



Annual Council

21 May 2015

Subject: Annual Report from the Challenge and Improvement Committee

Report by:

Director of Resources

Contact Officer:

Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Chairman of Challenge and improvement
Committee 2014/15

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Purpose / Summary:

To present the Annual Report from the Chairman
of the Challenge and Improvement Committee

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council notes the content of the report and the work undertaken by the Challenge and Improvement Committee during 2014/15.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

The Chairman of the Committee is required constitutionally (Part1 Page 17 paragraph 7.6) to submit an annual report to Council on the work his Committee has undertaken over the previous year

Financial :

None arising from this report

Staffing :

None arising from this report

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

N/A

Risk Assessment :

N/A

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :

N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 The Chairman of the Committee is required constitutionally (Part1 Page 17 paragraph 7.6) to submit an annual report to Council on the work his Committee has undertaken over the previous year.

1.2 The Chairman's Annual Report is set out below: -

2. Chairman's Annual Report

2.1 The primary role of the Challenge and Improvement Committee is to scrutinise the Council in a positive and effective manner, however, it has to be appreciated that all committees are there primarily to hold to account West Lindsey District Council. I cannot underscore the need for colleagues to study all papers and reports well in advance of meetings and to contact officers for clarification before the committee meets in order to be well informed to arrive at a decision and to remember, that if colleagues are unsure therefore to defer that decision, until they feel comfortable to proceed.

2.2 The central thrust of this year has been to make the Committee robust and give it more credibility as a scrutiny body, which is non-political, without fear or favour, working solely to enhance the work of The Council, and feel we have achieved this in a variety of ways.

2.3 **Establishment of Democracy Working Group** – C&I set up a small democracy group consisting of the Champion of Democracy, Cllr R Patterson & Cllr Howitt-Cowan, Chair of Scrutiny. This group was formed to promote the concept of democracy across the District and to look at possible initiatives which would engender greater participation in the democratic process and uphold the principles which support effective democratic operations. To that extent the group identified three initial projects:

- A review of the current configuration of the Council Chamber
- Consideration to take the Planning Committee out into the District
- Engagement with young people and schools

2.3.1 The Group most recently have been working with the Monitoring Officer and Richard Quirke, who has experience in the Houses of Parliament, to explore how we could improve the Chamber for Council meetings whilst continuing to allow that space the flexibility it currently offers.

2.3.2 The timing was opportune with the need identified much earlier for a new microphones. Two TV monitors are to be installed to enable the Councillors and the public to see proceedings thereby intentionally improving the quality of meetings during webcasting.

2.3.3 The interface between the council meetings and public gallery will be vastly improved and enable those present to feel much more part of the proceedings and not so isolated, which has been the present position.

These changes have not incurred vast sums of public money in order to deliver a wide and effective change to the Chamber.

2.3.4 The work of this Group has been much appreciated and continues.

2.4 Progress and Delivery Working Group – this group has reviewed with officers the appropriateness and usefulness of the measures included in the current progress and delivery reports to ensure that what is reported to the public, partners and stakeholders is relevant and relates to the aims and objectives of the Council’s Corporate Plan. The work has produced a revised set of measures to be reported against in 2015/16 on an exception basis, where only under or over anticipated performance levels are reported. An issue the Group has focused on is to ensure that where performance is causing concern, rectifications are in place which assure Members that the situation will be adequately addressed.

2.4.1 Additionally, attention was also paid to the way in which priorities for inclusion in the Corporate Pan were identified and developed with relevant objectives and realistic outcomes assigned to them.

2.5 Agreed an Operating Methodology – to ensure the on-going effectiveness of the Committee, a review of its operating methodology was undertaken. This focused on performance management and policy and performance reviews. The Committee recognises that the policy committees play a key role in challenging performance and policy development to seek assurance that any issues are rectified. However the Challenge and Improvement Committee must also play a part and scrutinise the operations of the policy committees to ensure they are fulfilling their roles effectively. To that extent, the Committee will intervene where it is felt that rectifications are inadequate and/or project development is cause for concern or post project reviews have not been conducted. Intervention will only occur after an agreed period of time has been allowed for rectifications to take effect.

2.6 Established a Programme of Public Body Scrutiny - to enhance the accountability for service delivery and the effectiveness of other public service providers delivering for residents of the District the Committee has initiated a programme of meetings with strategic partners to discuss their approach to addressing the strategic needs of the residents of the District. Meetings held to date have seen; Police Inspector discuss Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour; Lincolnshire County Council Highways and the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner attend to present overviews of their work; the impact it is having on the general well-being of the District and the issues they face. While still in its infancy, initial thoughts are that the meetings have provided valuable insight into the strategic aims of these bodies and their impact on the District. Additionally, it has provided an opportunity for issues pertaining to the District to be raised and for responses to be provided. A programme of work for 2015/16 is in development.

- 2.7 **Monitoring and Challenging Performance** - as detailed above the Progress and Delivery Working Group has played a key role in reviewing the performance measures which form the Progress and Delivery reporting. In addition, the format and layout of the report has also been reviewed to make it easier to follow and more concise. In terms of monitoring and reviewing performance, the Committee commissioned a report on enforcement activity within the Council and upon receipt sought assurance from officers that processes were working well and queried aspects of the work for clarification. This function of the Committee is crucial to ensure that services and officers are performing well and rectifications are in place where required.
- 2.8 **Selecting Items for Pre Scrutiny to assist in Policy Development** - a key role for the Committee is to take a pro-active stance in relation to the development of policy and to scrutinise proposals in advance of implementation. The Committee therefore routinely scans the Forward Plan to identify any matters of interest that are worthy of scrutiny and discussion. To date the topic of car parks and service plans have been selected for advance scrutiny with a view to effecting and influencing policy decisions at the outset.
- 2.9 **Considered ways to raise the profile of Tourism** - One of our ambitions is to progress with raising the importance of heritage & tourism within the District. This year, a working group under the chairmanship of the Deputy Leader, Cllr Anne Welburn was therefore established.
- 2.9.1 Members recognised the symbiotic relationship of heritage/tourism with economic development. Latterly this has been undervalued, almost to point of becoming the 'Cinderella' however in the light of the Corporate Plan, which underscores economic development, heritage/ tourism is again coming into its own. West Lindsey does offer a wide cultural provision within a diverse & rich geographical area.
- 2.9.2 The work of this Group has been much appreciated and continues.

3. Conclusion and look forward to next year

- 3.1 At the Committee's last meeting of the 14/15 Civic Year, Members gave consideration to areas they may wish to incorporate into their work plan for 15/16, namely: -
- Neighbourhood Plans – their successes, impact, the level of support offered, take-up (Councillor Lawrence)
 - Report from the Commercial Director, 1year + into post – An assessment of the Commercial viability of the Authority, the District, the Commercial Activity ongoing and planned, income generation position (Councillor Kinch)
 - Health (and Well-Being) Local Provision of Services (Councillor Tinker, whole Committee support)

- Director report from each service area (Councillor Wiseman)
- 3.2 The Committee also received a formal request from the Prosperous Communities Committee following their meeting in March 2015 to give consideration to including a workshop / scrutiny session on “the changes to supported / sheltered housing accommodation provisions” in their work plan for the coming 15/16 year.
- 3.3 It is intend that the new Committee at their first meeting will give consideration to all the suggestions made and form their scrutiny workplan therefrom.
- 3.4 In conclusion, I wish to express my hearty thanks to colleagues for their help and support and especially to the retiring Vice Chair, Cllr Nigel Bowler, who will be missed especially for his expertise. No committee can function without its Lead Officer and Clerk. Challenge and Improvement Committee are blessed with Mr Ian Knowles, Director of Resources and Katie Coughlan who together have enabled the Committee to carry its work both efficiently and effectively throughout the past year.

Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan
Chairman of the Challenge and Improvement Committee 2014/15

End