

## Scrutiny Committee Annual Report to Council - 2016/17

Throughout the course of 2016/17, 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.
- Performance of services in relation to agreed performance indicators.

As per the 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.”*

Based on the above approach, the following is a summary of work carried out during 2016/17 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
May 2016	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Health	Affordable Housing Homelessness Disabled Facilities Grants
May 2016	Cllr Matthew Dickins Direct and Trading Services	Parking Charges CCTV Flytipping
July 2016	Cllr Roddy Hogarth Economic and Community Development	Anti-social behaviour Parking provision Broadband Delivery
July 2016	Cllr Tony Searles Finance	White Oak Leisure Centre Oxford Palace Tower Property Investment Strategy
November 2016	Cllr Robert Piper Planning	Planning Fees Green Belt Swanley and Hextable Master

		Vision
November 2016	Cllr Anna Firth Legal and Democratic Services	Licensing Partnership Elections and Registration Trading Company
February 2017	Cllr Peter Fleming Policy and Performance	Swanley and Hextable Master Vision Property Investment Trading Company
February 2017	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Health	HERO Dementia Empty Homes
March 2017	Cllr Matthew Dickins Direct and Trading Services	

### External Invitees

May 2016 - Paul Carter CBE, Leader and Cabinet Member for Business Strategy, Audit and Transformation and Commercial and Traded Services of Kent County Council to answer question on Commercial and Traded Services and John Burr, CEO of Commercial Services, who gave an overview of Commercial and Traded Services at Kent County Council.

Mr Carter and Mr Burr gave a presentation on Commercial Services. They explained that Commercial Services had a combined turnover of £400 million, with three quarters from the LASER energy purchasing group. He explained that he did not want Commercial Services just to create artificial profits and so Commercial Services had separate accounts from the Council and no subsidies were provided. They clarified that 83% of the turnover come from businesses outside of KCC and the only service KCC staff were asked to use was Connect2Staff recruitment. Commercial Services contributed £5 million to £6 million per year back to the Council and had a target of £8.7 million in profit for the current year and £11 million in the next.

Members of the Committee then asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- The profitability of the services discussed
- Opportunities for wider trading
- Trading with District Councils
- Competition with the private sector

July 2016 - Elizabeth Austerberry, Chief Executive of Moat and Deborah White, Housing Director of West Kent Housing Association.

Mrs Austerberry and Mrs White gave presentations on the provision of housing in the district, the impact of the Voluntary Right to Buy, assistance to the “squeezed middle” and the challenges ahead.

Members of the Committee then asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Levels of rent charged
- The impacts of the Spare Room Subsidy
- Housing supply
- Tenancies

November 2016 - Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police in attendance to answer questions about crime and disorder in the Sevenoaks District.

Chief Inspector Walford explained that the Sevenoaks District was the third lowest crime area in the County. There had been a rise in crime with 388 extra recorded crimes over the rolling year to the end of October 2016 with between 10 and 14 crimes reported each day. However, crime recording methods were one of the best in the country with approximately 90% accuracy. Domestic violence was the most common crime but Kent Police had one of the best rates for domestic violence. Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2016 8 prosecutions with relatively low levels of repeat offenders and victims having more confidence to report incidents and receive support. The Kent Police sexual offences department would be restructured to deal with the rise in cases since Operation Yewtree. Kent Police were beginning to disrupt organised crime groups, which were causing disproportionate harm within the District.

He congratulated the Community Safety Unit for their work, with their well documented and audited processes leading the way in West Kent. The District had the lowest reported anti-social behaviour in the county.

Members of the Committee then asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Police Staffing Levels in the District
- Unauthorised encampments
- Theft in rural communities
- Cyber crime

February 2017 - County Councillor Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and James Pearson, Service Improvement Manager of the Libraries, Registration and Archives Service and Donna Dunn Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Services Manager in attendance to answer questions about Library provision in the District.

County Councillor Hill explained that libraries were the largest service provided under his portfolio and that it was a well loved service by the public. He advised that libraries would remain open as much as possible as they were an important part of the community. In the County there were 99 libraries, and this District had 5. It was important that the library buildings were used to their full capacity and

therefore other services, such as registrations were being included in library buildings.

Members of the Committee then asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Library Usage
- Services for Older and vulnerable residents
- Staffing at libraries

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

At its July 2016 meeting, the Scrutiny Committee considered the report of an In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group looking at the Leisure area.

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 - The report with a number of recommendations were forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

March 2017 - Final report of the Property Investment Strategy In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group to be considered.

### **Lessons Learned**

As ever the committee has found it challenging to ensure that we intelligently quest and probe. The fact that the Committee has done so is a credit to the members. Overall it has been striking that all those we have spoken to are trying to ensure services continue strongly despite, often, severe funding cuts and despite that challenge are still willing to be questioned, at length, by the Committee.

**Councillor James London**

**Chairman - Scrutiny Committee**