

# Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

2023 - 2024



Northumberland  
County Council

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEES  
2023 - 2024**

## 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, especially my Vice-Chair, Liz Dunn for all her hard work during the last year, particularly when she chaired the January meeting in my absence. I am sure all the Committee would wish to place on record their gratitude to the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, who has facilitated our work programming process and assisted my role as Chair. The work of the Committee continued to be 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 six occasions dealing with 19 substantive items of business.

1.2 Following the review of the Council's scrutiny function which was agreed at the last year's AGM as part of refresh of the Constitution, the Committee's focus has moved away from commenting on pre-Cabinet reports and has instead been on monitoring the Council's strategic policy making areas and continuing to provide overview of performance regarding financial, workforce and economic development issues. The Committee also received updates on preparation for the Budget 2024-25.

1.3 **Financial Performance** – the Committee believe that it is has an important role in monitoring the Council's financial performance and continued to receive quarterly reports in June, September and March. In June, members noted that a recurring theme in the Financial Performance reports was the number of vacancies that had remained unfilled. Although we understood that a review of vacancies was necessary as part of the budget reduction process, it was also acknowledged that there were some issues regarding recruitment. Members agreed to explore this further within workforce reports.

1.4 In September, the report highlighted several pressures throughout the Authority particularly in children's services including residential care placements, and housing services due to energy prices. However, members were assured that there were mechanisms in place to help manage pressures such as managing discretionary spend and deferring non-essential spends as well as a mechanism having been put in place regarding filling vacancies.

1.5 In March, members were assured that the Council was operating its finances well within its means and that the drawing down of the Business Recovery Reserve was a planned one-off scenario and that recurring overspends would not be funded by reserves.

- 1.6 **Debt Recovery** – in June and February, the Committee continued to monitor the Council’s debt position. Although we acknowledged the hard work of the recovery team, we noted that sundry debt had increased, partly due to the backlog created by the pandemic, but also because claimants were moving over to Universal Credit which made it difficult for overpayments to be reclaimed. Members have expressed concern regarding the impact of universal credit and increasing housing rates on debt recovery and have requested a further report on that position.
- 1.7 **Regeneration** – in September, the Committee received an overview of areas of investment and activity regarding town and community regeneration; cultural investment; rural stewardship and growth; economic growth, and strategic sites. We appreciate these regular updates and acknowledge the work the Council does in this area. However, it also gives us the opportunity to identify specific issues for further examination such as the gigafactory development at Cambois and broadband rollout across the county which were then added to our work programme.
- 1.8 **Workforce** – in September, the Committee received this annual report which highlighted how retention strategies were working as staff turnover had decreased. However, members raised concerns over the level of sickness – particularly in those services which appeared to have the highest number of vacancies and agreed that the OSC would continue to monitor this issue. In addition, we noted that the Council appeared to have an ageing workforce and were advised that initiatives were being put in place through talent management and succession planning in response to that issue.
- 1.9 In January, the Committee considered a report which gave an insight into staff absence and sickness across the workforce. The analysis of the data showed that the majority of short-term sickness was due to respiratory illness whereas long term sickness was mainly due to mental health. It was confirmed from the data that the mental health affecting staff was mainly due to external factors rather than work related stress. The Authority was now looking to implement several improvements including looking at bolstering the mental health offer to staff. Members wondered whether staff working from home may be doing so whilst ill and therefore masking issues through under-reporting. It was acknowledged that there had been a cultural shift since the pandemic when staff were initially happy to work from home but over time, some might begin to experience isolation and loneliness. The Work Smart review had recently been completed and there were recommendations made around striking a balance between home and office-based working that would suit both the needs of the individual and of the Council.
- 1.13 **Northumberland Lottery** – in September, we were pleased to hear that the Northumberland Lottery has raised £134,231 for community groups in the county. There were 119 registered community groups benefitting from the lottery - players choose which group they wish to support. New groups can register with the Council to join the scheme, subject to meeting the qualifying criteria.

- 1.10 **Broadband** – in February, the Committee considered a report which provided an overview of progress on broadband connectivity projects in Northumberland, and details of progress of the UK Telephone network move to digital, which was on track to achieve digital migration for all by 2025. However, despite commercial rollout of broadband and grant funded schemes such as Superfast and LFFN (Local Full Fibre Network), there are still premises in Northumberland without access to suitable broadband connectivity. The Council is working alongside BDUK (Building Digital UK) and suppliers to address this, through national and locally funded interventions, details of which are contained in the report. Although we noted that the objective of the projects was to ensure residents would be connected to the internet in some way, members acknowledged that not everyone would receive full fibre and it was therefore necessary to manage residents' expectations.
- 1.11 **BEST** – the Committee has received regular updates on the progress of the BEST Programme and has requested detailed reports on specific work streams. In March, members considered **Best in Class Commissioning** which set out the introduction of a new commissioning framework underpinned by a category management approach to improve the quality of public services in Northumberland and to ensure the Council manages its spend with suppliers more commercially to generate efficiencies. Members were pleased to learn that significant efficiencies had been realised through the programme and noted that improvements had been made regarding supplier engagement and that tenders would be awarded not just on price, but be criteria led, including on the quality of goods and services, and where practicable, locally sourced.
- 1.12 **Advance Northumberland** – in March, the Committee received a detailed presentation on the operations of Advance Northumberland from Robin Earl, Advance's Group Executive Director who was accompanied by his executive team. The presentation included progress of projects across the county, including regeneration schemes and housing, commercial and workspace programmes.

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

## 2. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor Nick Oliver,  
Chair

2.1 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 during my nine months as Chair. 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.

2.2 I invited the Portfolio holders for Improving Our Roads and Highways; Looking After Our Environment; Looking After Our Communities, and Promoting Healthy Lives to our first meetings of the year to discuss forthcoming issues so that the Committee members could identify those matters that we wanted to prioritise on the work programme.

**2.3. Firefighter's Decontamination** - in May, the Committee considered the risk of contaminants from fires and the measures that could be put in place to reduce the danger of these impacting on the health and safety of firefighters. We were particularly concerned to learn that firefighters were 7 times more likely to have cancer than the general public and were diagnosed earlier in their 40s and 50s. This was due to a cocktail of chemicals including carcinogenic materials which were produced by fires. Personal protective equipment (PPE) protected firefighters' skin and respiratory systems, but wind conditions could also mean that those outside burning buildings were also impacted by smoke and air borne fibres, which may or may not be visible or easily wiped off. They caused both acute toxicity and/or chronic toxicity which impacted on the body's internal organs. Following an extensive discussion and a demonstration of PPE including new breathing apparatus, helmet and coat, and comparison made with a dirty helmet which had been sealed in a protective bag, the Committee formulated the following recommendation which was approved by Cabinet in June:

*that financial support for the recommendations made by the fire and rescue service be provided to ensure that Northumberland was leading to reduce the risk of contamination and supporting fire and rescue personnel.*

**2.4. Food Waste Recycling Pilot** - the Committee continues to monitor the implementation of the Food Waste Recycling Pilot which has been rolled out in four areas: Morpeth/Longhirst/Hebron/Ulgham, Morpeth Stobhill, Bedlington and Pegswood. We heard that positive feedback is being received from residents participating in the pilot – overall user satisfaction levels are still to be determined via customer survey activity later this year. We were pleased with the progress made in developing this scheme and will continue to monitor this and other recycling initiatives in the future.

- 2.5. Development of a Tree Management Strategy** - the Committee has played an active role in the development of the Tree Management Strategy and was content to support the draft Strategy when it was presented to us in July. However, Members continued to raise their concerns regarding the impact that Ash Die-back was having on a significant number of the tree population in the county, particularly where there was danger to residents in public spaces and to the highway. We were advised that inspections were being carried out at key sites such as streets near schools and key paths in parks, and that sample checks were being carried out on key arterial routes to obtain a sense of the scale of the problem including the A69, A189, A68, A689 and the B road between Belsay and Morpeth. There would then be an assessment of the scope of the works required on those routes before making rough calculations for the remainder of the county's arterial routes. The Committee will continue to monitor this situation and support all efforts to identify areas where improvements can be made.
- 2.6. Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 -26 Progress Against Action Plan** - when the Strategy was approved by Cabinet in March 2023, the OSC agreed to monitor progress against the action plan, which we did in October. Whilst we acknowledged the good progress being made to deal with this is including aiding those in the armed forces or veterans with dedicated armed forces case workers and the 'Somewhere Safe to Stay' project placed rough sleepers somewhere safe overnight and provided assistance finding accommodation. However there remained some challenges such as assessing those individuals recently released from prison, and due to the current economic climate, there was a noticeable impact on the number of Section 21 notices being served. We noted that many properties were being sold by landlords due to increases in mortgage costs for property owners. Local authority housing allowance rates did not match rent levels and many tenants could not afford to pay the difference). We will continue to monitor this issue and will consider the implications of the new social housing regulations in early 2024/25.
- 2.7. Fix My Street** - in October, around five months after the introduction of the Fix My Street public realm reporting system, the Committee looked at how the scheme was being implemented. We were advised that although there had been a few minor teething issues, information was now available to officers much quicker and more easily accessible than previously; the system was enabling processes to be streamlined and consequently, was making the workforce more efficient, and members/public reporting issues to the Council were receiving timely updates. Members felt that the system was working well and was relatively easy to use both for elected members and the public and we welcomed the automatic updates that were generated as issues were resolved. We acknowledged that further tweaks would be needed following feedback from users and noted that some improvements were already planned.
- 2.8. Planning Services Performance** - the Committee has considered an overview of the performance monitoring and assurance arrangements currently in place for the Local Planning Authority function of the Council. We also received an update on the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 which had been given Royal Assent in

October 2023 which intended to facilitate growth in all parts of the country. Members were pleased to note that for many of the key performance indicators, the Council was in the top 25% of authorities (of 470 local authorities) and top 1% for some indicators. Although the Committee was supportive of the Planning service, we were concerned at the increasing workload for officers who were already performing a very challenging role and requested that Cabinet consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work, and approve additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received.

**2.9. Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report 2022-23 including the Service Plan Successes 2022-23**

- in January, the Committee received a very detailed presentation on the performance and operations of Active Northumberland in the previous year. We were pleased to hear that following the difficulties endured by the service and users during the pandemic, revenues had increased by £2.5m over this period and user numbers across Active's facilities had significantly recovered. However, members also noted that following a government prescribed procurement exercise to ensure value for money as well as delivery of key objectives, a new contractor had been appointed from April 2024 and that Active Northumberland was working with the Council to ensure a smooth transition for the business to the new contractor. We commended Active Northumberland' management team for their stewardship of the Council's leisure services in recent years and wished them well for the future.

**2.10. Delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-2032**

- in January, received a very detailed report on the implementation of the Plan in the relatively short time since it had been adopted. Members acknowledged that tourism and visitor experiences were very important to the county's economy and were supportive of the initiatives being actioned to promote Northumberland and its attractions.

**2.11. Storm Response**

- in February, following a number of named storms that had caused some minor damage in Northumberland, we considered an update about the Council's preparedness and response arrangements for storms. A summary of progress was also included against the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group recommendations approved by Council in July 2022. We were pleased to learn that 26 of the 28 recommendations had been closed, moved to business-as-usual activity or were being dealt with by organisations other than the County Council. With regard to the outstanding recommendations: progress was underway to improve the technological capacity of the West Hartford incident room and a bespoke Incident Management system, which was expected to be completed at the end of March with training to be provided for staff that would be using it, and arrangements for the provision of water and emergency water supplies had been escalated to the Local Resilience Forum to improve understanding of the risk for all partners. We discussed many issues around lessons learned from the process and the implantation of the recommendations and were satisfied with the plans now in place



both within the Council and in collaboration with statutory and other partners to fully respond to similar future weather events.

2.12. In addition, we have received updates on the Council's **Corporate Feedback Performance, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Inspection** and the **Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement**.

2.13. The Committee will continue to focus on our priorities in the coming year, which will include:

- North East Transport Plan
- Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans
- Northumberland Road Safety Strategy
- Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- New Section 106 system
- Green/Open spaces Review
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Highways Maintenance Programme
- Introduction to Places for People Leisure

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

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



**Councillor Richard Dodd,  
Chair**

3.1 I am delighted to present the Annual Scrutiny Report for the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This year has been marked by extensive deliberations and engagement on a wide range of issues impacting the health and wellbeing of the residents in Northumberland.

3.2 Firstly, I would like to extend my gratitude to Northumberland County Council Officers, NHS colleagues, and HealthWatch Northumberland for their invaluable contributions to our work. Their insights have been instrumental in guiding our scrutiny efforts. I must also acknowledge the support of our Scrutiny Officer and Democratic Services Officer, whose dedication has guided our work programme and ensured the smooth functioning of the Committee.

3.3 I extend my sincere thanks to my Vice Chair, Councillor Kath Nisbet, and all members of the Committee for their diligent work over the past year. Together, we have maintained a robust approach to our responsibilities and have identified numerous areas warranting further attention in our work programme.

3.3 Earlier this year, I presented the Committee's interim report. This report showcased the work we had done from May to September and focused on several critical issues in adult social care and healthcare services in Northumberland. Firstly, we addressed the pressing challenges of workforce shortages in adult homecare services, prompting discussions on strategies to attract more workers to the sector. Secondly, contingency plans for commissioned adult social care services were examined, focusing on the preferred approach of transferring service users to alternative providers and considering in-house options as a last resort. Thirdly, we looked at the closure of a 100-hour pharmacy in Cramlington which highlighted broader concerns about pharmacy closures nationally. Finally, we heard the Annual Report from HM Senior Coroner; this shed light on trends in the coroner service, including an increase in suicide conclusions, prompting a commitment from the Committee to further scrutinise these issues.

3.4 Every year, the Committee submits a formal response to our local NHS Trust's Quality Accounts. Last year, we were troubled by Newcastle upon Tyne Hospital Foundation Trust's Oncology performance and in our response, we requested they returned to our Committee to update us on the work they were doing to improve. In November 2023, they did return, and we received a detailed presentation on oncology performance nationally and regionally, highlighting challenges such as deteriorating cancer waiting times and increasing referral demand. Discussions ensued regarding the impact of straight-to-test pathways, the discontinuation of reporting on two-week waits, and efforts to improve performance through initiatives like digital imaging and enhanced pathway monitoring. Concerns were raised about forecasting accuracy and communication with patients awaiting referrals and treatments. However, optimism

prevailed regarding advancements in cancer treatment technology, including the potential benefits of artificial intelligence.

- 3.5 A joint meeting with the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine cross cutting issues including the refresh of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Plan marked a significant milestone in our efforts to address health disparities. We are committed to aligning our work with the objectives outlined in the plan, placing an emphasis on reducing inequalities in health outcomes. The joint meeting provided an excellent forum for scrutiny with the joint experiences and knowledge of both committees. The discussions of the four themes have led the committee to list several areas for further work in 2024/2025.
- 3.6 Our joint meeting also considered the annual Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership Report. The report highlighted the vision, structure, and strategic priorities of the partnership, emphasising joint and separate arrangements for children and adults. The report showcased Northumberland's commitment to safeguarding, providing detailed analysis and information on safeguarding work in the county. We commended the collaborative work with partners, emphasised the shared responsibility for safeguarding, and called for increased awareness and training on safeguarding issues, including domestic abuse and self-neglect among adults.
- 3.7 This year we also received reports from the Welfare Rights Advisory Unit, spanning from April 2019 to March 2023 and focusing on key issues in supporting individuals with benefits amidst ongoing changes to the benefits system, such as the migration to Universal Credit and adjustments to qualifying ages for certain benefits. We discussed the role of the Welfare Rights Team in training frontline adult social care staff, challenges posed by changes in benefit administration, participation in government pilot schemes, and the provision of support to residents through partnerships with organisations like Northumberland Communities Together and Citizen Advice.
- 3.8 In March 2024, we focused our attention on the Director of Public Health's Annual report. It promoted aging well in Northumberland, highlighting strategies to enhance independence and functional ability among older adults. The report, contributed to by various organisations and residents, emphasised the importance of addressing health inequalities and promoting a positive, strengths-based narrative on aging. We were supportive of the recommendations to challenge ageist attitudes and addressing social isolation, particularly in rural areas. Our discussions at the March meeting touched on issues such as affordable housing, physical activity, the cost of living crisis, and the vital role of carers. Suggestions were made to address challenges such as age discrimination, sexual health, and respite care for carers, with proposals to include these topics in future scrutiny.
- 3.9 As spring came into view, our work programme became dominated by the NHS Quality Accounts. A statutory requirement of NHS Trusts, to report on the quality of the healthcare they provide and consult with us on their quality priorities for the coming year. The quality accounts are always welcomed by our committee and

provide a great opportunity for us to get a holistic understanding of healthcare in Northumberland.

- 3.10 We have continued to play an active role in the Joint North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This Committee acts as a critical friend and scrutinises the work of the North East Integrated Care Board (ICB). The ICB has responsibility for commissioning healthcare across the region including pharmacy and dentistry. Two areas that are never far from our minds. In 2024/25 we will look at improving the way the Joint OSC and our OSC co-ordinate our efforts on vital issues. I'd like to thank Councillor Kath Nisbet and Councillor Paul Ezhilchelvan for their support with this committee.
- 3.11 I am proud of the Committee's achievements over the past year. Our dedication to promoting the health and wellbeing of Northumberland's residents remains unwavering. As we embark on the new municipal year, I look forward to furthering our collective efforts to address the challenges and opportunities in the health and social care landscape.

**Councillor Richard Dodd**  
**Chair - Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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



**Councillor Wayne Daley, Chair**

- 4.1 It has been another productive year, marked by thorough examination of critical issues facing children, young people, and families in Northumberland.
- 4.2 I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all individuals involved in facilitating the work of FACS, including our Vice-Chair, Councillor Eve Chicken, who assumed the role in July following Councillor Richard Dodd's appointment as Chair of our Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. I also acknowledge the invaluable efforts of committee members, the cabinet member, senior officers, the scrutiny officer, and the democratic services officer, whose collective contributions have been instrumental in enhancing the effectiveness and productivity of the Committee.
- 4.3 Throughout the year, FACS has considered a total of 15 reports, with the work programme being predominantly driven by the Committee's priorities. Notably, only one report was referred to our Committee prior to Cabinet, allowing us to focus on areas deemed most crucial in fulfilling the three key roles of scrutiny.
- 4.4 In November, I presented the Committee's interim report, detailing the reports we received on various topics including the Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker, Home to School Transport Review, Outcomes of the Consultation on Proposals for the Berwick Partnership, School Improvement Team report, and the SEND Strategy Report.
- 4.5 Since then we have examined the Quality of Practice in Children's Social Care and Children's Social Care Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan, which provided insights into the evaluation framework for Northumberland's Social Care practices. The Committee engaged in robust discussions and noted numerous examples of exemplary practice within the team.
- 4.6 In December we dedicated our time to the Education, Send and Skills Annual Report, which highlighted actions and progress against the six key priorities. Discussions encompassed various topics including support for school staff welfare, successful partnerships in early years education, efforts to enhance SEN provision, and initiatives to promote employability skills. Challenges such as falling school rolls and the persistent gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners were also discussed at length and identified as areas for the 24/25 work programme.
- 4.7 In January we held a joint meeting with the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny to explore cross-cutting areas impacting the health and well-being of children and young people. This included considerations on the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Refresh, with discussions highlighting priorities such as Education, Children's safety and

support, and positive lifestyle choices. Feedback from the Committee underscored the need for in-depth reports on Family Hubs, school readiness, and absences, as well as the importance of addressing the cost of living crisis, improving public transport, and enhancing access to affordable housing. FACS members commended the efforts of Northumberland Skills in offering courses and apprenticeships to bridge skills gaps and provide employment opportunities for young people in Northumberland.

- 4.8 The remainder of this year has been spent hearing the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher and Elective Home Education and the Annual Representations report.
- 4.9 Moving forward, the Committee will continue its oversight of the Home to School Transport Review and explore the evolution of family hubs and support services available for young people.
- 4.10 As we look ahead to the next 12 months, FACS remains committed to addressing key scrutiny priorities. We welcome suggestions from Council members on areas they believe warrant consideration within our remit, and encourage them to reach out to myself, Councillor Chicken, or our Scrutiny Officer.

**Councillor Wayne Daley**

**Chair – Family and Children’s Services Overview and 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, members can influence the scrutiny work programme as follows:
- (a) Any scrutiny member can ask for an issue relevant to their remit to be scrutinised by giving notice to either Simon Neilson, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, the OSC scrutiny officer or the Chair.
  - (b) Any five non-scrutiny members can also request an issue is scrutinised by informing the scrutiny officer and the relevant Chair.
  - (c) These requests then go to the Chairs' 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.

6.4 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 Group during 2023/2024:

**Community Defibrillators** – Health and Wellbeing – The group has been examining key issues related to the availability, maintenance, accessibility, and effectiveness of community defibrillators within Northumberland. The primary aim was to make recommendations that enhance the availability of community defibrillators, ultimately improving community health and safety. The Group has is currently drafting their final report and will present this to the wider Health and Wellbeing OSC, early in the new year.

## 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 were no call-ins in 2023/2024.

## 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 are to continue to make scrutiny 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 respective Chairs, Vice-Chairs or the Scrutiny Officers.

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

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