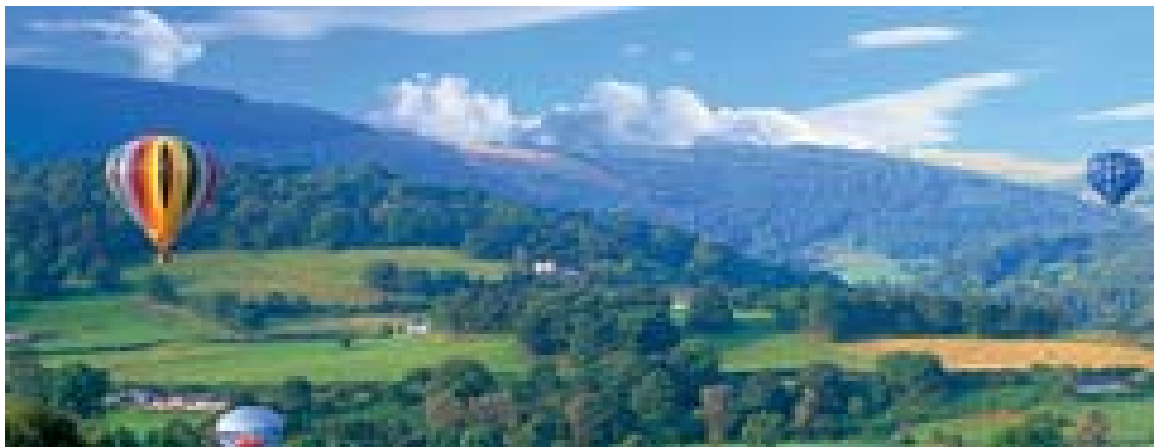




# ***Scrutiny@Denbighshire*** **2010/11**



**October 2011**



# Message from the Scrutiny Champion



Dear Resident,

Denbighshire's Scrutiny Committees examine a range of topics in detail with the aim of improving services to the County's residents. In this document we report to you on some of our activities during 2010/11. We sincerely hope that you find it interesting and that it gives you an insight into our work.

Our meetings are generally open to the public and we would really like to see more residents attending our meetings to make sure that we are dealing with the matters which are of greatest importance to you and the community.

Having read the document, if you feel that there is a particular service or topic which we should be looking at please let us know. You can do this by completing the form at the back of this leaflet, by telephoning or by e-mailing us, whichever method you prefer to use. The contact details are shown on the form.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Councillor David Smith  
**Scrutiny Champion**

# Scrutiny

## What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and plays a vital role in improving the services that the people of the County use, be they residents, people who are employed in Denbighshire, or just visiting the area and our wealth of attractions.

Scrutiny committees review decisions made by the Cabinet and can make recommendations to Cabinet to ensure that the residents of the county get the best out of their council. Scrutiny committees also play an important part in helping to develop council policies for the benefit of local people. Committees mainly look at services provided by the Council but can also look at wider issues involving other agencies. This latter aspect is expected to grow in importance over the next few years, as councils increasingly work with other public services and voluntary organisations to deliver services.

## How does scrutiny link into the decision making process?

Denbighshire County Council operates a Leader and Cabinet model of local government, which means that many of the Council's important decisions are taken by the Cabinet - a group of elected councillors who take key decisions about policy and procedures.

In addition to chairing meetings of the full County Council the Council Chair, and Vice-Chair, undertake a civic role representing the Council at numerous events and functions and presiding over civic functions.

Those councillors who are not Chair or Vice-Chair of Council, members of the Cabinet or of the Corporate Governance Committee, are able to participate in "Scrutiny" - where the Council's policies and the decisions of the Cabinet can be examined in detail.

## How does scrutiny work?

Scrutiny acts as a 'critical friend' to the Council's leadership and senior officers, it drives improvement in public services and enables the concerns of the public to be heard. Even though committee membership is drawn from all political parties/groups on the Council, scrutiny itself is an apolitical function consisting of independently minded people who determine their own agenda and how they will do their work. Scrutiny Committees meet once every six weeks for the purpose of:

- reviewing the Council policies
- help develop new policies
- to review the Council's performance
- to review decisions taken by the Council's Cabinet

In performing the above roles scrutiny aims to assist the Council to deliver its four corporate priorities:

- Modernising Education
- Demographic Change
- Regeneration

## ➤ Roads and Flood Defences

Scrutiny Committees also have the power to ask for a review of decisions taken by the Cabinet - prior to their implementation - if they think that the decisions should be looked at in more depth (this is known as "Call In").

## **The Council's Scrutiny Committees**

The Council has three thematic Scrutiny Committees:

- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
- Performance Scrutiny Committee

These committees act as a check on the Cabinet and its decisions. They also play a major part in the development of Council policy and in monitoring the Council's performance. Scrutiny committees can also establish working groups to undertake time limited reviews or to carry out in-depth scrutiny investigations.

If you have an issue which concerns you personally, or the community in which you live or work, either relating to a particular service which the Council delivers (be that by itself or in conjunction with another organisation) and which you think would benefit from being closely examined by scrutiny, please let us know. You can do that by completing the short form at the back of this leaflet or by contacting us using the contact details shown on the form. We would very much like to hear from you.

On the following pages we give you a flavour of the work which scrutiny has undertaken over the past year or so to give you an insight into how scrutiny can help influence and improve services and people's lives.

## Assisting to Deliver the Council's Corporate Priorities

To assist the Council to deliver its corporate priorities the committees have been examining various proposed policies and initiatives:

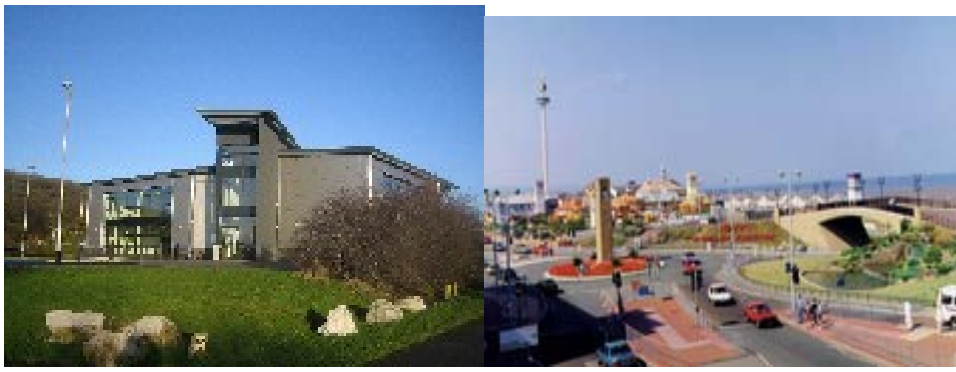


As part of the **Modernising Education** agenda scrutiny has been giving detailed consideration to draft policies and emerging proposals for modernising the delivery of education to residents of all ages in the county. Amongst the areas looked at this year have been the transformation of post 16 education, the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools programme and the review of primary school provision in the Edeyrnion area. Proposals in these specific areas are still evolving, therefore scrutiny will be keeping an eye on them over the next year or so.



To address the current and future pressures **demographic changes** are placing on the services provided by the Council's Social Services Department scrutiny has been examining the effectiveness of new service delivery proposals and methods, such as reablement and citizen-directed support for elderly and vulnerable residents. By monitoring the initial pilot projects for these initiatives scrutiny has been able to address any initial issues which came to light and recommend changes to the services ahead of their roll-out to other service-users.

It was extremely pleasing this year to welcome a service-user who had participated in the citizen-directed support pilot, and a carer of another service-user who had taken part in the same pilot, to speak to the Committee and hear first hand how this initiative had changed their lives for the better.



Delivering the **Regeneration** priority is key to securing the economic prosperity of the county and improving the quality of life of residents, whatever their ages. Regeneration is wide ranging and is dependent on input and cooperation from a number of Council services, as well as other public bodies, voluntary organisations and private industry and businesses. During 2010/11 scrutiny examined the Council's Enforced Sales Policy to ensure that it supported the aim of regenerating our communities. It has also considered the Council's capacity to control caravan sites within the county to ensure that they are complying with the terms and conditions of their licences and assisting the regeneration of the county by boosting tourism, and not being inhabited on a permanent basis which can cause pressures on limited Council services and resources.



Maintenance of the county's **Roads and Flood Defences** is a long term goal and priority. A strong and resilient infrastructure is key to the Council's ability to deliver its regeneration priority. Over recent months scrutiny has examined the implications to the Council of the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The severe weather conditions experienced in the area during the last two winters has taken its toll on the county's roads. Consequently, scrutiny has looked at the Council's highways maintenance programme, examined how it dealt with the severe winter weather conditions and made recommendations with a view to further improve these services in time for the coming winter.

## Acting as a 'critical friend' to the Council's leadership and senior officers

*"A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions...and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work"*

From the perspective of scrutiny this could be defined as acting as a 'second pair of eyes' when looking at policies, proposals or decisions. It does not mean opposing everything which has been suggested by officers or Cabinet - opposing for the sake of opposing. Scrutiny is a mechanism for applying checks and balances to make sure that any policy or proposal has been thoroughly thought through and will give the resident and the Council 'what it says on the tin'. It is a way of improving and adding value, a form of quality assurance

During the past year the Council's scrutiny committees have performed the 'critical friend' role when examining proposals and policies intended to improve Council services and services provided by other public bodies such as the Police and Health.

As a critical friend it assisted Cabinet to develop a long-term management strategy for the Council's Agricultural Estate. Whilst this process started with decisions taken by Cabinet in connection with the Estate being 'called-in' for scrutiny under the Council's 'call-in' procedure – a method which is rarely used and is usually reserved as a last resort – the end result was the development of a long-term sustainable management and rationalisation strategy for the Council's Agricultural Estate, which will now be applied to future asset rationalisation programmes across the Council. The capital receipts realised from the eventual sale of assets will be reinvested in other Council assets and services.

As mentioned above, the calling-in of decisions is a rare occurrence. However, scrutiny performs its critical friend role on a regular basis when consulted on policies and proposals. On the majority of occasions recommendations or improvements suggested by scrutiny are accepted by Cabinet.

### Reviewing the Council's performance

Over recent months scrutiny members monitored the performance of the Referral and Assessment System within the Council's Children and Family Services Department. By working closely with officers scrutiny was able to support and improve performance in this area and consequently ensured that no child was exposed to unnecessary risk. In working with officers it became apparent that the pressures on staff working in this particular service area had increased drastically in the wake of the 'Baby P' case, with a large increase in the number of referrals to the service being recorded across the UK. Scrutiny is continuing to monitor the situation closely to ensure that children and families are seen and assessed as soon as possible and that social services staff are supported in this work.

## Helping to drive improvement in public services

In performing its critical friend role scrutiny does not restrict itself to Cabinet or officers of the Council. It also engages with other public bodies.

During the past year Health and Police representatives have attended scrutiny.

Representatives of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board have been attending scrutiny meetings in Denbighshire for the past two years or so, ever since the decision to close in-patient facilities at Rhyl's Royal Alexandra Hospital. Representatives from the Health Board now attend scrutiny on a regular basis.

As a consequence of these meetings scrutiny has been able to air concerns raised by patients and carers with respect to the alternative in-patient service provision available for the elderly in the Rhyl area, and monitored the development and outcomes of the Home Enhanced Care Service (HECS) which has been introduced in the area as an alternative service to in-patient beds. Scrutiny has asked to be kept informed on the development of the proposals for future in-patient care in the North Denbighshire area as they emerge. In the autumn of 2010 the Health Board announced that it was undertaking a number of service reviews across North Wales. Scrutiny was able to voice residents' concerns on the potential outcomes of the reviews to representatives from the Health Board at a meeting held in late 2010. As a result of the concerns raised in Denbighshire, as well as in other counties and by other interested parties, the Health Board extended its consultation process on some of these reviews.

In early 2011 North Wales Police representatives attended scrutiny to discuss its future proposals for policing in North Wales. Officials from the Police Service and the Police Authority attended the meeting to outline their plans for the future and answer questions. Councillors were able to put forward their views and apprehensions, and more importantly those of their residents, to Police representatives. Council and Police representatives felt that the discussion had been frank, extremely useful and a constructive foundation upon which future dialogue and joint-working could be built.

## Enabling the concerns of the public to be heard



Whilst the previous examples demonstrate how scrutiny can assist to drive and influence improvements across the public services, they also demonstrate how scrutiny can enable the voice and concerns of the public to be heard – acting as the residents’ advocate.

In the summer of 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) consulted on proposals on how to further reduce the amount of waste in Wales going to landfill. One of the proposals put forward was that councils would have to adopt the WAG’s preferred method of recycling waste collection. This would have meant that Denbighshire would have to revert to its former kerbside sort recycling method instead of the new recycling bin and caddie system which had recently been introduced, and which had seen the county become one of the local authorities in Wales which recycled the highest amount of domestic waste. Residents were unhappy with the WAG’s proposal as they preferred the Council’s new recycling system which they felt was simple and effective. Scrutiny and residents wrote to the Government to lobby them on the matter. This paid off with the WAG eventually withdrawing the proposal from their final plan.

For a number of years the Council has been refurbishing its council housing stock in order to meet the Welsh Quality Housing Standard (WQHS) 2012. Scrutiny has taken a keen and close interest in this extensive programme of work, particularly following concerns raised by councillors during the initial stages of the refurbishment programme about relationships between tenants and the contractors carrying out the work. By highlighting these tensions early on scrutiny was able to work with officers, who in turn worked with contractors and tenants to build better, stronger working relationships. Consequently this led to higher satisfaction levels amongst tenants on the quality of the refurbishment work and the way in which it had been carried out.

## **Led by independent minded councillors**

It is important to stress that scrutiny is led by independent minded councillors who, as mentioned earlier, put aside party politics for the benefits of the county's residents. Scrutiny members decide what to scrutinise, when to do it and why. Officers can suggest areas for scrutiny to examine, but that does not necessarily mean that scrutiny will look at those areas. Scrutiny will consider all requests and determine each one on its own merit. It may form the view that scrutinising some areas, particularly ones which are performing well, will not add any value and would therefore not be an effective use of time or resources. As their local area's representatives they may be aware of other concerns within their community which are more deserving of scrutiny's time and attention, and which may benefit more from close scrutiny and examination. Therefore, they can, and do suggest these matters for scrutiny.

The examples illustrated in this leaflet show how scrutiny can actually give power to the people, which is why we would like the residents of Denbighshire and people who work in the area to contact us with areas, subjects or ideas for scrutiny. If you do have any suggestions for us please complete the form on the next page or contact us by telephone or e-mail.

## **Want to find out more about the Council etc?**

If you want to find out more about the Council and its services, information about your local councillor or who actually sits on various committees, including scrutiny, please contact us on any of the contact details shown overleaf. Alternatively, visit the Council's website at:

<http://www.denbighshire.gov.uk>

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

## We would very much like to hear from you if you live or work in Denbighshire

Is there something you would like scrutiny to have a look at?

Please give a brief description of the topic you would like to be considered by one of the Scrutiny Committees and why you think it should be considered

Would you like to attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee?

**YES/NO**

It would be useful if you could give us the following details so that we may respond to your request

Your name:

Address

Postcode

Email

Tel. number

For enquiries/requests, please contact:  
Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Legal and Democratic Services, County Hall,  
Wynnstay Road, RUTHIN LL15 1YN

Tel: (01824) 712554

Email: [rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk)

<http://www.denbighshire.gov.uk>

