

Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18

HEADLINE STATS

Committee Meetings

19 meetings held

105 reports
considered

35 public
presentations heard

1 cabinet decision
debated under 'call in'

Task Groups & Spotlights

9 reviews established

139 witnesses
interviewed

4 reports published

28 recommendations
for change



CHAIR'S REVIEW

Following elections and a new Council in May, a new Scrutiny Committee structure was adopted, giving the Council three Scrutiny Committees; **Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services**, **Children's** and **Health & Adult Care**. This new structure reflects the ongoing direction towards health and social care integration and a balancing of Scrutiny Committee workloads. Each Scrutiny Committee has its own specific remit but as Scrutiny Chairs we have worked together to take a 'whole Council' and Devon-wide approach to our overview and scrutiny role, and this year several themes have emerged across our work:

Integration and working better together

Health & social care integration remains a significant challenge for Council and Health leaders, and Scrutiny have looked to influence this through reviewing the progression of the **Better Care Fund TG** as well as the establishment of a standing overview group. The need for better connections between the police, local councils and community/voluntary groups to find solutions to community wellbeing issues was highlighted in a review of the **Impact of Changes to Local Policing**, and multi-agency working has been a key concern for councillors examining the state of **Children & Young People's Emotional Health & Wellbeing** and the availability of the right support.

Quality and Outcomes

Monitoring the quality of services and pushing for improvements is an enduring theme for Scrutiny. Members have continued to question CCGs over the impact of changes to community care services and examined the state of the NHS in Devon through the **NHS Inquiry** Spotlight Review. A further Spotlight Review established a number of principles to ensure that the future of **Public Health Nursing** maintained a focus on improving outcomes for children, and the quality and delivery of **Broadband and Mobile Connectivity** in the County was also examined through a Task Group review.

Challenges facing a large and diverse County

As one of the largest counties in England, with a vast rural landscape, travel around Devon is predominantly by car, and the impact of this is being explored by the **Air Quality & Congestion** Task Group. Equally, in a climate of reduced funding, connecting people to local services across Devon is a key challenge, and this has been reflected in much of Scrutiny's work including the already mentioned reviews into local policing, community care and broadband and mobile provision. The difficulties recruiting and maintaining social work staff in rural areas was also highlighted by Members following visits to **Children's Social Care** offices.

Councillor Alistair Dewhirst, Chair of Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny

Councillor Rob Hannaford, Chair of Children's Scrutiny

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson, Chair of Health & Adult Care Scrutiny

HOW HAS SCRUTINY LISTENED?

Scrutiny Committees hear from Devon residents in a variety of ways and as such play an important role in Scrutiny's priority setting and direction.

Task Group & Spotlight Review witnesses

This year almost 40% of review witnesses were representing communities or service users. Members also spoke to Council and NHS officers, service providers, public sector partners, schools and private organisations. As well as face to face meetings, reviews considered written evidence from the public and relevant groups, and used surveys to connect with town and parish councils and schools.

Staff groups

Good scrutiny relies on a range of evidence which can include hearing from frontline staff. This year Children's Scrutiny Members met and heard from over **80 children's social work staff** during their visits to social care offices and the Atkinson Secure Children's Home.

Written representations

Scrutiny Members are often lobbied on matters of public interest and community concern and this helps to inform Scrutiny priorities. This year **over 100 people** wrote to the Health & Adult Scrutiny Committee about proposed changes to community care services by CCGs. Public opinion around this matter has contributed to this issue being one of Scrutiny's most enduring and closely monitored concerns.

Public presentations at Committee

Through the Council's Public Participation Scheme Scrutiny Members listened to public representations on:

- Special educational needs
- Broadband & mobile connectivity
- Sustainability & Transformation Plan
- Changes to community care services by Devon CCGs
- Children's centres
- Health & social care integration
- Plans for community hospital services and buildings
- Foster carer allowances
- HotSW LEP Productivity Plan

HOW DID SCRUTINY INFLUENCE THE BUDGET?

A new process for the 2018/19 budget saw the Scrutiny Committees examine their services' draft budgets at Committee meetings in January. The Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny (CIRS) Committee had a co-ordinating role whilst also considering their own services' draft budgets, alongside the proceedings and recommendations from the Children's and Health & Adult Care Budget Scrutiny meetings. The Committees were largely supportive of the proposed 2018/19 budget, including the proposed 4.99% increase in Council Tax (inclusive of the Social Care precept), with Members recognising the financial pressures the Council faces and the need to safeguard the Council's budget.

Scrutiny welcomed Devon's inclusion in the Government's business rates retention pilot and additional monies from the Better Care Fund, while asking for clarity over the future of this funding. **Scrutiny also asked Cabinet to provide additional funding to allow Highways to undertake more preventative drainage works. Taking into account Scrutiny's recommendation, Cabinet proposed an additional £6.5 million to the Highways budget, which was formally approved by the County Council in February.**

WHAT HAPPENED NATIONALLY?

Communities & Local Government Select Committee Report

In December 2017 the CLG Select Committee published its report into the Effectiveness of Local Government Scrutiny, recommending a number of measures to strengthen the independence of the scrutiny function and increased scrutiny of combined authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and arm's length bodies. The Government published its response in March 2018, agreeing to provide further guidance on Scrutiny and promising reforms around LEP governance, but taking the stance that much of Scrutiny's working practices should be determined locally.

Centre for Public Scrutiny Independent Review of Governance at Kensington & Chelsea

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Kensington & Chelsea Council commissioned the CfPS to undertake an independent review of their governance arrangements. The report sets out 12 principles of good governance and several recommendations, the majority of which centre around a greater involvement of local people in decision making.

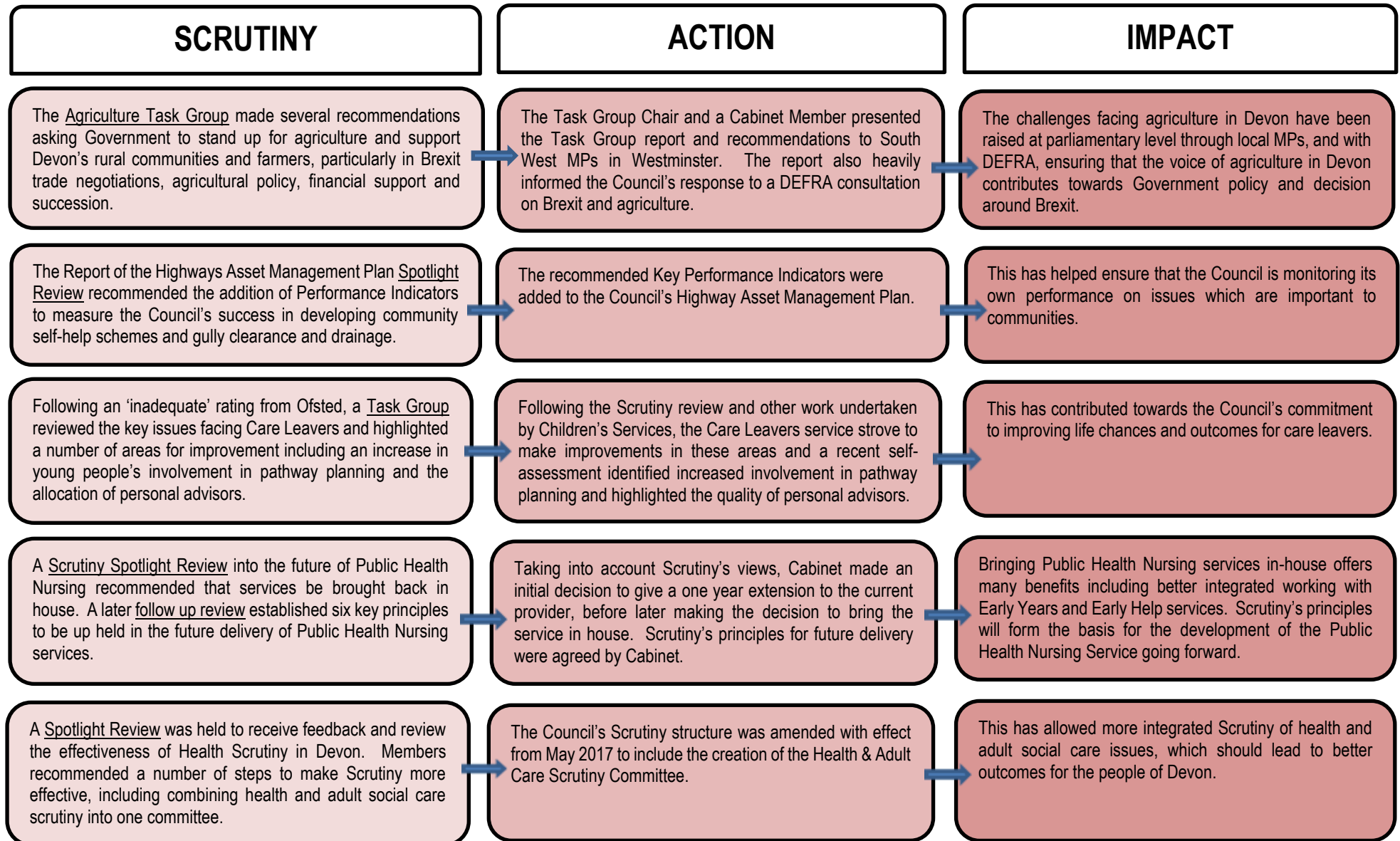
Northamptonshire County Council

Following the Council's financial difficulties which came to light in early 2018, the Government ordered a Best Value Inspection of Northamptonshire County Council. The report, published in March 2018, concluded that the Council failed to comply with its duty under the Local Government Act to provide best value in the delivery of its services. Scrutiny arrangements were found to be ineffective with Scrutiny Members reporting that they had been refused information and that there was a culture in the Council which discouraged challenge and criticism.

WHAT HAS SCRUTINY CHANGED?

Assessing the impact of Scrutiny is not always easy and a strong Scrutiny function influences decision making and policy development in a variety of ways. By developing a reputation based on robust questioning and examination of the issues, good Scrutiny drives decision makers to make better, more informed and accountable decisions. But as Local Government Scrutineers we must also ask ourselves 'What difference has Scrutiny made?', 'What has it changed?' and 'How have we improved things for the people of Devon?'.

Looking back over the last 12 months, tangible changes in council and local health policy and practice have taken place as a direct result of Scrutiny recommendations, or have been heavily guided by Scrutiny direction. In the last year Scrutiny has also influenced local partners, and through the lobbying of MPs and Government, sought to bring local concerns to the national table. Some examples are highlighted below.



SUPPORT, ADVICE & TRAINING

Scrutiny Team

The Council's Scrutiny Committees are supported by three **Scrutiny Officers**, carrying out research and proposing possible areas of investigation and lines of questioning. They attend committee meetings as advisers on current and planned investigations and project manage the work of Task Groups and Spotlight Reviews, including project milestones, triangulating data and research, identifying and inviting witnesses and other contributors, and compiling the information together into the investigation final report.

Specialist Advisors

This year, both Children's Scrutiny and Health & Adult Care Scrutiny have employed **Special Advisors**, helping to equip Members with the appropriate knowledge to support their work monitoring and challenging decisions and policy development in education, social care and health.

Masterclasses

Scrutiny Members continue to receive regular development sessions in the form of **Masterclasses** to further their understanding of key areas of the Council's business and relevant issues affecting communities. Topics this year have included Early Help, Safeguarding Adults and Emergency Planning.

20 YEARS OF SCRUTINY

2018 marks twenty years since Devon County Council first included a form of 'scrutiny' in its decision-making processes. The Council plans to host a learning, development and networking event in the Autumn, inviting Scrutiny colleagues from across the South West and further afield, to help celebrate, discuss and review two decades of Scrutiny in Devon.

WHAT NEXT FOR SCRUTINY?

Looking to the future, Devon County Council faces the ever-demanding challenge of balancing its budget and improving life for the people of Devon, in a climate of continued **reductions in funding** and a **growing demand for services**. **Health & Social Care Integration** and support for an ageing population will continue to be a key theme for Scrutiny in Devon, alongside a growing focus on **Early Help**, aiming to **reduce demand for services** and **improve outcomes** for children and families.

National issues such as **Brexit** and **Devolution** will impact on the workings of the County Council and the lives of residents, and the Council's purposeful systems work '**Doing what matters**' is changing the way the Council thinks about delivering services across the County.

In times of change and instability, as a 'critical friend' Scrutiny has a key role in ensuring that the Council **steps up to these challenges** and brings the **voice of Devon residents** to the forefront of policy development and decision making.

Devon's Scrutiny Councillors will also need to keep abreast of national developments and take learning from the experiences of other local authorities.

We hope that pending Government guidance will provide Scrutiny with up to date direction, whilst still giving Councils the flexibility to determine local Scrutiny arrangements. Greater clarity on the requirements for LEP Scrutiny is also awaited, and we are currently working with our local authority partners to prepare for this.


Scrutiny Chairs express their thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members, recognising in particular the valuable contribution made by Members through Task Group investigations and Spotlight Reviews.

The support of the dedicated team of Scrutiny Officers continues to be highly valued by the Scrutiny Committees.

For any background information on the work of scrutiny in Devon, individual Scrutiny Committees' remits and membership as well as past and present Task Group, Spotlight Review and Annual Reports please visit

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/>

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