

Overview and Scrutiny Issues

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

Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has concentrated on looking at one or two major issues at each meeting.

There are several interesting developments in train in the SCF Directorate at present, particularly those concentrating on dealing with the requirements of the family as a whole. The Committee has therefore looked at the arrangements for both the Essex Families Pilot Scheme and Families with Complex Needs, and has commented on these to both the Cabinet Member and the Head of Service. Data on the projects will be submitted to the Committee regularly and it will be looking at particular aspects (such as the use of volunteer helpers for individual families) over the next few months. The Committee regards these projects to be of major significance and is encouraging the Cabinet Member to hold a briefing session for all Members.

The Committee has also reviewed progress on:

- Multi Agency Allocation Groups (MAAGs); and
- Projects on bullying and eating disorders being run by the Young Essex Assembly;

and will keep then both under review.

The Committee is aware of the high level of public interest in appropriate safeguarding for children and young people. This is reviewed monthly by the Families Safeguarding Sub-Committee but, in addition, the Committee has placed an emphasis on reviewing the arrangements for procuring places in residential establishments, particularly when these are outside the geographical area of Essex, to ensure that these are robust and monitored closely.

Community and Older People Policy and Scrutiny Committee

The two Mental Health Partnership Trusts, delivering commissioned Mental Health services in Essex, presented their Annual Reports to the Committee in November. The Committee utilised Caroline Robinson, Mental Health Commissioner, as an expert witness to frame potential questions to the two Trusts.

The two Trusts were challenged on the number of cases under the Care Programme Approach that have substantial and critical social care needs which make them eligible for personal budgets; how the Trusts have addressed the personalisation agenda with NHS medical staff; and what the challenges are in offering choice under Personal Budgets within an NHS context. They were also challenged on whether there has been

significant change in service delivery as a result of the implementation of personalisation. There has been an increase in Mental Health Act assessments and the Trusts were asked what is behind the increase; and what are the trends. The Trusts were also asked what service users and carers have identified as the key strengths and areas of improvement of the Trusts.

Last year the Young Essex Assembly highlighted the risk of mental health issues amongst disabled people and in particular those with hearing impediments. The importance of looking at cultural and linguistic perspectives was stressed within the context of equality of access to services. The Trusts revealed that they had a corporate objective to increase deaf awareness across the organisation and had run deaf awareness programmes for all employees.

Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Since the last report to Council the full Committee has received briefings on the progress of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex; and various highways issues including the Pothole Programme, Local Highways Panels, and Winter Service. On both occasions Members had an opportunity to cross examine Cabinet Members, and exchange views.

The Committee has been conducting a large part of its activity through Task and Finish Groups, and over the next three months three final scrutiny reports will be released on Off Site Emergency Planning Requirements around the control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH) sites in Essex; Financial Inclusion; and the future of Recycling Centres.

Following the referral of a motion from full Council on Passenger Transport Concessionary Fares, it has been agreed that a new Task and Finish Group will be set up to consider the matter.

Over the past year the Committee has conducted a number of projects using a variety of methods, and it is proposed that in the New Year to review the effectiveness or otherwise of our activities so that lessons may be learned in the way to take scrutiny activity forward.

Executive Scrutiny Committee

Budget Process: The Committee continues to scrutinise the financial outturn quarterly.

Corporate Plan: The Committee continues to scrutinise progress against the Corporate Plan.

Procurement Strategy: The Committee commenced Scrutiny of the Council's Procurement Strategy. However, the Committee reached a consensus view that Procurement in itself is too large for one Scrutiny Committee to undertake in isolation. It was initially considered whether a Task and Finish Group could look at the Procurement Strategy, either by individual Procurement or thematically looking at the probity, value for money, management, benchmarking etc. of procurement. The consensus of the

Committee, however, was to request the Scrutiny Board to consider whether continued scrutiny of the Procurement Strategy is best served through the individual Scrutiny or Policy & Scrutiny Committees conducting scrutiny of the large procurements, the Council has engaged in over the last two years, which fall within their terms of reference. This approach would allow for both the individual procurements to be scrutinised as well as the probity, benchmarking, and value for money/savings delivered within these procurements to inform the future direction of procurement within the Council.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The main event since the last report to the Council has been the holding of an away day, also involving the Southend and Thurrock HOSCs, the NHS Commissioning Board, Clinical Commissioning Groups and other health bodies.

This provided an opportunity for commissioners, providers and scrutineers to meet together, to look at the rapidly changing health system, and to consider what will be the big issues for the next 12 to 24 months. The chance to meet face-to-face and in an informal setting is a very valuable one and many positive links were forged.

The Committee has also held two standard meetings. It has continued its scrutiny of health and wellbeing issues, as the shadow Health and Well Being Board goes about finalising its strategies and operating practices. The Committee has also commented on some specific proposals put forward by health bodies.

Finally, the Committee has received an update on the work carried out by hospices in Essex. The County has a highly regarded system of hospices, which are well supported by the public, and this provided an excellent opportunity to hear about their work and some particular examples of good practice.

2. Procurement Strategy

The Scrutiny Board has had an initial discussion of the proposal put forward by the Executive Scrutiny Committee in relation to the scrutiny of the Procurement Strategy and will give it further consideration at its next meeting.

3. Scrutiny Activity Events

Reference is made in the report of the Economic Development, Environment and Highways Policy and Scrutiny Committee of the successful work it has been doing with Task and Finish Groups and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee refers to the success of its away day. The Scrutiny Board is pulling together the experience of each Committee in undertaking activity outside of normal Committee meetings with a view to sharing best practice.

Sarah Candy
Chairman of the Scrutiny Board