



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Annual Report 2016/1

FOREWORD

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

“The role of scrutiny is often described as being that of a ‘critical friend’, looking at particular aspects of what an organization does and offering constructive advice for improvement.

One of the main functions of South Cambridgeshire District Council’s Scrutiny Committee is to scrutinize the proposed budget before it goes to the Full Council for debate and approval. As will be seen in the following report the Scrutiny Committee felt that the 2017-18 budget papers were set out in a more helpful and informative manner, that helped understanding, discussion and debate.



During 2016-17, the Scrutiny Committee scrutinized work of the Planning Department and the Contact Centre, and started scrutiny of housing and licensing that will continue into 2017.

I would like to thank all members and substitute members of the Committee for their constructive approach and contributions to the work of the Committee. In particular I would like to thank the Vice Chairman, Councillor Grenville Chamberlain for his help and support throughout the year.”

Tony Orgee
Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee

FOREWORD

Partnerships Review Committee

"It has been a pleasure to be the Chairman of the Partnerships Review Committee for another year. Having been set up to look at external issues affecting our residents, this year the committee decided to focus on a specific area of concern which was the provision of mental health services to children and adolescents in South Cambridgeshire.



The committee has had a busy year with members conducting their own research into the provision of mental health services and identifying the issues relating to this across the district. This led to a very productive meeting taking place with representatives from a number of South Cambridgeshire primary and secondary schools, service providers and health commissioners, to discuss the issues the committee had identified through. I would like to thank all the committee members for their hard work and enthusiasm on this and to the Vice Chairman for taking the lead on this. The work on this is not yet complete and will continue with a view to the committee making recommendations to Cabinet in the coming months.

I must also thank Members who have continued to provide regular updates on Outside Bodies to the committee during the year."

Councillor Ben Shelton, Chairman of the Partnerships Review Committee

What is Scrutiny and Overview?

The aim of the Council's scrutiny and overview function is to provide an open and transparent forum in which to investigate whether South Cambridgeshire District Council's policies and services are meeting the needs of local people.

Scrutiny and overview committees do not have any decision-making powers, but they do have the power to influence and make evidence-based recommendations to decision-takers. Such recommendations could be informed via performance monitoring, best practice, expert advice, or liaison with stakeholders, partners, service users or members of the public. Scrutiny and overview committees are often described as a Council's 'critical friend'.

Scrutiny and overview committees can also challenge executive decisions, taken by Cabinet, individual Portfolio Holders and occasionally Chief Officers. 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. Councillors on scrutiny and overview committees 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 and Overview at South Cambridgeshire District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council has two scrutiny and overview committees; the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Partnerships Review Committee, both of which consist of nine non-executive District Councillors drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole.

The Partnerships Review Committee was introduced to the Council's committee structure on 23 May 2013 at the Annual General Meeting of the Council, where the size of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee was reduced from thirteen to nine. The Partnerships Review Committee has a specific remit to scrutinise, challenge and hold decision takers to account on issues relating to the work of those organisations in the area of South Cambridgeshire, which may or may not involve formal partnerships. Whilst the Partnerships Review Committee's work is mainly externally focussed, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee retains its role of holding executive decision takers to account and centres on those issues considered as 'internal'.

The following Councillors served on the respective committees for the 2016/17 municipal year:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

Chairman: Councillor Tony Orgee
Vice-Chairman: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain
Councillors:
David Bard
Henry Batchelor
Graham Cone
Kevin Cuffley
Jose Hales
Philippa Hart
Bunty Waters

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

Val Barrett
John Batchelor
Anna Bradnam
Doug Cattermole
Neil Davies
Andrew Fraser
Roger Hall
Tumi Hawkins
Andrew Johnson
Douglas de Lacey
Ray Manning
Ed Stonham
Deborah Roberts
David Whiteman-Downes

Partnerships Review Committee

Chairman: Councillor Ben Shelton
Vice-Chairman: Councillor Bunty Waters
Councillors:
David Bard
Henry Batchelor
Kevin Cuffley
Andrew Fraser
Janet Lockwood
Ray Manning
Ingrid Tregoing

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

Val Barrett
Grenville Chamberlain
Neil Davies
Roger Hall
Tumi Hawkins
Andrew Johnson
Douglas de Lacey
David McCraith
Tony Orgee
Deborah Roberts
Ed Stonham
Aidan Van de Weyer

How do the scrutiny and overview committees decide what to scrutinise?

The scrutiny and overview committees set their own work programmes and topic suggestions can be gained from numerous sources, including: -

- individual councillors
- local petitions
- partner organisations
- officers
- residents
- Portfolio Holder Scrutiny Monitors
- the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions

Programme planning takes place at the start of the municipal year and the committee's work programmes are considered as standing items at every meeting of each 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 may require more in-depth review.

The Partnerships Review Committee and the Scrutiny and Overview Committee use a work programme prioritisation tool which enables both committees to assess those items that have been suggested or put forward and ascertain whether they should be included in their work programmes, as well as determine their level of priority.

Items included in the work programme usually go through an initial scoping process. This provides an opportunity to consider the rationale behind the Partnerships Review Committee or the Scrutiny and Overview Committee looking into the particular issue, the purpose or objective of scrutiny involvement and a methodology or approach that will be followed for the piece of work.

Scrutiny Reviews

Scrutiny Reviews provide the Partnerships Review Committee and 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 Partnerships Review Committee or 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 will go through a scoping process to outline terms of reference for the review and identify how the piece of work should be conducted. Reviews could be undertaken through one of the following options:

Scrutiny Review by the Full Committee

A scrutiny review by the full Partnerships Review Committee or Scrutiny and Overview Committee could take place when all councillors on the relevant 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 Partnerships Review Committee during 2016/17

The Partnerships Review Committee met formally on three occasions and informally on one occasion in the 2016/17 municipal year. This was as follows:

16 September 2016

Devolution

This meeting focussed on devolution. The Leaders of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils attended the meeting along with the Chief Executive of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership, to provide an update and discuss devolution with the committee.

Informal work programming meeting

Members of the committee met informally to discuss potential items for the committee's work programme for the municipal year. At this meeting, members agreed the committee would focus on the provision of mental health services. Members were later asked by the Vice Chairman to make enquiries within their wards with regards to the provision of health services, with a focus on mental health, and to report back to the next formal committee meeting.

20 January 2017

Provision of mental health services

Committee members provided verbal reports on the enquiries they had made and discussions they had had within their wards regarding the local provision of mental health services to young people. Through their initial findings, the committee agreed that it would focus its review on the theme of 'Mind the Gap' in support and provision between schools and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. At this meeting the committee identified key questions that needed to be addressed, which were:

- Identifying the referral pathways from schools to mental health services.
- Identifying the mental health support measures that schools were providing, accessing and buying in; where from, how much these cost and how these were funded.
- Identifying how schools' work and prevention work could be funded.
- What was happening in schools in South Cambridgeshire, with a focus on primary but including secondary schools as well.

The committee agreed that expert witnesses would be identified and invited to attend the next committee meeting, to discuss the concerns raised at the January 2017 committee meeting.

21 April 2017

'Mind the Gap' in support and provision between schools and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Expert witnesses representing primary and secondary schools in South Cambridgeshire, health commissioners and service providers, attended the committee's meeting to discuss with the committee the provision of mental health services and support to children and adolescents. At the time of writing this report the committee was reviewing the outcomes of this meeting with a view to drafting recommendations to Cabinet.

Outside Bodies

The Council's Civic Affairs Committee agreed on 5 December 2013 that Members appointed to outside bodies should provide written update reports to the Partnerships Review Committee. Updates on Emmaus Cambridge and Health and Wellbeing were received by the committee in the 2016/17 Municipal Year.

Work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee during 2016/17

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee met as a full committee on four occasions in the 2016/17 municipal year on the following dates:

- 5 July 2016
- 8 September 2016
- 9 November 2016
- 7 February 2017

The committee looked at the performance of the Council's Planning service and the Customer Contact Centre on an ongoing basis at its meetings throughout the year, as well as receiving the Council's quarterly position reports on finance, performance and risk:

Quarterly Position Statement on Finance Performance and Risk

The committee considered the Council's position statements on finance, performance and risk for each quarter of the year. These reports were presented to the committee by the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder and Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, and provided a statement on the Council's position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks.

Planning performance

Following concern raised by members of the committee regarding performance of the Council's Planning service, which was at threat of designation by Government, the committee requested service performance updates. These were received at the committee's meetings in July, September and November 2016. The Planning Portfolio Holder, Head of Development Management and the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development presented updates on performance and service improvements at each of these meetings. At its meeting in November 2016, the committee congratulated officers for the improvement in performance, which was recognised by Government in March 2017 with the decision not to designate the Council.

Customer Contact Centre performance

The performance of the Council's Customer Contact Centre continued to be of interest to the committee during the municipal year. The committee reviewed the Contact Centre's performance in November 2016 and February 2017, with performance reports presented to the committee by the Benefits Manager and the Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder at these meetings. The main issues discussed were staff retention and turnover, which had been an issue due to the high quality and well trained staff being recruited from the Contact Centre by other service areas of the Council, the introduction of electronic forms and the contingencies that were put in place for known peak call times such as the busy year end period and the changes to bin rounds introduced in February 2017.

Shared Services

The progress and performance of the Council's shared Legal, Building Control and ICT services was of interest to the Scrutiny Committee throughout the municipal year. The committee first discussed this at its meeting in September 2016, during which the committee focussed on recruitment and issues that had been raised with the ICT service. This led to the performance of the shared ICT service being focussed on at the committee's November 2016 meeting, with further quarterly performance monitoring requested and presented at the February 2017 meeting. The quarter three performance report for the shared Legal, Building Control and ICT services was considered by the committee at its meeting in February 2017.

HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy

In November 2016, the Housing Portfolio Holder presented an update to the committee on the financial position and forecasts for the Council's Housing Revenue Account, before this was considered by Cabinet. In considering this report, the committee was reassured that the Council's housing team was competently dealing with the housing issues faced by the Council as a result of changes in Government legislation. The committee congratulated the Housing Portfolio Holder and Housing officers for their work.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Council's draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which presented the Council's financial strategies and budgets, was reviewed by the committee in November 2016. Before its consideration by Cabinet and Full Council, the final MTFS was then presented to the committee by the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder and Housing Portfolio Holder, for its consideration on 7 February 2017. The MTFS was set out in a new format which the committee felt was very helpful and clear, helping understanding of the content.

In addition to these items, at its meetings in November 2016 and February 2017, the committee considered the following:

Grass verge cutting

Following committee members being made aware of issues regarding grass verge cuttings in their parishes, the committee received an update on this at its February 2017 meeting.

Corporate Plan 2017-2022

The Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Corporate Plan 2017-2022 to the committee for review at its meeting in February 2017. The committee suggested a number of additions to the plan before it was considered and approved by the Cabinet at its meeting later in February 2017.

Taxi Licensing

In response to an article featured in the media, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee raised concerns about taxi licensing policy at its February 2017 meeting. A workshop was subsequently arranged by Licensing Officers for the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to look at taxi licensing policy. This was scheduled to take place on 2nd June 2017.

Ermine Street Housing Task and Finish Group

At its meeting in February 2017, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to set up a task and finish group to look at Ermine Street Housing. At the time of writing this report, task and finish group members and a sub-committee chairman had been nominated and a meeting was due to be scheduled for the group to draft its terms of reference.

Monitoring Cabinet Portfolio Holders

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 2016/17 were allocated as follows: -

Cabinet Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Leader of the Council	Cllr Tony Orgee
Finance and Staffing	Cllr Philippa Hart
Corporate and Customer Services	Cllr Henry Batchelor
Environmental Services	Cllr David Bard
Greater Cambridge City Deal	Grenville Chamberlain
Housing	Cllr Bunty Waters Cllr Jose Hales
Planning	Cllr Graham Cone Cllr Philippa Hart

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 2016/17 municipal year.

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 democratic.services@scams.gov.uk.