



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

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FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR PHILLIP DUNNETT, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I am very pleased to be able to present the foreword to the 2014/15 Annual Report on the work of the Scrutiny Committee at Suffolk Coastal District Council. This report provides a retrospective record of the work undertaken by the Committee and its activities and achievements in the last Municipal Year.

Following the District Council local elections in May 2015, I would first like to take this opportunity to thank those who sat on the Committee during 2014/15 - but are no longer serving Councillors - for contributing their valuable time, knowledge and views towards the achievement of the Committee's objectives. I would also like to welcome those Councillors who now sit on the Committee. I look forward to working with them as we continue to endeavour to make a positive contribution in the delivery of the Council's priorities and service delivery principles. I believe Scrutiny is an excellent opportunity for new Members to gain understanding of the Council as it enables direct involvement in the development of both new and existing services.

Scrutiny remains, fundamentally, about improving outcomes for people. It is positive, objective and constructive and aims to add value to any service that it considers. The Scrutiny Committee acknowledges good practice but also recommends improvements where these may be necessary. Our work is independently led, in an open and transparent way, by local elected Councillors who question, evaluate and, if necessary, challenge policies, decisions and performance.

The Committee has a coordinated and focussed work programme which ensures it undertakes its business in a targeted and meaningful manner. During 2014/15, the Committee again engaged with a broad scope of policies and services of interest both to the Council and also to the wider community.

I thank all my colleagues on the Committee, and their Substitutes, for their enthusiasm and support which help to make the role of a busy Scrutiny Committee meaningful and possible. On behalf of the Committee, I also thank the Officers who support us in our work.

Councillor Phillip Dunnett
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 in order 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. During 2014/15, we have actively gathered evidence from external witnesses – for example in September 2014, senior representatives of the NHS Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group were invited to discuss the commissioning and management of healthcare services within the District. Scrutiny has scope for public participation and very much welcomes suggestions from Members and the public on wider issues for review.

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. During

2014/15, the Committee reviewed changes to core policing priorities which included hearing directly from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk, accompanied by the Assistant Chief Constable, on proposals for change and their implications (see *Section 3*).

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. As mentioned above, during 2014/15, and within this particular remit, the Committee reviewed in detail the changes to the organisation and provision of local NHS services as introduced by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (see *Section 3*).

The Scrutiny Committee conducts its proceedings in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution, which is available on the Council's website.

www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

The principles of good public scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, established in 2003, further 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 policy-makers 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

During the 2014/15 Municipal Year, the Committee was comprised as follows:

Councillor Phillip Dunnett (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Deacon (Vice Chairman)
Councillor Les Binns
Councillor Stuart Bird
Councillor Christine Block
Councillor Peter Coleman
Councillor Terry Eastman
Councillor Jan Garfield
Councillor Graham Harding
Councillor Trevor Hawkins
Councillor Graham Peck
Councillor Barry Slater
Councillor John Withey

In order to achieve its aim of being a constructive 'critical friend', the Committee works to a co-ordinated work programme which addresses the issues considered to be pertinent to the Council and the community. The work programme is reviewed and updated at each meeting. This flexible management of the work programme enables the Committee to consider issues which, though not previously scheduled, merit more immediate inclusion, as necessary, and helps to maintain clarity of purpose. Topics for scrutiny may be selected because, for example, they are of key importance to the district, or they are raised regularly with Councillors by the public, or are issues which feature in consultations which the Council conducts.

Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee

At Suffolk Coastal, the Chairman is a member of the Administration Group of the Council; the Vice Chairman is a member of the/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 and effectively promoted to the public, for example through specific item in the Council's magazine *Coastline* available on the Council's website. www.suffolkcoastal.go.uk

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 particular issues.

No scrutiny-specific training of Members of the Committee was conducted during 2014/15. A successful and useful scrutiny-specific development session was held for Members of the Committee, together with our counterparts from Waveney District Council, in July 2015.

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 particular groups to contribute expert knowledge or evidence, or to members of the public to contribute their views.

Also, as stated above, Scrutiny very much welcomes suggestions from Members and the public on wider issues for review.

3. THE COMMITTEE’S WORK DURING 2014/15

In addition to the references to the Committee’s work on health and well-being issues and policing priorities earlier in this report, for ease of reference, I have listed below the other main areas of work we have undertaken in 2014/15 and in the chronological order they were considered by the Committee:

Review of the Council’s Petitions Scheme: The Council’s petitions scheme is published on our website and there is a requirement for the Council to use any appropriate means to bring it to the attention of the population of the District. There is a requirement for the petitions scheme to meet a number of standards but there is discretion to adopt a scheme suitable to a local area, including an electronic online version. In 2011, it was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee that the petitions scheme would be reviewed annually.

During its review, the Committee did not recommend any changes to the scheme and agreed that future reviews will be undertaken at least once every four years i.e. at least once during each administration and our work programme now reflects this decision.

Community safety: As the Council’s designated Crime and Disorder Committee, we receive an annual update on community safety, particularly with regard to the Council’s statutory obligation to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder. In July 2014, we received information about certain funded projects which had been commissioned and which highlighted personal safety, good citizenship and positive role model experiences being progressed through the Suffolk Coastal Community Safety Partnership.

Also in July 2014, the Committee received an update on its Member Working Group's previous findings on issues of vandalism and considered the areas of work underway by the Community Safety Partnership to raise awareness and address this issue.

ICT provision within Suffolk Coastal District Council: Further to the Committee's work in the previous Municipal Year, in July and November 2014 we received reports on progress against the implementation of the comprehensive ICT action plan.

Provision of affordable broadband services:

This Member Working Group was formed in May 2013 and, in July 2013, the Committee agreed that the remit of the Working Group would be "to enquire how efficiently and how soon improved Broadband provision can be extended to the whole District, with particular regard to remote and rural areas, and to explore other available options".

As I reported last year, the Committee considered and agreed the Working Group's full and final recommendations to Cabinet in November 2013. The Working Group continues to proactively pursue improvements in the provision of affordable broadband to those who may otherwise not receive a service and it provides a verbal update on progress – which has been considerable and successful - to each meeting of the Committee.

Member Working Groups/Task and Finish Groups: The Committee is supported on detailed work by specific Member working groups or task and finish groups. The number of Members comprising such a group will be determined when the task group is established and dependant, in part, on the amount of detailed and supported work that will be required. No member of the Cabinet may sit on a task group convened for scrutiny purposes. Task Groups have no decision-making powers but do make recommendations to the main Committee.

During 2014/15, the Member Working Group on the provision of affordable broadband services continued with its specific and focussed work.

Call-ins: The Local Government Act 2000 introduced the power for individual members of the Cabinet to make certain decisions on their own. In order to balance these new powers and that of the collective Cabinet, scrutiny arrangements were introduced which included the right to call-in executive decisions. This system is further enforced by an ethical standards framework which was also introduced by the Act. It is the intention of the Act that the powers to call-in a decision are used in exceptional circumstances.

Full details of the Council's call-in procedures can be found in Part 4 of our Constitution which is available on our website www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk

During 2014/15, no call-ins were requested.

Dates of meetings held in the 2014/15 Municipal Year:

The Committee met on six occasions in the Municipal Year 2014/15.

18 June 2014
10 July 2014
11 September 2014
20 November 2014
15 January 2015
12 March 2015

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Work programme for 2015/16

The Committee reviews its forward work programme at every meeting and, where necessary, adjusts the schedule to enable new work to be undertaken if an issue of local concern emerges. This allows members of the Committee to decide collectively on topics for review taking into account the impact and relevance of the issue, and consideration of the Council's corporate priorities.

The Committee has recently reviewed performance around waste bin collections and will shortly consider the sale of the Spa Pavilion theatre.