



## Committee report

COMMITTEE

**CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE

**8 SEPTEMBER 2020**

TITLE

**REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY YEAR 2019-20**

REPORT OF

**CHAIRMAN OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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### **BACKGROUND**

1. This report is an opportunity to highlight the work that has been undertaken during the past year by the Council's scrutiny function. It includes reports of the policy and scrutiny committees with the agreement of their chairs. In the report to the Committee on 7 May 2019, mention was made of the Government's proposed updating of the statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny. This was eventually published on that same day. This has now provided an opportunity of reviewing the approach taken towards scrutiny within this authority and identify where changes can be made to ensure compliance with the guidance.
2. Each committee now has a 12-month rolling workplan though these have naturally been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has enabled appropriate items to be included to monitor and challenge the delivery of the key activities outlines within the Corporate Plan. A meeting is now held on an approximately quarterly basis between the chairman and vice chairman of the Scrutiny committee and the three Policy and Scrutiny Committee chairmen to discuss workplans, working processes and sharing ideas. This has been expanded to include one session with the Cabinet. Agreement had been reached to have a further meeting with Cabinet in April, but that was cancelled because of the pandemic.
3. On 7 October 2019 a training session was facilitated by John Cade from the Institute of Local Government Studies at the University of Birmingham. This was attended by both scrutiny and Cabinet Members. This training session covered the content and application of the revised statutory guidance, the development of a protocol on working arrangements between scrutiny and the cabinet, and work plans.
4. Since that session each scrutiny committee is attempting to make better proactive use of the forward plan. This is to enable earlier dialogue to take place with the relevant Cabinet Member and senior officer on a proposed decision. The purpose behind this is to enable the relevant scrutiny committee to help ensure that all evidence has been taken into account and if consultation has taken place that the responses have been fully assessed in the final decision.
5. Originally this report was compiled in readiness for submission to the meeting due to be held on 12 May 2020. This would have been in advance of the annual meeting of full Council when appointments to the various chairmanships. However due to meetings

being suspended due to Covid-19 these did not take place. This has enabled the report to be updated to reflect the involvement of the scrutiny function in looking at the response of the Council to dealing with Covid-19 and the recovery planning.

## **CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

6. The committee had ten ordinary meetings and one special meeting to consider a call-in. Since resuming meetings these have been held virtually using Microsoft Teams.
7. The committee's meetings are held two days before meetings of Cabinet. Whilst this enables the committee to comment on the items going before Cabinet for decision, due to the availability of the agenda and papers it does not allow a sufficient time for these to be fully digested enabling a more comprehensive comment to be provided. As indicated above the use of the forward plan is a key element in enabling scrutiny to play an effective role in the Council's decision-making process. This will hopefully result in less need to consider a call-in.
8. Whilst pre decision scrutiny is an important element of the committee's work it has developed its own programme of issues that it looks at in greater detail. These are normally drawn from the Council's Corporate Plan and ensures the efficient delivery of key activities. This has been achieved through either the establishment of a task and finish group, a single focussed agenda item or a scope being agreed enabling a more detailed follow up agenda item. Cabinet members and Directors are also able to ask the relevant chair for an item to be placed in the workplan.
9. The major items dealt with by the Committee were :-

### a) Commercialisation

This was a follow up to the work undertaken during 2018/19. It was aimed at assisting officers and the Cabinet Member with the development of a commercial strategy. A range of services and options were looked at where commercialisation could be progressed. A strategy has now been finalised and the Committee will be monitoring the action plan supporting the delivery of this.

### b) Collaboration with Town and Parish Councils

The review looked at how town and parish councils perceived its level of satisfaction with the provision of information from the Council and collaboration on service delivery. Overall the response was encouraging. The area where town and parish councils asked for better communications was in relation to planning matters. Officers and the Cabinet Member have been asked to look at ways of enhancing the existing lines of communication.

### c) Corporate Complaints Process

This work reviewed the Council's processes for handling complaints and that service improvements arose from lessons learnt. It was concluded that there was good evidence that there was learning from complaints. A new CRM system had been introduced which would capture data from complaints. The results of this will be monitored by the committee in 2020-21.

### d) Highway PFI

The committee has been concerned for some time as to the delivery of the Highway PFI. In posing a number of questions on this matter, it was advised (following special legal advice sought by the Council), that to enable these to be responded to at an informal briefing members would be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. This was due to the commercial sensitivity behind the contract for the PFI.

Members were not willing to take this course of action and were therefore provided with an informal briefing of a range of non-confidential aspects relating to the delivery of the Highways PFI. Arrangements have been agreed on a future monitoring report being submitted to the committee which is seen as a positive step.

The chairman has raised the committee's concerns with the Centre for Public Scrutiny about the ability of scrutiny members to access information required to ensure the effective and efficient use of public monies in the delivery of services.

- e) The two meetings that have been held since resuming business in June 2020 have focussed on the actions taken by the Council to deal with Covid-19, the financial impact of this and the steps being taken with a recovery plan. The Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Local Government Association has provided advice and guidance on the role that can be played by scrutiny on these matters. The topic will continue to be an ongoing item for future meetings given the nature of the impact on council services. The three Policy and Scrutiny Committees will also enable a more in depth look at how the services that come within their individual remits are being delivered.

10. Additionally, during 2019/20 the following items have featured on the workplan :-

- a) Community Safety Partnership
- b) Annual waste and recycling customer service survey
- c) Refresh of the corporate plan – corporate peer review action plan
- d) Fire service improvement inspection plan – Action plan
- e) Update on digital transformation

- 11. The committee continues to look at the quarterly performance report. It has made a recommendation to the Cabinet that the report that it considers should include mitigating actions that were being taken in areas where performance was below target.
- 12. With regard to the budget the committee's work comprises several elements. In the previous year it was possible for the committee to undertake a more detailed look at the indicative budget savings being proposed as the Cabinet released details in October 2018. Unfortunately, this process was not possible for the 2020/21 budget due to the timing of the general election and uncertainty about the level of government settlement.
- 13. The committee did meet informally in advance of the Cabinet budget meeting to collate a number of issues that required additional information or clarity. Although the timescales were very tight the responses received enabled the committee to endorse that the budget was legal and balanced.
- 14. There is an ongoing scrutiny of the delivery of the indicative savings that were presented to full council as part of the 2020-21 budget process. Whilst noting that there is an acknowledged element of risk that certain savings may not be fully achieved this has to be balanced against finding alternative savings in year and the consequences that these may have on service delivery if not correctly assessed.

15. Following the chairman's discussions with Hertfordshire County Council about its approach to budget scrutiny and also looking at best practice elsewhere in the country the committee will be arranging a special budget session with the Section 151 Officer to look at the framework used in constructing the budget. This is aimed at giving members a more detailed insight into the budget strategy and how this links in with the delivery of the Corporate Plan. This session is now of greater importance due to the financial implications faced by the Council in dealing with the response to the pandemic.

#### Call In of Decisions

16. One call-in request was made which resulted in a special meeting being held. This was in relation to a decision taken by Cabinet on the development of a strategic partnership for public health between Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council. A special meeting of the committee was held for this purpose. This enabled several issues to be clarified and the committee supported the actions proposed by the Cabinet.

#### **POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

17. This committee has the statutory health scrutiny function. In addition to its four standing formal meetings a year it has successfully developed a series of informal briefings with health partners and related stakeholders. These have enabled updates on key issues to be provided by the IWNHS Trust and IWCCG. There has also been engagement with the IW Voluntary Sector Forum and the Chief Officer of Community Pharmacy South Central.
18. The close working relationship between the Committee and Healthwatch Isle of Wight continues. This enables the Committee to ensure that recommendations made by Healthwatch in its reports are followed up by health partners and appropriately responded to, particularly where these would lead to service improvement.
19. The major items dealt with by the committee were :-

- a) Shackleton Ward and Mental Health Recovery Pathway

The closure of the Shackleton Ward and loss of an Island facility to deal with patients with severe dementia was at very short notice. Normally this would have been seen as a substantial variation in service delivery by the committee. Patient safety however is paramount, and the committee has been fully engaged with the IWNHS Trust and IWCCG on the steps being taken to deliver services in a different way within the community which are aimed at producing more effective outcomes. The early dialogue has enabled the proposals to be fully supported and members will closely monitor the delivery of the service redesign.

- b) Public Health

The partnership arrangement with Hampshire County Council has enabled the committee to review its approach to public health. Given the wide remit of public health it is a topic that features in the committee's approach to all aspects of not only its own work but that of all the other scrutiny committees.

- c) Discharge from Hospital

The Committee is keen to take an overview of how the whole health and social care service operates. It therefore decided to undertake an in-depth review of the

discharge of patients from hospital. It had been made aware of concerns being expressed about delays in discharging medically fit patients, absence of discharge notes, difficulties in accessing places in care homes. Work had started on this before the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the review had to be suspended.

20. In addition to the above members have considered reports on the following items :

- a) Assuring for quality in the Council's learning disability homes
- b) IW adult safeguarding annual report
- c) Adult Social Care annual complaints report
- d) IWNHS Trust CQC inspection report
- e) IWNHS Partnership arrangements
- f) Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

21. The workload of the Committee has been very intensive and reflects the pressures faced on the Island in providing health and social care. The need to change approaches to service delivery is fully supported by the Committee and the importance of introducing successful integration will be closely monitored.

### **POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S, EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

22. In its approach to its work the committee has decided to focus on children's social care at two of its meetings and school attainment at its other two. It is keen to ensure that service delivery is meeting the required standards set by Ofsted and that the Island strives not only to meet national standards but seek to improve on these.

23. The key areas of work have been :-

a) Autism

The Committee continues to closely monitor the delivery of services to children and young people with autism. It has been reassured by the IWCCG that good progress is now being made on assessments and identifying the support required for each child and family. The recent Ofsted/CQC inspection of the Council's SEND service has highlighted the positive work being done together with a number of areas for development on all aspects of delivery.

b) Education

School attainment is an ongoing key topic for the Committee. An annual report on this is provided but in support of this the Committee has looked at the implications of school attendance, further education provision, the impact of a mathematics project at Key Stage 2 and progress with the establishment of an all through school at The Bay. All these are will feed into helping push school attainment up to national standards and hopefully above.

24. In addition to the two items above the committee has also looked in detail at the following items :-

- a) Children's services quality assurance framework
- b) Higher education
- c) Fostering and connected carers
- d) Careers and participation

- e) Hampshire and IW Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Local Transformation Plan
- f) IW Safeguarding Children's Board annual report
- g) Statutory report on adoption and fostering arrangements

## **POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND REGENERATION**

25. The committee again saw a change in chairmanship from the previous year with Cllr Michael Beston taking on this position from Cllr Steve Hastings following his appointment as a Cabinet Member. It has a wide range of services to look at and this has given a challenge in prioritising its workplan accordingly.

26. The key activities for the year have been the following :-

a) Reduction in the Island's Carbon Emissions

This work was undertaken at the request of full Council. A draft strategy had been completed together with an action plan. Further work was to be undertaken to provide costings to enable the committee to endorse the final strategy for approval by the Cabinet.

b) Housing

This has always been a prime focus for the committee following the review that it undertook under the chairmanship of Cllr Tig Outlaw on affordable housing. Members have commented upon the draft Housing Strategy and is closely monitoring the progress with the construction of the Council's own housing stock.

c) Regeneration

Given that regeneration has been a priority of the Council the committee has been closely monitoring the various projects identified within the supporting strategy. Progress has been slow but there is recognition of the complexities involved in the majority of schemes. There are many strands being pulled together and members are keen to see that these result in tangible outcomes. The work being done with Newport and Carisbrooke Community Council and Ryde Town Council on heritage led regeneration demonstrates what can be done with the support of key partners.

27. The committee has also received reports on the following :-

- a) Relocation of the Record and Archive Office
- b) IW infrastructure task force
- c) Green flag and Blue flag status
- d) Unadopted roads
- e) Public Spaces Protection Orders – consultation
- f) Draft Island Planning strategy

28. Scrutiny needs to build on the many positives that it has developed with the Cabinet and officers in showing that it can be a supportive friend as well as critical one when the occasion requires.

29. The early involvement of scrutiny in the development or review of a policy would be very much welcome as would the ability to offer comments on options well in advance of a decision being made by Cabinet.

## **OUTCOMES**

30. Whilst this report is principally for noting it is also intended to demonstrate the value that scrutiny can bring to enhancing the Council's transparency and accountability in its decision-making process.
31. Scrutiny needs to build on the many positives that it has developed with the Cabinet and officers in showing that it can be a supportive friend as well as critical one when the occasion requires. The early involvement of scrutiny in the development, or review, of a policy would be very much welcome as would the ability to offer comments on options well in advance of a decision being made by Cabinet.
32. Originally when starting to draft this report the two challenges intended to work on during 2020-21 were ensuring that scrutiny members have access to the information needed to fulfil the statutory function, and that the budget process is more fully understood by all members to enable wider participation in its construction and delivery. However, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, there will be a need to help the Council ensure that, when appropriate, services are re-introduced in a safe and orderly manner ensuring that the safety of all is at the forefront.

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