY

In accordance with the provisions of part 4 of the Council's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Rules No. 15 (Call-in), The approval of the refreshed ICT Security Policy was subject to a call-in. A meeting to consider this issue took place on 4th June 2013

A valid call-in notice has been received in respect of a decision taken under delegated authority by the Portfolio Holder for Customer, Corporate Services and Planning on 24th April, 2013. That decision was as follows:-

“That the refreshed ICT Security Policy be approved.”

The reasons specified on the call-in form, duly signed by 5 Members lying outside of the Cabinet were;

- 2. Contrary to budget, and
- 4. Inadequate or Inaccurate information

The meeting was attended by the Leader of the Council who was previously the Portfolio Holder for Customer, Corporate Services and Planning at the time the original decision was taken.



Members considered the reasons for approving the refreshed Security Policy and the sections of the report highlighted in the call-in were addressed. Following the discussion for the purposes of transparency and clarification it was agreed that the decision would be reconsidered. This has taken place and the necessary clarifications have now been made

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is one of the key roles of Overview and Scrutiny and provides Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to proactively review and challenge performance, add value to the Council's services and monitor functions delivered with and by the Council's partners that add quality of life to the citizens of Ashfield.

During 2012-13 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitored the performance of an agreed list of priority areas to assess where problems were arising and which aims and objectives were being achieved. The Committee also reviewed the Corporate Plan / Strategy with the assistance of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager.



Scrutiny Members held a number of meetings to discuss performance issues with relevant service lead officers and Portfolio holders to actively challenge where outcomes have not been achieved.

The Committee have been pleased to note that the level of achievement against priorities identified within the Corporate Strategy has improved significantly from the 2009/10 CAA assessment.

Overall there has been delivery against the Corporate Priorities as indicated by a 90% positive position (based on completed or progressing actions and improving performance). 74% of improvement activity has been completed, with 94% completed or is on track. This is a very positive position for the first year of the three year plan. In 2010/11, following the introduction of specific, detailed improvement planning, only 62% of improvement activity was completed during the first year. Where performance can be compared to last year, there has been an improvement of 77%.

Scrutiny of Performance is additionally supported by the Corporate Performance Manager. Issues raised during performance considerations has also been used to inform the 2013-14 Scrutiny Workplan.

FURTHER SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

In addition to the scheduled scrutiny reviews undertaken by both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels A & B, a number of other issues have also been considered, however no formal recommendations were made to Cabinet. These are detailed Below

Regeneration Shared Service – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the progress and impact of the Regeneration Shared Service (RSS) with Mansfield District Council following its initial 12 months of operation.

The meeting was supported by a presentation which outlined the new regeneration service for Mansfield and Ashfield including first year achievements, interventions enabled, careers and advice days, Aim Higher/Graduates into Enterprise scheme, work experience placements, Mansfield Pathway to Work initiatives, Women's Enterprise Academy, Invest Ashfield & Mansfield website, marketing initiatives, and Ashfield/Mansfield property and urban regeneration projects.

Members expressed a number of concerns in relation to allowances paid to apprentices, lack of progress on the Prologis Park site and public transport links. These were noted by the Portfolio Holder and Service Director.

Attendance Management - The topic was placed on the Scrutiny Workplan some months earlier due to concerns about the Council's levels of sickness absence.

As part of the scope for reviewing the issue, Members had enquired as to how best the Council could support staff through the attendance management process, what impacts it may have on service delivery and how the Council compared to others in the East Midlands.

The Scrutiny Panel were informed that a separate review had already commenced within the HR and Payroll Section, in consultation with Unison and GMB, in relation to the revision and update of the Council's Sickness Absence Policy and Procedural Framework. The Panel acknowledged that the review should not duplicate any work already being undertaken.

During the consideration of this issue Members expressed concerns with regards to the Bradford Formula, reporting mechanisms and staff support. These considerations were taken back and subsequently a new Attendance Management Policy was agreed by Council in July 2013. The Scrutiny Panel will continue to monitor progress of the new policy and its impact on attendance and staff support.

Third Sector / Voluntary Sector - A review in relation to the Third Sector/Voluntary Sector operating within Ashfield was commenced in March 2012. The Panel agreed, having received an update on the service review, that it would be prudent to hold the review in abeyance whilst the Corporate Community Development Review commenced so as to avoid duplication. At such time Members would be able to consider their involvement with the review in conjunction with the Corporate Performance Improvement Team

At a recent meeting of the Panel Members received an update following publication of the 'Empowering Communities Within Ashfield' review document.

The Panel took the opportunity to consider the implications of the review document and raised the following points:-

- concerns regarding the funding/grant opportunities being targeted towards Council tenants/residents rather than being opened up to whole communities;
- the potential for the new Locality teams being able to support the Area Committees by drawing up locality action plans that address the issues and priorities within their areas and draw in appropriate and targeted funding;
- welcomed the area based approach in principle but concerns surrounding the potential silo effect of four area committees and skill sets being compartmentalised instead of being available to the District as a whole;
- the opportunity within the new teams for the transference of skills between officers and also at third-sector level (between community groups and volunteers) and to operate across boundaries when necessary or appropriate;
- the importance of being able to measure the 'empowerment' of communities and to have meaningful national and local comparator data to provide a baseline for future analysis (including agreed performance measures);
- the proposal to utilise the skills of the current Landscape and Design Team to lever in larger funding opportunities

with the Community Action Officers concentrating on attracting smaller funds for targeted use;

- the implications arising from the new funding regime and the need for community groups to recognise the requirement to work with other similar groups to identify the funding opportunities and place pro-active and robust bids;
- the acknowledgement that working with some District-wide partners needed to continue and the importance of Ashfield staying in the strategic arena (with key partner groups such as MASP) notwithstanding that the Council's role should be changed to provide a supportive role rather than the more traditional leading role.

These points will be considered as part of the wider review and have been noted by the officer leads on this review.

Getting Involved

There are a number of different ways in which members of the community can get involved in Scrutiny. These are:

1. Attend A Meeting - All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public to come and listen to the debate. There may also be a chance to speak at the meetings at the discretion of the Chair. The meetings are publicised and can be found at :

http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/cfusion/councillors/local_democ/meetings.cfm

2. Put Forward A Suggestion For A Topic To Be Considered By Scrutiny - Any topic can be suggested for consideration for the Scrutiny workplan. Topics put forward can be based on;

- Council delivered services
- Partner delivered services (Police, transport etc)
- Underperformance
- Issues of community concern

To put forward a topic does not mean that you will have to become directly involved in the review if you do not wish to be.

<http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/council-government-and-democracy/scrutiny/>

or by emailing the Scrutiny team at:

scrutiny@ashfield-dc.gov.uk

3. Speak To Your Local Councillor - Your local Councillor details are located on the Council's website at;

http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/cfusion/councillors/contact/contact_your_councillor.cfm

or you could attend one of the Councillor Surgeries which are listed on the above web address.