



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20



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FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR STUART BIRD, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I am delighted to be able to present my foreword to the first Annual Report of the new Scrutiny Committee of the newly formed East Suffolk Council. This Report will provide a retrospective record of the work undertaken by the Committee, its activities, and achievements in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

It was an honour to be elected as the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee in May 2019. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my two predecessors – Alison Cackett who chaired Waveney District Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and Phillip Dunnett who chaired Suffolk Coastal District Council's Scrutiny Committee – for their commitment and past contributions to the effective delivery of scrutiny functions and aims. I am fortunate to be supported by an experienced and enthusiastic Vice Chairman, Councillor Mike Deacon, and I have very much valued his support as I have settled into the role of Chairman.

The new Committee has examined various areas of the Council's work and, in some cases, the work of partner organisations that have significance for our local communities. We have also introduced a regular item to receive an update by individual Cabinet Members. This is an opportunity for the Cabinet Member to outline their key deliverables in the next six months and to identify any value that Scrutiny might be able to add to the pre-decision stages and the ultimate outcomes for the Council. This might be just seeking the Committee's thoughts or, equally, there is the offer of a "critical friend" - checking and challenging but in a constructive and purposeful way. At these sessions, the Scrutiny Committee aims to act as an influencing body acting positively to contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services.

Scrutiny will always seek to act as a counterbalance that complements the decision-making powers of the Cabinet as the new Committee changes its emphasis from the operational detail to the strategic overview and seeks to ensure better outcomes through constructive engagement with Cabinet, the Council's Officers, and its partners. I hope this Report reflects what I feel has been a very productive year in Scrutiny. I do hope that you find this Report informative and interesting.

Councillor Stuart Bird, Chairman, Scrutiny Committee



1. THE ROLE OF SCRUTINY

What we do

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new set of “political management arrangements” for the running of Councils, including the formalising of executive arrangements for local government to be balanced by a strong scrutiny function to ensure decision-makers were held to account. To carry out this scrutiny function, the arrangements included the power to do *anything they consider likely to promote or improve the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area.*

The role and purpose of scrutiny is to add value to the delivery of public services through providing strong but measured challenge both to the Cabinet and to external organisations where there are issues of public concern. It acts as a 'critical friend' to decision makers by beneficially examining the Council's policies, key decisions, and service provision to ensure they are appropriate, efficient, transparent, accountable and in the best interests of the District's residents. Since 2010, several pieces of legislation have further emphasised the value of scrutiny within modern and effective government, including reviewing issues which lie outside the Council's responsibilities. This is achieved by having co-operative relationships between scrutinised bodies and the Committee.

Scrutiny is led by local, elected Councillors working with other local bodies and local communities to help the constructive improvement of services. Scrutiny uses open and transparent processes and is an influencing, rather than a decision-making, body. It provides co-ordinated reviews of policy and service performance in line with strategic objectives and corporate priorities. Its challenges are constructive and purposeful. It is objective, focused, and realistic in its reviews. These are evidence-based so demonstrating that scrutiny is credible and useful at adding value.

Scrutiny is a catalyst for positive change, promotes and acknowledges good practice and challenges under-performance.

Meetings of the Committee are open to the public and, in the majority, held in the evenings. The Committee has endeavoured to engage with the wider community and to involve stakeholders and the public at its meetings, as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Committee is also the Council's designated **Crime and Disorder Committee** for the purposes of the Police and Social Justice Act 2006 (s19-22) and receives an annual report on community safety issues from the Council's Officers but also from senior members of Suffolk Constabulary.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 (s190) gave Councils powers to scrutinise local NHS trusts, including Primary Care Trusts. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gave more powers to local government to scrutinise

other public organisations, including bodies such as, for example, the Environment Agency. In 2019/20, the Committee did not review any aspects of health provision, but the power remains available to do so as considered necessary.

The Scrutiny Committee conducts its proceedings in accordance with its Terms of Reference (as set out in Part 2, Section C, Functions and Responsibilities of the Constitution) and the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (as set out in Part 3, Procedure Rules, of the [Constitution](#)).

The principles of good public scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, established in 2003, promotes the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government. The Centre has set out the four principles of good public scrutiny as:

- *To provide a critical friend “challenge” to executive policymakers and decision-makers*
- *To enable the voice and concerns of the public*
- *To be carried out by “independent minded governors” who lead and own the scrutiny role; and*
- *To drive improvement in public services*

What we do not do

The Scrutiny Committee does not deal with quasi-judicial matters such as Planning or Licensing, except if there were to be a significant system issue. It does not deal with issues that are, or should be, resolved by the separate corporate complaints procedure or through internal systems within Service Teams. The Committee does not deal with vexatious or discriminatory issues or matters that are not of wider community significance, the latter being more appropriately pursued through the relevant Service Team, Ward Councillor or Cabinet Member with responsibility for the area in question.

Scrutiny does not become involved where there would be duplication of existing work, or if its review would be untimely or would not lead to effective outcomes.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Council’s Constitution contains detailed role descriptions outlining the purpose, duties, and responsibilities of the various members of the Committee, as well as the qualities and skills required. They are designed to be used as a guide and a working document but are not intended to be prescriptive or exclusive. These can be found within [Part 2, Functions and Responsibilities](#), of the Constitution on our website, but a brief summary is also provided below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee

At East Suffolk, the Chairman is a member of the Administration Group of the Council; the Vice Chairman is a member of an Opposition Group.

The Chairman provides leadership and ensures the Committee is Member-led and has ownership of its work programme. S/he aims to develop positive relationships and encourages contributions from Members. The Chairman also ensures the Committee works inclusively and that the role of scrutiny is conducted in an enabling environment.

Committee Members

Members of the Committee contribute actively at the meetings with fairness and impartiality. They will participate, as appropriate, in the collection and assessment of evidence to produce effective recommendations and follow up on any recommendations made. Committee members take an overview of all the activities the Council is involved in and can decide to scrutinise issues.

Partner and public involvement

The views of local people are of importance to the primary aim of scrutiny – *improving the quality of life for the local community*. Partners and the public can contribute specific expertise to topics being examined from the perspective of either a service provider or a service user. Their involvement adds value and strengthens the links with stakeholders.

The work of the Scrutiny Committee also provides Members with additional opportunities to engage with groups within the community who may not readily get involved directly in the work of the Council. Therefore, it remains important for the Scrutiny Committee to be outward-looking and to consider how partners and the public might be involved in its work.

Such involvement may be through formal 'co-option' or invitations to representatives of groups to contribute expert knowledge or evidence, or to members of the public to contribute their views.

Scrutiny welcomes and encourages our Partners as well as members of the public who live or work in the District to get involved and suggestions for the work of our Committee will be considered for their suitability. Please email our Democratic Services Officer Katherine.abbott@eastsoffolk.gov.uk in the first instance.

3. THE COMMITTEE'S WORK DURING 2019/20

Instead of a complete commentary of all that the Scrutiny Committee has achieved over the year, this Report provides a brief summary of the key highlights of the work the Committee has been engaged in during 2019/20. The related full formal Committee reports and resulting minutes may also be viewed on our [website](#).

In summary, during 2019/20, the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the following key areas:

July 2019:

- Appointments to Outside Bodies with a scrutiny function: To agree appointments from the Committee membership (*see Membership of Outside Bodies below*)
- Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference and Procedure Notes: To adopt
- Review of the Scrutiny Committee's forms and guides: To approve

September 2019:

- Community Energy Saving Programme: To review the procedures and processes for endorsing external companies (and their sub-contractors) and how standards or work are maintained
- Council Housing Development in Southwold: To review, comment upon and make recommendations as necessary

December 2019:

- Capital Programme 2020/21
- Capital Strategy 2020/21 – 2023/24
- Housing Revenue Account Budget 2020/21
- Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2020/21 and Treasury Management Investment Statement 2020/21
- Draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2023/24

All the above reports were for review, comment and to make recommendation to Cabinet and Full Council

January 2020:

- Draft General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2020/21: To review, comment upon and make recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council
- East Suffolk Strategic Plan: To review and make recommendations to Full Council
- Cabinet Member update (Leader of the Council)

May 2020:

- Review of Postal Voting and Count Arrangements at the District and European Elections in 2019: To review and make recommendations as necessary
- Cabinet Member update (Planning and Coastal Management)

Task and Finish Groups

There have been no Task and Finish Groups established in the period of this report.

Membership of Outside Bodies

The Leader of the Council has stated that the Scrutiny Committee be asked to decide on the appointment of a representative to external forums with scrutiny functions. In 2019/20, the Committee considered and appointed the following members to the Committees indicated below:

- Suffolk County Council Joint Health Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Judy Cloke (also a member of the East Suffolk Council’s Scrutiny Committee).
- Suffolk County Council Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Keith Patience (as volunteer member representative Cllr Patience not being a member of the East Suffolk Council’s Scrutiny Committee).

Call-ins and Councillors’ Calls for Action

There have been no Call-ins or Calls for Action in the period of this report.

Training

The following scrutiny-specific training for members of the Committee were held in the 2019/20 Municipal Year:

16 August 2019: Planning for effective scrutiny

The Seminar was facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and led by national best practice and latest guidelines. The CfPS is an independent national body which promotes and supports excellence in governance and scrutiny. It provides independent and impartial advice across the public sector.

The Seminar covered the main areas of focus for the new authority and aimed to help the members of the Scrutiny Committee acquire and/or progress their skills and experience in leading an effective scrutiny role.

4 December 2019: Financial scrutiny

The training was also facilitated by the CfPS. The main areas of focus were the financial scrutiny of budgets, medium term financial plans, commercial ventures and their fit with Council plans and objectives. It aimed to give Scrutiny Councillors an understanding of the role scrutiny played in the development and delivery of the Council’s medium-term financial plans and budget as well as an enhanced understanding of how the medium-term financial plan and budget support the Council’s strategic objectives and priorities.

Budget

The Scrutiny Committee has an annual budget of £6000. In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, the Committee spent £3306.48 on scrutiny-specific training (*as detailed above*).

Dates of meetings held in the 2019/20 Municipal Year:

The Covid-19 pandemic and the Government's national instructions necessitated the cancellation of the March 2020 meeting. However, the Committee was able to re-commence its formal meetings in May 2020 pursuant to the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 via the Zoom video conferencing system and to broadcast live on the Council's YouTube channel. An Extraordinary meeting was held in June 2020 to ensure the planned work programme remained on course.

- 25 July 2019
- 26 September 2019
- 16 December 2019
- 23 January 2020
- 26 March 2020 (cancelled)
- 28 May 2020

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Forward Work Programme and how its contents are determined

At the time of writing this Report, the Committee has, so far, decided to review the following matters in the coming Municipal Year, in addition to the key budgetary and strategic finance reports it is required to receive:

- The Council's Asset Management Strategy
- The Council's Housing Development Strategy
- The economic recovery and regeneration of the District post Covid-19

In addition, the Committee will, in the coming year, receive a formal Committee report by the Council's Monitoring Officer on the Government's recent statutory scrutiny guidance for consideration. This will provide an opportunity to further review of our current arrangements and identify any areas for development so that we continue to focus on the 'big things' where a positive impact may be delivered.