

Scrutiny Committee Annual Report to Council – 2022/23

Remit of the Scrutiny Committee

1. As per Appendix C of the Council's constitution, "Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules":

1.1 The Council is required by Law to discharge certain overview and scrutiny functions. These functions are an essential component of local democracy. The Scrutiny Committee contribute to the Council's Performance and also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions.

1.2 The Scrutiny Committee allows a wider involvement in Council business by involving non-councillors from the wider public section, voluntary groups and community groups to help them in their work. They may make reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery.

1.3 The Scrutiny Committee also monitors the decisions of the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee can "call-in" a decision of the Cabinet which has been made but not yet implemented. They may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider their decision. They may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions.

1.4 Scrutiny should be carried out in a constructive way and should aim to contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of local inhabitants. The Scrutiny Committee should not shy away from the need to challenge and question decisions and make constructive criticism.

"The Scrutiny Committee will comprise a permanent Chairman and Vice Chairman, and 9 other elected Members that follow the political proportionality of the Council. No Members of the Committee may be members of the Cabinet, their deputies or members of any of the Cabinet Advisory Committees."

Approach

2. Throughout the course of 2022/23, the Scrutiny Committee has drawn up and followed a work plan that has focussed on four key areas. These are:

- **Inviting Cabinet Portfolio Holders** to each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee where possible to discuss particular areas of focus/challenge and concerns members may have;
- **Inviting a number of external representatives** to attend Scrutiny Committee to discuss particular areas of concern and their activities within the district;
- **Setting up In-Depth Scrutiny working groups** as task and finish groups to investigate particular areas in detail, reporting back to the Committee so that recommendations can be agreed and reported to Cabinet.

- **Reviewing performance of services** in relation to agreed performance indicators, in particular focusing on red flag indicators. These are discussed at meetings, with explanations being provided by Officers. Matters of serious concern are referred to the Portfolio Holder/ Cabinet as appropriate.

This approach has ensured that the Committee has scrutinised both the work of SDC and other public bodies across the district, per the Committee's above terms of reference.

Work Covered

3. Based on the above approach, the following is a summary of work carried out during 2022/23 by the Scrutiny Committee.

Portfolio Holders

4. Portfolio Holders were asked to provide an update on recent work and future challenges to the relevant meeting, and were subsequently asked a number of questions by Members of the Committee regarding specific challenges and their approach and views. Portfolio holders attended as follows:

Scrutiny Committee	Portfolio Holder	Area of Committee Focus
July 2022	Cllr Julia Thornton Development & Conservation	Emerging Local Plan National Planning Policy Framework
July 2022	Cllr Peter Fleming Improvement & Innovation	Levelling up and Regeneration Bill The Environment Bill Capital Projects
November 2022	Cllr Kevin Maskell Housing & Health	Framework for displacement of refugees through Homes for Ukraine Scheme across Kent The One You Programme Council's Housing Strategy
January 2023	Cllr Matthew Dickins Finance & Investment	Finances & 10 year budget Replacement of Council's Refuse fleet
January 2023	Cllr Margot McArthur Cleaner & Greener	Revision of waste collection rounds Bid to National Heritage Lottery Fund for improvement of Bradbourne Lakes

External Invitees

July 2022

Kent Police

Inspector Matt Atkinson, of Kent Police attended to give an overview of the levels of crime and approach of policing within the District.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- The use of Town Centre Constables to combat shop thefts
- The Community Safety Unit and working in partnership with the Council
- Evening and weekend policing levels in the District
- The priority of tackling domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG)

November 2022

Kent County Council

Cllr David Brazier, the Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport attended and gave a verbal update on the work carried out by Kent Highways.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Levels of support to bus services within the District
- Specific areas of concern regarding parking
- Winter services provided by KCC Highways
- Support to voluntary and community transport schemes
- The quality of the KCC out of hours service

January 2023

Sencio

The Chairman welcomed Jane Parish, Chief Executive of Sencio Community Trust and the Asset Maintenance Engineer (Sencio) who were in attendance and gave a presentation to the Committee.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions relating to areas including:

- Preventative maintenance of plant and equipment
- Edenbridge all weather pitch
- Sencio's financial position
- Sencio's submission of accounts

It will be noted that Ms Parish is due to come back to Scrutiny in March 2023, to provide assurances about the financial state of Sencio.

In-Depth Scrutiny

July 2022

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Working Group – Reconstitution

Members resolved to reconstitute the In-Depth Scrutiny working group that was formed in November 2021 to look at the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chairman expressed the importance of the report being shared with the members of the Working Group in the first instance and ideally for a consensus to be reached, although it could be noted in the report if this was not the case. He also advised the report should then be shared with officers in good time in order they could check for matters of factual accuracy and advise as appropriate. The report could then be submitted as per the published report deadlines to be considered at the November meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

November 2022

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Working Group - Final Report

Members considered the final report of the Covid-19 Working Group which had looked at the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and assessed the Emergency Plan and District Emergency Centre (DEC).

Following debate at the Committee, a set of agreed recommendations were made to Cabinet which were considered at its meeting of 8 December 2022.

Final Word

In May this year I will stand down as a District Councillor, having first been elected back in the heady days of 2007 (with the slogan "Vote Blue, Go Green, Vote Cameron Brown" – seemingly to cover all bases at the time but admittedly rather colour intensive), a period of some 16 years. It has been a real privilege to represent the residents of Dunton Green and Riverhead during my terms in office.

At SDC I have spent much of that time sitting as a Chair or vice Chair of Scrutiny and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my fellow Councillors and Officers for their assistance, hard work and support, but in particular James London, the vice chair, and Jim Carrington West.

I regard the role performed by the Scrutiny Committee at SDC as extremely important, acting when needing to do so as a check and counterbalance to both the Executive and Officers. A robust and lively Scrutiny Committee significantly contributes to the democratic health of SDC and it is vital that those who sit on that committee continue to hold to account those who exercise power on our behalf.

**Councillor Cameron Brown KC
Chairman – Scrutiny Committee**