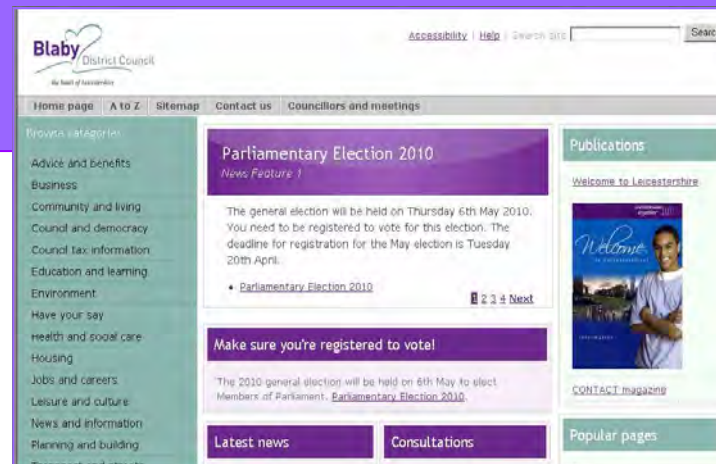


Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/2010



Contents

Welcome - Chairman's Introduction	3
Meet the Scrutiny Team	4
Scrutiny at Blaby District Council	5
Scrutiny's work in the 2009/10 year	6
Proposed 2010/11 Scrutiny Work Programme	11
Community involvement	14
- Please give us your suggestions for review	
- Councillor Call for Action	

Scrutiny Support

Linda McLean
Scrutiny Manager

Tel: 0116 272 7708
e-mail: lm@blaby.gov.uk

Leona Bendall
Scrutiny Officer

Tel: 0116 272 7706
email: lb5@blaby.gov.uk

Matthew Berry
Senior Democratic Officer

Tel: 0116 272 7638
email: mrb@blaby.gov.uk

Welcome



This year has been a year of significant achievement for the Scrutiny Commission and its working groups. I am pleased to say that Members stepped up to the mark and have worked effectively within the new framework of themed working groups. They have developed their skills and understanding and provided consistent and effective scrutiny on the topics assigned.

I am particularly pleased that the positive working relationship with Cabinet has strengthened during the year and unlike many authorities where Scrutiny is not resourced or supported, we on the Commission do feel that our work is valued. This can be evidenced by the growing practice for all major strategies and policies to be presented to Scrutiny in advance of Cabinet decisions; and the prompt and effective consideration by Cabinet of recommendations from Commission.

Our new structure, working primarily through three standing groups: Finance, Partnership and Performance, has been successful and is beginning to have an impact on the way the Council delivers its services to our communities. In addition we have completed a number of single topic reviews that are outlined on pages 6 and 7.

One clear illustration of the step change in our performance is the public recognition of our work. This year, we were one of three organisations short listed for the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Awards as the 2010 Scrutiny Team of the Year. I am proud to say we came second, with our work being Highly Commended.

We have also hosted visits from other Leicestershire authorities keen to examine our structure and progress.

So what's next?

We will build on our progress this year; developing our work programme from the robust self evaluation undertaken by each of our working groups; continue to focus on the delivery of Council priorities and take steps to increase partner, community and public involvement in scrutiny – see page 14

In what will be a difficult environment for all local authorities, Blaby District Council's Scrutiny will continue to provide constructive challenge; contribute to the Council's focus on driving forward service improvement, and reflect the interests and concerns of our communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Welsh', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Geoff Welsh
Chairman Scrutiny Commission

Meet the Scrutiny Team

Scrutiny Commissioners

Councillor Geoff Welsh
Chair of the Scrutiny *Commission*

Tel: 0116 277 7729
email: cllr.welsh@blaby.gov.uk

(pictured on page 3)

Councillor Phil Fox
Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Commission

Tel: 0116 233 9395
email: cllr.pn.fox@blaby.gov.uk



Councillor David Jennings
Scrutiny Commissioner

Tel: 0116 277 4263
email: cllr.jennings@blaby.gov.uk



Commission members

Cllr J Bell



Cllr M Bradbury



Cllr E Dawson



Cllr A Dilks



Cllr Dolby



Cllr Duffield



Cllr J Forey



Cllr J Fox



Cllr D Freer



Cllr J Kenney



Cllr E Parsons



Cllr D Pollard



Cllr S Scott



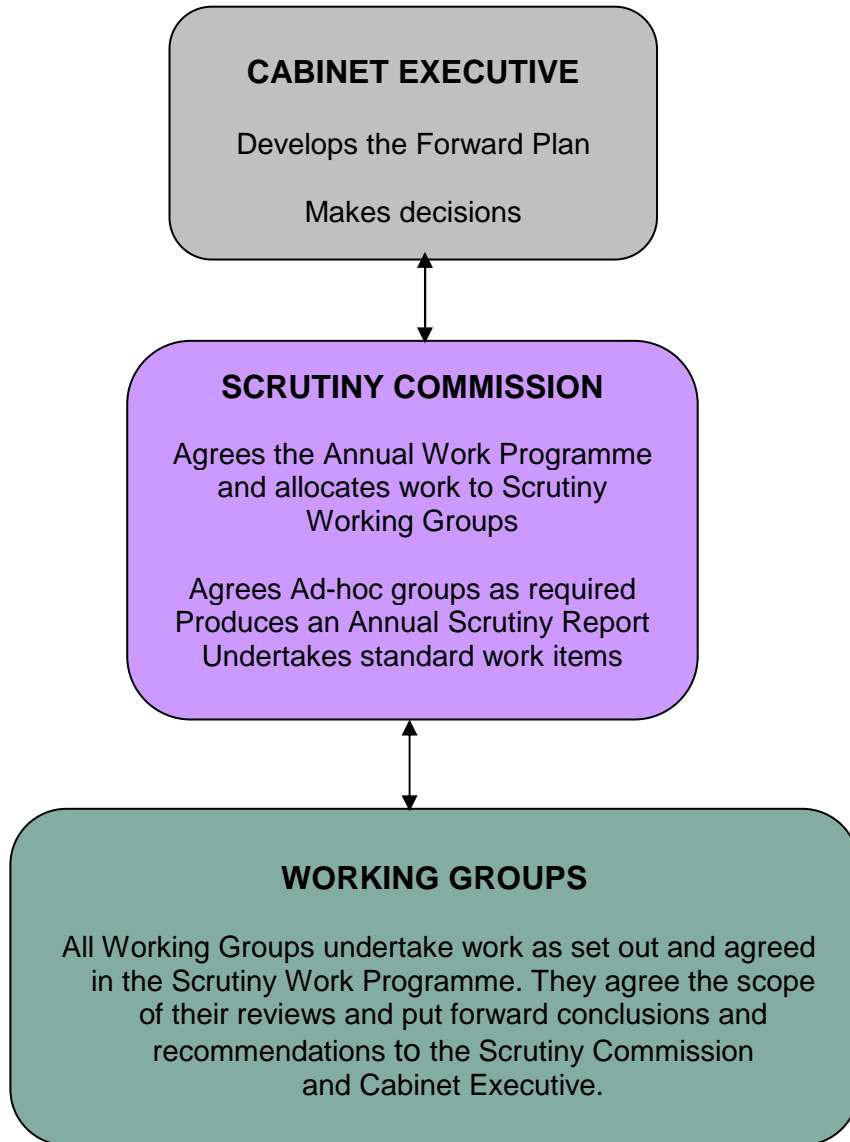
Cllr R Ward



Cllr J Weatherstone



Scrutiny at Blaby District Council



Scrutiny is essential to the success of our political management arrangements. It recognises that all parts of the political management structure have important roles to play and seek to work together to achieve common objectives set by Council. Scrutiny and Cabinet have different but complementary roles which are equally important. In effect Scrutiny acts as the Council ‘watchdog’ or critical friend.

Scrutiny within Blaby District Council operates through a Scrutiny Commission of 18 elected members from all political parties to ensure political balance. Three Scrutiny Commissioners, drawn from the three largest political parties work, as a management board of the Commission, carrying out its work and being responsible for the delivery of Working Group reviews

Scrutiny also has the power to Call-in decisions made by Cabinet. Call-in is used where members have evidence which suggests that a decision may not have been taken in accordance with the principles of good decision making set out in the Constitution, or in the context of the Council’s policy or budget framework.

The scrutiny process also allows the community to have a greater say in Council matters and issues of local concern. The Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) is a key new power given to Scrutiny to take on issues of local concern that have failed to be addressed through normal channels. Further information on CCfA is included on page 15.

Work of the Scrutiny Commission in 2009/10

The work of the Commission is taken forward through three broad strands:

- Undertaking an annual programme of briefings, examining developing policies before they go to Cabinet, considering all recommendations from the reviews, and monitoring of Cabinet responses
- Commissioning and directing the work of single topic, focused reviews
- Directing and reviewing the action of its three themed working groups: Finance, Partnership and Performance:

The Commission's annual programme in 2009/10 included:

“Reviewing our performance and future ambitions with Scrutiny is a good discipline and provides an opportunity for a helpful exchange of information and views.”

Bruce Kerr
Managing Director
Three Oaks Housing

- Presentation from the Audit Commission on the Council's continuing improvement in performance management.
- Background briefings on critical local issues such as the emerging Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework.
- Early briefings on developing new strategic housing options including Choice Based Lettings, Affordable Housing, Private Sector & Empty Homes
- Presentations from Cabinet members on the development of new corporate priorities
- An update on the Council's approach to Equalities
- An update from Deputy Chief Executive on progress toward development of shared services with neighbouring authorities

- Briefings from external partners included:
 - An update from Three Oaks Homes (the body created after Blaby's housing stock transfer) on its progress towards 100% decent homes.
 - Quarterly updates from the District's Community Safety Partnership

Single topic reviews that were presented to Commission and Cabinet in the year included:

“Scrutiny enables our tier of government to make a meaningful contribution to the wellbeing of our parishioners”

Phil Jennings
Clerk
Croft Parish Council

- The Section 106 Review, where our work with parish councils was a major factor in the success of the review. Of the 25 recommendations put forward by the review team – 18 were accepted by Council and as a result of Scrutiny's work the Council now has a robust and effective strategy. Our local councils feel that they were listened to and our communities will see benefits to them from the impact of new developments.
- Evaluation of the progress made by the District's Affordable Warmth Partnership to provide grants and home improvement to elderly and vulnerable households. The review concluded that after a slow start good progress had been achieved. Scrutiny made eight recommendations to ensure this was sustained and the Partnership Working Group will continue to monitor progress.
- The principal mechanism to drive improvements in performance within the Council is a process based management tool called Systems Thinking. The team undertook a detailed review and after some scepticism found that it to be working well. The Performance Working will continue to monitor progress.
- A review into the Council website and ways to improve access to IT was effective with a new website launched and further work being undertaken by the corporate team which has resulted in a 300% increase in visitors to the website.
- Steps to address historically high levels of staff absence due to sickness were reviewed – the review concluded that recent action has turned an area of underperformance around and that this will be continue to be monitored.

- In 2007 Scrutiny undertook a detailed review into the Council's work to meet the required of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) – this concluded that good progress has been.
- After the introduction of car parking charges, a short review was undertaken to examine public and business views on car park charging. The review was particularly notable for the consultation members undertook directly with the public, local businesses and parish councils.
- Perhaps one of the most significant pieces of work was the first phase of the review to Revitalise Council. This review was truly inclusive; seeking contributions and input from all members – and with a member of the Cabinet seconded to the Group. Every single member of the group fully contributed to the review: giving their ideas, undertaking research or interviews and considering practices in other authorities. After a period of bedding down, the outcome of this review will strengthen our ability to demonstrate community leadership and full council meetings will become a more effective democratic forum. This work will continue with a second phase to begin this autumn.

Work of the three themed groups

Finance Working Group – under the chairmanship of Cllr Phil Fox

Members of the group: Cllr Alex Dilks, Cllr Janet Forey, Cllr John Kenney, Cllr David Pollard, Cllr John Springthorpe, Cllr Joan Weatherstone

“As a result of Scrutiny’s budget process we made changes to the budget methodology – and in some places our financial practices. I am proud to say Scrutiny works at Blaby. ”

Cllr E F White
Leader Blaby District Council

The group has:

- developed an understanding of financial issues relating to local authority finance
- robustly considered all aspects of the Council's finance through monthly monitoring of capital and revenue in the year. Amongst the concerns identified in the year were the lower than expected investment income and the rising costs of concessionary travel.
- considered strategic financial reports such as the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Investment Reports
- undertook a robust and effective budget process

- begun a complete review of the Council's services in terms of value for money – looking for the balance between economy (costs) – effectiveness (performance standards) and excellence (representing customer satisfaction).

Partnership Working Group – under the chairmanship of Cllr Jennings

Members of the group: Cllr Tony Dolby, Cllr Jo Fox, Cllr Barbara Parkins, Cllr Elizabeth Parsons, Cllr Joe Roper, Cllr Gary Sanders, Cllr David Pollard, Cllr Sheila Scott, Cllr Iris Whaling, Cllr Bill Wright.

The group has:

- Developed their understanding of the complex relationships with our partners in Blaby Together – the District's Sustainable Community Partnership
- Individual work projects have work included:
 - a robust – and positive - assessment of Blaby Together's performance against its priorities which were set after a peer review in 2008
 - Development of a Guide to Scrutiny for Blaby Together partners
 - Taken evidence and challenged performance from Voluntary Action Leicester and Community Action Blaby District
 - Received a briefing from NHS Leicestershire and Rutland Primary Care Trust – and challenged them on their delivery of a number of priorities for the District
 - Agreed a strategy to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership and agreed to second a member of the Leicestershire Police Authority to the Working Group.
 - Undertook a self evaluation to determine priorities for training and future work

" We have found Scrutiny effective and focused on outcomes that improve lives of residents in the District"

Andrew Ingles
Chief Executive
Community Action Blaby

Performance Working Group – under the chairmanship of Cllr Welsh

Members of the group: Cllr Alan Bailey, Cllr Tony Dolby, Cllr David Freer, Cllr Barry Garner, Cllr John Kenney, Cllr Sheila Scott, Cllr John Springthorpe, Cllr Ron Ward

“Most of its services are improving and the Council is now reaching the vast majority of its targets”

Audit Commission
Dec 2009

The group has

- Undertaken training to develop its understanding of the complex issues of performance management and its impact on our communities.
- The Group has considered areas of persistent underperformance, to contribute towards the Council’s drive for improvement. One example of this work, was the Group’s examination of Disability Facilities Grants and Adaptations – which had an unacceptable historic backlog. The Group sought information on how this would be addressed and the impact of Systems Thinking on the service.
- Quarterly reports on portfolio performance is provided to Commission, which provides the constitutional platform to hold portfolio holders to account. The Group is conscious that while there has been a significant improvement in performance further work is needed.
- On the critical area of Access to Services the Group received presentations on
 - Customer Service Transformation – including the new Access Strategy.
 - Work began to look at how the Council is using new technology tools to gather information on customers’ needs and gaps in service provision. To put this in context the Group focused on an actual service, the Pavilion Leisure Centre at Huncote which was using the new tools to develop its business plan and capture public perceptions on its location and facilities.

Proposed 2010/11 Scrutiny Work Programme

Scrutiny Commission

- Proactively use the Council's Forward Plan to request information and identify potential areas of work, prior to reports going to Cabinet
- Consider the Audit Commission review reports and use this as a basis for Scrutiny's future work
- Consider development and progress against the delivery of priorities in the Corporate Plan
- Undertake half yearly progress reviews into delivery and outcomes of the District's Sustainable Community Strategy – through Blaby together
- Provide robust challenge to Portfolio Holders on development of their priorities and plans
- Instruct and scope completion of single topic reviews – including second phase of Revitalising Council Review

Finance Working Group – <i>to provide timely and constructive challenge on key aspect of the Council's priorities for finance</i>	
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly monitoring of General Fund Revenue Account and Capital Programme • Year end update
Value for Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To look at how the Council and its partners are providing value for money. • Monthly evidence from departments
Use of Resources consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine community/public consultation on budget proposals
Scrutiny of the budget setting process and 2011/12 draft budget proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present budget recommendations for consideration by Cabinet Executive

Partnership Working Group – <i>to ensure the community benefits fully from the Council's partnership activities through Blaby Together</i>	
Community Safety Partnership -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the progress and delivery of CSP Improvement Action Plans and partner involvement

Blaby Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress and delivery of theme group action plans and priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Environment • Healthy & Strong Communities • Children & Young People • Better Public Services • Work of Prospect Leicestershire • Examine the engagement and involvement of the PCT in delivery of Blaby Together Priorities
Local Development Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work as critical friend on development of the LDF and its various elements

Performance Working Group – <i>to assist the Council to meet its objective of a significant improvement in performance</i>	
Quarterly Performance Reports July 10, Oct 10, Jan 2011, April 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine portfolio performance reports • Identify and examine areas of poor performance
Systems Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor implementation of the intervention programme and examine effectiveness of completed interventions including value for money
Customer Access Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the effectiveness of the strategy linked to Audit Commission report and delivery of improvement action plan and examine how user data is used to ensure we are effective in reaching all service users
Service Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine delivery of service plan priorities and efficiency savings
Equality & Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine and monitor plans to attain the 'Achieving' level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government by March 2011 • Review recruitment and selection procedures examining the number of disabled applicants who are successful including related access issues for disabled employees

Community Involvement

The Scrutiny Commission would like to receive your views for suggested work programme items on issues that impact on the way Blaby District Council delivers its services to you. Scrutiny, however, is not a complaints system. Any specific complaints should be directed to the Council Officer or department responsible. However if you have a concern that is not being addressed by any public body – please read through the Community Call for Action on page 15 and we may be able to help

You can e-mail your suggestion to scrutiny@blaby.gov.uk – or alternatively you can either use this form and send it to
Blaby District Council
Scrutiny Team
The Council Offices, Desford Road
Narborough, Leicestershire, LE19 2EP

Suggested Work Programme Item

Please state why you are putting this suggestion forward

Who does this issue affect? Please identify any groups, communities or people – or residents of a particular area - that this issue affects.

Is there any other information or evidence that you wish to add?

Your Contact Details

In order that we can contact you if we require further information and to keep you informed of whether your suggestion will be reviewed by Scrutiny, please provide us with your contact details

Name: **Telephone:** **Submission date:**

Address/email:.....
.....

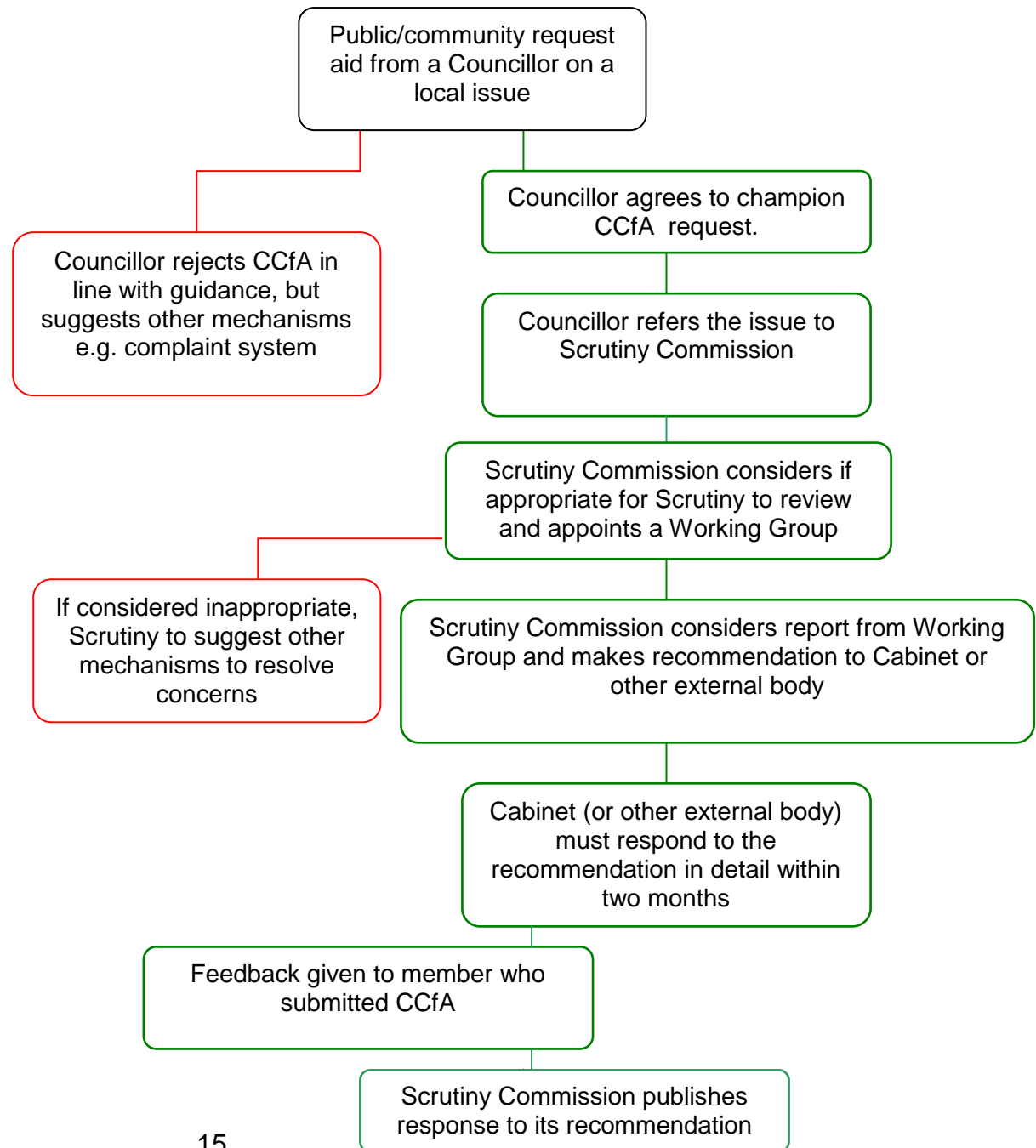
The information you provide on this form will be used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Should we require any further information from you regarding your suggestions we will use this information to contact you. Should you have any further questions please contact the Legal & Information Management Officer on 0116 272 7709

Councillor Call for Action

This recent power improves the ability of councillors to act on behalf of their community.

If for example a community is unhappy with the way a facility run by a public body (say a National Health Trust) is impacting upon their lives and they have been unable to get the Trust to listen to their concerns, they can now ask their local ward Councillor to take their concerns to Scrutiny.

It is important to understand that this is a last resort role – rather than a complaints service.



This document can be made available on request, in other languages and formats (large print, Braille, or on audio tape) by contacting

**Scrutiny
Blaby District Council
Council Offices
Desford Road
Narborough
Leicester
LE19 2EP**

**Tel: 0116 272 7706
Fax: 0116 275 0368
Minicom: 0116 284 9768
Email: scrutiny@blaby.gov.uk**

Published July 2010