

Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/2013

Introduction

Last year's Annual Report reflected on the changes which had been made to the structure and membership of Select Committees in order to ensure a strong focus on the Council's key priorities and the improvement of services for the benefit of Surrey residents. Changes were also made to the officer support so that the Committees had the resources they need to carry out their policy development and scrutiny roles effectively. The report looked forward to further successes for scrutiny in driving improvement in the Council, the following pages demonstrate that the Select Committees have continued to provide challenge to the Cabinet and have strengthened their policy development and review role.

This report has not attempted to list all the work Select Committees have carried out during the year, but it seeks to showcase some particular successes and reflect the range of different approaches which can be taken to help the Council meet the challenges it faces. To do that successfully, Select Committees have to do more than just scrutinise decisions after they have been taken. It is also important that they are involved early in the process to help shape policies and strategies and ensure that when decisions are made they have taken into account a wide range of views and perspectives.

The case studies in this report are structured around the Centre for Public Scrutiny's four principles of good scrutiny. This provides a useful reminder about where the focus of scrutiny should be, but the fact that there are good examples to share against each of those principles is an endorsement of what has been achieved through Select Committees this year. As well as highlighting the successes from the past year, this report acknowledges that further progress can continue to be made. The suggested improvement areas at the end of the report set out some of the challenges in the year ahead to ensure that the scrutiny function builds on past achievements and helps the County Council to continue to adapt to changing circumstances.

After a year of consolidation, 2013/2014 will see further changes to Select Committees as a result of the Council Elections in May 2013. The aim will be to ensure that the newly-elected Members are provided with the training and development they need to perform effectively in their overview & scrutiny role, and that Select Committees make the most of their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to ensure further success in the coming year.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has identified four principles of good scrutiny:

1. Provides 'critical-friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.
2. Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard.
3. Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role
4. Drives improvement in public services

This annual report highlights the ways in which Select Committees have followed these principles to reach effective outcomes, as well as highlighting ways in which the overview & scrutiny function can continue to improve in the future.

1. Good scrutiny provides 'critical-friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers

Good scrutiny should act as a 'critical-friend' to the Cabinet by reviewing decisions and policy and providing evidence-based recommendations in order to promote improved service performance and value for money for residents. The following case studies provide good examples of where scrutiny has effectively exercised its 'critical-friend' role:

Magna Carta

Select Committees have the power to 'call-in' a decision of the Cabinet if they feel it requires further consideration. **The Communities Select Committee** exercised this power in relation to proposals for the County Council to contribute £5m towards building a visitor centre in Runnymede to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta.

A number of witnesses were asked to present their views to the Committee, including Borough Members and Officers, special interest groups, and residents. Subsequently, following consideration of the business case for the project and the current financial pressures faced by the County Council, the decision was taken not to invest £5 million to this project but to continue to consider other ways in which to celebrate this important event for Surrey.

Supporting Families

The Children's and Families Select Committee sponsored a cross-select committee task group which has scrutinised the development of the Surrey Family Support Programme. The Surrey Family Support Programme is the name given to the local implementation of the Government's Troubled Families Programme, which seeks to target interventions at those families who have the most needs and cause the most problems within their communities. The task group worked closely with the Head of Family Services who is charged with coordinating the development of the Programme across the county, met with a range of stakeholders and discussed a number of reports and briefing papers. It submitted its final report and recommendations to Cabinet on 26 March 2013.

Every school a good school

After the Cabinet announced its ambition to have all schools recognised as ‘good schools’ by 2017, the **Education Select Committee** has been keen to act as ‘critical friend’ to help ensure that the Council meets this target. As a result, the Committee has focused its work programme on school improvement and performance, and has been working closely with Babcock 4S to ensure Surrey’s Improvement Strategy is implemented successfully. The Committee has also undertaken detailed scrutiny of school performance at all key stages, the final report of which is to be made available to all parents via the Surrey County Council website.

2. Good scrutiny enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard

By investigating issues of concern to Surrey residents, scrutiny is an important tool through which the public can have their voice heard. The following case studies provide two excellent examples of how scrutiny has focused on issues of public concern over the past year. There is also information on how scrutiny has sought to increase engagement with the people who use our services.

Epsom Hospital

The future of Epsom Hospital is a matter of great concern to many Surrey residents and as a result it has been a major focus of the **Health Scrutiny Committee** this year. The Committee was involved in scrutinising the proposed merger of Epsom with Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals and was frustrated when this process was halted. A variety of witnesses were invited to the Committee’s January meeting to discuss the way forward which resulted in the Chairman of the Committee releasing a press statement calling on all involved to find a viable and sustainable future for Epsom Hospital.

The future of Epsom Hospital is now under consideration as part of the Better Services Better Value (BSBV) review of the NHS in South West London. The Committee has been scrutinising this review from the beginning due to its representation on the South West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman has also been working closely with the MP for Epsom and Ewell to lobby the BSBV team on behalf of Surrey residents.

Fire Public Safety Plan

The Fire and Rescue Public Safety Plan remains an issue of great public interest in Surrey. The **Communities Select Committee** recently examined the progress of phase 1 of this plan as well as the proposed actions for 2013-2016. The Fire and Rescue Service continues to take into account the Committee’s recommendation that it needs to actively engage with stakeholders regarding public reservations about the plan. For example, there has been extensive public and Member consultation recently over the proposed changes to the emergency response cover in Epsom & Ewell and Reigate & Banstead.

Meeting people who use our services

One way in which scrutiny can ensure that it enables the voice and concerns of the public is by regularly meeting with people who use our services. Select Committees have been working to increase the number of site visits and engagement events they have undertaken over the past year.

For example, the Chairman of the **Children's Select Committee** has undertaken a series of 'meet and greets' with our partners and stakeholders to develop wider understanding about scrutiny and to ensure that different voices are heard within the scrutiny process. Members of the Select Committee also directly sought the views of care leavers before reviewing the Care Leavers' Service.

The **Adults Social Care Committee** Chairman and Vice-Chairman have also undertaken a programme of stakeholder engagement including attending a number of Delivering Empowerment Board meetings. These meetings (for people with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities) provide a great opportunity for Members to meet people who use our services and gather ideas for the scrutiny work programme.

3. Good scrutiny is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role

Good scrutiny needs to be led by Members who understand and champion the role of Select Committees, understand its importance in the democratic process and seek to make improvements to the function wherever possible.

Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The **Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee** has the dual role of reviewing the Council's central services (those in the Chief Executive's Office and the Change & Efficiency Directorate) as well as taking a broader view of performance issues across the whole Council. This Council-wide perspective is particularly valuable, as it enables the Committee to assess the impacts of decisions and proposed policies on individual services and balance these with pressures across the County Council as a whole.

Each of the Select Committee Chairmen sits on the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and they take responsibility for informing the Committee of the work they are planning or have carried out, as well as flagging up specific issues for their service areas. Through its scrutiny of financial and performance information, the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee in turn identifies issues in particular services which it asks relevant Select Committees to look into in more detail. Each Select Committee is responsible for taking the lead on issues relating to the services within its remit, but benefits from the wider perspective that the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee is able to provide.

A good example of Select Committees and the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee working together to examine issues at both the directorate- and County-wide level is in relation to the

budget. Each of the Select Committees took responsibility for monitoring its current budget and scrutinising the proposed budgets for 2013/2014 through a range of workshops and reports, and the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee consolidated the key issues for the Council as a whole and made recommendations to the Cabinet which helped inform the budget-setting process.

The Select Committee Chairmen also meet informally as a group to share good practice and innovative approaches between committees, and generally oversee improvements to scrutiny practices and procedures. Two joint meetings were also held with the Cabinet to discuss ways in which the effectiveness of the scrutiny role could be further improved, and arrangements for sharing information about forthcoming issues at an early stage and ensuring good communication with Strategic Directors were also agreed.

4. Good scrutiny drives improvement in public services

The ultimate aim of good scrutiny should be to result in tangible improvements in public services. The following case studies provide examples of where scrutiny has worked with the Cabinet, Officers and external stakeholders to drive such improvement.

Winter Maintenance

The impact of **the Environment and Transport Select Committee's** Winter Maintenance Task Group's recommendations continue to be recognised on both a local and national level. The Task Group's work, which resulted in a significant drop in complaints to the Highway Service, was shortlisted for a Good Scrutiny Award at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in 2011 in the category of 'Transforming Services', and was also nominated for inclusion in the 'People's Choice Award' for overall impact by delegates at the 2011 annual CfPS conference held in Central London..

The work of the Task Group has also been highlighted internally at Surrey County Council, with it being used as a case study of good practice in the Chief Executive's 6-month report, and the subject of a campaign by internal communications to raise awareness of the role of scrutiny in the organisation.

Support for Carers

The **Adult Social Care Select Committee's** Carers Member Reference Group produced its final report in May 2012, the purpose of which was to monitor an Officer Task and Finish group looking at improving support for Carers. The Members worked closely with the Directorate to monitor the project, with external expertise provided by the Chief Executive of Action for Carers. A recommendation arising from the work of both groups was the establishment of a Carers Practice and Performance Group made up of Adult Social Care officers and external partners. This group meets quarterly to review Directorate performance and follow up any actions to ensure improvements to carers services are continuing. The Group reports back to the Select Committee around every six months. The key performance areas the Group monitors are the numbers of carers 'open' in the AIS social care database and the numbers of carers with an

assessment of their needs. Being 'open' in the database means the carer is known to adult social care and is linked up with the person they are caring for. Having an assessment means they could be offered services to help them in their caring role. As of January 2013, the numbers of carers 'open' in AIS is 5,904, up from 5,801 in March 2012. The number of carers with an assessment has also increased since March 2012 from 1,214 to 2,129.

Utilities Task Group

Acting upon requests from residents and Members, the **Environment and Transport Select Committee** formed a Task Group to consider how the Council could work with utilities companies to better co-ordinate and improve the quality of street works on Surrey's highways. The Task Group surveyed a wide range of stakeholders, including residents and Councillors, in order to form a series of recommendations that addressed the concerns of the people of Surrey. A high response rate was received, and this was due the publicity given to the Task Group in the local media by newspapers, radio stations and websites.

The outcome of the Task Group's work was the formation of recommendations around improving the communication of street works, better reporting mechanisms, approval of a permit scheme and clearer processes for works taking place in areas with special conditions. These proposals were very well received by both the Environment & Transport Select Committee and the Council's Cabinet, with Cabinet Members stating that the Task Group's report should be regarded as an exemplar as to how this kind of work should be conducted in future.

New roles and responsibilities

The scrutiny team has needed to prepare for a number of new roles and responsibilities throughout the course of 2012-2013.

Police and Crime Panel

The Surrey Police and Crime Panel was established in 2012 in accordance with the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 which underpins new governance and accountability arrangements for policing in Surrey.

The Panel is a joint committee hosted by Surrey County Council, and consists of one elected councillor from each of Surrey's twelve local authorities and two co-opted independent members. The role of the Panel is to examine the actions and decisions of Surrey's elected Police and Crime Commissioner and to make sure information is available to the public so that they can hold their Commissioner to account. To date, the Panel has overseen the appointment of the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, agreed the Police precept for 2013/14 and worked with the Commissioner to develop his statutory Police and Crime Plan.

In the coming year the Panel will be receiving regular updates on progress made against the agreed Plan and Surrey Police's financial position. The Panel is also responsible for handling and resolving complaints received against the Commissioner and will be closely monitoring his and his Deputy's performance through both formal meetings and focused task groups.

Health Scrutiny Changes

The next year represents significant changes for the NHS, with reformed structures going live on 1 April 2013. In turn, these changes for the NHS present a challenge for the **Health Scrutiny Committee** which needs to ensure it is prepared to hold decision-makers to account in the new health landscape.

As a result the Committee has already begun developing relationships with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) who will take over commissioning responsibilities from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) in April. The Committee has also developed a Protocol setting out how it will work with the NHS in the event of a major service reconfiguration. This was agreed with the CCGs, acute hospital trusts, the mental health trust and the ambulance trust in March 2013 and ensures that all stakeholders are aware of what engagement needs to take place with scrutiny should they propose a significant change to the delivery of health services in Surrey.

Looking forward

How we can improve

In the same way that scrutiny seeks to ensure continuous improvement in the services reviewed to ensure that they meet the changing challenges they face, Select Committees themselves need to look at how they work to ensure that they provide a valuable resource and maximize their effectiveness. This section outlines some of the improvement areas identified for the coming year and explains the priorities for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services in supporting that improvement process.

More robust monitoring of Select Committee recommendations– Although the majority of scrutiny recommendations in 2012/13 have been accepted by Cabinet in principle (48 out of 54 total) there is potential for more robust monitoring of their implementation. Where recommendations are not implemented, the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider a greater role in holding the Cabinet to account.

It is also worth noting that there is variation in when Select Committees make formal recommendations to Cabinet, with some Chairmen preferring to work more informally by making recommendations directly to Officers or Cabinet Members. If 'recommendations to Cabinet' is a measure by which scrutiny wishes to measure itself, it may be worth the Select Committees Chairman Group clarifying when a formal recommendation should be made.

Increased public engagement – Building on the success of the 'meet and greet' sessions, the scrutiny team will be looking to work with Members to increase the number of opportunities for informal conversation with people who use our services, to help ensure that our work programs reflect their concerns. We will also be looking to improve the information available online regarding scrutiny, ensure reports can be understood by the public as well as ensuring more meetings are held in different venues across the County.

Increased training and development - Democratic Services will be offering a comprehensive scrutiny induction program to both new and returning Members. This will include training in scrutiny principles and methods (including specialist training for finance and performance scrutiny) as well as a full induction into the services within the remit of the Select Committees they sit on. There will also be more informal training opportunities, such as workshops and site visits, on offer to Members throughout the year.

Increased opportunities for external stakeholders to contribute to the scrutiny process – It is important that scrutiny Members hear evidence from a range of people, not just Surrey County Council Officers. Scrutiny needs to continue to build relationships with external stakeholders, so they understand the process and are able and willing to offer their input when appropriate. Members may also wish to explore whether they would like to increase the use of co-opted members on both Select Committees and task groups as it has been recognised (both internally and externally) that they can add great value to the process.

Different ways of working – As is evidenced in this annual report, many of scrutiny's most successful outcomes have come from working outside the formal Select Committee setting. The Scrutiny Team will be working with Members to support them in leading and participating on task group projects, through specialist training and increased guidance and support on the process.

Less is more – Unfortunately, it is not possible to scrutinise everything and those involved in scrutiny must be extremely selective and adopt a rigorous approach to choosing the topics which can have the greatest impact. Criteria have been developed to help Select Committees to decide whether an item should be looked at, and there are a range of different ways for the chosen topic to be reviewed, for example by setting up a task group or taking a report at a more formal committee meeting. Focusing on fewer issues and ensuring that these are the top priority will enable Select Committees to make the best use of their resources and have the greatest impact.

Support for Overview & Scrutiny

The overview and scrutiny function at Surrey County Council is supported by a small but dedicated team sitting within Democratic Services. Select Committees delivering tangible results is a key service priority for 2013/14 and the scrutiny team have agreed to focus on achieving the following objectives in order to realise this aim:

- (a) Scrutiny Induction delivered successfully, ensuring that new and returning Members feel supported and informed in their scrutiny roles.
- (b) Scrutiny produces timely and meaningful recommendations through working collaboratively with services and partners on key issues.
- (c) Stakeholders are engaged in the scrutiny process:
 - Chairmen meet with stakeholders informally to discuss key issues.
 - Stakeholders regularly participate in Select Committees and/or task groups as witnesses.

- (d) Training and guidance is in place which allows Officers throughout the Council to improve their understanding and awareness of the Scrutiny process.
- (e) Scrutiny Officers have good knowledge of scrutiny principles and relevant service areas, and have access to useful templates and guidance.

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