

# Successful scrutiny

2012





# Foreword

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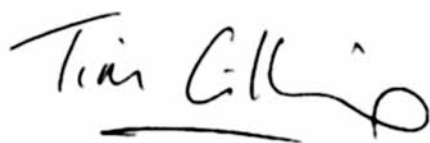
Now in their fifth year, the Centre's Good Scrutiny Awards continue to highlight the importance and strength of the 'non-executive role' – once again, the depth and range of work demonstrated by the winners and shortlisted entries is exceptional.

Some people might be tempted to regard scrutiny and accountability as bureaucratic, boring and irrelevant – an unnecessary luxury in austere financial times. The shortlist for this year's Good Scrutiny Awards provides evidence for them to think again. This year the judges commented particularly on the extent to which entries demonstrated the increasing confidence of non-executives to tackle issues that are often neglected, largely because they are socially or politically challenging.

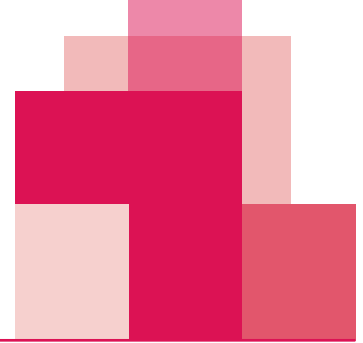
The Good Scrutiny Awards have two purposes. The primary purpose is to recognise the excellent work of non-executives around the country and to celebrate with the winners (and other shortlisted entries) their impact. The secondary purpose is to share new, different and effective practice and to inspire others from across the public sector to enter next time round.

Now more than ever our principles of transparency, involvement and accountability are crucial to the way people who plan and deliver services approach the challenges we face as a society. Our principles of good scrutiny remain firm foundations around which people who use services and the public can come together with professionals and political leaders to solve problems.

Congratulations to our winners and those who were shortlisted.



**Tim Gilling**  
Acting Executive Director,  
Centre for Public Scrutiny



## **OVERALL WINNER: Gloucestershire County Council: Severn Estuary Scrutiny Commission**

This entry was submitted for the “Involving Communities” category, for which it was shortlisted.

The Environment Agency (EA) published its proposed strategy for managing flood risk on the Severn Estuary in January 2011. The strategy proposed that flood defences be maintained or improved in some areas but provided for managed re-alignment in others, meaning that some flood defences would be left to lapse over time.

The Severn Estuary is an internationally important conservation area where rising sea levels are reducing the areas of salt marsh and mudflat in front of current tidal defences. This process is known as ‘coastal squeeze’ and the EA maintains that an EU Directive states that the loss of habitat must be compensated for by the creation of habitat elsewhere in the estuary.

The EA’s proposals caused huge concern among communities bordering the estuary based on the generally held view that the strategy development process was flawed from the outset with inaccurate data and little meaningful consultation. Residents were concerned at the potential loss of homes and livelihood.

The scrutiny process was seen as an ideal way of bringing important stakeholders together to present their views and allow non-executives to have a fresh independent look at all the issues. The normal approach would have been to establish a time-limited task group but, with so many interested groups and the need to respond quickly, an innovative approach was used with great success.

A one day scrutiny commission was held to respond to local concerns, directly involving a community group representing local people’s interests. The work involved town, parish and district councils, the NFU, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and others.

### **Impact of the work**

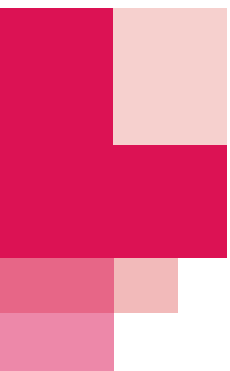
As a result of the scrutiny process the EA recognised that a new approach was required and have appointed two engagement officers to work with the communities most affected. They are:

- a) Engaging with the communities affected to assess their preferred short and longer term options for managing flood risk
- b) Advising communities on what measures can be funded using public money
- c) Assessing longer term options based on actual sea level rises rather than forecasts based on current predictions.

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Fundamentally, as a result of this work a major national agency has completely redesigned its approach to engaging the community on the unenviable dilemma created by global warming and shrinking public funds.

The EA has responded positively to the scrutiny recommendations. It has acknowledged the concerns of local residents and is making a genuine effort to engage with them. Local communities are now working closely with the EA to reach agreement on the best way forward.



“Following publication of the Environment Agency’s draft Managing Flood Risk on the Severn Estuary, local parish councils and landowners were extremely concerned that there had been virtually no opportunity for community and stakeholder engagement during the preparation of this extremely important document. Together with other local people and stakeholders, I knew it was based on inaccurate information and seriously flawed.

As a result of the work of our local parish councils and others, the Environment Agency withdrew its original proposals and started to address the issues again, this time engaging with the local communities and stakeholders. The Gloucestershire County Council Severn Estuary Scrutiny Commission looked at how the County Council could contribute towards this future process effectively.

By involving both parish and district councils and others in the Scrutiny Commission, Gloucestershire County Council ensured that it was fully aware of the concerns of the people affected by flood risk on the Severn Estuary. The Scrutiny Commission has provided the basis from which a focused and coordinated approach by stakeholders and the local communities can be developed as we all face the risk of rising sea levels and the effects that will have on our housing, livelihoods and infrastructure.”

**Rose Hewlett,**  
(Grandmother), Severnside resident

## WINNER: Brighton and Hove City Council, Traveller Scrutiny Panel

This review looked at an issue of significant controversy in the local area. With opinions polarised amongst the local community and politicians alike, scrutiny wanted to take the opportunity to try to “detoxify” the issue, to run a scrutiny process parallel to the administration’s development of a Traveller Strategy. This work was led by an independent academic expert and managed to complement the development of the strategy and – crucially – ensure cross-party buy-in to it, once agreed. Views were sought from a wide range of people and despite some extremely polarised opinions the review provided the opportunity to air those opinions fully, frankly and in public. There was significant engagement with the local media around the portrayal of travellers and traveller issues.

This sits within the context of a refinement of scrutiny’s role as the council adopts a committee system of governance, to bring political groups together at a pre-decision stage to try to establish a degree of common ground on key issues facing the city.

### Impact

- Fundamentally, the review cooled down an over-heated issue and allowed politicians to transcend previous disagreements;
- Significant influence over the final content of the Strategy, including:
- More of a focus on national practice, and a stronger evidence base for actions;
- More focus on making immediate service improvements while the long term solution (building a new permanent traveller site) is under way.

“The panel were not afraid to tackle difficult issues such as the local media’s portrayal of travellers and how the settled community had been affected by unauthorised encampments [...] It has been widely recognised that the comprehensive recommendations made by the panel have been responsible for strengthening the final Traveller Strategy”

#### **Cllr Bill Randall,**

Leader of Brighton and Hove City Council

“I was very impressed that despite the contentious nature of the subject, the cross party membership and independent chair were able to agree strong, supportive yet challenging recommendations [...] It was important to have this considered cross-party input into giving the strategy extra weight. Yet in saying all that, the panel didn’t sacrifice its integrity or independence.”

#### **Cllr Pete West,**

Cabinet Member for  
Environment and Sustainability

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## **SHORTLISTED: Scottish Borders Council; Commuting and the impact of modern working practices**

This review looked at a matter of national concern, but with a local impact. The review looked at three interlinking issues – the accessibility of the Scottish Borders, reducing the need and cost of commuting and reducing the carbon use associated with commuting. The work was holistic, drawing together policy in areas such as community work, transport, working practices, accessibility, communications and carbon management. Evidence was gathered from a wide range of people to support the review's findings.

### **Impact**

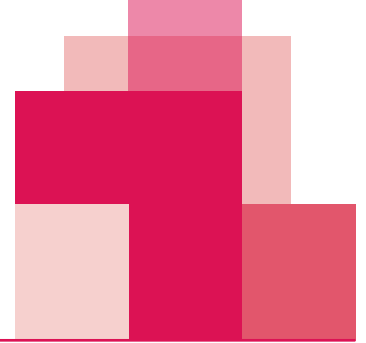
- Raising awareness amongst decision-makers, and others, about the interconnectivity of commuting with wider transport opportunities and digital connectivity;
- More effective fleet management by the council;
- Development of a partnership approach to electric vehicle infrastructure;
- Work to improve public transport, in the context of the introduction of the new Borders Railway.

## **SHORTLISTED: Chesterfield Borough Council: health and health equity in Rother**

This review used the technique of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to take a “whole place” approach to health outcomes in one electoral ward. It focused thinking and resources on joint, workable solutions, supported by evidence derived from interviews with local people which looked at perceptions and feelings about their needs.

### **Impact**

- Reduced organisational barriers by connecting front line workers in different organisations to each other;
- A tight, geographic focus on health inequalities has highlighted many social determinants of health in a practice and tangible way;
- Establishment of a Community Action Group, led locally, to keep up the momentum on the agreed actions.



## WINNER: London Borough of Redbridge: End of life care

This review was set up to consider how services work together to provide high quality care and how patient choice is supported. Scrutiny organised an “end of life care event” to bring together a number of stakeholders – including members of the public – to discuss and share ideas and improve experiences. Most attendees had some experience of end of life care, and having this wide personal and professional evidence allowed the working group to make recommendations that directly addressed the concerns that those people had. This evidence was supplemented by direct visits to hospices and hospitals, which involved speaking to palliative care specialists.

### Impact

- A more joined up approach to end of life care is now being taken;
- Information sharing between different organisations is now more effective;
- Education and training on end of life care is being provided to care home staff;
- Actions are being driven forward by the Director of Social Services and local NHS bodies working together.

“Many of those who attended [the event] were able to speak about their personal experiences and how end of life care could be greatly improved. Many were concerned about those vulnerable patients who could not speak for themselves or had someone else to speak on their behalf and how this could be improved in future [...] By gathering all this information from one event, it has enabled the scrutiny group to collate as much evidence as possible from people from many walks of life.”

#### **Lorraine Silver,**

Chairman of Cranbrook Residents’ Association and Chairman of Outer North East London People’s Platform

“On contributing to the scrutiny group meetings, I found the group’s approach was energetic, engaging, informed and in trying to understand what is a complex mix of services from various sectors and how they meet and don’t meet the needs of our users, they were intent on getting a comprehensive picture while still concentrating on how this “patchwork” of care affects the individual person”.

#### **Dr. Andrew Gage,**

Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Outer North East London Community Services Barking, Havering & Redbridge NHS University Hospitals Trust



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## **SHORTLISTED: Gloucestershire County Council: Severn Estuary Scrutiny Commission**

This review investigated Environment Agency proposals for flood defence along the Severn Estuary, which caused significant concern for a number of communities bordering the estuary. A one day scrutiny commission was held to respond to these concerns, directly involving a community group representing local people's interest. The work involved town, parish and district councils, the NFU, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and others.

### **Impact**

- Provided a strong voice in identifying and tackling an issue of local concern;
- A complete redesign by the Environment Agency of their approach towards managing flood risk;
- A commitment to engage with local communities to assess their preferred short and longer term options for managing flood risk;
- Closer and more co-ordinated response from local authorities to Environment Agency proposals in future.

## **SHORTLISTED: North East Lincolnshire Council: Coal dust**

For some time councillors had been aware that airborne coal dust had been having an effect on local people in Immingham, believed to emanate from coal, coke and petroleum coke stockpiles on Immingham docks. They decided to investigate the effects that such airborne dust have on local people – particularly the health impacts. They talked to local people, to the companies involved and to other key local partners.

### **Impact**

- Establishment of a round table, providing a forum for concerns to be discussed between coal handling companies, ward councillors and the town council;
- A considerable improvement in dust nuisance over the past year, despite the amount of coal passing through the port having doubled in the same period;
- Clear procedures to be followed when complaints are made, including analysis of dust to identify its origin;
- More joint working between regulatory bodies to create a more consistent and standardised regime.


## WINNER: Cardiff Council: Night-time Economy

This review secured wide coverage and an increased profile for scrutiny, as well as securing tangible impacts for local people. It constituted an attempt to fully evaluate the economic impact and management of Cardiff's night-time economy. A major inquiry priority was to gain public views on the NTE – a marketing plan using internet and social media, an online questionnaire, radio debates, direct marketing and close press liaison resulted in nearly 3000 public responses and a week's consistent coverage of the review's findings by the South Wales Echo.

A "Purple Flag" night time economy appraisal, typology, planning and licensing analysis also took place.

### Impact

- An NTE Strategy is being developed by a joint group of city leaders;
- Two new Saturation Areas (for licensing) added;
- Increased emphasis in policy on quality and diversification of licensed premises;
- Trialling of street cleansing operations between 12am and 2am;
- Moves towards unified enforcement powers for officers working in the city centre at night, encouraging improved business practice and increased efficiency;
- Improvements in standards for local taxis;
- Change in the nature of stories in the press about the NTE, following the review's attachment of a pound value for the NTE to the city.



"The utilisation of the internet, social media and working innovatively with the press represents an interesting, cost effective and efficient model of practice for public engagement [...] the staging of scrutiny related events such as the night time economy walk undertaken with the press, scrutiny and the city centre management team was another example of innovative practice. [...] The finalised scrutiny report and recommendations helped set the context for the future development of Cardiff's night-time economy and my service area is now leading on the development of a specific night-time economy strategy.

**Martin Hamilton,**

Chief Officer, City Management, Cardiff Council

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## SHORTLISTED: Birmingham City Council: A Music City

This review was carried out in response to a report produced by the national body UK Music highlighting the potential of local music industries as “considerable economic assets”. Scrutiny wanted to establish the role that music plays in attracting visitors to the city and enhancing the quality of life of residents.

The review gave real impetus to change, overturning cynicism in the local music industry that anything would or could change. The review garnered significant local and national media coverage, in the specialist and general press.

### Impact

- A clear statement of policy from the council on the importance of the music industry, reassuring and encouraging private investment;
- Establishment of “Music Birmingham”, a single contact for the industry and venues, and to enhance Birmingham’s profile within an independent music context;
- Bringing together different areas of the council, and other partners, to work jointly on this, with particular reference to the “Music Charter”, bringing together actions from the Cultural and Creative Industries Strategies.

## SHORTLISTED: London Borough of Ealing: August 2011 riots

This review aimed to investigate and evaluate the response to the disturbances from the emergency services and the council, and to attempt to build a definitive picture of what happened and why. The review panel also sought to feed evidence in to the national Riots, Communities and Victims Panel.

### Impact

- The organisation of a high-profile community event, involving members of the national inquiry, seniors councillors and local and regional emergency services and 150 members of the public allowed views of the events to be shared in public;
- A large number of written and verbal submission were directly fed into the national panel’s evidence;
- Led to tangible local recommendations for change, including improving communication by emergency services and better engagement with insurance providers.

## **WINNER: Bassetlaw District Council: Review of the future of services at Bassetlaw Hospital**

This review was carried out to investigate plans for future service delivery, and how those plans were being communicated. It followed a media storm about the future of services at the hospital, and led to particularly positive outcomes on communication from the Trust, and on future consultation arrangements by Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Councillors were keen to explore the facts about plans, and to carry out the review in a timely way – 36 witnesses were spoken to over 3 months, including an intensive period of questioning in public at four extraordinary meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Impact**

- More clarity in communications with the wider community from Bassetlaw Hospital;
- More pro-active “marketing” of hospital services;
- Cultural change amongst health service professionals in recognising the value and impact of democratic challenge;
- More focus in planning on the patient experience;
- Generally, a commitment to far more effective communication and dialogue with the local community over current, and future, plans for service changes.

“I think I can speak for all staff when I say that the scrutiny process was an eye-opening experience. We are not often questioned or challenged about what we’re doing in this way, and why. [...] Although the NHS is complicated to those not working in it – and, sometimes, to those of us working in it! – the scrutiny process has shown that NHS staff don’t have a monopoly of understanding. Members, with the support of officers, have clearly understood the challenges and I look forward to continuing to develop the relationships we have made so that we provide the best possible healthcare to the people of Bassetlaw”

### **Ian Greenwood,**

Director of Strategic and Service Development,  
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

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## **SHORTLISTED: Surrey County Council: Winter highways maintenance**

The winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 saw extreme weather conditions and considerable traffic disruption in Surrey. Scrutiny decided to look at the issue following high public dissatisfaction and with a view to improving matters in advance of winter 2011/12.

Councillors sought to understand the answers to some basic questions – such as the council's statutory responsibilities around highways maintenance, the purpose and location of grit bins, and following on from this what could be done in practice to reduce the disruption caused by severe winter weather.

### **Impact**

- Replacement of the council's existing, unstructured approach to winter highways maintenance with a clearer and more strategic approach;
- Better communication on these issues with district councils and with other partners, and the public;
- Although the 2011/12 winter was somewhat less severe than previous ones, there was a 79% decrease in "requests for service" received relating to highways issues and a significant reduction in complaints.

## **SHORTLISTED: Stoke on Trent City Council: Business services**

Over a number of months Stoke's Business Services Committee has looked across the council at ways to increase the collection of moneys owed to the authority, raise new moneys and make the money the council spends work harder. In doing so it has carried out reviews into a range of services, recommending transformative changes that have resulted in significant financial savings. This work has also contributed to the awarding of the full LGA Member Development Charter in 2012.

### **Impact**

- Recommendations around early identification of problems that local people are experiencing with paying debts to the council. This has involved closer communication with Citizens' Advice, debt collection agencies and the voluntary sector. Council tax collection has improved by £0.8 million;
- New approach to procurement informed by over 70 local business respondents, leading to £0.6 million in savings (in-year).

## **WINNER: City of Bradford Council: Bradford District Food Strategy**

This piece of work involved two of Bradford's overview and scrutiny committees coming together with the delivery organisations Healthy Weight and the Healthy Living Board, and with a range of other stakeholders, to investigate and tackle issues relating to poverty, health and inequalities.


### **Impact**

The work has led to the agreement of a Food Strategy for Bradford that will:

- Eliminate waiting lists for council allotments by 2015;
- Bring spare land into temporary food cultivation by community groups;
- Roll out more food growing projects in schools and public parks;
- Provide additional training for local people in food production techniques.

Early wins include:

- Work already begun on developing a pilot "low carbon" allotment project;
- The requirements for community food growing are being better reflected in two large masterplanning development documents;
- Actions on the Food Strategy are being considered formally at joint meetings, keeping up the momentum to deliver on what has been promised.



"[The review] is an excellent example of how we can secure better outcomes for the people of the Bradford District by working as equal partners with the communities we serve rather than working in isolation. The production of the Bradford District Food Strategy is a tangible output and demonstrates to citizens and communities that they do have a stake in directly contributing to achieving our ambitions for the District – as partners, and not as passive recipients of services"

**Tony Reeves,**  
Chief Executive, City of Bradford Council

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## **SHORTLISTED: Hartlepool Borough Council: Services for looked after children and young people**

Scrutiny carried out a workshop exercise to engage with housing providers, the police, the College of Further Education, the NHS, a GP representative, a primary school representative, social workers and other professionals. Looked after children themselves also attended and, as a result, recommendations were presented that combined a range of both professional and personal views. In particular, a lack of residential care facilities in the town were highlighted.

### **Impact**

- Commitment to opening a new children's home to provide additional residential care;
- Commitment to introduce a system whereby partner organisations contribute a gift to looked after children as a component of their support;
- More consistent support to looked after children in the form of mentors for each child in individual schools, and the development of new policy guidance (in partnership with young people) to identify the best way to carry out personal review meetings.

## **SHORTLISTED: North Central London Standing Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This joint committee has required the active co-operation of five London boroughs with political persuasions and interests that do not always coincide. It has directly involved service users – for example, those receiving child and adolescent mental health services – and has been used as a public forum for the open discussion of major planned service changes. It has built up a reputation which has meant that it has secured some significant successes recently.

### **Impact**

- Review of implementation plans for a major reconfiguration, which addressed local concerns and has resulted in the JHOSC maintaining oversight over the process;
- Particular focus on specialised services covering a larger geographical area, leading to changes that met patients' needs;
- Working to ensure that there will be continuity in key services following the changes in the Health and Social Care Act.

# Longlisted entries




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Some longlisted entries just missed out on being in the “top three” in their categories – here are a few of them.

## **South Cambridgeshire District Council: Contact centre**

The council’s contact centre contract was about to expire, which provoked scrutiny to consider whether it should be retendered, brought in house, or whether a radically different approach was required. The review carried out research that identified immediate cost savings opportunities on the current contract of £73,000pa plus a new approach to using cloud networking technology in the delivery of a service in-house, saving £250,000pa – recommendations which were accepted by Cabinet and are to be implemented.



## **Staffordshire County Council and Stafford Borough Council: Joint Health Scrutiny Accountability Sessions**

These sessions, involving the county council and all the district councils, have been part of the general response to the events at Stafford Hospital. They bring together a focused means of challenge, based on risk, with public involvement being a key driver for the process. Sessions are based on a self-assessment and a range of evidence including information from CQC, the local press and councillor caseloads. They focus study on particular areas of patient care and quality, and have led to a range of recommendations on basic care, public engagement and strategic priorities, which are managed and monitoring through subsequent sessions.



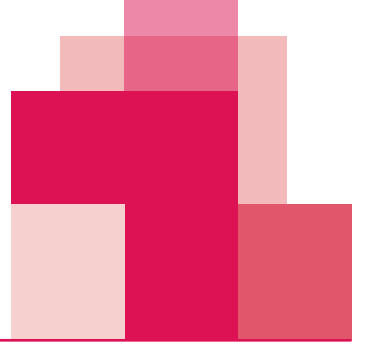
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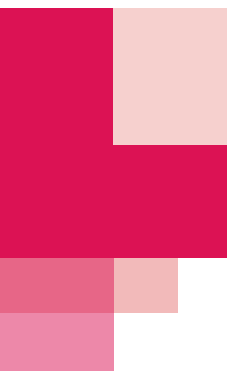
## **Adur District Council: Disabilities issues**

In response to concerns received from a number of residents who were prevented from doing things because of their disabilities, scrutiny recommended that an Access and Mobility Group should be developed to give disabled people a voice in scrutinising planning and building regulation applications to ensure that they are fit for use by disabled people. The Group is up and running and has produced an Access Guide using £10,000 of grant funding from the Big Lottery Awards for All programme.

## **Ryedale District Council: Post office review**

A review of the sustainability of the post office network in Ryedale aimed to build a more positive relationship with the PO and ensure that the area would be ready for any future network change. As a result of its recommendations, and the engagement of PO in the review, the council and the PO are now working together to develop a business case for using the 24 post office outlets in rural locations as front office service points for the District Council, without impacting on the council's budget. Scrutiny continues to be involved in the detailed design of these potential new arrangements.





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