



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21



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FOREWORD

By Councillor Stuart Bird, Scrutiny Committee Chairman



I am delighted to be able to present my foreword to the second Annual Report of East Suffolk Council's Scrutiny Committee. This Report will provide a retrospective record of the work undertaken by the Committee, its activities, and achievements in the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

It has been an honour to be the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and I am supported by a very experienced and enthusiastic Vice-Chairman, Councillor Mike Deacon. We work together to support and facilitate the Committee in carrying out its extremely important statutory function.

The Committee has continued to examine various areas of the Council's work and, in some cases, the work of partner organisations that have significance for our local communities.

We also receive regular updates from individual Cabinet Members who outline their key deliverables in the next six months. This approach enables the Scrutiny Committee to identify if they can add any value to the pre-decision stages and the ultimate outcomes for the Council. This might be just seeking the Committee's thoughts or, equally, there is the offer of a "critical friend" - checking and challenging but in a constructive and purposeful way. At these sessions, the Scrutiny Committee aims to act as an influencing body acting positively to contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services.

Scrutiny will always seek to act as a counterbalance that complements the decision-making powers of the Cabinet, however, moving forwards, the Committee will change its emphasis from the operational detail to the strategic overview and seeks to ensure better outcomes through constructive engagement with Cabinet, the Council's Officers, and its partners.

I hope this Report reflects what I feel has been a very productive year in Scrutiny. I do hope that you find this Report informative and interesting.

Stuart Bird

THE ROLE OF SCRUTINY

What we do

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new set of “political management arrangements” for the running of Councils, including the formalising of executive arrangements for local government to be balanced by a strong scrutiny function to ensure decision-makers were held to account. To carry out this scrutiny function, the arrangements included the power to do *anything they consider likely to promote or improve the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area*.

The role and purpose of scrutiny is to add value to the delivery of public services through providing strong but measured challenge both to the Cabinet and to external organisations where there are issues of public concern. It acts as a 'critical friend' to decision makers by beneficially examining the Council's policies, key decisions, and service provision to ensure they are appropriate, efficient, transparent, accountable and in the best interests of the District's residents. Since 2010, several pieces of legislation have further emphasised the value of scrutiny within modern and effective government, including reviewing issues which lie outside the Council's responsibilities. This is achieved by having co-operative relationships between scrutinised bodies and the Committee.

Scrutiny is led by local, elected Councillors working with other local bodies and local communities to help the constructive improvement of services. Scrutiny uses open and transparent processes and is an influencing, rather than a decision-making, body. It provides co-ordinated reviews of policy and service performance in line with strategic objectives and corporate priorities. Its challenges are constructive and purposeful. It is objective, focused, and realistic in its reviews. These are evidence-based so demonstrating that scrutiny is credible and useful at adding value.

Scrutiny is a catalyst for positive change, promotes and acknowledges good practice and challenges under-performance.

Meetings of the Committee are open to the public and, in the majority, held in the evenings. The Committee has endeavoured to engage with the wider community and to involve stakeholders and the public at its meetings, as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Committee is also the Council's designated **Crime and Disorder Committee** for the purposes of the Police and Social Justice Act 2006 (s19-22) and this requires the Committee to review community safety issues annually.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 (s190) gave Councils powers to scrutinise local NHS trusts, including Primary Care Trusts. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gave more powers to local government to scrutinise other public organisations, including bodies such as, for example, the Environment Agency. In 2020/21, the Committee did not review any aspects of health provision, but the power remains available to do so as considered necessary.

The Scrutiny Committee conducts its proceedings in accordance with its Terms of Reference (as set out in Part 2, Section C, Functions and Responsibilities of the Constitution) and the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (as set out in Part 3, Procedure Rules, of the [Constitution](#)).

The principles of good public scrutiny

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, established in 2003, promotes the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government. The Centre has set out the four principles of good public scrutiny as:

- *To provide a critical friend “challenge” to executive policymakers and decision-makers*
- *To enable the voice and concerns of the public*
- *To be carried out by “independent minded governors” who lead and own the scrutiny role;
and*
- *To drive improvement in public services*

What we do not do

The Scrutiny Committee does not deal with quasi-judicial matters such as Planning or Licensing, except if there were to be a significant system issue. It does not deal with issues that are, or should be, resolved by the separate corporate complaints procedure or through internal systems within Service Teams. The Committee does not deal with vexatious or discriminatory issues or matters that are not of wider community significance, the latter being more appropriately pursued through the relevant Service Team, Ward Councillor or Cabinet Member with responsibility for the area in question.

Scrutiny does not become involved where there would be duplication of existing work, or if its review would be untimely or would not lead to effective outcomes.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Membership 2020/21

The Committee comprises 13 Members and is politically balanced as follows:

9 Conservatives

Stuart Bird
Edward Back
Judy Cloke
Linda Coulam
Andree Gee
Tracey Green
Geoff Lynch
Mark Newton
Keith Robinson

2 Labour

Mike Deacon
Louise Gooch

2 GLI Members

David Beavan
Caroline Topping

Roles and Responsibilities

The Council's Constitution contains detailed role descriptions outlining the purpose, duties, and responsibilities of the various members of the Committee, as well as the qualities and skills required. They are designed to be used as a guide and a working document but are not intended to be prescriptive or exclusive. These can be found within [Part 2, Functions and Responsibilities](#), of the Constitution on our website, but a brief summary is also provided below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee

At East Suffolk, the Chairman is a member of the Administration Group of the Council; the Vice-Chairman is a member of an Opposition Group.

The Chairman provides leadership and ensures the Committee is Member-led and has ownership of its work programme. S/he aims to develop positive relationships and encourages contributions from Members. The Chairman also ensures the Committee works inclusively and that the role of scrutiny is conducted in an enabling environment.

Committee Members

Members of the Committee contribute actively at the meetings with fairness and impartiality. They will participate, as appropriate, in the collection and assessment of evidence to produce effective recommendations and follow up on any recommendations made. Committee members take an overview of all the activities the Council is involved in and can decide to scrutinise issues.

Partner and public involvement

The views of local people are of importance to the primary aim of scrutiny – *improving the quality of life for the local community*. Partners and the public can contribute specific expertise to topics

being examined from the perspective of either a service provider or a service user. Their involvement adds value and strengthens the links with stakeholders.

The work of the Scrutiny Committee also provides Members with additional opportunities to engage with groups within the community who may not readily get involved directly in the work of the Council. Therefore, it remains important for the Scrutiny Committee to be outward-looking and to consider how partners and the public might be involved in its work.

Such involvement may be through formal 'co-option' or invitations to representatives of groups to contribute expert knowledge or evidence, or to members of the public to contribute their views.

Scrutiny welcomes and encourages our Partners as well as members of the public who live or work in the District to get involved and suggestions for the work of our Committee will be considered for their suitability. Please email our Democratic Services Officer Sarah.Davis@eastsoffolk.gov.uk in the first instance.

The Committee's Work During 2020/21

Instead of a complete commentary of all that the Scrutiny Committee has achieved over the year, this Report provides a brief summary of the key highlights of the work the Committee has been engaged in during 2020/21. The related full formal Committee reports and resulting minutes may also be viewed on the Council's [website](#).

In summary, during 2020/21, the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the following key areas:

May 2020:

- Review of Postal Voting and Count Arrangements at the District and European Elections in East Suffolk in 2019

June 2020:

- Annual Report on Community Safety 2019/20

July 2020:

- Presentation on the processes and management associated with road closures
- Review of the Asset Management Strategy 2019-23

September 2020:

- Appointments to Outside Bodies with a scrutiny function: To agree appointments from the Committee membership (*see Membership of Outside Bodies below*)
- Jubilee Terrace Beach Hut Development

October 2020:

- Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to Covid 19 pandemic (Part 1)

November 2020:

- Review of Parking Management and Civil Parking Enforcement
- Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to Covid 19 pandemic (Part 2)

December 2020:

- Capital Programme 2021/22 to 24/25 including revisions to 2020/21
- Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25

January 2021:

- Draft General Fund Budget and Council Tax Report 2021/22: To review, comment upon and make recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council
- Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22

February 2021:

- Review of Economic Recovery and Regeneration of the District post Covid-19

March 2021:

- Review of Waste Management (Part 1)

Member Working Groups/Task and Finish Groups

A remit for a Task and Finish Group on Integrated Care (inter-agency co-ordination of social care) was agreed at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 November 2020 and updates were received in December 2020 and January 2021. The Task and Finish Group produced a further interim report in February 2021. However, it was agreed by the Group that, while their work had been informative and productive, they would not bring a formal report and recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee.

Membership of Outside Bodies

The Leader of the Council has stated that the Scrutiny Committee be asked to decide on the appointment of a representative to external forums with scrutiny functions. In 2020/21, the Committee considered and appointed the following members to the Committees indicated below:

- Suffolk County Council Joint Health Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Judy Cloke (also a member of the East Suffolk Council's Scrutiny Committee).
- Suffolk County Council Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Committee – Cllr Keith Patience (as a volunteer member representative as Cllr Patience is not a member of East Suffolk Council's Scrutiny Committee).

Call-ins and Councillors' Calls for Action

There have been no Call-ins or Calls for Action in the period of this report.

Training

The provision of training developed specifically for Scrutiny Committee Members is vitally important to support the continued development of the Committee. The following scrutiny-specific training sessions were held in the 2020/21 Municipal Year:

14 August 2020: Best Practice for Effective Scrutiny

The Seminar was facilitated by David McGrath, a respected and experienced trainer with over 15 years specialising in providing scrutiny training to Councils. Committee Members received details of best practice characteristics in a pandemic and post pandemic context as well as key pointers to make a bigger beneficial difference in scrutiny (adding value), together with some thoughts, tips and techniques on some (potential) priority areas of focus.

22 January 2021: Budget Scrutiny Training

This Session focussed on Budget Scrutiny and provided the Committee with training on how to ask effective questions on the draft Budget. It was facilitated by Ian Fifield, of Fifield Training Ltd.

The Committee also recognised the importance of providing non-Scrutiny Committee Members with an opportunity to understand and learn more about the Scrutiny function.

8 April 2021: Scrutiny is Sexy!

This in-house briefing session created and delivered by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Cllr Gooch and Katherine Abbott, Committee Support Officer was open to all Council Members. The session was designed to give Councillors an awareness of Scrutiny, focusing on the legislation and guidance, our aims and objectives, and how we conduct our business and the interviewing and questioning techniques employed.

Budget

The Scrutiny Committee has an annual budget of £6000. In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Committee spent £4125 on scrutiny-specific training (*as detailed above*).

Dates of meetings held in the 2020/21 Municipal Year:

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing restrictions, the Government brought in the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which enabled Councils to hold meetings remotely. The Scrutiny Committee was, therefore, able to re-commence its formal meetings in May 2020 via the Zoom video conferencing system and to broadcast live on the Council's YouTube channel. An Extraordinary meeting was held in June 2020 to ensure the planned work programme remained on course.

At the meeting on 17 December 2020, the Committee decided to move to having 11 meetings per year to enable Members to focus on one topic per meeting and avoid the need to arrange ad-hoc meetings.

Meetings were held on the following dates:

- 28 May 2020
- 18 June 2020
- 23 July 2020
- 24 September 2020
- 15 October 2020
- 16 November 2020
- 26 November 2020
- 17 December 2020
- 28 January 2021
- 18 February 2021
- 25 March 2021

LOOKING AHEAD

Forward Work Programme and how its contents are determined

The Committee's Work Programme is considered at each meeting and a scoping form is created for any potential topics suggested for review. These forms are then considered at a formal Committee meeting and a suitable date for the review is then selected. Topics can be suggested by Committee Members or non-Committee members. The Committee is also receptive to suggestions from Cabinet Members for areas within their portfolios which could form the basis of a topic for scrutiny. Committee will consider these suggestions positively, whilst retaining their independence in choosing topics and their extent for scrutiny.

At the time of writing this Report, the Committee has already completed several largescale reviews in 2021/22 Municipal Year, in addition to the key budgetary and strategic finance reports it is required to receive. In February 2022, the Committee will also be conducting the full and final review into the Council's response to the Covid pandemic focussing on the community response and ways to harness and keep volunteers engaged and active. The March 2022 meeting will see the Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee.

The Committee will also be considering a formal report by the Council's Monitoring Officer on the Government's statutory scrutiny guidance – date to be agreed. This will provide an opportunity to further review our current arrangements and identify any areas for development so that we continue to focus on the 'big things' where a positive impact may be delivered.