

## Scrutiny Committee Annual Report to Council - 2014/15

At the start of the municipal year, the makeup of the Scrutiny Committee changed with agreement from Council and moved to a fixed membership as opposed to the pool of members drawn from the Advisory Committees that was in operation for 2013/14. As per the revised constitution:

*“The Scrutiny Committee will comprise a permanent Chairman and Vice Chairman, and 9 other elected Members that follow the political proportionality of the Council. No Members of the Committee may be members of the Cabinet, their deputies or members of any of the Cabinet Advisory Committees.”*

Throughout the course of 2014/15, the Scrutiny Committee has drawn up and followed a work plan which has focussed on some key areas. These are:

- Inviting two Cabinet Portfolio Holders to each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to discuss particular areas of focus/challenge.
- Inviting a number of external representatives to attend Scrutiny Committee to discuss particular areas of concern.
- Setting up In-Depth Scrutiny working groups as task and finish groups to investigate particular areas in detail, reporting back to the Committee so that recommendations can be agreed and reported to Cabinet.

Based on the above approach, the following is a summary of work carried out during 2014/15 by the Scrutiny Committee.

### Portfolio Holders

Portfolio Holders were asked to provide an update on recent work and future challenges to the relevant meeting, and were subsequently asked a number of questions by Members of the Committee regarding specific challenges and their approach and views. Portfolio holders attended as follows:

Scrutiny Committee	Portfolio Holder	Area of Committee Focus
July 2014	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Community Safety	HERO, affordable housing, housing benefit fraud, Universal Credit.
October 2014	Cllr Peter Fleming Strategy and Performance	Switch and Save, partnership working, parking provision, Fort Halstead.
October 2014	Cllr Brian Ramsay Finance and Resources	Budget setting process, financial prospects.
November 2014	Cllr Robert Piper Local Planning and Environment	Affordable housing contributions, planning policy, planning appeals
November 2014	Cllr Roddy Hogarth Economic and Community Development	Emergency planning, parking provision, Fort Halstead

February 2015	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Community Safety	National affordable housing policy, empty homes
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### **External Invitees**

July 2014 – Martin Wells and Angela Newey, Chairman and Manager Sevenoaks and Swanley CAB. Mike Musgrove and Jill Eyre, Director and Manager Edenbridge and Westerham CAB

Mr Wells gave a presentation on the activities of both CABx and answered questions from the Committee regarding future sustainability and plans, funding and the benefits the CABx provide.

October 2014 – Jane Parish, Chief Executive, Sencio. Sarah McDonnell, Marketing Manager, Sencio.

Mrs Parish gave a presentation on the performance and activities of the Leisure trust across its facilities. She then responded to questions from the Committee. These covered a number of areas including value for money and the comparison to private sector providers.

November 2014 – County Councillor Roger Gough, KCC Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform.

Mr Gough gave a presentation on school places, performance, school transport and the provision of a grammar school annex in Sevenoaks District. Mr Gough then answered questions from the Committee.

Mr Gough highlighted that the rise in the birth-rate across the County had meant a need to plan ahead in primary school places, with major construction, and this would in turn filter to secondary school places. The pressures in the Sevenoaks District were less severe than in other areas where there was more intensive house building.

The KCC Cabinet Member added that many pupils travelled out of the District, particularly for selective education as there were no selective schools in the District.

February 2015 – Ian Ayres, Chief Officer, West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group

Mr Ayres was asked to come to the Committee with a view to discussing matters regarding patient transport

Mr Ayres provided an overview of patient transport including information on tendering the service to NSL, the contract performance, a report from the Care Quality Commission and the actions which had been taken to address concerns. He then responded to questions from the Committee focusing on areas including failings in the current provision, the future procurement of the service, ensuring performance levels were met and the involvement of the voluntary sector.

## **In-Depth Scrutiny Working Groups**

A number of In-Depth Scrutiny Working Groups have been created to look at specific areas at the request of the Scrutiny Committee, these are as follows:

### Budget

It was considered whether to set up a working group to look at matters relating to the budget. The Committee felt that the substance of the budget was already looked at by a number of Committees and at this stage there were no identified deficiencies requiring scrutiny. This area may be revisited in future.

### Leisure

Remit - To benchmark with other authorities and leisure providers the value for money provided by Sencio in the provision of leisure services through the leisure trust. To analyse the amount of subsidy per use of the Council's centres paid by the Council to Sencio – if possible in comparison with other providers as well as over time. To assess customer satisfaction with the service provided.

Outcomes – To report back to Scrutiny Committee after February 2015

## **Lessons Learned**

Scrutiny is not easy being both time-consuming and, at times, counter-intuitive when the Committee is trying to probe colleagues. This year the Committee has risen to the challenge and has made real progress. It has managed the balance between challenging and advising, with not too many complaints from Cabinet members after they have appeared before the Committee!

In an ideal world the Committee would have the resource available to do the leg-work which currently has to be done by members, particularly when looking at particular issues within working groups. Members have done their best and the move to a permanent membership of the committee has proved successful with members gaining both expertise and confidence, whilst officers have assisted as much as possible, but going forward this will be a limiting factor as to the effectiveness of the working groups.

However overall this has been a year where a number of positive steps have been taken and borne fruit. However if members feel improvements can be made or there are areas which need scrutinising, please contact either the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

Councillor James London

Chairman