

## Scrutiny Committee Chairman's Annual Report to Council – 2023/24

### Remit of the Scrutiny Committee

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

*1.1 There is a Scrutiny Committee to discharge the functions conferred by Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole.*

*1.2 The role and scope of the Scrutiny Committee is set out in Part 5 of the Council's constitution, which also sets out the specific functions of the Scrutiny Committee to review and scrutinise decisions and performance. This includes the power to review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area, by inviting them to attend and address the Committee.*

*1.3 The Scrutiny Committee also monitors the decisions of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee can "call-in" a key decision of the Cabinet which has been made but not yet implemented. It may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider its decision. It 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.*

### Approach

2. Throughout the course of 2023/24, 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 2023/24 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
November 2023	Cllr Julia Thornton Improvement & Innovation	Customer satisfaction Staffing including retention Digital services Economic and regeneration
November 2023	Cllr Kevin Maskell Finance & Investment	Budget progress Government funding for waste collection Pressures of staff recruitment and retention
January 2024	Cllr Simon Reay Development & Conservation	Local Plan National Planning Policy Framework Building Safety Act
January 2024	Cllr Margot McArthur Cleaner & Greener	Waste Collection Climate Change CCTV
March 2024	Cllr Lesley Dyball People and Places	Future Leisure Provision, consultation and procurement. Let's Cook Scheme – healthy food on a budget
March 2024	Cllr Perry Cole Housing and Health	Tackling homelessness Primary Care Trusts Hero Service

## **External Invitees**

July 2023

### **West Kent Housing Association (WKHA)**

Tracy Allison, Chief Executive of West Kent Housing gave a presentation on the work of West Kent Housing within the District.

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

- Methods of contact with tenants
- Satisfaction of tenants with WKHA services
- Responsiveness to requirements for repairs
- Void rates and times to turn around properties
- Working relationships with Sevenoaks District Council
- Funding

November 2023

### **Kent Police**

Chief Inspector Elizabeth Jones gave an overview of the changes made over the past year in the District's policing including the neighbourhood policing model and approach to victim based crimes. She also gave an overview of 'County lines', performance statistics and some examples of recent successes.

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

- Ways of reporting anti-social behaviour
- Use of gas canisters
- Criteria for identifying focus areas.
- Staffing levels and capacity
- Hate crime

January 2024

### **South East Water and Thames Water**

David Hinton, Chief Executive and Rob Cumbie, Head of Communications, from South East Water, Richard Aylard, Sustainability Director and Carl Leadbetter, Head of Waste Network from Thames Water attended the meeting. Both companies gave presentations on their remits.

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

- Collaborative working in emergency situations
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Support to agriculture during drought conditions
- Capacity of water supply and storage
- Monitoring and repairing leaks
- Sewerage treatment and overflow into water courses
- Links to the planning process and planning for future capacity
- Works and impacts on the road network

March 2024

### **Everyone Active**

Representatives of Everyone Active gave a presentation highlighting the progress and successes relating to the interim contract in place for the operation of Sevenoaks and Edenbridge Leisure Centres and Lullingstone Park Golf Course.

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

- Membership levels
- Maintenance and cleaning schedules
- Catering provision
- Costs
- Marketing activities and competition

### **In-Depth Scrutiny**

July 2023

The Committee resolved: That

- a) an In-depth Scrutiny Working Group be set up consisting of Cllrs: Horwood (Chairman), Baker, Leaman, Manston and Scott (co-opted);
- b) The working group consider the challenges and available measures relating to homelessness prevention including the approach and suitability of out of district placements; and
- c) A report on the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

January 2024

The Chairman of the working group, introduced the report and thanked Officers and the working group. He highlighted some key elements of the report, which included

high temporary accommodation net costs, impact of out of district placements, key performance indicators and customer satisfaction.

The Committee discussed the recommendations within the report and agreed recommendations were made to Cabinet which were considered at its meeting of 8 February 2024.

#### January 2024 cont.

The Committee resolved: That

- a) an in-depth scrutiny working group be set up consisting of Cllrs: Haslam (Chairman), Baker, Horwood and Robinson;
- b) The working group consider staff recruitment, retention and wellbeing; and
- c) A report on the work of the in-depth scrutiny working group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

#### **Call-in**

#### September 2023

The Key Decisions relating to disposal of land resolved at the meeting of Cabinet on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were called in by 5 cross party members.

The Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment were present to answer questions arising relating to rationale of the decisions that had been subject to call-in.

Members debated the matter and a vote was taken. It was resolved that no further action be taken, and the decision be implemented.

**Councillor Diana Esler**  
**Chairman – Scrutiny Committee**