

Scrutiny Chairman's Report 2014-2015

Several times during the past year I have been asked whether we have an effective scrutiny committee and whether we are holding decision makers to account. My reply to those questions has been in the negative with the proviso that we have moved the committee in to a stronger position.

Notable improvements include:

All reports, unless of an urgent nature, are now written and circulated with the agenda thus enabling Members, Members of the Public and the Press to understand the nature of the issues before the committee meeting. It is impossible to debate issues fully and give proper consideration to facts if the papers have not been read in advance. I thank all the Cabinet Members for attending our meetings and providing written reports.

We have clearly established the principle that although Officers may advise against a call-in of a Cabinet decision to Scrutiny, the final decision on call in falls to members of the Council.

An increase in the number of Councillors (non-committee members) taking the time to attend Scrutiny committee meetings and raise issues of concern to them and their constituents. My thanks to them for their commitment to the scrutiny function.

The rejection of the initial report in relation to Harlequin Valet and the subsequent adoption of a report with recommendations that should improve the way the Council responds to any further incidents.

In Brief.

In any politically controlled council there can be tensions between scrutiny and the executive, it is the very nature of the beast and is recognised as a barrier to effective scrutiny by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Whilst everyone is content for the committee to scrutinise outside agencies such as health and the police there does appear to be an unwillingness to scrutinise in house services!

There have been problems with Officers not being available to present their reports.

During the year, I met with the new Leader and the Cabinet to establish whether the Scrutiny committee could help them with their roles. On a personal note, I thank the Leader, Cllr C Eginton, for taking action on issues that were of concern to members.

I also would like to place on record my thanks to John Finn, Clinical Commissioning Group, for investing considerable time and effort in keeping us informed of key health developments in Mid Devon.

Finally, thank you to all those who have supported me through my two years as Scrutiny Chairman, it has been an interesting and valuable experience. A final but very important thank you, to Julia Stuckey for her commitment to Scrutiny, her hard work, together with her patience when members fail to respond to her emails!

Jenny Roach. 30/3/15