

Scrutiny committees will continue to review performance by looking at the outcomes of inspections, monitoring key performance indicators and contributing to Best Value/efficiency reviews as appropriate.



CIVIC SUITE

Chapter 4

Governance

Strong corporate governance arrangements are crucially important to the management of a modern and successful local authority. Following extensive consultation, local people chose to directly elect a mayor to represent all of Lewisham. The first mayor, Steve Bullock, was elected in May 2002. Lewisham is one of only 11 councils to have modernised its governance arrangements in this ambitious and innovative way.

Mayor and cabinet

Under the constitution, overall responsibility for the budget and policy framework remains with full council. Within this framework the Mayor is responsible for day-to-day decision making, following advice from professional officers and members of his cabinet.

The Mayor and his cabinet meet on a weekly basis to:

- monitor progress on priority areas
- discuss future business
- receive briefings on service, budget and policy issues.

A formal Mayor and cabinet meeting is held every three weeks with cabinet members and senior officers. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and make decisions on council business.

Governance and community engagement

In 2002 the Council established area networking in the form of six area forums. A review of the second round of area forums was conducted in July 2005. The key findings from the review indicated that the public's appetite for the area forum continues.

- Overall, attendance by members of the public at area forum meetings increased by 15% (though attendances at two forums have declined).
- Overall satisfaction levels on the part of the public increased from 70% in 2003/04 to 74% in 2004/05.
- The gender balance at meetings (female to male) improved from 35% in 2003/04 to 52% in 2004/05.
- The profile of Black and Ethnic Minority communities increased from 3% in 2003/04 to 11% in 2004/05.
- The percentage of those attending and declaring a disability rose from 10% in 2003/04 to 15% in 2004/05.



Various changes were implemented in the organisation of the area forums arising from recommendations outlined in the review of the first round of area forums and input by the Quality Public Services Scrutiny Committee. These include:

- arrangements for publicity for the events were changed to ensure greater quality and spread in the delivery of leaflets to every home in each area
- the format of the publicity for the area forums was enhanced to include information on how the public could get involved in other areas of the Council, such as overview and scrutiny, fostering, recycling and other environmental initiatives and school governing
- members gave suggestions on additional organisations that should be used to distribute publicity for the meetings
- time was included in the meetings for members of the public to meet with their local councillors on matters of individual concern
- in considering which venues to use for the forums during 2004/05, members paid close attention to ensuring ease of access, familiarity with venues, Disability Discrimination Act requirements and the proximity of the venue for residents of all three wards in each area forum.

A review of the 2005/06 round of the area forums will be conducted before the autumn of 2006 and will feed into work in progress on strengthening the Council's community engagement and neighbourhood governance agenda.

In addition to the area forums, the Mayor has continued his programme of ward visits: 'it's our borough – let's talk', which has enabled him to increase his interaction with local people. In the past 18 months the Mayor has visited every ward in Lewisham and met with many residents and community groups.

Member development

Additional capacity to manage training and development for members was put in place in 2005. A number of training courses was arranged for members, focusing on questioning techniques for overview and scrutiny and chairing and communication skills for area forums and other meetings. Members have also been kept informed of and attended a number of national events relevant to their roles. A comprehensive member development programme for 2006/07 is being drawn up to cater for the needs of newly elected and returning members following the elections in May. The programme will include an induction programme, key modules focusing on information that all members need to know and role-specific training. The Council will also seek to work towards achieving the London Member Development Charter.



Overview and scrutiny

Councillors who do not sit on Mayor and cabinet (the Executive) undertake the role of overview and scrutiny. A key aim of the overview and scrutiny function, as defined within the Local Government Act 2000, is to hold the Executive to account and to contribute to policy development.

At Lewisham, overview and scrutiny makes a significant contribution to the drive for continuous improvement in the delivery of services and community engagement. A well-established business panel oversees the Executive's decisions for the authority and can request the reconsideration of decisions via the power of 'call in'. The panel also coordinates scrutiny and policy development through a range of six select committees. Two decisions were referred back to Mayor and cabinet for reconsideration during 2005/06.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has an overview of all the work carried out across the scrutiny function and has a key role in its strategic development. In addition to the six standing select committees, the constitution makes provisions for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set up a single issue subcommittee to consider important matters to be addressed by the Council.

During 2005/06 a subcommittee was established to investigate the decision-making process in relation to the establishment of a new secondary school in the borough. The subcommittee has recently concluded its work. Its deliberations have led to a number of recommendations to be presented to the Mayor for his consideration.

The six select committees continue to have an input into performance management and policy development and an influence on decision making through their programmes of cross-cutting and targeted reviews.

Each of the select committees has completed a number of scrutiny reviews which have made an impact on the design and delivery of services locally. Key areas that members investigated and reported on in 2005/06 include access to GP services, school absence, recycling, payment miscoding, area forums, community safety, day services for older adults, young carers, lumber collection, budget savings and homelessness.

It is however acknowledged that the scrutiny function is not without areas for improvement. In light of this, the Chief Executive is undertaking a review of the scrutiny function.

Select committees actively seek public and partner involvement in the overview and scrutiny process, with key witnesses and experts being invited to assist in reviews. Examples in 2005/06 have included the following:

- The Adult Care and Health Committee received evidence from a national expert on Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) to support their review on infection control in the community.
- Specialist education officers presented evidence to the Children and Young People Committee for the review of attendance, exclusions and vulnerable children.
- For the review of climate change, members of the Environment Committee invited shoppers at Lewisham Centre to complete a questionnaire and take part in energy-related activities.
- Representatives from a local housing group submitted evidence to the Quality Public Services Committee for consideration as part of the review into housing needs for Lewisham.
- The Cabinet Member for Resources submitted evidence for the Public Accounts Committee review of the financial survey.
- Senior officers from Victim Support took part in the review of community safety carried out by the Social Inclusion Select Committee.

In addition, following a local review of public conveniences, the Environment Select Committee submitted a set of recommendations to the Greater London Authority Public Toilets in London Investigation.

Members of the Social Inclusion Select Committee continue to take lead roles on ensuring equality in terms of race, gender, lesbian and gay communities, disability, refugees/asylum seekers and older people by allocating areas for members to investigate between committee meetings.

Health scrutiny

The health scrutiny function has been enhanced by the development of a health scrutiny protocol and impact assessment on issues of substantial variation or development in the delivery of health services. Members of the Adult Care and Health Committee considered a number of service variations and, during 2005/06, scrutinised the timing and content of proposals to reconfigure services locally. Members of the committee received developmental support on health scrutiny from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Improvement and Development Agency.

Lead members of the committee regularly meet with key health delivery partners to share knowledge on a periodic, informal basis, enabling a better understanding of the work in hand. The Health Scrutiny Select Committee continues to work closely with the four local Public and Patient Involvement Forums on matters of health delivery.

It is however acknowledged that further development work needs to be undertaken, between the Council and its health partners, to ensure the effectiveness of joint working arrangements.

Overview and scrutiny committee arrangements

Arrangements for overview and scrutiny select committees during 2006/07 will reflect key national and local priorities.

Scrutiny committees will continue to review performance by looking at the outcomes of inspections, monitoring key performance indicators and contributing to Best Value/efficiency reviews as appropriate.

In the coming year overview and scrutiny will look to embed its influence further into arrangements for decision making across the Council. It will do so by building links between outcomes from scrutiny reviews and other consultation processes across the Council, e.g. the Mayor's consultation board and area forums.

A continuing professional member development programme will be rolled out during 2006/07 to ensure that members are given the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and competencies to fulfil the range of responsibilities they undertake as part of the modernising local government agenda.

In the coming year we will develop the role of overview and scrutiny further by increasing the use of pre-investigation project planning techniques for investigations and reviews, strengthening the processes for monitoring the progress and effectiveness of the scrutiny function, continuing to raise the profile of the function both internally and externally, and furthering the range and reach of the programme of member and capacity development.

The totality of arrangements being put in place to support elected members will make a considerable contribution to the way in which the Council develops policy, plans strategy and uses resources.

