

D38



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

TENTH ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT



2011/12

St Edmundsbury Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/12

Contents

	Page
Introduction	2
What does Scrutiny do?	3-4
How does Scrutiny work?	4-5
Review of Past Year – Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6-9
Review of Past Year – Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee	10-13
2012/13 Work Programmes	14-15

Introduction



Councillor David Nettleton

**Chairman of the
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2011/12**



Councillor John Hale

**Chairman of the Performance and
Audit Scrutiny Committee
2007/08 – 2011/12**

Welcome to the tenth 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 the two scrutiny committees during 2011/12. The report is not intended to cover all the work of the committees in great detail, 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.

2011/12 was a busy year for both scrutiny committees, with Overview and Scrutiny Committee carrying out some major policy and scrutiny reviews, having taken over responsibility for policy development on the deletion of the Policy Development Committee from the committee structure. The Committee also commenced a new way of working, replacing its traditional annual work programme with a rolling programme, enabling the Committee to be more responsive to changing priorities. The Committee also started carrying out the majority of its reviews in smaller “Task and Finish Groups” of up to 6 Councillors, enabling a greater number of Councillors to engage in scrutiny, and ensuring a Councillor lead on often controversial issues.

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, in its fifth year of operation, continued to increase the scope of its internal and external audit monitoring role, and oversaw significant savings in the 2012/13 budget, which will be good news for the Council Tax payers of the Borough.

2011/12 was also another strong year for external involvement in our scrutiny reviews, with a number of representatives from partner organisations attending meetings or taking part in consultations to help the committees or Task and Finish Groups 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 2012

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 two such committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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. It also examines new and evolving policies. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee has particular responsibility for monitoring the performance of services, as well as internal audit, procurement and risk management, and has responsibility for scrutinising the Council's budget, including any proposals for cost reductions.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsibilities:

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

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 also 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 would 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.

The Committee has eight scheduled meetings per year.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

- Performance management
- Internal and external audit responsibilities
- Strategic risk management
- Budget monitoring and budget development
- Procurement
- Capital programme monitoring and review

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 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or another appropriate committee or working group 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 also leads on achieving a sustainable forward budget. It has four quarterly monitoring meetings per year, plus a special meeting to consider the annual accounts.

How does Scrutiny work?

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a rolling work programme which prioritises the investigations it will carry out over the coming months. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee sets its work around the quarterly budget and corporate planning cycle. 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, partner organisations, 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 Councillors 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.

The Council sees an average of one call-in per year, however, none were considered during 2011/12.

Councillor Call for Action

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is a relatively new scrutiny power which came into force on 1 April 2009, and 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 Councillor Call for Action Protocol, which is available as part of the Council's Constitution, on our website, or by calling 01284 757613.

Four Councillor Calls for Action were submitted during the first year of operation of the new power, in 2009/10, but none were submitted during 2010/11 or 2011/12.

Training and Development

We recognise the importance of training and development for both Councillors 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. During 2011/12 an extensive three-module programme of scrutiny training was offered to all Members through the University of Birmingham, and held jointly with Members of Forest Heath District Council.

Meetings

Meetings of both 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 often 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 extensive targeted consultations carried out as part of reviews, the committees have formally invited several people to attend meetings and assist in investigations, including:


- A representative of the Upskilling West Suffolk Workforce Project
- Representatives from the Audit Commission
- Suffolk County Council's West Area Highway Manager
- A representative from the Bury St Edmunds Citizens Advice Bureau

Organisations and individuals contacted as part of major reviews included:

- Members of the public
- The West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership
- Suffolk Constabulary
- Over 30 local and national disability and voluntary organisations
- Bury St Edmunds Chamber of Commerce
- All owners and occupiers of Conservation Areas in Bury St Edmunds, as well as anyone else interested in proposed changes to conservation area boundaries
- Local estate agents, lettings agents and solicitors
- Local amenity groups
- Registered Providers (of housing)
- The Cambridge housing sub-region
- The Homes and Communities Agency
- Visitors to the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre and other town users
- Bury St Edmunds Tourism Group
- St Edmundsbury Cathedral
- Bid4Bury
- The Bury Society
- Theatre Royal

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 Nettleton Committee Chairman</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Terry Buckle Cllr Ms Maureen Byrne Cllr Phillip French Cllr Paul Hopfensperger Cllr Mrs Helen Levack Cllr Tim Marks Cllr Stefan Oliver Cllr Richard Rout Cllr Mrs Marion Rushbrook Cllr Clive Springett Cllr Jim Thorndyke Cllr Frank Warby Cllr Mrs Patsy Warby Cllr Mrs Dorothy Whittaker</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Trevor Beckwith Cllr Bob Cockle Cllr Jeremy Farthing Cllr Paul Simner Cllr Mrs Sarah Stamp Cllr Adam Whittaker</p>	 <p>Councillor Ian Houlder Committee Vice Chairman</p>
---	---	--

During 2011/12 (May 2011 to April 2012) 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 (WSLSP)** and discussed the projects being run by the Partnership, and developments since the last report. Presentations were received from two of the LSP's partners on projects funded through the Partnership, and the LSP Manager updated the Committee on plans for the future. As part of the six-monthly update in March 2012, the Committee was advised of the disbanding of the LSP from February 2012, and the establishment of the West Suffolk Partnership, covering Forest Heath DC and St Edmundsbury BC.
- Members considered a report which set out a framework for developing the new **Corporate Plan and Priorities**, and planned consultation, and made suggestions for how the corporate plan and priorities could be developed. At a later meeting the draft Plan was scrutinised, alongside three overarching priorities, each with its own commitments and actions. The Committee will review the Corporate Plan annually, to report on progress made against the priorities, commitments and actions, and to propose any amendments in light of changes in circumstances.

Scrutiny Reviews

- Via a Task and Finish Group, the Committee carried out a review of the provision of **free parking for Blue Badge holders**. The Group consulted with disability groups and other focus groups, and visited a neighbouring Council which had already introduced charging, to benefit from lessons learnt from implementation. The Task and Finish Group's recommendations, based around charging blue badge holders to park in the Council's off-street car parks on the basis of one free hour for every hour purchased, were supported through Cabinet.
- The Committee had an input into the Cabinet's review of **Community Centres**, recommending that two community centres be prioritised for transfer to community ownership with a target completion date of 2013, with the remaining two transfers being subject to a completion date of 2014. The Cabinet endorsed the Committee's recommendation.
- The Task and Finish Group looking at **Universal Coverage of Broadband in St Edmundsbury** discussed the scope of the Suffolk Better Broadband Review, which was designed to reduce Broadband inequalities across Suffolk, following a successful £22 million bid for funding. The Group will only meet again should it become necessary to review the progress of the Better Broadband for Suffolk project.
- Another Task and Finish Group which will continue working into 2012/13 is looking at **the Variable Quality of Paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre**. To date the Group has explored the rationale/criteria behind the County Council's maintenance standards, and how the specification of the paving for the town centre was arrived at. The Group will meet again to put together a list of areas of particularly poor paving across the Borough, and will then bring its recommendations through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Task and Finish Group looking into **the Continuing Success of the Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre** was completed during 2011/12, and brought a number of recommendations through the Committee and onwards to Cabinet aimed at ensuring that the Fayre continued to benefit the town and visitors.

Success Story – Leisure Facilities Asset Management Plan and Playgrounds in St Edmundsbury

A major piece of Asset Management Plan (AMP) work was carried out to advise specifically on the leisure facilities stock, identify revenue and capital requirements and introduce options for consideration including community asset transfer, disposal or retention.

Additionally, the Committee set up a Task and Finish Group in March 2011 to investigate the provision of childrens' play facilities in the Borough. This review formed part of the wider AMP review of Council-owned leisure facilities. The review commenced with work to ascertain the location, ownership and funding of play facilities in the Borough; current maintenance and inspection regimes; classifications of play areas; and the current condition of each play area.

Although the Task and Finish Group's, and the Committee's, recommendation for the Council to maintain all of the play areas in the Borough will not be supported unless funding for this becomes available, the recommendations for rationalisation of play areas, and that the initial schedule of leisure facilities refurbishment, replacement or investment be used to assist the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan and budget setting processes from 2012/13 onwards, were supported. This has enabled detailed maintenance and replacement estimates to be identified on a 5 year rolling basis consistent with the Council's five year financial model.

- Another Task and Finish Group which will run onwards into 2012/13 is looking at **Litter Collection and Litter/Dog Bin Distribution in the Borough**. To date the Group has looked at the cleansing service in relation to the Council's statutory responsibilities, and operational changes made to date in furthering the issues identified in the Group's scope. The Group has also reviewed the Joint Waste Committee approved framework for future provision, maintenance and servicing arrangements for dog and litter bins.

Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action

- This year no new CCfAs were submitted, and there were also no call-ins.

Policy Development and Review

- The **Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy** was last adopted in 2009. The Committee recommended a revised Strategy for adoption, through which the Council aimed to effectively engage with all individuals, groups and organisations.
- The Localism Act requires, as part of the social housing tenure reforms, that all local authorities prepare and publish a **tenancy strategy** setting out the matters which the registered providers of social housing for its district are to "have regard to" in formulating their own tenancy policies. The draft strategy was considered by the Committee, and suggestions for amendment made, prior to its adoption. As well as scrutinising the draft strategy, the Committee also will scrutinise the 'impact of the tenancy strategy' as part of its work planned for 2012/13, as a follow on to the development of the tenancy strategy.
- A Task and Finish Group is looking at the complex issue of **the Co-ordination of Licensing, Planning and Enforcement Functions Relating to Street Vending**. This is also known as the "A Boards" Review, as the presence of such signage on pavements was one of the issues which started this review. To date the Group has agreed that the best way to address the issues would be to draw up a policy on A Boards, to consult on it, to publicise it and to implement it, and a draft policy is intended to be brought to the July 2012 meeting of the Committee.
- The **Article 4 Directions** Task and Finish Group is looking into the application of policy before and after Article 4 Directions, restoration of alterations and raising awareness. Whilst working on this review, the Task and Finish Group made recommendations regarding consultation on proposed changes to the boundaries of the Bury St Edmunds Town Centre and Victoria Street conservation areas. These were taken through the Bury St Edmunds Area Working Party, which considered the proposed changes and recommended to Cabinet that they be approved for public consultation. The work of this Task and Finish Group will continue into 2012/13.

Diversity

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for overseeing the work of the Diversity Group, which exists to progress the Council's diversity and equality agenda. Through the Diversity Group, the Committee recommended approval of the **Revised Equality Scheme 2011-2014 and Equality Action Plan 2011/12**.

Follow-up Work and Post Implementation Review

- Following its November 2005 review of the future provision of **Affordable Housing**, the Committee receives annual updates on this important issue. Councillors considered an update on the housing reforms and progress on delivering the priorities identified in the Local Investment Plan

Joint Scrutiny

- A member of the Committee, Councillor Beckwith, was appointed to the reinstated **Suffolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**, which is responsible for the scrutiny of health provision across the County. Nominations to other joint county scrutiny committees are now made by Annual Council alongside other outside bodies.

Cabinet Liaison

- As 2011 was an election year, the usual June consideration of the **Cabinet's Annual Report** was brought forward to April 2011, in order to be able to draw a line under the previous year in good time for the new administration to take over and set its own priorities following the May 2011 elections. From June 2012 this annual discussion with the Leader of the Council will be considered in its usual month.
- The Committee discussed the **Cabinet's Forward Plan** at each meeting, and requested further information or involvement as necessary.

Other



- From June 2010 the Committee was given responsibility for scrutinising the Authority's use of its **surveillance powers** under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Directed Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources) Order 2010, and received quarterly reports on the use of these powers.

Success Story – Scrutiny Development

May 2011 saw big changes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: a new Chairman, several new Members (some new to the Council), and taking on responsibility for policy development and review from the Policy Development Committee. Due to the increased workload the Committee agreed that it would aim to carry out most scrutiny and policy reviews in "Task and Finish" Groups. This is considered good practice, and as well as easing pressure on the main Committee it ensures a Member lead on all scrutiny issues, enables a wider number of Members to engage in scrutiny, and allows for in-depth scrutiny to be carried out over a longer period of time.

The Committee reviewed the success of this way of working, and the results seen so far from the Task and Finish Groups which had been appointed to since July 2011. Members concluded that, although it was still early days for this way of working, the Task and Finish Groups had proven successful in allowing more in-depth scrutiny and a stronger Member lead on often controversial issues. To further improve the new way of working, the Committee resolved that no more than four reviews put forward by Members should be running at any one time. Reviews "in the pipeline" will be prioritised, and as each review comes to an end, the next review on the prioritised list will commence. Additionally, two questions were added to the "suggestion for scrutiny" form, to ensure that when issues arise which were the responsibility of a partner organisation, they will be discussed with that organisation before the issue is put into the public domain on the Committee's agenda.

Review of Past Year – Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

 <p>Councillor John Hale Committee Chairman</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Sarah Broughton Cllr Gordon Cox Cllr Paul Farmer Cllr Mrs Diane Hind Cllr Mrs Rebecca Hopfensperger Cllr Derek Redhead Cllr Mrs Karen Richardson Cllr Paul Simner</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Bob Cockle Cllr Jeremy Farthing Cllr David Nettleton Cllr Alaric Pugh Cllr Adam Whittaker</p>	 <p>Councillor Christopher Spicer Committee Vice Chairman</p>
---	---	---

During 2011/12 (May 2011 to April 2012) 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 some of the previous National Indicators plus additional local indicators identified by the Committee. From April 2011 National Indicators were abolished, and the Council is now able to choose which indicators it wishes to report and manage.
- At its October 2011 meeting the Committee received a report outlining the performance of **The Apex** during its first year of operation. The aspiration for the future is to target at least a break even position on concerts promoted by the Council.
- The Council's first **Data Quality Policy** was adopted in March 2008. The policy was revised and recommended for adoption by the Committee, following legislation being introduced as part of the Localism Act and in light of the Government's transparency agenda, in partnership with Forest Heath District Council.

Success Story – Scrutiny of Budget Savings

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee plays an integral role in delivering a sustainable budget for the Council. There were again significant levels of savings to be achieved, and the Committee scrutinised all proposals for growth and savings in the 2012/13 budget before making recommendations to Cabinet.

This work commenced at the Committee's October 2011 meeting with consideration of the context of the 2012/13 budget and the approach which would be taken to deliver the substantial savings required. The budget gap for 2012/13 was £2m. In November 2011 and January 2012 the Committee considered a number of proposed savings, and recommended that all proposals be considered for inclusion in the 2012/13 budget. The Committee also considered four capital growth areas required to deliver some of the savings proposed, and two of revenue growth, and recommended them all for inclusion in the 2012/13 budget.

All recommendations from the Committee were incorporated into the sustainable budget report considered by Cabinet on 15 February 2012. At the end of the process commenced by the Committee, savings of £2.1 million were delivered in order to balance the 2012/13 budget.

- 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 was outweighed by the number of compliments received. The Committee was also pleased to note that none of the complaints referred to the Ombudsman had resulted in a finding of maladministration.

Audit Responsibilities

- The Committee scrutinised the work of the **Internal Audit Team** towards achieving the 2011/12 audit plan, with updates at each meeting during which the results of completed audits were discussed. At its meeting in April 2012 the Committee approved an outline **Audit Plan for 2012/2013**.
- The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 require a **review of the effectiveness of internal audit** once a year. The review forms part of the review of the overall system of internal control required for the **Annual Governance Statement**. The Committee noted the report's conclusion, that internal audit was operating effectively and could be relied upon as a key source of evidence in the Annual Governance Statement.
- The Council is required to produce and publish an **Annual Governance Statement (AGS)**, which covers six laid down core governance principles, and is to be approved by full Council, and signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer. The Committee confirmed that the internal control assessment and proposed additional areas for improvement (Assurance Framework and related Action Plan) were adequate, and recommended the draft AGS for approval by full Council prior to accompanying the Council's financial statements.
- Various reports and presentations from the **Audit Commission** were considered over the year, commencing with a presentation to Members on the **International Financial Reporting Standards**, setting out the accounting framework, form and content of local authority accounts, and the Councillor role in this, at the Committee's July 2011 meeting. Additionally at this meeting the Commission presented the **Annual Audit Fee Letter 2011/12** to Members. This document confirmed the audit work which the Commission proposed to undertake for the 2011/12 financial year, and set out the fee for that work. In September 2011 the Commission presented the **ISA 260 Annual Governance Report** to the Committee, and advised that it was intended to issue an unqualified financial statements opinion and value for money conclusion. In January 2012 the Commission presented its **2010/11 Annual Audit Letter**, which summarised the Audit Commission's findings from its audit of the Council's financial systems, and its assessment of the Council's arrangements to achieve value for money in its use of resources. The Committee was pleased to see another positive report from the Audit Commission, praising the Council's achievement in publishing the final accounts before the 30 June statutory deadline, given the complexities involved in preparing accounting entries for the first time in line with International Financial Reporting Standards. In April 2012 the **Audit Plan – Audit 2011/12** was received from the Commission which set out the 2011/12 audit work which it proposed to undertake for the audit of financial statements and the value of money conclusion. A proposed timetable for the audit was noted by Councillors, as well as details of fees to be charged, and reports to be received by the Committee across the coming year. Finally, the **Presentation of Certification of Claims and Returns Annual Report** was considered, which summarised the Commission's outcomes of its certification work on the Council's 2010/11 claims and returns.

- 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 2010/11 and the first half of 2011/12. Six schemes were reported, showing an overall underspend of 5.37% (£438,879 below budget).
- Amendments to the Council's **Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy** were considered by the Committee. The amendments were proposed to reflect the implications of the Bribery Act 2010, which came into force on 1 July 2011. The Committee recommended that the revised draft Strategy be adopted.
- The Chief Finance Officer advised the Committee of the proposed **External Audit Fees for 2012/13**, updating Councillors on the outsourcing of the Audit Commission's East of England work, resulting in savings of £38,304 compared to the previous year.
- The Committee approved the revised **Internal Audit Strategy**, which had been updated to reflect the Internal Audit shared service arrangement, and also recommended approval of a revised **Internal Audit Charter**.

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 had been put in place to reduce them). Various changes were made to the Register across the year.
- **Budget Monitoring** reports were brought to the Committee quarterly, in order for it to flag up any areas of concern to the Cabinet.
- The Committee received a **budget outturn and financial highlights** report at its first meeting following the 30 June deadline for production of the draft accounts for audit. The report included a financial commentary on the year, details of revenue and expenditure including budgeted and actual expenditure and an explanation of the main variances, and details of how services were paid for. Capital income and expenditure was also discussed, as well as reserves and treasury management.
- Members were advised of the significant changes proposed to the way in which local authorities were financed, through the **"localisation" of business rates**, and provided with a view of what this might mean for the Borough Council and to the other local authorities in Suffolk.

Success Story – Budget Consultation

Due to the need to 'dig deeper' this year, full public consultation was undertaken on some of the more sensitive budget options. This consultation took the form of focus groups with residents, parishes and town councils, a postal survey to 2,000 households, and an online survey. There were 20 key areas in the public consultation.

Having reviewed the results, there were some areas which the public were clearly NOT in favour of, and which were therefore not pursued. The public told us that we should not cut grants to the voluntary and community sector, close the Tourist Information Centre, reduce the Park Ranger Service, reduce community work or reduce standards of planting, floral displays, grass cutting and tree replacement.

Councillors listened, and those potential savings areas were removed from the budget and replaced with savings which the public told us would be more acceptable, such as cutting staffing and other costs through sharing services with another council, transferring ownership and costs of urban community centres to local communities, and charging blue badge holders in borough council car parks.

- A formal **review of the Council's capital programme** is undertaken annually as part of the budget setting process, and the resulting rescheduled and updated programme helps to determine the extent and timing of associated revenue implications. A significant amount of work had been undertaken in updating the programme, prompted by the financial constraints that the Council faced, and the fact that the existing programme of major capital expenditure was coming to an end. The Committee scrutinised the updated and rescheduled capital programme, together with the revised capital strategy, and recommended them for approval as part of the 2012/13 budget setting process.
- The Committee scrutinised the Council's 2010/11 **Annual Accounts** before their adoption by full Council at its meeting in September 2011. These were the first accounts to be produced in the format required under the International Financial Reporting Standards.
- The Committee is responsible for monitoring the Council's procurement activities, and considered the **Annual Procurement Report 2011/12**, which outlined progress achieved during the year. Procurement savings of over £450,000 were reported to the Committee, as well as other achievements, including implementation of electronic tendering.
- The **Treasury Management Sub-Committee** of three members, who fulfil the enhanced monitoring and scrutiny requirements of treasury management, held 3 meetings, at which scrutiny of the treasury management strategy, investment activity and performance and monitoring reports took place. Officers continue to find this specialised scrutiny of the Council's treasury management activity extremely useful, and value being able to obtain Members' views on this important area of work.

2012/13 Work Programmes

Following a scrutiny re-structure in December 2010, which saw the deletion of the Policy Development Committee from the scrutiny structure, Overview and Scrutiny Committee took over responsibility for policy development and review. Additionally, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee took over responsibility for scrutinising the Council's budget, in particular for budget savings.

From July 2011 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also changed its working methods, moving away from its traditional annually set work programme, and towards a "rolling" work programme, whereby suggestions for scrutiny are brought to each meeting of the Committee, and timetabled no more than a few months ahead, thus making scrutiny more responsive to changing priorities.

This change means that the Committee can at any point in the year only set out the reviews on which it will be working in the next few months, however, these will still be selected based on issues of public interest and the potential for scrutiny to make real improvements.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out much of its work in "Task and Finish" groups, which carry out investigations and reviews and report back to the main Committee. This enables a greater number of Councillors to engage in scrutiny, as well as ensuring a Councillor lead on, often, controversial issues, right from the beginning of their review. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee works differently in that the bulk of its work is set around its quarterly budget and performance monitoring responsibilities.

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, carrying out site visits, and paying for 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

As set out above, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee now has a rolling work programme, set a few meetings ahead, to enable it to be more reactive to changing priorities. There are, however, certain pieces of work which take place on an annual basis, and these can be programmed further ahead in the work programme.

In addition to any call-ins or Councillor Calls for Action which may arise, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the following issues during the coming months. Annual work is also included.

Indicative timescale	Review	Anticipated outcomes
July 2012	The co-ordination of Licensing, Planning and enforcement functions relating to street vending (also known as the "A Boards" Review)	The Licensing and Planning teams work with different legislation with regard to authorising the positioning of objects or structures on or over the highway for the purposes of advertisement, and the Committee is undertaking a review, involving the County Council where necessary, to see whether consistency can be achieved, as well as clarification on enforcement.

Indicative timescale	Review	Anticipated outcomes
July 2012	The variable quality of paving in Bury St Edmunds Town Centre	To investigate why some of the paving in the town appears inappropriate for the area, and to ensure that the specification of future paving in the town centre is appropriate for the expected use of any area. The Task and Finish Group was later asked by the Committee to put together a list of areas of poor paving across the Borough.
July/September 2012	Conservation Area Policy/Article 4 Directions	The application of the policy before and after Article 4 directions; restoration of alterations; awareness raising.
TBA	Litter collection and dog/litter bin distribution in the Borough	The scope of this review will include the frequency of emptying; locations; sizes; and reducing litter dropped.
October 2012	The new social housing reforms – review of Tenancy Strategy	Concerning the introduction of new affordable rents and flexible tenancies for social housing, and the development of a Tenancy Strategy. The Strategy was approved earlier in the year, and a six month review of its effectiveness will be carried out by the Committee.
October 2012	Review of car parking charges throughout the Borough	This review aims to secure a clear way forward for future years' car parking charges in the context of the Council's budget, and its recommendations are expected in October 2012.
TBA	The impact on customers and stakeholders of the Council joining the Anglia Revenues Partnership	To scrutinise the impact of the Council's Revenues and Benefits Team joining the Anglia Revenues Partnership. The review will commence in May 2012, one year after the Council joined the Partnership.
March 2013	Annual Report on the impact of the West Suffolk Partnership	Following the disbanding of the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership, the West Suffolk Partnership will report to the Committee on its first year of operation.

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 scrutinising the Council's annual accounts, and making recommendations on delivering a sustainable budget for 2013/14.

• Performance Management	• Strategic Risk Management
• Budget Monitoring and Development	• Capital programme monitoring and review
• Internal and external audit	• Procurement

Looking Forward

With the shared services programme gaining pace between St Edmundsbury and its neighbour, Forest Heath District Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will aim to work closer with the scrutiny process at Forest Heath, and to look at areas where joint scrutiny could take place to avoid duplication and make the most of resources.

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