

Scrutiny Committee Annual Report to Council - 2015/16

Throughout the course of 2015/16, 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 2015/16 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 2015	Cllr Peter Fleming Policy and Performance	Future funding and the move to self-sufficiency
November 2015	Cllr Tony Searles Finance	Property Investment Strategy 2016/17 draft budget
November 2015	Cllr Peter Fleming Policy and Performance	Future funding and the move to self-sufficiency
February 2016	Cllr Robert Piper Planning	Affordable housing, call for sites, Swanley and Hextable Masterplan
February 2016	Cllr Anna Firth Legal and Democratic Services	Individual Electoral Registration, Council Trading Company, Alcohol Licensing
May 2016	Cllr Matthew Dickins Direct and Trading Services	TBC

May 2016	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Health	TBC
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External Invitees

July 2015 - County Councillor Margaret Crabtree, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform and Ian Watts, KCC Area Education Officer for the Sevenoaks District.

Mrs. Crabtree gave a presentation on apprenticeships and the commissioning of school places. With regard to apprenticeships she emphasised that they were an excellent way for young people to earn while they learnt and would increase their opportunities while improving their pay levels. Mrs Crabtree also spoke to the Committee regarding the provision of school places throughout the District and highlighted the County Council's approach in a number of different areas.

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

- Future primary provision in the Halstead area
- Costs of pupils leaving the District to attend Grammar schools elsewhere
- Future school provision in other areas of the District, including Swanley
- Apprenticeships and funding to support them

November 2015 - Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police

Chief Inspector Walford was in attendance to answer questions about crime and disorder in the Sevenoaks District. Chief Inspector Walford explained that 12 to 16 crimes were reported in the District each day, while 183 active crimes were open. Kent Police were in the top 8 forces in the country for crime reduction and while Kent experienced 61 crimes per 1,000 people, Sevenoaks District experienced only 45 crimes per 1,000 people. The largest form of crime was domestic violence, which had seen a small increase in the last year. The next largest crime was shoplifting, which occurred most at the ASDA supermarket in Swanley. Thirdly was criminal damage which, together with anti-social behaviour, had experienced declines. Kent Police would encourage further preventative measures through winter, particularly in securing allotments and garages. However he said that the District was a very safe place to be.

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

- Opening hours of District Police stations
- Road traffic incidents and measures being taken to improve safety
- The effectiveness of the 101 telephone service
- Visibility of policing in the District
- Staffing levels and consistency in approach

May 2016 - A representative from Kent County Council to discuss Commercial and Traded Services.

In-Depth Scrutiny Working Groups

At its July 2015 meeting, the Scrutiny Committee reconstituted an In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group to look 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 - To report back to Scrutiny Committee in May 2016

Lessons Learned

As the above report indicates this has been another busy year in which, with a largely new committee membership, the art of scrutinising has proved productive in holding Cabinet and key external stakeholders to account. As ever the art of being a critical friend can be problematic and ensuring a stable membership is key to success and will hopefully bear fruit during the coming years.

Councillor James London

Chairman - Scrutiny Committee