

Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2017-18

The basic responsibility of Scrutiny is set out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in that it:-

- Provides a constructive 'critical friend' challenge
- Amplifies the voices and concerns of the public
- Is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drives improvement in public services.

Effective Scrutiny can be proactive and help set out a policy agenda and also may undertake pre-decision scrutiny to offer focus on an issue in greater depth.

The Role of Scrutiny has also evolved with a growing interest in Scrutiny of:

- External bodies, i.e. health, police
- Growing number of partnership arrangements
- New council driven commercial operations.

This past year has been particularly active. Two important innovations were an appointment of a Scrutiny Officer, able to take on a research function and secondly, following his appearance at a Scrutiny meeting, the able assistance of Mel Stride MP, in securing and supporting a delegation to the Housing Minister to challenge the unfairness of the lack of a 5 year land supply. Whilst the objective failed to find traction it did provide the opportunity for Richard Chesterton and Jenny Clifford to lobby for a substantial claim on the Housing Improvement Fund whence MDDC received the second highest award in the country. Reference should also be made to the innovation of informal workshops which provide a creative mode of thinking for the Committee.

A review of the year follows which illustrates the extent of Scrutiny activity. I would like to commend the untiring efforts of Julia Stuckey who was instrumental in carefully monitoring the business of the meeting (and the Chairman) but now sadly chosen to enjoy a new professional challenge. I would wish to thank the Committee Members for their contributions, especially the consultation group led by Cllr Roach who took to the streets of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton to research the views of the public. Thanks are also due to officers and Cabinet Members whose contributions recognised the significance of Scrutiny to the well-being of MDDC .I particularly would thank our external contributors who willingly gave their time to inform the committee.

May

The Chairman welcomed Sector Inspector Steve Bradford and Sergeant Mike Warriner to the meeting.

The Committee had before it a report from the Parish Liaison Working Group, and a report from the Member Services Manager regarding Member Development.

June

The Committee challenged a report from the Public Health and Professional Services Manager providing an update on Crossparks, Templeton as it sought assurance that the Council had responded appropriately to the concerns expressed by residents

It was resolved that a letter be sent to the Government's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee (EFRA) asking them:

1. Whether or not they were aware of any perceived health issues for residents living near such pits?
2. Were there any implications to the health of local residents when digestate was being moved?
3. Was the Government content for digestate to enter the food chain?

The Committee had before it, and noted, a report from the Public Health and Professional Services Manager providing it with an oversight of the Community Safety Partnership including an overview of the working relationships of partner agencies and delivery of activities against the community safety priorities

July

Cllr F W Letch had requested that the planned cessation of Customer First Surgeries that were held at Crediton and Cullompton, for four hours every other week, be discussed by the Committee.

It was recommended that Council be asked to look at the idea of diminishing the level of face to face services at Phoenix House to allow for one session a month to be provided at Crediton and Cullompton. This proposal was not accepted by the Cabinet. on the premise that the roll out of digital access needed to be adhered to. The Chairman had requested that Members discuss Anaerobic Digestion and considered determining terms of reference to help develop a policy framework for the Council.

It was resolved to set up a Working Group to look into Anaerobic Digestion, using the following terms of reference:

“To understand the process, science and potential impact of Anaerobic Digestion (AD) on Mid Devon as a source of renewable energy and bio fertiliser.

The remit of the study would include:

- 1 A desktop review of the process.
- 2 A review of the current regulatory framework.
- 3 A review of planning legislation relating to AD; including a correlation with waste processes/plants.
- 4 Reference site visits.

- 5 A desktop review of nuisances, environmental concerns/incidents associated with plants and ancillary activities.
- 6 A peer review from health professionals on any potential human health impact associated with AD plants and ancillary activities.

In order to inform future planning and long term land use considerations.”

August

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Sarah Johns and Sector Inspector Jane Alford-Mole to the meeting.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Chief Executive regarding the Peer Review. During the 6-9th March 2017, the authority had received a delegation of external officers and members to conduct a ‘peer challenge review’. The process generated a review report which contained a number of specific recommendations for the Council to consider. The report which Members had before them provided an update on that process and outlined how this process would be contributing to the Council’s improvement programme moving forward.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Waste and Transport Manager regarding the use of agency staff in operational services. This information had been requested by the Committee at its last meeting.

It was agreed that any future work regarding ageing well will be delayed until after the Corporate Plan review and that in the meantime officers explore opportunities to work closely with Devon County Council and liaise with Exeter University and Dr Dixon of Cullompton to establish what is already taking place.

The Committee had before it a report from the Cabinet Member for the Environment providing an update on areas covered by his remit.

September

The Public Health and Professional Services Manager provided a verbal update regarding Crossparks and the continuing testing regime.

The Committee had before it and noted a briefing paper from the Cabinet Member for Housing updating it regarding areas covered by his remit.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources presenting the car parking outturn position for 2016/17 and an update on the first 3 months of 2017/18.

October

At the request of the Chairman the Committee had before it and noted a report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing an update on the position of the Council over the 5 year housing land supply and any implications upon it of the recent deferment of Local Plan Review examination sessions.

November

At its meeting on 11 September 2017, the Scrutiny Committee noted the number of policies and action plans which appeared to have been on-going for a number of years. In particular, in relation to Tiverton Town Centre, the Scrutiny Committee passed the following resolution: To recommend to the Cabinet that it acts upon the action plans to improve the Tiverton Town Centre and Pannier Market that were approved in 2011.

At its meeting on 28 September the Cabinet resolved that a briefing paper be produced for a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee highlighting the work that was taking place with regard to Tiverton Town Centre. The Committee had before it and noted this briefing paper.

It was resolved that the Scrutiny Committee would review the Masterplan.

The Committee had before it a report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration in response to its request for an update on the position of the Council regarding gypsy and traveller pitch provision.

It was agreed that the Chairman would send a letter to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Economy and Regeneration stressing the need to provide a public site within the District.

The Committee had before it and noted a briefing paper from the Cabinet Member for Finance updating it regarding areas covered by his remit.

December

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources regarding disposal of assets. The report had been requested by the Committee at its meeting in October.

The Committee had before it a report from the Cabinet Member for Finance updating it regarding areas covered by his remit.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Consultation Working Group, which led by Cllr Roach, took to the streets of Tiverton and Crediton to ascertain the views of residents.

It was agreed that staff should receive and be made aware of the report.

It was resolved that: it should be circulated to Members.

The Group were very impressed by the general upbeat atmosphere in Crediton when compared to the other two main towns and recommended that the Economic Development Team and Economy Policy Development Group explore further what might be causing this difference.

The Group found that in all three towns car parking costs were high on the agenda.. Noticeably in Crediton, where there was considered to be more on offer, people did not object to the charges. It was recommended that the Economy Policy Development Group consider making parking charges relevant to the offering in the area.

The Committee discussed the impact of housing development in Mid Devon on the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital at Wonford, in particular winter pressures.

It was resolved that the Scrutiny Officer be asked to put together a report containing information that was available, to include clinical issues/demand, influence over GP provision, pressures on A and E and alternatives that were available such as the new pharmacy first campaign, in order that Members were fully informed, prior to inviting attendance at a meeting.

January

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Director for Finance, Assets and Resources in order that the Scrutiny Committee review the draft 2018/19 budget and make any necessary comments/recommendations to the Cabinet to be considered at its meeting on the 1 February 2018.

The Committee had before it and noted a briefing paper from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources providing an update on the possible impacts from the rollout of Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS).

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Public Health and Policy Research Officer regarding measures that were in place to cope with the expected demand on hospital and GP services as a result of proposed housing development and for the coming winter.

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer arrange a future meeting with the Clinical Lead at Castle Place Surgery Tiverton and that data regarding delayed discharges be obtained.

Special Meeting January

The Chairman welcomed Neil Parish MP to the meeting.
The Committee put questions to the MP.and engaged in a useful dialogue.

February

The Committee had before it a report from the Group Manager for Human Resources informing Members of the overall structure of the Council and showing the management and deployment of officers.

It was agreed that the establishment be reviewed by Scrutiny in 6 months' time to consider the level of resignations and the reasons for them.

The Committee had before it and noted information from the Scrutiny Officer regarding various areas that he had been asked to look into on their behalf including delayed transfer of care, aging workforce, Cornwall housing policy, road maintenance and repairs in Mid Devon,

March

Dr Squire of Castle Place surgery attended to discuss public health and local issues.

The Committee had before it and noted an extended report from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration updating Members regarding the substantial areas covered by this remit.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration regarding a draft consultation document for Stage 1 public consultation in respect of the Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration Masterplan. The Committee had before it and noted a report informing the Committee regarding findings of the online residents survey carried out in the winter of 2017.

The Committee had before it and noted a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources and the 3 Rivers Development Limited Acting Managing Director regarding the draft 5 year business plan for 3 Rivers Developments Limited.

Additional Task Group work by the Committee:

Consultation Working Group
Partnership Working Group
Homelessness Working Group
Anaerobic Digestive Working Group

For the Future

In December 2017 the House of Commons Select Committee on Communities and Local Government published the report 'Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees' which made a series of recommendations to the Government and to the Local Government Association. It is understood that in due course the Government will publish revised guidance to Local Authorities on Scrutiny which the Committee will consider and make recommendations to the Standards Committee where appropriate.

Frank Rosamond
Chair of Scrutiny April 2018