

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 20 February 2014

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny report to Council – February 2014

Contact for further information: Councillor R Morgan



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from January 2014 to the present be noted.

Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 28 January 2014

1. At our meeting last Tuesday, we received a presentation from the Essex Probation Service. The speakers were Neeve Bishop and Adrian Saward from the Probation Services based in Harlow. They showed a film on how the probation service worked from the point of view of the offender. They stopped the film on various occasions to enable the members present to ask questions, and used these opportunities to fill in the background to the probation service and the related organisations that they work with, such as giving specialist help to people with alcohol related problems and people with anger issues.
2. Members raised a general concern that although using the probation services instead of imposing a custodial sentence was fine for handling low level offences, but the release of high risk offenders to the probation service was a worry. They thought that these offenders should have access to the various programmes, such as anger management, while they were still in prison.
3. We then considered the Cabinet Agenda for their meeting of 3 February 2014. Councillor Chambers commented, that under agenda item 12, 'Establishment of an Economic Development Strategy', where it talked of funds for health centres. He wanted to register that he was in favour of this.
4. Councillor Philip wanted to say that the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel fully endorsed the continuation of the consultation as outlined in agenda item 14, the 'Review of Licensing – Staffing and Budget' report. He also endorsed item 16, the 'Historical Planning Records Microfiche Project'. He noted that it was expensive but we had to do it now or lose access to the microfiche files.
5. Councillor Philip then went on to endorse item 22, the report on the 'Wide Area Network Contract Renewal', saying that the proposed route was the correct way to go.
6. Councillor Murray commented in relation to agenda item 20 – 'Council Budget 2014/15', recommendation 3(b). He wished it noted that he was in support of it.

7. We then considered three reports from the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel. The first one was the 'Annual Review of Officer Delegation', updating the schedule of officer delegation reflecting the new Directorate structure. This was approved. We then considered the 'Annual Review of Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations' which we also agreed.

8. The last report from the Constitution Panel was on the 'Vice Chairman of Council - Appointment Review'. This prompted a debate on whether a person should be nominated by 15 or 12 members and if this new system was fair for the minority parties and the independents on the council. After a considerable debate and a vote, the report was agreed.

9. Finally we considered our work programme and agreed to ask the Epping Forest College Principal to our April meeting and if possible someone from the Mental Health Services in our District to our February meeting.