

Ward: All

Portfolio: All

FROM: Chairman Scrutiny **Date: 15th MAY 2017**
 Board

SUBJECT: Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2016-17

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	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Chief Executive Officer	Stuart Brown	03/04/2017
	Deputy Chief Executive	Tracy Aarons	03/04/2017
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 2016-17 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 2016-2017 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 eight occasions with all meetings taking place in public session.

The Board is composed of 9 Members at present and membership consists of:

- Damon Hooton (Chairman)
- Steve Henderson (Vice-Chairman)
- Eve Berry
- Shane Collins
- Dick Skidmore
- Terry Napper
- John North
- Roy MacKenzie
- Graham Noel

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 many work streams; a few areas are highlighted below.

The Performance of the Council

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, including financial management. 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. As part of the performance monitoring Members identified that there would be value in focusing in detail on specific services during meetings, to allow greater scrutiny of individual services, and as a consequence will be taking this forward over the coming year.

Major Projects

Mendip Hub and Leisure Contract Benefits realisation – Following completion of the main work on the Mendip Hub, and the Leisure Contract work, Members considered an update report on the progress to realise the benefits anticipated from the projects.

Five Councils Contract – The Board received a report identifying the of the council's Land Charges Service following its transition in September 2016 to be provided by Capita. The report identified the changes made to improve customer experience and increase performance.

Policies & Policy Development

Review of the Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy – members received a report on the changes to be implemented to the Homefinder Somerset Allocations Policy. These were aimed at addressing the ongoing changes to welfare payments and also improving the way applicants expressed an interest in a property.

Local Enforcement Policy – The National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 207 recommends that all Local Planning Authorities publish a Local Enforcement Plan. Scrutiny endorsed the Mendip Enforcement Policy brought before them.

Mental Health Policy – As part of the Council's Health and Wellbeing priority a Mental Health Policy was considered by Scrutiny. This policy aims to broaden understanding amongst staff and the community of mental health matters.

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 2017-18.

Street naming and Numbering Policy - Mendip District Council is the body responsible for the administration of the street naming and numbering process to ensure that all properties in the district are officially addressed. This enables proper response by Emergency Services and Utilities and ensures that all Council customers have a verifiable address for postal, service and goods deliveries. Members considered the refreshed policy and endorsed its proposals.

Wider themes affecting the district

Glastonbury Festival – Members received a comprehensive de-brief report from officers regarding the 2016 Glastonbury Festival. The report looked at the successes of the festival from a licensing perspective and identified those areas where improvements would be required by the council and partners for the following year. Invitations to attend were made to South Somerset District Council, in recognition of the impact on Castle Cary station during the festival and to Glastonbury Festival Events Limited. Scrutiny showed considerable interest in ensuring that issues from last year were addressed and as a consequence an update briefing, regarding progress to meet the licensing requirements for 2017, was also received later in the year.

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

Governance

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 at that time. In December 2016 Members received an update on the progress against the action plan that came from the Inspection, noting the positive steps taken.

EFFECTIVE SCRUTINY

The board recognises that, as well as holding Cabinet to account for its activities, it is vital that it regularly reviews its own performance and ensures that it is both effective and adding value to the business of the Council. Over the year board members came to the view that Scrutiny Board was not functioning as effectively as it would wish and as a consequence, following discussions with the Leader of the Council, implemented a programme of work to consider how it might adapt in light of external and internal climate the council works in, to ensure that its performance might be improved.

All members, not just Scrutiny Board members, have been invited to give their views on our Scrutiny process and how it might work in the future. A workshop took place to give members a chance to look in more depth at current delivery and possible future approaches. The workshop was a lively event with a good mixture of members and strong views on what could be improved. I would like to thank those who took the time to attend or make written comments/suggestions.

From this work a series of proposals will now go to the June Scrutiny Board for consideration with a request that Council is asked to adopt these proposals in July. I firmly believe that these proposals will enable the scrutiny process to become an integral part of the way the Council does business and therefore make scrutiny more effective, and value adding, and am consequently optimistic that members will adopt them.

CHAIRMAN'S 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.

Finally I would like to add my thanks to Stuart Cave, who until his retirement last Autumn, was the Lead Officer for the Board. His contributions and support were greatly appreciated.

RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked to note the annual report of the Scrutiny Board 2016-17.

Contact Officer: Tracy Aarons
Ext No: 448
E-mail: tracy.aarons@mendip.gov.uk