

Examining the issues that matter

It's been another busy year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has been working on issues of importance to local people. This time last year we asked you what issues concerned you, and using your feedback, plus the views of city councillors, we put together an ambitious programme of short and in-depth reviews. As you will see in this report, we have made excellent progress, including looking at city centre development, the West Gate Towers, and new highways arrangements.

In addition, the Health Scrutiny Panel has been keeping a watchful eye on NHS reorganisations, making sure that the well-being of residents is considered by the relevant bodies, and that members of the public and patients have the opportunity to be involved in developing and monitoring their health services. The panel has also been working closely with other councils in Kent, looking at the growing problem of obesity.

Looking forward to the next council year, we would again like to hear your thoughts on what we should scrutinise during

the coming year. On the final page of this report you will find a form that you can use to let us know your concerns, and also on that page you will find some information on a Bill the government has introduced that will create a wider role for scrutiny.

We will keep you updated during the year, both on our website, and through articles in District Life.

A guide to scrutiny reviews

Following the introduction of short topic scrutiny reviews there was a need to revise the guidance on conducting scrutiny reviews. The revamped guide sets out how topics should be selected and how a review should be carried out.

The guide explains the role of elected members, officers and management, and how they should work together to ensure reviews are conducted effectively.

See www.scrutiny.canterbury.gov.uk for a copy of the guide.

A guide for witnesses

To coincide with the relaunch of the review guide, we have developed a guide for external witnesses, recognising that it can be daunting to be invited to give evidence to a committee, especially when you don't know what to expect.

The guide explains how a meeting is conducted, who will be there, and what to expect. It stresses that the panel isn't there to catch people out but is interested in their knowledge and their views.

It's all on the website

Over the last year we have been improving our website, www.scrutiny.canterbury.gov.uk which provides information on scrutiny, the members involved, and contact details for the relevant officers and councillors. New sections dedicated to Health Scrutiny have been added, along with information on how the public can get involved.

All the past and current reviews are listed and available to read, as well as information on how to conduct reviews (Scrutiny Guide) and how members of the public can have their say on current topics under review. If you have any suggestions for further improvements please let us know.

Current reviews

West Gate Towers

More than 600 years old, and with a varied history as a defensive structure, a 19th Century police station, a jail, and an important part of the city's defences during the Second World War, the West Gate Towers have had an important role in the history of the city, and are now both a scheduled ancient monument and a museum open to the public.

However, the Towers are located at a key point in the city's road network, and as such are exposed to a constant flow of traffic through the gate. Following increasing public debate about the Towers, the scrutiny committee decided to hold a review, looking at all the issues, including the museum, the traffic flows and future possibilities for enhancing the role of the Towers as a tourist attraction. The panel will report in April.

New highways arrangements

Until March 2005, roads and pavements in the district were managed by a partnership of Canterbury City Council and Kent County Council. However, from that date, KCC ended these arrangements and took sole control of highways services.

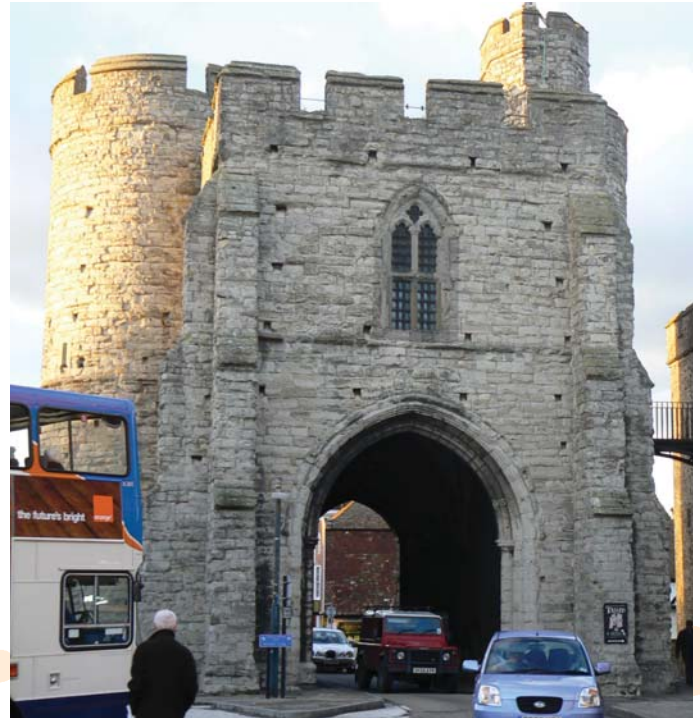
The scrutiny committee decided that it would be a good time to check on how the new system had affected the Canterbury district. The panel will be looking at comparative data and performance figures, and will be conducting an evidence-gathering survey. The review is due to report in June.

City centre development

The review's concern was that development within the city centre might produce conflict between the needs of residents, the council's aim to create a diverse cultural offering and a vibrant late night economy.

The review panel held four sessions where they heard evidence from a selection of witnesses. These included representatives from the city council, residents' associations, city centre management, the police, student groups and other organisations in the city.

The review dealt with a complex subject. The findings and the recommendations looked at transport, the role of city centre representatives, and the need for more detailed work, possibly through a further in-depth review.



The West Gate Towers



Highways arrangements have been examined



Taxis in Canterbury city centre

Completed reviews

Taxi operations in Canterbury

The review looked into taxi operations in Canterbury city centre including the provision of taxi ranks, their operation at different times and the consequences this may have for residents. Residents were concerned over the apparently large number of taxis in certain places at certain times. Conversely, taxi drivers were concerned over the inadequate taxi rank provision.

The review came up with a number of suggestions for locations of new taxi ranks, and made recommendations about existing ranks, access to bus gates, and communication between the Executive and the taxi driver association. These were to be examined by council officers and their recommendations reported back to the Executive.

Gypsies and travellers

This review looked at the way the council approached gypsy and traveller issues and how communication could be improved. The review panel felt that greater understanding of gypsy and traveller issues, including consultation with the community, other authorities and partners – for example parts of the county council, police and health services – was needed.

The panel had three sessions where they heard first hand evidence from a number of witnesses. These included council officers, those involved with providing services for gypsies and travellers and members of the community itself.

The panel made a number of recommendations including better training, improved communications and the establishment of a specific officer group within the council's Corporate Equalities and Access

Group to take forward the review recommendations and work more closely with the county council's gypsy and traveller unit and other statutory agencies.

Health scrutiny

In July 2005 the Department of Health began reviewing and reconfiguring Strategic Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts and Ambulance Services. In July it published a number of proposals involving the merging of smaller units into larger, more strategic bodies.

The Health Scrutiny Panel responded to these recommendations on behalf of the council and was able to discuss the recommendations in detail and feed the council's views directly to the Chief Executive leading the process.

Although the options supported did not reflect the council's views entirely, it is committed to a closer working relationship with the new Eastern and Coastal Kent PCT, and recently met with the Chief Executive to discuss how the new PCT would be taking its programme forward.

Joint work on obesity

Canterbury Health Scrutiny Panel, together with those from Gravesham and Tonbridge and Malling councils, worked with the county council main Health Scrutiny Committee on a Kent-wide investigation of how health agencies tackle obesity.

The panel heard evidence from a wide range of sources on the nature and scope of obesity as a public health issue and on measures that can be taken at local level to address this problem.

The report's recommendations were wide-ranging and aimed at the major public bodies in Kent.

They included recommendations on food labelling, health promotion and the work of Primary Care Trusts.





Next year's review programme – we need your help

Public and Patient Involvement in Health

When the panel responded to the PCT reconfiguration consultation in March, it highlighted the issue of patient and public involvement, and vowed to keep a watch on future progress.

In September members considered the Department of Health's plans for the future of patient and public involvement, and were concerned at the proposals.

Before the new arrangements the nine Primary Care Trusts and the four Acute Hospital Trusts in Kent each had their own Patient and Public Involvement Forum (PPIF). It was through these that patients were represented and could monitor the quality of service, with the PPIF having the right to inspect premises where services are delivered.

The Department of Health's proposal is to have one body, a Local Involvement Network (LINK), to represent all patients in Kent.

The panel is concerned that this will greatly reduce the influence that patients and the public will have over services. The panel was concerned that one body representing the views of 1.4 million people would find it hard to represent local people.

The panel raised the issue as an urgent item at a meeting of the full council who agreed with their concerns and instructed the Chief Executive to write to the Department of Health outlining the issues and asking for clarification. The Health Scrutiny Panel will be keeping a watching brief to ensure the best outcomes for the people of the Canterbury district.

Following up on this issue the panel discovered that the House of Commons Health Select Committee (the scrutiny equivalent in parliament) will be conducting a review into Public and Patient Involvement in Health, to look at similar issues.

The panel decided to submit written evidence to this committee, highlighting the concerns with the LINK proposals.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee wants to know what issues matter to you. The committee sets up panels to look at these issues in detail, and to see if the council can do anything about them. You can see from the previous pages the sort of issues that the committee has looked at.

Depending on the issue, the review panel will carry out an investigation, gather the facts and make recommendations.

So please let us know what your concerns are.

We will assess any request for review using the following criteria:

- Its effect on a group of people living within the Canterbury district,
- Its relation to a service provided by the council,
- That it does not relate to an individual service complaint,
- It has not been subject to a scrutiny review in the last three years.

Please complete the form below and send it to:

Policy and Improvement Division, Canterbury City Council, Freepost 41, Military Road, Canterbury, CT1 1BR. (There is no need for a stamp.)

Alternatively you can complete the form online by visiting our website www.scrutiny.canterbury.gov.uk

If you have any questions please call Scrutiny and Research Officer Wayne Gough on 01227 862 332 or e-mail wayne.gough@canterbury.gov.uk

A scrutiny panel should look at:

Because

Name and address (not compulsory, but will help us to keep you updated on the progress of your suggestion).
