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St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

EIGHTH ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT



2009/10

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10

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Introduction

		
Councillor David Lockwood	Councillor Ian Houlder	Councillor John Hale
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Chairman of the Policy Development Committee	Chairman of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to the eighth Annual Report on the overview and scrutiny function at St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Scrutiny is central to the decision-making process of the Council, and this Annual Report sets out the work of St Edmundsbury's three scrutiny committees over the past year. The report is not intended to cover all the work of the scrutiny committees, but to present some examples of where and how scrutiny has contributed to change, challenge and service improvements, and to give you a flavour of the work undertaken, in the hope that you will be encouraged to play more of a role in the scrutiny process in the coming year.

2009/10 was the first year as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Councillor David Lockwood, although he has significant scrutiny experience, both at Borough and County level, and the Chairmen of the Policy Development and Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees, who were commencing their third years in these positions, were pleased to welcome him.

David certainly had an eventful first year, with the introduction of Councillor Call for Action, which was enthusiastically taken up by councillors, as can be seen later in this report. Nevertheless, the Committee managed to incorporate this new power into its work whilst still carrying out its community leadership and internal and external scrutiny roles to the full. This did make for some very lengthy meetings, but hopefully the results speak for themselves.

2009/10 was equally busy for the other two scrutiny committees, with the Policy Development Committee, amongst other business, developing 9 new policies, and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, in its third year of operation, really getting into its stride with its responsibility for monitoring internal and external audit, the Council's budget, performance management and risk.

2009/10 was also a record year for external involvement in our scrutiny reviews, with over 30 people, including members of the public and representatives from partner organisations, attending meetings to help the committees with their investigations.

We hope you find this Annual Report both informative and interesting, and that you will continue to follow the progress of the overview and scrutiny function at St Edmundsbury.

May 2010

What does Scrutiny do?

The scrutiny function of this and other councils was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, which required councils to set up new structures to replace the old committee system. The aim of the Government's programme for modernising local government was for local people to know more about how their local council works and get more involved, and for Councillors to have more interesting and rewarding work. As part of this, councils were required to establish at least one "overview and scrutiny committee" to monitor decisions made and, where appropriate, to advise the Council on matters of policy or service delivery.

St Edmundsbury has three such committees. Put simply, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in effect, "looks back" at how and why decisions were made, how services are functioning and where improvements can be made, but in its role as community leader also looks at wider issues. The Policy Development Committee is more forward looking, concentrating on new and evolving policies, and in particular has responsibility for advising Cabinet (the Council's main decision making body) on the Council's budget. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee has particular responsibility for monitoring the performance of services, as well as the Council's budget, internal audit and risk management.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsibilities:

- Community leadership
- Reviews
- Pre-decision scrutiny
- Post implementation review
- External and joint scrutiny
- Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action
- Holding the Cabinet to account
- Scrutiny improvement

As the Council's critical friend, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee holds the Cabinet, full Council and staff to account by monitoring the decision making process and testing existing practices to check they are working properly. It can also call in Cabinet decisions to check them before they are put into practice. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is able to stand back from the decision making process, look at the outcomes for the people of St Edmundsbury and contribute to ensuring improved performance. The Committee has seven scheduled meetings per year.

Policy Development Committee

- Policy development
- Policy review
- Diversity
- Asset management
- Capital programme
- Budget development

This Committee takes a similar broad view of the Council's work but has the specific role of advising on the development and implementation of new policy and processes, as well as examining proposals for future budgets. Its six meetings per year are based around the budget and corporate planning cycle.

The Policy Development Committee looks at the impact on the community of key plans and strategies within the Council's policy framework, investigating why things are as they are, researching options, challenging assumptions and suggesting improvements. When looking at a new policy, the Committee ensures it will contribute to the Council's corporate priorities, and that any links to other Council policies demonstrate continuity. When reviewing existing policies, the Committee investigates how successful it has been, whether it achieved its objectives within

budget and to timescale and what needs to change. In all its policy development, the Committee aims to enhance services and make life better for people living and working in St Edmundsbury, as well as those visiting us.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

- Performance management
- Improvement planning
- Audit responsibilities
- Budget monitoring
- Risk management

Scrutiny also has an important role to play in monitoring the performance of services. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee looks at how well the Council's services are performing by considering a range of information such as performance indicators and reports from external inspectors, and by monitoring action plans. It does not carry out reviews, but may recommend that a review is carried out by one of the other scrutiny committees where a need has been identified.

This Committee also leads on improvement planning and risk management, as well as monitoring the Council's budget, and recommending the annual accounts to full Council. It has four quarterly monitoring meetings per year, plus one other to consider the annual accounts. Additionally, it meets with the Audit Commission in September each year to discuss the annual accounts.

There is sometimes a cross-over between the work of the three committees, with the effectiveness of a new policy being monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or a scrutiny investigation leading to the development of a new policy.

How does Scrutiny Work?

The scrutiny committees have work programmes which prioritise the investigations they will carry out over the coming year. Further information on how the committees set their work programmes is set out in the Scrutiny Guide available on the Council's website (or by calling 01284 757613). The committees gather evidence from a variety of sources including the Council's own information, other local authorities, service users, expert witnesses or research carried out by the committees themselves.

Once they have their evidence the committees make their reports, complete with recommendations, usually to the Cabinet. The committees' work programmes include time to check progress on the actions that have been taken following acceptance of scrutiny reports.

Call-in

Any decision by the Cabinet, or a key decision taken by an officer with delegated authority from the Cabinet, may be "called in" by at least five members of the Council, or the Leader of any political group on the Council which has five or more members (with the support of a further three members of that group). Call-in is used where members have evidence which suggests that a decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of good decision making set out in the Constitution, or in the context of the Council's policy or budget framework, and is only used in exceptional circumstances.

One call-in was considered during 2009/10, and this is detailed under the section on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work.

Councillor Call for Action

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is a new scrutiny power which came into force on 1 April 2009, which enables any member of the Council to refer to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee any local government matter or any crime and disorder matter which affects their ward/division, within certain limitations. These limitations are set out in the Council's new Councillor Call for Action Protocol, which is available as part of the Council's Constitution.

Four Councillor Calls for Action were submitted during this first year of operation of the new power, and these are detailed under the Overview and Scrutiny Committee section of this report.

Training and Development

We recognise the importance of training and development for both members and officers who support the scrutiny role at St Edmundsbury. Regular targeted training, both internally and externally, has facilitated the development of a successful scrutiny function.

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee takes a "bitesize" approach to its training, and in 2009/10 received short presentations on the National Fraud Initiative and International Financial Reporting Standards at appropriate places in its planned agendas. Further such sessions are planned for the coming year.

Meetings

Meetings of all three scrutiny committees are held in public (except when exempt or confidential material is being discussed), and in order to prevent whole meetings being taken up by a single topic, "task and finish" groups are sometimes set up to carry out major reviews and report back to the main committee with their recommendations.

Engaging the Public and Stakeholders

The scrutiny committees work hard to develop and improve the scrutiny process at St Edmundsbury, and continually aim to increase the involvement of stakeholders and public engagement. To this end committees often gather evidence with the involvement of external witnesses, and over the past year, in addition to targeted consultations carried out as part of reviews, the committees have formally invited over 30 people to attend meetings and assist in investigations, including:

- Residents of Stanton affected by flooding
- The Environment Agency's Flood Defence Officer
- Suffolk County Council's West Area Rights of Way Officer
- A County Councillor
- An independent Drainage Engineer
- Suffolk County Council's West Area Assistant Highways Manager
- The County's Pitt Review Project Manager
- Representatives from the Audit Commission
- Representatives from Choose Suffolk (the Suffolk Development Agency)
- The Manager of Bury St Edmunds CAB
- The Chief Executive and Neighbourhood Manager of Havebury Housing Partnership
- The Vice Chairman of the Bury St Edmunds branch of the National Market Traders Federation
- Two further representatives of Bury St Edmunds Market Traders
- A representative of Haverhill Market Traders
- Residents from the Howard and Mildenhall Road estates
- A tenant of Havebury Housing Partnership
- Suffolk County Council's Transport Planning and Procurement Manager
- Chief Inspector Martin Barnes-Smith, Suffolk Constabulary
- The County Council's Prolific and Priority Offender Scheme Co-ordinator
- The Residential Services Co-ordinator from Focus 12
- The West Team Leader for Substance Misuse Services West
- A former user of the services available to drug users in the Borough

If you would like to assist the committees in any future work or reviews, you should obtain a copy of the Council's Abridged Scrutiny Guide from the Council's website, or by calling 01284 757613.

Review of Past Year – Overview and Scrutiny Committee

 <p>Councillor David Lockwood 2009/10 Committee Chairman</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Les Ager Cllr Trevor Beckwith Cllr Terry Buckle Cllr David Chappell Cllr John Hale Cllr Gavin Price Cllr Mrs Marion Rushbrook Cllr Christopher Spicer Cllr Jim Thorndyke Cllr Christopher Turner Cllr Frank Warby</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Jack Anderson Cllr Bob Cockle Cllr Mark Ereira-Guyer Cllr Jeremy Farthing Cllr Allan Jones Cllr Tim Marks Cllr Richard Rout</p>	 <p>Councillor Stefan Oliver 2009/10 Committee Vice Chairman</p>
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During 2009/10 (May 2009 to April 2010) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee dealt with the following business:

Community Leadership

- The Committee received its annual report on the work of the **West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership** and discussed the projects being run by the Partnership. The Committee also received an update on the distribution of "Community Chest" grants, a 'pot' of £20,000 for the funding of smaller projects (up to £1,500 each). As part of the six-monthly update in March 2010, the Committee received details of distribution of £420,000 of Performance Reward Grant funding.
- As part of its responsibility as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee to scrutinise the work of the **West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership** in achieving the strategic aims set out in its Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, the Committee received a review of progress which included discussion of some of the projects which had been undertaken to meet the targets. Performance data was presented by Ch Insp Martin Barnes-Smith, and a presentation on the Prolific and Priority Offender Scheme was also given.
- Following its November 2008 review of the impact of County Council funding changes on the **Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs)** in St Edmundsbury, the Committee received a further update on how the CABs were balancing the increased demand on their services with changes in funding, and were pleased to welcome the Manager of one of the Bureaux to the meeting.
- **Havebury Housing Partnership's** Chief Executive, Steve Cook, gave a presentation covering an overview of the business carried out by the Partnership, how the Partnership was addressing housing need and working in communities, and Havebury's plans for the future.

- The Committee scrutinised **services available to drug users** in the Borough, and welcomed representatives from Focus 12 and Substance Misuse Service to the meeting, as well as a past user of these services. Information was also provided by the Suffolk Drug and Alcohol Team and the Council's own Substance Misuse Co-ordinator. The Committee concluded that the Borough was fortunate to have so many services available to support drug users.

Scrutiny Reviews

- The Committee scrutinised the development of the **Suffolk Waste and Street Scene Joint Committee and Partnership**, and the progress of the various activities and initiatives that had been undertaken, and concluded that the Partnership was working effectively.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also involved in the **Economic Assessment** and Action Plan, which is covered in more detail under the Policy Development Committee section of this report.

Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action

- The decision of the Cabinet, taken in December 2009, to hold a **review of the markets** in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill was called-in, because the Councillors calling in the decision felt that a review was unnecessary as the markets were working well. The call-in hearing lasted 3 hours, and evidence was taken from 14 witnesses including market traders. The Committee concluded that the review should take place, but sent a number of observations to Cabinet which it wished to be borne in mind during the review.
- As detailed in the box to the right, the Committee's new power to hear Councillor Calls for Action commenced in April 2009, and the first CCfA full hearing, on **Stanton Grundle** flooding remedial action, was held in July 2009 and was successful in getting all parties concerned around the table to discuss the issue. A second CCfA

Success Story – Councillor Call for Action

From April 2009 scrutiny was given a new power, whereby any member of the Council can refer to the Committee any local government or crime and disorder matter which affects their ward.

In June 2009, the first CCfA in the County was brought for consideration. Councillor Thorndyke asked the Committee to consider a long-standing issue of occasional flooding along a street in Stanton, near Bury St Edmunds, when grids across The Grundle, a heavily wooded, deep drainage channel, became blocked with leaves and other debris following periods of heavy rain. As required under the CCfA guidelines, the councillor was able to show that he had done everything in his power to resolve the issue, but as it was complicated by the fact that no landowner could be found, and confusion of responsibility for the issue between the County Council, Borough Council and Environment Agency, no conclusion to the issue had been possible so far.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee took up the Councillor's Call for Action, and at a hearing held in July 2009 the Committee took evidence from a number of partners and other witnesses including the Environment Agency, Suffolk County Council Highways and Rights of Way, an independent drainage engineer and affected residents.

This was the first time all parties involved with the issue had been brought together to discuss potential resolutions. The result of the hearing was that a potential solution was identified, and relevant partners were recommended to assess and design a replacement grid and to identify funding and ongoing maintenance responsibilities for it. Progress reports were brought to subsequent meetings.

In November 2009 the Committee considered its second submitted CCfA, concerning resident parking issues in Bell Meadow, Bury St Edmunds, and this time resolved not to take the matter forward to a hearing. The third submission was considered in January 2010, concerning resident parking and pedestrian safety issues on the Mildenhall Road and Howard estates, and this CCfA was accepted for full hearing, which took place on 3 March 2010. A fourth submission, on parking in Skyliner Way, Moreton Hall, was received in March 2010 and was not taken forward, although the situation will be monitored.

hearing was held in March 2010, concerning resident parking and pedestrian safety on the **Howard and Mildenhall Road estates**. Again, a number of witnesses attended the meeting to help councillors in their investigation, including residents, a Havebury tenant and Havebury Housing Partnership's Neighbourhood Manager. The Committee made a number of recommendations, including that a full review of these issues on the two estates concerned be carried out, but also asked that the Council and Havebury work together to investigate whether any of the issues can be solved prior to the review.

Follow-up Work and Post Implementation Review

When a review is completed, the work of the Committee does not necessarily end there. During 2009/10 the Committee followed up progress on a number of reviews undertaken in previous years.

- Following a 2007 review by the Policy Development Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the progress made since new actions to enforce against environmental crimes had been taken, concluding that these actions had had a positive impact on the amount of low level **environmental crime** being committed
- Following its November 2005 review of the future provision of **Affordable Housing**, the Committee receives regular updates on this important issue. Members discussed the numbers of affordable housing homes delivered over the previous 5 years and those expected to be achieved during the current year and 2010/11, the locations of these, and how these figures related to the target to achieve 120 new affordable homes each year. Recent completions were discussed, and Members also noted that the current economic conditions continued to impact on the ability to meet targets in relation to delivering affordable housing.
- The Committee considered a review of the Council's contribution to **safeguarding children**, its Safeguarding Children Policy and its duties under the Children Act. Since the policy's adoption, all staff had undergone basic awareness training, safeguarding children was included within the induction of new staff, an e-learning package was being investigated and safeguarding children was also highlighted in service plans for all services across the Council. The Committee concluded that the Council was fulfilling all its duties with regard to safeguarding children.

Success Story – Staff Survey Action Plan

In September 2008 the Committee received a report outlining the Council's proposed response to the 2007 Staff Survey. It was agreed that a cross cutting staff group be established to help prioritise and develop the actions identified in response to the survey.

In June 2009 the Committee received an update on the progress which had been made, including a presentation on the work of the Staff Organisational Development Group given by five members of that 16-strong group, which comprised membership from across the Council. In the few months since its commencement, the Group had identified a number of potential ways to develop new managers, publicise career pathways, and identify opportunities for cross departmental working. The potential to widen the range and choice of benefits offered to staff was also being developed, including an employee recognition scheme and the buying and selling of annual leave.

All these issues had been identified in the Staff Survey, and had now been picked up by members of staff themselves, who were investigating ways to make them a reality. The Committee was very impressed with the level of commitment being shown by the members of the OD Group, and how staff themselves were being given the opportunity to progress the issues which would provide opportunities for career progression, as well as making the Council a more attractive employer.

Joint Scrutiny

- A member of the Committee, Councillor Beckwith, was re-appointed to the **Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**, which is responsible for the scrutiny of health provision across the County. Councillor Beckwith presented an update of the Health Committee's work to the Committee at its June 2009 meeting.
- Other members were appointed to the **Joint Scrutiny of Flooding and Flood Risk Working Party** and **Joint Emergency Planning Policy Panel** for 2009/10.
- Councillor Levack continued as the Council's representative on the **Joint Local Area Agreement Scrutiny Panel** for the third year of her four year term.

Scrutiny Development

- The **Police and Justice Act 2006** provides that each local authority must designate a "crime and disorder committee" to deal with crime and disorder scrutiny and Councillor Calls for Action for crime and disorder issues. Amendments to the Constitution were recommended by the Committee, as required under the Act. Additionally, members took the opportunity to explore a number of other issues which may become more relevant under this Act, including enhancing the scrutiny of crime and disorder issues, investigating training requirements for members and working with partners and other Suffolk councils to carry out joint scrutiny and avoid duplication.

Cabinet Liaison

- In April 2009 members of the Committee were consulted on the **Annual Report of the Cabinet** and had an input into its content. The final report was then presented to the Committee at its June 2009 meeting, when members endorsed the content of the report and the Cabinet's Commitments for 2009/10.
- The Committee perused the **Cabinet's Forward Plan** at each meeting, and requested further information or involvement as necessary.
- The Committee had requested **presentations from Portfolio Holders** when setting its Scrutiny Improvement Plan, and during 2008/09 had received presentations from four Portfolio Holders. In November 2009 the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning gave a presentation on recently completed and ongoing works in the areas of highways maintenance, traffic management, new developments and capital works, plus car parking and environmental enforcement works. In March 2010 the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture spoke to the Committee about the current priorities in her portfolio, and the theme of the following questioning and discussion session was "cultural and leisure services – an investment or a cost?" The Committee concluded that the service was a major investment into the economy and wellbeing of the Borough.

Review of Past Year – Policy Development Committee

 <p>Councillor Ian Houlder Committee Chairman 2009/10</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Mrs Jane Bone Cllr Charles Bradbury Cllr Bob Cockle Cllr Robert Clifton-Brown Cllr Gordon Cox Cllr Robert Everitt Cllr Paul McManus Cllr Derek Redhead Cllr Mrs Karen Richardson Cllr Richard Rout Cllr Mrs Patsy Warby Cllr Mrs Dorothy Whittaker</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Mrs Sarah Broughton Cllr Allan Jones Cllr David Lockwood Cllr David Nettleton Cllr Christopher Spicer Cllr Adam Whittaker</p>	 <p>Councillor Charles Bradbury Committee Vice Chairman 2009/10</p>
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During 2009/10 (May 2009 to April 2010) the Policy Development Committee dealt with the following business:

Scrutiny Reviews

- A **Sports Development Review** was undertaken, to look at the Council's sports development objectives and priorities for the next five years and develop an action plan to demonstrate how the Council planned to enable and deliver these objectives. An **Olympic Strategy** was also formulated to ensure a lasting legacy for the Borough.

Community Leadership

- The Committee welcomed the County Council's Transport Planning and Procurement Manager to its March 2010 meeting to discuss **public transport options between Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Clare**. A major review of services between Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill had taken place, with an improved and more direct service due to be implemented in August 2010. Services to Clare will be similarly reviewed in the future.

Success Story – Scrutiny of Budget Savings

There were again significant levels of savings to be achieved when seeking to achieve a sustainable budget for 2010/11, and as in previous years the Committee scrutinised all proposals for growth and efficiency savings in the 2010/11 budget before making recommendations to Cabinet.

This work commenced at the Committee's September 2009 meeting with the consideration of a report covering the broad context of the 2010/11 budget. On 4 November 2009 the Committee discussed the key priorities for the coming year across the Cabinet's Commitments, as well as statutory, strategic and service pressures expected to be the focus of each service during 2010/11. On 4 November, 25 November and 13 January the Committee considered further budget context reports, and discussed a number of proposed efficiency savings and growth. At each meeting the Committee recommended a number of proposals for inclusion in the context of the 2010/11 budget and beyond, with the aim of balancing the budgets for 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Budgets and Corporate Planning

- As part of its process for development of the 2010/11 Service Plans, and also to inform discussions on the forward budget, the Committee discussed a **Service Plan Briefing** and position statement which set out the drivers across the Council for the coming year's Service Plans, including the Cabinet's Commitments, service pressures, new legislation and new opportunities
- The Committee carried out a **Review of the Capital Programme**, and also received an update on the **project and programme management techniques** which had been introduced in 2006, and which were now fully embedded across the organisation.

Policy Development

- Local authorities are required to adopt measures to bring privately owned empty homes back into use as part of their strategic housing approach. To this end, the Committee recommended adoption of a new **Empty Homes and Wasted Space Strategy**, to replace the existing 2005-2009 Strategy.
- The Committee recommended adoption of a **Tree and Woodland Strategy**, which was intended to provide a clear direction for the Borough's trees and woodlands. Also recommended was the allocation of £90,000 to deliver the improvement plan, and allocation of £17,500 for 2010/11 to replace street trees until the renewal of the Highways Agreement.
- A **Community Engagement Strategy** was recommended for adoption, which detailed how the Council will engage with its communities to improve local services, and to help local people to influence decisions.
- At the same meeting the Committee recommended adoption of a **Partnership Strategy**, which will help to ensure that the Council's partnerships are formed, monitored and reviewed with the appropriate level of governance arrangements in place to achieve better outcomes. The draft Strategy had first been piloted with Forest Heath District Council.
- The Committee considered the results of an options appraisal which had been carried out for the **Revenues and Benefits Service**, in order to investigate whether the service could be delivered more cost effectively if it was delivered jointly. The Committee agreed that a full business case should be drawn up for some form of shared service, to be presented direct to Cabinet.

Success Story – Economic Assessment and Action Plan

In September 2009 the Committee received a presentation on the work of Choose Suffolk, the **Suffolk Development Agency**, and found a lot of its priorities particularly relevant to this piece of work.

The Economic Assessment and Action Plan was a joint review carried out with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This review commenced during 2009 with the setting up of a member/officer working group including members of both Committees, whose initial remit was to carry out an economic assessment of the Borough. This assessment was approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2009, and was used by the Policy Development Committee in the creation of an Action Plan.

In January 2010 the Committee examined the first draft of the Action Plan, which was then sent out for consultation with local businesses, organisations and individuals, and the resulting final Action Plan was recommended for adoption in March 2010. The Committee is confident that this Action Plan will provide a clear way forward to promote the economic prosperity of St Edmundsbury. This review also provides an excellent example of both main scrutiny committees working together on a major piece of work, which in itself was strengthened through having member input at every stage of the process, from conception, through consultation, to the final adoption of the new Action Plan.

- As a result of the Parks Review, it was recommended that Management Plans be created for the Council's major parks, and the Committee considered a Management Plan which had been prepared for the **Abbey Gardens**. This will be submitted to the Green Flag Authority.
- Under the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, each local authority is required to prepare and publish a strategy setting out the authority's policies for tackling fuel poverty. The Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy was revised by the Committee into an **Affordable Warmth Strategy**, which incorporated an action plan covering such areas as consultation, identification of people in fuel poverty, grants towards insulation works and publicity.
- A **Tourism and Visitor Strategy** was recommended for adoption by the Committee, which was intended to give a clear direction to the Council's Tourism Service. Councillor Oliver, who had been part of the officer/member working group which formulated the Strategy, presented the Strategy to the Committee and explained that it would help the Council to make the most of the fact that the Eastern Region had the third highest visitor numbers in England.

Policy Reviews

- A review of the **Parish Grants Scheme** was undertaken, to ensure it remained fair and easy to understand. A councillor/officer working group worked on the review for several months, and following consultation with all parishes, it was recommended that the scheme be maintained as it currently exists, except that the 10% cap on grant payable to any parish council be decreased to 9% of the total grant available.

Cabinet Liaison

- Members of the Committee were consulted on the **Annual Report of the Cabinet** in April 2009, and had an input into its content. The final report was presented to the Committee at its June 2009 meeting, when councillors expressed support for the Cabinet's Commitments for 2010/11.
- The Committee perused the **Cabinet's Forward Plan** at each meeting, and requested further information or involvement as necessary.



Diversity

- The Committee is responsible for **Diversity** across the Council, through the work of its Diversity Group, and at its first meeting of the year received a progress report from one of the Diversity Group members on the Council's **Equality Action Plan**, and recommended some amendments to the Plan. The Plan formed part of the Council's Equality Scheme, approved through the Committee a year earlier, which brought together all the Council's statutory equality duties into one document.

Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy

- The annual report on the **performance of the Asset Management Plan** for 2008/09 and proposals for implementation in 2009/10 were scrutinised by the Committee, prior to submission to the Cabinet, and the recommendations supported.

Review of Past Year – Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

 <p>Councillor John Hale Committee Chairman 2009/10</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Trevor Beckwith Cllr Gordon Cox Cllr Ian Houlder Cllr Derek Redhead Cllr Karen Richardson Cllr Richard Rout Cllr Frank Warby Cllr Mrs Patsy Warby</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Robert Everitt Cllr David Nettleton Cllr Mrs Marion Rushbrook</p>	 <p>Councillor Christopher Spicer Committee Vice Chairman 2009/10</p>
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During 2009/10 (May 2009 to April 2010) the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee dealt with the following business:

Performance Management

- The Committee continued to monitor the Council's **Key Performance Indicators**, based on the National Indicators plus additional local indicators identified by the Committee.
- The Committee received a **Biannual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Digest**, which enabled it to monitor the Council's effectiveness at responding to complaints and learning from any mistakes which may have been made. Throughout the year the level of corporate complaints remained low, and was outweighed by the number of compliments received. The number of corporate complaints received also continues to fall year on year.
- The **Place Survey** is a national survey undertaken by councils once every two years, and the Committee considered the data from the survey held at the end of 2008. The survey measured feelings about quality of life, and satisfaction with local public services. As the Survey provided data for 18 National Indicators, and focused on the performance of the area, the Committee found that the findings complemented information in other reports which it considered regularly.
- The **Data Quality Policy Annual Update** was scrutinised, and members were pleased to note the solid progress made against the Action Plan, as well as the Audit Commission's assessment as part of its Use of Resources Assessment, which concluded that the Council *performed well* (level 3) and no recommendations were made for improvement.

Success Story – Audit Scrutiny

An objective of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, which has only been in existence for three years, is to increase councillor input into the important internal and external audit role. The Audit Team values the focused expertise of the members of this Committee, as well as the time available to it to provide constructive scrutiny of internal audits and to contribute ideas for future audits and the future plans of the Audit Team.

Having a specialised team of members with the time to scrutinise complex issues such as the annual accounts and Code of Corporate Governance continues to be of benefit, and the Audit Commission also appreciates having a dedicated group of members to present their regular reports to, providing valuable continuity.

Inspection and Improvement Planning

- The Committee discussed progress against the 2009/10 **Council Improvement Plan**, which brought together a range of actions to help the Council achieve further improvements in its performance. An end of year progress report was considered in April 2010, which concluded that significant progress had been made against the Plan, with all actions having been completed. The Committee also recommended approval of an Improvement Plan for 2010/2011.
- Representatives of the Audit Commission made a presentation to the Committee on the forthcoming change from Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)**, the new method by which the Council's performance will be judged from April 2009. The new inspection regime will be more in-depth, with the main focus being on how partnerships, in particular the LSP, are delivering real improvements for the public. It will be a more rigorous inspection, and should build even further on the improvements and benefits for local people which came out of CPA.

Audit Responsibilities

- The Committee scrutinised the work of the **Internal Audit Team** towards achieving the 2009/10 audit plan which had been approved by the Committee at its meeting in April 2010 and approved an outline **Audit Plan for 2010/2011**.
- At the Committee's first full meeting of the year representatives from the **Audit Commission** presented the Commission's Annual Audit Fee Letter for 2009/10. This document confirmed the audit work which the Commission proposed to undertake for 2009/10, and set out the estimated fee for that work. In January 2010 the Commission presented its Annual Audit Letter, which detailed the audit and inspection work carried out since the last Letter. The report was very positive, showing St Edmundsbury to be demonstrating continued good performance, and in particular to be the only council in Suffolk to achieve Level 4 in any Use of Resources Theme.
- The Committee was advised of the process and outcomes, including areas for development, of the 2008/09 review of the effectiveness of the Council's **system of internal audit**, as part of the review of the overall system of internal control required for the 2008/09 **Annual Governance Statement (AGS)**, which the Committee recommended for approval and issue with the Council's accounts.
- An amended **Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy** was considered by the Committee and recommended for approval.
- The annual report on the **capital programme audited accounts** notified the Committee of variations in cost between tenders and completed schemes. The report included key projects (over £25K) undertaken by property Services for which the accounts had been audited during the financial years 2007/08 and 2008/09. Four schemes were reported, showing an overall underspend of 6.10% (£6,409 below budget).
- Following a request from the Committee for "bitesize" training presentations, an overview of the **National Fraud Initiative** was received which covered the benefits of this exercise, and what the Council had done to comply with the Initiative.

- From this year the Committee is responsible for monitoring the Council's procurement activities, and considered the **Annual Procurement Report 2009/10**, which updated the Committee on progress with the Council's procurement in 2009/10, and its plans for 2010/11.

Budget and Risk Management

- The Committee received quarterly **Corporate Risk Register** monitoring reports and focussed its attention on those risks showing higher residual risks (the risk levels remaining after certain actions have been put in place to reduce them). Various changes were made to the Register across the year, including grouping similar risks together to enable ease of monitoring.
- From its October 2009 meeting, these risk register monitoring reports were completed using a new **Risk Management Strategy**, which had been approved by the Committee, and which set out a clearer management trail in terms of who is responsible for each mitigating action, and what the timelines are for each action.
- **Budget Monitoring** reports were brought to the Committee quarterly, in order for it to flag up any areas of concern to the Cabinet.
- The Audit Commission updated the Committee on some imminent major changes to how the Council's accounts must be prepared under **International Financial Reporting Standards**.
- The Committee scrutinised the Council's 2008/09 **Annual Accounts** before their adoption by full Council at a special meeting in June 2009. Then in September the Committee held a dedicated meeting to receive the Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report, which stated that the Commission would be issuing an unqualified audit opinion on the Council's financial statements. The Committee was also advised at this point that the Council had been assessed as Level 3 for its Use of Resources, which was an excellent achievement.
- At its final meeting for this year, in April 2010, the Committee established a **Treasury Management Sub-Committee** of three members, who will fulfil the recently enhanced monitoring and scrutiny requirements of treasury management. The Sub-Committee will receive and scrutinise treasury management strategy, performance and monitoring reports at least three times per year.

2010/11 Work Programmes

Whilst wishing to set timetabled work programmes covering the year ahead based on issues of public interest and the potential for scrutiny to make real improvements, the work programmes for the committees also leave time for innovative work as the year progresses, when local events, the Cabinet's Forward Plan and other factors may influence the committees' choice of priorities.

In order to accommodate the tasks they have set themselves, the Policy Development and Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to establish review groups to carry out investigations and reviews and report back to the main committees. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee works slightly differently in that the bulk of its work is set around its quarterly monitoring responsibilities, so it does not have a written work programme as such.

A joint budget of £5,000 will be available to the committees to assist them in their work which can be used, for example, in engaging specialist assistance, obtaining evidence, site visits, meeting accommodation, training and development. This budget provides an opportunity for the committees to build upon their successes to date and to develop innovative approaches to scrutiny in St Edmundsbury, and constructive relationships with the Cabinet and the Council's partners.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In 2010/11 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the following subjects, in addition to any call-ins or Councillor Calls for Action which may come up throughout the year:

Indicative timescale	Review	Anticipated outcomes
June 2010	Environmental Health and Licensing Self Assessment	Led by LACORS and IDeA, this review involves a self assessment of the service, followed by a peer review on site for 2 days in April and the creation of an action plan for improvement.
July 2010	Car Parking and Park and Ride	A review of the number of car parking spaces in Bury St Edmunds and the viability of park and ride, with the aim of ensuring people can enjoy the facilities offered in Bury St Edmunds.
	S106 Funding for Transport	A review covering the use of S106 money provided for transport, incorporating the adoption of roads and open spaces.
	Enforcement Policy – Review and Update	This is a review of the policy in light of new guidance and legislation. The review will also introduce quarterly monitoring of the use of the Council's powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act by this Committee, and will incorporate a request from PD Committee to look into the enforcement of planning conditions.
September 2010	The impact of heavy snow on the Borough	Following the heavy snow which affected the County last Winter, the County Council is carrying out some scrutiny of its winter maintenance scheme. The Borough will carry out its own investigation into what went wrong and what went right.
	Annual Report on the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership	The Committee monitors the Community Strategy and how the partnership is developing, and receives an annual report from partners on ongoing projects and successes.

Indicative timescale	Review	Anticipated outcomes
November 2010	Affordable Housing - Update	The Committee has requested a further update on the progress of schemes.
	West Suffolk Waste and Street Scene Partnership	The Committee will review the joint management structure and its effectiveness, specific activities and initiatives, and future plans/opportunities for improvement.
January 2011	Cultural Strategy Action Plan	A recommendation arising from the development of the Cultural Strategy Review was that a review of the Strategy be carried out by the Committee every two years.
	Maintenance of Play Areas	This review was requested to look into the fact that all sites in towns are supplied and maintained by the Borough Council, but not those in rural areas, most of which are supplied and maintained by villages.
March 2011	West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership	This is a six month update following September's annual review of the partnership, which traditionally concentrates on funding issues and allocation of grants.
	Disabled Facilities Grants	The item was added to the work programme due to the time which often elapses between identification of the need for a Grant, and the actual payment of such grant and provision of equipment. The County Council have been working on a review of the system.
April 2011	Monitoring the Community Safety Strategy and Partnership	The Committee is required to monitor the work of this partnership at least annually, and will meet with partners to discuss ongoing projects and successes, as well as areas where more action is needed.

Policy Development Committee

The Policy Development Committee will concentrate on the following areas:

Indicative timescale	Review	Anticipated outcomes
June 2010	Equality Action Plan	The Committee provides the member lead on diversity, and as part of this responsibility in June it will review the Council's Equality Action Plan.
	Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy	This annual review aims to identify the ideal and sustainable property portfolio for the authority.
	Vision 2025 Project	Vision 2025 formalises and articulates a future vision for St Edmundsbury. This year the Committee will look back on progress, and a new Vision will be incorporated into a wider master plan encapsulating all of the Council's visioning work.

September 2010	Delivering a sustainable budget 2010/11	The Committee evaluates any proposals for growth in the forward budget, as well as any proposed savings, and makes recommendations for Cabinet and full Council to consider when setting the budget.
	Empty Homes Strategy	This Strategy and Action Plan, aimed at bringing empty homes back into use, was recommended by the Committee in September 2009. A progress report against the actions will be considered.
	Parks Byelaws	Some of the Borough's parks have byelaws in place, the majority do not. Where park byelaws do exist in the Borough, they are old and inappropriate to enforce. A review group will be established to review the policy with officers.
October 2010	Delivering a sustainable budget 2010/11	See September. This work is carried out by the Committee between September and January.
	Capital Programme Review	This annual review is intended to ensure that the Capital Programme is kept up to date, as well as to identify pieces of work which are no longer a priority.
November 2010	Delivering a sustainable budget 2010/11	See September. This work is carried out by the Committee between September and January.
	Article 4 Directions to designate conservation areas	A review report on article four directions in Bury St Edmunds.
January 2011	Delivering a sustainable budget 2010/11	See September – the final recommendations of the committee on the 2010/11 forward budget will be made at this meeting.
	Corporate Communications Strategy	This Strategy was adopted in June 2007 to cover the period 2007 – 2010, and is therefore due for review. Progress on achieving the accompanying Action Plan will also be reviewed.
	Choice Based Lettings (Enhanced Housing Options)	The Committee carried out work on Choice Based Lettings under its 2008/09 Work Programme. Further developments in this area will be considered.
March 2011	This meeting will be used to consider items deferred from earlier meetings, or items added by members through the year.	

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee will have the following responsibilities and will consider quarterly monitoring reports along these lines, as well as reviewing the Council's annual accounts.

- Performance Management
- Strategic Risk Management
- Budget Monitoring
- Improvement Planning
- Internal and external audit

For more information about how scrutiny works at St Edmundsbury Borough Council, please contact the Scrutiny Manager on 01284 757613.