

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Review 2023/24

Chairs' Review

Into the third year of the Council, the focus of Scrutiny has been on the impact of proposed service changes on people, ensuring the right decisions are taken to support the financial sustainability of the Council.

CIRS Scrutiny Standing Overview Group on Climate Change has considered the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaption Strategy. The Committee has monitored the Council's implementation of the Race Equality Action Plan and maintains a focus on Highway improvement. Children's Scrutiny completed a Spotlight Review on Children's Services Recruitment and Retention in June 2023 which has informed the organisation's refreshed strategy. The improvement journey of both Children's and SEND Services continues to be monitored closely by the Children's Scrutiny Committee. Health and Adult Care Scrutiny undertook a second significant review of the proposed changes to services in Teignmouth relating to the Community Hospital as well as focused scrutiny on Integrated Adult Social Care consultations on service change. In addition, Members have attended Masterclasses on Adult Social Care CQC Inspection, Dentistry and NHS 111. Members reinstated the Quality Accounts Standing Overview Group, meeting with NHS healthcare providers on their priorities in terms of improvement.

Scrutiny Chairs express their continued thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members, the Scrutiny Team and two special advisors. Thanks is also expressed to the witnesses and members of the public who have engaged with Scrutiny over the past year.

Looking forward, following an iterative review of Scrutiny through the Council's Governance Review, the Scrutiny Action Plan 2024 aims to continue the development and refinement of Scrutiny in Devon County Council.

Highlights:

In person Committee Meetings:

- 19 public meetings
- 70 reports
- 3 Call-Ins
- 35 representations from Members of the public

Task Groups / Spotlight Reviews

- 2 reports published
- 3 new reviews established
- 34 witnesses

Masterclasses & Standing Overview Groups (SOG)

- 7 SOG Meetings
- 15 Masterclasses
- 8 Visits completed

How has Scrutiny Listened and Learned?

Children's Scrutiny Recruitment and Retention Spotlight Review in July 2023 heard from 25 staff across 5 teams.

In the Autumn Term Children's Scrutiny visited schools, meeting 6 members of staff and 12 students. Discussions covered SEND, access to Mental Health Services and working with the Council.

Scrutiny Committee meetings heard representations from 35 members of the public; a 131% increase on last year (13). Representations were made on SEND, Children's Services, Hospitals, Homelessness services, Link Centres, Mobile Libraries and the Council's banking arrangements.

Health and Adult Care Scrutiny set up a Task Group to review future service provision in the Teignmouth and Dawlish area and at Teignmouth Community Hospital, listening to concerns of the public and Members.

Health and Adult Care Scrutiny have visited Langdon and the Nightingale Hospitals, and have spoken to NHS Providers, with more visits planned. Members have used these opportunities to thank them for their work and listened to their experiences of delivering services in Devon.

CIRS visited the Anaerobic Digestion Plant, learning about the benefits as an eco-friendly sustainable source of electric, gas and potent plant food.

Scrutiny Impact:

- The Children and Young People's Futures Recruitment and Retention Strategy embedded many of the recommendations and research put forward by the Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Spotlight Review. This included recommendations on the induction programme, supervision, caseloads, reviewing the Council's offer to staff, celebrating staff achievements and career progression pathways.
- The SEND Improvement Partnership Board agreed to widen its improvement plans to create a 'system wide transformation' of services, as recommended in November 2022 by the SEND Task Group.
- To support communities to partake in the trials of Community Self-Delivery of Highways Improvement, CIRS Scrutiny recommended a step-by-step guide or 'checklist' for Town and Parish Councils. This has been included in the guidance documents.
- CIRS recommended Member Locality Budget expenditure be published on the Council's website, improving transparency.
- Health and Adult Care Scrutiny responding to the concerns of local people produced a series of recommendations to Cabinet on the future of the North Devon Link Service to try to assure a smooth a transition process as possible for those affected by the closure. Members recommended the development of community-based

solutions to meet identified needs and the emerging long-term pattern of community-based mental health support as a result of this process.

- As a result of the 2023 Community Pharmacy Spotlight Review and recommendation to establish a pharmacy school in the County, a partnership model had been set up between Plymouth and Bath universities with a first student intake in 2024. This would help to ensure Member's aim that Devon and the far South West develops its own pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.
- Over 3,200 impressions on Scrutiny related posts on our X: @devondemocracy
- In the budget process, Scrutiny successfully recommended that Cabinet:
 - Increase spending on highways drainage; subsequently an extra £1.5 million was committed to regular drainage works to help reduce the number of potholes,
 - Add to the budget book risk register that improvements to Children's Services are dependent on partnership working across the whole system, including Health, Police, District Councils and Schools.

Scrutiny Contribution to strategic priorities

Tackle poverty and inequality

- Progress on the 5 recommendations from the Cost of Living Spotlight Review reported back to CIRS in November 2023; monitoring progress will continue in 2024.
- CIRS reviewed the Councils progress in delivering the Equality Action Plan twice during the Municipal Year.
- Health and Adult Care Scrutiny investigated Health Inequalities.

Help communities be safe, connected and resilient

- The CIRS Committee have received reports on the Mobile Libraries service, Highways Performance, Bus Service Improvement Plan, held a SOG to scrutinise the draft 2026 -2040 Local Transport Plan and had an opportunity to question the Acting Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent on Organisational priorities and Community Policing.

Be ambitious for children and young people

- The Children's Scrutiny Committee's work has continued to hear from frontline staff and children and young people to understand services, current challenges and drive forward improvements.
- Committee meetings have been focused on ensuring oversight and improvements to Children's Social Care and SEND services. Members also invited partners, such as NHS Devon and School Leaders, to these meetings to provide critical friend challenge across all parts of the system.

Support sustainable economic recovery

- CIRS Scrutiny has continued to have oversight of Treasury Management throughout the year and received a report on the progress in delivering the South Devon Freeport.

Respond to the climate emergency

- The CIRS Scrutiny Committee conducted pre-decision Scrutiny on the Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy and continued its Climate Change Standing Overview Group to scrutinise the Draft Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaptation Strategy.

Improve health and wellbeing

- Health and Adult Care Scrutiny received 10 NHS/Health Services Reports relating to topics such as Dental access, a range of issues relating to Hospital sites, Pharmacies, the ICS Digital Strategy, the Integrated Urgent Care Service and End of Life Care.
- The Committee also received 10 Integrated Adult Social Care and Public Health Reports on topics such as the Consultations on service change, Carers and reports on the upcoming CQC inspection.