

ANNUAL REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

2013/14

CONTENTS

Page

Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees

1

A Summary of work undertaken during 2013/14

2

The Year Ahead

9

Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2013/14

Audit and Corporate Governance:

Chair Councillor G Morley
Vice Chair Councillor C Smith

Economic Regeneration, Skills and Environment:

Chair Councillor J Windle
Vice Chair Councillor W Lilleyman

Healthy Communities and Well Being:

Chair Councillor B Ridgway
Vice Chair Councillor T Reader

Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods:

Chair Councillor B Wright
Vice Chair Councillor N Dolby

1 A Summary of the Work Undertaken during 2013/14

- 1.1 The work programme undertaken this year has been interesting and varied. The time available as usual has been shared between Scrutiny review work, consideration of key policies and strategies of the Council and performance monitoring.
- 1.2 The committees have also been monitoring the delivery of action plans from previous scrutiny reviews including Child Poverty, Welfare Reforms and Joint ICT service.

2 Current Scrutiny Reviews

- 2.1 Three Scrutiny Reviews were undertaken this year and a number of recommendations were made for improvement. These are to be considered by Cabinet on 14th May, 2014 and if accepted will be translated into action plans for delivery. Full copies of the reports and all previous reports can be viewed on the Council's intranet scrutiny pages or in the Scrutiny Room 101.

2.2 The Allocations Experience

Members felt it was timely to review this issue due to changes in welfare reforms affecting social housing, revisions made to the Council's Allocations and Lettings Policy and to respond to concerns raised by members.

Interviews were held with a range of Officers both at Rykneld Homes and the Council who were involved with the Allocations Process. They also spoke with the portfolio holder and invited people who bid for properties to submit their views or come and talk with the Review Panel about their experiences

The Review Panel concluded that on the whole the Choice Based Lettings system was working well and was generally understood by bidders. Several examples were provided of efforts made by Rykneld Homes to communicate with its stakeholders and support vulnerable groups.

Twelve recommendations for improvement were made mainly concerned with reviewing how information was provided for bidders and enhancing the arrangements in place for vulnerable people.

2.3 The Relationship Between The Council and Rykneld Homes

This issue was identified for review as it was thought timely to consider the partnership as it had been in place for a while. Additionally with the departure of the Director of Housing it was considered important to consider the resource available to the partnership to ensure that the momentum is maintained.

A wide range of officers involved with the partnership from both Rykneld Homes and North East Derbyshire District Council were interviewed. The panel also spoke with a representative of the Homes and Communities Agency.

On the whole the relationship was a positive one and many examples were provided of the two partners working well together to deliver the service. The overall impression given was of ambition and optimism but this was balanced by a realistic assessment of what was achievable.

Seven recommendations for improvement were made which were mainly concerned with reviewing the Policy framework following recent changes, continuing to build on the relationship at all levels between the two organisations and horizon scanning to ensure the partnership could respond to future demands on the service.

2.4 Tourism

Members agreed to undertake this review as it was felt timely to review whether the operation of Tourism within the District was fit for purpose as new arrangements for delivery of the service had been put in place with Bolsover District Council. Prior to 2013 North East Derbyshire District Council's tourism function had been delivered by a service level agreement with Chesterfield Borough Council. A number of factors contributed to the changing service delivery including the new joint Strategic Alliance, a requirement to make savings, changes in business needs, intelligence, funding support and partnership opportunity.

Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of officers who were involved with the Tourism service both directly and indirectly. Councillor Windle, the Chair of the Committee and Councillor Rice attended the Chesterfield Area Mini Tourism Conference. A questionnaire was also circulated to members of the Peak Borders Tourism Forum to gather their views on how businesses viewed the service.

The Review Panel concluded that a great deal of successful work was being undertaken by the Tourism service. With the reduction in local authority budgets partnership working was considered the key to ensure the best use of resources. The Committee recognised that Tourism can bring significant economic benefits to the area. For this reason the Council should ensure that we maximise the benefits and seek to maintain a high profile for the service. Twelve recommendations were made in support of these aims.

3 Scrutiny Committees

3.1 Audit and Corporate Governance

The Committee considered a large number of the key governance and financial documents of the Council which included the Annual Governance Statement, Quarterly Performance Reports, Medium Term Financial Plan, Statement of Accounts, Internal Audit Consortium Annual Report and the Risk Management Update, Partnership Working and Strategic Risk Register.

A major area of work was the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Committee considered progress being made in securing the financial efficiencies which were necessary to balance the 2013/14 budget. Details were also provided of the draft plan for 2014-17. This covered the three main areas of the General Fund Revenue Account, Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. Other areas considered by the Committee included the work streams of the Strategic Alliance, the Strategic Income Review, Prioritising the Priorities and the Growth Strategy.

The Committee also considered the Audit Commission report on 'Protecting the Public Purse which highlighted the risks posed by fraud against local government and identified best practice and procedures to minimise these risks. The Committee was advised that Councillors had a crucial role in supporting the right approach to deter and detect fraud. A checklist had been completed by the Interim Head of the Internal Audit Consortium together with other relevant officers which showed that the Council had complied with all the areas listed in the report.

A report that provided details of the annual review by the Chief Financial Officer of the effectiveness of the Council's internal audit arrangements was also considered. This allowed the Committee to assess whether the conclusion of the report represented a reasonable evaluation in respect of the work of the internal audit service. The conclusion of the report was that the Chief Financial Officer was satisfied that an effective service had been provided. It was also reported that the Consortium was now providing management services to Derbyshire Dales District Council.

Regular reports were provided to the Committee on the performance of the Council. The aim of the quarterly performance reports was to provide a summary and overview of the progress made against key actions and performance indicators. This provided the Committee with accurate and timely information allowing decisions to be made where action needed to be taken, in particular to enable under performance or lack of progress to be identified and addressed.

3.2 Economic Regeneration, Skills and Environment

The Committee monitored the delivery of a number of key strategies/policies including the Local Development Framework, Waste Minimisation and Recycling Policy and the Employment and Skills Policy

The Committee considered an update on progress of the Local Development Framework. This was an important issue for the Council and the Committee were keen to see progress made. Consultations were due to commence over May and June 2014, with submission to the inspector scheduled for November and December, 2014. Following examination by the Inspector he would produce a report in May 2015, which would be adopted in July 2015.

The update on the Employment and Skills Policy provided the Committee with evidence of various initiatives that had resulted in employment, apprenticeships and training opportunities for local people at businesses around the District. The Working Communities Project had led to sixty three people gaining employment. Other areas of work included the M1 managed motorway project, a Nursing Home at Dronfield, Pets at Home, Dronfield, demolition of Tarran Homes and Rebuilding Project Eckington and Killamarsh, Gunstones Bakery, Twin Oaks Hotel and the Avenue Site at Wingerworth

The Committee also reviewed the work of the Street Scene service including the production of joint policies for Street Scene plus Waste and Recycling Collection. In respect of recycling the new burgundy bin scheme had resulted in increases in recycling of 2% at North East Derbyshire. It also considered the Derbyshire Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

Following on from its consideration of the Planning Applications Backlog and Planning Service last year the committee monitored the delivery of the action plan that had been formulated following the production of a Business Case for the service going forward. A significant amount of work had been undertaken on the Planning Service's processes in order to make them more efficient including improvement in document management systems and ICT skills to enable a move away from a paper based system.

The Committee also considered the Council's plans for Community Buildings. New rights had been brought in that allowed communities to place land and assets on the Council's List of Assets of Community Value. This would mean that should the owner of a listed asset wish to dispose of it, community groups would have six weeks to submit an expression of interest to be treated as a potential bidder. Details were provided of the assets the Council owned and other potential buildings.

A new Sponsorship and Advertising Policy was submitted to the Committee. The policy formed part of the new joint Revenue Strategy which identified opportunities to bring additional income into the two Councils. The Strategy had agreed a target of £50k income per authority.

3.3 Healthy Communities and Well Being

The Committee continued to monitor progress on car parking matters in the District following on from issues raised last year by the Disabled People's Consultative Group on parking bays and restrictions. The Group also made another referral requesting the committee to look at a number of housing related issues.

The Committee were asked to:

- Examine what disability benefits were ring fenced when calculating Discretionary Housing Payment by the Council
- Examine the budget calculator used for the Discretionary Housing payment by the Council and compare the calculator used with that of the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Look at what training staff received in completing the calculator
- Examine the definition of a bedroom that the Council uses

The Committee interviewed the Council's Assistant Director – Corporate Services and the Revenues and Benefits Manager to gather information on the issues raised. The officers provided a detailed response which was provided to the Disabled People's Consultative Group for consideration.

The Council's Leisure service was another key area the committee monitored both in terms of performance and value for money. The service had introduced a number of initiatives to ensure it remained competitive. The Committee was pleased to hear of the progress made on increasing membership and income.

The new Single Equality Scheme was submitted to the Committee for consideration following its approval by Cabinet. The Single Equality Act 2010 imposed a general duty on public authorities to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups. The Committee supported the Scheme but requested further information on figures provided in the report on the workforce which showed a percentage of female employees decreasing between 2009 and 2012. Information was provided at a later Committee that gave some possible reasons for this but the issue was continuing to be monitored.

Following issues raised by Employees on HR21 and the Employee Survey the Committee interviewed the Assistant Director of HR and Payroll. The issue with the CHRIS and HR21 systems were that they were not considered user friendly. The Assistant Director provided information on work currently being undertaken to look at the scope for further integration of the two systems or alternatively to discontinue its use in favour of an alternative such as Firmstep which the Council had recently purchased. With regard to the Employee Survey the Committee were concerned that the results showed a decline in staff morale across the Council. Whilst it was understood that the effects of funding reductions had played a role in this the Committee wished to see what the Council's response would be. Details were provided of the Stress management/awareness training that was to be rolled out and additionally they were advised that an action plan was currently being prepared to address the issues raised.

The Committee also reviewed the draft Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy that had been drafted by the Council in line with the Derbyshire County Council Policy and relevant legislation. A session on safeguarding for members was to be provided at a future Member Involvement Half Day and safeguarding contacts had been circulated to members and staff.

Following a request arising from concerns some members of the Committee had on the Allocations policy in relation to anti-social behaviour, a Rykneld Homes representative provided an update on how it worked in practise. North East Derbyshire had relatively low levels of anti-social behaviour which was reducing year on year. Details of the measures that were taken to prevent and monitor cases were provided for the Committee.

The Committee looked at work that was being undertaken on the Tarran Bungalow Regeneration Project in Eckington and Killamarsh. Developments at both sites were progressing well and the Committee were pleased that housing was being provided within the District and noted the award Rykneld Homes had received for the work on the Tarran Bungalows.

Monitoring of the Older Persons Housing Delivery Plan and the Supporting Older People and Disability activities being undertaken were also considered. The main purpose of the Delivery Plan was to understand what housing and support was needed where, so the Council could influence and guide members, developers and commissioners on the housing mix in new development and regenerations projects coming forward in order to meet local needs. Evidence was provided of numerous potential areas that were being explored.

The Committee considered the draft Member Development Evaluation Strategy which set out the methods in which the Council would evaluate learning and development for members. This would include how members felt the training had impacted on their role inside the Council and outside in their communities.

3.4 Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods

The Committee continued to monitor a number of key strategies and action plans including the Affordable Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and the Housing Strategy. A summary of the key issues and actions within the Affordable Housing action plan for 2013-14 was provided including the number of affordable homes sites under construction or in the pipeline. The need to maximise and prioritise the potential new funding streams for delivering Affordable Homes on both Council and non Council owned sites was highlighted.

The Committee was advised that the Homelessness Strategy was now due to be renewed but with the uncertainty of the Welfare Reforms it would need to be drafted to take account of the impacts of the Reforms. The Committee registered their interest in monitoring this issue over the coming year. The Housing Strategy was also being revised as part of the Council's emerging growth strategy and other factors including Rykneld Homes registered provider

status and Sheffield City Region and D2N2's growth strategies, both of which proposed new flexibilities to enable increased housing development locally.

Outcomes on the Housing Revenue Account Budget were provided for the Committee by the Executive Director Operations. The Committee was informed that the Council paid to buy itself out of the Housing Subsidy System in April 2012 which enabled it to retain all the money it raised in rents. It was now completely responsible for the Housing Revenue Account and was required to operate within its own local financial resources. It also had to ensure its housing was maintained at a 'Decent Homes' standard. Details were provided on the 30 year business plan and the amounts being spent on the Capital programme including the need for the Council to generate resources in the future to maintain its housing stock when Decent Homes funding had been fully utilised.

The Committee is statutorily required to review the Councils Community Safety Partnership under the Police and Crime Act. The Community Safety Manager outlined for the committee progress on delivery of the Community Safety Partnership Plan. The overall crime rate in the District had reduced by 3.2%. Domestic burglary has seen a 6.5% decrease, shoplifting 13.5% decrease and violence 1.3% decrease. Increases had occurred in vehicle crime 16.5% and criminal damage 3.8%. In partnership with the Police and the PCSO's a campaign was being developed to alert people to remove belongings from vehicles. An event had also been held at the Pro-act Stadium in Chesterfield to target harden vehicles that crime pattern analysis showed were more likely to be targeted. This made the vehicles more traceable if stolen. Additionally since April 2011 over 3,000 properties had been target hardened and residents had all been provided with information on how to protect their properties and belongings

An update was provided by the Portfolio Member with responsibility for Community Safety and Health on the work of the Derbyshire Police and Crime Panel. The panel began as a shadow panel tasked with scrutinising the work of the new Police and Crime Commissioner. From November 2012 it was formally established and had mainly focused upon its internal governance arrangements, Commissioner's staffing and the Police and Crime Plan. The Panel had also undertaken some work on alcohol related dependency and crime and anti-social behaviour.

3.5 Joint Scrutiny Panel (Shared Services)

This Panel was established between North East Derbyshire, Bolsover and Chesterfield to monitor the delivery of Shared Services between the three Councils. The three main services monitored are Building Control, Internal Audit and Shared Procurement.

Each year the Panel consider the annual service plans for each of the main services and monitor quarterly financial/performance information. The Panel has also considered the changes in the procurement unit. Following the loss of key members of staff details were provided of possible options for delivery of

the service. This included a joint initiative with the Chesterfield Royal Hospital and/or an application being made to a government programme based upon the three core District Council's developing opportunities which could arise from enhanced partnership working with Derbyshire County Council. This would progress Shared Services/Joint Working as a means of securing financial efficiencies while protecting and where possible enhancing services to local residents.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Joint Assistant Director of Regeneration on the options Appraisal Review carried out by Urban Vision in relation to the BCN Consultancy. The review looked at the current way in which BCN performed including ways to reduce costs and increase income. It also sought to identify and review future business models to reduce costs to member authorities and bring resilience to the service. The Committee considered the options and recommended to the Joint Board that they would wish the service to be kept in house. They additionally asked that the Board consider how the Scrutiny Panel's role could be enhanced to ensure it was proactive rather than reactive in relation to Shared Services decisions.

4 The Year Ahead 2014/15

- 4.1 Work plans are currently being developed for Scrutiny and will be finalised following the appointment of the new Scrutiny members and Chairs. The programme of reviews is also being considered so that Scrutiny Committees, once appointed, can scope the work they wish to undertake.
