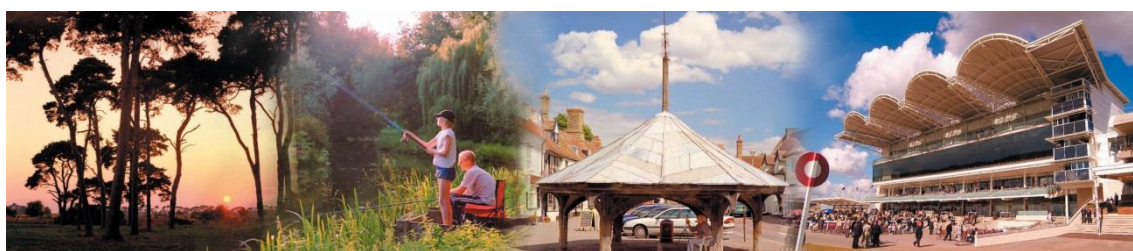




Forest Heath
District Council

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

West Suffolk
working together



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2014 – 2015

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Introduction



Councillor Tony Simmons
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (2014-2015)

Welcome to the tenth Annual Report on the overview and scrutiny function at Forest Heath District Council.

Overview and scrutiny is central to the decision-making process of the Council, and this Annual Report sets out the work of the committee during 2014-2015. The report is not intended to cover all the work of the committee 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.

2014-2015 was another busy year for the committee, with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carrying out several policy and scrutiny reviews alongside our usual workload. The Committee also held informal joint scrutiny meetings with members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss key issues for West Suffolk.

The committee held an Extraordinary Informal Joint and two Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings during the year. On 13 May 2014, this joint approach enabled informal discussions to take place between the two authorities on the West Suffolk Annual Report 2013-2014; on 23 July 2014 the Draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy and on 12 March 2015, the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2014-2015.

I 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 Forest Heath.

May 2015

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 to 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.

Forest Heath District Council operates with one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The 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 it also looks at wider issues. It also examines new and evolving policies. The Committee comprises ten Members. The arrangements for appointments to the Committee are made without compliance with the political balance requirements in SS15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

What we don't do

Overview and Scrutiny does not deal with individual complaints. The council has a complaints procedure in place to deal with this. However, the Committee welcomes suggestions on wider issues which members of the public feel should be reviewed. The functions and responsibilities of the Committee are set out in detail in the Council's Constitution, which is available on the Council's website. The Committee also does not scrutinise the everyday work of the Council or its financial management arrangements as this is undertaken by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 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
- Holding the Portfolio Holders 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 Forest Heath and West Suffolk 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 priorities as set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016, and that any links to other Council policies demonstrate continuity.

In its policy development, the Committee aims to enhance services and make life better for people living and working in Forest Heath, as well as those visiting us.

The Committee has up to eight scheduled meetings per year.

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 and is reviewed and updated at each meeting. Managing the work programme with this flexibility enables the Committee to consider matters of local concern, not previously scheduled but which may merit inclusion during the year.

The Committee gathers 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 it has gathered all the evidence the committee makes its report, complete with recommendations, usually to the Cabinet.

Call-ins

Any decision by Cabinet or a Cabinet Member may be "called in" by any five members of the Council. 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.

Councillor Call for Action

The Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) was introduced under Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act) and came into force on 1 April 2009. The Act enables any councillor 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. Since its introduction the Committee had received no Councillor Call for Action requests.

Training and Development

We recognise the importance of training and development for both Councillors and officers who support the scrutiny role at Forest Heath. Regular targeted training, both internally and externally has facilitated in the development of a successful scrutiny function.

Meetings

Meetings 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 / Research" groups are set up to carry out major reviews and report back to the main committee with their recommendations.

Community involvement

The Committee works hard to develop and improve the scrutiny process at Forest Heath and aims to continually increase the involvement of stakeholders and public engagement at its meetings through public speaking.

The Committee gathers evidence with the involvement of external witnesses, and invites representatives to attend meetings to assist in its work.


Overview and Scrutiny Committee support

The Committee is supported by a Scrutiny Officer, who is the lead officer for both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's scrutiny functions. The post requires working closely with the Corporate Policy Team, the Chief Executive, Directors, Heads of Service, Cabinet Members, the Chairman / Vice-Chairman of the Committee and other Members of the Council.

For further information or answers to any queries relating to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function or activities, please contact Christine Brain, Scrutiny Officer on (01638) 719729 or email Christine.brain@westsuffolk.gov.uk.

Members of Overview and Scrutiny (2014–2015)

The Committee comprises ten members, or as may from time to time be determined by the Council. No member of the Cabinet may be a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

 <p>Councillor Tony Simmons Committee Chairman</p>	<p>Committee Members</p> <p>Cllr Michael Anderson Cllr Chris Barker Cllr David Bimson Cllr Rachel Hood Cllr Timothy Huggan Cllr Michael Jefferys Cllr John McGhee Cllr Tony Wheble</p>	 <p>The late Councillor Geoffrey Jaggard Committee Vice Chairman</p>
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Review of the Past Year

This section describes some of the key scrutiny topics covered during the year (May 2014 to April 2015), and their associated outcomes.

Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Meetings

The Committee held three Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings during the year with Members of St Edmundsbury's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable informal joint discussions to take place between the two authorities.

Following the informal joint discussions, the two Overview and Scrutiny Committee's then met separately and voted on the recommendations for consideration for each council's respective Cabinet.

Reviews carried out in Informal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Meetings

Draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy

On 23 July 2014, informal joint discussions took place to enable members to provide input as a consultee on the **Draft West Suffolk Housing Strategy**.

The Draft Strategy set out the strategic direction and the actions that West Suffolk could take to deliver the Strategy for current and future residents. These actions would directly contribute to the overall sense of community and wellbeing of West Suffolk. The aim was to enable the supply of new housing; making the best use of existing housing; and offering support for specialist housing to those who required it.

Members scrutinised the Draft Strategy in detail and asked a number of questions of the respective councils Portfolio Holders responsible for Housing.

The Committee recommended to Cabinet the approval of the contents of the West Suffolk Housing Strategy 2015-2018, subject to comments made during the informal joint discussions and other stakeholder comments received as part of the consultation process.

Members were advised that once the West Suffolk Housing Strategy was approved, it would be monitored and an annual report produced to track progress in delivering the Actions.

Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

The Informal Joint Committee on 23 July 2014 received its annual report on the work of the **Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP)**. This was in line with the statutory provisions contained within Section 19-21 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 which extended the remit of Local Authorities to scrutinise the functioning of the local Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The Cabinet Members with responsibilities for Families and Communities updated the Committee on the progress of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership from April 2013 to March 2014. The report highlighted a number of individual projects the Community Safety Partnership had commissioned during 2013-2014 and the change to the future funding mechanisms. The report represented then final monitoring / close-out report to the WSCSP as a commissioning body.

The Committee was advised that as from April 2014, the WSCSP would no longer be a commissioning body, but would have an enabling and supportive role in the voluntary and community sector who could deliver against the priorities as well as a small number of statutory functions. The WSCSP was currently discussion how it would discharge these functions and a report on the future developments of the WSCSP would be presented to the Committee in due course.

On 12 March 2015, the Informal Joint Committee received an update on progress of the **WSCSP** from April 2014 to February 2015. In light of no funding being awarded to the WSCSP, the partnership ceased operating as a commissioning body and undertook a review of its role. A review workshop took place in April 2014 to enable partners to consider a new way of working. At the workshop it was agreed that elected members who represented the four councils at strategic level, would have a key role in ensuring that the partnership focused on community led issues, which reflected the West Suffolk Families and Communities Strategy and the strategic priorities of Mid Suffolk and Babergh councils. The partnership's plan over the next three years is to:

- Put communities at the heart of its work (focusing on the here and now); and
- Highlight strategic issues that may impact on West Suffolk (more forward looking, "horizon scanning").

Overview and Update of Planning Enforcement Service

The Informal Joint Committee on 12 March 2015 received a report on the **Planning Enforcement Service**, which had been raised by a member of the Committee as a work programme suggestion. The report updated Members on the newly formed Enforcement Team, including caseloads and forward work programme.

The Enforcement Team in 2015 would be consulting on producing a Local Enforcement Plan. The Plan will be in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and gives Councils the opportunity to state what work they will do, how they will do it and what will be given priority. One area of consideration was the attention to issues within Conservation Areas where additional resources or monitoring may be appropriate. A declaration of intent within a published plan would go some way to providing clarity to all parties concerned. Work was also being undertaken on making the Enforcement Registers available online and also on producing a periodic update to ward members and parishes so that they knew what enforcement cases were being looked at in their area.

Policy Development and Review

The Committee received three reports during 2014-2015 (19 June 2014, 23 October 2014 and 12 March 2015) on the **Locality Budget Scheme**, which updated the Committee on how the scheme was progressing since it was launched in July 2012. (Further information can be found below, under Cabinet Liaison).

On 18 December 2014, the Committee provided input as a consultee on the **West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy**. The joint strategy set out what the West Suffolk councils, along with their partners, would do over the next three years to address and prevent homelessness, ensuring that there was sufficient suitable temporary accommodation and support for those who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. Members scrutinised the Draft Strategy in detail and asked a number of questions of the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Transport.

The Committee recommended to Cabinet the approval of the contents of the West Suffolk Homelessness Strategy 2015-2018, subject to comments made by the Committee and other stakeholder comments received as part of the consultation process.

Cabinet Liaison

At an Extraordinary Informal Joint meeting held on 13 May 2014, the Committee jointly discussed the **West Suffolk Annual Report (2013-2014)** with the Leaders of both Councils. The report highlighted the key activities and developments which had been achieved over the financial year 2013-2014, with regards to the priorities set out in the Forest Heath Strategic Plan 2012-2016 and the St Edmundsbury Corporate Plan 2012-2016. The draft report reflected the fact that a great deal of the work our services carried out in the 2013-2014 financial year was on behalf of both Councils and for the benefit of all residents, visitors and businesses in West Suffolk; whilst allowing for the distinctive needs, activities and characters of the two councils' areas to be captured.

On the 12 March 2015, informal joint discussions with St Edmundsbury Borough Council took place on the **West Suffolk Annual Report (2014-2015)** with the Leaders of both Councils. The report highlighted the key activities and developments which had been achieved against the Council's priorities as detailed in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2014-2016.

The draft report contained a number of case studies and examples from West Suffolk to illustrate the achievements described. These outline the work that is undertaken across West Suffolk highlighting the range of activities and services provided across our diverse localities.

The Committee also considers at each meeting the **Cabinet's Decisions Plan** and requests further information or involvement as necessary.

Cabinet Members who attended Overview and Scrutiny in 2014-2015

Cabinet Member for Families and Communities

On 19 June 2014, the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities presented the annual report on the Locality Budget Scheme, which updated the Committee on the scheme and included details of projects/activities supported since the scheme was introduced in June 2012. Discussions were held on the number of good projects which had benefited from the scheme; how the council intended to measure the effectiveness/benefits from the locality budget scheme moving forward over the next 2-3 years.

On 12 March 2015, the Cabinet Member for Families and communities presented the Local Budget Scheme, which updated the Committee on revisions to Locality Budget Guidance and Locality Budget Application Form for 2015-2016. Since the scheme was introduced in June 2012, it had continued to operate well across the district. Between April 2014 and January 2015, 112 projects had been supported with a total of £37,100 allocated across the district. Taking into account the learning from the scheme over the past two years, revised guidance had been produced to assist Councillors develop the scheme further and ensure that funding was supporting community matters. The revised application form had been designed to make it easier for Councillors to consider the merits of a community project or activity with some explanatory notes to accompany the form.

Cabinet Member of Health, Leisure and Culture

On 18 December 2014, the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture provided an update on the council's activities relating to improving healthy lifestyles, which followed on from an earlier presentation to the Committee on 24 October 2013. The updated provided an overview of progress made so far by the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board; Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee; West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group; Forest Heath Health and Wellbeing Forum; Live Well Suffolk, Community Health Coach; Healthy Health; Otago – Falls Prevention; Suffolk County Council Integrated Healthy Lifestyle Service and Anglia Community Leisure.

Cabinet Member for Resources, Governance and Performance

On the 18 December 2014, the Cabinet Member for Resources, Governance and Performance was invited to the meeting to update the Committee on the Joint Risk Management Strategy and the Joint Information and Communications Technology Strategy.

Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action

This year no Councillor Call for Actions (CCfAs) were submitted, and there were also no call-ins.

Other

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. During 2014-2015, no such surveillance had been authorised.

The Committee during the year considered three work programme suggestions which had been submitted by Members and subsequently were included in the Committee's work programme.

Work Programme for 2015-2016

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out some of its work in "Task and Finish / Research Groups", which undertake a specific piece of work for a short period of time, reports back to the Committee, then disbands. These groups add significantly to the Committee's ability to scrutinise particular policy or service areas and to make an impact on the performance of the Council. They can also help to increase the level of involvement of the public and other stakeholders.

The Committee has access to resources, to assist it in carrying out its work programme, which can be used, for example, in engaging specialist assistance, obtaining evidence, carrying out site visits, and paying for meeting accommodation, training and development.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a rolling work programme, set a few meetings ahead, to enable it to be more reactive to changing priorities. In addition to any call-ins or Councillor Calls for Action which may arise, and additions to the rolling work programme through submitted work programme suggestions, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the following issues during the year:

- Directed Surveillance (Quarterly update)
- Cabinet Decisions Plan
- Annual Report 2015-2016
- Locality Budget Scheme (Biannual update)
- Local Air Quality Strategy Progress Report 2014-15

In addition to the above items, Extraordinary Informal Joint Scrutiny Sessions will be called, as necessary, with members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to enable common issues to be scrutinised jointly.

For more information about how scrutiny works at Forest Heath District Council, please contact the Scrutiny Officer on (01638) 719729.



Forest Heath

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