

Council

25 January 2025

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 2022.

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/September 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 2022.

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 2022.

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 2022 and complements the annual report which is submitted to council 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, Wellbeing and Health
 - 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 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. Overview and scrutiny members have also had the opportunity to take up training provided by the LGA in collaboration with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.
- 14 The Chair of COSMB has asked the thematic scrutiny committees to consider options for efficiency savings and income generation opportunities. The work is ongoing and will be reported in the Annual Report.
- 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

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP 13) 2023/24 – 2026/27

- a) COSMB has a constitutional role in assisting Cabinet in the development of the council's annual budget. The Council is operating in a period of significant financial uncertainty with concerns about the impact of inflation and fuel and energy prices. The Board continues to be updated by the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services and will consider the impact of the local government financial settlement on the council's budget and MTFP forecasts.
- b) Poverty Action Strategy and Plan

The Board have considered a report on the Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. The Strategy and Plan have been reviewed to better address the wider issues of inequalities and improve strategic direction and priorities for services and opportunities for residents in County Durham experiencing poverty. COSMB considered the report and agreed to forward their comments to the Secretary of State. The Board will receive an update following the conclusion of consultation on the refreshed Strategy and Plan.

c) Final Outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund 2021/22

The Board added scrutiny of the final outturn for the General Fund and Collection Fund 2021/22 to their work programme this year. The Board were informed about the impact COVID had had on expenditure although with Government support funding this had resulted in an underspend of £3.7million. COSMB were advised that the pandemic still had an ongoing impact on services. Members raised questions about the Council's reserves which the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services responded to.

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

Chair: Councillor Patricia Jopling

Vice Chair: Councillor Joanne Howey

a) North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System

- The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care system was established on 1 July 2022 replacing all Clinical Commissioning Groups in the region including NHS County Durham CCG. The Committee has examined the proposals for structural change in terms of Commissioning arrangements, responsibilities and collaborative working between the NHS and Local Government Social Care as well as considering and commenting on the draft North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Strategy. Update reports have been considered by the Adults, Wellbeing and Health OSC on 15 July and 21 November 2022.

b) Winter Planning

At its meeting on 21 November 2022, the committee examined the plans put in place across the health and social care system for both surge and cold weather activity and admissions 2022. The plans demonstrated how the system supports the health and wellbeing of the workforce; embeds infection prevention and control; protects elective surgery; promotes safe and effective discharges from

hospital and supports people to remain in the community and avoid hospital admissions.

c) Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2022-25

The committee considered and commented on the Health and Wellbeing Board's draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) 2022-25. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the Health and Wellbeing Board is responsible for the production of a draft PNA which is subject to a statutory 60 day public consultation. The Committee submitted a response as part of the consultation which included the following feedback:-

- Public responses to surveys undertaken by County Durham Healthwatch and the Community Champion network showed a high percentage of people having easy access to pharmacy services;
- The lack of pharmacy services in certain areas was a concern particularly the absence of any 100 hour pharmacies, pharmacies with core opening hours after 6p.m. weekdays and any with core opening hours on a Sunday in the Chester-le-Street locality.
- The Committee notes and supports the assessment within the draft PNA that:-
 - (a) The provision of all essential and necessary advanced services (New Medicine Service and Community Pharmacist Consultation Service) in County Durham are adequate to meet the current and future needs for pharmaceutical services;
 - (b) The provision of the other relevant advanced service, the Community Pharmacy Seasonal Influenza Vaccination is adequate however a more equitable provision is required across all localities;
 - (c) The widespread provision of the new other relevant advanced services (the Hypertension Case-Finding Service and the Smoking Cessation Service) should be encouraged.

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

Chair Councillor Anne Reed
Vice Chair Councillor James Cosslett

a) Child Exploitation Workshop

The Committee had requested a workshop on Child Exploitation following considering the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. Members were provided with information that included the four stages of exploitation and signs and symptoms. Members also received information on County Lines and Police powers.

b) Growing up in County Durham draft Strategy

CYP OSC members received a final opportunity to comment on the draft strategy. Members commented on the importance of setting achievable targets and suggested that the use of some wording in the strategy was subjective and referenced the need to increased opportunities and the importance of breaking down barriers. Members suggested a greater emphasis on poverty as a common thread throughout.

c) Ofsted ILACS May 2022

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services advising members of the key findings and outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection. The committee learned that the service had received an overall Good judgement. The Corporate Director agreed to members request to come to a future meeting with the action plan and service improvement plan.

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

Chair Councillor Bill Moist

Vice Chair Councillor Andrew Jackson

a) County Durham Economic Partnership

E&E OSC in invites on an annual basis the Chair or Vice-chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership to attend a meeting of the committee to discuss their priorities, current activity, and future plans. The Vice-chair of the partnership, Sue Parkinson attended the meeting of the committee held in June where the discussion centred around the role of the partnership in supporting the development and delivery of the County Durham Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The committee will receive at its December an update in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan and the first round of projects.

b) County Durham Employment Land and Strategic Sites

As part of the 2021/22 work programme the committee had received an overview of key strategic employment sites in the county, and it was felt by members when determining the committees work programme for 2022/23 that the committee should receive a further report detailing progress on delivery of these sites and the availability of commercial and industrial land and premises across the county together with detail of their contribution to job creation. At the October meeting of the committee members were made aware of: the further development of the key strategic employment sites including the number and type of jobs on those sites, other employment locations within the county; the potential for other strategic employment sites; how we attract investment and barriers to investment; availability of land and premises to attract new businesses; how we promote land and premises and how businesses identify available land and premises. The committee will continue to monitor the development of the key strategic employment sites within the county.

c) Inclusive Economic Strategy

The committee has provided comments in relation to feedback from, 'Our Big Econ-versation' the major consultation event launched at the end of January to shape the draft Inclusive Economic Strategy. At its meeting on the 7 November members received the emerging Inclusive Economic Strategy for consideration. The comments made by members at that meeting were formulated into an overview and scrutiny response which was shared with the Service Grouping to help shape the final strategy. In addition, it is proposed that the committee will consider the Delivery Plan for the strategy once it is developed, possibly within the next six months.

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

Chair Councillor Bev Coult
Vice Chair Councillor Jonathan Elmer

a) Waste Management

The committee considered an update of resources and Waste Management Services in County Durham which discussed the waste tonnages, levels of recycling and contamination and what measures the Council has in place to reduce the current levels of contaminated waste. Members also received information updating them on the Tees Valley Energy from waste project and information on the Environment Act and Resource and Waste Strategy. Members in attendance at the committee had a greater understanding of the challenges faced by the Council, particularly in relation to reducing the level of contamination as they had taken the opportunity to visit Thornley Waste Transfer Station, Biffa Material Recycling Facilities and Suez Energy from Waste plant.

b) Fuel Poverty

The committee received information highlighting the level of fuel poverty in County Durham and the work undertaken by the Council to promote and deliver various programmes to tackle fuel poverty which had resulted in County Durham having the fifth highest take up nationally of fuel poverty grants.

c) DCC Allotment Management and update on recommendations

Members received information on DCC's current allotment management arrangements and a progress update on recommendations made by the committee following their review of DCC 's Management of Allotments undertaken in 2019. The committee made several recommendations that suggested a rental review; reconsideration of the allocation process to take co workers into account; a review of the allotment portfolio; establishment of area allotment associations; provision of smaller sized plots; offer management of allotments to Town and Parish Councils where there is an appetite to do this; allotments to be managed by one DCC service team and the removal of large animals over a period of time.

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

Chair Councillor Joyce Charlton
Vice Chair Councillor Phil Heaviside

a) Anti-Social Behaviour Draft Strategy

The committee held a focussed briefing session with officers on anti-social behaviour prior to considering the strategy at a special meeting in October as part of the consultation process. At the special

meeting, members welcomed the strategy and were supportive of the proposal to have a single front door approach for reporting anti-social behaviour. They highlighted good communication was key to the success of the strategy. Members stressed the knowledge they have of issues in their local communities and the role they can have as partners within the strategy. The important role of Neighbourhood Wardens in responding to incidents and dealing with issues was discussed. Landlords, the selective licensing scheme and issues with empty properties, both residential and commercial were commented upon. The committee's observations on the draft strategy were reported back to the SDP.

b) Safety of Women at Night (SWaN) and Safer Streets 4 Programme

The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was launched in July 2021 and the SWaN fund was established to fund initiatives connected to the strategy. At its meeting in September 2022, SSC OSC received a presentation on the Durham City Safety of Women at Night (SWaN) initiative and the outcome of the fourth round of Safer Streets funding programme. Members were pleased to receive the positive update and learn about the valuable services the SWaN Hub provided to those looking for support in Durham City. Members referred to the sustainability of the scheme and it was hoped longer term funding would be secured.

c) Briefing Sessions

In advance of detailed reports presented to the committee, members requested to hold focused briefing sessions with officers to provide an overview on issues including arson suppression and anti-social behaviour. Held via Microsoft Teams, the sessions have been of value to members and enabled a greater insight to these subject areas.

Background Papers

Reports and minutes (June – November 2022)

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