

## Scrutiny Committee Chairman's Annual Report

Just two of the previous Scrutiny Committee are Members of the current Committee. The 10 June meeting started with Andrew Moore being elected Vice-Chairman and the meeting time staying at 2:15 pm. The Committee also received an update on Broadband provision in the District from Matt Barrow from Devon County Council, and heard questions from members of the public around how rural areas can receive improved broadband. Members decided that they would like continuing insight into the superfast broadband rollout and the contract with Gigaclear and requested an update in September.

The meeting of 8 July received an overview on the roll out of Universal Credit, including the number of people expected to be in receipt across the District. Members discussed the effect of Universal Credit and requested an evening Members briefing on the issue. The Committee also discussed the Council's adoption of the Devon Climate Change Declaration.

The 5 August meeting saw Cllr Bob Deed giving the Committee the Leader's Annual Report for 2018/19. There was also an interesting report on the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), it was enlightening to see the cooperation of the various agencies that work alongside the CSP. The Committee was pleased to note no whistle-blowing reports. Members also considered the Establishment 6 month update and they were concerned at the absenteeism figures and reasons given for leaving the organisation. This included 2% for bullying and for dissatisfaction with their line manager.

Two decisions made by Cabinet were called in for consideration by the Committee at the 2 September meeting. The Committee discussed the decision to abolish night time car parking charges and resolved that the Cabinet reconsider the decision, and resolved to accept its decision on the sale of the Park Road Nursery depot. We also had Inspector Steve Bradford answering some questions about policing in Mid Devon, including a discussion on the effectiveness of CCTV and the presence of police in rural areas.

The 30 September meeting gave the Committee its first opportunity to meet its new Scrutiny Officer, Clare Robathan. She gave a brief introduction about her previous experience and it was agreed that she would make a fuller presentation at the next meeting and help the Committee to draw up a meaningful scheme of work. At this meeting the Committee had its first report from a Cabinet Member, namely Cllr Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property Services. We also received and noted the annual Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) report and were told that the powers had not been needed. Members urged Officers for a list of the areas where surveillance could be used. Officers agreed to circulate such a list to Members. The Committee also received the Annual Report on Complaints, Comments and Compliments, and Members noted that in many areas the numbers of comments outweighed the number of formal complaints received.

Because Matt Barrow of DCC was unable to attend, the October meeting could have been a bit of a damp squib, rather routine, but the Committee took the opportunity to discuss the future with our Scrutiny Officer. We agreed to have a further meeting to plan the Work Programme. During a discussion on Performance and Risk the Committee also discussed the Cabinet's recent decision to defer the Tiverton Town Centre regeneration tender.

Our meeting of 2 December was a much livelier affair with members of the public coming to ask questions and express concerns about the roll out of 5G. This was because Matt

Barrow did attend and gave us an update of the provision of Broadband in Mid Devon. Progress is being made slowly but the main challenge remains the outlying areas and the inconsistency even in areas better provided. We also looked at the work programme and considered ways of choosing and prioritising areas of investigation. We agreed to look at helping staff with the delicate issue of the menopause and menstruation, as well as a potential review looking at procurement.

The first meeting of the decade saw all Members present, but sadly no members of the public, as one of the most important agenda items was the Members' call in of the Cabinet's decision to defer a final decision on the Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration Project. After a lively and civilised discussion it came down to the Chairman to cast the deciding vote and I supported the request by the three Members who had called in the decision to ask Cabinet to reconsider their decision to defer the Regeneration Project.

The Committee also looked at and noted a Carbon Baseline Report which was a result of the Council's Climate Change Declaration made in June 2019. We also considered the Performance and Risk report but nothing was raised.

Finally our Scrutiny Officer, Clare Robathan, reported on a scrutiny conference she had attended which will lead to a focused approach by our Committee.

The second meeting in January on the 27<sup>th</sup> was chaired by Cllr Andrew Moore with Cllr Ashley Wilce as his assistant. The meeting can be summed up as "quiet" and once again there were no members of the public, several reports were noted and there were no recommendations.

The first item of note was an update by Cllr Dennis Knowles, the Cabinet Member for Community Well Being. He told Members about MDDC's new "Noise App" which can record noise nuisances so that they can be sent directly to the Council, this can be found on the Council website. Members offered their congratulation to the Food Safety Team for the recent successful prosecution of an errant Cullompton business.

The proposed budget was discussed with close questioning from Members. It seems the budget gap at that moment stood at £243k. Members were concerned there was nothing set aside in the budget for climate change specific projects.

Clare Robathan, our Scrutiny Officer, gave a brief summary of 5G progress and told the Members that serious work was being done by DCC Scrutiny Committee on 5G. She also pointed out that following initiatives from the Scrutiny Committee there would be an all Members Procurement briefing on March 19 and she urged all members to attend to discuss the strategic investment opportunities.

I enjoyed chairing the meeting of 24 February because it demonstrated the role of the Committee being exercised at its best. The Chairman and Scrutiny Officer jointly reported on a 5G event run by Devon County Council to which they had been invited as observers. One issue that we flagged up was that of Planning because of the need for many more masts in the District. The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration gave an undertaking to look carefully at the planning implications for 5G masts.

The first report given to the Committee to note was presented by Cllr Graeme Barnell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration. Asked about the Hydro Mills Project he confirmed that a business case was to be brought to the Economy PDG and

then Cabinet.

Members raised the issue of consultants and inter District Council cooperation. The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that we used Officers from other Districts if they had the expertise and capacity and we reciprocated whenever asked. Sometimes outside consultants were necessary however.

Members expressed grave concerns about the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and its benefits to Mid Devon. They were reminded that Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) had already held one meeting on the policies of GESP and there was a second meeting of PPAG on this issue on 28 February.

The second report before the Committee was presented by the Group Manager for Human Resources. Members took some positives from the new sickness policy but were still concerned about the average days sickness of 8.2 which is higher than the private sector. They asked that research be done to ascertain sickness levels in other Local Authorities.

When considering items for future meetings the Chairman of the Customer Experience Working Group informed Members that the group's report will come to the April meeting. I also suggested the Scrutiny Committee should look at High Street Security after guidance had been reviewed by the Community PDG.

Finally, I would like to thank all Committee Members and substitutes, in particular Andrew Moore for acting as a superb Vice Chairman and Chris Daw on leading our first Working Group. On behalf of Committee Members I would like to thank all Officers who have helped us throughout the year with heartfelt thanks to our excellent Committee Clerk, Carole and our Scrutiny Officer, Clare. I am sure we all look forward to a busy and useful year!

Cllr Frank Letch

### **Scrutiny outcomes for 2019/20**

#### **Customer Experience Working Group**

A Working Group was established by the Scrutiny Committee to review the customer experience. At the first meeting in October 2019, Cllr Chris Daw was appointed Chair. The Group's focus is to look at how the Council's systems work, to ensure they are effective and delivering a positive and efficient service for customers.

In order to fully understand the customer experience, the Group has undertaken a number of site visits across the Council, including to: Customer Services; Housing; Planning; Building Services; Property Services; and the Waste Department. The site visits enabled Members to follow the customer experience from beginning (initial contact) to end (resolution or closure of case). The Group has had detailed discussions about how issues are handled in the Council, and will also visit North Devon District Council to see their system in place. The group has not yet formally reported back to the Committee with recommendations, but hope to do so early in the April meeting.

Other outcomes include:

- Following a request from the Committee, Lee Tozer, DWP Partnership Manager, gave a Members briefing on **Universal Credit** in August.

- The Committee at its meeting on 2 September 2019 resolved that the Cabinet be requested to reconsider the decision to abolish **night time car parking charges**. As a result, the Cabinet has reconsidered their decision.
- At the January meeting the Committee requested that the Cabinet reconsider its decision to postpone the specific scheme that came forward in advance of the forthcoming **Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan**, and allow the second stage of the process to be properly completed before seeking to prioritise strategic investment opportunities. Discussion took place at Cabinet and subsequently resolved that having reconsidered the decision to postpone the specific scheme, the original decision be confirmed. The Cabinet wishes to expedite a substitute scheme to be implemented as quickly as possible with a view to improving the Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration Project.
- Following public representation on the **health concerns of 5G**, the Committee is closely following the progress of the Devon County Council (DCC) Scrutiny Committee review on 5G. Members of the Committee have heard members of the public's concern, attended other public meetings on the issue and attended the Spotlight Review meetings run by DCC. The Committee will keep a close eye on the outcome of the DCC Scrutiny Review, in order to consider if any further work is needed on the issue, as well as consider the planning implications for the District.
- The Committee will now continue to ensure an impactful work programme for the following year, and alongside our regular standing items we will consider looking further into: women's health issues; sustainable procurement; 5G planning implications; and the Council's disability policy.