

ANNUAL REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

2014/15

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Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2014/15

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 T Reader
Vice Chair Councillor D Skinner

Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods:

Chair Councillor B Wright
Vice Chair N Dolby

1. A Summary of the Work Undertaken during 2014/15

- 1.1 Each of the committees has completed its work programme with the time available being 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, Joint ICT Service, The Allocations Experience and The Relationship between the Council and Rykneld Homes. Progress against the action plans has been satisfactorily completed and the reviews have been signed off.

2. Current Scrutiny Reviews

- 2.1 Three Scrutiny Reviews were undertaken this year and a number of recommendations were made for improvement. These were considered by Cabinet on 15th April, 2015 and accepted. These recommendations will now be translated into action plans for delivery. Full copies of the reports and all previous reports can be viewed on the Council's intranet or in the Scrutiny Room.

2.2 Anti Social Behaviour and Young People

This issue was identified for review as it was thought timely to review this area as the topic was considered important and relevant to both elected members and the Public. The Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee is also the Statutory Committee for the review of the work of the Community Safety Partnership.

Interviews were held with a range of stakeholders including the Police and officers from North East Derbyshire District Council and Derbyshire County Council. Questionnaires were also sent to residents who responded to an invite to participate in the review and Parish Councils.

The Review Panel concluded there were many encouraging examples of positive work being undertaken across the Community Safety Partnership to tackle Anti Social Behaviour. This focus on addressing Anti Social Behaviour within the District should be maintained.

It was also found that whilst the levels of Anti Social Behaviour by young people in the District were relatively low the impact it can have on people experiencing it could be significant. It was therefore important for all partners to continue to seek ways to engage with young people in our communities.

Five recommendations for improvement were made mainly focused around working with partners, engagement of young people and the facilities available to them.

2.3 Mental Health Services

Members felt it was timely to review this issue as there had recently been a number of cases highlighted nationally of gaps in organisations with regard to mental health.

Evidence was gathered in a variety of ways including written sources and interviews with a range of officers who came into contact with mental health issues through customers or colleagues.

The panel concluded that the level of awareness of mental health across the organisation was varied. Some key front line services had a good awareness and undertook regular training but there was some areas identified for further improvement.

Three recommendations for improvement were made which focussed on the establishment of a task force with relevant partners to identify how awareness of staff across the council could be raised, identifying any gaps in training and supporting employees and customers as appropriate.

2.4 Working with Parish and Town Councils

This issue was identified for review as the relationship with Parish and Town Councils is important and members wished to look at how it was working.

A wide range of officers at North East Derbyshire District Council were interviewed and a focus group was held with Parish Clerks. A questionnaire was also circulated to all Parish Councils and the District/Parish Liaison Group was observed.

The Review Panel on the whole concluded that the relationship between the District Council and Parish/Town Councils was working well. The majority of stakeholders felt that the support they received from the District Council was good and acknowledged the changing environment in which both organisations were working.

Seven recommendations were made mainly concerned with reviewing how the District/Parish Liaison Group worked to encourage participation, improving communication on both sides and sharing training.

3. Scrutiny Committees

All four Scrutiny Committees were consulted on the new Corporate Plan 2015-19 that was being developed for the beginning of the new civic year in 2015. The Committees raised a number of questions on the plan including:

- How we are ensuring the objectives are tied into the locality
- How our objectives were chosen and what evidence supports this
- The consultation process

- How we were identifying what was important to Communities and Councillors
- How success would be measured
- How we will ensure buy in
- Linkages with Bolsover District Councils Corporate Plan Aims

3.1 Audit and Corporate Governance

The Committee considered a 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, and the Risk Management update, Partnership Working and Strategic Risk Register.

A key area of work was the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget Monitoring. Several reports were considered during the year focusing on the General Fund Revenue Account, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme which advised Members of the financial position of the 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.

The Audit Commission report on 'Protecting the Public Purse Fraud Briefing 2014' was considered by the Committee. The report provided information to assist Councillors in considering the Council's fraud detection activities, fraud detection performance, gave focus for discussions on the local and national fraud risks and an opportunity for reviewing the Council's current strategy, resources and capability for tackling fraud.

A number of Audit related reports were also considered including the Annual report of the internal Audit Consortium 2013/14, Summary of Progress on the Annual internal Audit Plan 2013/14 and 2014/15, Public Sector Internal Audit Standards Improvement Plan, Annual Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit and various internal reports on individual services.

The Committee also considered a referral from the Standard Committee on the Whistle blowing Policy. Members were advised that the Whistle blowing Policy was aimed at fostering a climate of openness and transparency which ensured individuals in a workplace did not feel they would be victimised if they raised concerns about wrong doing within their organisation to an appropriate officer. Key changes had been made by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 and the policy had been revised to include this which had been considered and supported by the Standards Committee at its meeting on

28 May 2014. The Policy had then been approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 11 June 2014.

The Committee at a special meeting undertook a detailed self assessment of its role to enable a view to be formed as to its effectiveness as an Audit Committee and to recommend any actions necessary to improve its operation. The Committee as part of the evaluation of its work used the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA] and Society of Chief Executive's [SOLACE] criteria as the benchmarking mechanism for measuring the performance of the Committee. Members considered a series of questions based on six principles of Good Governance. This was the second time that the Committee has undertaken this detailed evaluation of its role and work. The findings of the self assessment were in the main positive.

3.2 Economic Regeneration, Skills and Environment

The Committee continued to monitor the delivery of a number of key strategies/policies during the year which included the Joint Street Scene Policy, Joint Waste and Recycling Collection Policy, the Waste Management Strategy and the Revenue Strategy.

The Committee, along with the Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee, was consulted on the Joint Economic Development and Housing Strategy in so far as it related to their remit. The consultation covered the key challenges facing the Authority and the key opportunities available. The Committee considered the eight key strategic objectives that had been identified in response to these challenges and opportunities and the proposed initiatives and actions that would deliver them.

The Asset Management Strategy and the Future of Community Buildings were also considered by the Committee. The Council had developed a strategy to set the context for the preparation for the detailed Corporate Asset Management Plan. The Committee considered the key objectives that were set out in the plan. These included the aim to ensure that the Council's service requirements were linked to an effective asset management solution. It also aimed to raise awareness of the Council's assets to provide a clear decision making structure for their management and further development. Additionally it aimed to rationalise the asset portfolio and try to target investment into buildings that had been identified as essential for long-term service delivery and to release value from assets by minimising running costs, structured investment or disposal.

The Chief Executive and the Executive Director -Transformation attended the Committee to provide an update on progress of the Growth Agenda, the Transformation Programme, and the work of the Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authority developments.

The Chief Executive provided a detailed presentation which set out the benefits of combined authorities with regard to greater funding and freedom

opportunities. The presentation also demonstrated the importance of generating growth for the Authority and outlined progress that had been made towards achieving the strategic priorities within the Growth Strategy.

The Executive Director -Transformation provided details of achievements made as part of the Transformation Programme. Some key projects highlighted were the implementation of the Firmstep Customer Information System, the implementation of the Civica Financial system and the Leisure Income/Expenditure Options Review and development of Leisure Services.

3.3 Healthy Communities and Well Being

The Committee continued to monitor progress on car parking matters in the District which had arisen originally as a matter raised by the Disabled People's Consultative Group on parking bays and restrictions.

Additionally further information was considered on Equality issues relating to disability and gender within the Authority. As a result of redundancies that had taken place during the year the Committee reviewed information provided by the Assistant Director – Human resources on the breakdown of the workforce leaving the Authority.

An update on financial inclusion activities was considered by the Committee. Tackling financial exclusion was an important focus within the broader strategy tackling poverty and inequality for all the people in North East Derbyshire District. It was recognised that actions which addressed the employment status, income, health and financial capabilities of parents/carers could have significant impact in making a difference to this priority. The Committee acknowledged the work that had been done but recognised that this was a large piece of work that needed to be undertaken.

Progress made on The Older Persons Housing Delivery Plan was monitored. The purpose of the plan was to be a prioritised working plan to deliver or enable/influence the delivery of the right housing and related support for older people, across tenure, to the right people in the right place across the District. An analysis of future population trends had been carried out and showed an ageing population, 74% of which would be owner occupiers and most choosing to remain independently in their existing homes. The action plan would reflect these key trends.

The Council's Leisure service was another key area the committee monitored including progress of the Leisure and Culture Strategy which was part of the Health and Well Being Strategy. The five key areas considered were Sports Development and Healthy Communities Plan, Leisure Services Marketing Plan, Built Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategy, Arts and Cultural Development Plan and the Leisure Services Subsidiary Reduction Plan.

Another area of work that was considered was a variety of Health and Wellbeing issues. This included the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing

Strategy, the internal Health and Wellbeing Strategy and health and wellbeing issues around the relocation of the Council to Mill Lane.

3.4 Safer Homes and Neighbourhoods

The Committee is statutorily required to review the Council's Community Safety Partnership under the Police and Crime Act. The Community Safety Partnership Manager outlined for the committee progress on delivery of the Community Partnership Plan. The overall crime rate in the District had seen an increase of 3.2% compared to the previous year. Domestic burglary had seen a 24.2% increase, violence a 13.8% increase, shoplifting had reached plateau. Vehicle crime had decreased by 26.45% following a number of measures taken to tackle this issue. The Community Safety Partnership Manager outlined the various initiatives being undertaken during the year to try and deal with these increases. She also outlined a number of new tools and powers that were now available to the Partnership including the Community Trigger which was set up because of the recent Fiona Pilkington case. People who felt agencies were not helping could now submit a form to the Authority for the situation to be assessed.

The Portfolio member for Community Safety and Health provided an update on the work of the Derbyshire Police and Crime Panel. She advised the Committee of the six strategic objectives of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The panel intended to undertake Task and finish groups on various issues and was working with the Commissioner's office to develop a performance framework.

The Committee also continued to monitor a number of key strategies and action plans including the Affordable Housing Strategy and Affordable Warmth Activities under the new Environmental Health Structure. The current Affordable Housing need for the District was for 560 additional properties per year. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager informed the Committee that 332 affordable housing units were already under construction. The Sustainability Officer for Rykneld Homes and the Strategic Alliance advised the Committee on the Warm and Healthy Homes initiative which was an energy reduction programme which enabled people who qualified to access a range of measures designed to tackle fuel poverty. Activities carried out under the scheme included installation of new boilers, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.

The first annual report on the Choice Based Lettings and Allocation Policy and welfare reforms impact monitoring report was considered. The report provided annual data relating to the impacts of the welfare reforms legislation. The revised Choice Based Lettings and Allocations Policy sought to mitigate some of the impacts of welfare reforms, particularly on under occupation and potential increased debt for tenants.

Outcomes on the Housing Revenue Account were provided for the Committee by the Executive Director – Operations. The Committee was informed of the latest position including details of the increase in rental income of 2.2% which

had gone to the Capital Programme. This money would then be spent on maintaining and repairing properties for tenants which would provide a better tenure with greater security for tenants and still be below the market rent.

Rykneld Homes provide an update on the Non-Traditional Housing Stock Condition Survey. Forty percent of the Council's housing stock was non-traditional and as part of the Decent Homes bid money had been allocated to deal with the problems. The Director of Property Services and Development advised that to date 10% of the problems had been addressed and detailed the work that had been undertaken on various types of property together with future works that needed to be undertaken.

3.5 Joint Scrutiny Panel (Shared Services)

This Joint Panel was established between North East Derbyshire, Bolsover and Chesterfield Council's to monitor the delivery of Shared Services between the three Authorities. The three main services monitored were Building Control, Internal Audit and Shared Procurement. This monitoring took the form of consideration of the annual service plans for each of the main services and the monitoring of quarterly financial /performance information.

However, recently the arrangements for the provision of these shared services had changed since the original formation of the Panel in 2008. These changes had been considered at the Panel and were being monitored. Procurement was now being delivered by a joint initiative with the Chesterfield Royal Hospital, on behalf of NEDDC and BDC with CBC undertaking separate arrangements. Internal Audit was currently considering whether to enter into a Derbyshire Wide Consortium and Building Control was also exploring the establishment of a Derbyshire wide Building Control service. As a result the Panel were reviewing how the Panel operated.

4. The Year Ahead 2015/16

- 4.1 An induction session for Scrutiny Members will be held on 2nd June, 2015 to look at the remit of the Scrutiny Committees following their realignment to the proposed new Corporate Plan. Work programmes will also be discussed and developed at this event and suggestions for reviews will be considered and prioritised.