

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report 2010/11

Chairman's Annual Statement

In this final year of the current Council, the Committee has had a heavy workload dominated to a large extent by the scrutiny of the Cabinet's proposed budget and the impact on frontline services, given the difficult financial circumstances that affect both this Council and the public sector as a whole.

We had a total of four separate budget scrutiny sessions with Members of the Cabinet often arranged at relatively short notice due to the late notification of the government's grant. Our thanks go to Cabinet Members for their flexibility in attending re-arranged meetings and for giving us full answers to our questions.

We have taken our first steps in scrutinising the strategic work of the Community Safety Partnership and agreed with that body a protocol for scrutiny. We also had a presentation from representatives of the partnership at our September meeting on what the partnership is, how it operates, its main areas of work, and its key current activities. At our meeting in March, we received a presentation from the District Commander of Police concerning the key issues and challenges faced by the Police in dealing with crime and disorder issues in the District. Community Safety Partnership will be a regular feature of our work programme in future years.

Our recommendations to Cabinet concerning our study into how contributions from Section 106 Agreements are managed by the Council, were finalised at our June meeting. Cabinet subsequently welcomed the recommendations.

At our July meeting, we conducted a post decision scrutiny review in connection with the accommodation options review – Causeway House, Braintree/Mayland House, Witham. This was helpful in clarifying the chronology of events and what information had been available to Members (and who supplied it), but as the situation had moved on we did not feel it appropriate to make any specific recommendations to Cabinet.

We have received regular progress reports on the work of the Public Services Provision for Older People – Task and Finish Group, and were pleased to note that the Group's recommendations were endorsed by Cabinet and that an action plan has been approved to implement those recommendations.

In October, the Committee as part of its role for operating the appeal mechanism for petitions, considered a petition appeal regarding the Council's handling of issues in relation to Silver End village hall. This culminated in the Committee carrying out a full scrutiny review and holding a scrutiny hearing at its meeting in late January. Cabinet subsequently accepted the Committee's recommendations to take on board a series of learning points, and the need for clarification on the Council's policy in relation to closure of community halls.

Finally, at our last meeting of the year we felt that the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee, once elected, should examine the Committee's recommendations over the past four years and determine what outcomes have been achieved.

We have also asked the Assistant Chief Executive to submit a discussion paper to the first meeting of the new Committee concerning its terms of reference and its potential main areas of work given the challenges facing the Council over the next four years.

As ever, I would wish to express my thanks to all those persons who have assisted us with our enquiries and studies over the past year.

Cllr. Michael Gage, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.