



Scrutiny Committee Annual Report

2015/16



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Index

Section		Page
1	Chairman's Foreword	3
2	Introduction	4
3	Introduction to Scrutiny	6
4	Performance & Priorities	6
5	Flooding	10
6	Safeguarding	11
7	Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	12
8	Gas servicing	13
9	Representatives on Outside Bodies	14
10	Conclusion	15

1.0 Chairman's Foreword

2015/16 was an exciting year for the Scrutiny Committee. The new Committee was appointed following the District Council elections. not only did it contain a number of new completely new Councillors, many of the returned Councillors were new to Scrutiny.

During 2015/16 the Committee participated in two training sessions. The first, which was delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, focussed on high-level, strategic topics. The second session, which was delivered by Dr. Stephanie Snape provided a more practical introduction to scrutiny, concentrating on skills and tips to help the Committee in its activities.

In its first year, the Committee has particularly focussed on its critical friend role.

I would like to thank the Councillors who sat as members of the Committee during the year for their commitment and willingness to participate. While it can be challenging to start something from scratch, I think the whole Committee is now getting to grips with its role and gaining momentum so I look forward to seeing it develop in the coming years.

In particular I would like to offer my thanks to Councillor Bob Russell who served as the Committee's vice-chairman in 2015/16. I am pleased that he will remain a member of the Committee and we can share his knowledge and experience.

Finally I would like to offer my thanks to all those officers who have attended meetings of the committee and helped us with our scrutiny work, sharing their expertise.

*Councillor Bob Sampson
Chairman, Scrutiny Committee*

2.0 Introduction

Overview and scrutiny was introduced as part of the modernisation agenda for Local Government in the Local Government Act 2000. The overview and scrutiny process can influence decisions but it cannot make them.

In South Kesteven the overview and scrutiny functions are separated. Three Policy Development Groups carry out overview work, while the Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny function.

2.1 About the Committee

The Scrutiny Committee is politically balanced, comprising 11 non-Cabinet members of the Council. Details of membership during 2015/16 are shown below:

Chairman:	Councillor Bob Sampson
Vice-Chairman:	Councillor Bob Russell
Members:	Councillor George Chivers (<i>replaced by Councillor Lynda Coutts on 9 July 2015</i>) Councillor Phil Dilks Councillor David Mapp Councillor Mrs. Judy Smith Councillor Mrs. Sarah Stokes Councillor Mrs. Brenda Sumner Councillor Frank Turner Councillor Dean Ward (<i>replaced by Councillor Ray Wootten on 21 January 2016</i>) Councillor Ray Wootten (<i>replaced by Councillor Mrs. Rosemary Kaberry-Brown on 9 July 2015</i>)

During 2015/16, the Committee met six times. Full details of the agendas and action notes from those meetings are available on the Council's website.

The Committee has a responsibility to monitor the Council's performance, consider its decisions, question how those decisions were made and recommend improvements.

The Scrutiny Committee also undertakes external scrutiny to examine wider issues that affect the district. The Council is required to have a Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee; the Constitution allows the Scrutiny Committee to fill this role.

2.2 The role of scrutiny

The Scrutiny Committee has four key functions, which are listed below.

- *To provide a “critical friend” challenge to the Cabinet as well as external authorities and agencies*
 - Challenge by scrutiny should be constructive, robust and purposeful
 - Scrutiny should work effectively with the Cabinet and senior management
 - Scrutiny should provide an effective mechanism for the Cabinet to demonstrate public accountability
- *To reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities*
 - Scrutiny should take a community leadership role by focusing on issues of public concern
 - Scrutiny should have a constructive relationship with the press and media
 - Scrutiny should create the conditions for plural views and concerns to be taken into account
- *Scrutiny members should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public*
 - Scrutiny should operate with political impartiality
 - Scrutiny should have ownership of its work programme
 - Scrutiny members should have a worthwhile and fulfilling role
- *Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services*
 - Scrutiny should have access to timely and accurate performance information
 - The scrutiny work-programme should be balanced, well co-ordinated and integrated into corporate processes
 - Scrutiny work should be carried out with strategic objectives in mind
 - Scrutiny should contribute to improving local public services

2.3 Work programming

As part of its working programming for 2015/16, the Committee has tried to concentrate on topics that support corporate priorities and drive improvements in the services the Council provides for its customers.

3.0 Introduction to Scrutiny

At the first meeting of the new Committee on 2 June 2016, the new Committee received a presentation which gave them an overview of the key principles of scrutiny. The aim of the presentation was to give members an understanding of the way the scrutiny function worked in South Kesteven prior to the training session led by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The presentation gave members information about the local arrangements for processes like call-in and Councillor Call for Action.

4.0 Performance and priorities

Annual Performance Report – 2014/15

At its meeting on 20 October 2015, the Scrutiny Committee received the annual performance report for 2014/15. The report and included statistics showed progress against the Council's corporate priorities in respect of projects and strategic performance measures.

Highlights from the report included:

- Increased footfall in the town centres towards the end of 2014/15 and beginning of 2015/16
- 166 new business enquiries
- 81% planning applications determined within the statutory timescale
- 92 affordable homes were delivered
- Projects aimed at keeping the district attractive including publicity campaigns and reviewing cleansing regimes
- Footfall in leisure centres exceeded targets
- Delivery of the second Gravity Fields Festival

Other issues discussed as a result of the report included the removal of recycling credits and its impact on the organisation, classification of villages within the Local Plan, matters related to council housing, the programmes being run through the arts centres, arrangements for answering customer telephone calls and headline financial information.

Performance updates 2015/16 – quarters 1 to 3

During the year the Committee received updates on the Council's performance and their contribution towards achieving priority themes.

Performance information was supplied to the Committee in a new, tabulated format, which members found very useful; they also noted the quality of the information that was being provided to support its work.

The tables provided information on 10 broad performance indicators that underpinned the Council's priority themes. Four of the indicators were recorded for data only; these were indicators over which the Council had little control but were useful in providing wider context and showing the general direction of travel. The remaining indicators all had targets set against them.

The indicators against which performance was reported to the Committee were:

Grow the Economy

- Percentage of planning applications approved (data only)
- Occupancy rates of retail units in town centres (target)
- Total footfall within key shopping areas (data only)

Keep SK clean, green and healthy

- Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (target)

Promote leisure, arts and culture

- Number of visits through our leisure centres (target)

Support good housing for all

- Net additional homes provided (target)
- Gross number of affordable homes delivered (target)
- Number of households on the Council's housing needs register assessed as having a housing need (data only)

Well run council

- Number of complaints received (data only)
- Working days lost due to sickness absence including first day of sickness per full-time equivalent (target)

The report showed the levels of performance achieved, and where a target had been set, the target for that period, the annual target and the direction of travel. The information also gave performance against the indicator a red, amber or green status and provided commentary which

provided a summary of progress against the indicator and gave an explanation for any exceptions.

Town centre occupancy

Highlighted in the quarter 1 and 2 performance report was the occupancy of shops in the four main town centres where performance exceeded the national average. Through questions members identified that the town centre with the lowest occupancy rate was Grantham. This was confirmed when a more detailed breakdown was provided for members as part of the quarter 3 performance report. Members asked questions about the steps that were being put in place to bring the occupancy of retail units in Grantham into line with the other towns in the district. One of the key projects designed to increase footfall in Grantham town centre and make the town centre more attractive to businesses was the St. Peter's Hill project, which included the multi-screen cinema. Officers were also working with the landlords in town, focusing on the shared ambition of attracting the right type of retail development. Members also recognised that through the production of the new Local Plan for the district, there would be an opportunity to bring new uses into Grantham town centre.

Notably the quarter 3 performance report showed an upward trend in the occupancy of town centre retail units in Grantham.

Households assessed as having housing need

During discussion on the indicator which highlighted the number of households that were on the Council's housing needs register and assessed as having a housing need members asked about the process for turning round void properties and whether the condition in which properties were left had a significant impact on the turnaround time delaying the new tenant moving in. Members were advised that the condition in which the properties were left had improved as a result of the rechargeable repairs policy. The approach would be complemented through revisions to tenancy agreements, which would be adjusted to reflect changes in government policy and the Council's housing allocations policy.

Working days lost due to sickness

During quarter 1 and quarter 2 members noticed that the number of working days lost due to sickness had increased from a quarter 1 value of 9.98 to 10.88 in quarter. Members learned that the overall sickness rate was affected by the number of people who were long-term sick. The Committee was concerned that there might be a trend to sickness

absence that could be attributed to stress, so they requested a breakdown of the reasons given for sickness absence.

Further detail provided at the Committee's next meeting identified that the main reasons for absence between October and December were those expected for winter months: colds, flu and digestive issues. While stress-related sickness was amongst the top three reasons for absence in October 2015, it decreased and dropped out of the top three in November and December, which gave members reassurance.

Members did note that performance against the indicator in quarter 3 was just below target but within tolerances. An explanation was given that the figures quoted in the report were projections of the number of working days lost as a result of sickness would be at the end of the year if it were to carry on at the same rate. The actual number of days lost due to sickness at the end of quarter 3 was 7.26, reflecting the interventions that had been put in place, particularly working with those people on longer term sickness.

Complaints

Following receipt of the performance information for quarters 1 and 2, members of the Committee had asked for more detailed information on complaints. The Committee wanted to see whether there were any trends in relation to the number of complaints received for different areas of business. A majority of the complaints received at the end of quarter 3 related to street care services, which comprised refuse collection and street cleaning and included missed bins. Technology in the waste vehicles allowed crews to log households that failed to present bins, which meant those that were legitimate missed bin complaints could be identified. If a bin was missed legitimately on three occasions within a six-month periods, a complaint was automatically raised.

Members also considered the number of complaints relating to responsive housing repairs. There was some concern that the number of complaints was exacerbated by customers who were contacting the council about the same problem multiple times. Business managers were provided with a breakdown that included the number of times a person had called about the issue.

Committee members identified the distinction between complaints where the service of the council had not met customer expectations from those where the correct processes had been followed but the customer did not like the outcome. As an example, a number of the complaints made about the development management service were complaints where a customer disagreed with the decision made on a planning application. Going

forward, a new way of recording complaints was being introduced which would include the facility to distinguish between the different types of complaint received. This would provide a clearer picture of any trends and where it would be appropriate to take additional action.

Additional homes provided

During quarters 1 and 2, performance against this indicator was below target but within tolerances for the indicator. A piece of work was undertaken to identify the reasons that performance against the indicator was below target. This included a review to ensure completions were being accurately recorded as data could be provided through a number of different sources and to identify whether there were any wider circumstances contributing to performance, for example, material shortages.

By the time the quarter 3 report was presented to the Committee, performance against this indicator was below target and outside the tolerance levels. In questioning the reason for this the Committee learned that nationally the housing market was subdued, pending further detail on new Government programmes for building starter homes and affordable homes. No shortages of labour or materials had been identified.

Strong performance was shown against the target in 2014/15, when there was a strong appetite for development as the economy was coming out of recession; this used up available sites that were ready to be built out. Adversely, some new development land was slow to be released by landowners.

Members noted that there were a number of actions in place to try and facilitate the release of sites for development, ensuring that sufficient land was included in the emerging local plan to meet strategic housing need and the Council's growth aspirations, and provide opportunities for development where developers had an appetite to build.

5.0 Flooding

During 2014/15 the Committee carried out extensive work in relation to flooding, which is summarised in the annual report for that year. The outcome of the work led to a report to be sent to Lincolnshire County Council as the lead local flood authority requesting feedback on:

- A simple explanation of who does what in the District and/or Lincolnshire as a whole and who to call/where to get information in

respect of flooding incidents, flood prevention and emergency planning

- Whether the information would be available to members of the public as a leaflet
- An explanation of which flooding incidents are investigated, the procedure for investigation and how the outcomes of those investigations are reported
- How and when the decision will be made about which organisation has responsibility for advising on SuDS
- The relevant consultee on flood risk and drainage issues for the determination of planning applications

Feedback on each of these areas was provided by officers at Lincolnshire County Council and reported to the Committee's meeting on 25 August 2015. The response included a link to Lincolnshire County Council's website, which included a number of flooding related downloads including leaflet on managing flood risk in Lincolnshire. This leaflet explained the role of Lincolnshire County Council in managing flood risk in Lincolnshire. The response also provided members with information about the role the County Council played in relation to flooding matters in consultation on planning applications following changes in legislation.

6.0 Safeguarding

At the Committee's meeting on Tuesday 25 August 2015, the Community Engagement and Policy Development Officer delivered a presentation giving an overview of the Council's responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Members of the Committee identified that Councillors could make a valuable contribution in relation to safeguarding; their responsibilities were the same as officers of the Council and they were well-placed to identify issues of concern within their own communities.

During the presentation members asked questions and sought assurance in relation to a number of issues:

- Arrangements were in place to check the suitability of taxi drivers including mandatory training for those taxi drivers with school contracts, which was delivered through Lincolnshire County Council
- The quantity and distribution of family support workers throughout Lincolnshire
- Arrangements for the scrutiny of the safeguarding function and the self-assessment process Council's were required to undertake
- Suggestions to assist Councillors as they work in their Wards
- Training arrangements

Examples were given of the wide range of issues covered by the safeguarding agenda and hypothetical examples of how concerns might be raised and dealt with using a multi-agency approach.

At the end of the presentations members decided they wanted to look more deeply at safeguarding training for members and officers and to look at the structures used to deal with safeguarding matters. Consequently, safeguarding structures and an item on training was presented to the Committee's meeting on 20 October 2015.

During the October meeting members received a report on the training pathway for safeguarding, current training levels of staff and elected members within the authority and the structure of the Safeguarding Boards for Lincolnshire.

During the discussion on attendance at training, members considered ways to optimise attendance including promotion through group leaders and whether it would be possible to provide an e-learning option. In the end, members agreed a recommendation:

- That members of the Scrutiny Committee should encourage their Councillor colleagues to attend safeguarding training sessions

7.0 Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

The Committee requested an item on the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. The topic was scoped at the Committee's meeting on 25 August 2015 when members decided they wanted to look at the following issues:

- The number of people affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy and the impact on council tenants
- The impact of the subsidy on housing provision and supply
- The measures put in place by the Council to support people affected by the spare room subsidy and whether those measures worked
- Whether the Council had sufficient resources in place to deal with the requirements and whether they were deployed effectively

A report was produced on the issue which was considered at the Committee's October meeting, which covered:

- The rules in relation to the removal of the spare room subsidy
- The national impact of the removal of the spare room subsidy was outlined in an evaluation produced by the Department of Work and Pensions
- The number of SKDC tenants in receipt of Housing benefit

- Discretionary Housing Payment including the numbers of applications received and the total number of housing benefit claimants that had applied for a discretionary housing payment that were linked to the removal of the spare room subsidy
- SKDC housing allocations policy and homelessness including composition of housing stock

Members identified that in stock to meet general needs, only 4.58% had one bedroom.

In terms of support for residents affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy, government introduced Discretionary Housing Payments which were a short-term measure to allow tenants to consider their position and make changes. The Council also ran a rent deposit scheme to support residents in finding accommodation in the private sector.

On Tuesday 1 December 2015, the Committee received a further update. Members had previously asked questions about the number of evictions where the removal of the spare room subsidy was a contributing factor. While there was no conclusive proof of a link between the eviction and removal of the subsidy, officers advised the total number of evictions and how many they believed were as a direct result of the removal of the subsidy. The judgement was based on whether the tenant had had a good payment history prior to the introduction of the subsidy.

Additional information was also made available as to the level of Discretionary Housing Payment made available to the Council including the percentage of payments that were made to council tenants and tenants of housing associations.

Members of the Committee concluded that they were content with the measures that the Council had put into place to support tenants and the smooth transition of the removal of the spare room subsidy.

8.0 Gas servicing

The Committee had asked to look at the arrangements for gas servicing, which was managed by an external contract. The Business Manager, Property and Development attended the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday 16 February 2016 when members considered report number P&D24.

The report explained the process used to let the contract, the contract management arrangements, the arrangements that are in place to ensure appropriate notice is served to tenants, the way in which customer

satisfaction is recorded and the procedures in place to deal with any concerns regarding contract performance.

The Committee was particularly interested in the number of broken appointments and the process that would be followed if a tenant failed to provide access to the property for gas servicing. Members considered whether the channels used to communicate with tenants were appropriate. Regular transfers of data were made between the Council and the contractor to ensure that they had access to the most up-to-date information, which included information gathered through the tenants' census on how tenants preferred to be contacted. Reassurance was also given that the contractor tried all numbers on record to speak to a tenant to arrange for servicing and where a second letter had to be delivered by hand, the officer spoke to neighbours and liaised with the housing team to try and find out why the tenant had not responded.

If the Council had concerns about the performance of the contractor, an 'Early Warning Notice' procedure would be instigated, however members were informed during the meeting that the provision had not been required to date.

Following further discussion, members were pleased to note that carbon monoxide detectors were checked at the same time gas servicing was conducted.

Members also discussed the logging of complaints about gas servicing within the debate about the quarter 3 performance report. Some members expressed concern that complaints would not be captured corporately because they were managed through the external contractor.

9.0 Representatives on outside bodies

During 2014/15, the Committee received reports from representatives on the following bodies:

- Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board
- Upper Witham Internal Drainage Board
- West Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Service
- Welland and Deeping Internal Drainage Board
- Lincolnshire Health Scrutiny Committee
- Lincolnshire Police and Crime Panel

10.0 Conclusion

Members of the Committee recognise that it is important to constantly improve to help the Council to meet its priorities. Learning lessons where things could have been done better or celebrating success and identifying any strategies that could enhance delivery of other projects and policies.

The Committee was particularly pleased with changes to the way in which performance was reported, addressing comments made in previous years. The new format was considered particularly user-friendly and in a style that facilitated scrutiny by the Committee.

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