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# Overview and Scrutiny Issues

## 1. A Snapshot of some of the Scrutiny Work currently being undertaken

### **Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has concentrated on two main items recently.

The first is the detailed work being undertaken by the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. This has picked up on the comments made in the joint Ofsted / CQC report published in the summer and on how the Areas for Improvement are being implemented. Stage 1 of this work has concentrated on processes and procedures which must be in place to underpin all the activity which takes place and has involved lengthy witness sessions with all the appropriate lead officers across the Schools, Children and Families Directorate, Health and the Safeguarding Board. The Committee has passed on a range of recommendations to these agencies. Generally the Committee has been reassured, seeing a clear wish amongst all the agencies to improve and an acknowledgement that they must do so. The Committee now needs to confirm whether the good intentions are being implemented at the local level and whether they are actually improving outcomes for children and families. This will form the focus of Stage 2 of the Sub-Committee's work, which will commence after Christmas.

The second is looking at educational attainment. All members will be aware that Essex children did well in last summer's GCSE (Key Stage 4) results. Of course, the Committee welcomed this, but it wanted to look at activity across all the key stages to gain a full picture. It is clear that progress is being made across the board and that Essex has plans in place to respond where schools are failing or underachieving. One area the Committee will keep under very close review is the level of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS), which still remains too high in some parts of the County.

### **Community Wellbeing and Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

**Adult Safeguards:** The Committee received the annual report from the Adult Safeguards Unit (and receives quarterly updates throughout the year) and heard of the increasing awareness of professionals and the community of safeguarding concerns. Members discussed closer collaboration between the Adult and Children's Safeguards Units. It was acknowledged that each unit had differing statutory responsibilities, and that the Children's Unit was in the process of implementing an improvement plan to meet regulatory concerns. The Committee would recommend to the respective Cabinet Members that the Adult and Children's Safeguards Units form one Unit and be co-located to ensure clarity and cohesion; and that senior management continue to look at a joined-up and cohesive approach between the existing two Units.

**Occupational Therapy Service Review:** The Committee made six recommendations to the Cabinet Member which will feed into the review. The Committee will consider the review again in December.

**Libraries, Goldlay Gardens:** The Committee will receive an update from the Library Service on the Goldlay Gardens site in December.

**Meals on Wheels:** The Committee has commenced scrutiny on Meals on Wheels in line with the procurement process for the contract.

**Absence Management:** A Task and Finish Group has been gathering evidence on the reasons behind absences within the AH&CW directorate. The final report is to be received by the Committee in December with seven recommendations for improvement. The Executive Scrutiny Committee will receive the report in January 2011.

**Extra Care Sheltered Housing:** Members will commence scrutiny in January 2011. New Extra Care accommodation has opened recently in Witham and a Member site visit is being arranged. This will build upon the site visit undertaken to two extra care accommodation sites in Cambridgeshire

### **Economic Development and Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Since the last report the Committee has embarked upon a scrutiny review on how works in the highway undertaken by the utility companies are regulated and managed by this Authority.

Although road works may be a highly visible activity that disrupts traffic flows, in fact, only 10 % of road congestion is caused by road works (including the Council's own works). As a Highway Authority, this Council has a responsibility:

- to co-ordinate road works to minimise disruption, thus maximising the availability of the network to the public, and
- to manage the quality of the asset, ensuring that openings in the carriageway are correct and to standard.

So far the Committee has learned about the current framework that exists to manage and co-ordinate road works, and heard from representatives from Utility Companies on their perspective of carrying out works in the highway, and in particular their experience in Essex. The next stage of the review will be to hear evidence from some groups of road users.

In conjunction with the Safer and Stronger Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee, a Task and Finish Group as been set up with the objective of considering the proposed new Local Transport Plan in the delivery of the Council's long term vision for highways and transportation in Essex.

In October the Committee received an interesting presentation on the work of INVEST Essex, which is the Council's inward investment service that promotes the County as an outstanding business destination and provides

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confidential advice and practical support to companies that may be potential investors. The item was initially raised because the performance indicator “Jobs Created and Saved as a Result of Foreign Direct Investment” (LI 015) had been referred to the Committee as it was flagged as red in July against its target. The creation of such jobs is not something that may be controlled: however, INVEST Essex does use its best efforts to encourage businesses to locate in the County, and it was pointed out that any jobs that might eventually arise from an enquiry may take some time to come to fruition, and projects will vary in size and impact.

### **Executive Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has continued its review of the Transformation Programme and has received presentations from the Director of Customer Services around the development of the new website and from the Director of People and Transformation who provided an update on the savings achieved to date and the outcomes of the projects in Transition States 1 and 2. A Task and Finish Group has been established to consider the governance and risk management arrangements of the Programme, scheduled to report back to the Committee in February 2011. The Forward Look has been updated to include a review of the New Ways of Working initiative in addition to the other topics already under consideration.

In October the Committee carried out a review of the School Governor appointment policy, and after a wide-ranging discussion of the potential options it agreed to recommend not to change the current policy.

The Committee carried out a review of the risk management and contracting arrangements for capital programmes in September, with the final report of findings and recommendations considered in November. This report will be forwarded to the relevant Cabinet Members for a response shortly.

In November the Committee received a presentation from Councillor Finch, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Transformation Programme, that included details of the Corporate Plan and Capital Budgets for 2011/12 and beyond. The Committee welcomed the opportunity offered by this presentation to gain insight into the future budget arrangements and thanked the Cabinet Member for sharing information so candidly.

The work of the now disbanded Central Services Committee has been amalgamated with the work of the Executive Scrutiny Committee. The Capital Resourcing review that was carried out by a Task and Finish Group convened from the Central Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee will be reviewed by the Executive Scrutiny Committee in January 2011. Those Members that carried out the original review have been invited to take part in this process.

There have been no call-ins since the last report to Council, and the Committee has considered regular financial and performance reports.

### **Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee continues to undertake a strategic overview and scrutiny role in a period of much change in the health service. In respect of all five PCTs it has (a) reviewed how they propose to divest themselves of their provider services and become purely commissioning authorities by 1 April 2011; (b) looked at the actions taken to streamline senior management arrangements, including reducing the number of Chief Executives from five to two; and (c) commented on the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessments prepared in response to national legislation.

The Committee has been updated on work on local issues being undertaken by joint HOSC/Area Forum/local council task and finish groups, allowing these subjects to be looked at by Members at the most appropriate level. Many of these will be reporting their outcomes early in the New Year.

Members will be aware of the financial concerns in NHS South West Essex. The Committee has discussed these with its Chief Executive and will monitor progress on how it implements its money saving projects.

For the first time the Committee has looked in detail at services for children, particularly proposals to bring together commissioning activities. We will take care to ensure that follow up work does not cut across the detailed work being undertaken by the Children and Young Peoples Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

Essex continues to Chair the Regional Health Chairs Forum and its officer support group, and all 11 HOSCs involved have welcomed Essex's suggestion that this role should continue for the foreseeable future.

Finally, last winter the Committee held a very successful away day event with the Chairs and Chief Executives of the five PCTs, the Southend HOSC and the Essex and Southend LINK. The Committee has agreed to hold a similar event in the New Year with the five Hospital Trusts and the two Mental Health Partnership Trusts.

### **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Since the last report to Council we have embarked upon gathering evidence for the following scrutiny reviews:

- The off site emergency planning requirements around top tier COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) sites in Essex
- The management of A Boards (advertising boards) on the publicly maintainable highway.

The reviews will take place over a number of meetings and, aside from scheduled meetings, we are adopting a variety of techniques to gather evidence including interviewing witnesses, site visits, and a questionnaire to District Councils in the case of A Board management.

As Councillors should be aware, in July a decision was made by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste for the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to assume the role and responsibilities of the County Emergency Planning Officer on an interim basis under a Memorandum of Understanding; and to develop options for future joint working arrangements. In November the Committee visited the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters at Kelvedon with the aim of learning about the new arrangements, the advantages and disadvantages associated with the new working arrangements, and the potential for future joint working.

Members who took part in the visit were provided with an interesting and informative insight into the wide range of work that is covered by Emergency Planning Services and the Fire Service, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and the management and co-ordination of emergency planning in Essex (including broader national co-ordination issues).

**John Aldridge**  
**Chairman of the Scrutiny Board**