

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012

Contents

Welcome

The Work of the Scrutiny Chairs Group

The Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

- Corporate
- Children and Families
- Environment and Prosperity
- Sustainable Communities
- Adult Social Care
- Health and Wellbeing

Lessons Learned

Welcome

Overview and Scrutiny plays an important role in the governance of Cheshire East Council and this year has involved 51 of the Council's 82 elected Members and many Officers from all departments and services of the Council. Overview and Scrutiny's purpose is to ensure that the Council's decision makers and those of our partner organisations are held to account for their decisions. In its overview element, Overview and Scrutiny plays a role in developing Council policies. Committees can review policies and make recommendations to Cabinet and Council about whether current policies are effective and what new policies should be. The Scrutiny element can be used to review the performance of Council, and Partner, services and make recommendations for improvement. By doing these things, we strive to ensure that the Council is achieving the best value possible from the services provided to the residents of Cheshire East.

During the last twelve months the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have continued to develop and progress by strengthening their relationships with Cabinet and Corporate Management Team (CMT), as well as the Council's external partners and community groups across the Borough. The Committees have conducted some important work in vital areas of the Council's strategy and policies and have helped to ensure that services are performing well and are value for money.

The Scrutiny Chairmen's Group has been developing its role in helping to coordinate scrutiny across the six Committees as well as playing a crucial role in supporting the scrutiny function's role in the Council and maintaining strong relationships with CMT and Cabinet so that Scrutiny may operate more effectively. We hope that the relationships between Scrutiny, Cabinet and CMT continue to improve and that Scrutiny's profile continues to grow amongst Officers and the Public.

The Localism Act 2011 and several other pieces of legislation look set to have a big impact on the way the Council delivers, and therefore Overview and Scrutiny, services and support to the residents of Cheshire East. The Scrutiny Chairmen's Group and all six committees will work hard to ensure that they continue to deliver effective scrutiny throughout by ensuring the opportunities afforded through changes that may occur over the next twelve months are taken. Possible changes in governance arrangements will hopefully improve the delivery of the Council's services whilst ensuring that decision making and service delivery is open and transparent, and subject to challenge where necessary.

Our thanks is extended to all those who have taken part in the work of Overview and Scrutiny over the past year. Effective scrutiny would not be possible without the cooperation and support of Cabinet, co-opted members, officers and engagement with the public.

Cllr Brian Silvester – Chairman of Scrutiny Chairmen's Group

Scrutiny Chairmen's Group

Chairman: Cllr B Silvester

Vice Chairman: Cllr P Findlow

Committee Membership: G Baxendale, K Edwards, L Gilbert, M Grant, A Kolker, H Murray, D Newton, J Saunders, M Simon, G Walton

The Scrutiny Chairmen's Group is an informal body made up of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of each of the six Scrutiny Committees. The group meets monthly to review work programmes, share best practice and consider how to deal with issues that overlap the remits of the Scrutiny Committees.

The Group supports the Overview and Scrutiny Function and ensures that each of the Committees is operating effectively with the necessary support. The Group has kept an eye on how new legislation will affect the work of the Committees and discussed how Committees can adapt to any changes. New provisions under the Localism Act 2011 have already had to be considered, in particular possible changes to governance arrangements. It is hoped this group will be able to offer expertise and knowledge that will help to inform the discussion on governance arrangements.

There are a variety of matters and subject areas that cross Cabinet portfolios and service areas and the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group consider how these should be dealt with and by which Committee. As a result some joint Task and Finish Groups have been set up which ensure the interests of all Committees involved are considered. Examples include the joint task and finish group on Health and Cared for Children which has members from Children & Families and Health & Wellbeing. The Home to School Transport task and finish group was commissioned by Children and Families as an education matter however included members of Environment and Prosperity as transport is part of their remit.

The Group has also worked hard to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny is strengthened by ensuring each Committee is supported with appropriate financial and performance information so they can effectively review the Council's services and make recommendations for improvements. The Group has consulted with the Council's Director of Finance to agree arrangements that will allow Officers to better assist the Scrutiny Committees with Financial and Performance information.

Other developments that the Group has considered and will continue to pursue are the use of social networking to better engage with the public and training arrangements that will help to improve Members knowledge and scrutiny skills.

Corporate

Chairman: Cllr A P Findlow

Vice Chairman: Cllr D Newton

Committee Membership: G Barton, G Baxendale, B Burkhill, S Corcoran, S Davies, F Keegan, B Moran, D Neilson, D Topping, G Wait

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the Resources portfolio and the Procurement and Shared Service portfolio. This includes areas such as; financial strategy; business management; treasury management; audit; member training and development; human resources strategy; organisation development; shared services; pensions; occupational health; and procurement.

Last year the Committee carried out a task and finish review of Business Generation Centres in Cheshire East to make recommendations for the development of a policy for the future of business generation. The recommendations for the review were positively received by Cabinet and many of them are being supported by the Council's Economic Development Strategy. The Committee are pleased that the Council will be fully supporting the principle of business generation and the development of new local business to help the local economy in these times of economic uncertainty.

This year the Committee has been working on several ongoing tasks to advise Cabinet on the budget setting process and to review finance and performance reports. The work of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and the Budget Task Group has helped to keep a close check on the finances and performance of the Council as well as ensuring that the budget setting process is carried out effectively and considerately so that the Council can deliver its priorities for the Borough in the coming year.

The Committee met in November to discuss a report on Shared Services. Cheshire East shares a wide variety of services with Cheshire West and Chester Council ever since the two authorities were formed after the Local Government Review in 2009. It has been important for the Committee to monitor these shared services in order to ensure Cheshire East is operating as effectively as it can. The Committee has been involved in consultation on the creation of a Single legal Entity to provide a range of high level services currently provided by Shared Services.

In January the Committee began joint work with the Council's Constitution Committee to review the Council's governance arrangements and to consider whether changes could be made to improve the effectiveness of the current arrangements. The Localism Act 2011 allows Council's to choose their own governance arrangements and a small number of Councils have taken the opportunity to review how they work to assess whether there are any ways in which they can improve the efficiency, transparency and quality of decision making.

Adult Social Care

Chairman: Councillor M Simon

Vice Chairman: Councillor B Silvester

Committee Membership: C Andrew, D Bebbington, I Faseyi, J Jackson, L Jeuda, S Jones, F Keegan, B Murphy, J Saunders, D Stockton

The Committee's responsibility is to scrutinise the Adult Services portfolio. This includes matters such as; re-ablement; family based care; residential care; nursing home care; equality in access; welfare rights; connected service delivery for families; and support for informal carers.

Cheshire East has the fastest growing ageing population in the North West. It also has one of the highest life expectancies in the North West which has created an unprecedented demand on adult services. Caring for people in need is a major priority for the Council which is looking forward at how to deal with a growing population of over 65s. The Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee plays a key role in helping to develop policies and scrutinising the performance of services on behalf of service users and carers.

This year the Committee has considered and monitored several issues that are important to the care for adults in the Borough. In July the Committee received a report on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). These are mandatory grants which are rewarded under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The purpose of the grants is to help disabled residents to meet the cost of adapting their homes, facilitate independent living and help individuals to maintain their personal dignity. The ageing population of Cheshire East has resulted in a rise in the demand for DFGs. The Committee suggested that if DFGs result in a reduction in injuries and health issues which save the NHS time and money then perhaps the Council should work with health partners to secure funding and increase the level of DFGs awarded to residents of Cheshire East. The Committee is keen to continue to monitor DFGs to ensure that the Council is able to meet the demand of its ageing population.

The Committee also considered the Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) strategy in July to offer recommendations before Cabinet took a decision. The TLAP strategy is a national strategy building on the principles of the 'Putting People First' agenda, first initiated by Government in 2007. Whilst accepting the principle and direction of this policy, the Committee was concerned about the move towards web based and electronic platforms as the preferred communication method for disseminating information to older people. The Committee requested that officers attend future meetings with a communication strategy that catered to all needs. After seeing a demonstration of various alternative methods in November and December, the Committee was reassured that their suggestions had been considered and was also pleased to have one of its Members co-opted onto a communication working group.

In September the Committee considered the 2011-2015 Strategy for Carers in East Cheshire. The strategy set out the collective commitment to Carers across Cheshire East and demonstrated the value the council and its partners placed in supporting Carers and their families. This is an issue of considerable interest to the Committee and once the strategy has been allowed to embed, this topic will be explored further in 2012/13.

The Adult Social Care budget has been an issue which has been looked at closely since the start of the municipal year. The Council is not alone in having to balance growing demand with an increasingly stretched budget. With this in mind, the Committee has been interested to explore and analyse what impacts budget reductions are having on policies and outcomes. Much of 2011/12 has been taken up with gaining an understanding of the complexities within the Adult Social Care budget and extra training sessions have been provided for Members.

In November the Committee considered a progress report on the Adults Local Account. With the Annual Performance Assessment by the Care Quality Commission and the National Indicator Set coming to an end, the Committee was informed that the Council planned to replace these with a Local Account which will reflect those outcome measures which the public and the Council feel are most important. It is expected that this will become a vital tool for the Committee in 2012/13.

The Committee also considered an update on a review of Adult Services Transport during their November meeting. Members were impressed with the extensive consultation process that had gone into making the proposed changes but the effectiveness of the new model will be analysed over the coming years to examine how successful it has been for service users.

In April, the Committee dealt with a call in relating to the consultation process for the permanent closure of Bexton Court. The Committee concluded however that the consultation process had been adequate and therefore no advice was given to Cabinet.

In the final meeting of the year, the Committee considered the Council's newly formulated personalisation policy. For those in need of social care, the last few years has seen an increase in the individual's choice and control over services and this has been reflected in how the Council now delivers these services. Whilst the Council had incrementally changed how it delivers social care services there was not one document that brought these various work streams together. The Committee was informed that the personalisation policy would help to do this and ensure a consistency of service across the Directorate. As this is a major piece of work, it was resolved that the Committee would receive an extra training session on the policy and its potential implications.

Task Groups

The Committee inherited a Task Group from the former Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee which was looking at issues around

Dementia. As it is predicted that there will be over 1 million people living with dementia by 2025, of which Cheshire East will be disproportionately affected. This is a key piece of work for the Council.

Following a Notice of Motion submitted regarding instability in the residential care market in Cheshire East and its potential impact on the finances of the Council a task and finish review was commissioned to determine the best means of managing demand for residential care including demand from returning self funders. The task group has explored a number of 'invest to save' initiatives for mitigating demand and is expected to report with its findings by the end of April.

Children and Families

Chairman: Cllr A Kolker

Vice Chairman: Cllr K Edwards

Committee Membership: L Brown, S Gardiner, P Hoyland, B Livesley, D Mahon, G Merry, D Neilson, B Silvester, G Wait

Co-optees: John McCann, Jill Kelly, Ray Woolgar and Claire Blanchard

The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the Children and Families portfolio. This includes matters such as; early years and childcare; education; children's social care and wellbeing; family support services; cared for children and care leavers; children's safeguarding; and services for children and young people with disabilities.

This year the Committee has commissioned a number of task and finish reviews which have helped the Council to better support children and young people in the Borough. The Committee has also taken part in various site visits and training sessions in order to help it better understand the needs of all children and young people in particular their education and safeguarding needs.

In July the Committee considered a report on the Cheshire East Family Service. The implementation of a new family service was in response to a range of initiatives and strategies from recent task and finish group work and national policy. The Committee has tracked the development of the new initiative throughout the year and is pleased to find that it is creating some positive outcomes.

In October the Committee received a presentation on the Virtual School and how this initiative enabled Cheshire East to maintain an overview of all its cared for children and their educational progress. The Committee was delighted to discover that the initiative had already produced some significant improvements and this will be continued to be monitored to ensure that this is a sustainable and long lasting change.

In November the Committee had an overview and discussion about Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This item had been requested as there had been a concern that the level of and access to services was not consistent throughout the Borough. After considering the item, the Committee was reassured that work was under way to mitigate this issue.

In December the Special Education Needs Policy draft was presented to the Committee for consideration. A number of Councillors had undertaken site visits to a selection of the Borough's special schools in order to gain an understanding of the prevalent issues. As a result of the 'hands on' experience of Members, a number of comments were made on the draft policy and these were taken into consideration by the officers.

In the first meeting of 2012 on 17 January the Committee considered the impacts of Academies on the Council and its budgets. The Committee also received an update on Disabled Respite Care. A parent of a disabled child who had attended a meeting of the Committee early in 2011 with concerns regarding the future of disabled respite care following the closure of a special unit, revisited the Committee to provide an update and was able to explain that he had been entirely satisfied with the alternatives that had been put in place for his child.

The Committee received a response on the fostering task and finish review (completed April 2011) in the meeting held on 14 February. The Committee was pleased to note that all 33 recommendations had been endorsed in principle by the department. Whilst this is promising, fostering remains a topic of interest to the Committee and therefore work will be continued to be monitored throughout 2012/13.

In order to try and gain a deeper understanding of the issues being scrutinised, the Committee decided to hold its last two meetings of the Municipal year outside of the usual venue of Westfields, Sandbach. The first of these was held in Oakenclough Children's Centre, Wilmslow and the Committee was treated to a Premiere viewing of a promotional DVD that had been produced to demonstrate the value of Children's Centres. During this viewing, the Committee was able to talk to the parents and children involved in the DVD which was useful to gain a first hand account of the challenges they faced.

The final meeting of the year was held at Ash Grove Primary School, Macclesfield. The Committee was considering an item on school improvement and as Ash Grove was the second most improved school in England it was deemed appropriate to hear how they had achieved such an outcome. Following a talk and tour of the school from the Head teacher, the Committee was then able to take this knowledge into the meeting to aid questioning.

The Committee agreed that holding meetings outside of Westfields was a useful exercise and something that should be repeated in 2012/2013. It was felt particularly valuable in the way that it helped bring items to life and added an extra dimension to the Committee's knowledge. Having said this, it was noted that holding meetings in some venues such as schools could potentially reduce public participation as people might feel less comfortable accessing such venues. Going forward therefore, the Committee will attempt to strike a balance between holding meetings in Westfields and choosing external venues when it is judged to be appropriate and worthwhile.

Task Groups

The Committee set up a task and finish review into Home to School Transport. This emerged as a topic when Cabinet delayed a decision on the removal of denominational and mainstream post 16 school transport subsidies and resolved to refer the matter to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee for further consideration. Following an extensive evidence gathering process, two reports emerged from the Group; one a majority and

one a minority, both with different options and solutions proposed. The Committee considered both reports and resolved to refer both to Cabinet, with the minority report being put forward as the endorsed report. Whilst this was an unusual situation, it illustrated that the principles of democracy and debate were still held in esteem and that the scrutiny process offered room for both.

A couple of task and finish reviews tumbled out of the findings of the successful fostering review, carried out in the previous year. These were, firstly, health and cared for children and secondly, care leavers. Both of these reviews will be looking to strengthen the safeguarding processes around some of the Borough's most vulnerable children and through their recommendations will hopefully improve the lives and outcomes of those children and young adults affected. Both reports are expected to conclude early in the next municipal year.

Environment and Prosperity

Chairman: Cllr L Gilbert

Vice Chairman: Cllr G Walton

Committee Membership: A Barratt, G Barton, P Butterill, H Davenport, K Edwards, R Fletcher, P Hayes, S Hogben, P Hoyland, A Thwaite

The Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the Environmental Service portfolio and the Prosperity portfolio as well as development management and building control from the Safer and Stronger Communities portfolio. This includes matters such as economic development; waste management; housing strategy; tourism; highways and transport; carbon reduction; and planning.

This year the Committee has been consulted on a wide range of issues, has contributed to policy development and has addressed some of the concerns of the public. In June 2011 the Committee looked at the Council's Public Transport Criteria and was successful in persuading Cabinet to amend the criteria to better support elderly and disabled who required access to public transport.

In July the Committee called in a Cabinet decision declare the site of the Crewe Heritage Centre surplus to requirements and to offer a 125 year lease for sale on the open market with a restrictive covenant which would preserve the site for the rail heritage of Crewe. The Committee questioned the Prosperity Portfolio and heard evidence as to why the original decision had been made. The Committee considered the evidence given by both representatives of the Heritage centre and portfolio holder. The Committee subsequently recommended that the proposed decision to abandon the existing lease arrangements should be delayed. Although the Portfolio holder upheld his original decision the process followed by the Committee was commended and members of the public were given an opportunity to take an active part in the democratic process.

In October the Committee considered the Council's Housing Strategy. The housing strategy is fundamental to the lives of everyone in Cheshire East and to setting out the Council's priorities for the future. The Committee made significant recommendations which helped to strengthen the Housing Strategy and ensure that the Council has a good quality housing at an affordable level and that our most vulnerable residents are given every opportunity to retain their independence.

In November the Committee considered two important items that will have an effect on the local economy in the near and distant future. The Council's Pavement Café Policy plays an important role in creating vibrant and sustainable towns and villages. In 2011 there was a lot of public debate about the "Alfresco Policy" of Cheshire East which prompted the Committee to consider the current arrangements and make recommendations for the future. The Committee was fully in support of the Council's current policy and hope that the Committee's backing will reassure members of the public that this is a

best way forward in order to support local business and ensure that the public can enjoy vibrant and thriving communities in a safe and sustainable environment.

As well as the Pavement Café Policy the Committee considered the future of Cheshire East's farm estate. The Council's farm estate provides an essential supply of farm land for young farmers looking for a way into the industry and the Committee were happy to endorse the strategy for rationalisation of farm estate to provide viable and sustainable farming for the long term future.

At the Committee's meeting just before Christmas, Members were asked to consider income from car parking by the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group which was concerned by the underachievement against budgeted income in the first quarter. Income from car parks was down nationally due to economic conditions and a reduced footfall in towns and cities and although Cheshire East had suffered a reduction it was still performing well in comparison with other local authorities. The Committee recommended to the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services that the budget set for income may have been too optimistic and that in future historic data should be used to set a more realistic budget.

The Committee's agenda for its February meeting was well attended by visiting Members and members of the public who wished to speak and witness proceedings. Many attended with regard to the proposed parking tariff structure which sort to make parking tariffs more logical and understandable. There were concerns about how tariffs would be applied and possible increases in charges despite these not being considered as part of the item. Due to the concerns of both Members and the public the Committee decided to commission a Task and Finish Review into tariff structures and the setting of tariffs in Cheshire East. The Committee also received a report on Planning Enforcement in February which the Committee felt would need further consideration and a Task and Finish Review on Planning Enforcement is scheduled to begin in the next municipal year.

Task Groups

The Task and Finish Review of Cheshire East Car Park Management began in February to review the current tariffs and management of car parks to ensure that they are contributing to the vitality and viability of Towns and Villages in Cheshire East. Although the review is in its early stages, the Task and Finish Group is planning to consult ward councillors on car parking in their local areas to identify and address the issues with car parking. It is hoped that the outcomes of the review will be tariffs and management procedures that are supported by the public and contribute to the vitality of towns and villages by attracting the appropriate users to the car parks.

Health and Wellbeing

Chairman Councillor G Baxendale

Vice-Chairman Councillor J Saunders

Committee Membership: G Boston, S Gardiner, M Grant, M Hardy, D Hough, A Martin, G Merry, A Moran, G Wait, J Wray

The 2011/12 municipal year saw the introduction of a new scrutiny committee. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was created during the split of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee to form a Committee that will be able to shadow the Council's Health and Wellbeing Board that will begin work in 2013.

The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the Health and Wellbeing portfolio as well as leisure and cultural services from the Environmental Services portfolio. Health and Wellbeing covers areas such as; health promotion; liaising with NHS trusts; disability; mental health; ensure the transition of LINKs to Healthwatch; monitor the impacts and outcomes of the health and wellbeing strategy; and the Ageing Well programme.

During its formative year the Committee has had to hit the ground running and get to grips with the issues around health and wellbeing quickly in order to carry out its role effectively. The Committee has received many briefings on the various services and issues it will be scrutinising giving Members all the necessary skills. The Committee has also been communicating regularly with the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board to establish a relationship that will work effectively to hold health services to account.

As well as working to develop an understanding of health services the Committee has considered a number of issues affecting the health and wellbeing of residents of Cheshire East. In July the Committee supported changes to the opening times of the Minor Injuries Unit at Congleton War Memorial Hospital. It was felt that the new arrangements would reduce the risk to employees of lone working and make the unit more efficient by operating during peak times without reducing the level of service available.

In October the Committee supported changes to vascular services in South Cheshire which would ensure that residents would have access to a highly specialised team working in a large centre to which patients could be referred. The Committee is extremely committed to ensuring the health services for residents of Cheshire East are at the highest possible standard and will continue to use its powers to scrutinise performance and help to develop policy.

In January the Committee considered a report on alcohol related harm reduction. Abuse of alcohol and the negative consequences to individuals and the public as a whole is an issue that has received lots of national attention over recent years. The reduction of alcohol abuse and the negative effects alcohol has on health and communities has been a priority to most authorities for a long time. The Committee is keen to make its contribution and, having considered the report, emphasised the importance of educating young people and taking advantage of social media to communicate messages to a wider

audience in a way that young people relate to. The Committee also supported minimum unit pricing and wanted the Council to use licensing powers to reduce the opportunities for all day drinking. The Committee will continue to monitor the issue of alcohol harm to ensure that it remains a priority for the Council and its partners.

The Committee also considered the Ageing Well Programme and how Members can contribute to the making Cheshire East a good place to grow old. The Ageing Well Programme will be important in preparing Cheshire East to deal with the fastest growing ageing population in the North West. The Programme sets out how the Council may go about maximising the opportunities for the ageing population to prepare for the later stages of life maintain their quality of life during later life and have access to person centred services when required. The programme comprises six work streams each with five priorities that will be the focus over the five years of the programme. The Scrutiny Committee has the responsibility to ensure that all of the priorities within the programme are being met to ensure that ageing residents are able to maintain a good quality of life and independence. The Committee will be monitoring the Council's progress regularly over the next five years and where possible contribute to improving access to education, activities and services for the ageing population.

Sustainable Communities

Chairman: Councillor H Murray

Vice Chairman: Councillor M Grant

Committee Membership: A Barratt, G Barton, L Brown, P Hayes, D Hough, J Jackson, B Livesley, M Parsons, G Wait, J Wray

Expert Advisor – E Lam – Police Authority

The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the Safer and Stronger Communities portfolio and the Performance and Capacity portfolio. This covers a wide range of areas including; crime reduction; community safety wardens; environmental health; local area partnerships; corporate and business planning; local development framework; risk management; and customer complaints and responses.

This year the Committee has conducted work on a number of issues that have helped to improve some of the services that the Council and its partners provide. During the 2010-11 municipal year the Committee conducted a review of Community Safety Wardens. In October 2011 the Committee returned to the issue after six months to see how their efforts the previous year had affected the service. The Committee was please to hear that due to some of the changes recommended in its review the Community Safety Wardens (CSW)were more focused and providing a better value for money service. The group had recommended that the CSWs needed to work more closely with the Police. Now operating from Police Stations, the CSWs are able to apportion work with the Police, allowing the Police to concentrate on the more pressing issues. Operational Statistics for CSWs showed increases in activity in the previous six months compared to the six months prior to that. These changes were attributed to the improved co-ordination and joint working with the Police that had been recommended by the Committee. The changes to the service have also produced significant cost savings in addition to improvements in performance. The Committee is pleased with these outcomes but are also keen to continue to monitor the situation to contribute to further improvements in the service.

In August Members of the Committee conducted site visits to the Council's new CCTV base in Macclesfield Town Hall. Having inherited three separate CCTV control units from the legacy authorities Cheshire East decided to rationalise the service by moving all facilities to Macclesfield. Committee Members were invited to attend the new site in order to determine whether they believe the new arrangements would be adequate for the safety of the Borough. The feedback from Members was offered to the Safer and Stronger Communities portfolio holder who welcomed the input of the Committee which would help her decision making in the future.

In September the Committee conducted an investigation into the development of the Council's Library Strategy to advise Cabinet about what it should consider when developing a library strategy in the future. The Committee held a one off meeting at Macclesfield Town Hall during which they interviewed

various officers in order to obtain views on the libraries service and the development of a strategy from various angles within the Council. Having collected their evidence from officers and discussed the issues faced when producing a library strategy the Committee produced a discussion paper and synopsis and presented them to the Informal Cabinet. The recommendations of the Committee were well received by Cabinet and will help in the formulation of a Libraries Strategy early in the new municipal year. Non-members of the Committee who attended the meeting in Macclesfield to observe said they thought the process had been an effective way to gather information from officers and were pleased with the conclusions that the Committee had reached. The Committee is hoping to use this innovative method of investigation in scrutiny on other issues in the near future and other Committees are commended to take advantage of this kind of process.

In November the Committee gave its support to setting up a formal agreement for delivery of Road Safety between Cheshire East Council, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cheshire Police. In the new agreement the Council will be responsible for road maintenance and the Police for enforcement. The Fire and Rescue Service would provide education on road safety specifically to primary school children as pedestrians and cyclists and those about to leave secondary school to prepare them for learning to drive. The Fire and Rescue Service also run Think Drive Survive courses for secondary schools and Members of the Committee will be attending their local event in summer 2012 to see how effective they are and get the feedback of the pupils.

At its meeting in February the Committee made recommendations on improvements to the management of Section 106 agreements and funds. As awareness amongst about where on a ward by ward basis such funds had been and consequently were unable to monitor the situation and ensure that Section 106 monies were spent. The Committee recommended that a document used Members should receive regular updates on section 106 monies to allow them to monitor activity and ensure that funds were spent on improvements to their wards.

In April the Committee considered the impact the introduction on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would have on Section 106 agreements and how the negative impact of developments would be mitigated. CIL funds will be spent on improvements across the Borough which will aid in ensuring that infrastructure is capable of accommodating new developments and the growth of communities. Concerns had been expressed about the level of funding that would be retained in the vicinity of a development to improve the area in the way that Section 106 is set up to do. The Committee recommended to Council that at least 50% of funds should be retained within local areas to ensure that local people gain from having new developments placed in their community.

Lessons Learned

At the end of the 2011/2012 municipal year, the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group undertook an 'end of term' review of the scrutiny function.

The Group summarised its findings as follows:

Scrutiny Chairmen's Group

It was generally accepted that the Scrutiny Chairmen's Group Works well. The style of meeting has changed in 2011/12 and is more business focussed with formal style agendas. It has spent less time looking back at the work of individual committees and has focussed on topical issues common to the whole of the scrutiny function, particularly those relating to the development and improvement of Scrutiny. Due to the increased work of the Group, Members feel that Scrutiny as a higher profile and Cabinet give more attention to the scrutiny process.

Questioning techniques

There are many examples where scrutiny committees have missed an opportunity to get the best out of visiting officers and members. The Scrutiny Toolkit provides simple guidance about questioning techniques and Members are asked to take note of that advice. Too often members fall into the trap of making statements rather than asking direct questions. There are good examples of occasions when Members have extracted incisive and valuable information from targeted questioning. One particular example was the informal meeting of Sustainable Communities that undertook a spotlight review of library services. This review was conducted in private but was considered to be a success by all participants.

Scrutiny Engagement with the Public

Although significant developments have occurred in this area through the recent improvements to the website including the introduction of a twitter account and Chairman's blog facility, there is very little tangible evidence that the Scrutiny is engaging with the residents of Cheshire East.

Task and Finish Groups

Task and Finish groups have provided a vehicle for the most productive and well received work by Overview and Scrutiny. Scrutiny has completed 3 reviews this year. Without exception they have been well received by Cabinet. Furthermore, in most cases the recommendations have been accepted in their entirety. Although time consuming, the original work undertaken by Task and Finish groups is having a direct influence on the strategic direction of the Council, and those members who have been on Task and Finish report that it is a rewarding and interesting part of the Scrutiny process.

Cross Cutting Issues

There are still areas where improvements could be made to the structure to enable Scrutiny to deal with cross cutting issues more effectively. One example is the area of safeguarding. Although there is no desire to review structures annually, there are some areas which need to be addressed.

Committees

Generally, the committees operate in a spirit of co-operation and function in a non political arena. This is positive and in keeping with the principles of good scrutiny.

No action required

One of the pitfalls that academics in the field of Scrutiny warn local authorities against is allowing agendas to be dominated by items to be merely noted. Items to be noted are relatively common Cheshire East but should be avoided. There are other avenues for members to note matters of interest. Scrutiny agendas should be constructed so that the Committees always add value to the work of the Council.

Member Involvement

For a scrutiny function to work well, it must be led by its Members. Cheshire East should encourage its Members to actively contribute to the work programme more than they currently do and efforts should be made to increase the cohort of Members involved Task and Finish work.

1:1s

1:1s should be used more consistently – they provide an excellent opportunity to build up good relations between the Cabinet Member Scrutiny and senior officers and allow matters to be rehearsed in an informal setting.

Policy Development

Members feel that they should have an involvement in policy development from an earlier stage to allow them to influence the policies of the Council. Committees should be proactive in reviewing the Council's policies or developing new ones.