

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

2021 - 2022



**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEES  
2021 - 2022**

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

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



**Councillor David Bawn**  
**Chair**

1.1 I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee, particularly my Vice-Chairman, Liz Dunn for all her hard work, including chairing the December meeting whilst I was away. 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. The work of the Committee has been greatly assisted by the regular attendance of Cabinet members and senior officers, for which I am grateful. In the last year the Committee has met on ten occasions dealing with 28 substantive items of business.

1.2 The Committee members have played a valuable and constructive role in the Council's strategic policy making areas and continue to provide overview of financial and strategic

policy issues.

1.3 The Committee has considered 19 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:

- **Borderlands**
- **Northumberland Enterprise Holdings Limited**
- **Northumberland Line** (two reports)
- **Council Tax Support Scheme**
- **Establishing a Pilot Culture and Creative Zone in Northumberland**
- **Energising Blyth Programme**
- **Newcastle Airport – Shareholder Loan Guarantee**
- **Green Homes Grant, Local Authority Delivery Phase 2 (LAD2) Grant Funding**
- **Corporate Plan Refresh 2021-24**
- **Dissolution of the Council's Partnership with Northumbria Healthcare/ Proposed Partnership for 0-19 Public Health Services - Consultation**
- **Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-25**
- **Household Support Fund** (two reports)
- **Budget 2022-23 and MTFP 2022-26**
- **Revenues and Benefits Policies for 2022/23**
- **Budget Consultation Report**
- **Trading Companies Financial Performance 2021-22** (two reports)

- **Blyth Relief Road**

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

- 1.4.1 **Workforce** – in July, the Committee received this annual report. Members paid tribute to the staff of the Council for their resilience and the emergency response provided for Covid as well as continuing with all business as usual activities. The year had been very different, and staff had adapted fantastically to undertaking different ways of working and a wide number of health and wellbeing activities had been developed to assist and support staff during this period.
- 1.4.2 **Statutory Consultation on the new timetable for the East Coast mainline between Edinburgh and London** – in July, the Committee considered the concerns of local member Isabel Hunter regarding the statutory consultation on the new timetable for the East Coast mainline between Edinburgh and London which was to be introduced. The proposals would cause significant impact on the county with a loss of 24 services per day. The North-East region as a whole would be adversely affected by these proposals and the only gain was one extra train an hour to Newcastle and a reduction of 5 minutes on the journey. The Committee supported the Council in seeking to suspend these introductions.
- 1.4.3 **Debt Recovery** - the Committee continued to receive regular reports (in July and December) which provided information relating to the level of outstanding debt owed to the Council. Members continued to be assured that the Council responds to customers proportionally and according to circumstances when recovering debt and that help would be given to residents who needed it.
- 1.4.4 **Advanced Propulsion Centre UK** – in August, Julian Hetherington, Director of Automotive Transformation gave a detailed presentation about the work of the Advanced Propulsion Centre. The presentation detailed the research, development and production of low carbon propulsion technology. It gave information regarding opportunities and challenges that may be faced with producing the technology within the county. The Committee subsequently received a presentation from British Volt on its proposed operations at East Sleekburn – see below.
- 1.4.5 **Advance Northumberland** – in August, the Committee was updated on the governance arrangements of Advance Northumberland and sought clarification on issues regarding future business planning, the impact of the pandemic on revenues and asset values and staffing roles. Members continued to monitor those issues in the quarterly Trading Companies Financial Performance reporting.
- 1.4.6 In April, members received an overview of the work being undertaken by Advance Northumberland. Members agreed that this should be an annual report.

- 1.4.7 **NCTA Digital Programme** – in December, the Committee received an overview of the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) digital programme and how it would benefit the County. The anticipated impact on Northumberland would include improved and faster connectivity; an increase in the number of businesses embracing digital to support growth; reduction in digital exclusion; investment in 5G pilot programmes in the county and the potential for further job opportunities. Members felt that it was important to close the digital divide, particularly in rural areas.
- 1.4.8 **Britishvolt** – in April, Peter Rolton, Executive Chairman at Britishvolt gave members an overview of its operations at the ground breaking first Gigaplant site in Blyth – a site chosen for its ideal location close to critical infrastructure. His presentation included details of the battery EV market; the long term vision to provide clean energy storage that supports the wider global energy transition; the phased building of the Gigaplant, and the Supplier Park which will create a battery eco-system around the Gigaplant. Peter also discussed the BV FutureGen Foundation which is a registered charity to support hard to reach groups in the communities near our factories. It will work with other like-minded organisations and individuals to develop relationships, training programmes, and employability programmes to provide and enable those with the correct level of desire to transition, with a pathway into a career at Britishvolt. A site in the centre of Ashington has been purchased to provide a FutureGen Hub.

**David Bawn**  
**Chair – Corporate Services and Economic Growth OSC**

## 2. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Nick Oliver,  
Chairman

- 2.1 I was pleased to Chair the Committee on five occasions and would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee, particularly Mark Mather, the Vice Chairman, for their support in those meetings.
- 2.2 The Committee received a number of overview reports on important issues for the county including the challenges faced by Active Northumberland throughout the covid pandemic and the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.
- 2.3 In addition, the Committee commented on six reports prior to determination by Cabinet:

- **Funding for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

- **Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy**
- **Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2020-23**
- **Integrated Domestic Abuse Services for Northumberland – Permission to Tender**
- **Northumberland Waste Management Strategy – Outcome of Kerbside Glass Recycling Collection Trial**
- **Policy for Street Naming and Numbering**

2.4 As mentioned above, the Committee received overview reports on the following issues.

2.4.1 **Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report 2020-2021 and Active Northumberland Annual Service Report April 2020– April 2021** – in early August, the Committee received these annual reports which set out the partnership agreement with Active Northumberland together with operations within the service and the challenges arising from Covid-19 which led to the partial and full closures of many of the leisure facilities managed by Active Northumberland. Members acknowledged that the past year had been a very difficult period for Active Northumberland and thanked management and staff for their work during the pandemic, including support to communities, schools and health services, which had been incredibly valuable as well as reopening centres quickly when permitted.

2.4.2 **Overview of the Fleet Replacement Programme in 2020/2021** – in late August, considered progress in the delivery of the programme to ensure that it was being delivered in a timely manner to ensure provision of front-line services, secured benefits of new technology, minimised impact on the environment and made a positive contribution to tackling climate change. Members noted however that, largely due to the pandemic, of the 391 vehicles scheduled to be replaced during 2021/22, 117 had been rescheduled.

- 2.4.3 Members were assured that improvements were being made to the depot-based charging network to accommodate the growing EV fleet. Planning permission had been obtained by estates management for the construction of solar PV car ports with EV charger capacity at County Hall. There was concern regarding the environmental impact of alternative fuel sources, e.g. hydro treated vegetable oil. The Energy Savings Trust had been engaged and were considering 'greening' the fleet, feasibility of EVs and alternatives, as EVs might not be suitable across the whole fleet. Technological advances and availability of models were continuing to be closely monitored.
- 2.4.3 **Northumberland Climate Change Update** – in October, the Committee received an update on progress implementing the Climate Change Action Plan which had been agreed by the previous Administration. Members were advised that grants of £8 million had been received to date to make improvements to the Council's estate and also assist residents earning less than £30,000; a 50% reduction in carbon emissions had been achieved ahead of the 2025 target, although it was acknowledged that a fall in business miles during the Covid 19 pandemic had contributed to that, and there had been an 8% reduction in emissions across the county based on 2019 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) data, comparing favourably to other Local Authorities where the average was 3.5%. Following a comprehensive discussion, the Committee expressed its appreciation of the work done to date and agreed that regular updates be provided.
- 2.4.4 **NE Bus Service Improvement Plan** – in October, the Committee discussed progress on developing the Improvement Plan, including the strategic importance of buses in the region, noting the impact that Covid-19 had had on passenger numbers and revenue. Members supported a number of proposals in the Plan including: to introduce fixed daily tickets, a flat fare of £1 for those under 19, but hoped that that could be extended for students in full time education and improved facilities both on buses and at bus stations/stops. The Committee looked forward to receiving further updates as the Plan was progressed.

**Nick Oliver**  
**Chair – Communities and Place OSC**





Councillor Jeff Reid, Chair

2.5 I was delighted to resume as Chair of the Committee from the December meeting following my previous stint in the Chair from 2017 to 2021. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee for continuing to make the work of the Committee relevant and productive. I would also like to thank Mark Mather, my Vice Chair, for his useful contribution and support. The Committee would not work as well as it does without regular attendance of the relevant Cabinet members who submit themselves to scrutiny and the staff who support them.

2.6 I will continue to prioritise the issues identified by the Committee's members, including such important matters as establishing a Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group to

examine the response of the Council and involved partners; the impact on communities and make recommendations that will ensure that we are all better prepared for similar events in the future.

2.7 Although the Committee is moving away from 'pre-scrutiny', preferring to focus on the implementation of Cabinet decisions where appropriate, members did comment and made recommendations on two reports prior to determination by the Cabinet;

- **Destination Management – Structure and Future Funding Arrangements**
- **Climate Change Update**

2.8 As stated above, the Committee has set its own priorities and considered several overview reports since I became Chairman, including:

2.8.1 **Active Travel and Road Safety for the Journey to School** – in December, the Committee looked at the activities delivered across Northumberland to support more people to walk and cycle for the school journey. Members were advised that current data showed that 37% of children walked to school with 6% either walking or scooting, with 6% parking away from the school and walking the remainder of the journey. 20% used school transport or public transport and 30% had travelled to school in a car, with 2% of those sharing. Members welcomed the initiatives that had been put in place such as 'Schools Go Smarter' which promoted sustainable travel to school; 'Go Smarter Safe Routes to School' which aimed to improve road safety and reduce traffic management issues around schools, and 'the Big Northumberland Gear Change' which asked residents to think about the journeys they took and to consider swapping some car journeys to a more active form of transport.

2.8.2 **Storm Arwen Review** – in January, the Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to examine the disruption caused by Storm Arwen in late November and the overall response to it, as well as identifying gaps in current systems and ways of improving policy and plans, within the County Council and also with partner organisations and the community to ensure that we can build



better resilience for similar events in the future. The Group has received around 70 written submissions from residents and businesses in the county, town and parish councils, elected members and a MP and will conduct further evidence gathering sessions with partner organisations in late March and April with the aim of presenting a report and recommendation to Council soon after.

2.8.3 **Empty Homes in Northumberland** – in February, the Committee considered the issue of empty homes in the county, the measures the Council were undertaking to bring them into use and the challenges that this represented. There has been a slight increase in the number of long-term empty properties from 1,985 at November to 2,070 at the time of the meeting, the highest number of which were mainly located in urban areas, particularly in Ashington and Blyth, although figures in areas such as Alnwick and Amble were cause of concern.

2.8.4 Members were concerned at the negative impact that such dwellings had on communities and supported measures to bring uninhabited or in some cases, abandoned homes, back in use, suggesting that there was a demonstratable need for a dedicated Empty Homes Team. The Committee will continue to monitor this issue and support officers in their efforts to resolve the problem.

2.8.5 **Great Northumberland Forest** – in April, the Committee was updated on progress with the scheme to plant a million trees in the county by 2024. Members were concerned at the level of commercial planting and the impact on nearby communities and infrastructure. This is an issue that I would like the Committee to continue to monitor.

2.9 The Committee also considered regular updates on the performance of Local Services (Neighbourhood Services and Technical Services); the Fire and Rescue Service following **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Round 2 Inspection Report**; a revised **Complaints Improvement Framework**; the **Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement** and the **Library Service Strategy 2021-2025** and agreed that these issues should continue to be monitored by this Committee in future. The Committee was also included in the **Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service: Community Risk Management Plan 2022-26 Consultation**.

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

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



**Councillor Jeff Reid,  
Chair**

3.1 I would like to start by thanking: my Vice-Chair, Kath Nisbet, the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr, our Director of Public Health, Elizabeth Morgan, and the wider team involved in supporting the Committee to deliver effective oversight and Scrutiny.

3.2 This report covers my time as Chair of the Committee from May 2021 to November 2021, after which I returned to Chair Communities and Place overview and scrutiny committee and Cllr Veronica Jones assumed the role of Chair for Health and Wellbeing.

3.3 Much like 2020, the Committee has spent a great deal of time monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee received regular updates regarding the local, regional, and national picture from the Director of Public Health, CCG, NHS, and other partners. These reports covered the epidemiology of Coronavirus, Public Health's outbreak, prevention and control plan, testing, vaccinations, and the impact on our local healthcare services and the wider community.

3.4 This year the Committee had several new members to it. Therefore, in June 2021, we organised for the NHS to give us an update on the developments of the Health and Care Bill currently progressing through Parliament and the continued roll out of the Integrated Care System. This was in addition to my attendance at the joint North East and Cumbria ICS scrutiny committee, where members from across the region scrutinise the ICS strategy and its progress.

3.5 June and July saw the Committee receive the annual quality accounts for the three local trusts. These accounts provide the Committee with oversight of the Trusts' priorities for coming year and highlight some areas the Committee wanted to understand more about:

**3.5.1 Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust** - Members were pleased to hear about the progress in Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and to see the continuation of this work as a priority for 2021/22. As expected, members were interested in the impact of COVID and long COVID, agreeing that a future report should be scheduled so as to keep the Committee to be informed of Northumbria's COVID strategies. Members asked for an update on the joint end of life strategy with commissioners which we received in March 2022.

**3.5.2 Newcastle Upon Tyne NHS Foundation Trust** - The Committee welcomed the efforts to improve the quality of care provided, as a result of the NCEPOD recommendations, to young people and young adults with mental health conditions. Members were pleased to hear of a dedicated and efficient pathway for assessment and treatment plans in partnership with CNTW. The enhancing of capability in quality improvement in light of COVID-19 and the training of staff throughout the organisation and work with Institute for Healthcare Improvement was of particular interest to members and they looked forward to hearing how this priority progressed.

**3.5.3 Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne, and Wear NHS Foundation Trust** – Members discussed access to mental health services and were informed that during COVID there had been an increase in service use by 18-24 year olds. This increase was in part, due to virtual and online access which had seen people more engaged. CNTW confirmed these options would remain available, in addition to face-to-face services. The Committee also considered the transition from childhood to adulthood in line with the Trust’s collaboration work with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley. Some concerns were addressed when Members were told the patient facility for young people with an eating disorder which had previously been provided in Middlesbrough, could now be provided more locally at Prudhoe or in paediatrics in hospital.

3.6 The work programme was very much the Committee’s own during my time as Chair, with only one report being dealt with prior to its determination by Cabinet: Dissolution of the Council’s Partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. The Committee will continue to receive updates on this throughout 2022.

3.7 During my time as Chair, the Committee also received the following overview reports:

- Northumbria Healthcare NHS: COVID Recovery Strategy
- Community Mental Health Transformation
- Proposed Partnership for 0-19 Public Health Services
- Complaints Annual Report 2020/2021: Adult Social Care and Continuing Health Care Services
- Winter Planning Update
- HealthWatch Northumberland Annual Report

**Councillor Jeff Reid**  
**Chair - Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**Councillor Veronica Jones, Chair**

3.8 I was appointed to the role of Chair in December 2021. As former Cabinet Member for Adult Wellbeing and Health, I was looking forward to chairing this Committee.

3.9 The Committee has planned its work programme around some of the most pressing issues facing health and wellbeing at this current time. Since December, the Committee has looked diligently at 9 reports, including 1 strategy report prior to determination by Cabinet.

3.10 This would not have been possible without the support of Chris Angus, our Scrutiny Officer and senior officers such as Cath McEvoy-Carr and Liz Morgan, to whom I would like to offer my thanks. I would also like to thank my Vice-Chair, Councillor Nisbet for her contributions to the Committee.

- 3.11 In January 2022, the committee reviewed and commented on workforce issues in commissioned care service. Members discussed the current recruitment and retention issues affecting the care providers from which the Council commissions adult social care services. The report proposed contractually obligating providers to raise the minimum wage of career workers in Northumberland to the meet the level of the real living wage. The Committee were pleased to see this report and its recommendations and welcomed the input of HealthWatch Northumberland at the meeting.
- 3.12 The Committee supported the recommendation to offer a fee uplift linked to a higher minimum wage and their comments were shared with Cabinet at their meeting the following week.
- 3.13 In February 2022, the Committee examined access to GP and dental services in Northumberland. The detailed presentation, from the CCG, highlighted the various pressures and requirements faced by GP surgeries over the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a lengthy discussion around the issues residents face with access to GP services and the ways in which access to services were changing. The CCG used this opportunity to highlight their ongoing survey which looked to improve partnership working across the health and social care, continuity of care, value the relationship between partitioner and patient, be proactive and anticipatory but also include residents on the journey to improving access to services. Members accepted that access to GP services needed to change but were clear this should not be at the detriment of the needs of patients and all changes should avoid unintended discrimination.
- 3.14 NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) engaged with the Committee in a discussion regarding access to dental services. NHSE/I gave a detailed explanation of the framework in which dental service must be delivered; this, alongside the 'myth buster' document produced by HealthWatch Northumberland helped the Committee understand the challenges NHSE/I faced in providing these services. Members

recommend that NHSE/I improve their communication to aid better public understanding of how dental services can and should be accessed.

- 3.15 The Committee frequently hears about the difficulties the health and care sector faces with recruitment and retention nationally, regionally, and locally. Dentistry was no exception to this with NHSE/I saying recruitment and retention was a significant risk to both sustaining existing or improving levels of NHS dentistry.
- 3.16 In March 2022, we received the draft version of Northumberland CCGs End of Life Strategy. This Committee had recommended, in 2018, that the CCG develop a county wide strategy for palliative and end of life care for all the residents of Northumberland. The new strategy was written around 6 key ambitions with details of how to achieve them clearly set out within the strategy. Members sought assurance on several concerns, namely around the options available in certain localities. The CCG confirmed that the aim would be to have care as close to home as possible but there were sometimes issues around access to appropriate beds, which would hopefully be improved through the strategy. The Committee will continue to receive updates as this strategy is implemented.
- 3.17 In addition to the above, the Committee also considered the following reports:
- COVID-19 & Vaccination Update
  - Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020
  - North Tyneside and Northumberland Safeguarding Adults Annual Report 2020-2021
  - NHCT Quality Accounts
  - NEAS Quality Accounts
  - Update on Rothbury Hospital
  - Addictions Services: Outcomes of the independent review of drugs by Professor Dame Carol Black
- 3.18 As we move into the new municipal year, the Committee will continue to drive its own work programme. We already have items on the following issues scheduled for the coming year:
- COVID-19 Updates (inc the impact of long COVID)
  - Review Following the Dissolution of the Council's Partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.
  - Extra Care and Supported Housing Strategy
  - Specialist Dementia Service
  - NHS Quality Accounts

**Councillor Veronica Jones**  
**Chair - Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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



Wayne Daley, Chair

4.1 I would like to start by thanking the members of the Committee for their insight, diligence, and focus over the last 12 months. I would like to extend my thanks to the Committee's Scrutiny Officer, Chris Angus, and the Committee's Senior Democratic Services Officer, Lesley Little.

4.2 2021/2022 has been a busy year as we continue to deal with the impact of COVID-19. I would like to take this opportunity to record a special thank you to Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director for Adults and Children's Services, and all her team for their unwavering dedication to Northumberland, its residents and its children and young people.

4.3 The Committee have made comment on 16 reports and strategy documents prior to determination by the Cabinet. The following reports were approved subsequent to that process:

- Seaton Valley Federation
- Proposals for Atkinson House
- School Organisation Plan for 2021 – 2024
- Education Infrastructure Contribution Policy
- Health Education England & NCC Project Choice
- Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan 2021- 25
- Northumberland Skills Pathfinder – Curriculum Research
- Key Education Outcomes - 2018-19 Academic Year
- National Funding Formula and 2022/2023 School Funding
- School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2023/2024 Academic Year
- RDA relocation
- Report on Berwick Partnership Organisation
- Business Case for Astley and Whytrig

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

**4.4.1 Impact of COVID pandemic on SEND services** - in June 2021, the Committee continued to monitor the effect of COVID on our communities. The report detailed the response of Northumberland County Council to the COVID pandemic in relation to children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND). Our committee was pleased to see some of the work that been undertaken to help the system cope with the increase in demand as a result of COVID. Members still had some concerns about wider access to mental health services for children and young people and the Committee will continue to watch this in the coming year.

**4.4.2 Peer Review for Care Leavers Service Update** – In September 2021, the Committee continued to scrutinise areas of interest. Following on from the peer review undertaken in late 2018, the Committee received an update on the actions taken to date. We were pleased to hear that work was on going to assist care leavers into jobs and apprenticeships within the Council, Advance Northumberland and Active Northumberland. There was also a successful mentoring scheme within Northumberland Fire and Rescue. A continuous improvement plan was monitored monthly and more detailed scrutiny was undertaken by the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group. Our committee will continue to monitor the progress of this service throughout 2022 and into 2023.

**4.4.3 Children’s Home Placement and Sufficiency Strategy** – In January 2022, the Committee received a report setting out the Council’s approach to meeting its responsibilities to provide secure, safe, and appropriate accommodation to children in care and care leavers, identifying appropriate planning and delivery of sufficient and high-quality placements and associated support. Our committee had early involvement with the development of this strategy having received a report on these issues in November 2021. Members welcomed this impressive report on a complex area.

**4.4.4 Home Builds Progress** – Linked to the above report, FACS also received an update on the progress of the children’s homes build. This was a very welcomed report and Members were able to clearly see how the Children’s Home Placement and Sufficiency Strategy was being implemented.

**4.5 Monitoring Reports** - in addition to the issues highlighted in paragraph [4.1](#), the Committee received the following overview reports:

- Winter Support Grant
- Schools Forum Role and Decision Making Powers
- SEND Revisit
- Children’s Services Self-Assessment
- Social Worker Recruitment and Retention
- North East Submission to the Care Review
- OFSTED Inspection Framework
- School Transport Governance Arrangements – TOR
- Development of Family Hubs
- Pupil Premium Funding
- Complaints Annual Report 2010/2021 – Children’s Social Care,
- Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2021
- Adult Learning Service Annual Report: Learning and Skills Service
- Annual Engagement Statement
- Director of Education Annual Report: Key Educational Outcomes 2020-2021 Academic Year.
- Safeguarding Activity Trends
- Annual Report of Principle Social Worker



- Performance and Finance Report (Children's Services)
- Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership (NSSP) Annual Report

**4.6** 2022/2023 looks to continue to be a busy year with the Committee already having 25 reports scheduled on its draft work programme and we will further scrutiny's work with other organisations in the County by acting as a critical friend. I have already reached out to the Regional Schools Commissioner and look forward to discussing how we can work together in the future.

**Councillor Wayne Daley**

**Chair - 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, and
  - (f) referrals from the Cabinet or Full Council.
- 6.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs have regular briefings from Executive Directors, 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 task and finish 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 continues to give the opportunity for OSCs to comment on reports prior to determination by Cabinet, although it is becoming increasingly common for committees to consider the implementation of decisions made. This is particularly the case of reports which fall within the remit of the Communities and Place OSC. However, when reports are subject to pre-scrutiny, any comments or recommendations arising from the OSC meeting are presented to the Cabinet by the Committee Chair 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 has been one task and finish groups operating at times during 2021/2022:

**Storm Arwen – Communities and Place** – it is anticipated that the final report and recommendations arising from the review will be presented to Council in July 2022.

## 8. CALL-IN

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 (Dissolution of the Council's partnership with Northumbria Healthcare) in 2021/2022, which was rejected by the Health and Wellbeing OSC and no further action was required.

## 9. VISITS

There were no Committee visits during this period.

## **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 or, for matters relating to the Family and Children's Services and the Health and Wellbeing OSCs, Chris Angus, Scrutiny Officer. 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**

Sean Nicholson, Scrutiny Co-ordinator (01670 622605)  
[Sean.Nicholson@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Sean.Nicholson@northumberland.gov.uk)

Chris Angus, Scrutiny Officer (01670 622604)  
[Chris.Angus@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.Angus@northumberland.gov.uk)