



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



Our Vision for Scrutiny Activity

Scrutiny at East Suffolk Council aims to enhance the quality of life for all who live and work in the District by ensuring the provision of a safe, clean, attractive and prosperous environment for our communities.

Scrutiny aims to be objective, evidence-based, transparent and constructive and to reflect the interests and concerns of local communities.

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Foreword by the Chairman

**Councillor Stuart Bird,
Scrutiny Committee Chairman 2021/22**

As Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, I am delighted, once again, to be able to present my foreword to the Annual Report of East Suffolk Council's Scrutiny Committee. This Report provides a retrospective record of the work undertaken by the Committee, its activities, and achievements in the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

I continue to be supported by Councillor Mike Deacon, a very experienced and enthusiastic Vice-Chairman, as well as the other 11 dedicated Members of the Committee. We all work together, cross-party, to support and facilitate this extremely important statutory function.

The Committee's main priorities each year are as follows:

1. To act as a counterbalance that complements the decision-making powers of Cabinet in terms of the strategic direction of the Council.
2. 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 and residents.
3. To scrutinise as a "critical friend" individual Cabinet Members on their key deliverables for the year, thereby enabling the Committee to identify if they can add any value to the pre-decision stages and the ultimate outcomes for the Council.

The Committee decided to focus on particular issues of importance or concern to East Suffolk's communities and residents including:

- Community Partnerships, the Council's flagship community engagement programme
- A review of NHS dental provision across the district
- The final review of the response to Covid 19.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone who has participated in this year's Scrutiny process, in particular the specialist guest speakers who took part in the review of NHS Dental Provision, and the representatives from our partner organisations who were involved in the review of Community Partnerships and the Review of Covid 19.

In addition to scrutinising specific topics and Cabinet Members on their portfolios, the Scrutiny Committee also continues to look at ways in which to improve its own processes and procedures to ensure that it provides responsive and meaningful scrutiny of issues that matter to our residents and benefits the Council.

I hope this Report reflects what I feel has been a very productive year in Scrutiny and that you find it 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 mostly held in the evenings. The Committee has endeavoured to engage with the wider community and to involve stakeholders 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 promotes the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government and has identified the following four principles of good public scrutiny:

- ***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 2021/22

The Committee comprises 13 Members and is politically balanced with 9 Conservatives, 2 Labour and 2 GLI Members as follows:



Stuart Bird (Chairman) (CON)
Chairman since May 2019-



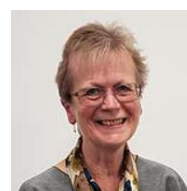
Mike Deacon (Vice-Chairman) (LAB)
Vice-Chairman since May 2019-



Edward Back (CON)
Member since May 2019-



David Beavan (GLI)
Member since May 2019-



Judy Cloke (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Linda Coulam (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Andree Gee (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Louise Gooch (LAB)
Member since May 2019-



Tracey Green (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Colin Hedgley (CON)
Member since May 2021-



Geoff Lynch (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Keith Robinson (CON)
Member since May 2019-



Caroline Topping (GLI)
Member since May 2019-

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 Scrutiny Support Officer Sarah.Davis@eastsuffolk.gov.uk in the first instance.

The Committee's Work Programme 2021/22

The Committee decided to continue scheduling 11 meetings per year in its Work Programme as it enabled Members to focus on one topic per meeting and avoided the need to arrange ad-hoc meetings. Meetings were held on the following dates:

20 May 2021
17 June 2021
15 July 2021
16 September 2021
21 October 2021
16 December 2021
20 January 2022
17 February 2022
17 March 2022
19 April 2022

Each year, the Committee has a number of reviews it must carry out such as the Budget (16 December 2021 and 20 January 2022) as well as a requirement to sit at least once a year in its statutory role as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee (17 March 2022).

For the remainder of its meetings in 2021/22, Members decided to focus primarily on those issues that were deemed to be of particular importance to the District's communities and residents. Below is a brief summary of the key highlights of the Committee's discussions - the related full formal Committee reports and resulting minutes may also be viewed on the Council's [website](#):

20 May 2021 - Review of Community Partnerships

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How town/parish council, VCSE and Community Sector membership would be boosted• Ensuring equality between town/parish councils in CPs regardless of size• Looking at transport issues• Monitoring of good practice and Peer Review• CP Funding allocation regardless of area's size• Assisting groups to identify funding opportunities• How CPs would meet in the future• The annual review of CPs' priorities	That, having received the written report and questioned its contents, the Committee agreed to formally thank the Cabinet Member, all Officers within the Communities team and the Chairs of the eight Community Partnerships for their excellent work and achievements to date.

17 June 2021 - Review of Waste Management (part 2)

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current state of littering and cost to the taxpayer • Impact of litter on the environment, including wildlife impacts • Bins to be in the right place and emptied regularly • Role of councillors and MPs in addressing littering • Increase in bin collections in tourist areas • Microchipped bins • Education on littering through Greenprint Forum • Dissemination of information on littering via social media and partnership working • Litter issues and bin contamination in Lowestoft • Cost in lost recycling payments • Disparities between the north and south of ES • Waste separation at Haddenham Road site • Recycling centre booking system • Bulky waste collection • Comparison of ESC to other local authorities • Recycling rates • Enforcement powers against individuals and companies that continually contaminate • Recycling practices abroad • Impact of the Environmental Bill • Staff deployment for litter pickers/street cleansers • Communication between litter pick groups • Possible pilot of returning deposits on plastic bottles and packaging • Mechanism to communicate with SCC about clearing highways and verges • ESC control over setting fixed penalty notices • Impact of reduction of single-use plastics on recycling contract • Combined bin to separate recyclables • Reporting littering and fly tipping • Evidence collection for contamination of bins • Profile of littering in school education programmes • Officer resources to tackle the issue 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That, having considered the report on Waste Management in East Suffolk, it was agreed that a number of recommendations would be circulated to Committee Members for approval prior to submission to Cabinet. 2. That the Cabinet Member and Officers be thanked for their assistance on this review and be asked to email details of the Norse litter picking schedule to Members to avoid duplication with community litter pick groups, and further details be sent to Members on the approach to fly tipping on private land particularly in rural areas.

16 September 2021 – Housing Development Programme Update

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis by Ward • Affordable Homes Programme from government • Shared ownership being classified as affordable housing • New builds • Housing Strategy 2017-23 • The Council's housing stock numbers • Housing waiting lists • Social housing – apparent discrepancy between ESC and government figures • Target to complete 50+ houses per year • Town Centre housing development in Lowestoft • Reaching zero carbon standard • Right to Buy scheme • National shortage of building materials • Value for money on the open market for housing land • Development of the Sanyo site in Lowestoft • Digital inclusion and assistive technology • Integrated housing • Affordable home ownership target • Borrowing funding from the HRA to build more homes 	<p>That Cabinet be asked to support this Committee's recommendation for Officers to draw up a Business Case within 3 months of the Cabinet decision on the resources required in order to increase the existing target of delivering 50 new build Council houses per annum to 100 new build per annum</p>

16 September 2021 – Empty Homes Update

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of an empty home • New Homes Bonus receipt for bringing properties back into use • Resources to follow up on annual exercise of reviewing empty homes • Number of empty properties brought back into use at neighbouring local authorities • Officer resources to bring empty properties back into use • Who to contact about empty properties 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Officers produce guidance notes to help Members when dealing with empty homes cases. 2. That Cabinet be asked to support this Committee's recommendation that the process for tackling long term empty homes in East Suffolk be reviewed within 3 months of the Cabinet decision, including liaising with other Local Authorities to ensure best practice and a Business Case being drawn up to provide resources in order for us to engage a dedicated Empty Homes Officer

21 October 2021 – Review of NHS Dental Provision in East Suffolk

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30m appointments lost for dental patients – amounted to half a million courses of treatment or interactions with dentists • NHS national contract's negative impact on delivery of care across the region • Move to a commissioning model • Underperformance in relation to contracts and reasons why • Failure to keep pace with NHS targets • Procurement of dental services • Clawback of monies • Lack of contractual obligation between dental practices and patients • Recruitment issues in dentistry • Issues recruiting dentists from overseas • Impact of Brexit on EU nationals working in dentistry • Posting for vocational training • Morale and retention in the workforce • Preventative measures for patients and work hygienists can do • The Dental Strategy • Practitioners moving from NHS to private practice • Potential changes to the NHS dental contract • Dentistry training • Excessive waiting lists • Gulf in provision in the region • Accessibility of services • Impact of COVID-19 on dentistry provision • Frequency of treatment for patients with good oral health • Potential new dental contract in April 2022 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Councillor Back be asked to report back to the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee on the findings of this review. 2. That a letter be sent to the Minister emphasising the importance of creating a new national contract as soon as possible. 3. That a letter be sent to the Universities of East Anglia and Suffolk regarding the creation of a dental school in the region which could be attached to the universities. 4. That the Cabinet Member and Head of Communities discuss potential interventions the Council could make, possibly through the Community Partnerships, including an early year's programme to improve oral health and contacting practices regarding better communication.

17 February 2022 – Review of Covid 19

Key points discussed	Resolution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role, work and funding of the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) • Communication with volunteers throughout the pandemic • Emergency Planning Groups • Designated emergency persons for town and parish councils • Emergency plans held by towns and parishes • Role of councillors in an emergency • Data protection requirements during an emergency • Rest Centre training for Members • The role of the voluntary sector during the pandemic • Funding requests during the pandemic • Move to online service provision • Volunteers not returning to roles post lockdowns • The refreshed Volunteering Strategy • The importance of volunteers during the pandemic • The potential overuse and overreliance on volunteers in East Suffolk • Examples of activities and programmes provided during the pandemic by local communities • Partnership working • The Good Neighbour Scheme • Planning and preparedness for future booster programmes • Use of schools as vaccination centres • Possible exclusion through digitalisation • Encouraging intergenerational volunteering • Volunteer Passport Scheme • DBS checks • Home But Not Alone Scheme • Referral routes • Results of the CAS community group survey – June 2021 • Mental Health and Wellbeing Task & Finish Group formed by Community Partnership Board • PinkOrange Scheme • Budget advice and support • Free school meals • Increasing engagement with Financial Inclusion services • Emerging needs and early intervention • Community pantries/larders 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That progress in relation to key areas of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically community response groups, volunteering and emergency planning, as well as the emerging needs be noted. 2. That Ben Hogston liaise with Councillor Beavan regarding a potential venue in Southwold for the next booster rollout. 3. That the Head of Communities raise the possible development of an app with the Collaborative Communities Board. 4. That the Cabinet Member for Communities discuss the promotion of Emergency Plans with the District Emergency Planning Officer.

In addition, the Committee received updates from the following Cabinet Members regarding their portfolios:

- 20 May 2021 - Cllr Letitia Smith – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism
- 15 July 2021 - Cllr Stephen Burroughes – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Customer Services, ICT & Commercial Partnerships
- 15 July 2021 - Cllr Steve Gallant – Leader of the Council
- 16 September 2021 - Cllr Richard Kerry – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing
- 16 December 2021 - Councillor Maurice Cook – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources

Member Working Groups/Task and Finish Groups

There were no Task and Finish Groups held during the period of this report.

Membership of Outside Bodies

The Leader of the Council has requested that the Scrutiny Committee decide on the appointment of representatives to external forums with a scrutiny function. In May 2021, the Committee considered and appointed the following for the 2021/22 Municipal Year:

- **Suffolk County Council Joint Health Scrutiny Committee** – Cllr Colin Hedgley as the named representative with Councillor Ed Back as the nominated Substitute – these roles were swapped in September 2021 with Councillor Back becoming the named representative and Councillor Hedgley the nominated Substitute.
- **Suffolk County Council Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Committee** – Cllr Linda Coulam as the named representative with Councillor Keith Robinson as the nominated Substitute.

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 Committee received a training session on 12 August 2021 entitled "Developing Scrutiny and Building the Team". The session was

facilitated by David McGrath, a respected and experienced trainer with over 15 years specialising in providing scrutiny training to Councils.

Budget

The Scrutiny Committee has an annual budget of £6000. In the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Committee spent £1768.39 on scrutiny-specific training and refreshments for the Work Programme Away Evening in February 2022.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Scrutiny Committee continues to evolve by looking at its processes and procedures to ensure that the Committee works effectively and efficiently.

With this in mind, the Chairman authorised a review carried out by the Scrutiny Support Officer, Sarah Davis, which took place from December 2021 to February 2022. The review included 1:1 interviews with each individual Scrutiny Committee Member to find out their views about how the Committee operated, and also with several other Senior Members and Officers, who had attended and supported the Committee with recent reviews, in order to gain their perspectives and any suggested ideas for improvement.

The results of the review and a reminder of the Government's Statutory Scrutiny Guidance were discussed with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and circulated to Committee Members. This approach ensured that any potential changes accorded with the Guidance. It was agreed that the following changes would be introduced for the new Municipal Year:

1. Scoping Forms

The requirement for Members to complete a Scoping Form for potential topics was scrapped as it was felt this process put some Members off from suggesting topics and there was also some disparity in the level of detail on the completed forms which could result in topics not being scrutinised as fully as possible.

2. Work Programme

Members had previously suggested potential review topics for the Work Programme at the end of regular Committee meetings but it was considered that this was not the optimal time to enable Members to give topics the right amount of consideration. It was agreed, therefore, that an annual "Away evening" would be held to agree the Work Programme for the following Municipal Year as this gave Members dedicated time in an informal setting to discuss each topic in greater detail and decide if it should be reviewed using the following:

Key features of an effective work programme

A Member led process, shortlisting and prioritising topics – with support from officers – that:

- **reflects local needs and priorities – issues of community concern as well as Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy priorities**
 - **prioritises topics for scrutiny that have most impact or benefit**
 - **involves local stakeholders**
 - **is flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues**

The Committee's Away Evening took place on 21 February 2022 and each Member was encouraged to suggest at least one review topic for discussion. Although 15 review topics were considered in total, Members decided that only one review topic would be programmed in for each meeting to ensure that any chosen topic had sufficient time devoted to it. On this basis, six review topics were agreed for the 2022/23 Work Programme and these were initially scoped out in draft by Members before being reviewed and scheduled with Officers, prior to

final agreement by Committee Members. Two months were also left clear in the Work Programme to provide flexibility and enable Members to slot in any reviews which arose during the year.

It was felt that this was a much more structured and inclusive process that enabled Members to consider in more detail the benefits of scrutinising particular topics and also enabled Officers, as the technical experts, to have a greater input at an earlier stage.

3. Cabinet Member Sessions

These were made much more focussed by identifying in advance the two areas within each portfolio which the Committee wished to scrutinise.

The Committee remains committed to regularly reviewing all its processes and procedures to identify any areas for development so that we continue to focus on the 'big things' where a positive impact may be delivered for the Council and residents.