

# Overview and Scrutiny Issues

## 1. Essex County Council's Scrutiny Function

1.1 The current Scrutiny arrangements have been in operation for two years. In January, the Scrutiny Board started a review of the effectiveness of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements, also revisiting the principles of scrutiny and the role of the member. Councillor Glen Sanderson, Regional Peer for LG Improvement and Development and Deputy Group Leader at Northumberland Council, provided some peer challenge.

1.2 The current iteration of the Scrutiny Function embraces the four objectives for scrutiny set by the Centre for Public Scrutiny:

- provide "critical friend" challenge to executive policy-makers and decision makers
- enable the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- is carried out by independent minded governors (*for the most part elected members*) who lead and own the scrutiny process
- drives improvement in public services.

These objectives should remain the touchstone for future arrangements.

1.3 In thinking about the role of scrutiny consideration will be given to the future structure and organisation of the Council and the role of members in that structure. Some of the points to be considered are the impact of:

- the Government's response to the financial crisis
- the Council's target operating model (TOM) which moves towards a reduction in the number of directly employed staff and a commissioning / provider split
- the Big Society
- the Government's drive for greater transparency in local government
- increased partnership working and joining up of services
- the move towards less proscription and greater self regulation
- the creation of LEPs and Health and Wellbeing Boards
- the changes to the Health / Education Sector
- the election of Police and Crime Commissioners.

1.4 In its review of the scrutiny arrangements the Board was also mindful of:

- the number of committees;
- the effective use of member skills;
- focusing on relevant and topical issues;
- an effective relationship between Scrutiny Chairmen and Cabinet Members;
- producing meaningful recommendations;

- engaging with the most appropriate witnesses;
- Members' preparedness for meetings;
- opening up of Scrutiny meetings to the public and public participation in meetings; and
- Member development.

1.5 In its consideration of the changes outlined in paragraph 1.3, the Board will continue to review the structure and process of scrutiny to meet current and future needs.

**John Aldridge**  
**Chairman of the Scrutiny Board**