

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor R Morgan (Chairman)
Councillor K Angold-Stephens (Vice Chairman)
Councillors G Chambers, K Chana, A Church, D Dorrell, L Girling, P Keska, J Lea, A Mitchell, S Murray, B Rolfe M Sartin, G Shiell, B Surtees A Watts and D Wixley.

The Lead Officer was Derek Macnab, Deputy Chief Executive.

Terms of Reference

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's main functions are to monitor and scrutinise the work of the executive and its forward plan, external bodies linked to the District Council and the Council's financial performance. It is tasked with the consideration of call-ins, policy development, performance monitoring and reviewing corporate strategies.

The Committee's workload over the past year can be broken down as follows:

(a) Scrutinising and monitoring Cabinet work

The Committee has a proactive role in this area through carrying out pre-scrutiny work. This involved considering the Cabinet Forward Plan for the coming months on a meeting by meeting basis.

(b) Call-ins

The Committee received no call-ins this year.

(c) Scrutiny Panels work programme monitoring

The Committee received regular updates from the Chairmen of the various Scrutiny Panels reporting on the progress made on their current work programme. This allowed the Committee to monitor their performance and when necessary adjust their work plans to take into account new proposals and urgent items.

(d) Items considered by the committee this year

Over the year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received various presentations and considered a range of diverse topics.

Presentations:

(i) Strategic Direction of Epping Forest College - The Committee at their meeting in July 2014 received a presentation from Penny Morgan, the recently appointed Principal of Epping Forest College; she had been appointed in December

2013. She was there to speak on the strategic direction of the college, its vision for the future and its relationship with the Community.

The college had made great strides over the last five years, taking in over 3,500 students each year and had hundreds of visitors that came in to use the college for various events etc. Over 85% of the students live within 10 miles of the college. The college was also a major employer for local people, over 59% of staff live within 10 miles of the college, thus contributing to the local economy.

They provided a wide range training, skills and educational provision, such as Business, Childcare, Construction, Media and Music, IT, Maths and English and Sport, ensuring that they were giving students the best opportunity to become work ready and gain employment. They also work with local employers and help to provide apprenticeships in local businesses, an achievement they were very proud off.

They were always striving to improve on the range of courses and opportunities offered to their clients whilst additional demands were placed on them by the government.

The meeting was then opened out to questions from the members of the committee.

(ii) Presentation from Children Services - At their meeting in November 2014 the meeting welcomed Chris Martin, the Integrated Commissioning Director (West) from Essex County Council. He was there as part of a follow up to last years successful presentation on Children Services, given by Jenny Boyd.

Mr Martin noted that it was important to support children and their families from birth right through to the early years of their life (2 to 5 years), to give them the best possible opportunity to succeed. They wanted to be challenging and have all the people working across the early years system to have a single vision of what needed to be changed, this would require big shifts in culture and practice.

They would be working towards building capacity and capability of parents to support themselves and to support one another; with professional workers starting from peoples strengths and finding ways to build on them to preventing problems occurring. This would involve thinking differently about the workforce, letting them do what needed to be done and make use of their diverse experience. If they get this right they would achieve better outcomes for children while at the same time saving money.

It was noted that they had less money to spend than before and so would need to be more effective with what they do have. More needed to be done and improvement continued as resources diminished.

They were undertaking an ambitious, strategic, broad reaching review of early years in collaboration with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to identify innovation across the system, especially with families, removal of duplication of resources and roles, developing a common understanding and model of child development and skilling up the workforce to deliver new approaches.

They would also engage in ethnographic research with Essex parents and families, taking an in-depth look at the lives of eight families living across Essex combined with observational fieldwork at over 30 services. This type of research reveals behaviours and patterns that other methods would not pick up. Insights gained so far

was that they needed to focus on building the resilience of families and reducing their isolation.

The meeting was then opened to questions from the members present.

(iii) Presentation from the Epping Forest Youth Council - At their meeting in January 2015, the Committee received a presentation from six members of the Youth Council; they were joined by thirteen other Youth Council members.

They were there to give an overview of what the Epping Forest Youth Council had been up to over the past year. This was their first year in office of the two they were elected for.

By far their highest profile event last year was the Youth Conference held in the Council offices on 14 October 2014. 90 pupils from years 7, 8, 9 and 10 representing ten secondary schools from the District attended. They were consulted about issues affecting the lives of local young people; gathering their views on possible solutions and gather ideas on how to improve the local community. They were also keen to promote local democracy.

Three main concerns were highlighted. They were alcohol misuse, bullying and stress. Other issues raised were around skills and jobs and the need for more volunteering opportunities, the misuse of drugs particularly 'legal highs'.

The Youth Council had launched a campaign called '#URNotAlone' during national Bullying Awareness week in November; highlighting services and support groups for victims of bullying and their parents and also gave presentations to all year 9 pupils in the district. The project was deemed a great success by pupils, parents and teaching staff and the Youth Council were really proud of this piece of work.

The Committee noted that:

- Social Media was also an important part of their work as it promoted their work and raised the profile of young people in the district.
- They had been asked to contribute to 10 consultations this year and were pleased to have representations on the Epping Forest Youth Strategy Group.
- The Council's Youth Volunteer Programme was now being taken up by all secondary schools in the district.
- They had secured external funding of £1200 from the Jack Petchey Foundation, £900 from Think Big O2 for their project work and a further £750 from the Jack Petchey Small Grants awards.

They had hoped that they had shown that the 21 Youth Councillors had developed strong links with schools and youth groups and had connected with many thousands of their peers on behalf of the council.

(iv) Mental Health Services in the District – In March 2015 the Committee welcomed Chris Martin (Integrated Commissioning Director (West)) and Christina Pace (Commissioning Lead, Essex County Council) to the meeting. They were representing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and were there to give a presentation on the joint re-commissioning of emotional well being and mental health services for Children and Young People in Southend, Essex and Thurrock.

They noted that now with national government plans to put in more funding, their new service model would be based on needs assessment and feedback from consultation with service users and partners. This highlighted the need for more integration and clearer access routes to services, especially for vulnerable people and for the consistency of the quality of service.

They were jointly commissioning one integrated service for the whole county for targeted and specialist mental health services. There would be a single point of access for all referrals to the service, including self referrals. The services would be community based and available in each area. They would focus on identifying and treating young people who need CAMHS services as early and effectively as possible.

There would be 24/7 access to the crisis services and a community based intervention service. There would also be consistent advice and training for all their partners.

It was noted that a new national taskforce had recently made recommendations on improving mental health for children and families and nationally, an additional £1.25 billion investment over a five year period was set out in the budget. CAMHS were uncertain how any future government would respond, but this was an opportunity to build on their new service model.

The meeting was then opened out to questions from the Committee.

Other Topics Considered:

(i) This year for the first time the Committee considered the Cabinet's Forward Plan and Key Objectives for the coming year on a regular meeting by meeting basis. At their first meeting of the year in July 2014 the Committee look at the coming year's work programmed in for the Cabinet.

It was noted that the Cabinet took an interest in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and appreciated the important role scrutiny played in providing checks and balances to the Executive.

The Cabinet's Key Objectives for 2014/15 were presented under a number of broad themes and these constitute the priorities of the Cabinet over the next municipal year. It was noted that a number of items were an extension of last year's programme.

It was noted that the local plan was probably the most significant document that the Council would produce for many years. It would determine the future character of the District and help deliver benefits to the residents in terms of homes and employment. All key decisions in relation to the Local Plan would be taken by the Cabinet, but they wished to be as consultative in their approach as possible. It was noted that the Scrutiny Panel on Planning was responsible for scrutinising the Local Plan and this was an area where it was hoped that the Cabinet and Scrutiny could work together.

It was highlighted that the Council was keen to embark on a Council House-building Programme and the Housing Portfolio Holder had established a Cabinet Committee to advise him. With tenders being received for the first phase this was an exciting initiative for the Council.

The Council had also embarked on the development of a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy, which would not only clarify the role that the Council would play in future provision, but also determine the best way to procure the new Leisure Management Contract.

(ii) In July 2014 the Committee received a report setting out the year end outturn of the Corporate Plan Key Objectives for 2013/14. A range of key objectives for 2013/14 was adopted by the Cabinet in March 2013; progress in relation to individual actions and deliverables are reviewed on a quarterly basis.

At the end of the year, 23 (42.6%) of the individual deliverables or actions supporting the key objectives had either been completed or achieved. Some 20 (37.0%) deliverables or actions were not completed by year-end. A further 11 (20.3%) deliverables or actions were on-hold at year end, as a result of external circumstances.

(iii) In September 2014 the Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding the Local Elections held on 22 May 2014.

The following elections were held in May 2014:

- (a) Election of 7 Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region of the UK;
- (b) 19 District Council Wards; and
- (c) 1 Parish Council by-election for Buckhurst Hill West.

Voter turnout at the various elections ranged between 44% in the Buckhurst Hill East Ward and 28% in Waltham Abbey Paternoster Ward. Turnout for the European Parliamentary Election, within the district, was 35.58% compared with a turnout of 35.90% across the region.

It was noted that there were few issues with the election, generally all practices were completed successfully.

(iv) Also in September the Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 made it compulsory for this authority to carry out a review of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places within 16 months, starting from 1 October 2013, with further reviews starting on 1 October of every fifth subsequent year.

A polling district was a geographical area created by the sub division of a UK Parliamentary Constituency for the purposes of an election. A polling place was the building or area in which polling stations would be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station was the room or area within the polling place where voting took place.

(v) The Committee received a report regarding the London Infrastructure Delivery Plan consultation from the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods.

The London Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) had been published by the Mayor of London for consultation making the case for better infrastructure provision in London.

It was noted that the London Infrastructure Delivery Plan did not set out how policies would be delivered, implemented and monitored. Instead, it made a business case for London to control its own finances through fiscal devolution. The Committee supported the prioritization of transport schemes, such as four tracking the West Anglia Lines along the whole of the Upper Lee Valley and the Central Line because of:

- (a) Predicted job growth in Central London;
- (b) The Central Line's importance in delivering commuters to this area; and
- (c) Its particular importance to the lower end of the London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor.

Members were particularly concerned about providing car parking facilities around train stations as there was currently a congestion problem there.

(vi) In November 2014 the Committee received a report on the Communities and Local Government Consultation on 'Planning and Travellers', seeking views on proposed changes to planning policy and guidance for the travelling community. The stated intentions of the proposed changes were to (i) ensure that the planning system applies fairly and equally to both the settled and traveller communities; (ii) further strengthen protection of "sensitive areas" and Green Belt; and (iii) address the negative impact of unauthorised occupation. The consultation also stated that the Government remained committed to increasing the level of authorised traveller site provision in appropriate locations to address historic undersupply as well as to meet current and future needs.

The consultation contained 13 questions with draft answers contained in the appendix to the report.

It was also noted that all the pitches/caravans were in the Green Belt and that our District was 92% Green Belt.

The extent of Green Belt in different Council areas varies very widely – e.g. East Herts was about 33% Green Belt while Uttlesford was significantly less – i.e. both these neighbouring districts have potentially significantly greater options for identifying suitable locations. This proposal by the Government – a "one size fits all" approach seems too blunt and inflexible given the wide variation in Green Belt coverage of affected districts. It was particularly unfair to those districts which have a very high percentage of Green Belt, and where there was already a long-established and sizeable traveller community.

Officers could think of no immediate and practical solutions to the problems, other than to suggest a re-think at national level. The planning system as it currently operates was not making adequate provision for the needs of the travelling community. The problem was particularly acute in Green Belt areas, where there does seem to be a perception of favourable treatment for travellers, but the proposals in the consultation would only exacerbate the overall problem of meeting total needs, and make it very much harder to identify suitable sites in the Green Belt.

The Committee noted and agreed the draft answers to the CLG Consultation on Planning and Travellers.

(vii) In February 2015 the Committee considered the draft Corporate Plan for 2015 to 2020. They noted that the current Corporate Plan ends on 31 March 2015 and this new Corporate Plan had been developed to take the authority forward over the next five years.

The Council's main areas of focus for the five year lifetime of the new Plan had been captured in a new set of corporate aims; in addition a new set of Key Objectives had been developed to support the aims. On consideration the Committee agreed the proposed new plan and recommended it to the Cabinet and Council.

(viii) Also in February 2015, the Committee considered the final report of the Task and Finish Panel looking at the current Scrutiny Panels of the Council (see a fuller report under the Task and Finish Chapter of this report).

With the revision of the Council management structure in December 2013, reducing the service directorates down to four, the Panel considered the creation of a four panel structure to align with the new directorates. This proposal arose in part, due to the existing arrangements, where not all service areas were subject to scrutiny by any particular Panel.

The Committee agreed with the Panel that a new Overview and Scrutiny framework, based on a structure of four 'select committees', be established with effect from the commencement of the 2015/16 municipal year.

(ix) The Committee also considered a consultation report from the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) on its Park Development Framework. They noted that whilst it was not a planning authority, there was a duty to prepare plans for the management and development of the park.

The proposals in the consultation document were generally in line with the statutory duties of the Park Authority. Subject to the detail of individual projects, the Council were supportive of these proposals, as they were in line with the original purposes of the Park and relevant policies of the current Local Plan and Alterations and the National Planning Policy Framework.

However, there were two matters within the proposals which were of concern. Firstly, a significant number of new buildings were being suggested to support implementation of the proposals, and a lot of these were in the green belt. The consultation document generally acknowledges the need to take account of Green Belt location for most of these suggestions, but the proposals could still amount to a significant amount of development with implications for the openness of the Green Belt.

Secondly, there was the casual reference to the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers for large areas of glasshouses etc. The document also indicated that it was likely that the Authority would resist major redevelopment or expansion of new large-scale glasshouse uses.

Members noted that recently the Council had formed the Lea Valley Food Task Force. The intention was to develop a standard policy approach in new Local Plans, supportive of the glasshouse industry, across local authority boundaries as an example of positive co-operation.

The Committee agreed that the overall approach of the proposals in the context of the statutory functions of the Park Authority, ie in relation to sport and recreation, leisure, education and landscape, heritage and nature conservation be supported.

But they expressed concerns about the possible extent of new building being proposed in the Green Belt and to object to proposals, as currently worded, concerning the use of compulsory purchase powers in relation to a number of glasshouse sites and other long-standing commercial uses within the Park.

(x) In March 2015 the Committee considered the review of the operation of the Planning Committees and their Terms of Reference. This had originated from a PICK form that initially went to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel and then on to the Constitution Scrutiny Panel, when they looked at the following matters:

- (a) The operation of the speaking arrangements and deadlines for submission of material to planning sub-committees; and
- (b) The terms of reference of the Planning Sub-committees and the District Development Control Committee.

The changes would also bring clarity to the role of the Chairman in controlling the business at the meeting, particularly for speakers. It was considered by the Panels that these rules should be implemented in advance of the completion of the Constitution Review to allow a period of operational experience to be undertaken with a check in 2016 to make sure that they were still appropriate.

On consideration the Committee endorsed the proposed changes and made this recommendation to the next full council meeting.

(e) Case Study: