

Annual Report: Management Scrutiny Committee 2011/12

Chair: Cllr David Tate

Vice-Chair: Cllr Kath Rolph

Committee Members:

Cllr Florence Anderson, Cllr Graeme Miller, Cllr Michael Mordey, Cllr Robert Oliver, Cllr Paul Stewart, Cllr Peter Walker, Cllr Susan Watson and Cllr Peter Woods.

The end of another municipal year and it is satisfying to report that the Management Scrutiny Committee has again tackled a demanding work programme which has seen the committee undertake two quite differing policy reviews. The committee's wide ranging remit always ensures that the work programme is interesting and varied from financial performance to corporate policy performance through to its overall co-ordinating role.

The coalition Government is committed to greater local public accountability and continues to scale back on inspection and assessment. Despite the level of scaling back there is still an expectation that councils can evidence the delivery of priorities and outcomes, and this is to be achieved largely through self regulation. The committee has held a series of workshops that looked at a number of key themes around the self regulation agenda. Self regulation is a new and emerging approach and the policy review recognises this, it also acknowledges how scrutiny is well placed to play a hand in driving forward stronger local accountability. The policy review and its recommendations aim to help promote, support and develop self regulation within the organisation.

The committee also conducted a policy review around illegal money lending and high cost credit within Sunderland. This review was a direct result of the national illegal money lending team beginning to work and gather information about activities taking place in the area. The review has gathered evidence through a variety of methods including focus groups, sites visits and even the performance of a hard hitting play illustrating the methods and repercussions of lending money from a loan shark. The committee also looked at the rise and proliferation of payday loan companies and high cost credit receiving responses from local MP's on this particular issue.

It is a positive move to have the illegal money lending team operating in Sunderland and this can only help to remove unlicensed credit operators from our local communities. It is fair to say that as a committee we cannot solve many of these deep seated and financially influenced issues, but the review does highlight a number of common themes that, working with our partners, can help to improve the outcomes for local people and communities.

The committee has also throughout the year received a variety of reports, policies and strategies as part of our work programme. The committee has looked at and discussed a range of issues including Apprenticeships and Early Retirements, the Welfare Reform Bill and looked at the Localism Act. It is through the reporting to committee that members can provide challenge to policies and strategies which can help directorates and service areas to further develop such documents.

One of the key roles of the Management Scrutiny Committee revolves around the City Council's budget process and we continue to examine the budget. The committee has also responded to a number of financial reports brought to the committee with our comments reported back to Cabinet or Full Council respectively. In a change to previous years the Management Scrutiny Committee held an informal meeting with Cabinet Portfolio Holders as part of the budget consultation process for 2012/13. This more informal setting worked well and allowed for a greater interaction between Scrutiny and Cabinet and it is hoped that we can continue in this way in future.

The coming year will no doubt be as equally challenging and demanding on both Members and officers but I know that as a local authority we will continue to deliver quality services to the residents of Sunderland. I continue to attend the various scrutiny committees at regular intervals throughout the year and offer my appreciation to the level of commitment shown by each individual committee in the work that they have undertaken. Finally I would like to thank

my member colleagues who sit on the Management Scrutiny Committee for their hard work, dedication and commitment to Scrutiny, the local authority and the residents of Sunderland.

Cllr David Tate
Chair of the Management Scrutiny Committee