

**Community and Regeneration Scrutiny
Committee**

Annual Report 2009/2010



Foreword by the Chairman

The workload for the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee has been very full and interesting this year. I say full because as part of our varied work programme we have received and scrutinised reports on major items such as the Local Development Framework and West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy, items that can quite easily fill a whole meeting on their own.

Members were also interested to hear about items such as the Wyre Forest District Council Health Action Plan and asked for an update on its progress which we received at the meeting of the committee in April.

This year the Government has decided that each local authority has to hold at least one Crime and Disorder (Community Safety) Scrutiny Meeting per year. This can be done in two ways, either by creating a new Scrutiny Committee which would be completely devoted to Community Safety or, as we have chosen to do, devote one whole meeting per year to the subject.

This meeting was held in December 2009 and Rosie Higgins from the Safer Communities Office at Government Office for the West Midlands attended to ensure we were on the right track and also because it was one of the first such meetings in Worcestershire. She was very impressed with Members' interest in the subject and was kind enough to write to the Chief Executive congratulating us on the work of Members and officers during the meeting.

At the end of the last municipal year members were conscious of the fact that every year it would be beneficial to have an agenda item devoted to tracking back through all the recommendations that had been made by the committee. It was felt that having this as part of the work programme would enable us all to be able to see what, if any impact, the Scrutiny process had made on the way the Cabinet and Council carried out its business. This was a huge task and in the end appeared as an agenda item for two meetings which actually shows the amount of work covered over the past two years.

I would like to thank my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Julian Philips for his help, support and patience and I would also like to thank all the members of the committee and review panels for their hard work, attendance and contributions throughout this very busy year. Last but not least I would like to say thank you to Ben Craddock - Assistant Scrutiny/Committee Officer for making sure that I have all the information and paperwork I need for each meeting and for generally making sure that I am kept on the straight and narrow throughout the year, and to Jane Alexander - Principal Solicitor for her expert and helpful legal advice offered when I have asked her for help!

Councillor Helen Dyke
Chairman, Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Listed below is a summary of the activities undertaken by the Committee in the past municipal year:

1) Review Panels

The following Scrutiny Review Panels were established by the Committee in order to scrutinise specific issues in greater depth:

a) Local Development Framework Review Panel

The complexity and scale of the Local Development Framework (LDF) necessitated a dedicated Scrutiny Review Panel to carry out in depth and effective scrutiny. Originally established in 2007, the LDF Review Panel met four times this municipal year to consider items ranging from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, to the Submission Core Strategy.

Members of the Review Panel have made observations and recommendations at each meeting, which were incorporated into the relevant documents ahead of their consideration by the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. In addition, the LDF Review Panel continued to involve co-opted members from Parish and Town Councils, which ensured that the scrutiny exercise was inclusive and representative.

b) Parking Review Panel

At the January 2010 meeting of the Committee, a Review Panel was established in response to concerns raised by residents in Bewdley regarding pay and display parking.

The Review Panel considered evidence from officers which outlined that the Council's Parking Order had contained a 23 Hour Maximum Stay Rule for all Council Car Parks, which was intended as a legal protection to prevent claims to ownership of Council Parking Spaces.

The Panel sent a questionnaire to neighbouring local authorities, and a number of relevant authorities further afield, the responses to which were very varied which reinforced the complexity of the situation.

The Review Panel invited Bewdley Town Council to form a Consultative Panel of residents who were affected by the parking situation. The Consultative Panel were encouraged to collate written submissions of evidence from other residents, which was then presented to a meeting of the Review Panel, to which the Consultative Panel were invited to attend and speak.

The Review Panel is expected to make recommendations to the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting of the 2010/2011 municipal year.

c) Renewable Energy and Efficiency Review Panel

This review was suggested during a meeting of the Local Development Framework

Review Panel, when Members were considering expected levels of renewable energy generation in relation to the LDF Evidence Base.

Subsequently agreed at the November 2009 meeting of the Committee, the focus of the Review Panel was to assess how the Council could encourage individuals, landlords and small businesses to use more sustainable forms of energy, and to become more energy efficient.

To date, the Review Panel has invited the following guests to provide presentations on renewable energy and efficiency measures:

- Act on Energy
- Worcester Bosch
- The Community Housing Group
- Worcestershire County Council

The Review Panel visited Hobson's Brewery in Cleobury Mortimer, a site which is renowned across the UK for its use of sustainable energy and efficiency technology.

Members were taken on a guided tour of the site by Managing Director Nick Davis. Members were impressed by the effectiveness of a Ground Sourced Heating and Refrigeration system and also an 11kw Wind Turbine which had been installed on site, which met 25% of the brewery's electricity needs.

By visiting in person, Members were able to see for themselves the effectiveness of the technology in a real world industrial application.

The Review Panel is expected to make recommendations to the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee early in the next municipal year.

2) Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

In accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006, Councils are required to scrutinise Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP). Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership, the local CDRP, were invited to the December 2009 meeting of the Committee, which was focused solely upon crime and disorder issues.

Representatives from the following Responsible Authorities which constitute the CDRP were invited:

- West Mercia Police Authority
- West Mercia Police Force
- The Community Housing Group
- Safer Community Team - Government Office for the West Midlands
- NHS Worcestershire Primary Care Trust
- Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
- Worcestershire Drugs and Alcohol Action Team
- Wyre Forest Neighbourhood Watch

- Worcestershire Youth Offending Service
- West Mercia Probation Trust

Items considered at this meeting included the Council's Audit under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, a report which outlined the statutory duties of Crime and Disorder Partnerships and how these were applied to the Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership, and an item on the performance of the Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership in reducing crime.

3) Cemetery Update

The Committee received update reports from the Director of Community and Partnership Services regarding plans for the provision of a new District Cemetery, Crematorium and Associated Facilities. Members were conscious of the timescale involved in the delivery of the project, and requested a final detailed update be provided to the final meeting of the municipal year, which would include architect's impressions of the site, and a land plan diagram.

4) Housing

Several items relating to housing policy were considered by the Committee including:

- Update Report on the Provision of Choice Based Lettings
- Temporary Accommodation / Private Sector Leasing
- Re-commissioned Home Improvement Agency
- Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy
- Worcestershire County Housing Assistance Policy

5) Conservation

The Committee considered several items relating to Conservation Area Status, including a Conservation Area Appraisal for Ribbesford and subsequent consultation responses, two separate sets of applications for grant funding under the Bridge Street Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas, and the Local List of Buildings of Architectural and/or Historic Interest in the Wolverley and Cookley Parish.

6) Recommendation Tracking

An important task undertaken by Members was to consider the outcomes of recommendations made by previous committees which fell within the Committee's terms of reference. This meant that Members were able to look at all of the relevant scrutiny recommendations from the past two municipal years and highlight areas which required follow up actions, which were subsequently undertaken.