

# **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

**2018 - 2019**



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. CORPORATE SERVICES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor David Bawn**  
**Chairman**

1.1 I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee, particularly my Vice-Chairman, Lynne Grimshaw for all her hard work. I am sure all the Committee would wish to place on record their gratitude to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, who has facilitated our decision making process and assisted my role as Chairman, both inside and outside of the meeting room. The work of the Committee has been greatly assisted by the regular attendance of Cabinet members and senior officers, for which I am grateful. This has been a busy year for the Committee, which has met on eight occasions dealing with 25 substantive items of business.

1.2 The Committee members have played a valuable and constructive role in the Council's strategic policy making areas this past year and continue to provide overview of financial and customer feedback issues.

1.3 The Committee have considered 21 reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet, and in addition to supporting the majority of them, members have put forward comments and suggested amendments, many of which have been accepted and included in the final decision. The following reports have been subject to that process:

- Arch Transition and Establishment of a New Company
- Apprenticeship Pay Proposal 2018
- Bates Terminal - Infrastructure Works
- Ashwood Business Park - Infrastructure Works
- Replacement of Berwick Leisure Centre
- Proposed Transfer of 5 Palace Street East, Berwick upon Tweed
- Hexham Business Improvement District (BID) Termination
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-22 and Budget 2019-20
- Council Tax Support
- Update on Shared Services Due Diligence
- Current Status of Active Northumberland Terms and Conditions/Job Evaluation Negotiations
- Borderland Inclusive Growth Deal
- Budget 2019-20 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-22
- Loan Governance
- Advance Northumberland - Transition From Arch
- Approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20
- East Sleekburn Enterprise Zone

- Potential Loan to Alnwick Youth Hostel
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-22 and Budget 2019-20
- Northumberland Cultural Fund to support Great Northumberland 2019
- Establishment of a Regeneration Development Reserve

1.4. In addition, the Committee has considered a number of overview and scrutiny reports, including:

1.4.1 **Debt Recovery** - the Committee received regular reports which provided information relating to the level of outstanding debt owed to the Council. Members continue to be satisfied as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the collection and recovery policies and systems. However, it has raised concerns regarding the potential impact of Universal Credit on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the county, which has been the subject of all member briefings.

1.4.2 **Customer Feedback** - in September, the Committee undertook an overview of the Council's Corporate Feedback system and considered information on customer feedback from informal resolutions, complaints, suggestions and comments and compliments received into the Council for the period April 2017 to March 2018. Members noted that how data was being collected and used was under review and a draft strategy document would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee for comment.

**David Bawn**

**Chairman – Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC**



## 2. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Jeff Reid,  
Chairman**

2.1 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee, as well as the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, for making the work of the committee relevant and productive. I would also like to thank Ian Swithenbank, my Vice Chair, for his helpful advice and support throughout the year. The committee would not work as well as it does without the staff who have presented reports to us with a willingness to engage in discussion.

2.2 The Committee's work programme has been more balanced this year as a greater number of reports have been considered at the request of members, covering such important issues as domestic violence and abuse and homelessness.

2.3 The Committee have made comment on 11 reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Draft Northumberland Local Plan
- Review of Transport Asset Management Plan - Policy & Strategy
- Markets Strategy
- A Risk Based Approach to Highway Management and Feedback on Network Hierarchy Consultation
- Implementation of the Revised Highway Maintenance Code of Practice, "Well-managed Highway Infrastructure": Asset Performance and Financial Management, Priorities and Programme
- Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan 2018/19
- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Support Services Commission
- Improvements and Investment in Parking Provision
- Review of Waste Strategy - Kerbside Collection of Household Waste
- Proposed Introduction of Charges at Tourism and Railway Station Car Parks - Consultations Response
- Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-21

2.4 Whilst considering the Market Strategy; the funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Support Services Commission, and the Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-21, the Committee requested that further updates be provided in due course on how the proposals were being implemented. In addition, during the discussion regarding the Review of Waste Strategy - Kerbside Collection of Household Waste, it became clear that further proposals on waste recycling would be coming forward in the future, so members agreed to visit the West Sleekburn Integrated Waste Management Facility, to see how the plant was playing a major role in achieving the Council's target to cut the amount of municipal waste it sends to landfill.

2.5 As stated above, the Committee have considered a number of overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

2.5.1 **Fly Tipping** – in June, the Committee examined recent trends in the level of fly tipping both nationally and within Northumberland. Members noted that the change in the opening days at 5 Household Waste Recovery Centres (HWRCs) introduced in October 2016, as part of the revenue budget savings for 2016/17, had not resulted in a reduction of the quantity of waste delivered to HWRCs and that concerns that the changes would lead to widespread fly tipping had not been realised. However, the Committee cautioned that the Administration should think very carefully before reducing opening hours further, as there was no guarantee that future reductions in operating times would not result in higher incidents of fly tipping. The bulky waste scheme continued to be popular with residents.

2.5.2 **The Green Dog Walkers Scheme and Dog Fouling Enforcement** – in July, the Committee were updated on the implementation of the Green Dog Walker Scheme and also on dog control enforcement in 2017/18. At the time of the meeting, 1327 people had signed up to the Council's Green Dog Walkers Scheme, which had far exceeded the uptake predicted by colleagues at other authorities operating similar schemes. The scheme demonstrated that the Council was supportive of responsible dog owners, but members were assured that it was prepared to take action against those who were not.

2.5.3 **Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northumberland** – in October, the Committee were provided with an overview on the current partnership work programme to co-ordinate service provision to tackle the issues and harms caused by domestic violence and abuse in Northumberland. Members were advised that incidents of domestic violence had historically been under reported, and that may be particularly the case in rural areas. There was a continuous programme of data collection from all sectors dealing with domestic violence issues, which was being utilised to identify areas of need. A further report on direction of travel and a more detailed breakdown of the figures in Northumberland, particularly with regard to geographical areas and early intervention measures in supporting children and young people exposed to domestic abuse, will be considered by the Committee in early 2019/20.

2.5.4 **Homelessness in Northumberland** - in October, the Committee undertook an overview of the service provision for residents who were homeless or at risk of homelessness in Northumberland. Although a high proportion of homelessness could be attributed to domestic abuse, the number of such cases appeared to be decreasing in some areas as a consequence of the early intervention work that the Council was implementing with partner agencies, to either maintain tenancies, or provide mediation to move on from a property before reaching crisis point.

2.5.5 The Committee was unconvinced that government figures relating to “rough sleepers” were accurate and suggested that they were much higher. The numbers were collated from charitable and other partner organisations where homeless people presented themselves on a particular night in October. It was acknowledged by members and officers that many rough sleepers did not want to identify themselves as such, and therefore could not be reflected in the figures. The Committee expressed their frustration that the Government had not prescribed a method for collecting this data and was content to accept the low figures without challenge. The Committee will continue to monitor this issue, including the impact the roll out of Universal Credit may have on the homelessness figures.

The Committee has also received monitoring reports and updates on the following:

- Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Boundary Review
- Home Office Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services
- Service Performance
- Retention of Affordable Housing
- Fleet Replacement Programme

**Jeff Reid**  
**Chairman – Communities and Place OSC**

### 3. HEALTH AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Jeff Watson,  
Chairman

3.1 The Committee has been very busy in 2018/19. I would like to thank Lesley Rickerby, my Vice-Chair for her assistance, together with all officers who have provided support to me and the Committee Members through some very complex issues throughout the year, including continued monitoring of the situation regarding Rothbury Hospital and Dental Services in Coquetdale and Hadston. Members are also grateful to receive presentations and updates from Healthwatch Northumberland, the North East Ambulance Service, the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust and the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

3.2 The Committee has offered the Cabinet comments on two reports prior to determination this year: Accommodation with Support Strategy and on the Proposed Integrated Hospital, Care and Leisure Complex in Berwick.

3.3 The Committee considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

3.3.1 **Rothbury Community Hospital** - in January, members received a report on the work of the Rothbury Hospital Referral Review Group which had been established by the Committee to address the recommendations from the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) following the referral of this issue last year. Although there had been no instruction in the report to re-run the consultation or to re-open the beds, further action was required locally to agree and implement the health and wellbeing centre. Inpatient beds were to be considered as part of that work and the wider development of services at the hospital and in the local community.

3.3.2 The Committee also received representations from the Save Rothbury Hospital Campaign Group, Healthwatch Northumberland, the local member and the Clinical Commissioning Group and Northumbria Trust. I requested that an update be provided to the Committee early in 2019/20 regarding plans for the hospital building and hoped that it would provide residents with the opportunity to create something special.

3.3.3 **Dental Services in Coquetdale** - in May, June, November and January the Committee received updates on the engagement process being undertaken to contract the provision of dental services within the Coquetdale area. The Committee had expressed concern that this issue remained unresolved and about the possibility of any wider health impact resulting from a gap in local service provision. Members will continue to monitor the situation in 2019/20.

3.3.4 **Healthwatch Northumberland** - in November, the Committee received a

detailed presentation which set out the top four priorities for Healthwatch Northumberland (the independent champion for people who use health and social care services) identified for 2018/19: (1) Mental health; (2) GP services; (3) access to services, and (4) home care/dementia care.

3.3.5 Results from their specific issue engagement surveys and the annual survey showed that 65% of respondents said their experience of health and social care was good or excellent over the past 12 months and issues were with other services around it - transport, administration and coordination. Comments about dentists, hospitals and ambulances were generally more positive. GPs received more favourable comments, but lost confidence when it came to booking appointments. Other issues included how finding out about mental health services for young people was difficult and timely information was needed when changes were being made.

3.3.6 The Committee will continue to receive updates every six months.

3.4 **Monitoring Reports** - in 2018/19, the Committee has also received the following overview reports:

- Reprourement of Primary Care Specialist Orthodontic Provision
- Specialist Substance Misuse Services
- Annual Report of the Director of Public Health
- Accommodation with Support Strategy
- Customer Experience: Joint Children's and Adult Services Customer Experience: Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2017/18
- Welfare Rights Annual Report 2017/18
- Specialised Vascular Services in the North East
- Charges for Care and Support – Consultation
- Safeguarding Adults Annual Report and Strategy Refresh
- Winter Planning Update
- Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust - Quality Account
- Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - Quality Account
- Update on Whalton Unit
- North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust - Quality Account
- Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust - Quality Account
- Brexit and the EU NHS Workforce

**Councillor Jeff Watson**

**Chairman - Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## 4. FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Guy  
Renner-Thompson  
Chairman**

4.1 This year the Committee has met on ten occasions dealing with 42 substantive reports, more than any other OSC. I would once again like to thank the Committee members and officers for the full part they have played in dealing with such a substantial workload. Their insight and wisdom continues to ensure effective scrutiny.

4.2 The untimely death of committee member and former chairman Councillor Bernard Pidcock in February was a great loss to us all. His experience and enthusiasm for education in Northumberland will be hard to replace. Our thoughts go out to his friends and family.

4.3 The Committee have made comment on fourteen reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Outcomes of Consultation on a proposal for closure of Netherton Northside First School
- Consultation Exercise for Proposed Changes to Post 16 Transport Policy
- Consultation on Education in the West of Northumberland
- Regional Adoption Agency (2)
- Report on Outcomes of Statutory Consultation on Proposals for Education in the West of Northumberland
- School Organisation Plan
- Proposed Closure of Netherton Northside First School
- Elective Home Education
- Ponteland Joint School and Leisure Facility Project Update
- National Funding Formula & School Funding
- School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2020/21 Academic Year
- The Outline Business Case for the replacement of school buildings for Hadrian Learning Trust Schools
- Proposed consultation on extending the age ranges of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools

4.3 The Committee have also considered many overview and scrutiny reports during the last year, including:

4.3.1 **Supporting Families in Poverty** - in July, the Committee examined the development of a poverty strategy for Northumberland. Northumberland County Council was one of the most deprived local authorities in England with 13.2% of the population living in one of the top 10% most deprived wards. The poverty strategy starting point was in direct response to local need and

opportunity and the importance of working with partners, voluntary and community sector organisations, communities and others was highlighted. Work was being undertaken with the Literacy Trust to help encourage parents from low income families to talk/read to their children to help address speech and language difficulties. Various models of delivery were being used across the County depending on the area and facilities available.

4.3.2 Work was also being undertaken with the Data Team to ensure that the County was in a good place to help residents when the roll out of Universal Credit took effect. Partnerships were being developed with businesses to deliver events which provided opportunities to meet with role models who could inspire children to achieve.

4.3.3 **Children Permanent Excluded from School & Elective Home Education** - in November, the Committee examined the rising numbers of permanent and fixed term exclusions within Northumberland schools and academies which had become a priority for the Council Authority to address. There were concerns regarding zero tolerance policies within some schools, whereby previously pupils who would have been disciplined for minor infringements of rules, were now being excluded. Exclusion had a major impact on the education of pupils and could have consequences for the rest of their lives. The safety of excluded pupils was another major concern when an alternative provision was not always able to be provided in a timely manner. The Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to address the rising level of exclusions within the County. The Group's final report is expected to be published early in 2019/20.

4.3.4 **Youth Service Review** - in December, the Committee looked at the work undertaken on implementing the recommendations of the Youth Service Review, including details of the proposed delivery model, the effect this would have on staff employed in the youth service, and the communities which might be affected by the proposed changes. Members examined the rationale for the changes and the benefits of the proposed model and discussed which communities and target populations of young people would benefit from the proposed changes.

4.3.5 **Peer Challenge - Care Leavers Service** - in December, the Committee examined the recent Peer Challenge which had focussed on the services to care leavers including the context of Peer Challenges, how it was undertaken, the findings and the next steps. A great amount of work had been undertaken following the feedback about the service by OFSTED in 2016 and the Peer Challenge offered an external review of changes that had been implemented since that time. The report highlighted that leaders knew the service well and what further work was required. Young people were positive about their workers and the service they received. An action plan to take forward the recommendations had been drawn up and was being worked through.

4.4 **Monitoring Reports** - in addition to the issues highlighted in paragraph 4.3, the Committee received the following overview reports:

- Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher 2016-17
- Safeguarding Activity Trends Report (2)
- Supporting Families in Poverty
- CIN Census Benchmarking (Safeguarding Activity Trends Annual Report)
- Care Proceedings and Public Law Outline Annual Report on Progression
- Finance and Performance Six Monthly Report (2)
- Children's Social Care Practice Week
- Presentation from Northumberland College
- Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board - Annual Report
- Update on Academic Outcomes (Presentation)
- Schools Capital Programme
- Fostering Agency Annual Report
- Adoption Agency Annual Report
- Northumberland Adult Learning Services Outcomes - Annual Report
- Presentation on Outcomes of SEND OFSTED visit
- Director of Education Annual Report
- Annual Test of Assurance
- Children's Social Care - Self Assessment
- Outcomes of OFSTED visit to Haydon Bridge High School
- Schools Resilience Programme in the west of Northumberland

4.5 **Recruitment and Retention of Teachers Task and Finish Group** - established last year in response to the difficulties encountered in the recruitment and retention of teachers, especially in rural areas and the impact this had on schools, the Group presented its findings to the Committee in June. A number of the recommendations had already been implemented and an action plan would be presented to a future meeting.

**Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson**  
**Chairman - Family and Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



## **5. POLICY DEVELOPMENTS - IMPACT ON SCRUTINY**

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny function will play an important role in subjecting policy proposals to independent analysis and help the Cabinet and its Partners consider the long-term implications of the decisions being taken. Scrutiny can also provide valuable assurance to the public and stakeholders that their views and concerns will be taken into account in the way the new measures are shaped and implemented.
- 5.2 To retain public confidence, it is important that all existing and new forms of service delivery are subject to robust and public accountability. Scrutiny can harness the challenging and investigative aspects of its work together with its positive role in contributing to policy development and the restructuring of local services.

## **6. WORK PROGRAMMES**

- 6.1 The work programmes will continue to be delivered through a number of mechanisms, for example:
  - (a) Revisiting previous reviews and issues considered, focusing on progress made with recommendations contained in the reports
  - (b) Light touch reviews on particular issues
  - (c) Task and Finish Working Groups to look at in depth investigations;
  - (d) Receiving information on policy/strategy areas as part of their overview function
  - (e) Cross cutting issues will be considered by joint meetings
  - (f) Referrals from the Cabinet or Full Council.
- 6.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen have regular briefings from Directors and Service Heads on current and potential issues which may impact on the respective committee's future workload. These meetings are crucial in managing the work programmes, to ensure that particularly significant issues are given priority.
- 6.3 In addition, the Council's Business Chair has confirmed the following methods by which members can influence the scrutiny work programme:

### **6.3.1 Scrutiny**

- (a) Any scrutiny member can ask for an issue relevant to their remit to be scrutinised by giving notice to the scrutiny officer and notifying the Chairman.
- (b) Any five non-scrutiny members can also request an issue is scrutinised by informing the scrutiny officer and the relevant Chairman.
- (c) These requests then go to the Chairmen's Group for consideration and referral. It might not always be the case that the item requested by a committee member

is best suited to that committee, or workloads or overlap may see it given to another committee to consider.

- (d) Occasionally, items are raised that need an in depth study or examination and may be sent to working groups, which, following a review process, may then make recommendations or present their findings to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee to determine how the matter should be further progressed.
- (e) Scrutiny should also respond to any requests from Council or Cabinet to review particular areas of Council activity.

### **6.3.2 Pre-scrutiny**

The Administration have kept in place the pre-scrutiny system, whereby the majority of reports to be determined by the Cabinet are first considered for comment by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, the Chairmen's Group may passport a report directly to Cabinet without comment from an OSC, if they believe that there is not anything meaningful that an OSC can contribute to the process. Any comments or recommendations arising from the OSC meeting are presented to the Cabinet by the Committee Chairman prior to the matter being determined.

- 6.4 It is envisaged that the scrutiny function will continue to contribute positively to policy development, community engagement and participation, performance monitoring and scrutiny of partners and improvements in the services provided.

## **7. THEMED SCRUTINY**

There have been three task and finish or working groups operating at times during 2018/19:

- Teacher Recruitment and Retention - Family and Children's Services
- Children Permanently Excluded from School and Elective Home Education - Family and Children's Services
- Improving Health and Fitness - Health and Wellbeing

## **8. CALL-IN**

- 8.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committees can exercise their right to call-in, for reconsideration of decisions made, but not yet implemented by the Cabinet. There was one call-in (Provision of Indemnities in Respect of Legal Costs) in 2018/2019, which was rejected and no further action was required.

## **9. VISITS**

- 9.1 In February, representatives of the Health and Wellbeing OSC - Improving Health and Fitness Working Group visited facilities at Concordia Leisure Centre, Cramlington; Pegasus Centre, Morpeth, and Blyth Civic Centre (to discuss issues at Blyth Sports Centre) to gather evidence on programmes that can provide health benefits for users. The Working Group's findings will be contained in its report to the Health and Wellbeing OSC in early 2019/20.
- 9.2 In March, the Communities and Place OSC visited the West Sleekburn Integrated Waste Management Facility to see how the plant was playing a major role in achieving the Council's target to cut the amount of municipal waste it sends to landfill.

## **10. CHALLENGES/AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

- 10.1 The key challenge for both members and officers this year is to continue to make scrutiny more effective and outcome focused.
- 10.2 To maintain and build on the current levels of member engagement and attendance by focusing on priority issues of concern to members and the County's residents, providing concise information in appropriate formats and offering a range of training and development opportunities which meet member requirements.
- 10.3 To take on board the increased powers and responsibilities of the relevant legislation.
- 10.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to monitor the status of their recommendations to Cabinet. The aim, as always, will be to achieve best practice standards and to make a positive contribution to partnership working and service improvement.

## **11. FURTHER INFORMATION**

If members would like to receive a copy of any of the reports referred to above, please contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator. Feedback on scrutiny work or suggestions for possible issues to be included in the work programmes are always welcome. Members are invited to contact the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen or the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

## **12. AUTHOR AND CONTACT DETAILS**

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