

Report to: **Scrutiny Committee**



Date of Meeting 4 April 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

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Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee

Report summary:

To review the work of the Scrutiny Committee during the civic year 2023 – 2024.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That the Scrutiny Committee notes the work it has undertaken during the civic year 2023 – 2024 and agrees the annual report to full Council on 8 May 2024.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform the Council of the work of the Scrutiny Committee during the civic year 2023 – 2024.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

1 The Role of the Committee

The role of the Scrutiny Committee is to review how the Council is delivering services and working for the public. The Committee also checks that Council policies have been implemented effectively. The Committee does this by reviewing activities in the Council Plan and checking if targets set for delivering services have been met.

The Scrutiny Committee is also described as a “critical friend” to the Cabinet. This means that it can review their decisions and make recommendations. For example, what lessons can be learnt from how an issue was handled in the past. It can also act as a “critical friend” to other authorities and agencies, making recommendations about issues outside of the Council’s remit.

The Scrutiny Committee cannot make decisions on behalf of the Council, but does try to influence the decision makers by investigating an issue, and making recommendations based on the evidence it has found.

2 Chair’s Foreword – Cllr Mike Goodman

This has been the first year since the elections in May 2023 for the newly formed Scrutiny Committee. During the year key pieces of work have been the Scrutiny Improvement Review, undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the introduction and adoption by Council of a Scrutiny Protocol. Together with the Action Plan which is being developed, this work will underpin and greatly enhance the future performance and effectiveness of the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee has a vital role to play in improving the delivery of Council services and improving the lives of East Devon’s residents and I am looking forward to working with Members and Officers to continue to develop and improve the Committee’s contribution to the work of the Council.

I would like to thank everyone, Officers and Members, who have contributed to the work of the Committee throughout the civic year 2023 – 2024.

3 The Civic Year 2023 – 2024

Following the elections in May 2023, the Committee has held ten meetings. Of those, two meetings were joint meetings: the joint budget meeting held with the Overview Committee to consider the Council’s draft budget and service plans; a joint meeting with the Overview Committee and Housing Review Board to consider the findings of the Scrutiny Improvement Review. A virtual consultative meeting with South West Water was also held in February 2024.

3.1 Scrutiny Improvement Review

As referred to above, during the civic year the Council commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to conduct a Scrutiny Improvement Review. This work took place in October and November 2023.

Eight recommendations arising from the CfGS Scrutiny Improvement Review were considered at the joint meeting with Overview Committee and Housing Review Board held on 15 February 2024 together with a draft Scrutiny Protocol. The joint meeting agreed its recommendations to full Council which were subsequently agreed by Council on 6 March 2024. As a result, the CfGS recommendations were accepted, the Scrutiny Protocol was agreed and an Action Plan is currently being prepared which will identify the resources required to deliver the CfGS recommendations. This work will ensure that the overview and scrutiny function has the arrangements in place to support and maintain ongoing improvement which will result in better outcomes for the Council and the district's residents.

During the year the Committee also considered the following matters and, where appropriate, made recommendations to Cabinet:

3.2 Section 106 and CIL resources and processes

The Committee considered a report which highlighted a number of issues in relation to the Council's work in administering planning obligations such as CIL and S.106 agreements. The report proposed measures to address staffing issues within the planning team as well as changes to the process for the spend of S.106 monies to try and reduce the administrative burden on the Council. As a result of this report, the Committee made several recommendations to Cabinet regarding the proposed revised S.106 Monitoring Fees charging schedule, changes to staff structure within the planning team, changes to the current spend process for S.106 receipts and recommending that an interim solution be found to put resources in place to deal with the approximately 150 outstanding cases where a notice of payment had been issued and monies remained outstanding.

3.3 Update on climate change action plan progress

The Committee considered a report from the Climate Change Officer which highlighted that the adoption of the Climate Change Strategy was a new approach for the Council, with the Strategy embedded across all Council services. Progress to date was noted and the Committee agreed that a further report would be received in due course following the comprehensive review of both the Strategy and Action Plan, which had been brought forward from 2025.

3.4 Grass cutting and re-naturing report

As part of its forward plan, the Committee requested a report on grass cutting and re-naturing. At the October 2023 meeting, the Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country and Environment advised the Committee that the Council is working on a Nature Recovery Policy and that it was appropriate for this work to be completed first as this would inform EDDC's work. The report on grass cutting and re-naturing will be brought to the Committee early in the new civic year.

3.5 South West Water

As part of its ongoing work with South West Water, the Committee had previously requested information from the local MPs on what actions they had taken to require improvements from South West Water, primarily regarding sewage discharge into the district's rivers and coastline. A response from Simon Jupp MP was considered at the October 2023 Committee meeting when it was also agreed to invite the CEO of South West Water to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to

provide details on issues across the district and what was being done to address these. Officers from South West Water subsequently attended a virtual consultative meeting in February 2024 and provided answers to advance questions from EDDC officers and questions put at the meeting by EDDC Members. It was agreed to invite South West Water to attend another meeting in six months time by way of follow up.

3.6 Report on UK Shared prosperity fund evaluation plans

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a significant source of devolved funding for investing in local communities and supporting local businesses. At the January meeting, the Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the UKSPF funded activity for 2022-23 and the key findings of the evaluation work undertaken to date. It was intended that the report would be provided on an annual basis to update the Committee on how UKSPF funded activity was performing relative to the EDDC UKSPF Evaluation Strategy. The Committee agreed that written feedback should be provided to DLUHC on the need for qualitative metrics to be made available to measure the success of projects where quantitative metrics alone are not appropriate.

3.7 Portfolio Holder reports

Receiving reports from Portfolio Holders remains a key part of the Committee's work. During the civic year, the Committee considered reports from the Portfolio Holder for Communications and Democracy (November 2023) and Economy (January 2024).

3.8 Quarterly performance report

The Committee regularly reviews the quarterly performance reports which provide performance information and progress against the performance indicators and key objectives of the Council. At the July 2023 meeting a small task force was set up to work with the Chair and officers to review the format for presenting information in the quarterly performance reports. This work led to a Council review of performance indicators and data measuring, and is in the course of being agreed.

3.9 Public engagement

The Committee welcomes engagement from the public. At the July 2023 meeting a member of the public addressed the Committee to raise concerns regarding phosphate levels arising from development and affecting the River Axe. A separate question was put regarding the future of Seaton Jurassic. Officers provided written responses to these concerns which were included in the meeting.

In September 2023 the same member of the public addressed the Committee regarding car parking tariffs.

Public engagement is very important to the work of the Committee, and is currently being reviewed as to how this can be improved.

3.10 Other work undertaken

- The meeting in September 2023 considered the issues of public toilets and car parking. Detailed reports were not received, however, discussion of the issues highlighted the need to develop the public toilets strategy and fed into the development of a car parking strategy.
- At the January 2024 meeting the Committee considered a report on consultancy and agency spend which detailed capital and revenue spend on consultants and specialist advice and agency staff during the year 2022-23.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations in this report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to the report.

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