



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

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FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR PHILLIP DUNNETT, CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I am very pleased to be able to present my foreword to the 2016/17 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.

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. In the last Municipal Year, the Scrutiny Committee has continued to endeavour to make a positive contribution in the delivery of the Council's priorities and service delivery principles.

The Committee has a coordinated and focussed work programme which ensures it undertakes its business in a targeted and meaningful manner. During 2016/17, the Committee again engaged with a broad scope of policies and services of interest both to the Council and also to the wider community and this is reflected later in this report.

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. In particular, I thank my Vice Chairman, Councillor Mike Deacon, for his continued and valued contribution to the Committee's endeavours. 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. Scrutiny has scope for public participation and very much welcomes suggestions from other 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 2016/17, the Committee received a presentation from the Chief Constable and his Officers on the Suffolk Local Policing Review, and had the opportunity to discuss the details of the revised policing map for the county and the new locations of response bases and neighbourhood policing teams. (*see also 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. In 2016/17, 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 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 2016/17 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
Councillor Peter Coleman
Councillor Jane Day
Councillor Graham Harding
Councillor Colin Hedgley
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.

At the Committee's request, a successful and useful scrutiny-specific development session was held for Members of the Committee, in September 2017, on the review of complex financial information.

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 2016/17

For ease of reference, I have listed below the other main areas of work undertaken in 2016/17 and which have been considered, in depth, 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.

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.

During the period of this report, the Scrutiny Committee also reviewed the Council's and Partner interventions relating to the unauthorised traveller encampment on Grange Farm, Kesgrave in June 2015. The Committee also considered whether or not there were other viable alternative enforcement options and reviewed the financial costs of dealing with unauthorised encampments.

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”.

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.

The Committee also met, informally, with the (then) Minister of State for Digital in May 2017 and took the opportunity to apprise him of its active pursuit of improvements in broadband.

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 2016/17, 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.eastsuffolk.gov.uk

During 2016/17, no call-ins were requested.

Dates of meetings held in the 2016/17 Municipal Year:

The Committee met on six occasions in the Municipal Year 2016/17:

12 May 2016; 14 July 2016; 15 September 2016; 17 November 2016; 19 January 2017 and 30 March 2017.

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Forward Work Programme

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.