

People's Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Chairman:

The **Small Schools Task Group** considered the challenges facing small schools not only to remain financially viable but to also achieve good educational outcomes, in a time of unprecedented structural and financial change. Recommendations were made around strengthening support from the Council and Babcock LDP, including the recruitment of skilled governors and the provision of better governor training, alongside lobbying for fairer funding, greater partnership working and sharing of best practice.

A short piece of work following up the recommendations of last years' **School Exclusions Task Group** was also undertaken.

A Joint People's and Health & Wellbeing **Spotlight Review** looking at **Dementia** services in Devon and recommended a continuation of dementia awareness training for staff and Members, an evaluation of the level of community support for dementia across Devon to ensure consistency, and further work to address the impact of dementia on the farming community.

A further **Joint Spotlight Review** with Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was undertaken, to consider service options for **Public Health Nursing**, and recommendations made to Cabinet in respect of this.

The **Children's Standing Overview Group** and **Adult Standing Overview Group** continued to meet bi-monthly to review performance and explore key issues for each service area.

Members of the Committee were also grateful for the support of Special Advisor Hilary Corrick Ranger, helping to equip members with the appropriate knowledge to support their work monitoring and challenging the authority's social care arrangements, in particular the safeguarding of children in the County.

Headline Stats

Scrutiny Committees met 23 times during 2016/17, completed 6 Task Group Reviews and 6 Spotlight Reviews, interviewing 148 witnesses. Cabinet accepted all recommendations.



Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17

Place Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Ray Radford, Chairman:

Scrutiny Members contributed to the review of the Council's **Highways Asset Management Plan** through a **Spotlight Review**. The review focussed on how the performance of Highway Assets would be best measured, and Members recommended that the performance of gullies and drainage systems should be monitored, along with the Council's engagement and work with communities in respect of self-help schemes, road and snow warden schemes and other areas such as grass cutting and/or wild flower verge planting.

The **Agriculture Task Group** considered the challenges facing Devon farmers today and the impact on the rural economy. The review aimed to identify ways in which the County Council, partners and central government can help support, sustain and develop the industry. The Task Group met with a range of witnesses including Devon dairy farmers, representative groups including the NFU and Farming Community Network, Exeter University, Bicton & Duchy College and Neil Parish MP, and considered the impact of the EU referendum result on the industry. The Task Group made several recommendations to government around agriculture post-Brexit, and around support for young farmers and new entrants, succession and retirement, as well as recommending that the County Council promote a greater understanding of farming and food production among the general population.

Following publication of the Report and endorsement from Cabinet, Councillors Andrew Leadbetter (Cabinet Member for Economy & Growth) and Brian Greenslade (Task Group Chairman) have been invited to present the Agriculture Task Group report at a meeting of the South West Conservative MPs in Westminster.

Task Groups and Spotlight Reviews

One of the strengths of scrutiny is using Task Group reviews to undertake in-depth work over a number of months – an approach used in Devon since the year 2000. Spotlight Reviews are short, sharp, focussed investigations, usually completed within a day, giving Scrutiny Committees flexibility to respond to urgent issues as they arise.

Task Group and Spotlight Review Reports completed since 2007 are available on the County Council's [website](#).

Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Julian Brazil, Chairman:

The **Heart of the South West Enterprise Zone Spotlight Review** was held in May to undertake a closer assessment of the potential effects upon both the Enterprise Zone area in East Devon, the County Council and District Councils, prior to the issue being considered by Cabinet. Members concluded that the proposed Enterprise Zone area had the potential for accelerating economic growth and prosperity, and would provide an opportunity for stronger marketing and promotion of the area at a national level. However, it would also have an impact on the Council's business rates income, and Members felt that it could also impact negatively upon the economic development of other parts of the County.

In light of reduced government funding and an increase in demand for many services, the **Income Generation Task Group** considered options for increasing the Council's income. Recommendations were made around increasing the capital and revenue potential of Council assets, and to take a more strategic approach to identifying income generation opportunities, including working with staff to develop a greater commercial and innovative culture.

Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Richard Westlake, Chairman:

The Health Scrutiny agenda this year has been dominated by wide scale change on a national basis. The introduction of Sustainability and Transformation Plans with the closure of many community hospital beds and anticipated changes to acute services has raised the profile of health scrutiny as local politicians grapple with what these changes mean for local people. Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny has heard from more members of the public this year than ever before.

Against this backdrop the Committee exercised its powers to make a **referral to the Secretary of State for Health** following the closure of the hospital beds in **Torrington Community Hospital** on the basis of this not being in the best interests of the health service in its area. There is ongoing dialogue with the Department of Health but at this stage the referral has not been recommended for a full review.

A **Joint Spotlight Review** was undertaken with People's Scrutiny and Torbay and Plymouth Councils to consider the impact of the **Sustainability and Transformation Plan Model of Care**, concluding that changes could result in better outcomes for patients and more intensive rehabilitation, but concerns endured over how different localities would be affected and around the provision of additional services and staff in the short term.

A consistent theme has been the integration of Health and Adult Social Care combined with the need to adequately fund both. The Committee undertook the **Fair Funding in the NHS Task Group** in the closing months of 2016 and asking Government to provide a settlement which better reflect the needs of the population in Devon, taking into account rurality, age of the population and a complete picture of the local health and social care cost. The report and recommendations were **endorsed by Sarah Woolaston MP**, who undertook to use the report to lobby government for fairer health funding.

The Committee also looked inwardly at its own practice considering how Members can ascertain if a service is working well or underperforming through the **Quality and Performance in community services and beyond Spotlight Review**, and concluded the year with a **360 review of its own impact and effectiveness**, since health scrutiny legislation changed following the Francis review in 2013.

Special Meetings

A Special meeting of the **Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee** was held in January 2017 to consider the **Wider Devon Sustainability & Transformation Plan (STP)**. After careful consideration of the STP report, hearing further from the STP Team and following debate, the Scrutiny Committee resolved that that the Success Regime/STP organisation publish a clear statement of its proposed next steps, that the Council continue to press for a pause in the STP work, that Devon MPs be urged to do the same, to call for fairer health funding and to back all party calls for a holistic review of NHS/Social care funding.

Call In of Cabinet Member Decisions

Changes to Post 16 Education Transport Policy

Called in by Peoples Scrutiny and considered at their meeting on 5th September, on the grounds that in its decision making Cabinet had failed to consider colleges ability to plug the funding gap, that the new County scheme was vague and unreasonable in its assessment, and that the impact on young people from rural areas and/or families on low incomes engaging in post 16 education had not been considered. Following reply from the Cabinet Member and further debate, the Committee resolved to endorse the original decision, with the additional wording that the Local Authority continue to lobby central government regarding the sparsity factor faced by a County Shire such as Devon.

Closure of Compass House Crèche

Called in by Peoples Scrutiny and considered at their meeting on 5th September on the grounds that the decision failed to take sufficient account of the onsite childcare needs of women suffering from post-natal depression. Following reply from the Leader of the Council the Committee resolved that the Cabinet Member decision not be endorsed and that the Cabinet be recommended to retain the Crèche for the present and that the Devon Partnership Trust (DPT) be asked to look at the possibility of it providing those therapy and counselling services (currently provided at Compass House) in premises elsewhere in Exeter. At the following Cabinet meeting the Cabinet Member decision was deferred pending a further report and at the October Cabinet meeting, after considering further information, an updated impact assessment and further assurances from DPT, alongside the views of People's Scrutiny, it was resolved that the crèche be closed with immediate effect.

Budget Scrutiny

The 2017/18 budget was scrutinised as a two-stage process, with a detailed examination by individual committees early in the New Year, and a subsequent joint all-day session of all Scrutiny Committees on 30 January 2017. Generally speaking, the Committees were largely supportive of the proposed 2017/18 budget, with Members recognising the financial pressures the Council faces.

The joint meeting resolved that Cabinet/Council continues to lobby government for a fairer finance settlement, reflecting the challenges of rurality, and in addition, Devon MPs be urged to speak and vote against the Finance Bill should the provisional financial settlement for Devon be not significantly improved. Support was also given for the raising of Council Tax both by an additional 3% in 2017/18 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.

Public Participation

Throughout the year Scrutiny Committees heard **36 representations** from members of the public through the public participation scheme trial. Topics at Place and People's Scrutiny included Community Transport, Speed Limit Policy, Broadband and the closure of Compass House Crèche, but it was Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny who hosted the majority of public speakers, many of whom expressed views on the NEW Devon CCG Success Regime, Your Future Care proposals in the Eastern Locality and the Sustainability and Transformation Plan.

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

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/>

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