



Nottingham
City Council

Overview & Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2010-11



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Introduction

The fundamental purpose of Overview and Scrutiny is to secure improvement in public services. There are many roles that the Overview and Scrutiny function performs in pursuit of this goal (whether this is acting as a critical friend during the decision making or policy development process, supporting local transparency, holding decision makers to account or monitoring performance, for example,) but the ultimate aim is to add value to the provision of local services.

The annual report looks at how the Overview and Scrutiny function performed its role in 2010/11 and provides a snapshot of the contribution it made to improving public services. It also summarises the findings of an independent review of the function on how it can achieve greater impact going forward into the next 4 year term of the council.

For 2010/11, the City Council continued to deliver Overview and Scrutiny through the following structure :-

- an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to co-ordinate the overall work programme and carry out scrutiny of key strategic issues
- four select committees with the remits of Community Wellbeing; Health and Adult Social Care; Regeneration and Sustainability; and Young Nottingham.

- A Joint Health Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise health issues across the Nottingham conurbation with members from both the City and County Councils
- A Call-In Sub Committee to review 'called-in' executive decisions. This sub committee met on two separate occasions during the year following the City Council's first ever called in decisions.
- a single task and finish group to assist the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in delivery of the work programme.

The function was supported by a small team of scrutiny colleagues within Democratic Services.

To achieve its full potential to obtain better outcomes for citizens, the Overview and Scrutiny function relies on the active participation not only from the non executive councillors engaged in scrutiny but also the input of many others – executive councillors, colleagues, representatives of external organisations and groups and individual citizens. Over the past year, involvement in Overview and Scrutiny has ranged from large bodies such as the Environment Agency to the individual carers of those with dementia. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who provided us with information, attended meetings and responded to our recommendations. In particular, we would highlight the good working relationship Overview and Scrutiny enjoys with the Council's partner organisations, such as NHS Nottingham City and Nottingham

University Hospitals NHS Trust, who, by being open to challenge and welcoming of our involvement, have benefited from scrutiny in terms of service outcomes.

Contributing to improvement in public services

Adding Value – participation and service outcomes

It is important to the function that it can demonstrate the value it adds both to good governance and to service improvement. It is increasingly important to citizens that governance is transparent and that they have input. Scrutiny has enabled citizens (including those whose voice may not always be heard) to get involved with holding decision-makers to account or influencing the provision of local services in 2010/11 and the following are some examples of the impact and outcomes which have flowed from the findings and recommendations of scrutiny activity:

Review of funding for domestic violence services – a topic for scrutiny which was submitted by city citizens and interest groups. This review was an example of citizens using scrutiny to hold the Executive to account. Following an initial request from Women's Aid, a study group of scrutiny councillors spoke to a wide range of colleagues and partners to consider the impact of reduced funding to domestic violence accommodation services. While the decision to make reductions was not reversed, the Executive welcomed the scrutiny review and reassured councillors that there would be no further cuts to accommodation in the domestic violence sector.

Review of dementia care in hospital – Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) has some real areas of strength in its approach to dementia, and has been piloting better ways of

caring for patients with dementia. However, carers raised concerns about consistency in standards of care for patients receiving treatment for dementia and patients with dementia receiving treatment for another condition. We interviewed carers about their experiences and raised their concerns with NUH. NUH acknowledged these, responded positively to the need for improvement and did not wait until the end of our review before making improvements. All of our recommendations have been accepted and these have included:

1. creating a joint NUH and LINKs Patient and Public Involvement Steering Group;
2. strengthening NUH's relationship with the Alzheimer's Society and delivering training jointly with them to staff;
3. improving links with the community on discharge;
4. reviewing access to outpatient services and ways to enable carers to stay with dementia patients during their stay in hospital.

This has been a good example of how working jointly as two local authorities and in close partnership with our local hospital and local LINKs, has had positive outcomes for carers of dementia sufferers both practically and in the opportunity to express views and obtain effective responses to issues raised by carers of dementia sufferers.

“I felt they (Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust) are listening to carers' concerns and are taking them on board. We are the ones at the coal face and we have the experience and expertise that is needed for the person we are caring for.”
(Quote from a carer of a dementia patient involved in a scrutiny review)

Review of Dentistry – the objective was to map the oral health of people in Nottingham and the availability of NHS dentistry services, to find out about the charging scales for dental treatment and to assess how good services were. We worked with NHS Nottingham City and a member of the City Local Involvement Network (LINK) and heard from a wide range of people, citizens, local dentists, NHS Nottinghamshire County, Council colleagues and workers who support vulnerable people, especially the homeless. We found a lot of good work and commitment from NHS Nottingham City aimed at improving standards of oral health and were impressed by the high level of support provided in a number of areas, for example work with children in care and in promoting children's oral health.

However, we did find some room for improvement and made wide ranging recommendations following which NHS Nottingham City have taken the following action:

1. a review of sedation services and other methods to relax patients has been instigated;
2. out of hours services have been reviewed to ensure that emergency dental treatment slots are available at the times they are most needed;
3. improved publicity has been issued to make it clear how to get treatment when your dentist's surgery is closed;
4. general information leaflets, including information on charges, have been updated, some with pictorial content to make them more accessible to people who can't read or write;
5. dental contracts with quality performance indicators linked to contract payment have been issued to new dental practices;
6. a new mobile dental service is being targeted at vulnerable groups, including those who are homeless or in supported housing.

"I wanted you to know that we welcomed the findings which will be helpful to us in focusing our future efforts in this area."
(The Chair of NHS Nottingham City)

Review of Pavement Gritting - following the worst winter for 32 years for low temperatures, and 47 years for snow, we reviewed the 2009/10 winter season and the winter maintenance service including gritting and clearing of snow and ice and especially the gritting of pedestrian areas and pavements and the impact of the weather conditions on pedestrian injuries. Evidence was gathered from local people via ward work, Council colleagues engaged in the winter maintenance service, NHS Nottingham City and representatives of Nottingham University Hospitals' Emergency Department in terms of increased number of patients requiring treatment on a particularly icy day and subsequently. The review resulted in recommendations about the future winter maintenance regime, the targeting of resources and the provision of advice to citizens and the following outcomes have been achieved:

1. operational changes have been made to the winter maintenance service, including the priorities for gritting beyond A and B roads;
2. increased priority for gritting now being given to pedestrian areas adjacent to main roads that link to key services and footways near health centres and care homes;
3. Council workers from the City Services Team are also helping to increase capacity in responding to severe weather;
4. Residents can now access more information about gritting routes and the location of grit bins on the Council's website;

5. A leaflet has also been produced advising residents on preparing for, and coping with, snow and icy conditions;
6. The winter maintenance service is also working more closely with schools to try and keep them open, including offering bagged salt at the start of the winter season; providing more information on gritting routes; and facilitating direct contact with the winter maintenance service for any queries.

In reviewing the winter maintenance service one year on from our original work, we found generally good performance during the 2010/11 winter season, despite challenging conditions with snow arriving earlier than usual and accompanied by extreme cold spells. However we did identify concerns regarding the inconsistent service provided by Royal Mail and have recommended that this be raised with them directly.

Safeguarding children - The objective was to ensure positive outcomes for vulnerable children were achieved in relation to child protection and children's social care. There are a number of areas where performance has not been in line with targets and the shortage of social workers and independent reviewing officers, both nationally and locally, is a significant factor affecting this. We found through our review work and liaison with the portfolio holder that plans were in place to address capacity and staffing issues.

Since our review, work has taken place to address capacity gaps. This has included both recruiting new staff and retaining existing employees, for example, by providing additional payments for longer serving staff. The staffing situation has improved with the majority of posts filled, and where vacancies remain these are being covered by agency staff to ensure safe services are maintained. However, challenges remain with the additional support required for newly qualified staff that have filled vacancies and some staff still leaving to join agencies or

pursue specialisms elsewhere. The situation will need ongoing monitoring and action. Alongside this, work is taking place to put a greater emphasis on early intervention and basing staff within the local community to try and reduce the number of cases escalated to referrals to social care in the first place. Both of these should support improvements in service performance. In December 2010 OFSTED assessed Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Nottingham as 'good'. We provided evidence to this inspection and the value of scrutiny was recognised in the arising report – "scrutiny arrangements in Nottingham are good. [It] focuses on key issues affecting the quality and efficiency of services, including safeguarding, and ensures concerns are appropriately raised and monitored".

Executive Councillor Training - the Call-in Sub Committee reviewed a decision, under the Call-in procedure, about the delivery of the Leading Nottingham Transformation Programme and the Executive Development Programme. We sought to look at whether, based on the evidence provided, in making the decision there had been adequate consultation, relevant information and viable alternatives considered and whether justification for the decision could be challenged.

Following thorough review of the decision, the sub – committee found that the tendering process applied was reasonable and appropriately applied and that the evaluation of tenders received was reasonable, fair and followed existing guidelines. The decision was not referred back to the decision taker for reconsideration.

Recommendations were made for improvements to process (both in terms of the tendering procedure and the level of detail included in a portfolio decision) and since the review the following positive outcomes have been achieved:

1. the Learning and Development Team is creating a preferred supplier list for smaller value training courses, and for larger work will now use the corporate Alito procurement system to draw up a preferred supplier list;
2. when the Council's Corporate Procurement Rules are next updated, amendments are to be made so that they reflect that every effort should be taken to obtain three tenders. Good practice guidance from corporate procurement on procuring consultants includes that relevant qualifications and previous experience should be taken into account. There is already a system that can be used for evaluating work, but a review is being carried out to see if this fits the Council's needs or whether an alternative needs to be explored;
3. we have a commitment that delivery of the Executive Development Programme will be evaluated and outcomes of the evaluation will be made available, including to the Councillor Development Steering Group. The Group will also be made aware of future executive development work before it commences;
4. improvements have been made to the portfolio holder decision form so that reasons for decisions and why other options were rejected are better explained;
5. the Call-in procedure itself was clarified in particular around timescales and the expectations of those required to attend and give evidence. The improvements were tested at a subsequent 'Call-in' several months later.

Making an impact - other examples of our work

Below are some other examples of scrutiny activity in the last year. Most of this activity has only recently finished and it is as yet too early to assess its impact but the majority of our recommendations have been accepted by colleagues and

partners, who are committed to implementing them to improve services.

Dementia care diagnosis and early intervention – It is estimated that there are 2,600 dementia sufferers in Nottingham. We sought to explore how the objectives and intended outcomes in the national strategy for delivering improvements to dementia services and to address health inequalities in relation to dementia would be achieved locally. With a focus on diagnosis and early intervention, including the role of GPs, early access to services, memory services and specific issues for black and ethnic minority patients a review was conducted which involved the City Local Involvement Network (LINK), carers of dementia patients, representatives from the Alzheimer's Society NHS Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust and local GPs. The review was also closely supported by the Commissioning Manager for Adult Social Care. Recommendations from the review focused on encouraging GPs to diagnose dementia at an early stage and to then make relevant referrals; improving communication with and the level of support offered to carers; and improving the links between memory services and primary care. We have been meeting with a wide range of partners and holding useful discussions about the recommendations and how best to work together to encourage early diagnosis and appropriate intervention.

Alcohol harm reduction – An estimated 60,000 people in Nottingham drink at higher levels than recommended with a major impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, the safeguarding of young people and the City's reputation. We explored effective messages and measures to reduce harm from alcohol. A representative of the Alcohol Problems Advisory Service worked closely with us and our evidence gathering included accompanying the Police on an evening visit to the City centre. In general, partners work well

together to reduce harm from alcohol but due to its cultural significance, it is extremely challenging to change drinking behaviours. Our recommendations include making the Best Bar None scheme more robust by including an unannounced visit of inspectors; Nottinghamshire Police to include information in the letters sent to those arrested for alcohol related crime about services to help reduce their drinking; and establishing an enhanced caution scheme to help people whose drinking has become a problem to understand the consequences of their behaviour – partners are already exploring options to implement this.

Flooding – Nottingham has significant levels of flood risk, both from the River Trent and from surface water. As encouraged by the Pitt Review, we have an ongoing role in exploring how key partners work together to manage the risk of flooding and flooding incidents. An important part of our work is developing relationships with our partners such as the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water and supporting links between them and the local community. The establishment of Basford Flood Group has had success in this regard. Our review of how flood risk is managed included improving the targeting of gully cleansing at higher risk areas. We also identified the need for councillors involved with development control to have a good understanding of local flooding issues and recommended that briefings be held to ensure up-to-date knowledge. The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 introduced new responsibilities for the City Council as lead local flood authority, and enhanced powers for overview and scrutiny in relation to this, and as a next step in fulfilling our responsibilities for scrutinising flood risk management, we have identified a need to explore the extent to which the Council is prepared for this.

Un-let properties – We reviewed with Nottingham City Homes (NCH) how they maximise the efficiency of their letting process,

so properties are vacant for the shortest period of time. Following information about the high number of refusals by prospective tenants due to a property not being to their liking / personal preference, we recommended that NCH put regular articles in their newsletters to remind prospective tenants that they do not have to bid for properties that they don't want in order to stay on the waiting list. We also recommended that NCH explore good practice in making properties more attractive to prospective tenants by securing void homes while still maintaining 'kerb appeal'.

Access to health services for people with disabilities - We meet regularly with the Community Equality Forum (CEF) and raised a wide variety of issues with service providers on their behalf. For example, we raised concerns with Nottingham University Hospitals Trust (NUH) about communication with visually impaired patients and the audiology clinic – visually impaired patients accessing services at NUH were concerned about poorly sited signage and receiving letters in small fonts; while those attending the audiology clinic felt that calling patients to their appointment and the lack of a visual display unit was unacceptable. NUH responded positively to the raising of both of these issues and members of the CEF have already told us that their experience has improved when they go to NUH.

Participation in further and higher education – Following national announcements about changes to further and higher education, including the withdrawal of Education Maintenance Allowance, we carried out an initial exploration of the potential impact on young people in Nottingham in terms of their aspirations and participation in further and higher education and how this could be mitigated. Relevant stakeholders such as the principal of a further education college, university pro-vice chancellors, those working on schemes such as Aimhigher and students were brought together for a timely meeting to

discuss the emerging picture. Based on the information received, we wrote to the relevant Minister of State to express concerns and submitted evidence we had gathered to a national review of 16-19 participation. We also identified areas to explore locally to mitigate the impact on young people – having a cross-city approach to provision of information about student support options and access to transport. We have asked the 14-19 Partnership to look at these.

Developing local health services –A significant proportion of our time has been spent on fulfilling our statutory role for scrutinising formal NHS consultations. In the last year this has included consultations on the establishment of new dental practices and a mobile dental service (Transforming Community Services; the 111 Urgent Care Pilot; and Adult Community Mental Health Services. Working with our colleagues at the County Council, we have also scrutinised formal consultations on Eating Disorder Services, Maternity and Newborn Services, Major Trauma Services, Children's Congenital Heart Services and have commented on the Quality Accounts of provider trusts. In all of these consultations we have monitored how patients and the public have been involved and their views listened to, as well as providing our own views on proposals for changes. In all cases, proposals have been supported following robust questioning and consideration of a range of options. We also gave thorough consideration to the national Health White Paper consultation, particularly in terms of the future of health scrutiny. Our conclusions were not taken on board by the Council's Executive, but the issues we raised have been reflected in national discussions and the subsequent Health Bill.

Reflecting on our experiences and looking ahead

In the past year we have reflected on our own experiences and of those who make contributions to our work, to identify things that have gone well and opportunities to learn and improve. This report has highlighted our positive contribution to improving local public services but we also recognise in reviewing the year just gone that there was scope for improvement e.g. ensuring that all work has clear objectives and stays within agreed scope and timescale; making the most of opportunities to use creative ways of working; being clear about what happens to the recommendations we make and ensuring everyone is aware of the impact of our work.

These identified areas for improvement were reinforced by an independent review which was undertaken at the end of 2010 to explore what the role and function of a high impact and value added Overview and Scrutiny function should be and how any current barriers to its achievement could be overcome. Based on the findings of the review, a number of important cultural and structural changes have been agreed including:

- Making Overview and Scrutiny a key part of a councillor's role
- Developing councillors better to understand the role, practice and skills necessary for top quality Overview and Scrutiny work
- Creating a positive and enabling culture in Overview and Scrutiny
- Having a smaller, outcome-focused work programme that concentrates on fewer topics, each resulting in a smaller number of clearly focused and achievable recommendations
- Being more creative in how we carry out Overview and Scrutiny, and continuing to widen citizen participation

- Improving the relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive
- Introducing a new, more productive and inclusive way of delivering Overview and Scrutiny. A new structure was approved at the Annual Council Meeting on 23 May 2011 with an Overview and Scrutiny Committee whose changed role will involve taking a strategic overview of issues affecting Nottingham, agreeing a prioritised and smaller work programme and then commissioning time-limited review panels (with varying membership) to undertake reviews in line with that programme.

This represents considerable change both in the structure within which we will operate and the approach we need to take to our work. New ways of working will take time to embed and there will be scope to reflect on the changes as we progress to ensure they are achieving the intended outcome.

Going forward, we welcome views on how our service can be further improved.

Contact information

For further information about this report, and anything else related to Overview and Scrutiny, please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team:

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The City Council's website contains more information about overview and scrutiny in Nottingham including examples of how our work is making a positive impact on public service delivery; and details of current work taking place and opportunities for people to get involved.

Visit www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/overviewandscrutiny

If you require this information in an alternative language, **large font**, Braille, audio tape or text only version, please contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team on 0115 8764313 or 0115 8764315.