

Ward: All

Portfolio: All

FROM: Scrutiny Board

Date: 9th May 2016

SUBJECT: Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2015 – 2016

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Report Sign off	Seen by:	Name	Date
	Legal	Lesley Dolan	21/04/16
	Finance	Duncan Moss	20/04/16
	Chief Executive Officer	Stuart Brown	20/04/16
	Corporate Manager	Stuart Cave	12/4/16
Summary:	I welcome you to the Annual Report of the Scrutiny function at the Council; this report provides an outline of the work undertaken by Scrutiny Board Members over the course of the 2015-16 municipal year.		
Recommendation:	Council is asked to note the annual report.		
Direct and/or indirect impact on service delivery to our customers and communities:	The work of the Scrutiny Board links to all the Council's priorities and objectives. Scrutiny performs an important role in monitoring of performance and reviewing major policies and strategies.		
Impact on Service Plans:	Resources are required from officers to support reviews and investigations and may result in some Service Plan activities being re prioritised.		
Financial Implications:	There are no financial implications arising from this report.		
Legal Implications:	The function of the Board complies with Local Government Act 2000 and the Constitution of the Council.		
Crime and Disorder Implications:	Effective scrutiny contributes to the in role of investigating particular issues relating to crime and disorder and, monitoring and improving to enhance outcomes for residents of the area.		
Equalities Implications:	No direct implications from this report. Scrutiny has an important role to play in ensuring that the Council's policies and services take into account equalities considerations.		

Risk Assessment and Adverse Impact on Corporate Actions:	By supporting and undertaking the Scrutiny function to the Council The Board provides an added level of overview in respect of decision making and policy formation.
Scrutiny Recommendation (if any)	N/A

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to summarise work undertaken by the Scrutiny Board during the 2015- 2016 municipal year.

The Board supports the work of the Council and Cabinet by performing its role as a 'critical friend'; it carries out this role via its three key functions:

- i. Holding the Cabinet to account by scrutinising decisions and monitoring performance.
- ii. Contributing to the review and development of the Council's policies.
- iii. Considering other matters of concern to local people.

MEMBERSHIP

During the year the Board met on 10 occasions with all meetings taking place in public session.

The Board is composed of 9 Members at present Membership consists of:

- Damon Hooton (Chairman)
- Dick Skidmore (Vice-Chairman)
- Eve Berry
- Shane Collins
- Steve Henderson
- Terry Napper
- John North
- Linda Oliver
- Ros Wyke

HOLDING THE CABINET TO ACCOUNT

The Board carried out the role of holding the Cabinet to account by reviewing the decisions made by Cabinet and individual Portfolio Holders. Additionally, Members of the Board took a proactive and constructive approach to working collaboratively with Cabinet and officers, to add value particularly in the areas of policy development and increasingly with the change agenda as the council looks to transform the way it conducts its business.

AREAS OF ACTIVITY DURING THE YEAR

During the year, the Board considered and made recommendations to assist the council in respect of some key work streams; a few areas are highlighted below.

Major Projects

Mendip Hub & Phoenix project – Following completion of the Mendip Hub and Phoenix Project Members considered the outturn information and how the project had influenced the way in which the Council delivered projects and conducted business. Key successes were not just the improvements of the buildings themselves but the

change in culture and how staff now worked with partners for the benefit of residents and communities.

Five Councils – Joint Procurement of Services – The Board considered a report for the joint procurement project in relation to the commissioning of a range of services. Members accepted the report subject to the addition of the further recommendation made during their consideration of the item report.

Policies & Policy Development

Discretionary Housing Payments/Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Policy – Scrutiny Board noted and endorsed the Discretionary Housing Policy and Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liabilities Policies 2015-2016.

Illegal Eviction and Harassment Policy – The Policy outlined when and how the Council would deal with reported incidences of illegal eviction and harassment, and ensured that the Council used a fair and consistent approach to the way that enforcement activities were undertaken.

Where tenants felt that they were being harassed and believed their landlord may want to evict them illegally, or if they had already been evicted illegally, they could ask the Council for help. The Council had a role to advise the tenants about their housing rights and options.

Review of the Rural Lettings Policy – Members of Scrutiny considered a report following a member working group that reviewed the rural lettings policy.

The Policy aim is to utilise social housing stock in villages/parishes with limited supply, to enable people to remain or return to a locality where they have a local connection. The local connection criteria is defined in line with the Homefinder Somerset Policy and is applied to people wishing to return or remain in a particular parish where they have local connection.

The Rural Lettings policy was adopted by Mendip District Council in August 2012, to complement Homefinder Somerset, in order to specifically recognise and address the needs of the rural community.

Finance

2016/17–2020/21 Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) – The Board examined the financial outlook for the forthcoming 5-year MTRS cycle covering the period 2016/17 to 2020/21. The key themes included the revenue budget and pressures and savings, fees and charges, and proposed capital programme schemes.

Scrutiny recognised the impact of the Central Government budget cuts would require difficult decisions by the authority in order to resolve previewed funding shortfall.

Fees and Charges 2016/2017 – Members examined the proposed charges relating to the forthcoming financial year. Key themes included the principles for setting charges, in particular that of full cost recovery. Members asked numerous questions in relation to the proposals and recommended to cabinet for approval.

Wider themes affecting the district

During the year the Board set up a Task and Finish Group under the chairmanship of Cllr. North, supported by Cllrs. Hooton, Oliver, Wyke, Bradshaw and officers to look at how the health service identifies the type and level of service it needs to provide having regard to the number of new households identified in the Local Plan.

The first stages of this work has identified that this is in effect a two handed approach, one of focus on personnel requirements and the other on the provision of buildings that house the necessary services.

The group recently received a presentation from two members of the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group on the outcome of its research into future needs for primary care provision in light of the reducing numbers of GPs in the area. There was a diverse discussion with the CCG on the data they presented and the plans they have, which moved to include wider secondary care provision and a discussion around parking to access health facilities. From these discussions there was an agreement by the CCG to provide more specific data requested by the group around patient numbers per GP, GP hours and numbers of patients per surgery.

The key message coming from the discussions though was that there are unlikely to be enough GPs available to meet the current expectation of the public and that as a consequence people needed to be helped to try to manage their own needs where appropriate, perhaps be offered alterative support via nurses or pharmacists or be willing to accept the use of solutions that mean GPs are used only where really necessary.

The next stage of work for the group is to look at the estates strategy that will be published shortly to gain an assurance that the planned facilities do address the increasing numbers expected in the Mendip area over the next 15 to 20 years.

A final report will be considered by the Board and its recommendations will be considered further during the coming months. The report will detail the actions of the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations coming from that work.

Connecting Devon and Somerset – Scrutiny received two updates during the year and were pleased with progress being made, particularly latterly in respect of Phase one of the programme. Scrutiny continues to maintain a strong interest in programme and recognised the importance of superfast broadband in supporting rural business and communities.

Voluntary Sector – Board Members received a presentation and update on the work of three Voluntary sector organisations operating in the district and providing services for residents. Members were taken through the work undertaken by Mendip CAB and informed on the numbers of clients they see, issues dealt with and the role the organisation plays in assisting people access services.

Mendip Community Support gave an overview of the services provided to local community groups, including funding information and volunteering advice.

YMCA Mendip updated the Board with their work relating to the provision of housing and homelessness advice for young people particularly enabling young people to develop independence. The YMCA also referenced the support they received from

volunteers, partnerships with other interested parties i.e. landlords and their success with family mediation and other outreach projects designed to help young people.

Governance and performance

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) - The Council is subject to audit inspections, every three years by an Assistant Surveillance Commissioner. The last audit inspection took place on 5 November 2015 and the Inspector's report and recommendations has been subsequently received and considered by the Board. Members noted the inspectors report had been positive together with the various recommendations. These would be taken forward via an action plan.

Annual Contract Review of the Core Services Contract – As part of the Contractual agreement The Landscape Group (TLG) have with Mendip District Council an Annual report is produced in respect of the Core Services Contact to show contract performance and service delivery, a report which is presented to Scrutiny.

Following consideration of the contract in 2015 by Scrutiny a contract review was undertaken Led by Cllr North in order to develop a governance model which encapsulated clearer reporting and monitoring to better illustrate contract performance.

As such, the performance report presented to Scrutiny in March 2016 was well received Members noted importance of this contract for the Council which appeared to have bedded in well with performance trends moving in the right direction.

Performance Management – Board Members received and examined quarterly performance reports and were satisfied with the performance and direction of travel in the key areas of business relating to the Strategic Priorities of the council. Members asked numerous questions on the information contained within the reports; specifically those areas highlighted as a potential concern and did not identify any issues or performance exceptions as a concern to Cabinet.

CHAIRMANS THANKS

As Chair of Scrutiny Board I am grateful to Members of the Committee for their continuing input, to other Members for their participation, and to council officers for their responsive contributions.

I am particularly thankful to external organisations and the contributions they have made together with their engagement in the scrutiny process.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked to note the annual report of the Scrutiny Board 2015-16.

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