

Overview and Scrutiny Issues

A Snapshot of some of the Scrutiny Work currently being undertaken

Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has looked at three major items since the last report to Council:

- **Commissioned and Traded Services.** The Committee discussed the services which the Council makes available to schools on a traded basis. These reflect the position where education is now provided at a range of schools, many at secondary level in particular, who may buy in services from either the public or the private sector. It was acknowledged that each traded service must make provision of a suitable quality and must 'pay its way';
- **Home to school transport.** The Committee was updated on the current position and made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet Member about possible changes. In particular, the Committee supported an outline proposal to encourage children to cycle to school and to make resources available for families and young people to purchase bicycles where they would otherwise not be able to.
- **Schools Forum.** At an earlier call-in, concerns had been expressed to the Committee about the constitution and role of the Schools Forum. As promised, the Committee has scrutinised these issues. The Committee was aware that a number of changes were taking place in any case, due to a Statutory Instrument being published, and it raised a number of issues about membership and good practice, which the Forum is taking forward. In general, however, the Committee is satisfied that the Forum works in an appropriate and proper manner.

Since April, all safeguarding matters are referred in the first instance to the Families Safeguarding Sub-Committee, a joint sub-committee with the Community and Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee with equal membership from both Committees. This has led to a more streamlined and logical approach to this aspect of the scrutiny function. In addition, the Committee used one of its meeting days for a private workshop session with Quadrant Managers, going through the entire range of safeguarding measures available, from giving advice, up to fostering and adoption.

Community and Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG): The first recommendation in the Committee's Final Report following Scrutiny of the DFG process was enacted upon earlier this month when a Seminar was held in the Council Chamber. There were 54 delegates in attendance drawn from every District/Borough/City Council in Essex including Southend and Thurrock, Essex County Council, service users and Home Improvement Agencies. Agreement was reached to reconvene in Spring 2013 to ensure a leaner model for Occupational Therapy assessments and delivery of DFGs throughout the County to improve customer service.

Mental Health Personalisation: The Committee requested that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing consider widening the authority to approve Self Directed Support for Mental Health services beyond just the Head of Mental Health Commissioning.

Sensory Services: A Task and Finish Group was convened to consider the redesign of Sensory Services. The Committee agreed the Task and Finish Group recommendation that the Cabinet Member requests that the County Council should commission a new integrated service on the open market, via the Council's regulated procurement process, which would be implemented in late autumn. The current service with Essex Cares had been extended until 30 June 2013 to allow for completion of the procurement process. Tender documents would be drafted to have flexibility so that an 'all age approach' could be implemented at a later date if necessary.

Carers Strategy: A Task and Finish Group has been involved in the development of a new Carers Strategy for the Authority. This strategy has been delayed and the Committee will consider the matter again in December.

Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee endorsed the Corporate Carbon Reduction Task & Finish Group's scrutiny report as formally submitted to the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment & Culture including a recommendation that the Corporate Emissions Strategy be supported for adoption.

The Committee monitored responses from Cabinet to recommendations from reviews completed over the past eighteen months: Essex Heritage; Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy; Essex Legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; the exercise of Planning Control on the use of Inert Waste for recreational development, Park and Ride; and the relationship with Statutory Undertakers in the way works are undertaken in the highway.

In June and July the Committee conducted Task and Finish Group activities to take forward the reviews on Financial Inclusion; the Future of Recycling Centres, and Country Parks.

In July the Committee attended a site visit to QinetiQ, Shoeburyness, in preparation for considering the final report on a review of the off-site emergency planning requirements around COMAH (Control of Major Accidents and Hazards) sites in Essex. The visit provided Members with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the issues which have been considered as part of the scrutiny review and to learn more about the role of emergency planning. The final scrutiny report will be considered by the Committee later this year.

The Task and Finish Group's report and recommendation on the School Crossing Patrol Service Policy were ratified by the Committee.

The Committee considered the Interim Report of the Financial Inclusion Task and Finish Group and approved the Scoping Document, Interim Report and five proposed recommendations. The work of this Group is on-going. The Committee also considered the final report of the Country Parks Task and Finish Group and agreed to support Phase 1 of the project and agreed that the Task and Finish Group be engaged at an early stage in the development of Phase 2 of the project.

The Committee received an informative Highways Briefing covering the Pothole Programme, Local Highways Panels, Member Information/Enquiries, Speed Policy Review, Parking Partnerships, Essex Highways Update and Winter Service.

Executive Scrutiny Committee

Budget Matters: The Committee continues to scrutinise the quarterly outturns. To consolidate the work of the Committee has received a presentation on the Changing Pattern of Finance in Local Government.

Annual Report: The Leader and Chief Executive presented the Annual Report to the Committee which endorsed the report.

Corporate Plan: The Committee will scrutinise the Corporate Plan throughout the year. At first quarter stage the Committee suggested more use could be made of space in Libraries by other users. Concern was raised regarding the economic conditions affecting employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities. As a result a report will be produced for the Equality and Diversity Board.

External Communications: The Task and Finish Group established to review External Communications continues. The Committee has agreed to widen its remit to include Internal Communications.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Recent Committee meetings have concentrated particularly on scrutinising how the County Council and local health bodies are responding to the requirements of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which will bring about far reaching changes to health provision in 2013.

The Committee has been a consultee on the proposed Health and Well Being Strategy, which is owned by the Health and Well Being Board. It has also commented on the changes in public health, which have brought those staff in to the service of the Council. Finally, it looked at the draft proposals for the structure and governance of Essex Healthwatch, the new body which will form the main focus for the general public to get involved with health bodies. The Committee found the proposals to be somewhat complex and made a number of observations. The Committee welcomes the review then undertaken by the Cabinet Member and the Essex Pathfinder Management Board, which has accepted the main area of concern and suggested a much clearer and user friendly approach, which the Committee supports.

Two other items have also been looked at in detail:

- **Stroke Services.** Following adverse reports by the Care Quality Commission in 2011, and a general acceptance that outcomes in the UK are below those achieved in other countries, the Committee has been consulted at an early stage on proposals to carry out a thorough review of stroke services. Although the presentation received related to Essex in particular, the review covers the whole of the Midlands and East of England. The Committee therefore passed its comments on to the Regional Health Chairs Forum, so that the reviewers can receive the thoughts of the 11 HOSCs in the region in a single response.
- **Dementia Services.** The Committee received a progress report on how the recommendations made by its task and finish group in 2011 have fed into the service changes that have taken place over the last 18 months, and it is clear that much has been achieved across Essex, Southend and Thurrock. A further update will be received prior to the Council elections next year.

Finally, the Chairman of the Committee has chaired a further meeting of the Regional Health Chairs Forum, which discussed the major issues affecting the region at present and into 2013 and beyond. The existing regional structures will end on 31 March 2013, so the Forum is unlikely to continue beyond that point. However, all feedback from health colleagues in the region has confirmed that it has fulfilled a very valuable consultative role for a number of years, and that Essex has been the lead player in forging positive and constructive links with health bodies across the region.

Sarah Candy
Chairman of the Scrutiny Board