

ANNUAL REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

2018/19

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Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2018/19

Audit and Corporate Governance

Chair - Councillor G Morley
Vice Chair - Councillor G Butler

Communities

Chair - Councillor T Reader
Vice Chair - Councillor C Tite

Growth

Chair - Councillor J Windle
Vice Chair - Councillor C A Smith

Organisation

Chair - Councillor D Skinner
Vice Chair - Councillor T Mansbridge

1 A Summary of the Work Undertaken during 2018/19

- 1.1 Each of the Committees has completed its Work Programme with the time available shared between Scrutiny review work, consideration of key strategies and policies of the Council and performance monitoring.
- 1.2 The Committees have also been monitoring the delivery of action plans from a number of previous scrutiny reviews. Domestic Abuse and Tourism & Growth were making progress but would be monitored further in the new municipal year. Progress against the action plans for Scrutiny Reviews on The A61 Corridor, Health & Wellbeing and Morale, The Impact of Town Centre Environments on Community Safety and Job Evaluation & Associated Benefits had been satisfactory and they had been signed off as complete.

2 Current Scrutiny Reviews

- 2.1 Three Scrutiny Reviews were undertaken this year and a number of recommendations were made for improvement. These will be considered by Cabinet and if the recommendations are accepted they will 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 Homelessness

The Communities Scrutiny Committee decided to review Homelessness to ensure that the Council was responding effectively to the recent introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017.

A number of documents and evidence were considered by the Committee to help inform the review. The Housing Options Team Leader provided a briefing presentation that set the scene on what Homelessness was and how the Homeless service was delivered by the Council. Other documents considered were the Housing Options/Homelessness prevention 2017/18 report, the Choice Based Lettings and Allocations Policy, An Easy Read Guide to Your Tenancy Agreement and the Homelessness Service User Survey. The Deventio Housing Trust also gave a presentation on the work they were doing to provide sustainable solutions to hospital in-patients who were homeless and high impact users of urgent care.

A wide range of stakeholders were interviewed including a number of internal officers which included the Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer – Housing Strategy, the Housing Options Team Leader, the Accommodation and Prevention Officer and the Prevention and the Homelessness officers from the team. The Housing Needs Manager, Bolsover District Council and the Housing Options Manager, Chesterfield Borough Council also participated in the review. The Assistant Director Strategy from the Deventio Housing Trust and the Housing Welfare Officer from the Probation Service were two external interviewees. The Head of Neighbourhoods and the Choice Move Allocations Officer from Rykneld Homes also assisted the Committee on two occasions. A

District Councillor also attended to provide a useful insight into a case study of Homelessness from her experience of helping the people concerned.

The review panel concluded that a number of measures were being undertaken by various sections of the Council to ensure it was responding effectively to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The commitment that internal staff and partners had to work together and meet the challenge of preventing homelessness was very evident.

Nine recommendations for enhancing the current provision were identified around the provision of temporary housing, participation in the review of the Allocations policy, working with partners and performance monitoring.

2.3 Business Centres and Industrial Units

The Growth Scrutiny Committee chose to undertake a review of Business Centres and Industrial Units. It was considered timely to review this area as it supported the Councils Growth Agenda.

Interviews were held with a range of stakeholders including the Head of Partnerships and Transformation, the Head of Property and Commercial Services, the Facilities and Contract Manager, the Business Centre Manager, the Estates Manager, the Property Services Manager, The Estates Technician, the Senior Estates and Valuation Officer and the Concierge at Coney Green Business Centre. The review panel also heard the views of Coney Green Business Centre Tenants - Pillbox Design Ltd., Wiltshire Farm Foods and Stal Ltd on their experience of leasing a business unit from the Council.

The review process identified a number of measures the Council was taking to support local businesses within its District and promote economic growth. It was concluded that views of this service were very positive and tenants of business units interviewed were very satisfied with the facilities they were provided.

Ten recommendations for improvement were made focused around branding, investment, performance monitoring and keeping the units fit for purpose in the future for tenants.

2.4 Communications and Marketing

The Organisation Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Communications and Marketing. The Committee wished to ensure the service was meeting the needs of our Customers.

The Committee considered a number of documents which included a presentation by the Communications and Marketing Manager to set the scene on how the service worked and various examples of publications. The results of the NEDDC Viewpoint Citizens Panel – June 2017 Survey and the Internal Satisfaction Survey 2016 for the Communications, Marketing and Design Team were also reviewed.

Interviews were held with a variety of internal officers including the Communications and Marketing Manager, the Marketing and Design Officer, the Communication Officer and the Digital Media Officer. The Managing Director and the Communications Manager from Rykneld Homes also attended the review panel to provide evidence. External interviews were held with the Derbyshire Times Editor and the portfolio holder from Bolsover District Council who informed the panel about the recently launched Bolsover TV and related publications.

The review process identified a number of measures that were working well. However, some ideas for improvement were identified and seven recommendations were made for the Cabinet to consider around resources, The News, information sharing, communication and working with other organisations.

3 Scrutiny Committees

3.1 Audit and Corporate Governance

During the year the Committee met on six occasions. It considered a number of key governance and financial documents of the Council which included the Medium Term Financial Plan, Budget Monitoring, Annual Governance Statement and the Statement of Accounts. It also continued to monitor and keep under review risk management and partnership working arrangements.

The Committee is the body to which both the Council's external and internal auditors report. Key reports from Internal Audit included the Annual Report of the Internal Audit Consortium, Summary of Progress on the Annual Internal Audit Plan, the Annual Review of Adequacy of Internal Audit and various internal Audit reports on individual services. The key reports from External Audit included the report prepared around the audit of the Council's Accounts ISA260, together with the Annual Audit Letter.

In its key role of overseeing the financial governance arrangements of the Council the Committee:-

- Considered and approved the Annual Statement of Accounts;
- Monitored the Councils budgets
- Considered the Council's systems of internal control and in particular any issues arising from the reports of Internal Audit;
- Kept under review performance against the Council's Performance Management Framework.

It also considered a report on Accounting Policies that it was proposed to adopt for the current financial year in the preparation of the Statement of Accounts 2018/19. These policies determined the accounting treatment that would be

applied to transactions during the financial year and in the preparation of the Statement of Accounts at the year end.

The Committee also considered the CIPFA Fraud and Corruption Tracker Survey for 2018. This was an annual survey which aimed to provide a picture of fraudulent activity within local government and illustrate the actions which local authorities were taking to mitigate the risks. The Committee discussed the fraud prevention measures which the Council had put in place. Members made it clear that they continued to support the current zero tolerance approach towards fraud. This approach was set out in the Council's Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy.

3.2 Communities

During the year the Committee met on seven occasions. The Committee has considered a number of licensing items during the year. This has included the Taxi Licensing Policy Review for which the Committee had made a number of suggestions on the original Policy which had now been incorporated in the revised policy. They received the consultation responses and suggestions and discussed a number of issues regarding multiple convictions of a sexual nature, provision of evidence of good conduct or criminal record from other countries and policy requirements in relation to executive vehicles. Proposed amendments to the Council's Gambling Act – Statement of Principles to cover 2019-2022 were also considered and issues raised included the measurement of the impact of gambling, targeting of gambling to poorer areas and the requirements for gambling machines in pubs and clubs. Additionally the Licensing Act Policy which was being reviewed to cover the period 2019- 2024 was discussed as amendments to cover legislative changes and simplifying of the Statement were being proposed.

Progress against the Healthy North East Derbyshire Partnership was provided by the Partnership Team and Councillor Liz Blanshard (scrutiny representative on the partnership). Details of the health priorities were provided which included building cleaner communities and promoting healthy lifestyles. A number of projects had been commissioned including the Pathways project and Together Events. A Community Development Worker had helped support the Shirland Healthy Futures Group to start a community café in the village. The events had proved successful and popular. Volunteers within the communities had exceeded 3,500 with at least 5,500 beneficiaries during the time. It was estimated that the social return on investment equated to £41,949 in 2018/19.

The Committee had been monitoring the impact of Universal Credit and Welfare Reforms since its introduction. Therefore, it considered an update from the Council's Revenues and Benefits Manager on how its implementation was progressing. He advised that Universal Credit (UC) had been fully implemented across the country. Those who were making new claims and those who had a change in circumstances were being moved to UC. All job centres were now fully in line with the new legislation. The Government was making a series of changes to the new welfare system so that those who were moving on to UC were not at any disadvantage. These changes were becoming increasingly

noticeable on claimant cases. It had been noted that there had been a reduction in the number of housing benefit claims, yet an increase in Council Tax reduction cases. Members asked what support the Authority was providing for residents with their UC applications. The Council had received some funding from the Department for Work and Pensions for digital support. This funding ceased on 1st April, 2019 and would go to the Citizens Advice Bureau in future. The Committee suggested that this topic be placed on a future District/Parish Forum to advise attendees what help was available.

The Committee continued to monitor financial inclusion activities undertaken by the Councils Partnership Team and other departments and partners engaged in facilitating financial inclusion within North East Derbyshire. The Committee considered Child Poverty statistics for the District which showed the rate of 13.9% was below the national average of 16.6%. However, the District still had some areas that had particularly high rates, including one area where the rate was 41%. The anti-poverty statistics for the District showed that the average household earnings, pension credits, unemployment and fuel poverty were all better than the County average although it was recognised at a more local level some areas experienced these issues significantly worse. The Council was engaging in a number of projects to assist those who were most vulnerable. These included an annual grant to the voluntary sector so that wide-ranging support and assistance was delivered, including to Citizens Advice NED and the Derbyshire Unemployed Worker's Centre. Other initiatives included working with the Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Credit Union to support a family loans scheme, delivering the Council's Business Growth Fund, locality working, supporting food bank donations, family trips, youth activities and a Thriving Communities project that looked to give residents work and skills support. There had also been an increase in demand for welfare benefits, debt and housing advice. This had risen from 14,751 household interventions in 2014/15 to 20,832 in 2017/18.

The Committee considered the Joint Waste Collection and Recycling Policy. Procurement arrangements had provided an initial shared efficiency savings to both Councils of around £100,000. The Council was also providing environmental educational messages to primary school children including events and educational packs for recycling. In partnership with the Environmental Health Team the Council had jointly delivered school education programmes to 137 classes of around 4,100 children across North East Derbyshire and Bolsover. Members also discussed the Councils recycling rate which was currently 46.6% and had slowly increased over the past ten years. It was slightly higher than the National average and it was hoped that a better practice of diverting food from domestic waste would increase that further.

The Committee is statutorily required to review the Councils Community Safety Partnership under the Police and Crime Act. The Community Safety Partnership Manager outlined for the Committee the performance of the Community Safety Partnership during 2018/19. The Committee were advised that crime had increased with a 10% rise in incidents in the year to date. However the officer stated that the number of crimes committed was small and this increasing trend had been seen countrywide. Details of some of the

achievements the partnership had made were provided including anti-social behaviour interventions, new CCTV surveillance facilities plus drug and alcohol awareness sessions within schools and youth clubs. Key themes for the Partnership in 2019/20 were:

- Reduce Anti-Social Behaviour
- Serious and Organised Crime Groups
- Domestic Abuse
- Cyber Crime
- Human Trafficking
- Reduce Alcohol and Drug Related Harm
- Troubled Families (incorporating all forms of safeguarding)
- Reduce Acquisitive Crime/Offender Management
- Increase Public Confidence/Perception and Fear of Crime/Support for victims and witnesses

3.3 Growth

During the year the Committee met on seven occasions. It continued to monitor progress on the delivery of the Local Plan, the Economic Development and Housing Strategy, the Empty Properties Strategy and associated action plans.

The Committee had been considering whether to under a Scrutiny review of Devolution and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The Chief Executive attended the Committee to set the scene for where these issues were at as there had been several recent developments. He reminded the Committee of their non-constituent membership of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority and advised them about the election of a mayor for the Sheffield City Region. He also explained the attempts which had been made to establish a combined authority for the North Midlands and the variety of reasons the proposals did not progress. He informed them that an impending review of the LEPs which was due to be announced later in the year could possibly change the current arrangements. The Committee recognised that the situation was complex and there was several areas that were still to be resolved. Members felt that there was still a great deal of uncertainty in this area and insufficient progress had been made for the Committee to add value at this stage. The Committee agreed that it would not carry out a review on the topic at this time but would continue to monitor what progress is made.

The Committee considered a further update from Rykneld Homes on the condition of the stock of garages within the District that they maintained. The Committee had been monitoring this area as some of the garages were now in need of repair and members had been advised that it would not be cost effective to upgrade them. The officer advised the Committee that they were often now used for storage rather than for parking cars as they were too small for modern vehicles. As a result some garages had been demolished but currently the land on which they sat was still be utilised for parking.

The Committee looked at the Councils procedures for debt monitoring as part of its review of Business Centres and Industrial Units. The Head of Finance &

Resources and Section 151 Officer outlined the process by which debts were identified, recorded within the revenues system and how reminders and collection activity was undertaken. Members discussed the time length before reminders were issued and how proactively the debts were pursued. The Committee were advised that a monthly debt schedule was issued to every department and each debt had a budget manager identified against it. Managers were expected to engage with tenants and leaseholders through their tenancy management procedures. The Audit and Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee also regularly considered the issue of debt performance. Arising from the discussion the Officer advised Members that a bench marking exercise would be undertaken to compare the Council's debt management procedures and timescales within which reminders were issued to consider whether any improvements could be made to the Councils procedures.

The Committee reviewed the work of the Partnership Team in support of growth. The Strategic Partnership Co-Coordinator outlined the Partnership Team's contribution to the growth agenda directly through managing funding programmes which facilitated economic growth and job creation within the District. He advised members of funding that was available to parts of the District through the Bolsover-North East Derbyshire LEADER Approach, part of the Rural Development Programme for England, which is funded by the UK Government and the European Union. There were six priority areas with a grant budget totalling £1,237,704. Twenty projects had been approved and contracted in the District and eleven in Bolsover, equating to £1,142,050.10 which would create 68.82 jobs. Additionally the North East Derbyshire Business Growth Fund had a funding grant totalling £66,500 and involved fifteen projects with a further five in development. The team were also working with the voluntary and community sector to deliver a wide range of support and assistance to vulnerable members of the community, including the financially excluded.

The Chief Executive Officer attended the Committee again later in the year and provided an update on progress of key growth projects within the District and additional information on progress of the Local Enterprise Partnership Review. He advised the Committee of the timescale and background to the review and the Governments proposed changes on composition, membership, performance and accountability and areas of overlapping geography. The Committee also discussed the One Public Estate project and funding secured for locality reviews for Dronfield, Eckington and Clay Cross town centres. Further information was also provided on projects in Egstow Park, The Avenue and joint ventures - Northwood Development, Ankerbold Road and Manor Farm.

3.4 Organisation

During the year the Committee met on six occasions. At the first meeting the Committee considered the review of the Councils Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy which included a procedure for dealing with correspondence from Members of Parliament and discussed response times for complaints.

The Committee also considered the Annual Report of Human Resources and Organisational Development. The report updated on a range of employee related issues. This included measures taken to improve the Councils recruitment process by better marketing and promotion of the Council as a good employer in order to attract candidates. This work included holding career-days, increased use of social media and adopting better branding. Data was also provided on the levels of sickness within the organisation. The outturn figure was higher than the target figure and a range of measures had been taken to improve occupational health and the wellbeing of staff. The Committee discussed why people left the Organisation and asked that further statistical analysis on the reasons given by former employees for leaving the Council be provided.

Organisation Scrutiny Committee had been monitoring progress against the Councils Transformation Programme since it commenced. Most of the original transformation projects had been achieved and the Council had launched a new programme for the future. The Strategic Director – People gave a presentation on the makeup of the new Programme, including its governance structure. Details of some initial achievements were provided on the Revenues Structure Review and the Joint Kerbside Recycling Contract. A discussion on immediate projects and long term projects also took place, such as the Sharley Park Leisure Centre Redevelopment, Dronfield Sports Centre Café and the implementation of the Modern.Gov System. The success of the Council in house Procurement Service was also raised and the potential for selling some of the Councils services to other organisations. The Council's vision was to deliver a self-sustaining Council that provided an excellent service to the community when and how they wanted it. The Director stated that the transformation would mean a significant change in the way the Council delivered its services and the way it operated. It was the aim to achieve service transformation by 2021. This would include transformation of finances, digital transformation, organisation transformation and environmental transformation.

The Committee discussed the Councils Sickness Absence Management Policy with the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager. An Organisation Scrutiny Member had asked that the Committee review the Policy to ensure it was fit for purpose. She provided the Committee with copies of another organisations policies for consideration which she felt were more user friendly. Information was considered on when the policy was last reviewed, the stages of action taken by the Authority, including how the triggers operated to identify sickness absence that may require further action, review meetings, referral to the Council's occupational health provider, formal warnings and dismissals. Members also questioned the effectiveness of the policy. The manager informed the Committee that the average days lost per employee due to sickness had fallen for each of the last four financial years and that overall the policy was considered fair to both the employee and the Authority. Additionally the policy followed the guidelines of best practice from ACAS. Having considered the documentation and discussed how it worked in practice the Committee felt the Council's Policy was fit for purpose

The Committee considered the Customer Services Performance Report which provided details of the performance of the Council's Contact Centre during the 2017/18 year. The Customer Services Operational manager advised the members that the Call Centre staff had answered 95% of calls within 22 seconds and that only 2.7% of calls had been abandoned. Additionally all personal visitors to the Customer Services centre at Mill Lane had been seen with the 20 minute corporate standard that had been set. Members welcomed the high levels of performance achieved by the Contact Centre. They also discussed the successful take up of webchat as a way for customers to access information from the Council about its services and resolve any problems.

4 The Year Ahead 2019/20

After the appointment of members to the Scrutiny Committees at Council on 20th May, 2019, work programmes for 2019/20 will be discussed and developed. Suggestions for Scrutiny review topics will be invited from a range of stakeholders. These will be discussed at the first scrutiny meetings of the new municipal year to prioritise which subjects should be reviewed.