

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman Report to Council

24 October 2017

- This is the first report to Full council, which spans 5 months. Therefore I will not go into the detail of each topic considered, but set out what has happened, since I took over Chairmanship in June and indicate some of the issues addressed. In future I will be happy to present particular scrutiny topics in detail, if Members consider it important.
- Myself as Chairman and Alastair McCraw as Vice-Chairman, provide a balanced approach to Scrutiny. This should reassure members that there is no political emphasis on the scrutiny process.
- The role of scrutiny is even more important than before, having adopted the Cabinet system and becoming a legal requirement. Therefore, it is essential that we have a robust scrutiny process and active, enthusiastic and lively Overview and Scrutiny Committee members. To date we have suffered from changes to the makeup of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and poor attendance by some members.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee now meets monthly. This means that to get through the work load, it is necessary for all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to actively participate in the scrutiny process. This requires Members to work outside the formal Overview and Scrutiny Committee on specific topics, to develop in depth assessments. This allows meaningful questions to be addressed at the formal Overview and Scrutiny meeting.
- To improve the scrutiny process to that previously adopted, we aim to:
 - Scrutinise Cabinet decisions. Relevant Cabinet Members are expected to support the scrutiny process at each meeting. This initiates a process where Cabinet Members get used representing their portfolio in the scrutiny process, on a regular basis.
 - Undertake ongoing scrutiny tracking, through the life of a topic, particularly at key decision points. This places emphasis on individual committee members who take a lead on particular topics, throughout the topics life.
 - Engage and review with Officers and others, outside of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to undertake pre-scrutiny in order to improve the quality of the scrutiny process.
 - Provide the opportunity to introduce a topic where there is concern, in a timely fashion.
 - Provide a communications link between the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, since they are both, to some extent, fulfilling similar objectives.
 - Ensure good communication between Babergh and Mid Suffolk Scrutiny Committees. Here the Chairs and Vice Chairs meet on a semi regular basis each month to discuss the Scrutiny programme and common issues.

- The topics to be considered have been planned on the basis of:
 - Considering outstanding topics from the previous scrutiny committees.
 - Considering Cabinet decisions for a rolling three months – From the forthcoming decisions List
 - Evaluating the Significant Risk Register
 - Considering topical and Members topics of concern.
- There have been 4 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings since I was appointed Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman. The first taking place in June with others in July, September and October. August was cancelled, because of the unavailability of personnel to support scrutiny of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, which is a legal requirement.
- Three Topics have been Scoped, including:
 - Voids
 - Homelessness and Bed & Breakfast & Accommodation.
 - Supporting Business Growth
- Seven topics have been scrutinised to date, with 3 requiring further action.
- The seven topics with associated issues in red include:
 - Development of the Scrutiny Forward Plan. (See the plan for the next four months and other topics)
 - Housing Revenue Account 30 year business and financial plan. (Concern regarding non-linear projections and validation, now resolved). (1)
 - Homelessness & Bed and Breakfast review and the requirements of the new legislation coming in on the first of April 2018. (Seems to be progressing well, but will be reassessed in November. Awaiting a Report to be issued)
 - Risk Assessment – where it was identified that the Council was at risk, because it was not possible to Audit Risk assessments. (This has now been partially addressed by John Snell and the Senior Management Team, by recording minutes of Risk assessment meetings, but there is still some concern regarding all reports issued. It is important to have confidence in the Risk assessments and statements). (2)
 - Void Times in Council Properties – (Significant problems with high Void times, definition of remedial action, and implementation. In particular concern with the ongoing lack of progress in reducing Void times; particularly since Void times had increased since the previous Scrutiny review, undertaken during 2016. This problem is now being addressed by new management team. A Scrutiny Committee member has been appointed to track progress and this topic will come back to Scrutiny within the next 6 months, to assess progress). (3)

- Neighbourhood Planning (Review of the Task and Finish Group finding show a need to ensure that Parish Councils understand the importance of developing Neighbourhood Plans and what the benefits are. They are particularly important for Core Villages. Further engagement with Parish Councils is planned).
- Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership. (Babergh are currently staffed to organise individual reviews of tragic events, which is considered appropriate. Shared responsibility is with the Members of the West Suffolk Crime and Disorder Partnership. Funding is mainly by application to e.g. The Police & Crime Commissioner).
- Ten topics have been planned for scrutiny over the next four months to February.
 - Supporting Business Growth
 - Report on the current status of Interims & Consultants
 - CIL – A review of the impact and delivery of the CIL regime for infrastructure.
 - Review of preparations to implement the Homelessness Act.
 - Review of the legal Services Partnership.
 - Community Grants
 - Performance Management
 - Draft Joint Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget
 - Investment Strategy Business Plan, before presentation to full council.
 - Waste Strategy Review
- Other topics identified include;
 - Void Times in Council Properties
 - Fuel poverty – Consider if further action is needed at this stage, in the light of it being incorporated into a Suffolk-wide strategy
 - Home ownership review
 - Leisure Strategy – when its timetabling in the Forthcoming Decisions List is known
 - Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services.
 - Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Review.
 - Costs of the move to Endeavour House
 - Reviewing the impact the office move has had on staff with the aim of learning points for other future major change activities.
 - Pre-application planning process
 - Leisure Strategy - To scrutinise the paper presented to Cabinet
 - Etc.
- There will be other topics, which arise and will be dealt with in a timely manner as necessary.
- Finally, if any Member has a concern, which requires consideration for scrutiny, please contact Alastair or myself. Also in future I will be happy to discuss specific topics considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Council as necessary.