

People's Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Chairman: The [Safeguarding Children Task Group](#) continued to examine Devon's arrangements and monitor the County Council's implementation of the Ofsted Action Plan, which prompted the Cabinet Member to announce extra funding for REACH. The Group published its second interim report in June 2014 and received verbal updates at each Committee meeting.

The same Task Group reviewed [Child Sexual Exploitation](#) following the publication of the Jay report on failings in Rotherham. The Task Group sought to understand the scale of the issue in Devon and the work of the County Council and partners to combat the threat. It published an interim report on 8 January 2015. Members identified the need for the County Council and partners to develop a smarter approach to intelligence gathering and data mapping on child sexual exploitation as a matter of great urgency; and training for all.

The [Educational Outcomes Task Group](#) reported in November 2014 on the overall poor outcomes for disadvantaged children in Devon, and the work undertaken to address this issue. The Task Group recommended restructuring the Virtual School and improving monitoring the educational progress and fostering arrangements of children in care.

Headline Stats

Scrutiny Committees met 27 times during 2014/15, completed 12 task group reviews, interviewing 225 witnesses. Cabinet rejected none of Scrutiny's recommendations.



Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Richard Westlake, Chairman: The year began with a Spotlight Review considering how the Committee might hear the [Voice of the Vulnerable](#). Following the criticism from the Francis Report the Committee challenged themselves to **Hear, Share, Understand and Act** in all their work.

Appreciating the impact of the challenges and pace of change undertaken by the two Clinical Commissioning Groups in Devon took up a large part of the committee's effort. The [NEW Devon CCG Spotlight Review](#) helped crystallise the direction and extend understanding of the challenges which are faced by Health commissioners.

The [CAMHS Spotlight Review](#) responded to serious concerns raised by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services. Taking a wide approach and reviewing strategies taken by all partners working to support Children and Young People in good mental health. This is an issue which the Committee will keep a watching brief on.

Corporate Services Scrutiny C'tee

Councillor Julian Brazil, Chairman: The [Search and Rescue Task Group](#) examined the local impact of the national decision to privatise. The group concluded that significantly improved technology and specifications are likely to improve the local search and rescue service.

The committee also conducted a [Communities Task Group](#) which has been working to define the attributes and the role the County Council needs to play in partnership with others in order to develop stronger communities.

Place Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Andrew Moulding, Chairman: The [Flooding Task Group](#) reported in September 2014 on the implementation of the Devon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and the working relationships of the risk management authorities which, it recommended, need formalising and all resources need mapping in order to be coordinated.

The [Energy Policy Task Group](#) discovered in November 2014 how overhauling the Council's management of energy consumption and investing in renewable energy could safeguard public services in the future and generate an income for the Council.

The Committee also helped inform the future of the [Highway Maintenance Contract](#) (January 2015) and refreshed its [Waste Task Group](#) recommendations (March 2015) which it is anticipated will inform the revised Corporate Energy Policy due to be considered at Cabinet in June 2015.

Budget Scrutiny

The 2015/16 budget was again scrutinised as a three-stage process – with first 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 and a subsequent joint all-day session of all Scrutiny Committees on 29 January 2015. Generally speaking, the Committees were largely supportive of the proposed 2015/16 budget as Members recognised the financial pressures which the Council faces. Some continuing concerns remained, however, particularly in relation to safeguarding. The Place Scrutiny Committee had raised concerns over the reduction in the number of school crossing patrols and funding for those was reinstated for the coming financial year.

Scrutiny Committees also highlighted the need for a fairer financial settlement for Devon and the ability of the Council to plan for the future was severely restricted without any indication by Government of funding levels for future years. In response to the Joint Scrutiny meeting, the Cabinet confirmed that the Council had and would continue to lobby Government direct and through Devon Members of Parliament to secure increased investment in Devon, acknowledging also the need to generate increased income to offset budget reductions.

Task Groups

As recognised by the Peer Reviews (→), 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/>.

Future Challenges

During the year, the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out two Peer Reviews of the Council's children's safeguarding arrangements, leadership and capacity issues, corporate support, including scrutiny and performance monitoring and reporting.

The Reviews – albeit looking primarily at children's safeguarding – recognised that scrutiny was effective and Members regularly demonstrated their willingness to challenge and probe, acting as a critical friend. Scrutiny in Devon is known and recognised but the challenge now is to demonstrate its impact even more and better identify trends and themes and ask even more awkward questions. Similarly, in acknowledging the comments of the Peer Review that scrutiny in Devon has the building blocks in place to be truly effective, the People's Scrutiny Committee has looked afresh at its ways of working to ensure sufficient focus is routinely placed on safeguarding issues.

Especially in the move towards a commissioning authority, scrutiny needs to continue to exercise influence through asking questions about delivery mechanisms, quality, monitoring, safety and responsiveness as an appreciative inquiry where problems are analysed and understood as a precursor to improvement and change rather than punitive action.

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

Call-Ins

...of Cabinet and Cabinet Member Decisions

(1) Adult Residential Day Care Services

The People's Scrutiny Committee called-in the changes to adult residential services to ensure that suitable alternative provision is available and that providers meet acceptable standards. The decision was not reconsidered or amended and therefore implemented.

(2) Devon Youth Service Options Appraisal

The same Committee also considered the call-in of the decision to prepare a business case for the disinvestment in the Devon Youth Service and development of an alternative service, making procedural recommendations for similar exercises in the future.

Work in Progress

- * Work continues on the Integration Spotlight Review in partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) as well as the Strong Communities and Young People and Employment Task Groups, all of which are expected to report to Scrutiny Committees in June 2015.
- * The impact of incorporating task group recommendations into Spar.Net and the revised performance management process being developed will, it is felt, enable Scrutiny Committees to better monitor performance and identify issues.
- * Safeguarding issues – for both children and adults – will continue to be areas of interest to 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/>

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