

Update on Ways of Working in Scrutiny & its Effectiveness

Feedback from Corporate Director of Economy & Place

Whilst both Scrutiny panels got off to a slow start and there was some inherent political scepticism as to the new structure because of the way it came into being, I believe the new structure has significant merit and should remain for another year to allow the trial to continue and then a new administration can take a view as to the organisation of scrutiny after next year's elections.

The Policy Development Committee which was initially considered to be the more radical proposal has in part due to the hard work of the chair being the most successful and really started to grasp and relish the role of looking at policy and thinking strategically about the Councils objectives. It is however early days and the potential for this scrutiny role is significant over the next few years following the submission of the Local Plan with a number of strategic documents now capable of starting the renewal process as we head towards plan adoption.

The power of this Committee is that it encourages Members to consider the levers they need to use to achieve their political objectives and also recognise the complexity of policy development with many actions, creating reactions or unintended consequences. This committee allows officers and members to explore these issues ahead of policy adoption so is politically quite a safe space.

The more traditional scrutiny committee has surprisingly not been as successful and confused policy and operational issues regularly. Its ability to scrutinise a number of operational performance issues has also been impacted by the fact that they are part of CSMC's remit i.e. sickness absence and budget allocation.

There is undoubtedly an officer element to this in that inviting scrutiny or constructive criticism in public is not easy but we have endeavoured to engage proactively with both Committees. It does however often bring into stark relief the level of resources the Council has and the impact that budget choices have on outcomes - perhaps something that possibly Members do not wish to explore, preferring to target specific areas of complaint.

In summary whilst I wouldn't want to say we have got it right, the scrutiny is I believe of a better quality. From a policy perspective, it is also concentrating on issues more strategic and relevant than previously.