

Scrutiny Panel

19 August 2014

Item
16

Report of	Assistant Chief Executive	Author	Jonathan Baker Tel. 282207
Title	Annual Scrutiny Report		
Wards affected	None		

This is a report setting out the work of the Scrutiny Panel during 2013/14

1. Action required

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to consider and comment on the draft Annual Scrutiny Report.

2. Reason for Action(s)

- 2.1 The Constitution states the Scrutiny Panel shall report annually to the full Council on its work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

3. Purpose and Content of the Annual Report

- 3.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Council of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel, and for the Council to form an opinion of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function. The final report will be submitted to full Council for consideration and approval following endorsement by scrutiny panel members.
- 3.2 This Scrutiny Report is a descriptive record of the scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel 2013/14.

4. Standard and Strategic Plan References

- 4.1 The Council recognises that effective local government relies on establishing and maintaining the public's confidence, and that setting high standards of self governance provides a clear and demonstrable lead. Effective governance, of which scrutiny is a part, underpins the implementation and application of all aspects of the Council's work.
- 4.2 Scrutiny is a key function to ensure decisions have been subject to full appraisal and that they are in line with the Council's strategic aims. The role of scrutiny is also an important part of the Council's risk management and audit process, helping to check that risks are identified and challenged.
- 4.3 There is no publicity, equality and diversity, human rights, community safety, health and safety, risk management or financial implications in this matter.

Scrutiny Panel Annual Report 2013-14

This Annual Report demonstrates the contribution made by the Scrutiny Panel at Colchester Borough Council.

This is the first year of the newly formed Scrutiny Panel, after an agreement at Council on 20 March 2013 to merge the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Financial and Audit Scrutiny Panel. This agreement formed part of the Council's new governance arrangements after the Universal Customer Contact Fundamental Service Review.

Scrutiny Panel Role

The role of the Scrutiny Panel is to examine the policies and strategies from a borough-wide perspective and ensure the actions of the Cabinet accord with the Council's policies and budget. The Panel also reviews corporate strategies that form the Council's Strategic Plan, Council partnerships and the Council's budgetary guidelines, and scrutinises Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decisions which have been called in.

The Scrutiny Panel in 2013/14

The function of the Scrutiny Panel is as important as ever, given the challenging future of providing services in difficult economic times with limited resources.

The success of Scrutiny Panel reviews depended on the involvement of Councillors, Council officers, expert witnesses and members of the public, and the Chairman of the scrutiny panels would like to thank everyone for their contribution to scrutiny in 2013/14.

The very low level of call-ins and matters of urgency suggested Councillors continued to take a responsible approach to Governance.

Portfolio Holders have continued to regularly attend items on the Scrutiny Panel agenda that fall within their remit to take a lead on major reviews and to discuss policy, spending and performance.

Members are asked to consider whether the scrutiny and review process is a function that remains effective, ensuring the critical friend challenge to the executive policy and decision making that drives improvement in public services.

Prominent Reviews at Colchester Borough Council

The Scrutiny Panel requested a number of reviews during 2013/14.

The review of the North Essex Parking Partnership occurred twice over the course of the year. The first meeting focused on the operation of the partnership (10 December 2013), at which the NEPP Chairman Councillor Mitchell attended. An extra meeting was requested by Panel members to look further into the financial aspects of the NEPP which took place on 24 February 2014.

The Panel also held a Final Overview of Firstsite, with regards to the construction project of the visual arts facility, which took place on 10 September 2013. In addition the Scrutiny Panel looked at the Councils provision of IT (18 March 2014).

Pre Decision Scrutiny

Pre-scrutiny enables the Scrutiny Panel to examine an issue in depth, and make proposals to the Cabinet or portfolio holder in advance of that decision being taken. This work, regularly includes the Budget Strategy (Noted in July 2013 and January 2014) and the 6-monthly and year-end Performance Report and Strategic Plan Action Plan (Noted in June and December 2013).

The Corporate and Financial Management Fundamental Service Review was considered and noted at Scrutiny, with a recommendation that the minutes were taken into account by the Cabinet (29 October 2013).

The Panel also scrutinised the New Housing Arrangements on the 2 July 2013. This was scheduled in for pre-scrutiny before the Cabinet took its decision on 10 July 2013, providing an opportunity to look at strengthening the partnership arrangements and in what organisation the functions are best delivered. The Panel noted the report and recommended that the Cabinet makes its decision in light of the Panels discussions.

Another pre decision scrutiny that took place was the Portfolio Holder decision to close the Abbots Activity Centre on 23 July 2013. This meeting took place in the Auditorium at firstsite to ensure that there was enough capacity for members of the public to attend. Fifteen members of the public participated in Have Your Say! as well as four Councillors who were not members of the Panel. The Panel made a number of requests to Cabinet including to look at alternative funding options and to take into consideration the views of the public who spoke at the meeting.

The Panel also looked at the Homelessness Strategy on 11 February 2014.

Partnership arrangements

Two regular partnership reviews were undertaken. Both reviews, the 'Safer Colchester Partnership' (10 September 2013) and the Colchester Community Stadium Limited (March 2013) were noted.

Call-in

There was one call-in in the municipal year at the meeting on 12 November 2013, which referred the Allotment Charges and Review of Tenancy Agreements decision to the Panel.

The meeting was attended by the Portfolio Holder, members of the public who spoke as part of Have Your Say! as well as other councillors.

The Panel resolved that the decision on the allotment charges and the review of the tenancy agreements be referred back to the Portfolio Holder for Communities Leisure for reconsideration. ***Cabinet confirmed the decision as made by the Portfolio Holder.***

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

There were no CCfA issues brought to the attention of Scrutiny Panel during 2013/14.

Decisions taken as a matter of urgency

Two decisions were taken as a matter of urgency in 2013/14.

The first was to approve the fees for applications made under the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013. The Scrutiny Panel was notified on the 29 October 2013, and both the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel certified the immediate implementation of the decision and that the call-in procedure would not apply.

The second was the recommendation to join the Essex Business Rates Pool. The Scrutiny Panel was notified at the meeting on 12 November 2013, and both the Monitoring Officer and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel certified the immediate implementation of the decision and that the call-in procedure would not apply.

Task and Finish Group

There were no Task and Finish Groups commissioned by the Scrutiny Panel 2013/14.

Schedule of meetings and reviews

Scrutiny Panel 2012/13

Councillor Davies (Chairman), Councillor Harrington (Deputy Chairman), Councillor Bentley, Councillor Cope, Councillor Harris, Councillor Hayes, Councillor Higgins, Councillor Hogg, Councillor Oxford

11 June 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2012-13 Year-end performance report and Strategic Plan Action Plan (SPAP) • Financial Monitoring Report 2012/13 • Capital Expenditure Monitor 202/13
2 July 2013 (extra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Housing Arrangements
23 July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Scrutiny the Portfolio Holder decision 'to close the Abbots Activity Centre' • Budget Strategy, Timetable and Medium Term Financial Forecast • Annual Report on Treasury Management
20 August 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2013-14 Capital Monitor, period April-June • 2013-14 Financial Monitor, period April-June
10 September 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer Colchester Partnership (Crime and Disorder Committee) • Final Overview - firstsite - the construction project for Colchester's Visual Arts Facility
29 October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental Service Review of Corporate and Financial Management
12 November 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call-in – Allotment Charges and Review of Tenancy Agreements • Local Council Tax Support 2014/15 • Capital Expenditure Monitor 2013/14 – Quarter 2 • Financial Monitoring Report – April to September 2013
10 December 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Parking Services in Colchester • Treasury Management Strategy Statement – Mid-Year Review Report 2013/14 • Half Yearly Performance Report including progress on Strategic Plan Action Plan

28 January 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue Budget 2014-15
11 February 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colchester's Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 • Financial Monitoring Report - April to December 2014 • Capital Expenditure Monitor 2013/14 - Quarter 3
24 February 2014 (Extra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the North Essex Parking Partnership Financial Position
18 March 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colchester Community Stadium Limited Review • Review of Council's overall IT provision