



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Committee Annual Report 2012/13

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Welcome to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's Annual Report for 2012/13.

The role of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee is a very important one as the Committee can scrutinise or influence decisions before they are taken and make formal recommendations to individual Portfolio Holders, Cabinet or Full Council. It is also able to monitor the work of Cabinet Members and has done this throughout the year by inviting individual Portfolio Holders to attend meetings of the Committee and provide updates on the service areas they are responsible for.

It is an honour to serve as the Chairman of this Committee and, as is shown in this report, we have been busy looking at all kinds of issues which affect the residents of South Cambridgeshire. These issues have ranged from recycling and housing to health and wellbeing and the Committee has also had the opportunity to influence the development of key issues such as the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (its budget) and the aims, approaches and actions included as part of its Corporate Plan.

In reviewing health and wellbeing in particular I was able to gain an understanding of just how huge the health and wellbeing agenda is. The Council contributed to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy earlier in the year, with some of the suggestions put forward being incorporated into the final document. Health and wellbeing in South Cambridgeshire is influenced by all of the Council's service areas and is a good example of how working in partnership can work effectively. I am pleased that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee has been involved in such an important issue.

(I propose to include a section within my foreword about crime and disorder and two ICT related scrutiny reviews. These issues are due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee in April, so the content of my foreword in relation to them will depend on the outcome of the meeting).

So in summary, as a Committee we are looking at the key issues that affect the people living and working in South Cambridgeshire to ensure that the Council is providing effective services of high quality whilst achieving value for money. It therefore gives me great pleasure to submit this annual report to you.



Councillor Ben Shelton
Chairman, Scrutiny and Overview Committee

What is Scrutiny?

The aim of the Council's scrutiny function is to provide an open and transparent forum in which to examine whether South Cambridgeshire District Council's policies and services are meeting the needs of local people. The Committee itself does not have any decision-making powers, but it does have the power to influence and can make evidence-based recommendations to decision-takers that are informed by stakeholders and public opinion, performance comparisons, best practice and expert advice. Scrutiny and Overview Committees are often described as a Council's 'critical friend'.

The Committee can also challenge Cabinet decisions. The Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee or any five Councillors can, in certain circumstances, 'call-in' a decision that has been made but not yet implemented in accordance with the Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee Procedure Rules. The Committee is then able to interview the relevant member of Cabinet or officers, examine the evidence and suggest improvements to the decision, or refer it to Full Council for further consideration.

Effective scrutiny provides an additional, independent resource for reviewing decisions and policies without being divisive or confrontational. Scrutiny Councillors are in a unique position to influence policy and contribute to the decision-making process.

When working well, scrutiny and overview can help to: -

- get to the heart of issues
- develop new ideas
- engage and provide a voice for service users
- improve decision-making
- strengthen accountability
- contribute to policy development
- monitor and improve services

Scrutiny at South Cambridgeshire District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council has one scrutiny committee, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, which consists of thirteen non-executive District Councillors drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole. The following Councillors served on the committee for the 2012/13 municipal year: -

Chairman: Councillor Ben Shelton

Vice-Chairman: Councillor David Whiteman-Downes

Councillors:

Alison Elcox

Jose Hales

Roger Hall

Lynda Harford

Mark Hersom

Roger Hickford

Douglas de Lacey

Janet Lockwood

Ted Ridgeway Watt

Bridget Smith

Bunty Waters

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year: -

Councillors:

David Bard

Richard Barrett

Neil Davies

Sally Hatton

Tumi Hawkins,

Charles Nightingale

Tony Orgee

Deborah Roberts

Neil Scarr

Hazel Smith

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee was supported by a dedicated Scrutiny Officer until September 2012 when the individual post holder left the authority and responsibility for the Council's scrutiny and overview function returned to the Democratic Services Team. A new Democratic Services Team Leader was appointed in October 2012 and was allocated as the lead officer for scrutiny. This post holder, together with a Democratic Services Officer, subsequently supported the work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

How does the Scrutiny and Overview Committee decide what to scrutinise?

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee sets its own work programme and topic suggestions can be gained from numerous sources, including: -

- the Customer Complaints system*
- individual Councillors
- local petitions
- partner organisations
- officers
- residents*
- Portfolio Holder Scrutiny Monitors
- the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions

* The committee does not scrutinise individual complaints as there are other ways to resolve these, but it would consider any underlying trend or policy where there might be a number of similar cases.

Programme planning takes place at the start of the municipal year and the committee's work programme is considered as a standing item at every meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. Additional items for consideration will usually be added during the year as and when they arise, which can be a mixture of one-off topics and items that require more in-depth Scrutiny Reviews.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee usually meet with officers from Democratic Services to agree upon the agenda content and running order prior to each meeting of the committee.

Scrutiny Reviews

Scrutiny Reviews provide the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with opportunities to consider specific issues in more detail, sometimes outside of formal meetings involving a small group of Councillors with experience, expertise or an interest in the subject being reviewed. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee will ultimately agree whether or not a Scrutiny Review on a particular issue will be undertaken. Any initial requests for Scrutiny Reviews usually go through a scoping process, which is designed to outline terms of reference for the review and identify how the piece of work should be conducted from the following options: -

Scrutiny Review by the Full Committee

A Scrutiny Review by the full Scrutiny and Overview Committee could take place when all Councillors on the committee express an interest in scrutinising a specific issue. These meetings would normally be held in public with the review culminating in formal recommendations to a decision taker.

Scrutiny Review by a Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Groups are typically established when significant research and evidence gathering is necessary to assist in the production of a comprehensive report substantiating a set of recommendations to decision takers. An appropriate timetable would be agreed at the commencement of the Scrutiny Review, with most Task and Finish Groups aiming to have completed their reviews by six months. These meetings are usually not held in public.

Scrutiny Review by an Informal Working Group

Informal Working Groups with relevant officers, Portfolio Holders or external parties are an effective means of undertaking Scrutiny Reviews that do not require significant research or evidence and can be completed in a much shorter timescale. Formal recommendations can still come out of a review carried out by Informal Working Groups, but a comprehensive report is usually unnecessary. The informal format of these meetings would mean that they are not held in public.

Scrutiny Review by a Focus Group

A Focus Group could carry out a Scrutiny Review on any issue that requires an urgent response. It would take the shape of a significant fact-finding exercise, taking up one or two full days in an intensive session with very little research required and report its outcomes to relevant officers or decision takers.

Work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee during 2012/13

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee met as a full committee on seven occasions in the 2012/13 Municipal Year: -

5 July 2012

The main item considered at this meeting was the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy, ahead of the Council submitting a formal response to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the content of the Strategy. Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee took the opportunity to question Councillor Sue Ellington as the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the health and wellbeing agenda on a range of related issues. These included future funding, the content of a recent questionnaire, identifying areas of deprivation, identifying hidden health issues and residents returning home from hospital.

Councillor Sue Ellington was also invited to provide the committee with a presentation on the varied responsibilities of her Portfolio where she updated Members on the Council's recycling performance.

6 September 2012

The Council's Benefits Manager attended this meeting and explained the background to and key provisions of the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme, which had been introduced as part of the Government's Welfare Reform and Deficit Reduction proposals. A substantial public consultation process was undertaken on a range of options open to the Council in respect of this Scheme to reduce Council Tax exemptions and discounts on certain types of empty and second homes. The Committee considered and provided comments on each of these options, which informed Cabinet and subsequently Full Council prior to implementation of the Scheme in April 2013.

5 November 2012

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Corporate Plan, prior to consideration of both issues by Cabinet and Full Council. Formal recommendations on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Corporate Plan were submitted to and supported by Cabinet.

A quarterly performance monitoring report was also considered at this meeting. In particular it highlighted continued improvements in reducing sickness absences levels amongst staff and an underperformance against target in relation to waste being diverted to landfill.

10 January 2013

The Director of Health and Environmental Services, on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, provided the committee with an update on the Mechanical Biological Treatment Processing Plant in response to the underperformance reported at the committee's meeting in November.

Councillor James Hockney, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, was also invited to provide the committee with an update on the areas of responsibility that came under his Portfolio. In particular he updated members on the performance of the new in-house Customer Contact Centre, the launch of the new Website and key issues for each of the service areas he was responsible for. As part of his presentation, Councillor Hockney reported progress made on the recommendations of previously undertaken Scrutiny Reviews on 'Customer Contact' and 'Learning from Customer Feedback'.

The committee considered an item of pre-decision scrutiny on the Grants Programme for 2013/14 which was scheduled for a decision by the Leader of the Council. The Council's Head of New Communities provided an update on the consultation process that had been undertaken on this issue, which at the time of the meeting was still on-going. In view of the consultation process and the fact that members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were invited to attend the Leader's Portfolio Holder Meeting on 1 February 2013 to put forward their views, the committee agreed not to submit a formal recommendation.

Further to the meeting held on 6 September 2012, the committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny on the draft Localised Council Tax Support Scheme prior to its consideration by Cabinet and subsequently Full Council. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supported adoption of the Scheme.

A report by the Council's Executive Director (Corporate Services) was considered in relation to Business Rate Pooling and the Scrutiny and Overview Committee recommended to Cabinet that South Cambridgeshire District Council should not join the Growing Cambridgeshire pool for business rate retention. This recommendation was accepted by Cabinet.

The Leader of the Council presented a report that was scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on 14 January 2013, which sought approval to finalise and submit an expression of interest in a Greater Cambridge City Deal to Government. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supported submission of this expression of interest, which was subsequently approved by Cabinet.

14 February 2013

This meeting provided the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an opportunity to reconsider the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy ahead of the budget meeting of Full Council scheduled to be held on 28 February 2013.

A further update on the Mechanical Biological Treatment Processing Plant was received.

A quarterly performance monitoring report was considered at this meeting, where general discussion ensued on the Council's new website, the Local Development Plan and the strategy to reduce barriers to employment.

21 March 2013

Members were informed at this meeting that work was progressing to bring the Mechanical Biological Treatment Processing Plant back to full working order. They also noted that AmeyCespa was putting all black-bin waste straight to landfill, which was a commercial decision based on it being more expensive to transport the black-bin waste elsewhere and pay to have it processed and subsequently landfilled by another party. The committee was disappointed at this response and agreed to invite representatives from AmeyCespa and Cambridgeshire County Council to a future meeting of the committee.

A report by the South Cambridgeshire Youth Council was considered at this meeting, which provided the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on the work that the Youth Council had carried out over the past couple of months. Members agreed that update reports from the Youth Council would feature as a standing item on the committee's agenda for alternate meetings.

Jane Belman, Scrutiny and Improvement Officer from Cambridgeshire County Council, provided the Committee with a briefing on health service changes in the county and their implications. Ms Belman was the responsible support officer for the County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and answered a number of questions on the role of the Local Health Partnership and General Practitioner led Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, was invited to provide the committee with an update on the areas of responsibility that came under his Portfolio. He reported progress made on the recommendations of previously undertaken Scrutiny Reviews on 'Sheltered Housing' and 'Value for Money'. Updates on Mears, in respect of the responsive repairs contract, and sheltered housing were also given at this meeting.

30 April 2013

(To be inserted after the meeting)

Monitoring Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Portfolio Holders at South Cambridgeshire District Council in 2012/13 took the majority of their decisions at public Portfolio Holder Meetings. Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were allocated as Scrutiny Monitors for specific Portfolios and attended these meetings to develop greater knowledge in an area of the Council's work,

as well as offering well informed challenge and influence. Scrutiny Monitors for 2012/13 were allocated as follows: -

Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Leader	Councillors Lynda Harford and Ben Shelton
Deputy Leader Finance and Staffing	Councillors Roger Hickford and Ben Shelton
Corporate and Customer Services	Councillors Jose Hales and Lynda Harford
Environmental Services	Councillors Alison Elcox and Janet Lockwood
Housing	Councillors Jose Hales and Bunty Waters
Northstowe	Councillor Bridget Smith
Planning and Economic Development	Councillor Jose Hales
Planning Policy and Localism	Councillors Douglas de Lacey and Bridget Smith

Scrutiny Monitors usually write a short report after each Portfolio Holder Meeting, summarising any key issues, highlighting their input and raising any issues that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee may wish to consider further. They are usually circulated to Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the relevant Portfolio Holder outside the formal meeting process.

Call-in

Call-in is usually a last resort, when other means of influencing decision-making have failed. Any Call-in would be considered by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, but this procedure was not used during the 2012/13 municipal year.

Cambridgeshire Scrutiny Officer Network

The Council continues to benefit from an officer-led scrutiny network in Cambridgeshire, which provides a forum for sharing experience and good practice, as well as identifying any opportunities for joint working. Scrutiny Chairmen are also invited to attend alternate meetings of this networking group.

Training and development

A workshop for the Scrutiny and Overview Committee was held in June 2012, which included development sessions on team building, the basics of scrutiny and overview, monitoring Portfolio Holders and improving scrutiny processes.

Numerous briefing sessions for Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were held throughout the year on key issues such as the significant changes to local government finance and the local government finance settlement, as well as the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Localised Council Tax Support Scheme and the Corporate Plan. These sessions were programmed in advance of meetings of the

Scrutiny and Overview Committee where items of the same topic were due to be considered.

Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were given opportunities to observe a Parliamentary Select Committee evidence session followed by a roundtable discussion with the Committee, facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The Council's Democratic Officer that supports the Scrutiny and Overview Committee attended a development course in February 2013 on being an adaptable and effective Scrutiny Officer.

Contact us

If you would like to know more about the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at South Cambridgeshire District Council please contact the Democratic Services Team Leader, Graham Aisthorpe-Watts, on (01954) 713030 or democratic.services@scambs.gov.uk.