

Council – 9 July 2012

Annual Scrutiny Report 2011/12

Service: Legal and Democratic Services

Wards All

1. Summary of report

This is the annual report to Council outlining the work of scrutiny in 2011/12.

The report provides a case study analysis of the work undertaken during the municipal year by the panels and their respective working groups aligned to the Councils corporate priorities.

A copy of the annual report is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Recommendations

Council is recommended to:

Note the annual scrutiny report for the 2011/12 municipal year (annexed).

3. Resource and legal considerations

Scrutiny is a key aspect of the governance framework and an integral part of how the council makes effective decisions. Good scrutiny can help to inform policy making and help ensure that decisions taken by the cabinet are in effectively considered prior to implementation. The role of Scrutiny is defined in Walsall's constitution, Article 6.

4. Citizen impact

Effective scrutiny enables the public to fully engage in the topics under review. Ensuring that the items for consideration are effectively communicated via the council's website and public notice boards encourages citizens to become involved in the scrutiny process. Any potential work item that will have citizen impact will be fully scoped and include the opportunity for public involvement.

5. Environmental impact

The work of scrutiny picks up on a range of environmental factors across the whole borough. There are no direct environmental considerations as a result of this report.

6. Performance and risk management issues

The role of Scrutiny is fundamental in ensuring that the most effective and informed decisions are taken whilst delivering value for money for residents.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny and Performance Panels which helps to achieve these objectives.

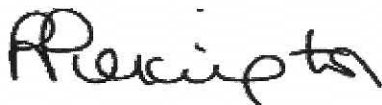
Asking members to recognise and review past achievements and consider the potential items to scrutinise helps to ensure that the Scrutiny and Performance Panels focus their attention on the main issues that have strategic relevance and importance to the council as a whole. Incorporating an effective scoping process enables a risk based approach to be taken in the development of potential work programmes; focussing on the key issues that affect the performance of the council, impact on service delivery or potentially result in service delivery that does not meet resident expectation or offer value for money. The Council's priorities and pledges are all considered when looking at potential work programmes for the following year and frequent performance monitoring reports are presented to individual Scrutiny and Performance Panels.

7. Equality implications

This report details all of the work that has been across the whole borough. Scrutiny Members represent a number of wards across the borough and actively work with residents to best represent their views at Scrutiny.

8. Consultation

Individual panels have sought the expert opinion and views from witnesses to ensure that a balanced perspective is provided against any of the work topics under consideration. This year, evidence has been brought to the panels by officers, members of the public, officers from other authorities, partners and independent experts.



Pauline Pilkington – Executive Director (Children's Services)
28 June 2012

Author:

Neil Picken

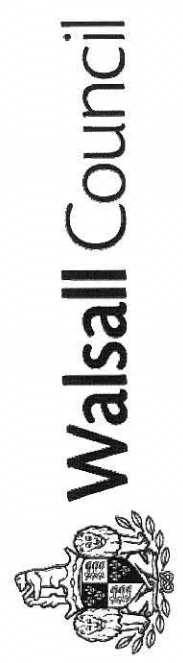
Senior Democratic Services Officer

☎ 01922 652018

✉ pickenn@walsall.gov.uk



Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/12



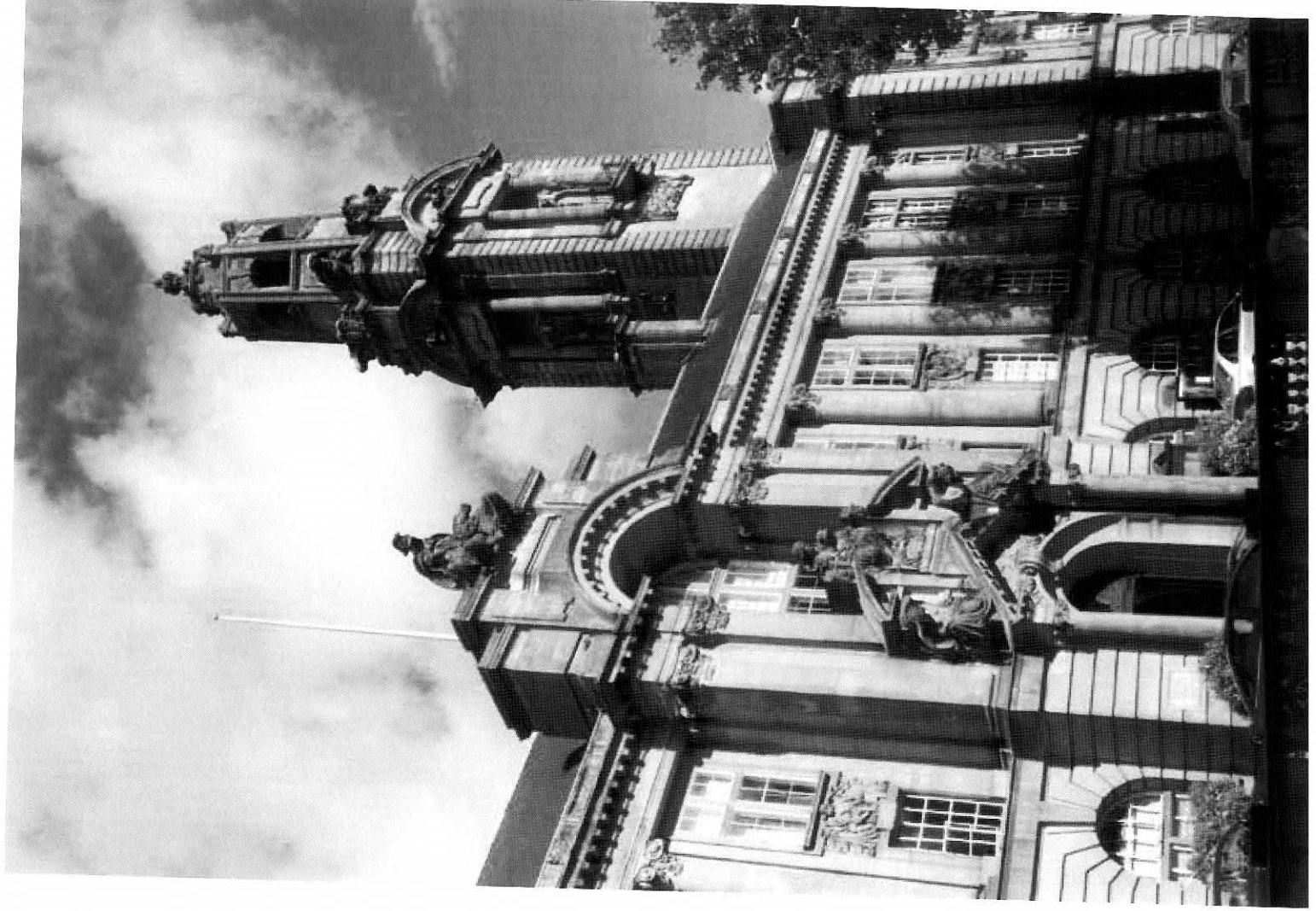
Foreword

The last year has seen the initiation of a fundamental shift in the way in which the Council delivers its services. Using Working Smarter principles, the customer has been placed at the heart of the process with services shaped around their needs. This significant programme, together with legislative changes brought about by The Localism Act 2011, Police and Social Reform Act 2011 and Health and Social Care Act 2012 all have implications for the way in which the Council operates.

Scrutiny has taken an important role overseeing and scrutinising these, and other areas, to ensure that the Council delivers a more efficient service for customers whilst realising savings. A number of working groups have been undertaken to consider issues including Scrap Metal, Personalisation and Sustaining Business. As a result, a number of recommendations have been considered and approved by Cabinet. This shows that the Scrutiny process continues to add real value to the decision making process in Walsall.

The next few years will continue to be challenging for the whole of the public sector up and down the country as tough decisions are taken in the light of diminishing public finances. In this context, it is encouraging to see an improved scrutiny function that will be able to play a central role in assisting the council and its partners meet this challenge. I am also confident that further improvements can, and will, be made and Members will continue to have the full support of all council officers in implementing these improvements.

Pauline Pilkington
Executive Director – Children’s Services and
Statutory Scrutiny Officer





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Introduction

Scrutiny and Performance Panels are made up of non-executive members from across all political parties and they exist to provide accountability to the council and its partners. They have four key roles:

- Holding the Executive to account for their decisions;
- Scrutinising local partners (e.g. NHS Walsall);
- Reviewing and developing policies and making recommendations to Council and Cabinet on these; and
- Reviewing services to ensure they are providing value for money and meeting local needs.

Scrutiny also has a vital role in enabling the voice of local residents through community engagement. All meetings are open to the public to attend (except in exceptional circumstances where something has to be taken in private session). The public can also suggest items for scrutiny to consider. More details on the role of scrutiny can be found on our website www.walsall.gov.uk/scrutiny.

At its annual meeting in May 2011, Council set the Scrutiny panel structure and remit for the year ahead which included 6 panels:

- Children's and Young People
- Community & Environment
- Corporate
- Health
- Regeneration
- Social Care and Inclusion

This report details how the work of Scrutiny and Performance panels during 2011/12 supported the Council's three priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan.

It is not an exhaustive account of the work Members have undertaken but gives an overview of the wide variety of work that has taken place throughout the year. There are many other issues that have also been looked at that are not mentioned here but details of all meetings can be found on the [council's committee website](#).

Communities and Neighbourhoods

What the Corporate Plan says

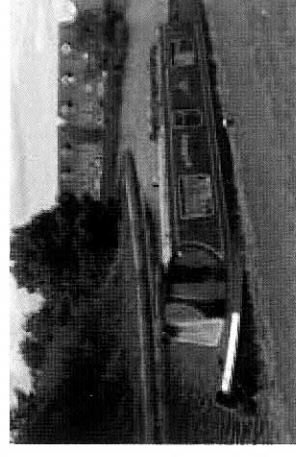
The Corporate plan sets out a number of ambitions which include, among others:-

- Our green spaces will be well maintained and accessible so that people want to use them and value the time they spend there.
- Feeling safe in the local area and in the town and district centres is also important to building local pride. In partnership with the police we want to drive down anti-social behaviour and to do more to tackle acquisitive crime such as theft and burglary.
- Walsall should be a place where people are proud of their local area. We now that physical appearance is important for this so we must continue to build on our top class waste and recycling service and improve street cleanliness.

How Scrutiny has added value in 2011/12?

Scrutiny has undertaken various pieces of work which relate to Communities and Neighbourhoods. The Communities Services Scrutiny & Performance Panel (CSPP) established a Green Spaces Working Group that undertook an in depth review of all areas in relation to publicly accessible open space of value. The group proactively sought to shape and influence Council strategy.

Elsewhere, the Environment Scrutiny & Performance Panel (ESPP) established a Scrap Metal Working Group in a bid to tackle an issue which causes distress to many due to thefts and anti social behaviour. The same Panel established a working group to undertake a review of street pride to ensure that services such as fly tipping, refuse collection and enforcement continue to be efficient and to identify areas for further improvement.



Greenspaces Working Group

The CSPP identified the opportunity to investigate the effectiveness of the current Green Spaces Strategy and make recommendations for its future direction.

The Green Spaces Working Group held 10 meetings taking into account views of representatives from the Friends Group Network, NHS, Sports and Leisure, Area Managers and an external consultant.

It considered the management, purpose and services provided by Green spaces and how this service interlinked with grounds maintenance work undertaken by Streetpride.

As a result of their findings, the group suggested a future vision for the next green spaces strategy supported by 6 priorities:-

Green space in Walsall should be a proud public asset securing the environmental and ecological future of the borough for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of the whole community.

1. 'Green space in Walsall should be enhanced and improved'

2. 'All green space should be safe and free of crime and antisocial behaviour'

3. 'Green space should be used to increase the health and well being of residents'.

4. 'Commercial opportunities should be sought in green space'.

5. 'Greater partnership working for the development of all green space should be pro-actively developed'.

6. 'Green space should be used to create rich habitats and bio-diversity'.

Scrap Metal Working Group

Members of the ESPP were keen to investigate the issue of metal theft and anti social behaviour linked to scrap metal collections. This is an issue that affects many communities with some residents living in fear of recrimination should they try to tackle those collecting, storing and processing metal in their homes.

The working group met with various partners including the Police and Whg, together with members of the public, scrap metal dealers and scrap metal collectors to gain a full insight into the problems faced. As a result of this in depth investigation a report was submitted to Cabinet. Key recommendations included:-

That Registered Social Landlords be urged to enforce breaches of tenancy conditions and that they be fully supported, where necessary, by the relevant enforcement powers of the Council and Partners.

That a review of procedure be instigated to evaluate the current practices the Council makes in securing it's property assets when they are vacated so as to prevent metal theft, a deterioration to the local environment and a loss in value to the asset if it is sought to be sold.

That the Council implements a programme of replacing gully-covers with non metal composite at such time that existing gulleys are stolen or come to the end of their life subject to successful trials.

That the working group support the establishment of byelaws to:-

- i. address verge parking and;
- ii. introduce a licensing scheme for scrap metal collectors

That more stringent penalties be imposed for those proven to be carrying out an illegitimate scrap metal business.

That powers of enforcement be streamlined and redesigned to enable quicker more effective enforcement to take place.

Councillor Gareth Ilmann- Walker, Lead Member of the Scrap Metal Working Group states:

"I'm pleased that we engaged with a wide variety of interested parties in bringing about this report and it contains a raft of recommendations to take us forward. Although now the real proof of its worth will be in the implementation."



Economy

What the Corporate Plan Says

The Corporate plan sets out a number of ambitions which include, among others:-

- A thriving economic environment will attract new businesses in targeted growth sectors. This will help to maximise business start ups, grow the business base and increase employment in sectors which are currently under-represented.
- Our existing businesses will be supported to thrive through difficult economic times. New businesses will be attracted to the borough through the development and promotion of our major assets.
- New developments will be created to attract businesses and sectors.
- Businesses will have the support they need to identify opportunities for jobs and skills training along with opportunities to supply goods, services and expertise.
- Residents will be helped to reach their full potential through access to a range of skills and training opportunities that also meet the needs of employers.



How has Scrutiny added value in 2011/12?

The economy has been the key topic of consideration for the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel (RSPP) during the last year.

Due to the vast importance of this area Members concentrated their focus on creating new business, sustaining existing businesses and increasing growth in niche economic sectors.

Creating and sustaining business

To investigate this important area the RSPP established two working groups. One group (Creating Business) looked at how more businesses could be created and the other (Sustaining Business) focussed on how existing businesses could be supported.

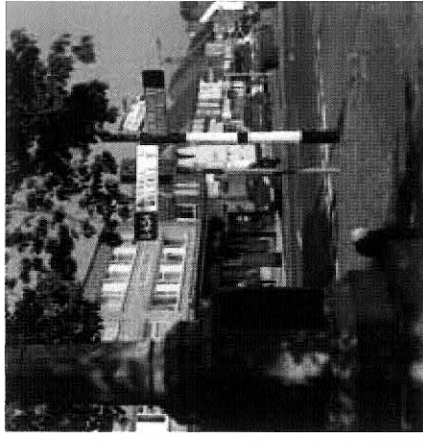
Both working groups adopted an external focus and met with local businesses and other support agencies to understand:-

- What was available to businesses;
- Where the gaps were;
- What businesses actually want.

Following extensive evidence gathering and information sharing Members developed a vision, 9 priorities and potential actions that they believe will enable the borough to create and sustain business now and in the future.

This piece of work was recognised in the scrutiny survey with a Member commenting that:

“this piece of work was successful because it introduced direct consultation with a series of stakeholders and local businesses”.



The vision and priorities are as follows:-

VISION

That the Council and its partners help create and sustain jobs and improve the local economy by supported local businesses.

The borough should aspire to increasing business density to the regional and national averages.

PRIORITY 1: 'Walsall's Offer' needs to be developed and marketed regionally, nationally and internationally.

PRIORITY 2: Improving the local offer of business locations and premises.

PRIORITY 3: Developing new forms of business lending.

PRIORITY 4: Walsall should be a place for innovation.

PRIORITY 5: Education and skills should be focussed on the workplace.

PRIORITY 6: The Council and its partners need to be prepared to apply for external funding.

PRIORITY 7: Communication with businesses needs to be efficient and available on demand.

PRIORITY 8: Reducing business crime.

PRIORITY 9: Building relationships and networking are critical for business success.



Niche Sectors

The Panel also engaged with local niche economic sectors to improve understanding and consider what support may be necessary to increase prosperity in these areas.

Members met with representatives from the local creative industries and brewing sectors in Walsall. This has since led to further informal work taking place with creative people in Walsall following the establishment of a Facebook Group: 'Can we make Walsall a more creative place?'. Over 75 people have signed up to the page and further informal work with creative residents is scheduled. It is hoped that this engagement and development will help to nurture a more creative scene in Walsall and in turn further jobs to support the local economy.

One Member completing the annual scrutiny survey noted the creative industries:

'has tremendous potential for development'.

Councillor Ian Shires, Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance during 2011/12 Panel states:

"The economic performance of the borough is critical to improving the whole of Walsall and tackling our areas stark inequalities. If local people are in employment their personal health and wellbeing improves dramatically. This emphasises the importance of continuing to work and develop this critical area in the years to come and not finish here with the publication of the report".

Health & Well Being

What the Corporate Plan says

The Corporate plan sets out a number of ambitions which include, among others:-

- Families with multiple needs will experience a joined up service that will take a Whole Family Support approach rather than treating issues around children and adults separately;
- Our looked after children will spend less time in the social care system, moving back to their families, or to other appropriate permanent arrangements faster;
- Prevention and early intervention will improve the health and well-being of all our residents and reduce the number of people requiring direct social care support.
- The health inequalities between the west and east of the borough will be reduced.

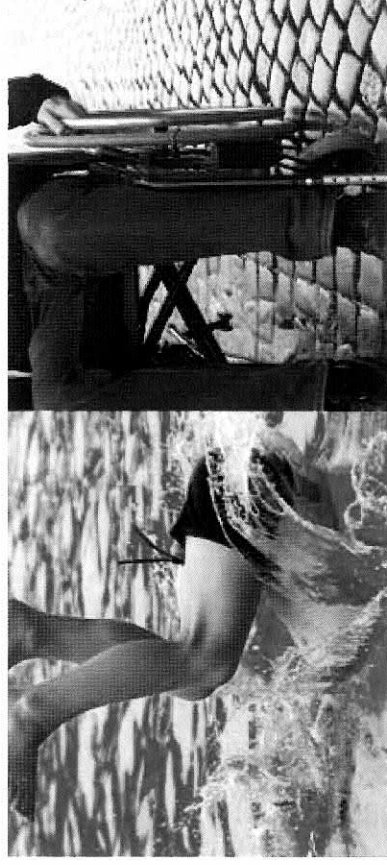
How has Scrutiny added value?

Scrutiny has added value and focussed on many areas such as Safeguarding Services, the Carers Strategy & Support for Living at Home. Members have overseen and contributed to the development a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for the borough. In addition, various working groups have been established to scrutinise areas including Personalisation and Safeguarding.



Disabled Children Safeguarding Services working group

The Children and Young People Panel established a Disabled Children Safeguarding Working Group.



This group was established to review services provided for disabled children and their families.

The working group were keen to engage with parents whose children access disability services to gain real insight into the service from a customer perspective.

Michelle Whiting, Assistant Director, Children's Services, observed that:

“Staff and parents were pleased to see councillors being prepared to listen to the issues facing these children and making a commitment to get services right for disabled children and their families by ensuring that they are consulted at all stages of the process”.

Members of the working group undertook visits to the Eldon and Redruth residential homes and learnt about the New Eldon respite facility. As a result of in depth consideration the Panel made numerous recommendations including that:-

- Officers commissioning or delivering services ensure that appropriate consultation with disabled children and their parents informs decisions;
- Officers continue to support groups for parents with disabled children;
- Children's Services and other council services, including adult social care, work effectively to effect smooth transitions when children reach the age of eighteen;
- Further attention be paid to the training of helpers and volunteers working with children with a disability to create a more consistent workforce.

Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel: Area Family Support Team (AFST)

The Panel met with officers who were part of the recently established multi agency Area Family Support Team aimed at supporting the most vulnerable youngsters in Walsall. This is a new operating model which has been developed. It builds on the good practice which has been undertaken with the social work service and the Integrated Young People's Support Service to offer and provide intensive support to the most vulnerable children and their families, using a whole systems approach to drive down costs and improve service delivery.

This intensive process of working with families allows the support teams to identify the real challenges for families, assist them in resolving those issues and ultimately help them to become self-sufficient. The Panel were highly supportive of the work being undertaken as well as plans to introduce Area Family Support Teams to other parts of Walsall.

Councillor Eddie Hughes commented that:-

"the opportunity to meet with individuals, whether those responsible for service provision or in receipt of services, was much more compelling in enabling councillors to understand the operation and impact of services than written reports".

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

This key document identifies the health and well-being issues in Walsall today and recommends high level actions that should take place to improve the life chances of local people in the future.

Walsall has some stark health inequalities with residents in the east of the borough living up to 8 years longer than those in the west. This emphasises



the importance of ensuring that long term health plans are subjected to overview and scrutiny.

The need for overview of this issue became more important due to the ongoing changes to the management of the public health system. With PCTs making way to GP commissioners and Health and Wellbeing Boards Members are aware that it is more important than ever that these two emerging bodies have accurate and up-to-date information.

With these changes in mind the Chair of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel was keen to see that the JSNA was revised to ensure that it was fit for purpose, up-to-date and included considered ways forward to advise the new group of health commissioners.

The Panel took oversight of the JSNA development and the Chair acted as a critical friend to the JSNA steering group on behalf of the Panel. This involvement was crucial to driving improvements in the JSNA 'at the coalface' and helped create a new-look assessment as well as setting out a vision for how the document could look in the future.

Councillor Longhi explains:

"A year ago it was clear that the new Health and Wellbeing Boards were going to need a reference base and evidence to help them in decision making – and in Walsall I wanted to make sure we had a working and living document rather than something that collated data and sat on a shelf.

"I also wanted something that all members of the new board would find easy to read and interpret and something that would also point them towards solutions that might be community asset based as well as the traditional service based propositions.

"This revised JSNA is a starting point and I fully expect it to look differently in a couple of years and I do believe that, in conjunction with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, it will begin to bring about the changes we have not delivered during the past decades."



Annual Scrutiny Survey 2011/12

An annual scrutiny survey is undertaken each year to seek the views of Members on the successes and areas for improvement in scrutiny over the last 12 months.

This year the survey was sent out to all 60 Members electronically to be completed online. A paper based version was also available on request. A total of 12 responses were received including 1 on paper. A range of questions were posed focusing on different scrutiny themes:

Successful topics

It is clear from the survey that working groups are seen as an effective tool for investigating matters in depth and producing meaningful reports. Topics rated as successful included reviews into the winter service, creating and sustaining business and green spaces.

Other topics rated as successful included the libraries consultation, evaluation of area partnerships, the new operating model for children's services, mortality rates and working smarter. Members attributed the success of these topics to effective working relationships with officers and Members being able to provide robust challenge to officers and external partners.

"The scrutiny panel was very effective in holding external stakeholders to account and in understanding the implications for the reconfiguration." – In relation to the review of trauma care reconfiguration.

Satisfaction with scrutiny

All respondents agreed that panel structure and work programmes were good or very good. Mixed views were expressed in relation to the forward plan and portfolio holder involvement. Whilst the majority of respondents stated that they thought the forward plan and portfolio holder involvement was good or very good, a number of contrasting views were held:-

One respondent commented, in relation to the forward plan, that:

"it continues to be the case that the information given in the plan is often not sufficient to understand the full complexity of the item."

In relation to portfolio holder involvement, narrative from the survey suggests that portfolio holder attendance at meetings can vary between panels.

Every recipient agreed that the number of Panel meetings as 'about right'.

Budget scrutiny

54.5% of respondents agreed that the budget should continue to be considered by all Panels whilst 36.4% suggested that a specialist working group should be established. 9.1% suggested that using a single Panel to discuss the budget would be the best approach.

Officer Support

100% of respondents agreed that Scrutiny Staff are knowledgeable of the Scrutiny process with 90% agreeing that staff were helpful, responsive, easy to contact and took ownership of queries.

Scrutiny Panel Membership in 2012/13

Community Services & Environment

Chair: Councillor Woodruff

Vice-Chair: Councillor Creaney

Membership:

Councillors Azam, Douglas Maul, Hussain, Illmann-Walker, Rattigan.

Corporate

Chair: Councillor S. Coughlan

Vice-Chair: Councillor Flower

Membership:

Councillors Illman-Walker, Rochelle, D. Shires, Turner, Worrall.

Regeneration

Chair: Councillor Harrison

Vice-Chair: Councillor Azam

Membership:

Councillors Barker, Creaney, Jeavons, Longhi, Wade.

Social Care & Inclusion

Chair: Councillor Oliver

Vice-Chair: Councillor Douglas-Maul

Membership:

Councillors Barker, Burley, D. Coughlan, Rattigan, Rochelle.

Health

Chair: Councillor Longhi

Vice-Chair: Councillor James

Membership:

Councillors Bennett, Flower, Russell, Sarohi, Woodruff.

Children & Young People

Chair: Councillor Cassidy

Vice-Chair: Councillor Martin

Membership:

Councillors Hughes, Jukes, Perry, D. Shores, Thomas together with representatives from

- 1 representative – Lichfield Diocesan (voting)
- 1 representative - Archbishop of Birmingham (voting)
- 3 parent governors (voting)
- 1 Primary Education Teacher (non-voting)
- 1 Secondary Education Teacher (non-voting)

Further Information and Contact Details

All Scrutiny and Committee reports can be accessed online at:-
[council's committee website](#)

For any queries you may have you can contact any of the team:-

Neil Picken
Senior Democratic
Services Officer (Scrutiny)
01922 654300
pickenn@walsall.gov.uk

Craig Goodall
Scrutiny Officer
01922 654300
goodallc@walsall.gov.uk

Matthew Underhill
Scrutiny Officer
01922 654300
Underhillm@walsall.gov.uk

Nikki Gough
Scrutiny Officer
01922 654300
goughn@walsall.gov.uk

