

Committee: Council

Date:

Title: Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2017/18

Tuesday, 10 April
2018

Report Author: Cllr Alan Dean, Chairman, Scrutiny Committee

Summary

1. There is a requirement under the Council's Constitution for the Chairman of the Committee to report annually to Full Council.
2. The information below summarises the key work of the committee in 2017/18.

Recommendations

3. Council notes the content of the report.

Financial Implications

4. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	The report has been approved by the Scrutiny Committee
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None

Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

1. In 2017/18 the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken work looking at a range of policies and services along with its role in scrutinising key financial matters through the draft budget and Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS).

LCTS

2. The Committee considered the draft scheme proposals for 2018/19 at its meeting in June. There was support for the scheme, in particular the 12.5% contribution rate which was lower than any other authority in Essex. Members also considered the proposed withdrawal of the discretionary Parish and Town grant funding and resolved to recommend to Cabinet that it should approve the draft proposals.
3. The final scheme was presented to the Scrutiny Committee in November along with a report on consultation responses. The committee acknowledged it was a difficult subject on which to consult as the scheme was technical in nature but noted almost 1,000 residents took part. A motion was put forward to maintain the grant to parish and town councils, but this was defeated. The committee voted by a majority to endorse its withdrawal.

Budget Scrutiny

4. The Committee reviewed all budget reports prior to their submission to Cabinet and Full Council at its meeting in February. Among the matters highlighted during these discussions were the £715,000 efficiency savings made during the year and the need for further savings in the future, the importance of having a robust reserves strategy, the proposed Council tax rise of 2.99% and the loss of significant funding from central government.
5. In addition, the Committee considered the Council's new Investment Strategy and may request a further report on this area of work during 2018/19.

Local Plan

6. During the year the Committee was presented with terms of reference to formalise its role in the Local Plan process. However, after debate it was decided that without the technical expertise provided at the Planning Policy Working Group it would be difficult to effectively fulfil this role. As the Committee could call in any decisions made by Cabinet during the process if it considered there were issues that merited further consideration, the Committee voted not to adopt the terms of reference.

Matters previously considered by the Scrutiny Committee

7. In 2016/17 the Scrutiny Committee had called in both the Air Quality Action Plan and the Street Naming and Numbering Policy. During 2017/18 the Committee received revised versions of both these policies.
8. The revised Air Quality Action Plan incorporated recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee, including prioritisation of actions, quantification of cost and confirmation that the plan met Defra guidelines, and the Committee recommended to Cabinet that the revised scheme be adopted.
9. Similarly, the Committee recommended the adoption of the revised Street Naming and Numbering policy and noted the greater say for town and parish councils when it came to the street naming process.
10. In 2016/17, the Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group to look at matters relating to Enforcement. At its June 2017 meeting, a new Enforcement Strategy and associated policies were presented prior to the approval at Cabinet.

Call In

11. One Cabinet decision was called in for further consideration during 2017/18. The Cabinet decision to approve the disposal of land at De Vigier Avenue, Saffron Walden, was called in by three members, with the meeting taking place in September.
12. Two public speakers made statements along with one of the two ward members, before the committee debated the issue.
13. The committee decided by a majority that no further action be taken on the call-in and therefore the Cabinet's original decision to approve the disposal of the land for planning purposes would come into effect.
14. The committee also wished to advise Cabinet of the need to achieve maximum benefits from the sale of the land by investing capital receipts and to ensure a barrier was maintained between the new development and De Vigier Avenue.
15. Subsequent to the meeting, the Chairman discussed with officers establishing a more formal structure for call in meetings, work that will be progressed in 2018/19.

Centre for Public Scrutiny

16. Towards the end of 2017/18, the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) was commissioned to conduct a review of Uttlesford District Council's Scrutiny processes and practices. Face-to-face interviews were held with councillors and officers over two days in February, with other interviews carried out over the phone. Those interviewed included the Chairman of the Committee and Committee Members, Cabinet Members, officers working directly in the Scrutiny function, senior officers including the Chief Executive and officers

who had taken reports to the Committee. The review was conducted by Ian Parry from the CfPS, who also attended the February Scrutiny Committee meeting.

17. At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27 March, Mr Parry presented his final report and members discussed a series of recommendations. It was noted that the Council was among a very few to have undertaken such a piece of work and its willingness to take on board constructive criticism and recognise where improvement can be made was welcomed.
18. The report highlighted strengths in the Council's Scrutiny arrangements, including good relationships between committee members and officers and committee members and executive members, along with the function being generally well-organised and welcomed in the Council.
19. Among the areas for improvement were that Scrutiny lacks purpose and authority, it does not provide sufficient impact and value in shaping and improving decision-making and that Cabinet is not sufficiently visibly accountable to Scrutiny.
20. The Committee has requested that Cabinet considers the full report at its meeting in May as some of the recommendations will require a closer working relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny.
21. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny will work with officers to develop an action plan to start making recommended improvements.