

Scrutiny Committee Annual Report to Council - 2018/19

Remit of the Scrutiny Committee

1. As per Appendix C of the Council's constitution, "Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules":

1.1 The Council is required by Law to discharge certain overview and scrutiny functions. These functions are an essential component of local democracy. The Scrutiny Committee contribute to the Council's Performance and also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions.

1.2 The Scrutiny Committee allows a wider involvement in Council business by involving non-councillors from the wider public section, voluntary groups and community groups to help them in their work. They may make reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery.

1.3 The Scrutiny Committee also monitors the decisions of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee can "call-in" a decision of the Cabinet which has been made but not yet implemented. They may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider their decision. They may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions.

1.4 Scrutiny should be carried out in a constructive way and should aim to contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of local inhabitants. The Scrutiny Committee should not shy away from the need to challenge and question decisions and make constructive criticism.

"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."

Approach

2. Throughout the course of 2018/19, the Scrutiny Committee has drawn up and followed a work plan that has focussed on four key areas. These are:

- **Inviting Cabinet Portfolio Holders** to each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee where possible to discuss particular areas of focus/challenge and concerns members may have;
- **Inviting a number of external representatives** to attend Scrutiny Committee to discuss particular areas of concern and their activities within the district;
- **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.

- **Reviewing performance of services** in relation to agreed performance indicators, in particular focusing on red flag indicators. These are discussed at meetings, with explanations being provided by Officers. Matters of serious concern are referred to the Portfolio Holder/ Cabinet as appropriate.

This approach has ensured that the Committee has scrutinised both the work of SDC and other public bodies across the district, per the Committee's above terms of reference.

Work Covered

3. Based on the above approach, the following is a summary of work carried out during 2018/19 by the Scrutiny Committee.

Portfolio Holders

4. 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 2018	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Health	Quercus Housing Health and Wellbeing West Kent Housing
July 2018	Cllr Peter Fleming Policy and Performance	Swanley Sites Corporate Plan
November 2018	Cllr John Scholey Finance	Property Investment Asset Maintenance Programme
February 2019	Cllr Anna Firth Legal and Democratic Services	Licensing Partnership Legal Successes Member Training
February 2019	Cllr Roddy Hogarth Economic and Community Development	Sevenoaks High Street Swanley Town Station Sevenoaks Community Safety Unit
April 2019	Cllr Robert Piper Planning	TBC
April 2019	Cllr Michelle Lowe Housing and Health	TBC

External Invitees

July 2018

5. Representatives from Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham in attendance.

6. Representatives from Edenbridge and Westerham and North and West Kent Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) gave a presentation on the work of Citizens Advice within the district.

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

- Budget allocations
- Criteria for clients accessing CAB services
- Impacts of Universal Credit
- Volumes of website users
- Staffing resources

November 2018

8. Chief Inspector Tony Dyer, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police in attendance.

9. Chief Inspector Dyer gave an overview of crime levels within the Sevenoaks District area. The Chief Inspector explained that Sevenoaks District has **the first or second lowest recordings for most if not all crime categories in the County**. The Sevenoaks District had also seen a reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour and had the **slowest increase in recorded crime in the County**.

10. Members were reassured that the perceived increases crime were a result of the Crime Data Integrity Inspection, affecting the way crime was reported and recorded. The roll out of Crime Data Integrity Inspections also made comparisons with other Councils outside of Kent difficult, however the Police would commence comparisons in 2019.

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

- Strategy relating to visible policing
- Current focus of resources and priority areas
- The 101 service
- Use of PCSOs

February 2019

12. Frank Czarnowski, Chief Executive of West Kent Housing in attendance.

13. A presentation was given covering the organisations 6 key objectives relating to customers, homes, older people, growth, community and viability.

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

- Anti social behaviour
- Plans for West Kent Housing garages
- The process for tenants moving including overlapping rent payments
- Property turn around times and waiting times

In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group

15. At its November 2018 meeting, the in-depth scrutiny working group presented its final report which looked at matters relating to staff recruitment and retention.

16. Councillor Brown presented the final report as Chairman of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group. The working group had been investigating a range of areas including staff turnover, sickness absence, approach to recruitment and staff benefits. Meetings had been held with a number of Officers and an external recruitment agency.

17. The Chairman noted that salaries were given as the primary reason by staff for leaving the Council, with competition from London and the private sector. Certain areas were identified as more problematic to recruit for, and Market Related Payments (MRPs) were offered in some circumstances.

18. The working group made a number of recommendations to improve staff recruitment and retention, set out in full in the report, which were further discussed by the Committee.

19. A copy of the report of the working group, considered by the Scrutiny Committee can be found at:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s35915/In%20Depth%20Scrutiny%20-%20Staffing%20Report.pdf?J=5>

20. Members agreed that the report should be referred to Cabinet following the inclusion of feedback from Committee Members.

21. Cabinet then considered the report from the Scrutiny Committee at a subsequent meeting. Cabinet thanked the Committee for the work that had been put in and referred the recommendations to officers to look at further and take forward as appropriate.

Other

22. The Chairman would like to thank his Vice Chairman, other committee Members and Officers for the work they have put in over the year.

Councillor Cameron Brown
Chairman - Scrutiny Committee
2nd April 2019