

Council

26 January 2022

Overview and Scrutiny – Six Monthly Update



Report of Corporate Management Team

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Councillor Craig Martin - Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide information to County Council on the activity of overview and scrutiny for the six month period to November 2021.

Executive summary

- 2 It has previously been agreed that a six month update on the activity of overview and scrutiny is considered by Council, in addition to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual report which is submitted to Council in July each year.
- 3 This update sets out the approach that scrutiny has been taking since the elections in May 2021, regular matters which feature in the committee work programmes and highlights some items which have formed part of more in-depth scrutiny over the six month period to November 2021.

Recommendation(s)

- 4 Council is recommended to note the information on overview and scrutiny activity which has taken place in the six month period to November 2021.

Background

- 5 As a result of statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny arrangements in local authorities published in 2019, the County Council agreed a six-monthly report of overview and scrutiny activity be submitted to council to assist in the communication of scrutiny's role and purpose.
- 6 This update report highlights some of the work scrutiny has undertaken in the six month period to November 2021 and complements the annual report which is submitted to council in July each year.
- 7 Following the local elections in May 2021, a Joint Administration was established, and a new chair and vice-chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) were appointed. In their role as the strategic driver of the overview and scrutiny function, they have encouraged an inclusive and transparent approach to carrying out scrutiny.
- 8 Contributing to policy development is a key task for scrutiny and the scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs have a clear ambition to increase activity in this field.
- 9 Overview and scrutiny has continued the practice of meeting with members of the Executive regularly. This approach was recommended in the statutory guidance issued in 2019 and it was acknowledged that Durham County Council has a strong record of sharing information with the Executive.
- 10 The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) oversees and co-ordinates the work of overview and scrutiny committees. Five thematic overview and scrutiny committees scrutinise the following themes:
 - Adults Health and Wellbeing
 - Children and Young People
 - Economy and Enterprise
 - Environment and Sustainable Communities
 - Safer and Stronger Communities
- 11 Durham County Council's overview and scrutiny function has embedded the four principles of good scrutiny in all the work it does. These principles, originally developed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, inform and shape scrutiny work. They state that overview and scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
 - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
 - Be led by independent minded people who take responsibility for their role
 - Drive improvement in public services
- 12 Scrutiny committees undertake regular monitoring of budget and performance reports, receive updates on previous reviews and undertake light touch and in depth review activity.
- 13 The impact of COVID-19 on service delivery has been a common thread running through many reports considered by scrutiny committees. More recently the emphasis has been on understanding service restoration and recovery.
- 14 All scrutiny members have received the corporate induction training following the May 2021 elections. This has been supplemented by bespoke scrutiny training delivered by the Scrutiny team. The Chair of COSMB is taking a fresh approach to how scrutiny works within Durham County Council with an emphasis on input into policy development. To support this scrutiny chairs and vice chairs have agreed to develop a training and development programme. This will include budget and financial awareness training delivered by the Corporate Director of Resources, peer mentoring and support from the LGA and training in changes to performance management reporting from the Head of Transformation and Strategy.
- 15 Comprehensive work programmes are developed by scrutiny committees each year and this update highlights only some of the work they carry out.

Scrutiny Committee Activity

- 16 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB)

Chair: Councillor Craig Martin,
Vice Chair: Councillor Chris Lines

- a) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

COSMB has a constitutional role in assisting Cabinet in the development of the council’s annual budget. The Board has considered reports setting out the significant financial challenges and uncertainty the council is operating in. These challenges and uncertainty are brought about by a combination of inherent low tax raising capacity and significant budget pressures in social care and

waste services alongside other unfunded pressures arising from pay and price inflation. The Board has been kept updated by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services on the latest announcements on the Comprehensive Spending Review and public spending decisions. This coming month the Board will consider the impact of the local government financial settlement on the council's budget and MTFP forecasts.

b) Review of the Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Collection and Archive

In June 2021 Cabinet agreed to review options for the potential future use of the former DLI Museum and Art Gallery building and surrounding grounds. They asked COSMB to consider whether the former DLI museum could be brought back into use to house the collection and to look at the options to repurpose the building and/or site. In July 2021 COSMB held a special meeting with key stakeholders invited to submit representations framed around questions outlined by Cabinet on repurposing the building and options for the site. The meeting generated a lot of interest and gave an opportunity for questions to be asked on the information presented. The outcomes of the meeting formed part of the evidence base for the review by Cabinet.

c) Excellent Council

COSMB is responsible for scrutinising the Council Plan's Excellent Council ambition and associated objectives. They do this by receiving the full form performance management reports which are also considered by Cabinet. (The five thematic scrutiny committees receive sections of the report relevant to their remit.) Members take the opportunity to examine performance in detail to see how well we look after our employees, manage our resources and how good our services to customers and the public are. The Board also received regular reports detailing a wide range of information collected to provide an insight to help us understand our customers – including performance in response to service requests, call and complaint handling. This feedback is invaluable, and members are keen to understand how the Council can always strive to improve our services.

17 Adults Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee (AWH OSC)

Chair: Councillor Pat Jopling

Vice Chair: Councillor Rochelle Charlton-Lainé

a) Shotley Bridge Community Hospital

The committee has continued to scrutinise proposals to review those services currently provided at Shotley Bridge Community Hospital. The scheme has been incorporated into the Government's new hospitals programme and presentations have been given to the Committee setting out the clinical model under which the proposals have been developed; the extent of stakeholder and community engagement undertaken to inform the proposals and the options for the development of a new hospital facility. At the committee's meeting on 1 October 2021, members recommended support for the project to progress without the requirement for formal public consultation to mitigate risks of further delays to the scheme. The Committee has also requested further update reports as the project progresses.

b) Winter Planning

The committee examined the plans put in place across the health and social care system for both surge and cold weather activity and admissions 2021. A 13% increase in activity between 2019 and 2021 has been identified, with hospitals working to manage beds often at the highest levels of operation (OPEL4). The North East Ambulance Service has also experienced the highest ever summer demand for ambulance services in 2021.

An increase in sickness amongst staff due to both COVID-19 and workplace stress was also having an impact on the system's ability to cope with current demand. Winter planning updates on the following system service areas have been examined by the committee:

- Social care
- Primary care
- Community services
- Acute hospital care
- Mental health services provided by TEWV NHS FT
- North East ambulance service NHS FT
- Public health
- Durham County Council's highways and technical services
- Vaccinations programmes.

c) Access to GP Services in County Durham

The committee reviewed progressed against its recommendations made as part of a review into GP services in County Durham. At its meeting on 19 November 2021, the committee received updates against the review recommendations and examined a number of concerns raised by members regarding the availability of face-to-face GP appointments as part of the roadmap out of COVID-19 lockdown and the resulting service recovery and restoration process.

As part of its deliberations, members recommended to hold a special meeting of the committee to examine current demands placed on the 999/111 service delivered by North East Ambulance Service. Members are concerned about the length of time it takes to get a response via the service as well as the potential incidence of aborted calls to the service.

18 Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CYP OSC)

Chair Councillor Chris Hood
Vice Chair Councillor James Cosslett

a) Developing a New County Durham SEND Strategy

CYP OSC members were pleased to learn of the development of a new SEND Strategy, which they felt was ambitious and overdue. They welcomed the step to recognise the positives of neurodiversity and that all children and young people are valued for what they bring into the world. They highlighted that positive communication was the key to ensuring that statements were understandable and broadly agreed on the vision and aims but would like to see the phrase co-production included in the document.

b) Key Findings and Actions to the Ofsted focused visit

CYP OSC considered information on the key findings, strengths and required actions following the focused Ofsted inspection earlier this year at its July 2021 meeting.

c) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

CYP OSC considered an update from CAMHS that provided information on inpatient beds for young people across the North East region, waiting times, challenge to the service and opportunities and future plans.

19 Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee (E&E OSC)

Chair Councillor Bill Moist
Vice Chair Councillor Andrew Jackson

a) County Durham's Visitor Economy

E&E OSC recognise the significant contribution that the tourism sector makes to the economy of the county in relation to local growth, jobs and prosperity. At its meeting on the 11 November 2021, it received a presentation from Visit County Durham focusing on County Durham's visitor economy, detailing the impact of the pandemic on Durham's tourism sector and future plans. Members were advised of key strategies and wider economic plans to help grow the sector following the pandemic, work by Visit County Durham to support the sector and improve the visitor offer and work undertaken with partners to promote the county as a visitor destination through various promotional campaigns. The committee will continue to monitor the county's visitor economy.

b) Managing Change in County Durham's Towns and Villages

E&E OSC has previously considered masterplan activity in the county and received updates on the development of the Town and Village Centres Programme. In November the committee received an update on work to develop a number of new masterplans to support potential Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bids, at Chester-le-Street, Durham City, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Stanley and Three Towns. The committee also considered an update on the Town and Villages Programme identifying projects across the county together with detail of Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans (TDPs), part of the Council's approach of accelerating the delivery of projects to address issues in local communities.

c) Strategic Employment Sites in County Durham

The committee has examined the approach undertaken by DCC in developing key strategic employment sites in the county. These sites are concentrated in the A1 corridor (key industrial location), Durham City (key office market) and the A19 corridor (secondary industrial and office location). The committee received detail of the type of sector and industry on the various sites, timescales for the development of the individual site, number of jobs currently provided together with any forecast of future jobs. The committee will continue to monitor the development of these strategic sites.

20 Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (E&S OSC)

Chair Councillor Bev Coult
Vice Chair Councillor Jonathan Elmer

a) Climate Emergency

The committee considered the latest Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) at its October 2021 meeting and provided comments for consideration in a new version of the CERP (CERP 2) which will be considered by Cabinet in the New Year. The committee continues to monitor the CERP and will receive detail of CERP 2 at its May 2022 meeting.

b) Single Use Plastics

The committee continues to monitor the Single Use Plastics (SUPs) action plan and have been pleased with the initial successes achieved following the considerable amount of work carried out by the SUPs task group. The committee will continue to monitor both the action plan and the communications plan going forward.

c) Ecological Emergency

A Cabinet report requested the committee undertake a piece of work examining the evidence base to determine whether there is a need to declare an Ecological Emergency in the county. The committee will undertake the work over a series of special meetings with the involvement of colleagues from the Ecology Service. The committee will report its findings and recommendations to Cabinet at a future date.

d) Waste Management

The committee in November considered an overview of waste management arrangements in the county. It provided members with detail of the extent of services provided, the impact of the pandemic and how the service responded, the challenges of the Environment Bill, work undertaken to promote recycling and reduce contamination and an update on Energy from Waste. The committee will continue to receive further waste management updates.

21 Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SSC OSC)

Chair Councillor Joyce Charlton

Vice Chair Councillor Brian Avery

a) Arson and Deliberate Fire Setting

The committee considered a presentation on arson and deliberate fire setting at its meeting in November 2021 that enable members to provide comment on countywide data for primary and secondary fires, national benchmarking information and the approach through the arson suppression group. Within its response to the Safe Durham Partnership, the committee noted current performance levels, partnership approaches and academic research that is being undertaken and requested a focused session to be held on work of the arson suppression group within the east Durham area.

b) Domestic Abuse

At its meeting in November 2021, SSC OSC received an overview of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and implications for the council and partners. To meet requirements of the Act a draft safe accommodation strategy had been produced. Governance and oversight arrangements for a Local Domestic Abuse Partnership will be undertaken by the County Durham Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group. In addition, a whole system approach to domestic abuse strategy is scheduled to be published in 2022. Within its response to the Safe Durham Partnership Board, the committee have requested to receive a progress update and opportunity to comment on the draft strategy.

c) Briefing Sessions

In advance of detailed reports presented to the committee on substance misuse and anti-social behaviour, members requested to hold focused briefing sessions with officers to provide an overview on these two areas. Held via Microsoft Teams, the sessions were of great value and enabled a greater insight to these subject areas prior to the reports being considered by the committee.

Background Papers

Reports and minutes (June – November 2021)

- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
- Adults Health and Wellbeing OSC

- Children and Young People OSC
- Economy and Enterprise OSC
- Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC
- Safer and Stronger Communities OSC

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities published in May 2019 stated that to maintain the interest of full council in the work of the scrutiny committee, authorities should take steps to ensure full council is informed of the work the scrutiny committee is doing.

The council must have regard to the statutory guidance when determining its scrutiny arrangements and have good reasons for not following any aspects of the guidance

Finance

None

Consultation

The statutory role of some scrutiny committees means that consultations are regularly considered.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

All scrutiny reviews are subject to an equality impact assessment

Climate Change

The council has declared a climate emergency and scrutiny committees such as the Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC receive regular reports on the commitment to contribute to reducing the causes of climate change and the implications of responding to and adapting to the inevitable impacts of climate change. Any climate change implications will be included in individual reports to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

Any crime and disorder implications will be included in individual reports to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None