

Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22

Chair's Review

The first year of the new Council has seen Scrutiny focus upon supporting new and returning Members to understand the Council. This is reflected in the unusually high number of masterclasses. After this focus all Committees have now moved to undertake task group investigations and spotlight reviews.

CIRS Scrutiny has continued to have a Standing Overview Group on Climate Change and established a spotlight review on loneliness as well as completing work on the highways Milestone contract. Children's Scrutiny has continued to have a focus upon the service's improvement journey and have set up task groups on Child Friendly Devon and SEND. The Health Committee has sought to ensure ongoing public scrutiny of the NHS's recovery and restoration journey as well as making a referral to the Secretary of State for health and undertaken a spotlight review on ambulance wait times.

Scrutiny Chairs express their thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members, across the four year term. The support of the dedicated Scrutiny team, coupled with the expertise offered by the two special advisors continues to be critical to the success of scrutiny.

Councillor Alistair Dewhirst Chair of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson Chair of the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Rob Hannaford Chair of the Childrens' Scrutiny Committee

Highlights

In person Committee Meetings

- 16 Public meetings, broadcast live
- 60 Reports
- 0 Call-ins

Task Groups / Spotlight Reviews

- 1 report published
- 5 reviews underway
- 33 witnesses

Masterclasses & Standing Overview Groups

- 8 SOG Meetings
- 22 Masterclasses
- 14 General Induction Training and Development Sessions

How has Scrutiny listened & learned?

Scrutiny and Audit are working more closely together with the Chair of Audit coming to all Scrutiny Chairs meetings.

Spoke to over 40 front line practitioners from a range of teams and services including visits to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), visits to all 4 Locality Offices and meeting social workers virtually to discuss the Eclipse Case Management System and to share case studies of families' experiences with Early Help.

Two masterclasses including

- SEND Transformation, Best Start in Life, Early Help and Domestic Violence
- Utility companies, property & facilities and management information
- Social Care workforce, Support for people with disabilities, safeguarding adults

During the Spotlight Review of the South-Western Ambulance Service, evidence was received from a wide range of stakeholders including patients, frontline staff and system leaders. The Chairs and Vice Chairs Group has continued to meet monthly to manage business and connect and the Scrutiny team has met weekly to connect and co-ordinate.

Scrutiny Impact

In the budget process, Scrutiny successfully recommended that Cabinet:

- rethink the reduction in community grant schemes, and the money was subsequently returned to the budget,
- add additional funds for highways and the Cabinet Member agreed an additional £1m for drains, safety and cyclical maintenance.

- Discussions around affordable housing for key workers at the Children's Scrutiny Committee inspired the notice of motions which resulted in the formation of the Devon Housing Taskforce.
- Milestone Contract: Scrutiny held a Spotlight review looking at the Highways Contract and recommended extension of the current contract - which was agreed by Cabinet. The highways contract will now continue for another three years.
- Two Children's Spotlight Reviews in 2020 recommended additional investment in recruitment and retention and Scrutiny is subsequently very pleased that the Cabinet listened and invested over £5m in Early Help and the recruitment and retention of staff. These concerns continue to be raised by Scrutiny to Cabinet, Senior Leaders and Devon MPs.
- The Children's Scrutiny Committee's critical friend challenge over IT systems (Eclipse and MASH Guardian) acted as a catalyst for improvements and a closer working relationship between Children's Services and Digital Transformation.
- As part of their role in formulating the Devon Carbon Plan, CIRS Scrutiny championed community involvement as a key priority in the development of new energy infrastructure to help Devon meet net-zero targets.
- The CIRS Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and Cabinet accepted all changes including expanding the Community Road Warden Scheme and the Snow Warden Scheme as well as exploring closer relationships between local councils and the County Council.

Childrens scrutiny reaction to Ofsted

Children's Scrutiny sharpened their approach following the July 2021 Ofsted focused visit, building upon the shifts already in place from the 2019 Scrutiny Statutory guidance. The resulting Children's Scrutiny Action Plan is an evidence-based plan, drawing upon national best practice.

The action plan led to 18 actions and work has been carried out against all actions, below is a summary of progress.

Information and Intelligence

Action

Prioritisation of items at Committee and Standing Overview Group meetings (CSOG).

Taking a Performance Report at every Committee, shaped by the Committee in a dedicated session.

Impact

Member-led work programme demonstrating increased focus, average number of Committee items has fallen from 5 to 2.

Members see 'Performance on a Page' for Social Care and topical Education and Learning reports to ensure oversight of key information at each public Committee meeting to enable oversight of the service.

Critical friend challenge

Action

Scrutiny has made good progress in listening to front line staff and increasing understanding in masterclasses.

Scrutiny employs a special advisor to support highlight key areas, plan lines of enquiry.

The LGA's Children's Improvement Advisor ran a bespoke session on best practice.

In house development sessions run on Introduction to Scrutiny, Questioning Skills and Work Programming in addition to continued development 1-2-1 and drop-in sessions.

Impact

The Committee have used the feedback, experience and learning to support critical friend challenge to drive improvement.

Members feel more prepared before meetings and understand the purpose of the meeting which supports participation and active engagement.

Developing Members' skills further and embedding good practice in Scrutiny.

Impact and follow up

Action

The Children's Scrutiny Lead Officer manages the actions and recommendations made by the Committee in a formal log.

Lessons learnt through this process have been shared with other local authorities through the Scrutiny network and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

Impact

Improved clarity over expectations and requests by the Committee and subsequently a better response to Councillors.

The Scrutiny team continue to challenge our thinking and practice and further develop a culture of reflective learning. Our learning has inspired other local authorities to challenge their own practice.