

People's Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Chairman:

The **Care Leavers** Task Group was established in response to the Ofsted judgement that the 'experience and progress of care leavers' in Devon was 'inadequate'. The Task Group recommended better support for the transition to adulthood, greater involvement of care leavers in their pathway planning, working more closely with housing authorities, strengthening corporate parenting and re-examining the commissioning arrangements relating to supported accommodation.

A Task Group was set up to review the **People's Budget Overspend**, undertaken at the request of the Cabinet in the light of a potential overall overspend of £9,100,000 in 2015/16. The report made recommendations to help prevent future overspends involving: the allocation of sufficient resources to Looked After Children to ensure that the demand-led service is properly funded, greater attention to delivering in-year savings, arrangements to ensure continued delivery of services during periods of major disruption such as Ofsted inspections, strengthening the brokerage of commissioning services, and staff training on budget management.

With a rise in the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools in the County, a Task Group review was undertaken to explore the reasons for **School Exclusions**, and preventative work being undertaken. The review also focused on how funding is used to support students at risk of exclusion, including therapeutic and specialist provision and multi-agency engagement.

Headline Stats

Scrutiny Committees met 25 times during 2015/16, completed 7 task group reviews and 1 spotlight review, interviewing 186 witnesses. Cabinet accepted all recommendations.



Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16

Place Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Andrew Moulding, Chairman: The **Young People & Employment Task Group** was established to review how young people in Devon could be better supported to access education, training and/or employment. The Task Group recommended that schools build stronger links with careers advisers and the business community, and offer more flexible work experience opportunities to students. The Council was asked to offer 8 week work experience placements for young people and to provide a more personal and independent careers advice service.

Members from all other Scrutiny Committees worked collaboratively with Place Scrutiny Members to evaluate the County Council's and East Devon District Council's strategies and policies, as well as those of New Community Partners in relation to the development of the new town of **Cranbrook**. A number of recommendations were made to address gaps in provision in the town, including the lack of provision for young people, and for the establishment of a health and wellbeing group for Cranbrook. The Report also recommended that the planning authorities establish a Devon-wide planning strategy, and that the urban development expansion pattern be more clearly defined, which would support similar future developments in the County.

In November 2015 the Place Scrutiny Committee heard that the Council's approach, as recommended by the 2014 Flooding Task Group, to consolidate its Flood Risk Management scheme, had been **highlighted and shared by DEFRA as providing best practice**.

Spring 2015 saw the appointment of the Council's first **Corporate Energy Manager**, who has been tasked with working collaboratively to develop projects and identify funding to improve the Council's water and energy consumption and deploy renewable energy, in line with the recommendations made by the 2014 Energy Policy Task Group.

New Ways of Working

This year saw the establishment of the **Adults' and Children's Standing Overview Groups** (ASOG/CSOG) which were set up by the People's Scrutiny Committee to review performance and explore key issues for each service area, with a particular focus on **safeguarding**. During 2015/16 ASOG met 6 times and the CSOG 5 times. Much of CSOG's work has focussed on the County Council's response to the requires improvement outcome from the Spring 2015 Ofsted inspection for services for children in need of help and protection, children who are looked after, and care leavers in Devon.

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Julian Brazil, Chairman:

Recognising changes to the way that Council services were being delivered, a Task Group was established to review the role of **Scrutiny in a Commissioning Council**, collaborating with the Centre for Public Scrutiny. In response to inconsistencies in practice the Task Group recommended that a Scrutiny and Commissioning Protocol be established to clarify the role of scrutiny in commissioning processes, that communication and collaboration between Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Committees around commissioned services be improved, that joint venture partners and large providers be required to attend and answer questions at Scrutiny Committee, and to strengthen scrutiny's role in the performance monitoring of joint venture partners and large providers.

The **Communities** Task Group also completed its review, recommending that the Council strengthen partnership working with communities and voluntary groups, embed a positive Asset Based approach to Community Development, better support its staff to contribute to their communities, consider the social value of assets and with partners, and to further investigate social investment in Devon.

Budget Scrutiny The 2016/17 budget was scrutinised as a three-stage process – with an in-year briefing during the autumn committee cycle to review spending within agreed budgets during the year, followed by a detailed examination by individual committees early in the New Year, and a subsequent joint all-day session of all Scrutiny Committees on 29 January 2016. Generally speaking, the Committees were largely supportive of the proposed 2016/17 budget, with Members recognising the financial pressures the Council faces.

The People's Scrutiny Committee welcomed the increase of the People's Services budget, particularly for Children's Social Work and Child Protection. Jointly, all Scrutiny Committees resolved that representations be made to Government over its failure to provide Councils with full details of the local government finance settlement, highlighting particularly the very late notification of the Public Health Grant, in good time for Councils to make considered judgments over future budgets. Agreement across Scrutiny Committees was also reached in urging the County Council take advantage of the opportunity to raise Council Tax by an additional 2% to help cope with the costs of adult social care, and the maximum of any other increase permitted (i.e. 1.99%) to safeguard the Council's budgets to the fullest extent possible.

Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Richard Westlake, Chairman: The Committee has worked with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and the Local Government Association to pioneer work on understanding **Health and Social Care Integration**. A Spotlight Review was held to explore the challenges. Recommendations were made asking Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the Council's Social Care Commissioners to improve communication and joint working, as well as recommending that the Health & Wellbeing Board take ownership of the strategic direction of integration. This work was shared with other local authorities through a workshop at the national CfPS Conference.

This year the Committee has also taken a sustained and detailed look at the two CCGs' approaches to **Community Hospitals**, particularly through the lens of the changes that have taken place in Torrington. This in-depth piece of work has yet to conclude but is working to ensure that local people get the best from their health service.

Over the last year the Committee has also been reviewing and inputting into NHS England's **Success Regime**.

Special Meetings

The Chairman of **Place Scrutiny Committee** called a Special Meeting of the Committee in September to examine the delivery of the Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) Programme and the role of the CDS Partnership. The Committee made a number of recommendations to the CDS Board and the County Council, encouraging greater accountability & transparency in the progress of the programme.

Task Groups

One of the strengths of scrutiny is using task group reviews to undertake in-depth work – an approach used in Devon since the year 2000. Task Group reports completed since 2007 are available on our website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-task-group-investigations/>

Call In of Cabinet and Cabinet Member Decisions

1) Fees & Charges for disabled parking spaces, access protection makings, residential and charity parking permits and doctors spaces

Called in by Place Scrutiny in June 2015, questioning the methodology used to arrive at the new charges, what consultation had been undertaken, how much income would be generated, and if there were any circumstances when proposed charges may be waived due to local or individual circumstances. Following the receipt of further information and a full debate, the Committee endorsed the Cabinet Member's decision.

2) Closure of Compass House Crèche

Called in by People's Scrutiny in November 2015, on the grounds that neither the Council nor the Trust had provided or ensured alternative facilities were available and therefore the decision was not in the best interests of vulnerable users. The decision was subsequently withdrawn.

3) Cessation of funding for School Crossing Patrols

Called in by Place Scrutiny in March 2016, to assess the financial implications of mitigation measures where patrols would be withdrawn, the impact of cuts in areas of social deprivation and the robustness of operating models for externalisation of the School Crossing Patrol Service. At the meeting the Leader of the Council indicated that having now received further representations from parents and families across the county he was now of the view that the proposals approved at Cabinet should not be implemented. The Committee supported this view, urging Cabinet to continue to provide the current service.

4) Sutcombe Primary School Closure

Called in by People's Scrutiny in March 2016, on the grounds that 'not all the relevant factors were made known'. Following the receipt of further information and a full debate, the Committee endorsed the Cabinet Member's decision.

Public Participation

As a means of facilitating and encouraging greater public participation at Scrutiny Committees, the County Council agreed to the suggestion from Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, to introduce public speaking at Scrutiny Committee meetings, on a 12 month trial basis, from February 2015. Any Devon resident, after giving notice, may now speak for up to three minutes on any substantive matter listed on the agenda of any Scrutiny Committee. The March round of meetings saw four members of the public take up the opportunity to speak at a Scrutiny Committee.

Work in Progress

Alongside their review of the Devon CCGs **Transformation of Community Services**, Health Scrutiny will be considering **hospital discharge, end of life services**, and reviewing the work of the Committee following the reorganisation of health services in 2013.

Meanwhile People's Scrutiny have begun reviewing the issues faced by **Small Schools**, while keeping a close watch on **Adult** and **Children's Safeguarding** through its bi-monthly ASOG & CSOG meetings. A Task Group on **Early Help** is also getting underway.

Place Scrutiny Committee recently established a Task Group to explore the current challenges faced by the County's **Agriculture** sector, and the impact of this on Devon's wider economy.

Corporate Services Scrutiny have begun investigating ways that the Council can **Generate Income**, to safeguard future services, and in the coming months will be reviewing the financial implications for the County Council of the new **Enterprise Zone** planned for East Devon.

Future Challenges

The Local Government and Health landscape is changing fast, and Scrutiny will need to keep pace if it is to be effective and valuable.

The **Devolution** agenda will have a tremendous impact on governance and scrutiny in Devon. Scrutiny will also feel the effect of changes such as **acadamisation**, continued **reductions in government funding** and further changes to service delivery through **greater commissioning** and **trading** activity.

Scrutiny Chairman express their thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members, recognising in particular the valuable contribution made by Members through Task Group investigations.

The support of the dedicated team of Scrutiny Officers continues to be highly valued by the Scrutiny Committees.

For any background information on the work of scrutiny in Devon, individual Scrutiny Committees' remits and membership as well as past and present task group and annual reports please visit

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/>

Democratic Services & Scrutiny Secretariat, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QD; tel. 01392 382300

email scrutiny@devon.gov.uk

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