



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Produced: January 2017

Contents

Foreword by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee

The role of Scrutiny

- **What we do**
- **The principles of good public scrutiny**
- **What we do not do**

Scrutiny Committee

- **Membership (2015/16 Municipal Year)**
- **Roles and responsibilities**
- **The Scrutiny Committee's work during 2015/16**
- **Member Working Groups/Task and finish groups**
- **Call-ins**
- **Dates of meetings in 2015/16**

Looking ahead

- **Work programme for 2016/17**

FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR PHILLIP DUNNETT, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I am very pleased to be able to present the foreword to the 2015/16 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.

A robust Scrutiny function is an important element within the Council's governance and decision-making arrangements. 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 2015/16, the Committee again engaged with a broad scope of policies and services of interest both to the Council and also to the wider community.

My thanks, as always, to 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 all those who were involved in supporting or assisting the scrutiny process in 2015/16, including our Officers and partners.

I hope you will find this report interesting and informative.

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. A key aim is to make decision-making processes more transparent, accountable and inclusive. 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 scrutiny's value 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; it helps to promote and acknowledge good practice and challenges under-performance so effective improvements can be made.

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 2015/16, we have actively gathered evidence from external witnesses –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.

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.eastsuffolk.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 2015/16 Municipal Year, the Committee was comprised as follows:

Councillor Phillip Dunnett (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Deacon (Vice Chairman)
Councillor Stuart Bird
Councillor Christine Block
Councillor Stephen Burroughes (*since November 2015*)
Councillor Peter Coleman
Councillor Jane Day
Councillor Graham Harding
Councillor Colin Hedgley (*since July 2015*)
Councillor Geoff Lynch
Councillor Ian Pratt
Councillor Susan Mower

Councillor Paul Rous

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 items in the Council's magazine *Coastline* available on the Council's website. www.eastsuffolk.gov.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 2015/16.

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

3. THE COMMITTEE'S WORK DURING 2015/16

For ease of reference, I have listed below the main areas of work we undertook in 2015/16 in the chronological order they were considered by the Committee:

Presentation on performance and activity around bin collections:

In July 2015, the Committee received a presentation by Mr Emms, Director, Suffolk Coastal Norse, which provided an overview of green waste collections, the combined challenges which had resulted in reduced performance against targets, an outline of service failures which had occurred, related communications issues, the solutions put in place and the results of this combined action. The Committee questioned Suffolk Coastal Norse on their performance and received assurance that the operational issues had been resolved.

Update on the review of Planning Services:

In September 2015, the Committee received a detailed update on the current status of the agreed actions arising from the recommendations which had originated from the Committee's comprehensive review of Planning Services during 2010. The update also provided the current position with regard to staffing levels, performance, the planning IT system and the accessing of information. The Committee formally concluded this review of the Planning Service.

Review and response to questions regarding the sale of the Spa Pavilion, Felixstowe:

In November 2015, the Committee considered the issues previously raised by Councillor Deacon following the completion of the sale of the Spa Pavilion to NRG in May 2015 and was also provided with an explanation of the background to that sale and related processes. The Committee concluded that the process had been rigorously examined, including the procedures and policies followed during the marketing and sale.

Site Allocations and Area Specific Policies Development Plan Document and the Felixstowe Peninsula Area Action Plan – Proposed Submission Documents

In March 2016, the Committee considered these two Documents which related to the delivery of the policies of the Core Strategy. The presentation

referred to the key stages in the preparation of the two Documents including their publication, subject to Council's approval, in order to receive representations in relation to their "soundness", the four tests of "soundness", and the submission of the Documents for independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate. The Committee resolved that, subject to the amendments requested during its discussions, the documents were noted and endorsed for further consideration by Full Council.

Suffolk Local Policing Review:

In May 2016, the Committee welcomed the Chief Constable who provided an informative presentation on his recent Review of Suffolk's Local Policing. The Committee invited the Chief Constable to return in one year to update the Committee on how the changes arising from the Review had progressed (See Section 4 below).

Review of the Council's and Partners' interventions relating to an unauthorised traveller encampment at Grange Farm, Kesgrave in June 2015:

Also in May 2016, the Committee received a report which provided an analysis of the interventions taken in relation to the unauthorised traveller encampment in June 2015 and considered other viable and alternative enforcement options for further evaluation and discussion. The report also considered the financial implications. The Committee considered the various options for dealing with unauthorised encampments and commented on each accordingly.

Provision of affordable broadband services:

A 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 two years ago, the Committee considered and agreed the Working Group's full and final recommendations at 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.

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.eastsuffolk.gov.uk

During 2015/16, no call-ins were requested.

Dates of meetings held in the 2015/16 Municipal Year:

The Committee met on six occasions in the Municipal Year 2015/16.

9 July 2015
10 September 2015
19 November 2015
1 February 2016
10 March 2016
12 May 2016

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Work programme for 2016/17

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 Business Plan which provides details of the Council's future vision and corporate priorities, including meeting the current and future needs of our communities.

The Committee has recently reviewed its Petitions Scheme as well as the provision of affordable broadband to rural locations with the assistance of representatives of Suffolk County Council and the Better Broadband for Suffolk project team. Early in 2017, the Committee intends to shortly consider the cutting of hedgerows and grass verges as well as the maintenance of, and access to, footpaths. It will also receive an update from the Chief Constable in Spring 2017 on the progress of the Suffolk Local Policing Review (see Section 3 above).