



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2014 - 2015

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the 2014-15 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for Ashfield District Council. This report provides the opportunity to review last year's activity and to look ahead to the work of scrutiny over the next year.

Following the May elections this year, many new members were elected to the Council. We began by firstly reviewing the Scrutiny workplan to try to capture the broad range of issues that constituents told us were their main concerns. These included both services delivered by the Council and by external partners.

Development of the workplan, to ensure that we are both proactive and reactive, is an ongoing process with the Committee monitoring and reviewing topics for inclusion at each subsequent meeting.

This report details the activity of scrutiny during 2014 / 2015 and includes details of reviews undertaken, organisational considerations, performance challenge and any other activity that Scrutiny has been involved with during this period.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Panels continue to be a very important contributor to the consideration, delivery and review of both Council services and issues effecting the community.

The work of scrutiny has been supported by officers, partners external representatives and the community throughout the year and this has helped Scrutiny put forward some evidenced based recommendations aimed at adding value to both Council services and community concerns.

I would like the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those people who have contributed to and supported the work of Scrutiny in the last year and look forward to working with you again in the next twelve months.

COUNCILLOR LEE ANDERSON – CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

INTRODUCTION

Ashfield District Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and two Scrutiny Panels (A and B). The Scrutiny function has an essential role in the democratic process. It was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000 which placed a requirement on all local authorities to have an Overview and Scrutiny function to hold Cabinet to account.

It is also about listening to the concerns of local people and can review how external partners are performing, recommending improvements where necessary.

The aim of the work of Scrutiny is to ultimately improve services and the quality of life of Ashfield residents. This is achieved in the following ways:

- Monitoring Council Performance;
- Developing and Reviewing policy;
- Reviewing issues of community concern;
- External Scrutiny

The Council's Constitution states that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must report annually to Council on its workings and make recommendations for future work programmes (workplan). The workplan is developed in consultation with all elected Members, officers and the community. It has also recently been agreed that it become a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda to ensure that Members are updated on the progress of the reviews and

allowing flexibility for additional items to be added if necessary.

Recent national legislation to strengthen the Scrutiny process has included the following which have been recognised by Scrutiny in Ashfield;

- The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 includes requirements for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive certain petitions and review the Council's responses to petitions at the request of the petition organiser in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme.
- The Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced requirements in April 2009 that all local authorities have in place arrangements, either individually or jointly with other local authorities, for committees which will review, scrutinise, and report on the decisions made and actions taken by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.
- "Councillor Call for Action" (CCfA) was introduced under Section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Act), and came into force on 1st April, 2009. The statutory requirement applies to all Councils in England (with the exception of Parish Councils) regardless of their Executive arrangements. The Act enables any Member of the Council to refer to an overview and scrutiny committee any local government matter which affects their ward or division. The power to refer a matter is available only where the matter is of direct concern to the ward or division which the Councillor represents.

Overview and Scrutiny Activity

Scrutiny has considered a number of key issues throughout the year from both the scheduled workplan, issues raised throughout the year by residents of the District and through performance matters.

These include:

- **Tenants Charter**
- **Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse**
- **Street Works in the District**
- **Procurement**
- **Communications**
- **Fats, Oils & Greases**
- **Effectiveness of Councillor Surgeries**
- **Attendance Management**

Those issues considered include issues raised by the community, Councillors and Officers and are aimed at adding value to both the community and quality of services delivered by the Council.



Scrutiny Panel A Chair – Councillor Cath Mason and Vice Chair – Councillor Joanne Donnelly



Scrutiny Panel B Chair – Councillor Amanda Brown and Vice Chair – Councillor Lauren Mitchell

TENANTS CHARTER

Ashfield Homes invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the proposals for an update to the Tenants Charter in June 2015. Scrutiny had previously been involved with the development of the prior Tenants Compact, which had been in place since 2011.

Ashfield Homes Limited have had a 'Tenant Compact' from 2011. This document outlines their commitment to tenant participation, and how tenants can be involved in the various ways to design and influence tenant services.

In 2015, this document was reviewed, updated and rebranded as the 'Tenants Charter'. Overview and Scrutiny were previously involved in the development of the Compact and were invited to consider the refresh to the document before any changes were made.

In considering the Charter, Members of the Committee invited representatives from both Ashfield Homes and Council officers to present the draft document and review the planned changes.

Key to the original Tenants Compact was the recognition that tenants' power to influence decisions, and AHL's willingness to be influenced, results in management policies that tenants support,

excellent services that tenants expect, and financial investment that tenants want; whilst acknowledging that some tenants want to be involved only in a limited way, whilst others want to tailor different participation options to suit their particular needs and circumstances. Members were clear that these principles should be maintained in the new Tenants Charter.

Members of the Committee were informed that the current profile of 'involved' tenants primarily consists of tenants of an older age group and was therefore not necessarily representative of the customer base as a whole. The review of the 2011 Tenants Compact aimed to redress this imbalance and ensure as many tenants as possible from as broad and representative a range of backgrounds and circumstances, are able to get involved and influence the work of AHL, in a positive and meaningful way to ensure that the views of all tenants are taken into account.



In undertaking the review of the Compact, Members were informed that Ashfield Homes undertook road show events,

surveys, consultations with Tenants Gateway, Annual Tenants Conference, and good practice.

The findings from this consultation suggested a number of changes would be welcomed. These included;

- opening the Tenants Gateway to community groups, and removal of the 4 yr time limit on places
- change the Mini Gateway name to Supported Housing Gateway to reflect the target audience
- Introduce a Youth Gateway for younger tenants and tenants children (16-25 yrs)
- Re-launch the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to maintain an overview of service delivery
- Grants for Community Groups - consider funds held prior to releasing funding
- Re-introduce Tenants Voices on estates where there is no active community group
- Introduce Tenants Champions - volunteers to support and advise others on welfare reform, energy efficiency or using IT
- Youth Engagement, working with local schools to plan a programme of estate walkabouts and litter picking
- Local events - Annual road shows/fun days to be held in each of the four areas of the district every summer
- Outreach work- to existing groups such as youth groups and BME groups to ensure proportional representation when undertaking consultation and empowerment.

During the review, Members of the Committee questioned the proposed end to the four year time limit which people could serve

on the 'Tenants Gateway'. There was some concerns that this might mean others would be unable to join and so actually prevent a wider range of tenants from participating.

The Committee was informed that this was unlikely to happen as it had been a struggle to get people to join and attend Gateway meetings and there was no waiting list of tenants who wished to join it at present. However, it was accepted that if any new people did come forward then they should still be able to serve as Gateway Members, with others who had served for more than four years then being removed. The Committee welcomed this.

In concluding the review Members made the following recommendations;

- That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee welcomes the proposals for improving tenants involvement set out in the proposed Ashfield Homes Tenants Charter.
- That any incentives to improve engagement and participation should be proportionate and not excessive.
- That caution is taken with regards to the removal of the 4 yr time limit on places on the Tenants Gateway. Whilst it is understood that there are valid reasons for the removal of this limit, the Committee agreed that where there are new applicants that put themselves forward, these should be encouraged. New people can often bring a fresh approach and generate creative ideas on tenant related issues.

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN ASHFIELD

Scrutiny Panel B considered this topic as part of its ongoing involvement in addressing domestic abuse in Ashfield, ensuring that ADC continues to raise awareness of the issue and that support is available to those affected.

Domestic Violence remains an extremely important topic to cover and one that has been subject to consideration by Scrutiny on a number of occasions over the last 8 years.

The Panel were informed that domestic violence covers a broad spectrum and can include physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse. The Council is committed to raising awareness of domestic violence within Ashfield ensuring that support is available to those affected.

The Panel invited the Domestic Violence Prevention Officer, the Portfolio holder and the Service Director for Environment to a meeting to update Members on the issue and consider any further actions necessary to improve support and awareness raising.

The Council currently works in partnership with a variety of agencies to provide an holistic approach to this issue. This involves working in collaboration with the following services;

- Women's Aid Integrated Services (WAIS);

- Nottinghamshire Independent Domestic Abuse Services (NIDAS);
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC);
- Male Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA);
- Police and the Domestic Abuse Support Unit (DASU);
- Social Services;
- Probation Service
- Domestic Violence Coordinators – County Wide;
- Vulnerable Person's Panel;
- Housing Options Team;
- Ashfield Homes Limited

Members were informed that effective partnership working is key to ensure that information is shared between the various agencies and enable appropriate actions to be taken. Members also noted that encouraging neighbours to be more proactive and report cases to the relevant bodies was an important part of the process.

Panel Members were updated on some of the work that had been undertaken locally over the last 18 months including:

- Community Engagements throughout the District promoting support services at various locations - Supermarkets, Idlewells Shopping Centre and Hucknall Market Place;
- Targeted awareness raising around Valentine's Day, World Cup, White Ribbon Day (25th November) and the Christmas period, when reports of domestic abuse can increase;
- The 'Shoobox Campaign' which asked people to donate items for women in crisis who were leaving abusive relationships. Over 150 boxes were

collected and had been well received by women who had fled and were unable to take any necessities with them;

- Funding on behalf of WAIS was recently obtained by the Council to help them provide floating support specifically for women fleeing abusive relationships. The Council will provide the platform for WAIS to provide their service by donating up to 6 properties as temporary emergency accommodation.

Members were informed that Ashfield District Council was awarded 'White Ribbon' Status on 25th November, 2014. The White Ribbon Campaign is a global campaign that encourages men within our society to become positive role models, promote healthy relationships and stand united against violence towards women.



White Ribbon accreditation lasts for a 2 year period and the Council must continue to meet key criteria to be able to obtain accreditation for a second time.

During the review Members discussed the next steps to be taken namely, expanding on partnership working, awareness raising and training and development. A training plan currently being

developed for employees with the aim of assisting knowledge and experience in terms of responding to disclosures. This training will also be rolled out across the Council over the next 18 months and elected Members would also be encouraged to complete the e-learning module.

In concluding the consideration of this topic, Members discussed the following points;

- The criteria used to publicise the work undertaken to prevent Domestic Violence and how the success of this work is measured;
- Education with regard to the broad spectrum of Domestic Violence
- Support for the continuation of awareness raising events and the circulation of posters and promotional material in appropriate venues signposting Domestic Violence victims to support services
- The need to address more effectively homophobic and sexual violence issues as part of Domestic Violence work
- The creation of 'safe houses' within Ashfield and the safeguards that need to be put in place
- The level of awareness training on Domestic Violence for employees/elected Members
- How to engage with the younger generation (16-17 year olds) to promote what constitutes acceptable behaviour

The following recommendations/comments were made to the Portfolio Holder for consideration;

- the Council continue to support survivors, raise awareness and promote the reporting of domestic violence in a proactive, focussed and positive manner;
- as part of this approach the focus and awareness raising with regard to sexual violence and same sex relationships should be a consistent part of the

- the project to develop 6 'safe houses' be welcomed and progressed as soon as possible
- the Panel extended their support and appreciation to the Domestic Violence Prevention Officer for the progress made to date and her ongoing commitment to raising awareness of Domestic Violence within Ashfield
- the Council continue to work collaboratively with other authorities to assist those affected by Domestic Violence

STREET WORKS IN THE DISTRICT

The perception that the community have on street works is that no sooner has one set of works been completed another set of works would occur on the same stretch of highway. In considering this topic Members were interested in considering whether this could be reduced by more strategic planning of works.

Members of Scrutiny Panel A undertook an objective review on the impact of street works in the district following concerns raised

by Members and the community. The original scope for the review was to consider whether external utility companies were working efficiently together to minimise the impact of street works for residents and businesses and plan works in a more co-ordinated manner.

In considering this issue it was clear that there was a perception in the district that no sooner had one set of works been completed another set of works would occur on the same stretch of highway. Members were interested in considering whether this could be reduced by more strategic planning of works.

However during the information gathering process and subsequent meetings, Members received information that satisfied them that the planning and joint working systems in place appeared sufficient and joint working between the external agencies appeared to be working efficiently. Therefore the Scrutiny Panel revised its focus to concentrate more on the communication of information.



In reviewing this topic, Members considered a wide range of documentation including;

- Department for Transport, Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matters

- New Roads and Street Works Act (1991)
- The Street Works (Registers, Notices, Directions and Designations) (England) Regulations 2007
- Best practice from other local authorities
- Information from Nottinghamshire County Council

During the information gathering process and subsequent meetings, including a meeting attended by the Transport Manager for Nottinghamshire County Council, Members agreed that the planning of street works and joint working between the external agencies appeared to be working efficiently.

It was recognised that the co-ordination of street works can be a difficult process which can often result in disruption for many individuals and thus lead to complaints being made, however the evidence provided to the Panel suggested that every effort was made to co-ordinate and plan works to minimise disruption where possible. Members were advised that on the whole utility companies do communicate effectively and where possible will co-ordinate their works in order to minimise disruption to the community. This included trying to balance various issues such as working at night/weekends and through the school holidays to minimise disruption to traffic, residents and businesses.

Members were unanimous in recognising that street works by utility companies appear adequately planned and managed by Nottinghamshire County Council in collaboration with each company. This was further reinforced by quarterly meetings held to review both current and long term projects. These meetings provide the opportunity to identify areas that could be co-ordinated and those which could be potentially conflictive.

It was recognised that a large number of major works have been carried out around the District by a number of utility companies in recent months which has impacted greatly on residents and businesses. However, much of the gas and water maintenance

work has now been completed. The Panel were informed that the electricity network will now need to bring its apparatus up to date.

The Panel agreed that regardless of what utility or highways operators do on the highways, there is a justifiable expectation by everyone affected that those carrying out the work will provide adequate information about the timing of the works, and their scope. What constitutes 'adequate' depends on the nature of the works. Most importantly, the level and type of communication needs to be proportionate to the size of the works and anticipated level of disruption.



Whilst it is recognised that Nottingham County Council do communicate street works to statutory bodies and publicise works both through press releases and on their website, invariably, street works can lead to a rise in residents and business complaints. These can include direct complaints to Councillors for the following perceived reasons;

- a perceived lack of coordination with multiple works appearing, one after another, on the same stretch of road.
- a lack of prior notice of works;

- unclear indication who is carrying out the street work or why;
- street works appearing to have been left unfinished for days;
- works overrunning without warning;
- disruption for businesses and employment

In making its recommendations, Panel Members concluded that that there is little that can be done relating to street works being carried out, as these already appear to be efficiently planned as far as they possibly can be, however the process of enhancing information displayed and improving communications with the District Councillors could improve perceptions of the public and help to reduce frustrations.

The following recommendations were made for Cabinet to liaise with County Council partners to address the following improvements;

- to consider improving street works signage to provide details of the planned road works and clearly display a website address and contact details should they be required;
- to consider providing District Councillors with regular briefing notes which provide details of planned works to be carried out within the Ashfield District on a monthly basis (or as necessary);
- to consider the provision of e-mail alerts for the District Council and Councillors, particularly for emergency works;
- to provide data in relation to number of complaints received relating to road works within the Ashfield District to enable the Council to ascertain levels of impact and resolution at both District and County level;
- that both the County and District Council assess their current use of press and social media in relation to communicating planned and emergency road works to

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PROCUREMENT

The issue of procurement was added to the workplan to enable Members to discuss the effective procurement practices that are required to purchase and deliver value for money and good practice on goods, works and services bought by the Council. The Panel made its recommendations in April 2015, with an update report in October 2015.

Procurement covers all of the supplies, services and works needed to deliver services. The rules by which Ashfield District Council spend money on goods, services and works, are set out in the Contract Procedure Rules.

Members agreed to undertake the review for the following reasons;

1. To enable the Scrutiny Panel to acquire an understanding of procurement practices and procedures;
2. To understand and evaluate the Council's systems for communicating procurement policies and procedures;
3. To assess knowledge and understanding within the organisation of the Council's policies and procedures

- 4. To identify examples of good practice in Ashfield and in other Local Authorities to support the achievement of efficiency savings;

Furthermore, Members also expanded the review to consider further issues relating to procurement good practice. These included;

- Economic and social value links to procurement
- The Living Wage
- Blacklisting
- Best practice.



In carrying out the review, Members invited a number of key officers to their meetings to explore effective procurement practice. These included;

- Lead Service Procurement Manager at Bassetlaw District Council
- Finance Manager
- Assistant Chief Executive (Governance)
- Service Lead - Waste and Environment

Ashfield District Council's procurement services are part of a shared service arrangement with Bassetlaw, Mansfield District Council and Erewash BC. The Shared Procurement Unit organises tender processes leading to the establishment of contracts and framework agreements for the provision of goods, services and works. Individual services section then uses these contracts on a day to day basis to place orders and make purchases.

The Panel explored the strengths, opportunities and the areas for potential improvement, in respect of the shared service arrangements and concluded that there was a clear commitment to deliver a good customer service and also raise the profile of the shared service across Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

In concluding the review, Members agreed that effective procurement and consistent approaches were essential to achieve not only improved value for money but also to contribute to the local economy in a positive way.

Members further agreed that in order to maximize the effectiveness and outcomes from the shared service arrangement there is a need to encourage a more consistent and increased use of the procurement unit. In light of discussions and fact finding exercises, the Panel also considered there to be a need to clarify the Councils position on the living wage, blacklisting and

zero hour contracts to ensure that all those involved in procuring services are clear on the priorities agreed by Council.

It was hoped that in highlighting the importance of effective procurement, that the Council and the Shared Service Unit will continue to improve the tendering process, add social value through encouraging sourcing locally and continue to seek improved efficiency savings through more informed ways of procurement.

A final report was presented to Cabinet in April 2015, with a follow-up report with additional actions taken to Cabinet in October 2015. The following recommendations were made.

- the Council promote and encourage a more consistent and increased use of the Shared Procurement Unit to maximise the effectiveness and outcomes from the shared service arrangement;
- the Council considers Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) and local sourcing wherever possible to encourage local economic growth;
- That a spend analysis is undertaken to ascertain what is spent on procuring services and where;
- the Councils Contract Procedure Rules are reviewed to consider ways that we can encourage local economic growth and support the banning of blacklisting in the contracts that we procure;
- investigate ways in which the Council, alongside the Legal Department and Procurement Unit, can determine a legal expectation for contractors to eliminate zero hours

- the promotion of the e-Tendering portal to maximise tendering opportunities for buyers and suppliers and make it easier for businesses to be informed about current opportunities;

In October 2015, a progress update was undertaken and reported back to Cabinet.

ATTENDANCE MANAGMENT

In June 2015, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised concerns in relation to attendance management, which appeared to have worsened over the last 12 months. The Committee agreed to undertake a desktop review to consider the topic.

In considering this topic, Members reviewed the Attendance Management Policy, which was approved at Council in July 2013.

The objective of this policy is to provide a framework for supporting employees to maintain expected levels of attendance and to outline the approach that will be taken in circumstances where employees are unable to maintain expected levels due to reasons related to their health.

In discussing the topic with HR, the Committee acknowledged that the Council is committed to promoting health and well being in the workplace. The policy is designed, therefore, to provide a framework in which an employee is given every reasonable opportunity to improve their attendance. It outlines the steps that will need to be taken to improve attendance and makes clear the possible consequences in cases where an employee is unable to achieve an acceptable level of attendance.

The Council sets absence triggers for absence under short term and long term absence. If an employee meets any of the trigger points during a 12 month rolling period they will be invited to attend a meeting with their manager/supervisor.



During consideration of this issue, Members also reviewed the initiatives that had been put in place during 2014/15 to improve employee attendance. These included;

- The introduction of 'Stress Action Plans' to help identify and address the reasons why employees who are absent with stress are stressed
- Sending letters to all Ashfield's General Practitioners (G.P's) explaining what support the Council could offer to help employees return to work
- The introduction of a new 'Employee Assistance Programme' to provide counselling as well as online information and support
- Quarterly meetings between Human Resources and Service Directors to discuss sickness absences. In addition 'Exception Reports' are now produced for the Service Directors to highlight when employees have not been managed in line with the Attendance Management Policy
- Promoting healthy lifestyles, with the introduction of workplace health schemes and exercise referral schemes, stop smoking and weight management services, as well as cognitive behaviour therapy or 'talking cures'
- Greater use of the physiotherapy service to help those who are absent with muscular or skeletal problems

Members concluded by welcoming the various initiatives which have been introduced to reduce sickness absences but agreed that more should be done to improve attendance management, including reviewing causes and help offered.

Members concluded by agreeing the following set of actions

- the topic of attendance management remain on the workplan and be revisited in 6 months time to review the impact of initiatives currently being trialled;
- Committee Members to receive comparative data relating to sickness absence

EFFECTIVE COUNCILLOR SURGERIES

An objective review of councillor surgeries was undertaken by Scrutiny Panel A following concerns regarding the lack of attendance and consideration of whether or not they are still the best way to engage with constituents.

As part of the workplan consultation process held in March 2014, Members raised the topic of the effectiveness of Councillor surgeries as a possible option for further consideration. The reasons cited were that attendance at some surgeries was very poor and on regular occasions there would be no attendance from the public at all.

In discussing the issue, Panel members emphasised that the reason for undertaking this review was in no way to end traditional Councillor surgeries as these face to face drop in sessions were considered to still be a method that is preferred by some Councillors and constituents. The aim was to consider whether providing engagement with constituents could be enhanced to benefit the community and individuals.

Furthermore, through improved access methods to Councillors, promotion of greater participation in the decision making process could be achieved.

During the review, Members acknowledged that technological advances, variations to traditional working hours and cultural shifts have resulted in changes to the way in which people and communities interact. Whilst going to see a Councillor can be a good way of outlining a problem which people may need help with, particularly if the alternative is writing a letter, waiting for a reply, then explaining in more detail, and so on. Increasingly the use of emails and social media is seen as the most efficient option both in terms of raising the issue and receiving a response. Furthermore, it can be less intimidating than a phone call.

Also, as people lead busy lives and may not be able to make it to a surgery at a fixed time, social media and digital interaction often proves an attractive alternative. The growing social trend towards instant gratification means that with a problem arising on a Tuesday, many people may not be willing to wait until a Saturday surgery to talk it over.

As part of the information gathering process, Councillors were contacted to gain their views on traditional surgeries, how well attended they were and whether they thought alternative approaches should also be considered.



Members discussed the effectiveness of their own surgeries and possible improvements that could be made to improve access to Councillors and enhance community engagement between Councillors and constituent. In considering their own surgeries, Members of the Panel also discussed different methods by which they communicate and engage with the community.

Members concluded the review by agreeing that elected representatives remain the indispensable link between the public and decisions which have to be made in the collective interest: but such a system of representative democracy does not exclude additional forms of democratic engagement.

There is a plethora of different ways in which people can make their views known between elections. There have always been public meetings, advice surgeries but there are many more opportunities now for deliberation and dialogue, not least involving newer technologies that enable a richer network of connections.

Councillor Surgeries were previously seen as being the ideal forum to engage with the local community, raise issues and concerns and take forward any cases to relevant officers and departments. However there has recently been an increasing amount of national debate about whether these surgeries in their traditional form are still the most efficient way to communicate with constituents.

Members of the Panel do not see that embracing other forms of engagement should exclude face to face surgeries as these will always have their place, however communities are now communicating in different ways than they did 5 years ago and Councillors representing these communities should explore evolving communication methods such as Skype, Twitter and Facebook.

The Panel made the following 8 recommendations to Cabinet. A progress report on those recommendations is scheduled for early 2016.

- Members and political groups be requested to discuss the current arrangements for Councillors Surgeries and explore different options, including the use of different public locations such as Libraries, coffee shops etc;

- The Council explore and discuss with each political party the use of information technology, as part of the contact arrangements for constituents and their local Councillors;
- Information Technology training for all Members be included as part of the training package being developed for post election (to include Skype etc);
- The Citizens Panel be used to gather consultation feedback on engagement with Councillors, including the location of meetings and outcomes;
- Greater use of the Councils website be developed to ensure that access for contacting a Councillor and engaging in local decision making is improved;
- The use of the Kirkby Council Offices on a Saturday, specifically for Surgeries, be ceased in favour of alternative public locations to try and encourage a greater take up of Councillor Surgeries;
- The Councils



COMMUNICATIONS

In September, Members agreed to undertake a review of effective communication tools and the expectations of residents in accessing information to ensure that the Council continues to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Members have acknowledged that communications and the expectations of residents in finding out about the Council and its services are fast pacing and it is important that the Council continue to communicate in the most effective and efficient way possible.

As part of the information gathering process a number of meetings have been held with the Corporate Communications Manager, Corporate Performance Manager and the Web Development Officer. The Panel have so far held two meetings on this topic, recommendations are expected to be made to Cabinet in February / March 2016.

DISPOSAL OF FATS, OILS & GREASES

This topic was suggested following concerns raised by Seven Trent Water relating to the problems caused by the disposal of cooking oils/fats down drains. Furthermore, an additional focus on the reuse of those materials as bio fuel will also be considered.

Fats, oils and grease cause major problems to the sewerage system. When they are discharged down kitchen sinks or foul drains they cause sewer blockages and when discharged down rainwater pipes and gullies they cause pollution in local water courses.

Clearing these blockages cost millions of pounds a year. Businesses also risk blocking their drainage systems, which will result in loss of income due to cleaning up costs. These fat blockages result in sewer flooding, odour problems and the risk of rat infestations near residential and commercial premises.

Members have so far held one meeting on this topic with invited representatives from Seven Trent Water to discuss what the issues are, what can be done and collaborative working initiatives. The Committee will be making its recommendations in March 2016.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is a key role of Overview and Scrutiny. It provides Members with the opportunity to proactively review delivery against Corporate Priorities and challenge performance, add value to the Council's services and monitor functions delivered with, and by, the Council's partners that add quality of life to the citizens of Ashfield.

Scrutiny Members have held a number of meetings to discuss performance issues with relevant service lead officers and

Portfolio holders to actively challenge areas where outcomes have not been achieved.



Scrutiny of Performance is additionally supported by the Corporate Performance Manager. Issues raised during performance considerations has also been used to inform the 2015-16 Scrutiny Workplan.

SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The Scrutiny workplan is a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda. Ongoing consultation on the 2015-16 Scrutiny workplan will continue to be undertaken with Service Directors, Third Tier Officers and Members. Community engagement will also form part of an ongoing consultation process.

The Scrutiny Work Plan outlines the areas of work which are expected to be scrutinised over the coming months / year by or on behalf of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels A and B.

Topics added to the workplan should have expected outcomes to add value to the services delivered by the Council and it's partners and/or improve the quality of lives of Ashfield residents.

It is recognised that there is a need for flexibility in the work plan so as to allow relevant issues to be dealt with as and when they arise.

The following topics have been agreed for inclusion on the Scrutiny Workplan in 2015/16.

SCRUTINY WORKPLAN 2015/16

TOPIC	PANEL	TIMESCALE
<p>Disposal of cooking fats/oils/grease and the potential to reuse these as biofuels</p> <p>Scrutiny Review to examine the impact of how communities and businesses dispose of waste materials, the damage this causes and the potential to recycle some of this material.</p>	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Dec 2015 – March 2016</p>
<p>Do current Public Transport services meet the needs of the community?</p> <p>Scrutiny review to consider how well current public transport facilities meet the needs of the community and whether there are any areas for improvement that could be considered by service providers, partners and the Council.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel A</p>	<p>Underway</p>
<p>Communications Review – To review how we communicate both internally and externally with particular focus on improving digital communications.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel B</p>	<p>Underway</p>
<p>Housing Benefit Overpayment</p> <p>To consider processes and performance</p>	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>Early 2016</p>

TOPIC	PANEL	TIMESCALE
<p>Fly Tipping</p> <p>Scrutiny Review to consider the extent of fly tipping in the District, action taken and best practice</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel A</p>	<p>Early 2016</p>
<p>Selective Licensing Scheme (as part of consultation process)</p> <p>To consider views of community and stakeholders in the pilot for Selective Licensing Scheme</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel B</p>	<p>Early 2016</p>
<p>Disabled Facilities Grants</p> <p>To consider effectiveness of disabled facilities grant including time taken and processes in place (scope to be defined)</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel B</p>	<p>Early 2016</p>
<p>Loneliness amongst the elderly</p> <p>To consider support in place to support loneliness amongst the elderly in the district</p>	<p>Scrutiny Panel A</p>	<p>2016</p>

Getting Involved

There are a number of different ways in which members of the community can get involved in Scrutiny. These are:

1. Attend A Meeting - All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public to come and listen to the debate. There may also be a chance to speak at the meetings at the discretion of the Chair. The meetings are publicised and can be found at :

<http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/residents/democracy,-elections-and-legal/calendar-of-council-meetings.aspx>

2. Put Forward A Suggestion For A Topic To Be Considered By Scrutiny - Any topic can be suggested for consideration for the Scrutiny workplan. To put forward a topic does not mean that you will have to become directly involved in the review if you do not wish to be. To find out more information on engaging in the Scrutiny process please visit

<http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/residents/democracy,-elections-and-legal/scrutiny.aspx>

or email the Scrutiny team at:

scrutiny@ashfield-dc.gov.uk



3. Speak To Your Local Councillor - Your local Councillor details are located on the Council's website at;

<http://www.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/residents/democracy,-elections-and-legal/contact-your-district-councillor.aspx>