
SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16



What is scrutiny?

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 the Council's services and policies meet the needs of local people according to the Council's own aims and standards.

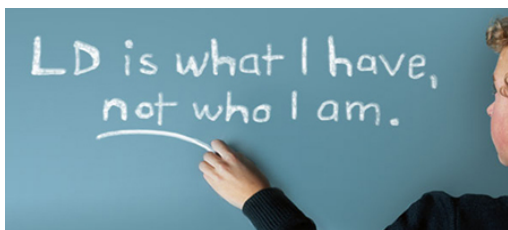
Contents

Adult Services and Health Select Committee.....	Page 2
Children and Young People Select Committee.....	Page 3
Crime and Disorder Select Committee.....	Page 4
People Select Committee.....	Page 5
Place Select Committee	Page 6
Executive Scrutiny Committee.....	Page 7
Regional Health Scrutiny.....	Page 8
Police and Crime Panel.....	Page 9

Adult Services and Health Select Committee

The aim of the Access to Services for People with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism review was to examine two main issues. They were the uptake of GP-led annual health checks and the general accessibility of universal, community services.

People with learning disabilities have significantly poorer health and shorter life expectancies than their non-disabled peers. Annual health checks for people with learning disabilities are intended to help address this issue but the Committee found that overall Stockton's GP Practices were found to not perform well and recommendations were put forward to prompt improvements.



In relation to universal and community services the Committee found that although it was not possible to measure the take up of services by this client group Members have considered a number of good practice examples of service delivery across several schemes. However further

work was identified in order to improve consistency and awareness of the needs of these client groups. This includes making awareness training available for Council staff delivering community based services whilst in the community support will be available to raise awareness of the Safe Place Scheme. It came across in evidence many times that getting services right for people with learning difficulties and/or autism meant that we would get it right for all client groups.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to the people around them

A key event was the publication of North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust's Care Quality Commission Inspection Report. Published in February 2016 with an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' the report was considered so that Members could be updated on findings and the early action plan. Identified issues included nursing recruitment, staffing levels, hospital environment, and risk/governance issues to which the Committee will monitor progress.



Visit to local Daisy Chain Autism Charity to inform the Access to Services Review

Committee Members are increasingly undertaking visits to frontline services in Adult Social Care. This year councillors have visited STES/Sporting STEPS, Rosedale Rehabilitation and Assessment Centre, Allenway Day Centre, the Halcyon Centre and LiveWell Dementia Hub. Members were impressed with all services visited which enabled them to have much greater insight into the issues within their remit.

Children and Young People Select Committee

The Scrutiny Review of School Organisation and Admission Arrangements completed its second phase which sought to understand the demand for reception places across the Borough and examined the wider aspects of the approach to school organisation in Stockton.

With increased demand at primary school level the main issue and overall aim of this aspect of the review was to consider the challenge faced by the Council to meet parental preferences at an acceptable level for reception class intake in 2016 and subsequent years. With significant housing developments across the borough this also needed to be taken into account.



Every school has an 'admissions zone', a defined geographic area where a school is located and from where it will draw most of its pupils. Parents are entitled to apply for a place at any school on the understanding that strict criteria is applied to deal with over-subscription and priority for children within the admissions zone.

In addition to the usual committee meetings Members travelled throughout the borough to hold information gathering sessions in order to listen to the views of parents, governors, and school leaders as part of a consideration of options and alternatives in school organisation.

Every year around 2,500 pupils living in the borough join a primary school.

Further work will now be undertaken with Secondary Head Teachers and Principals to plan for the increasing pressure on secondary places. Particular socio and demographic information will be examined for Ingleby Barwick.

The current zone arrangements will remain in place but a feasibility exercise will be undertaken to determine the need for any adjustments required. Improved communication with parents to explain the equal ranking system will also be introduced.

In order to strengthen the Committee's quality assurance role its Members undertook 16 to front line services and requested formal responses to feedback from those visits. In addition, they interviewed all the managers of children's homes in the borough at a special meeting.

Crime and Disorder Select Committee

With 539 river crossing structures in the borough of which 372 are in the ownership of the Council varying enormously from historically significant bridges to wooden footbridges in parks and drainage culverts that run under highways the economic importance is not realised until they are not in use. Whole Government Accounting calculated the gross replacement cost of Stockton's stock at £393 million.



When Newport Bridge closed for remedial work the 30,000 vehicles per day that used it had to make use of the Tees flyover which already carried 100,000 vehicles per day resulted in long delays to journeys to and from Middlesbrough which demonstrated the fragile nature of the existing infrastructure.

The Review of the River Tees Crossing Infrastructure raised particular concern about the Teesside Park access which underwent remedial work during the period of the review at a cost of £1.5 million. With approximately 6.25 million visits per annum it highlighted the likely financial impact if it lost its only access route.

The only source of funds has been the Local Transport Plan budgets which are not sufficient to cover the scale of investment needed without having a major impact on other highway maintenance programmes. A 'challenge fund' now exists but this requires at least a 10 per cent investment from local authority resources.

The review recommendations have developed a robust asset management plan to be developed with a linked five year investment strategy to oversee the bridges and structures in Stockton Borough.

Teesside Park access will be monitored more frequently to ensure it remains viable and structurally sound whilst other bridges and structures are reviewed with a view to disposing of or demolishing redundant assets if feasible and cost effective.



People Select Committee

Choice Based Lettings (CBL) is designed to give greater choice and transparency when accessing social housing by enabling applicants to 'bid' for advertised properties to which they are suitably matched. This system has been in place since 2009 as part of a Tees Valley-wide scheme named 'Compass'.



The Committee's Scrutiny Review of Choice Based Lettings informed Stockton Council's response to the Tees Valley Partnership review of its scheme focused on the operation of the bidding system and marketing aspects of CBL.

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to develop and maintain an allocations policy that Registered Providers must adhere to when managing and allocating their social housing stock.

Examination of an amended bidding process proposed by Compass was recommended for support which will see improved advertising of properties and faster allocation of properties for suitable tenants. Members were very keen to see improvements in the marketing of social housing and the customer experience.

The Committee also looked at Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). FASD is a permanent, lifelong neurological issue caused solely by drinking alcohol during pregnancy and is therefore completely preventable, but public awareness remains relatively low.

There has been considerable preventative work undertaken by Stockton's Public Health Team in conjunction with locally based charity FASD Network, and Members agreed there was a strong foundation to do further work.



Recommendations were made to increase awareness of FASD, and undertake further preventative work with partner organisations. Members recognised that this was a sensitive issue and key messages also needed to be targeted at male partners recognising their supportive role.

Alex Cunningham MP for Stockton North is an active campaigner raising the profile of the effects of alcohol in pregnancy working with various groups as well as asking questions and taking part in debates in Parliament. He welcomed the Committee's report and its contents which he would put to use in any further debates on FASD.

Place Select Committee

The Committee began the year by focusing on a review topic requested by the Council's Corporate Management Team examining boundary signs around the borough. This followed the publication of the draft Traffic Signs Regulation and General Directions (TSRGD) proposing revisions including greater flexibility to the design of boundary signs to enable local authorities to foster a better sense of place and geographic qualities often associated with particular areas.

The Committee agreed that in terms of historical county boundary signs to limit the number of signs to reduce the likelihood of street clutter as well the level of confusion for motorists. Ceremonial boundary signs of Durham and Yorkshire would occur at the River Tees crossings at Princess of Wales, Victoria, Jubilee, and Yarm Bridges.



Local public consultation about historic boundary signs supported their introduction but differences of opinion were expressed about the wording that should be adopted. The review was put into abeyance until Department for Transport guidance is published.



The Committee then reviewed kerbside waste collection, a key council service which affects all residents of the borough. Particular focus was on the recycling rate that is achieved in the borough as approximately 30 per cent of general waste contains material that could be recycled. If disposed of correctly Stockton Council's recycling rate would be 44.9 per cent and match the national target.

Green waste was also addressed as the 'seasonal service' takes place over 26 weeks from Easter onwards resulting in residents disposing of early cuttings or winter pruning amongst the residual waste stream.

Stockton Council will actively consult to determine residents views on kerbside recycling increase recycling participation rates in the future. The collection of green waste collection will be reviewed including examining alternative collection arrangements.

The annual rate of increase in household recycling rates in England has been slowing over the past three years to the most recent annual increase of just 0.2 per cent.

DEFRA (2013) IN 'THE UR[BIN] ISSUE'

Executive Scrutiny Committee

As the coordinator of the scrutiny work programme it provides a strategic steer for the work of the Select Committees and in addition:

- Receives regular 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; and
- Receives Chairs' Updates from each of the five themed Select Committee in order to share best practice and ideas on topics under investigation.

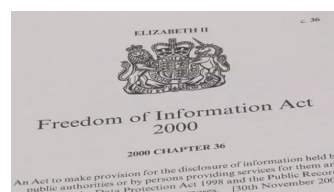
This year the Committee held a developmental session to further improve its role. Members suggested a range of improvements that will see the Committee gain a greater understanding into the work of each Select Committee, and received more information on national and regional developments affecting scrutiny as a whole.

Although it doesn't undertake its own reviews it often acts as a conduit for officer led departmental scrutiny receiving findings and enabling commentary and challenge before final reports are presented to Cabinet.



During 2015-16 the Committee commented on an officer led review of Consultation which recommended a combined Consultation, Community Engagement, and Communications Strategy as well as the development of a Stakeholder Consultation Portal for use throughout Stockton Council.

Comments were also given on the officer led review of Freedom of Information Requests. This recommended a range of actions to better manage requests for information due to the volume and time required to respond.



Regional Health Scrutiny

Stockton Council is part of two standing Joint Health Scrutiny Committees, the Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, and the North East Regional Health Scrutiny Committee

Redcar and Cleveland Council hosted the Tees Valley Committee which considered a number of emerging and ongoing issues including, South Tees Hospital Trust's CQC Inspection Report, the Regional Back Pain Programme, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Transformation Plans, and the performance of the Tees, Esk, and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

The Committee, following a suggestion from Stockton Council, receives regular reports on the performance of the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS). Members continue to scrutinise the recruitment efforts of NEAS and their work to reduce the reliance on third-party providers. They also met the new Chief Executive to discuss future plans of NEAS.

The North East Committee has been hosted by Hartlepool Council. A key issue was a regional review of neonatal services. The Committee challenged the proposals to have fewer intensive care units in the region, and the proposals affecting the Tees area were postponed to be considered more closely as part of the Better Health Programme (see below). It also reinforced the need to have a dedicated neonatal transport service in the region and was pleased to receive an update in June 2016 confirming its establishment.

The Committee also considered the North East Fast Track project (Learning Disability Transformation Programme) aimed at increasing the numbers of people with learning disabilities living in the community and out of NHS inpatient care. The Committee very much agreed with the principles of the project agreeing to formally monitor the project at a regional level in particular how it impacted on local authorities. This aligned with the work of Stockton Council's ASH Select Committee and informed their work (see page 2).

The Better Health Programme will be a major piece of work for health scrutiny in the Durham, Tees Valley and North Yorkshire areas during 2016-17. The Programme is particularly focused on acute care in hospitals and how high quality services can be achieved and maintained, given the pressures facing the local east economy. The local NHS states that it needs to enact change or risk a continually declining level of quality. Services to be considered include urgent and emergency care, acute medicine and surgery, and maternity/paediatrics. Commissioners are also increasingly looking at how out of hospital care can be improved.

Formal consultation is planned for late 2016 and a joint committee made up of the affected councils has been established.

Police and Crime Panel

The Cleveland Police and Crime Panel agreed the Scrutiny Work Programme arranging for task and finish groups to examine victims' services, shared services, and the overall budget strategy of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

In October 2014 the Commissioner took on new responsibilities to commission further services for victims and witnesses of crime and from April 2016 would commission victim referral services and specialist support based on local need. The task and finish group learned that a new contract provider was being sought to commence for a four year term and therefore felt that the timing of this review should be revisited to allow the successful applicant time to provide services before scrutinising the performance of the new service. The Group recommended to reschedule the review during 2017-18 when the performance of the service can be scrutinised.



Another task and finish group was established to understand the key issues and financial pressures as part of the budget setting process in order to inform the work of the Panel and PCC.

The Office of the PCC assumed that the funding and precept would continue to increase by 1.99% until 2019-20 with anything greater triggering a local referendum. The vast majority of properties in Cleveland would see increases of 5-7 pence per week in their Council Tax bills.

Assumptions were also made regarding government grant reductions so the total funding projections for the next four years is expected to provide a cash neutral position. With an overall general improvement than previously forecast the force is having to deliver services with effectively the same level of finance. Any investment in priority areas will have to be found within current resources.

The force was attempting to retain 1,292 officers and 132 police community support officers to deliver services in line with PCC priorities from PCC monies provided to the Chief Constable.

The report of the task and finish group was accepted by the Panel and the precept was subsequently adopted.

With the term of the Police and Crime Commissioner ending in 2016 it was agreed to delay the commencement of the review of shared services until after the election for the PCC which took place on 5 May 2016.