

# Scrutiny

Improving public services in Essex

## Annual Report

October 2015



Essex County Council

This document contains a number of links to online resources and information. Councillors receiving this report in the Council agenda pack can access these via the electronic version of the pack, or by visiting [www.essex.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.essex.gov.uk/scrutiny).

## Foreword

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This report covers the municipal year running from May 2014 to May 2015 – with further information to bring it up to present day. It outlines the key pieces of work undertaken by Scrutiny during that time, and is aimed at members of the public as well as members of the Council.

2014/15 was the second year of the current four-year electoral cycle so the committees entered the year relatively settled into their roles: ready to focus on continued improvement of their scrutiny techniques and on making a difference for the people of Essex. While the Scrutiny Board led discussions about member development, scrutiny best practise and how to engage constructively with the Cabinet and senior officers, the scrutiny committees embarked on a new and more robust way of planning their work for the year. Those programmes were then delivered by the committees, with adjustments through the year to capture new issues as they arose.

Looking across what the committees have managed to fit into their busy programmes this year, I am pleased to see a fair balance between breadth and depth of focus, between planned work and responsive work, and between items that helped inform Councillors and items that give them an opportunity to apply that knowledge.

Many of the largest pieces of work first planned at the beginning of this period have come to fruition in the last month or two, such as the report to the NHS on complaints handling in hospital trusts and the recent report on educational attainment in Essex – or will do so before Christmas, such as the Jobs, Welfare and Skills report and a report on third party responsibilities in flood management.

As I write this, each committee's work programme for the current municipal year – and up to the 2017 County elections – has also now been agreed, subject of course to Scrutiny's responsibility to respond to unforeseen events as they arise. In general, this report is retrospective and so does not cover the detail of those new work programmes or the work which has begun on them, except where they take forward work from 2014/15.

All in all, this was an excellent year for Scrutiny, resulting in some good work of which Councillors can be proud.

I commend the report to Council.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Walsh', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

**Councillor Simon Walsh**  
Chairman of Scrutiny Board

# Scrutiny

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## What is it?

The [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#) describes local government scrutiny as ‘an independent function, led by local elected Councillors, that works with local people and local bodies to help improve services’. Essex County Council’s scrutiny committees gather evidence and prepare reports on issues of importance to the local community, often making recommendations to the Council’s Cabinet Members and other local bodies (including the health service) to bring about these improvements.

## What does it aim to do?

Scrutiny aims to contribute to the Council’s corporate outcomes in many ways, including:

- Giving Councillors a role in policy development;
- Providing a forum for direct engagement with communities and their representatives;
- Feeding into the planning of consultations and other public engagement;
- Giving Cabinet Members and officers a constructive forum through which to seek Councillors’ input or backing for ideas in an apolitical environment;
- Through the call-in process, providing a structure for scrutinising specific decisions of the Executive;
- Keeping Councillors and the public informed;
- Playing a key role in monitoring, influencing and holding to account the Health Service;
- Monitoring the Council’s performance, tracking progress against plans, reviewing the success of the Council’s actions;
- Acting as a critical friend to the Leader and Cabinet, holding to account when necessary; and
- Helping the authority champion success and learn from experience.

## Who does it?

Essex County Council (ECC) has four scrutiny committees:

- [Corporate Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee \(‘HOSC’\)](#)
- [People and Families Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee](#)

These committees are chiefly made up of elected county Councillors and are composed so as to reflect the political balance of the Council. However, they are expected to operate independently of party politics.

Much of their work is carried out by smaller sub-groups of Councillors which report back to the main committees. Because these are always time-limited groups with a specific purpose, they are often called ‘Task and Finish groups’.

The four committees are overseen by the Scrutiny Board, made up of the Chairmen of each Scrutiny Committee, and the Chairman of the Audit Committee. The Board has a role in steering the direction of Scrutiny, encouraging and disseminating best practice, allocating work across the committees, looking out for new issues on the horizon, leading scrutiny member development and playing a key role in engagement with cabinet members and senior officers.

## How is it done?

A scrutiny exercise broadly consists of the committee deciding what subject to look at, gathering evidence and investigating the matter through research, workshops, visits and written or spoken reports. They pull the findings together into a public scrutiny report.

Scrutiny reports usually include recommendations to members of the executive or other local bodies (such as the NHS). These recipients are expected to respond to those recommendations indicating whether and how they will do something differently as a result.

## How do I find out more?

For more detail about how scrutiny works in Essex County Council you can consult the [Council's constitution](#) which specifies the committees' responsibilities, remit and procedures. Or you can visit [ECC's scrutiny website](#) or contact the [Scrutiny team](#). For those using a paper version of this report, contact details are on the back page of this report.



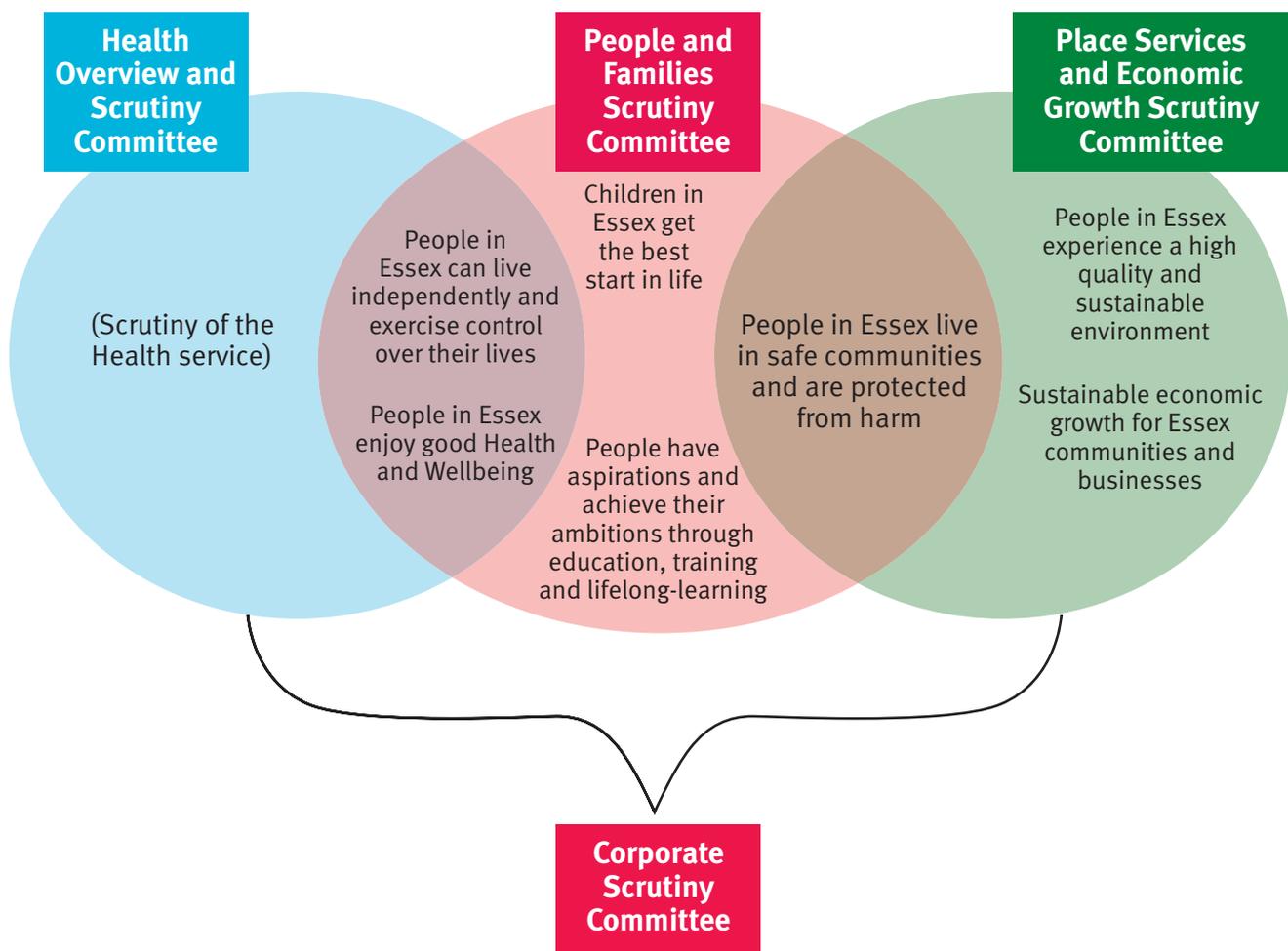
*The Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee spent a day on site learning about various methods of road surface repair (see case study)*

# Scrutiny in Essex County Council 2014-2015

Essex County Council (ECC) has committed to working towards seven Corporate Outcomes. Because a range of different types of ECC's work contributes to each outcome, most committees relate to most of the outcomes in some way; this diagram shows only the main links.

*Corporate Scrutiny Committee's* role spans all seven because it considers overarching matters and because some elements of its remit (such as HR) relate to all of the outcomes.

The following pages outline a selection of the work undertaken by Scrutiny over the year in relation to each corporate outcome. This list is by no means exhaustive.



## Call-in

Four decisions were **called in** in 2014/15, although three of these were withdrawn by the originator after they met the decision-maker to discuss:

- [Update on expenses Issue – Lord Hanningfield](#)
- Appointment of a non-executive director to Essex Cares Ltd (withdrawn)
- [Speed limit at Rivenhall](#) (withdrawn)
- [Colchester Town Centre Traffic Regulation Order](#) (withdrawn)

# Corporate Outcome: Sustainable economic growth for Essex communities and businesses

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- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* received the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- Broadband coverage in Essex is a live issue for *Corporate Scrutiny Committee*, and the matter is kept on six-monthly review.
- Following lengthy investigation into issues around [financial inclusion](#) in Essex, the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* [made recommendations](#) to Cllr David Finch, Leader of the Council (see case study).
- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* considered the work of [ECC's Brussels office](#) and received a [briefing](#) from Cllr Kevin Bentley, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Waste and Recycling on the Council's approach to bidding for and receiving [EU funding](#).
- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* considered the work of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and its future direction. The Committee wrote to the Secretary of State supporting the Council's position on the future shape and boundaries of the LEP.

## Case Study – Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion seeks to combat the inability of some individuals to access mainstream financial products and services.

The Financial Inclusion project was originally a cross-cutting scrutiny review in 2012/13. Seventeen recommendations were made to the Cabinet, including budget and policy implications. A 'Task and Finish' group was reconvened in 2013/14 to cross examine the Cabinet's response and review progress since the report was published. This Group [completed its task](#) in June 2014.

The Committee monitored progress through a [response from the Leader of the Council](#) in July 2015 providing a detailed update on activity taken by the Council to promote financial inclusion across Essex. The range of measures described include adjustments to funding allocations for the Citizens Advice Bureaux to reflect the likely number of people experiencing financial issues within their areas (a key recommendation) and a review of ECC's website, grouping all financial inclusion content together on [a single page](#).

The Leader of the Council thanked the Committee for their continued focus on financial inclusion and its impacts on the residents of Essex.

## Corporate Outcome: People in Essex enjoy good health and wellbeing

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- The Essex health arena is complicated with multiple health bodies; some who identify patient needs and purchase health services on their behalf, and others who are providers of those services. Some of the biggest providers of health services in Essex are the five hospital trusts and two of these have had significant financial and performance issues this year. The HOSC has a programme of engagement activity with a large number of these organisations, to offer support and constructive challenge. Adverse regulatory inspection reports on significant providers are reviewed by the Committee and re-assurance sought that appropriate improvement actions are being put in place to address the concerns highlighted.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* looked into the commissioning of [Public Health for Children and Young People](#), with members of the Young Essex Assembly setting the agenda for the meeting and [sat in on the Committee's deliberations](#).
- The HOSC highlighted difficulties in accessing GP services in Essex and discussed with NHS England Area Team the current challenges, including: more complex issues presented at GP surgeries, higher patient expectations, a shortage of GPs and the older age profile of GPs. The HOSC encouraged initiatives to increase recruitment and retention of GPs and improve communication with service users.
- The HOSC reviewed proposals for the procurement of a [pan-Essex Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service](#), making suggestions and seeking re-assurances about public engagement. In early 2016 a small review group will be established to look at child and adolescent accessibility to mental health services.
- The HOSC reviewed proposals to change the level of [maternity service at Clacton and Harwich community hospitals](#), seeking assurance on public engagement.
- Scrutiny committees continue to monitor the integration of Health and Social care and tie their detailed work into this wider direction of travel.
- Essex is Lead Authority on a joint HOSC with Southend and Thurrock Unitary Councils which is reviewing [changes to the provision of urological cancer surgery](#) proposed by NHS England. The joint HOSC will be seeking to ensure that there is a robust procurement and selection process and good public and patient engagement.
- Essex is one of three areas in England selected to be part of a new Success Regime which will encourage collaboration between all health organisations in the County and provide increased support. The HOSC has discussed the possible implications of this initiative and will review the new arrangement in due course.
- The HOSC continues to monitor [seasonal A&E pressures](#) on acute trusts as part of its regular engagement with hospital trusts.

## Case Study – NHS Complaints

A sub-group of the HOSC looked at complaints handling processes in the five Essex hospital trusts, involving representation from Southend and Thurrock unitary authorities to reflect the pan-Essex nature of the review. In addition to hearing from the Trusts themselves, the Group received evidence from a variety of contributors including patient representatives.

In its [conclusions in July 2015](#), the Group acknowledged good practice in a number of areas but that there is still significant opportunity to improve patient communications and engagement, and the sharing of knowledge and learning in the Trusts. Consequently the Group made recommendations about better Patient Engagement, making it easier to complain and give feedback, learning from complaints, staff training and improving the way the HOSC receives and uses information.



*Some members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee rode out for a day with ambulance crews, to see at first hand the day-to-day pressures on the service.*

## Corporate Outcome: People have aspirations and achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong-learning

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- A task and finish group of the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* investigated [Educational Attainment in Essex](#) and produced its findings to a positive [response from the Cabinet Member](#) (See case study).
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* has run an extensive piece of work throughout the year on [jobs, welfare and skills](#). This is being conducted by a task and finish group and has involved workshop sessions with the Young Essex Assembly including a full day at Anglia Ruskin University. A final report will be published later this year to outline its findings.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered a report on [training and jobs for young people](#) with the [assistance of the Young Essex Assembly](#). Paula Hornett, Senior Strategic Commissioning Manager was on hand as a contributor and to pick up the points raised including a discussion about careers advice in schools and the current rate of young people who are ‘NEET’ or ‘not in employment, education or training.’

### Case Study – Educational Attainment

One of the main topics for the People and Families Committee this year was educational attainment. The Educational Attainment Task and Finish Group worked for 11 months and called for a more linked-up approach to ensure improvements to the education system in Essex. The Task and Finish Group praised the progress already being made in Essex schools, and is keen to ensure those improvements continue.

The Group sought evidence from individual schools, district, borough and city councils, the Young Essex Assembly, Essex School Governors Association, Essex Primary Headteachers Association and the Association of Secondary Headteachers in Essex. On one occasion, in order to hear from key contributors, the Group met out of hours so that young people from the Young Essex Assembly could attend.

The group has made a [series of recommendations](#) to Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. Cllr Gooding endorsed many of its findings when he attended the committee in [September 2015](#).

Cllr Maggie McEwen, the Chairman of the Educational Attainment in Essex Task and Finish Group, said: “There have been some notable improvements to educational attainment in Essex in recent years and we are keen to ensure that that momentum continues.

“Having spent almost a year reviewing various aspects of the County’s education system, I am pleased we have been able to produce a list of recommendations that I believe have the potential to make a real difference.”

## Corporate Outcome: Children in Essex get the best start in life

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- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered proposals for a [new operating model for the Youth Service](#) (see case study).
- Following a delay while an Ofsted inspection was carried out in Children's Services, a report on the subject of [children in care](#) - including the favourable result of that inspection - was brought to the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* by Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Children and Adults and Nicky O'Shaughnessy, then Director for Local Delivery Children, Young People & Families Mid. Members commended the Ofsted result and held a [wide-ranging discussion](#) about the services provided, including ECC's various preventative support schemes.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* was [consulted](#) on the [re-procurement of community provision for children with a disability](#) by Cllr Madden and Philippa Bull, Head of Commissioning Vulnerable People. The committee investigated elements of the proposal such as the aim to support smaller providers in the market and agreed to revisit the issue in 2016, to monitor progress.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- A sub-group of the HOSC has been looking at obesity issues in Essex with a specific focus on preventative measures for pre-school children and those of primary school age, and a final report will be brought to the committee in the Autumn.

### Case Study – New model for the Youth Service

As an issue likely to attract public interest, the [new operating model for the Youth Service](#) was considered by the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* in [November 2014](#) with the support of Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. This led to a further update from the Cabinet Member in January 2015 and the committee continues to monitor progress.

The Committee learnt about the four core values in accordance with which youth work in Essex is delivered; all youth work is intended to be educative, participative, empowering and to provide equality of opportunity. With opportunities to ask questions of the Cabinet member and expert witnesses, the Committee provided constructive challenge as they learnt about the new way that ECC seeks to deliver youth work in the community and in schools; and how the work is delivered to individuals through partnership working.

## Corporate Outcome: People in Essex live in safe communities and are protected from harm

- The [Essex Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report](#) was presented by Paul Bedwell, business manager, Safeguarding, to the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* in [November 2014](#). The committee heard about the role and current priorities of the Board, including the preliminary results of an audit on key statutory organisations working with adults. The committee continues to work closely with the Board on safeguarding matters.
- Cllr Madden presented a [report on domestic abuse](#) to the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* in [July 2015](#), alongside Sheila Norris, Director for Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People, and Peter Fairley, Head of Policy & Strategy, People. Following a [detailed discussion](#), including learning about the new roles of Individual Domestic Violence Advisors and the wider prevention agenda, the Chairman thanked Cllr Madden and his team; he was encouraged by the good work being carried out and by the way key parties seemed to be coming together.
- Cllr Madden attended the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* with Claire Burrell, Head of Commissioning Vulnerable People to brief the Committee on the progress and outcomes of social impact bond-funded multi-systemic therapy.
- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* received the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- Throughout the year the HOSC has worked with the Chairman of the Safeguarding Adults and Children Boards to ensure that safeguarding issues identified at major health providers are considered as a thread through the Committee's business.



Members of the Young Essex Assembly held a workshop to give their response to the People and Families Scrutiny Committee's Educational Attainment report

## Corporate Outcome: People in Essex experience a high quality and sustainable environment

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- The *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* considered the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- Following a series of call-ins in the previous year, the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* approved a scrutiny report on [part-night street lighting](#) in [June 2014](#), making [nine recommendations](#) aimed at influencing better practise in this arena. A thorough point-by-point response was received from the Cabinet member in [October 2014](#) with a number of actions including an update of the exemption criteria.
- A workshop was held on proposals for a consultation on a local Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy, with the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* feeding into planning for the consultation over the following months and then in [July 2015](#) agreeing to add it to its future work programme for further consideration.
- In order to draw together several lines of enquiry on the topic, members of the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* attended a private site visit and seminar to learn first-hand about how highways maintenance is managed in practise (see case study).
- Cllr Roger Hirst, Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment, and Tim Dixon, Head of Country Parks consulted the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* on proposals regarding: [country parks car parking charges](#) in [December 2014](#). The consultation was about introduction of a variable charging model with the aim of improving the experience of customers and becoming cost neutral. The Committee was supportive of the content of the consultation, recognising the funding gap.
- An extensive piece of work has been ongoing throughout the year on [flood management and third party responsibilities](#). This is being conducted by a *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* Task & Finish group which will present its final report in Autumn 15.
- Councillors visited Stansted Airport to inform a subsequent session in March 2015 where Cabinet Members and officers presented an overview of the County Council's work around Essex Airports and the Stansted Airport Sustainable Development Plan.
- In [May 2015](#) the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* had a briefing on the matter of [Local Highways Panels](#) – a detailed review is scheduled to take place in 2015/16.
- In June 2015 members of the *Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee* visited Tovi Eco Park in order to give them first hand insight into the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and surrounding issues.

## Case Study – Roadway Repairs

As the condition of roadways is a perennial topic for this Committee, on 25 September 2014 an innovative approach was taken: an on-site seminar was held at and around the Highways Depot at Springfield to give Councillors first-hand experience of the techniques used to fill potholes, and how highway assets are managed.

Three roads were visited, and four different pothole repair techniques were demonstrated and explained. The Committee was given a tour of the Highways Depot at Springfield by David Forkin, Head of Maintenance and Operations. Councillors learnt about the winter service facilities and other machinery and plant on the site. It also provided an appreciation of the working relationship between the maintenance undertaken on the highway network with the provision and availability of materials and equipment, recycling facilities etc at a depot, as well as the underlying management of the maintenance programme.

This was followed by an afternoon seminar, with a presentation by Paul Goosey, Chairman of Road, Transport and Safety Association (covering the relative merits of the technical options) and David Forkin, Head of Maintenance and Operations (covering the way that the Highways Asset is managed).

Councillors concluded that this level of insight will be crucial in their role as a scrutiny committee considering these issues, accepting that the incidence of potholes would continue to be at the forefront of public concern but proposing that this type of insight would help the Committee consider how best to represent their interests. [A report of the visit](#) and findings was presented in November 2014.



*The Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee spent a day on site learning about various methods of road surface repair (see case study)*

## Corporate Outcome: People in Essex can live independently and exercise control over their lives

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- A detailed piece of work on the Commissioning of Services for Vulnerable people was scoped by the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* between July-September 2014 and is underway.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* made recommendations to the Cabinet Member on the topic of [Sensory Services](#) – Peter Tempest, Executive Director for Adult Operations, and Anna Saunders, Head of Commissioning for Vulnerable People, presented the [Cabinet Member’s response](#) later in the year and the committee continued on to monitor outcomes from its recommendations.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered a report on [Occupational Therapy in September 2014](#), presented by Cllr Anne Brown, then Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Wellbeing. After a full discussion, The Chairman thanked Cllr Brown for the positive report and commended the evidence of joint working with local district councils on the topic.
- Cllr Terry Cutmore gave an update on Councillor visits to residential care homes. This will now form part of the future Residential and Domiciliary Care review being undertaken by a task and finish group from the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee*.
- Essex Cares has been on the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee’s* radar in the year (see case study).
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* has been monitoring the progress and impacts of [the Care Act](#) throughout the year – they received a report specifically on this topic in [March 2015](#).
- A task and finish group was convened in October 2014 to consider [ECC’s Carers Strategy](#). An [interim report](#) was presented to the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* in March 2015, at which point the committee backed the report’s seven recommendations.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* heard about an entirely new service called the [Community Agent Essex Scheme](#) in [May 2015](#), presented by Cllr Brown with contributions from, among others, Andrew Gardner, Chief Executive of Age UK Essex. Members raised a number of [points for discussion](#) on the day, including looking for clarity on referral routes and recognising that the new Care Act sets prevention as a higher priority.
- The *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* considered the [commissioning strategy](#) relating to this Corporate Outcome as part of a market stalls event in the Council chamber. The committee put its feedback together into a letter to the Cabinet Member and was in general supportive of the strategy.
- In [July 2015](#) the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* had the opportunity to learn from Cllr Madden and officers including Louise Hall, Head of Commissioning, Vulnerable People, regarding changes to [Meals on Wheels](#) in Essex as the Council approached the termination of its Sodexo contract. The Committee felt that effective communication would be key, and suggested that Councillors should get involved in this process, especially at the Parish level.

- The HOSC has discussed briefings on a number of initiatives to help avoid hospital admissions, including: frailty programmes to re-able the elderly to stay in the community, reducing alcohol-related admissions, ensuring appropriate out of hospital end of life care and the potential enhanced role of pharmacies.

## Case Study – Essex Cares

The Chief Executive of Essex Cares attended the *People and Families Scrutiny Committee* with Peter Martin, Board member, in [November 2014](#) to present their [annual reports](#).

To inform this discussion, members of the Committee visited Essex Cares Harlow Hub in May 2015. Councillors found the visit informative and humbling; Councillors' discussions in advance of this session led to the use of written questions before the committee date, so that when the contributors were present at Committee the discussion could explore a further layer of detail.

One outcome of the discussion was a recommendation that Essex Cares' Annual Accounts be added to their website to support openness and transparency - this was done.



*Members of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee visit Essex Cares' Harlow Hub*

## **Corporate Outcomes: Corporate and overarching work**

Some Scrutiny relates to strategic issues which cut across all of the corporate outcomes – this often falls to the *Corporate Scrutiny Committee*.

This committee also deals with the way the organisation manages itself. This includes how the Council agrees its goals, how it decides to spend its money and how it manages its employees. This type of scrutiny also contributes to all of the above corporate objectives, albeit indirectly, while bringing in important considerations about value for money, good governance, ethics, accountability and transparency.

- The *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* has quarterly items presented by Cllr Derrick Louis, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Corporate and Traded Services, and Keir Lynch, Executive Director for Strategy, Transformation and Commissioning Support (STC), regarding the planning and progress of ECC's transformation programme. The Committee raised various specific queries through the year, including about [ECC's staffing structure](#) and the corporate risk register. The Committee received a [written response](#) from the Cabinet Member on these matters.
- Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Finance, attended the Scrutiny Board and subsequently *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* in [June 2014](#) to discuss the work he had undertaken reviewing the [Capital Programme](#). A task and finish Group will be established following peer review.
- Budget outturn reports are scrutinised by the *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* quarterly, including the [year-end financial outturn](#) in [July 2014](#), presented by Cllr Spence and Margaret Lee, Executive Director for Corporate and Customer Services.
- A [written response](#) was received from Cllr Spence to questions related to youth centre improvements and two academies, raised by Councillors at the October 2014 *Corporate Scrutiny Committee*.
- Cllr Louis attended the *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* in [September 2014](#) to report on [property assets including disposals](#); the committee requested further information later in the year.
- The *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* requested a report from Cllr Louis and Keir Lynch, Executive Director for STC on [the use of consultants by ECC](#). There was a further exchange of [written questions and answers](#) from the Cabinet Member, including a brief outline of the benefits of three pieces of work utilising consultants.
- Councillors heard a briefing from Cllr Spence and David Wilde, Chief Information Officer on ECC's project to [transform its corporate systems](#)/IT infrastructure. This was followed by [further information](#) from the Cabinet member about ECC's approach to partnership working, in particular in the context of collaboration on systems.
- A task and finish group was established by the *Corporate Scrutiny Committee* to [consider ECC's procurement strategy](#) and made [recommendations](#) to the Cabinet Member at the end of the previous year. However the Committee followed up on the matter with a [report on ECC's procurement strategy](#) in [April 2015](#).

## Case Study – Budget Setting

Budget setting and planning was a key interest of the Committee in this year, as they look to add more value to the budget-setting process. The committee was given an overview of the picture at national and County level by Margaret Lee, Executive Director for Corporate and Customer Services, including a jargon-busting session and a session looking at the specific format of ECC's budget papers. This was followed by more Essex-specific insight from Nicole Wood, Director for Financial Services, and several sessions of constructive engagement with Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Finance. The Cabinet member and Committee agreed to continue to seek improvement to Scrutiny's early engagement with the budget-setting process in future years.

## Improvements to scrutiny practise in 2014/15

- The Scrutiny Board has led discussions about **scrutiny best practise** this year, resulting in developments across all four committees such as use of pre-meetings and clear key lines of enquiry, and a move towards using committee time flexibly for briefing days, workshops, market stalls, seminars or visits where appropriate.
- A structured **work programming** process was put in place to enable the committees to better plan their work, respond to emerging issues and engage with the rest of the organisation. For example, this led to two proactive scrutiny investigations by the HOSC this year – the first for four years – in addition to its usual busy workload.
- Committees have begun looking for more opportunities for direct **engagement with communities** and community representatives. For example, Healthwatch Essex has 'speaking observer' status at HOSC, members have engaged with ECC's planning groups and Young Essex Assembly, and HOSC spoke to patient representative groups as part of its review of complaints handling in the hospital trusts.
- As Essex moves towards becoming a **commissioning-led, outcomes based organisation**, scrutiny committees have aligned themselves to the 7 corporate outcomes and received the initial round of commissioning strategies early in the year. They will continue to hold the Cabinet to account on the delivery of those outcomes whilst looking to engage with commissioners and providers, scrutinising relationships as well as outcomes.
- **Communication and links with Cabinet and senior officers** have been strengthened, with regular meetings at both member and officer level, action notes produced directly after each meeting, better tracking of items and updated branding for publications.
- After discussions through the year led by the Board, committees will now have more robust **performance management information** available to them.

# How to get involved in Scrutiny

## Attending a meeting

Members of the public are welcome to attend any public meeting of a Scrutiny Committee or 'Task and Finish' group. Public meetings are listed on the online [meeting calendar found at this link](#).

All Scrutiny Committees allow a certain amount of time for public questions at the beginning of each meeting – if you wish to ask a question make yourself known to the Chairman or clerk well before the meeting starts.

Public meetings are recorded, streamed live on the internet and archived on [ECC's website](#).

Scrutiny regularly asks organisations or individuals to give evidence at meetings for the purpose of their investigations. If you will be attending Scrutiny to give information to a committee, you can find information and guidance about what to expect in the Scrutiny Handbook which has the following subsections at the following links:

- [Guide for County Councillors](#)
- [Guide for county council officers](#)
- [Guide for the public and other organisations](#)

If you would like to feed into the Scrutiny process, or suggest a topic for Scrutiny's attention, you can get in touch with the Scrutiny Team at [scrutiny@essex.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@essex.gov.uk).

Alternatively, you can contact any of the Councillors who are on the relevant committee or Task and Finish group and ask them to consider representing you or calling you to give evidence. You can find out which local Councillors are on which Committee by checking the [website](#) or contacting the [Scrutiny Team](#).



*Cllr Reeves, Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on a fact-finding mission to the Hazardous Area Response Team at Great Notley*

# Key topics proposed for 2015-2017

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Scrutiny must be responsive and proactive about unforeseen issues as they emerge. For this reason, the list of topics below can only be indicative - it will be subject to revision and alteration throughout the period in question.

For further details about the committee's work programmes, information on any particular items or scheduling information, please contact the [Scrutiny Team](#).

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- Staffing
  - Interim staff
  - Paying the living wage
  - Zero-hours contracts
- Assets and money
  - Ethical investments
  - The Reserves Policy
  - Rates of return/risk strategy and Council proposals for selling land and building assets)
- Engagement
  - ECC Petitions Policy
  - ECC Engagement Strategy
  - Member Enquiries system
- Budget
  - Capital Programme
  - Council tax and budget setting & planning 2016/17
- A full programme of other business both already underway and to be commenced; including in response to matters arising such as decisions or consultations.

## Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Obesity issues (ongoing)
- Complex Urological Cancer surgery proposals (in joint committee with Southend and Thurrock Unitary Councils – ongoing)
- Mental Health Service for children and young people
- Patient engagement and the HOSC's working relationship with Healthwatch
- Area updates for all five Clinical Commissioning Groups in Essex, on rota through the year.
- Results of inspection reports eg Care Quality Commission inspection of Colchester Hospital University Foundation Trust.
- Primary care staff shortages, recruitment and succession planning / workforce development.
- A full programme of other business both already underway and to be commenced; including significant service variations, picking up regulatory concerns and any other issues arising in-year.

## People and Families Scrutiny Committee

- Child sexual exploitation
- Care Act implications
- Residential and domiciliary care
- Health and Education plans
- All-age disability
- A full programme of other business both already underway and to be commenced; including in response to matters arising such as decisions or consultations.

## Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee

- Third party responsibilities and flood management (ongoing)
- Jobs, welfare and skills (ongoing)
- Local Highways Panels
- Recycling centres for Household Waste Service
- Ringway Jacobs contract (underway)
- Parking Partnerships
- Passenger Transport Strategy
- Commissioning Strategies: environmental aspirations
- Utility contracts and major road schemes
- Aviation Policy
- Local Economic Partnership
- A full programme of other business both already underway and to be commenced; including in response to matters arising such as decisions or consultations.



*Audio from most public meetings of the Council and its Committees, including all Scrutiny Committees, is now broadcast live online*

**This information is issued by**

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