

Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny Activity
2018/19



Essex County Council

Introduction

By Scrutiny Board Chairman, Councillor Jill Reeves




I am pleased to present this report on scrutiny activity at Essex County Council over the last fifteen months. We have changed our approach a little this year, presenting a summary of activity and highlighting three issues from each committee.

There has been some very good work undertaken by my scrutiny colleagues, both in full committee and through task and finish groups. Some of it reflects national concerns such as air quality and drug gangs, knife crime and county lines whilst other work has focused on local issues including the Ringway Jacobs highways contract and the Virgin Care contract. In delivering its services, the Council has to deal with ever increasing complexity. As a result, our scrutiny committees must rise to the challenge and address more cross-cutting issues. This requires greater planning and depth of understanding than ever before.

There are significant issues and cost pressures facing Essex County Council. It is important to remember that scrutiny can be a valuable extra resource in giving issues prominence and transparency whilst also helping to address these corporate challenges through delivering policy change and encouraging further partnership working. It is essential therefore that scrutiny continues to be involved early in the development of policy and has the opportunity to help shape it.

We all work in a political environment, but it is encouraging to see that when it comes to scrutiny we take the 'party political' out of the picture. Scrutiny operates at its best when it is independent and non-partisan and works constructively with decision-makers to drive the improvement in public services that we all want for our constituents.

I am proud of scrutiny's achievements this past fifteen months and would like to thank both officers and the scrutiny Members for their hard work and commitment.



Councillor Jill Reeves
Scrutiny Board Chairman

Contents

The Scrutiny Committees

Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	Page 4
Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee	Page 5
People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee	Page 6
Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee	Page 7

Essex County Council's Strategic Aims

Transform the council to achieve more with less	Page 8
Enable inclusive economic growth	Page 8-9
Help create great places to grow up, live and work	Page 9-10
Help people get the best start and age well	Page 10-11

How the Public can get Involved	Page 12
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Corporate

Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This Committee reviews the overall strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Cabinet and Council including the budget strategy, financial resources, equality and diversity issues, procurement and the Council's transformation programme.

Full details of the Committee's work over the period can be found on the Council's website - [Please click here](#)



"This has been another busy and productive year for the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee. Alongside the more "business as usual" responsibilities of scrutinising the budget and the Council's financial management processes, the Committee has engaged in task and finish work designed to ensure that the Council's processes are robust and that high quality services are provided to members of the public, and within the Council.

The first of these reviews related to the procurement of the Council's human resources contract, which will expire in the Autumn. Clear recommendations were produced from this review, all of which were received positively by the Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate. The second review was undertaken jointly with the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee and looked at the Ringway Jacobs contract. Wide ranging recommendations were produced, including setting out a clear process for ongoing scrutiny by establishing a member-led working group to provide continuity of scrutiny input.

My thanks go to the members of the Committee, and the working groups, who have shown a great deal of commitment and enthusiasm in progressing the matters falling within the Committee's remit".

Councillor Michael Mackrory – Chairman

Membership

Councillor Michael Mackory (Chairman)

Councillor Ivan Henderson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor James Abbott

Councillor Jo Beavis

Councillor Malcom Buckley

Councillor Mike Garnett

Councillor Michael Hardware

Councillor Valerie Metcalfe

Councillor John Moran

Councillor Ron Pratt

Councillor Wendy Schmitt

Councillor Andrew Sheldon

Councillor Anne Turrell

Councillor Mike Steptoe

Health Overview

Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This Committee reviews and scrutinises matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the County of Essex. This includes primary, secondary, tertiary care, and public health, and may involve reviewing the work of commissioners (such as local clinical commissioning groups), providers of health services (such as hospitals) and other organisations in the health sector.

Full details of the Committee's work over the period can be found on the Council's website - [Please click here](#)



"Over the last year the committee has moved towards scrutinising cross cutting themes and partnership working. To illustrate this, three pieces of work have been highlighted all of which are currently ongoing.

These demonstrate that it has become increasingly difficult to separate health from social care. For example, the recruitment and retention challenge facing the health sector is difficult to separate out from those same challenges in social care.

We have established Joint Health Scrutiny Committees (JHOSCS) with neighbouring authorities (one with Southend and Thurrock and the other with Suffolk) to scrutinise proposals from Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships for geographical areas that do not align with our county council borders. Integrating these committees into our HOPSC governance processes and ensuring our work complemented that of the Joint Committees added greater complexity. The role of the JHOSCs has been to challenge the plans being developed by these partnerships, engagement arrangements, and ensuring that proposed changes are sustainable and reflect best practice. The HOPSC retains a strategic oversight across all three footprints. Partnership working always brings challenges, but I am pleased that the HOPSC has positively engaged with the work of these joint committees.

I would like to thank all my HOPSC members for their commitment over the last year and especially those that have volunteered to also serve on the Joint Committees. In addition, particular thanks go to Councillors Brown and Egan as our lead members on the JHOSCs."

Councillor Jill Reeves – Chairman

Membership

Councillor Jill Reeves
(Chairman)
Councillor Anne Brown

Councillor Ricki Gadsby

Councillor Bob Massey

Councillor Dr Richard Moore

Councillor Stephen Robinson

Councillor Dave Harris
(Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Jenny Chandler

Councillor June Lumley

Councillor Maggie McEwen

Councillor Colin Sargeant

Councillor Beverly Egan
(Vice Chairman)

District Councillors:

Councillor Tony Edwards

Councillor Neil Pudney

Councillor Vic Ranger

Councillor Peter Tattersley

People and Families

Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This Committee exercises the scrutiny function on matters relating to children and young people, families, education, adult social care, special needs and safeguarding.

Full details of the Committee's work over the period can be found on the Council's website - [Please click here](#)



"My Committee has a challenging and wide remit which means our proactive work needs to be selective to enable it to be manageable. The last year has seen the committee undertake more detailed scrutiny work than in the previous year. In the activity update that follows three pieces of work have been highlighted, all of which have commenced but require further scrutiny. Reflecting the experience of other committees, the cross-cutting nature of issues has become increasingly apparent with, for example, the drug gangs and county lines issue needing not only discussions with those trying to disrupt the gangs but also officers considered public health, education and safeguarding factors to those at risk and most vulnerable.

One of the other issues highlighted is the relationship the County Council has with its care providers. The financial challenges being faced in providing social care to an ageing population with increasingly complex needs means that the county council's partnership working is critical. My committee has spent time challenging how these relationships are being maintained.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of my committee for their commitment to their work. I am pleased that the Committee is providing a robust challenge on some key issues."

Councillor Malcolm Maddocks - Chairman

Membership

Councillor Malcom Maddocks (Chairman)	Councillor John Baker (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Jenny Chandler (Vice-Chairman)	Councillor Graham Butland
Councillor Jude Deakin	Councillor Beverley Egan
Councillor Mark Durham	Councillor Jeff Henry
Councillor June Lumley	Councillor Peter May
Councillor Maggie McEwen	Councillor Ron Pratt
Councillor Clive Souter	Councillor Patricia Reid
Richard Carson (Education Rep)	Lee Cromwell (Education Rep)
Marian Uzzell (Education Rep)	

Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This Committee exercises the scrutiny function on matters relating to environment, economic growth and infrastructure, sustainability, highways and transportation, libraries, planning communities, waste and recycling and trading standards.

Full details of the Committee's work over the period can be found on the Council's website - [Please click here](#)



"Conducting effective scrutiny will always require us to move beyond simple challenge, working instead as a critical friend to the organisation. As local members we are all ambassadors for our communities, and we are uniquely placed to provide genuine insight. I'm immensely proud of how well members of my committee have drawn upon this expertise, working constructively and positively to really add value to the areas we've looked at.

As always, the wide scope of this committee has allowed us to be ambitious in our scrutiny work. We have engaged with a really diverse range of policy areas. These include nationally important and topical issues such as air quality and devolution, as well local service delivery in areas such as country parks, highways and libraries.

I'm particularly proud of the how we have balanced the work of the full committee with more detailed task and finish reviews. These pieces of work have allowed us to be more reflective in our understanding of scrutiny - working across committees, undertaking site visits and generally engaging with a broader range of stakeholders. This has required a significant commitment from a number of members and I'd like to particularly thank all those who have volunteered for their dedication.

The commitment and enthusiasm of my committee is clearly mirrored in the quality of work we've undertaken and the outcomes we've achieved. We need to ensure that this ambition is matched moving forward, and that we can build on this good work in years to come".

Councillor Ian Grundy – Chairman

Membership

Councillor Ian Grundy
(Chairman)

Councillor Chris Pond (Vice-
Chairman)

Councillor Stephen Hillier
(Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Barry Aspinell

Councillor Tony Ball

Councillor Terry Cutmore

Councillor Andrew Erskine

Councillor Paul Honeywood

Councillor David Kendall

Councillor Bob Massey

Councillor Ron Pratt

Councillor Wendy Schmitt

Councillor Carole Weston

Councillor Julie Young

Transform the Council to Achieve More with Less

Provider relationships

PAFPSC has reviewed issues around the relationships Essex County Council has with adult social care providers. Additional responsibilities imposed by the Care Act around market management and sustainability means that the quality of those relationships is critically important.

Members:



Increased their awareness of the actions being taken to improve relationships; challenged whether there is consistent engagement across sectors and the reasons behind provider aged debt; challenged the extent of the political leadership and executive oversight of the issues and actions being taken and will be reviewing a draft of the refreshed Market Strategy.

The Strategic Highways Contract

Members of both **PSEGPSC** and **CPSC** set out in January 2019 to undertake a joint task and finish review of the contract with Ringway Jacobs under which much of the Council's highways service is delivered. This was established to feed into an upcoming decision on whether or not to extend the contract. Members engaged with a wide range of partners and officers to deliver a comprehensive report, outlining a range of recommendations. These included setting out a clear process for ongoing scrutiny by establishing a member-led working group to provide continuity of scrutiny input.

Members:



Delivered the report to the cabinet member in early May 2019. It is understood that work is taking place to positively engage with the recommendations and provide a response to the committee.

Enable Inclusive Economic Growth

Budget review and financial management

CPSC receives regular reports and presentations on the financial management of the Council, to allow the review of the budget before it is presented to Council. It also undertakes, scrutiny of the half year reports and the reserves.

Members:



Have been an important part of the Council's checks and balance system which provides assurance that the Council's finances are sound and offer value for money, and that robust planning is in place to meet future financial challenges.

Procurement

CPSC established a task and finish group to consider the procurement of the Council's human resources contract, which is due to expire in September 2019. A number of recommendations were developed relating to enhancing the clarity of aims and objectives, use of technology, demonstrating value, contract duration, the tender specification and review of the draft contract by the Committee.

Members:



Produced a range of recommendations that received a positive response from the Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate, which would be used when shaping the procurement of this specific contract ultimately improving the way the Council recruits its people.

Help Create Great Places to Grow Up, Live and Work

Drug gangs, knife crime and county lines

In response to a referral from Full Council, **PAFPSC** is looking at the development of a multi-agency strategy to confront drug gangs, knife crime and county lines. To date the PAF has spoken to representatives from the Youth offending Team, Essex Police and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Members:



Increased their understanding of the challenge of drug gangs, knife crime and county lines being faced in Essex and some of the structures and partnerships already in place, and those also being developed, to confront the issue; established a task and finish group to continue the review and challenge of the development of the multi-agency strategy, the extent of partnership working and the contribution of prevention and early intervention to minimise the issue.

Recruitment and staffing

HOPSC has been looking at the recruitment and retention issues being faced in health and social care. To date, discussions have been held with STP representatives, Health Education England, Essex County Council and commissioner and provider representatives, which have focused on understanding the scale and nature of the challenges being faced.

Members:



Increased their understanding of the scale of the recruitment and retention challenge in the health and social care sector in Essex and sought assurance that the challenges and issues have been recognised and defined at local, sector and more strategic levels, and that planning is in place to address them.

Air Quality

PSEGPSC members conducted a wide-ranging piece of task and finish work looking at air quality and focused on: public health and technology, planning, and highways and transportation. Throughout the course of this review, members engaged with a diverse range of sources from across the public, private and community-voluntary sector. This included site visits to look at best practice, and engagement with nearby Writtle college to hear evidence around emerging technologies and techniques. The final report was well received by Cabinet and the recommendations were commended as being informed, constructive, and ambitious.



Members:

Submitted the final report to four cabinet members in early March. Positive work is currently taking place to ascertain the feasibility of the recommendations with senior officers before a response is delivered to scrutiny in May 2019.

Independent Property Review Commission (IPRC)

In April 2019, members of **PSEGPSC** conducted a review a year on from the report of the Independent Property Review Commission (IPRC) that considered fire safety following the Grenfell tragedy. The commission had produced 14 wide ranging recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Leader and Cabinet and voted through by Full Council in May 2018. As part of PSEGPSC's review, members engaged with internal ECC officers as a critical friend, conducting an in-depth analysis of progress against these recommendations.



Members:

Considered in detail the original recommendations and the progress that had been achieved and were very satisfied with the progress made against most recommendations. A number of actions were identified, and a follow up exercise has been added to the PSEGPSC work programme for six months' time.

Help People Get the Best Start and Age Well

Seasonal planning

HOPSC has discussed current A&E pressures and seasonal planning with both the Ambulance Service and acute hospital trusts in Essex. The HOPSC were keen to see operational level personnel attending in order to inform these discussions.



Members:

Sought assurances around systemic working arrangements, advance winter planning and review mechanisms, and discharge planning. They have suggested that there was a role and opportunity to deliver more prominent Public Health messages. A follow-up session is scheduled to review the success of the winter pressures planning and Essex County Council have been specifically requested to also attend to discuss its work on admission avoidance.

Virgin Care Pre-Birth to 19 contract

PAFPSC is reviewing the contract placed with Virgin Care and Barnardo's to provide Health, Wellbeing and Family Support services (incorporating previous services such as the Healthy Child Programme, Healthy Schools Programme, Family Nurse Partnership and Sure Start Children's Centres) to the pre-birth to 19 age group. PAFPS has also spoken to the sub-contractors under the contract.

Members:



Increased their understanding of the challenges faced in launching the new service and the new delivery model; considered the effectiveness of the services now being achieved and the arrangements for young adults leaving care, and will be conducting site visits of some of the new Family Hubs ahead of a follow-up session with Virgin Care and Barnardo's.

Responding to STP Consultations

In Mid and South Essex, the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (the group that brings local health and care providers together to plan the long-term needs of local communities) launched a full public consultation on its proposals for hospital service changes. The JHOSC with Southend and Thurrock held several in-public and private sessions during the consultation period before submitting a formal response to the STP proposals highlighting several issues. **HOPSC** retained a strategic oversight during this time.

Members:



Ensured that both JHOSCs have increased transparency and accountability of the STP proposals, challenged the extent of partnership working and enhanced the opportunity for public engagement. In Mid and South Essex the JHOSC broadly supported the STP in further progressing its proposals and through its recommendations, highlighted the urgent need to develop a Joint Workforce Strategy across all sectors of the health and social care economy, the need to develop a locality based STP Primary Care Strategy and to finalise plans to mitigate the impact of the proposed relocation of certain services on staff, patient, family and carers. In response, the STP committed to continuing to work with the JHOSC in addressing these concerns.

How the Public can get Involved

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](#).

All scrutiny committees normally allow 15 minutes for public questions at the beginning of each meeting. If you wish to ask a question, let the Chairman or clerk know in plenty of time before the meeting starts. Public meetings are usually audio recorded and streamed live on the internet. The recording can be found embedded within the web page for each individual meeting, accessed via the link above.

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](#).

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 democratic.services@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](#).

This document has been produced by Essex County Council's Democracy and Transparency service. Contact us by email at democratic.services@essex.gov.uk.