

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/2024

Introduction

This year I was honoured to be appointed Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB). I welcomed the opportunity to return to the role as chair of the board responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the work of overview and scrutiny and its committees.

The Council continues to operate in a period of significant financial uncertainty with no long-term financial settlement for local government causing additional pressure. A key task for scrutiny is to hold the executive to account and each year Cabinet's budget proposals are prioritised for scrutiny by COSMB. This year they have again worked diligently and constructively in scrutinising Cabinet's medium term financial plans.

Several significant strategies and policies have been developed and consulted upon during the course of the past year with further consultations expected during 2024/25. This annual report sets out some examples of where the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have worked with service groupings to ensure that members' views and considerations are taken into account when formulating Council strategy and policy and presenting these to Cabinet and Council for approval.

We continue to be committed to the key principle of openness and transparency within the scrutiny function. In order to enhance these principles and provide an opportunity for the voice of local communities to be reflected and amplified in the work of scrutiny, we appoint non-statutory, non-voting co-optees to the five thematic OSCs. A full refresh of co-optees was undertaken in 2022 and it was agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in April 2024 that the appointment of the co-optees be extended by a further two years to 2026 when a further refresh will be undertaken.

I would like to thank everybody who has been involved in supporting and assisting the overview and scrutiny process during the past year including members, officers, partners, and the scrutiny team themselves in delivering another extensive series of work programmes.

Councillor Rob Crute

Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Overview and Scrutiny in County Durham

Scrutiny provides a valuable tool to scrutinise how we deliver our services and to drive improvement. We are supported by a dedicated scrutiny team and senior and specialist officers across the council. We have developed a strong scrutiny culture which adds value to the work of the council.

Durham County Council (DCC) has embedded the four principles of good scrutiny, developed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, in all our work. These are:

- To provide a constructive critical friend challenge to executive policy-makers and decisions-makers
- To amplify the voice and concerns of the public
- To ensure scrutiny is carried out by independent minded people who lead and own the scrutiny role
- To drive improvement in public services

Overview and scrutiny is a valuable part of local democracy and has important statutory roles in the scrutiny of health and crime and disorder.

DCC appoints members to six overview and scrutiny committees. DCC has 126 members and of these over 80 take part in scrutiny activity. (Following an electoral review of Durham County Council new arrangements will come into force from May 2025 which will reduce the overall number of members.)



Scrutiny committees decide which areas they wish to examine. This may arise following representations by members of the public about a particular matter; be an issue identified by councillors themselves; or follow on from reports or performance assessment on the council's activities made by the cabinet or outside agencies.

We also promote scrutiny by maintaining an excellent relationship between executive and non-executive members and meet regularly to discuss matters of common interest.

The overview and scrutiny process provides an opportunity for members of the public and local communities to comment upon any service.

Co-optees and engagement

We continue to work with the non-voting co-optees who sit on our scrutiny committees. They bring skills, knowledge and their own expertise and views to scrutiny and provide important external challenge to our work programme.

We have also promoted engagement of local expert and academic researchers in overview and scrutiny where they can add to our work.

This ownership of the work programme and strong organisational culture underpins scrutiny's legitimacy as an effective and strategic function.

Co-opted members appointed to scrutiny committees ensure a strong external representation and help scrutiny to engage with the public.

We value the different perspectives and challenge our co-optees bring to our work. Co-optees

- Act as an independent voice for those who live or work in County Durham.
- Bring specialist knowledge, skills and an element of external challenge to the overview and scrutiny process.
- Take an interest in, attend and contribute to the committees and working groups to which appointed.
- Establish good relations with other members, officers and co-optees.

We undertake a full refresh of our co-opted members every four years with the latest refresh undertaken in May and June 2022. The new cohort of co-optees appointed to the OSCs included some experienced co-optees who had previously served for a number of years, complemented by new appointees bringing a range of skills, professional competencies and lived experience to

ensure that the voice of the public is given an opportunity to be promoted and listened to. A full refresh of co-optees will be undertaken in 2026.

Anyone who would like to express an interest in serving as a co-optee is requested to contact the Scrutiny Team.

Overview and Scrutiny Review Activity

Each year the scrutiny work programme is developed to ensure a balanced programme. Alongside considering overview reports and updates, we plan focussed review work throughout the year. These reviews can be light touch or in depth and are usually reported to Cabinet and the appropriate thematic partnership.

During the past year, several significant new Council policies and strategies have been developed and subject to extensive consultation. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees have concentrated on their respective roles in shaping and informing Council and partnership policy through workshop activity and these formal consultation mechanisms. Examples of this include:

- The Inclusive Economic Strategy Draft Delivery Plan – E&E OSC
- The Destination Management Plan for County Durham – E&E OSC and ESC OSC
- County Durham's Tourism and the Visitor Economy - E&E OSC and ESC OSC
- The County Durham Housing Strategy – E&E OSC
- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – E&E OSC
- The new Place Brand for County Durham – E&E OSC and ESC OSC.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – CYP OSC
- Children's Social Care Demand – CYP OSC
- Community Water Fluoridation in the North East of England – AWH OSC and CYP OSC
- Sexual Health Strategy – CYP OSC and AWH OSC
- Library Transformation – ESC OSC
- Safe Durham Partnership Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy – SSC OSC
- County Durham Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan – SSC OSC
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy – CYP OSC and AWH OSC
- Quality Accounts for County Durham and Darlington NHS FT; Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT and North East Ambulance Service NHSFT – AWH OSC
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2022-25 – AWH OSC
- Oral Health Promotion Strategy 2023 – AWH OSC

Planned Overview and Scrutiny in 2024/25

The work programmes for overview and scrutiny focus on the priority areas identified within the Council Plan, the Cabinet's forward plan of decisions, the County Durham Vision 2035, partnership plans and strategies, performance and budgetary control data and changes in government legislation.

The process for developing the Council's overview and scrutiny work programmes is consultative and comprehensive. Initial proposals are influenced by legislation, plans and strategies, performance reports and include engagement with the executive, partners and officers. Each overview and scrutiny committee chair ensures there is a clear focus on the committee's role and forward plan of work. Where there are any cross-cutting matters, joint meetings are held to avoid duplication and make the best use of capacity of both members and officers.

Work programmes are finalised during June and July and are designed to ensure there is flexibility and capacity to take on topics which may arise throughout the year.

A summary of the key issues for the 2024/25 Work Programme is below:

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

- Medium Term Financial Plan and budget setting
- Council Plan 2024-28 Refresh
- Poverty Action Group Annual Report
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)
- Performance and budget outturn
- Workforce Strategy
- North East Combined Authority
- The County Durham Pound Project
- General Fund and Capital Final Outturn
- Annual Representations Report
- County Durham Partnership Update
- Digital Strategy
- Community Engagement (AAP) Review

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Programmes
- Strategic Place Plans
- Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan
- Strategic Sites

- New identified industrial sites
- Major Programmes
- Skills Development
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan
- Housing Strategy Delivery Plan
- Selective Licensing Scheme
- Council New Housing Build Programme
- Supported Housing Improvement Programme
- Leisure Transformation Programme
- County Durham Visitor Economy
- Destination Management Plan for County Durham
- Development of the new Place Brand for County Durham

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Child Poverty
- SEND Update
- Early Help Service
- 0-25 Family Health Services
- Home to School Transport Update
- Best Start in Life
- Vaccination Take up
- Children and Young People Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing
- CAMHS – Waiting Times
- Attendance Update
- Support for Young People not in Education, Employment or Training
- Risks Outside the Home
- Review of Children’s Social Care Update
- Sufficiency Strategy

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Waste & Recycling
- Simplified Recycling
- Woodland Management
- Highway, Footway and Bridge Maintenance
- Library provision
- Strategic Leisure Framework
- Management of DCC Theatres
- Ecological Emergency
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Management of DCC land for biodiversity
- Environment and Climate Change Partnership
- CERP3

- Air quality
- Fly-tipping
- Waste and Recycling
- Environmental Awards
- Durham City Green Corridor

Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Safe Durham Partnership priorities – ASB, hate crime, sexual violence and other violent crime
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and delivery plan
- Horden Together
- Off road bikes and vehicles
- Probation Services and reducing re-offending
- Serious Violence strategy
- Drug and alcohol services
- Youth Justice plan
- Prevent Strategy: countering terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism
- Open water safety
- Domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Road safety

Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- NHS Statutory Consultations/Legislative plans
- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Systems and Partnerships
- Health Protection and Assurance
- Adult and Health Services Updates
- CQC Adult Social Care Assurance Framework;
- Shotley Bridge Community hospital
- Oral Health and Community Water Fluoridation
- Winter Planning and Preparedness
- Public health funding and services/campaigns
- NHS Foundation Trust performance and Oversight of CQC Inspection and Improvement Plans –
 - County Durham and Darlington NHS FT
 - Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT
 - North East Ambulance Services NHS FT

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board 2023/24



Cllr Rob Crute
Chair



Cllr Chris Lines
Vice chair

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) provides a strategic direction for the work of all the overview and scrutiny committees.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- Monitored the Council's applications for surveillance under the Regulation of Investigative Powers Act 2000 and reviewed the RIPA scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose
- Examined and commented on the Council's updated Digital Strategy
- Considered and approved the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23 and agreed its submission to Council
- Consideration of the [Key Decisions of cabinet](#)
- Called-in the Cabinet decision of 14 June 2023 in respect of the Home to School Transport Services consultation outcomes
- Scrutinised the outcome of the Council's Community Engagement Review and commented on the results of the consultation exercise and development of Local Networks
- Supported the Council's work in developing new ways of working via digital solutions
- Reviewed the Council's Statutory Representations report for 2022/23 and agreed its publication on the website
- Received updates in respect of the County Durham Pound Project and its role in promoting social value and wealth building
- Agreed key priority actions and workplace initiatives following scrutiny of the results of the 2022 workplace survey
- Examined the Poverty Action Steering Group Annual report 2022/23
- Reviewed the refresh of the Council Plan 2024/2028

Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24



Cllr Veronica Andrews
Chair



Cllr Matt Johnson
Vice chair

The Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (AWH OSC) has a statutory role under the Health and Social Care Act 2001 as amended to scrutinise local health services

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- Reviewed and commented on the draft Integrated Care Board County Durham Plan 2023/24
- Examined plans by Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT to review the clinical model for Adults Learning Disabilities services across County Durham and the Tees Valley
- Engaged in the refresh of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28 and receiving the final strategy and priorities
- Examined the County Durham Health Protection Assurance Annual Report
- Considered and commented on the North East and North Cumbria ICB Joint Forward Plan 2023/24 to 2028/29
- Examined details of CQC Inspection reports and associated Improvement Plans in respect of:-
 - County Durham and Darlington NHS FT Maternity Services
 - Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT
- Scrutinised proposals to reconfigure Community Mental Health Services for Older People in County Durham and Darlington by Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT
- Monitored progress of plans in respect of the future of services at Shotley Bridge Hospital and the provision of a replacement facility
- Considered updates in respect of Adult Social Care and the Introduction of Local Authority Assessment by the CQC
- Reviewed the Winter preparedness Plans for 2023/24 of the County Durham Care Partnership
- Reviewed ICB Plans for NHS Dentistry Services following members concerns at the reduction of access to NHS Dentistry Services

- Engaged with key NHS, Health and Social Care stakeholders to share information regarding:
 - Healthwatch County Durham Annual Report
 - Director of Public Health County Durham Annual Report
 - NHS Quality Accounts for North East Ambulance Services NHS FT; Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT and County Durham and Darlington NHS FT
 - Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS FT Community Services Transformation Plan

Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24



Cllr Anne Reed
Chair



Cllr James Cosslett
Vice chair

Children and Young
People's Overview and
Scrutiny Committee
(CYP OSC)

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- Starting Well Partnership Priorities
- Holiday Activities with Healthy Food Programme
- Home to School Transport Proposals Feedback
- Best Start in Life
- 0-25 Family Health Services
- Family Hubs – Start for Life
- Valuing Neurodiversity in County Durham
- Preparation for Adulthood
- Sexual Health Strategy
- Children and Young People and Vaping – the Evidence Base
- Pre Birth Intervention Update
- Support for Children and Families on the edge of care
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- School Attendance and Inclusion
- School Ofsted Update and Educational Attainment
- Elective Home Education
- Children's Social Care Demand
- Children and Young People's Mental Health, Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience
- Quarterly Performance Management
- Quarterly Forecast Revenue and Capital Outturn
- Informal information session on Sufficiency and Third Party Payments
- Visits to Family Hubs and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24



Cllr Bill Moist
Chair



Cllr Angela Surtees
Vice chair

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

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- Town and Villages Programme
- Business Start-up Support
- Strategic Sites
- Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan
- Major Programmes
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- County Durham Draft Housing Strategy
- County Durham Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
- Supported Housing Improvement Programme
- Selective licensing Scheme
- Council New Homes Delivery Programme
- Masterplan activity
- Skills Development
- Destination Management Plan
- County Durham Visitor Economy
- Promoting the Tourism offer
- Transport Regional and Local
- New Place Brand for County Durham
- Quarterly Performance Management
- Quarterly Forecast Revenue and Capital Outturn
- Informal Awareness session on:
 - Selective Licensing Scheme

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24



Cllr Bev Coult
Chair



Cllr Jonathan Elmer
Vice chair

Environment and
Sustainable
Communities Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee (ESC OSC)

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- Woodland Management
- Tree Management Policy
- Highways, Footways & Bridges Maintenance
- Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project
- Ecological Emergency Update
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Strategic Leisure Framework
- Library Transformation
- Fly Tipping
- Bereavement Services
- Community Protection Service Overview
- CERP2
- Energy from Mine Water
- Durham City's Green Corridor
- Allotment Update
- DCC land for Biodiversity
- Environment and Climate Change Partnership Update
- Destination Management Plan
- County Durham's Tourist Economy
- Transport – Regional and Local
- Quarterly Performance Management
- Quarterly Forecast Revenue and Capital Outturn

- Informal Information Sessions on Fuel Poverty, Pest Control and Air Quality Management Plan
- Visits to Hardwick Park and Morrison Busty

Safer & Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24



Cllr Phil Heaviside
Chair



Cllr Joyce Charlton
Vice chair

SSC OSC has powers under the Police & Justice Act 2006, as amended, to scrutinise work being undertaken by the statutory crime and disorder reduction partnership - the Safe Durham Partnership

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2023/24 include:

- County Durham Youth Justice Service
- Anti-social behaviour strategy, delivery plan and strategic group updates
- Safe Durham Partnership refresh of partnership priorities
- Nuisance vehicles/Off road bikes
- Open water safety
- Alcohol and drug services
- Home fire safety
- Horden Together project
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group annual report
- Civil Contingency Planning and Storm Arwen Review
- Serious Violence Strategy
- Prevent Strategy: Countering terrorism radicalisation and violent extremism
- Public Protection Service: enforcement and intervention activity
- Road safety
- Probation Service and reduction of reoffending
- County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Community Risk Management Plan
- Informal Awareness sessions on:
 - Anti-Social Behaviour - Theory of Change
 - Empty Properties

Regional Scrutiny

The North East Regional Employers' Organisation supports a region-wide North East Joint Scrutiny Member/Officer network where all North East local authority scrutiny leads discuss national developments in scrutiny. The network also provides an opportunity to share work programmes and priorities and consider emerging issues that have an impact across local authority boundaries.

North East Combined Authority scrutiny arrangements

In May 2024, a new Mayor was elected for the LA 7 authorities of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland and the North East Combined Authority formed. A new constitution for that Authority has been agreed and Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are set to be formalised. Durham County Council will collaborate closely with other Council's as part of these arrangements to ensure appropriate scrutiny and challenge is part of the governance arrangements.

During 2023/24 we have continued to work with other regional authorities as the North East Combined Authority (NECA) which comprised the four councils of Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

NECA had three broad areas of focus:

- Transport
- Employability and Inclusion
- Economic Development and Regeneration

We had representation on the NECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise and challenge decision-making on behalf of our communities. The committee investigates matters of significant importance to residents across the areas covered by the four councils with a view to influencing decisions.

Durham County Council was represented on the NECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Councillor Rob Crute Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Councillor Chris Lines, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board . Councillors Angela Surtees, Vice Chair of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Joyce Charlton are the nominated substitute members.

Transport was of strategic importance to the North East and both NECA and the North of Tyne Combined Authority (Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland councils) worked collaboratively to ensure effective decision making takes place across the region. We worked with NECA and the North of Tyne Combined Authority on a North East Joint Transport Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee established with representatives from all seven authorities. Councillors Jake Miller and Councillor Chris Lines represent Durham County Council. With Councillors Kevin Shaw and Joyce Charlton as the nominated substitute members.

Both scrutiny committees usually meet at varying locations across the NECA area and meetings are open to the public.

Further details on NECA can be found at www.northeastca.gov.uk .

Regional Health Scrutiny

The Council continues to work collaboratively at a regional level to ensure that the impact of changes to health services across local authority boundaries does not adversely impact upon residents of County Durham.

The North East Regional Joint Health Scrutiny Committee consists of lead Health Scrutiny members from all 12 north east local authorities.

The committee is charged with scrutinising issues around the planning, provision and operation of health services in and across the north east region, comprising for these purposes the areas covered by all constituent authorities.

Sub Regional Joint Health Scrutiny Committees

The emergence of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System and associated Integrated Care Partnerships has resulted in the establishment of two Integrated Care System/Integrated Care Partnerships Joint OSCs within the region.

North East and North Cumbria ICS and Northern and Central ICP Joint OSC

This Joint OSC comprises representatives from Durham County Council; Gateshead BC; Newcastle City Council; North Tyneside BC; Northumberland CC; South Tyneside BC and Sunderland City Council

The regional and sub-regional joint scrutiny overview and scrutiny arrangements will be used to scrutinise the development of the ICS/ICPs and any associated proposals for substantial developments or significant variations in services.

Overview and Scrutiny Team

The Overview and Scrutiny team is part of the Chief Executive's Directorate.

- Helen Bradley, Director of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer.
- Michael Turnbull, Democratic Services Manager and Statutory Scrutiny Officer
- Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer.
- Diane Close, Clare Luery and Ann Whitton - Overview and Scrutiny Officers.

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Key contacts:

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Environment and Sustainability Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

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diane.close@durham.gov.uk

Safer Stronger Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

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