

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13



Scrutiny provides Councillors, not part of Stockton Council's decision-making Cabinet, the opportunity to review decisions, policies and performance that affect the Borough. Scrutiny is a Councillor-led process which helps to ensure that the Council's services and policies meet the needs of local people according to the Council's own aims and standards.

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The scrutiny process not only provides a means of reviewing the Council's own achievements against its planned targets but can also examine services provided by other public organisations on issues causing public concern. It provides the opportunity for Councillors to champion the issues of local concern to residents and participate in the development of new policies. At Stockton, the Council's scrutiny committees are called Select Committees and they make recommendations to the Council and other organisations following in-depth investigations.

## Work during 2012/13

During the past year, the Scrutiny Work Programme has focused on a wide range of topics including reviews of public facing services as well as internally focused efficiency work.

In addition to their review work programme, all Select Committees take the opportunity to review the impact of previous reviews and recommendations. Some key achievements and outcomes highlighted from the monitoring of past reviews include:

- Democratic Services achieved Customer Services Excellence and Charter Plus
- A bid for funding to the Weekly Collections Support Scheme was successful, and refuse and recycling rounds are now re-configured
- The Visitor Information Centre now operates from the Rediscover Stockton shop on Stockton High Street
- An Economic Strategy Team is now in place
- A smaller statutory ceremony room for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies was opened together with a larger ceremony room (Nightingale Suite) providing a greater choice of venues for customers and has generated additional income for the Council
- NHS funding for carers services has been secured until 30.9.16
- Funding for outdoor exercise equipment has been secured which will provide two outdoor gym areas within the Borough

This report presents a summary of the work of the Council's Select Committees during 2012/13. Details about the membership of the Select Committees and further information about all of the scrutiny investigations and reports and recommendations can be found at [add link](#)

Our **Executive Scrutiny Committee** co-ordinates the Scrutiny Work Programme providing a strategic steer for the work of the Select Committees. In addition, the Committee:

- Sets and monitors the **Scrutiny Work Programmes** and allocates work to each Select Committee
- Receives quarterly **Performance Management** information identifying potential areas for further scrutiny and reports on the Council's **Medium Term Financial Plan**
- Receives the **Forward Plan** of decisions to be made by Cabinet so that Members can request further information about forthcoming issues and reports
- Receives **Chair's Updates** from each of the seven themed Select Committees in order to share best practice and ideas on topics under investigation

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The **Housing and Community Safety Select Committee**, is the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee. As part of its role an annual meeting is held to examine crime and disorder matters and discuss any matters of local concern.

The Committee undertook a review of tobacco control throughout 2012/13. Split into two phases the Committee examined the regulatory services involvement and also the public health perspective. Stockton Council's Trading Standards and Environment Departments, FRESH NE, and HM Revenues and Customs all contribute to the tobacco control agenda through actions such as regular test purchasing, labelling and legislation compliance, tackling the supply of counterfeit/smuggled tobacco, monitoring the advertising of tobacco products, and partnership working.

The scope of the public health phase focused on preventing smoking uptake by young people, strengthening stop smoking services, reducing the level of smoking in pregnancy, and targeting vulnerable groups helping to reduce health inequalities. The Committee was pleased to receive strong support from the Chief Executive of the North Tees and Hartlepool Hospitals Foundation Trust for ideas to help reduce the instances of smoking whether undertaken by health professionals or the in the Trust itself especially in an attempt to make the hospital grounds smoke free.

During the review the issue of Teesside Pension Fund investment in tobacco companies was raised. A referral from Council and then Executive Scrutiny Committee asked the select committee to consider incorporating evidence and recommendations in the scrutiny review final report. Evidence was therefore obtained from representatives of the Teesside Pension Fund to investigate the ethical issues raised regarding investment in the tobacco industry.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Lobby for legislation for the positive licensing of wholesalers/retailers before they can supply tobacco products and for no smoking zones around the entrances to public access buildings and areas – in particular pubs, clubs, hospitals, schools, shopping centres, parks and play areas
- Introduce a voluntary code of smokefree practice in and around designated children's play areas
- Encourage Stockton Borough Council to work towards achieving the North East Better Health at Work Gold Award and register the Council's commitment to tobacco control as part of the Public Health Responsibility Deal
- Explore improved and increased partnership working with Schools, Colleges, Youth Service and Fire Service as well as increased opportunities for brief intervention training with Housing and Social Care staff to promote the Stop Smoking Service.
- Request the Teesside Pension Fund to seek the views of fund members (current, past and retired and including the other local authorities who are part of the fund) on divesting from tobacco.

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The **Corporate and Social Inclusion Select Committee** undertook a review examining the benefits of its subscription to the Local Government Association (LGA) and other outside bodies to which the Council subscribes.

Spending over £300,000 annually, the Committee recognised the cost to the Council of all outside body memberships, subscriptions to journals, magazines and newspapers, portals, licenses, and professional body memberships. The Committee's review examined the value for money and benefits of membership for Stockton Council.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Continue Stockton Council's use of a rolling notice for membership to the LGA whereby the Chief Executive writes informing the LGA annually
- Develop and apply specific criteria to determine the membership of all outside bodies and professional organisations
- Develop and improve the circulation and sharing of information and learning from membership to outside bodies utilising all available resources such as the Council's Intranet

The Committee then went on to review the Council's energy supply. With electricity costing the Council £3.3m, plus £1.4m spent on gas and both showing significant price volatility and a longer term upward trend, the Committee carried out its review to begin to identify a cost effective route to procurement of energy over a period of 20 to 25 years.

During the review the ability to benefit from renewable energy became a reality with the installation of photovoltaic (PV) cells on Council buildings. In particular a link between the PV cells and electric charging points provides the opportunity for 'free energy' to charge electric cars leased to Stockton Council from electricity generated 'by Stockton Council'.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Promote the use of photovoltaic cells wherever possible on Council owned properties and elsewhere
- Update the Sustainable Construction Policy to reflect all advances in renewable energy technology to ensure buildings are as energy efficient as possible while delivering value for money
- Make use of the electric cars that have been leased to Stockton Council whenever possible
- Ensure Stockton Council's cost of operation of pool cars is fully offset by reduction in business mileage
- Consider initiatives such as Energy Service Companies to aid future energy supply for the Council regarding their positive contribution to meeting the Council's objective on future energy supply

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The **Children and Young People Select Committee** undertook a review of quality and sufficiency of childcare which included looking at the support available to private / voluntary / independent nurseries, school nurseries, and childminders to improve their Ofsted ratings.

It was noted that there has been an improvement in the percentage of childminders and childcare settings achieving good or outstanding at their Ofsted inspections over the last year. However, there are still some improvements to be made if the Borough is to match the ratings achieved both in the North East and England as a whole.

The Committee found that support and toolkits have been made available to help childcare providers to improve their ratings, however providers are independent of the Council and therefore cannot be required to engage with improvement activities. The recommendations therefore aimed to tackle the barriers to engagement.

The review also looked to ensure that there will be enough childcare places available in the borough to meet demand, especially when the free 15 hours childcare entitlement for three and four year olds is extended to all disadvantage two year olds. The Committee found that there were sufficient places for three and four years olds, and work was on-going to secure places for the two year old offer.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Improve the information available to parents when choosing childcare
- Consider locality based networks for all childcare providers to share good practice, give peer support, ease the transition between childcare and school, and embed a single approach to monitoring children progress at Early Year Foundation Stage
- Consider commissioned peer support utilising good quality childminders from the network
- Continue to oversee the introduction of the two year old offer and ensuring any gaps in provision for all childcare are identified and resolved

The **Adult Services and Health Select Committee**, as part of the Council's Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Programme, carried out an in-depth review of the Learning Disability Services examining the commissioning, care planning, and provision of adult social care services for people with learning disabilities.

Learning Disability Services are provided to over 560 working age people in Stockton Borough, a figure projected to grow by 11% by 2030. It was found that there was scope to improve local services whilst at the same time achieving improved value for money.

The Committee's proposals were subject to 12 weeks of public consultation, and the feedback was broadly supportive of the proposals. Cabinet agreed the Committee's final report and the full report can be found on the Council's website. An action plan drawn up to take forward the recommendations included the following key points:

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- There should be only one building based day service in the Borough at Allensway focused on providing services for people with complex needs, and service users without complex needs should be supported to access services in existing community settings and new provision in Billingham
- As a general principle the Council should enable more people with learning disabilities to have access to more independent living opportunities, and reduce the use of residential care
- For those whose assessed needs would still be best met through residential care, the Council should aim to increase the range of in-Borough placements to reduce the use of out of Borough placements
- The Council should explore the commissioning of new autism provision in the Borough

As part of the same EIT programme, Members have also started to review the Council's Adult Mental Health Social Care Services. Members have reviewed day time activities, respite, rehabilitation, service user and carer involvement services, and the potential to increase the use of personal budgets. A number of proposals for change were put forward for public consultation between March and June 2013, and the results will be used to inform the final recommendations later this year.

The Committee has been kept up to date with the progress of the NHS Hartlepool and Stockton Clinical Commissioning Group before its 'go-live' in April 2013, the re-development of the Billingham Health Centre, and the commissioning of the new HealthWatch Stockton service that has taken over the role of Stockton LINK together with key additional functions such as signposting.

Members of the Committee continue to be involved in the work of the Tees Valley and Regional Joint Health Scrutiny Committees. During 2012/13, these committees have monitored the transition in NHS and Public Health Services across the region, together with maintaining an overview of key issues such as NHS 111. The Regional Committee has completed its monitoring of the implementation of the regional review of the health needs of ex-service personnel.

During 2012/13, the Government consulted on changes to the Health Scrutiny Regulation and the Committee informed the Council's response. Another key development has been the Francis Report into the failures at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust, and there were a number of recommendations in relation to the role that health scrutiny plays in monitoring the quality of local services.

An important part of the current arrangements is when the Committee considers the Quality Accounts of local NHS Trusts. This year the Committee once again reviewed the Quality Account of North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust in conjunction with Stockton LINK. Further developing its approach to this agenda, including responding to the Francis Report, will be a key area of work for the Committee in 2013/14.

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The **Environment Select Committee** dealt with a review of affordable warmth, which is defined as “the ability to heat a property sufficiently for health and comfort without incurring financial hardship”. There are recognised links between living in cold conditions and poor health and it is predicted that the number of people living in fuel poverty will increase significantly. The review examined the three major causes of fuel poverty – energy efficiency of properties, fuel costs, and household income – and assessed the success of initiatives and schemes which had already been carried out in the borough to address fuel poverty.

The Committee appreciated the work of SBC and its partners to not only help those in fuel poverty or struggling with their energy bills, but also to prevent households becoming fuel poor. The importance of partnership work and sharing data in targeting schemes and initiatives was recognised and the Committee noted the effectiveness of the holistic approach to tackling fuel poverty that many schemes took, giving residents access to a range of different measures.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions of properties, and reduce fuel poverty rates in Stockton borough
- Form a Fuel Poverty Partnership to bring together key stakeholders to monitor the strategy and lead on securing funding and delivering initiatives
- Investigate potential funding mechanisms to support and develop strategies to promote the new Green Deal ‘loans’ scheme
- Evaluate current and planned projects to measure and understand their long term health impacts, carbon efficiency, social and economic impacts, reduced supplies and services budgets

In addition Members undertook a task and finish review of Community Safety and Security Services, focusing on residents’ satisfaction. They received the results of several customer feedback surveys including Viewpoint, IPSOS MORI Resident Survey, and the service quarterly customer satisfaction survey as well as performance data showing the number of compliments and complaints received.

The data presented to the Committee showed that the services were performing well with crime rates lower than in other Tees Valley Local Authorities and the national average whilst receiving positive customer feedback. The Committee supported:

- Collaboration between Tees Valley Authorities regarding the provision of CCTV / community alarm services infrastructure
- The development of an online service to enable members of the public access to review their cases and check progress
- An assessment by Vela Homes of the impact of changes to the concierge services within 12 months following their introduction.

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The **Regeneration and Transport Select Committee** concentrated on its review of empty and abandoned residential properties. The scope of the review included consideration of increased powers to bring non-decent properties back into use; increased Council Tax income and production of savings on temporary accommodation expenditure; and an increase in New Homes Bonus to the Council.

At the beginning of the Scrutiny Review it was reported that the number of empty homes in Stockton amounted to £2.12m in 'lost' council tax. The Committee heard how the Local Government Finance Act now provides councils more flexibility over the Council Tax charges that can be levied on certain empty properties. Stockton Council's removal of most exemptions whilst charging a premium for properties empty more than two years is meant to address the 'lost' revenue.

The Committee concluded that, although there is no shortage of legislation to deal with empty properties, the process to address the problem was time and resource intensive. Therefore the main focus for the review was the availability of funding and staffing for the Council to facilitate the return of empty properties back into use.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Explore a business case for an invest to save opportunity to provide additional staff from increases in Council Tax and/or investment reserves to tackle the problem of empty homes through proactive and reactive work across Private Sector Housing and Planning Enforcement
- Reprioritise empty properties (empty just over 6 months) to identify those that can be brought back into use sooner
- Increase publicity of successes for empty properties brought back into use to assist tackling this issue
- Explore a business case for utilising one off funding allocation, with an annual top up, to cover the costs of works in default
- Use the Enforced Sale Procedure to take action to recover debts in excess of £1,000 through enforcing the sale of the empty property and ensuring its return to use



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The **Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee** reviewed the marketing of Stockton's Visitor Offer during significant change to the support arrangements for the visitor economy both locally and across the region resulting from reduced funding across the public sector, and a number of organisational reviews. The Committee found that there had been major changes to the regional support arrangements following the abolition of One North East and Visit Tees Valley. Within the Council the dedicated tourism support service was reconfigured with the visitor economy supported locally by the Business Engagement Team focused on encouraging business growth across all sectors.

Key outcomes from the recommendations seek to:

- Enhance the quality of life aspects of marketing materials
- Provide a dedicated section for visitors to the Borough on the new Stockton Council website
- Support the development of a dedicated Stockton Borough heritage website
- Ensure the Council's continuation to take advantage of all appropriate opportunities to highlight the railway-related heritage of the Borough.

## How can I get involved?

All select committee meetings are open to the public and information on the current work of a committee is displayed on our website ([add link](#)). If you have experience of, or an interest in, any of the topics under review, you can get involved by contacting a member of the scrutiny team.

You may also have an issue that you feel a select committee should look at as part of its work. All requests will be considered and a decision will be made on the most appropriate way forward.

Please note that scrutiny is not the correct forum for dealing with individual complaints about Council services. There is no guarantee that all requests will be investigated by a select committee although you will always receive an explanation of what action has been taken.

If you have any suggestions please email Scrutiny at the following address: [scrutiny@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@stockton.gov.uk)

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If you would like this information in any other language or format for example **large print** or audio please contact 'Scrutiny Team' on 01642 528957.

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال 'بدايفرستي تيم' [Scrutiny Team] على هاتف رقم 01642 528957

ARABIC

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MANDARIN

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسیتی (گوندگونی) [Scrutiny Team] با شماره 01642 528957 به تماس شوید

FARSI

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations dans d'autres langues ou sous un autre format, par exemple, en gros caractères / version audio, veuillez contacter l'équipe "Scrutiny" au n° 01642 528957

FRENCH

ئەگەر حەرت لێ بە ئەم زانبارە بە دەستت بگەوتت بە زمانەکانی تر یان بە شیوەیەکی تر بۆ نمونە جایی گەورە/یان بەتێبی تۆمارکراو نکایە بەیوەندی بگە بە 'تیمی دایفیرستی' [Scrutiny Team] لە سەر زمارەکی ئەلەفۆن 01642 528957

KURDISH

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਥੱਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 'Scrutiny Team' ਨੂੰ 01642 528957 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

PUNJABI

آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز میں (مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ) کے لیے درخواستیں حاصل کرنا چاہیں تو ذرا نیچے دیئے گئے نمبر (Scrutiny Team) کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے 01642 528957

URDU