

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023

Chair's Review

Into the second year of the Council, the focus of Scrutiny has been to ensure the right decisions are taken to support improvement and fiscal solvency. Building upon the high number of masterclasses and training opportunities last year, this year has seen a high output in task groups and spotlight reviews.

CIRS Scrutiny has continued to have a Standing Overview Group on Climate Change and has completed work on the cost of living crisis, and set the future direction on moving traffic offences and the replacement of the corporate finance system. Children's Scrutiny completed the Child Friendly Devon Task Group in June and the SEND Task Group in November and continue to closely monitor the improvement journeys of both Children's Social Care and SEND services. Health and Adult Care Scrutiny has continued to seek ongoing public scrutiny of NHS Devon and adult social care, at a time with the former facing significant issues with waiting lists and its finances. In addition Members have undertaken reviews on community pharmacy, unpaid carers and replacement day care.

Scrutiny Chairs express their thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members, especially those with regular attendance and contribution and particularly highlight the reward of contributing to meaningful scrutiny and policy development. 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.

Councillors Alistair Dewhirst, Sara Randall Johnson and Rob Hannaford.

Chairs of the CIRS, Health and Adult Care and Children's Scrutiny Committees.

Highlights

In person Committee Meetings

- 19 Public meetings, broadcast live
- 76 Reports
- 2 Call-ins
- 13 representations from Members of the public

Task Groups / Spotlight Reviews

- 10 reports published
- 140 witnesses
- 2 new task groups established

Masterclasses & Standing Overview Groups

- 7 SOG Meetings including dedicated sessions on Ofsted and climate change
- 17 Masterclasses to increase understanding and improve Scrutiny.

How has Scrutiny listened and learned?

Children's Scrutiny has spoken to 26 front line practitioners so far this year, with more visits planned. Members have used this opportunity to thank them for their work and listen to their first hand experience of delivering services.

In a continuation of the championing of Carers, Health Scrutiny members spoke to 13 carer ambassadors at Westbank as well as 10 Members of staff at Westbank.

In response to public representation a Spotlight Review has been set up on Teignmouth Hospital to consider whether there is sufficient evidence to re-refer the matter to the Secretary of State.

44 members of staff responded to the SEND Task Group's staff survey and a further 4 took part in follow up evidence sessions. These were integral to the findings on the pressure on the 0-25 Team and staff capacity.

Across their work, Children's Scrutiny heard directly from 24 children and young people and our Members of Youth Parliament (MYP).

Scrutiny Impact

Following the Spotlight Review on the Ambulance Service, significant progress has been made against Member recommendations including improvements to handovers and response time. The rapid assessment triage model that Members advocated being more widely used across Devon's acute hospitals had for instance been introduced in Barnstaple.

CIRS Scrutiny thoroughly reviewed the efficacy of adopting moving traffic offence powers and recommended that the council do so - with considerations for vulnerable people. This is now Council policy.

Recognition from Ofsted for Children's Scrutiny: "The local authority's scrutiny committee provides robust challenge to senior leaders".

The SEND Task Group Report was used by policy specialists working with the Education Select Committee to prepare MPs for an oral evidence session on the Government's SEND Review.

CIRS Scrutiny reviewed the process and the suggested outcome for the replacement of the Council's financial system. They contributed their views to the Future Finance Project' and galvanised Corporate support for the prioritisation of the project as well as ensuring the timescale is met.

Health and adult social care performance continues to be closely monitored. NHS Devon faces significant issues with waiting lists and its finances, which members robustly track and challenge. Budget updates from NHS Devon and also ASC are now being presented at each Committee.

In the budget process, Scrutiny successfully recommended that Cabinet:

- increase the spending on highways maintenance and subsequently an extra £2 million was put into drainage and cyclic maintenance (Potholes),
- review Council support to the voluntary and community sector and an extra £100,000 for the Citizens Advice Bureau; and £150,000 for a new Growing Communities Together Programme was included.

Scrutiny Contribution to strategic priorities

Tackle poverty and inequality

- Spotlight review undertaken to look at the cost of living with five recommendations to support people in Devon.

Help communities be safe, connected and resilient

- The CIRS Committee have received reports on libraries, food insecurity and the response to the household support as well as the future management of local bus services.

Be ambitious for children and young people

- The Children's Scrutiny Committee's work has continued to progress actions against the Action Plan. All of the actions have measurable progress against them.
- The Committee published two landmark task group reports in 2022, the Child Friendly Devon Task Group and the SEND Task Group.
- The Committee was named as the "driving force" behind the Council's Senior Leaders discussing and looking at the issue of affordable housing for key workers.

Support sustainable economic recovery

- Following concerns raised in the budget round Scrutiny has implemented greater financial checks and balances to ensure the realism of future budgets and that savings can be delivered.
- CIRS Scrutiny has continued to have oversight of treasury management throughout the year.

Respond to the climate emergency

CIRS Committee standing overview group has reviewed:

- Review of Devon County Council's Environmental -Policy and 2021 Carbon Footprint Report
- Low Carbon Supply Chain Strategy
- Socioeconomic Impacts on Farming Sector and Carbon Impact of the Waste Management System

Improve health and wellbeing

- 18 health specific items to Committee
- Scrutiny has undertaken spotlight reviews on both ambulance wait times, and a review looking at community pharmacy.