

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23



**Date:** March 2023

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23.

This report provides an overview of the work of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, and Sub-committees during 2022-23.

Scrutiny members have welcomed a return to greater normality following the disruption experienced during Covid. Scrutiny Committees have been able to revert to their usual meeting cycle and to focus their attention on a wider range of topics and priorities than has been possible in recent years.

Over this year, Scrutiny has had a continued focus on policy development, and this has included a small number of scrutiny reviews contributing to the main themes and objectives set out in the Council Plan:

- A thriving North Tyneside
- A secure North Tyneside
- A family friendly North Tyneside
- A caring North Tyneside
- A green North Tyneside
- Working together

Scrutiny has also continued to play an important role in scrutinising the recovery of services post-Covid, and in the context of the 'cost of living crisis'.

# The role of Overview and Scrutiny

The role of overview and scrutiny is to provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the Cabinet (and other decision makers), whilst also assisting in the development of key policies and plans.

Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development involves councillors of all political parties, as leaders of their communities, examining the delivery of services and influencing decision makers to ensure that they meet the needs, and improve the lives, of people in North Tyneside. It does this by:

- a) reviewing and challenging the impact of decisions and actions taken by the Elected Mayor, Cabinet and partner organisations;
- b) carrying out investigations into services and policy areas of interest and concern to communities in North Tyneside;
- c) involving communities in its work and reflecting their views and concerns; and
- d) supporting and assisting the Elected Mayor, Cabinet and partner organisations in the formulation of their future plans, strategies and their decision making by making evidence-based recommendations to them on how services can be improved.

# Update from the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

The Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee has undertaken a full programme of work across the municipal year.

Engagement with the Executive is important, and the Committee has continued its custom to seek the attendance of Cabinet Members to its meetings where items within their portfolio are discussed. The relationship with the Executive and scrutiny works well in this respect and Cabinet Members are regular attendees. This includes the Elected Mayor who attended the November 2022 meeting to address the Committee and set out her priorities for the year.

It has considered the 2023/2027 Financial Planning and Budget Process, including the associated Engagement Strategy, and continued to scrutinise the Efficiency Savings Programme 2022/23, receiving regular progress updates. It continues to monitor performance update reports with respect to the partnership with Capita.

The Committee has scrutinised proposals for the new performance measures following the refresh of the Our North Tyneside Plan in line with the Council's policy framework. The Committee made a number of comments to feed into the development of the plan and engagement strategy, including

- Ensuring that a comprehensive engagement process is in place and that no individuals or groups were missed, and in particular to ensure the views of young people and economically disadvantaged groups were sought.
- To consider including reducing mortality rates as a priority in the plan within the Secure North Tyneside theme.
- To ensure increased integration across the Council and Partners in relation to the Environment.
- To consider how the Our North Tyneside Plan would be eventually marketed, with a priority on action towards environment net-zero.

## **Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee: Budget Scrutiny**

The Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee again established a Budget Sub-group to conduct its important role of being a critical friend to Cabinet and providing challenge to the budget.

The membership of the Budget Sub-group was opened to non-executive members from both parties with eight members participating in the budget scrutiny.

The Sub-group met on two occasions. A full day session was held on the 1 December 2022, where the Assistant Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Senior Officers presented the 2023-2027 Cabinet's Initial Budget proposals including an update on engagement activities. A report was produced and reported to the OS&PD Committee on 16 January 2023.



A further meeting of the Budget Sub-group took place on the 31 January 2023 to consider Cabinet's final proposals, following the receipt of the Government Settlement, and a report was produced for consideration at the Cabinet meeting 6 February 2023. Both reports were then received at the council budget meeting on 16 February 2023.



### **Storm Arwen Sub-group**

At its meeting 20 January 2022 Council debated a Motion in relation to the weather event known as Storm Arwen.

Following debate it was agreed that the Elected Mayor would; "Launch a cross party inquiry into the handling of Storm Arwen by North Tyneside Council, including what work is outstanding and what lessons can be learned, and report back to full Council before the end of the municipal year".

The Elected Mayor made a request that a review be undertaken by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee (OS&PD) and it was agreed that OS&PD would establish a Task and Finish group to review the Storm Arwen weather event.

All non-executive members were canvased to be part of the Group, and 8 members took up the opportunity to be involved. The agreed approach for the review was through two focussed sessions, which took place on 16 and 23 May 2022.

On the completion of its work a report was presented at the Council meeting 21 July 2022, where Council decided to refer the report to Cabinet for its consideration as it has the responsibility to implement any changes to the Authority's Emergency Planning arrangements.

At its meeting 23 January 2023 Cabinet accepted all recommendations and gave delegated authority to the Director of Public Health to address the recommendations made by the Storm Arwen Task & Finish Study Group via the Emergency Planning Leadership Group (EPLG).

# Update from the Scrutiny Sub-committees

## Finance Sub-committee

The Finance Sub-committee has continued to examine the Council's Financial Management Reports on a regular basis, including monitoring the forecast outturn positions for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Investment Plan. It has continued to receive update information of the effects of Welfare Reform and on the Business and Technical Partnership Risks.

The Sub-committee has also requested and received information on the operation of the Poverty Intervention Fund, Section 106 Funding and the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

## Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee

Over the year, the Sub-committee has considered reports and presentations on a range of topics, including:

- The Council's Autism Strategy;
- The Better Care Fund;
- Availability and Access to NHS dentistry services in North Tyneside;
- Adult Social Care;
- A report from the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing on progress against the Health Inequalities Plan;
- The role of the NHS in addressing Health Inequalities.
- Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report
- Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust Quality Account
- Commissioning of mental health services

The Sub-committee have had a particular interest over the year on Adult Social Care and home care services. During 2021-22 a Study Group established by the Sub-committee completed a review of home care provision in the borough and submitted several recommendations to Cabinet. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care attended a meeting of the Sub-committee to present the Cabinet's response to the recommendations, and the Sub-committee has requested updates on the implementation of the recommendations.

The Sub-committee has also continued to monitor progress with the joint home care pilot underway with Northumbria NHS Healthcare Trust, and has received a presentation from Northumbria Healthcare Trust on Care Northumbria, a new domiciliary care service established by the Trust.



### **Regional Health Scrutiny**

Some Members of the Sub-committee are also representatives on the Joint Overview and scrutiny committee for the North-East & North Cumbria Integrated Care System and North and Central Integrated Care Partnerships, which was established to scrutinise the development of the North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System. These members have provided regular updates to the Sub-committee following meetings of this joint Committee.

### **Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust: Annual Quality Account**

The Sub-committee welcome the opportunity to submit the annual statement to Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust for inclusion in the published Quality Account for 2022-23.



This will cover views on the Trust's performance over the year as set out in the Quality Account and the priorities identified by the Trust for 2023-24.

# Economic Prosperity Sub-committee

During 2022-23 the Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee has:

- examined the Council's approach to develop a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan and to create low traffic neighbourhoods. Members commented on the criteria to be used in prioritising cycling and walking infrastructure projects for investment and in selecting areas to become low traffic neighbourhoods.
- met with Councillor Carl Johnson, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member with responsibility for strategic transport, to review the state of public transport services in North Tyneside and to examine the actions being taken by the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) to deliver the North East Transport Plan.
- met with Councillor Hannah Johnson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Inclusion, Employment and Skills, to examine the Cabinet's overarching approach to building a more inclusive North Tyneside, particularly using the local economy as a route to make that happen.
- considered the ways in which the Authority engages with the local business community, particularly through the North Tyneside Business Forum, and how this has evolved given the increasingly challenging economic conditions. This enabled members to gain a better understanding of the pressures facing local businesses and how the Authority can help to support them.



- continued to monitor how the Authority is supporting the development of the Borough's town centres. The sub-committee commented on the proposals contained within the Ambition for Wallsend as part of the consultation on the masterplan.
- Regularly monitored data to provide an indication of the state of the economy in North Tyneside. The data has included the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit, the number of employments furloughed, the town centre vacancy rate, the number of job advertisements, new business start-ups, the number of companies in distress, out of work benefit claimants, levels of earnings and qualifications within the population and the number of apprenticeships.

# Housing Sub-committee

The Housing Sub-committee has reviewed a number of issues over the year, including:

- Monitoring progress on the delivery of affordable homes;
  - Examining the main changes emerging from the Housing White Paper and the work to be undertaken to prepare for the changes;
  - Collaborating with Environment Sub-committee to examine plans for the decarbonisation of housing stock;
  - Identifying support available to tenants and residents in dealing with the cost-of-living crisis;
  - The plans for a refreshed approach to Tenant Engagement;
  - The works being undertaken to reduce the number of derelict properties within the borough; and
- An update on Homes for Ukraine
- Met with Cllr John Harrison, Cabinet Member for Housing to discuss key priorities for the service.

## Spotlight Review

The Sub-committee has continued to fulfil its role of scrutinising crime and disorder related matters. A small Sub-group was established to undertake a spotlight review of the support available to victims of anti-social behaviour. As part of this work, members met with some victim support volunteers to hear first-hand of the role that they play. The conclusions of this short study, along with some practical recommendations on making improvements to the service provided, have been shared with the relevant Cabinet Member.



## Environment Sub-committee

In view of the Authority's decision to be Carbon Net Zero by 2030 the Sub-committee decided to examine each of the workstreams of the Carbon Net Zero Action Plan to monitor progress made in delivering carbon reductions. This year the Sub-committee has examined how the Authority planned to decarbonise its fleet and how nature based solutions, carbon offsetting and insetting formed part of the Carbon Net Zero Plan.



As it was 10 years since 'Thunder Thursday' and the other severe flooding events that had occurred in the Borough the Sub-committee took the opportunity of revisiting the action taken by the Authority and its partners to address surface water flooding in the Borough and to reassure itself that the systems in place remained fit for purpose. The Sub-committee also reminded itself of some of the flood alleviation schemes that had been delivered and how these had successfully prevented a large number of households and businesses being inundated with flood water in the intervening years.

The Sub-committee considered the delivery of the Newcastle and North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan as it related to North Tyneside and examined the role of various community groups in improving the biodiversity of the Borough. The Sub-committee also considered the impact that the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain as set out in the Environment Act 2021 would have on increasing biodiversity through the planning process.

The Sub-committee considered how dog fouling, littering, flytipping and graffiti adversely impacted on the appearance of the Borough. It examined the steps taken by the Authority to deal with the issue including regular street cleansing, the provision of additional litter and dog fouling bins, the provision of advice and education and finally by appropriate enforcement action.



Finally the Sub-committee met with Councillor Sandra Graham, Cabinet Member responsible for the Environment to review the actions taken in relation to the environment and the delivery of the Carbon Net Zero Action Plan.

## Culture and Leisure Sub-committee

During the year, the Sub-committee has considered reports and presentations on a range of topics and visited a number of facilities and locations in the Borough in relation:

- An update on the consultation initiated by the Authority with Ward Councillors, partners across the cultural sector, businesses, and the community, with a view to establishing a cultural compact for North Tyneside. Also, a steering group initiated to develop the compact as part of the process of developing a Cultural Strategy for the period to 2030, in line with the strategy timescale of Arts Council England.

Work had been undertaken by Iain Watson OBE (former Director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM)) and Catherine Hearne (former CEO Helix Arts) in order to gain feedback on the key issues for cultural activity as seen by a range of partners from across the Borough, in the light of new developments and new challenges within the sector. An indication of themes emerging from the conversations to date was provided with a selection of creative businesses/individuals in Whitley Bay, North Shields, Wallsend and Longbenton. These included equal access and confidence, local identity, discomfort, and invigorating cultural ambition.

- Following the reports to Cabinet in May 2019 on Community Hubs and again in February 2021 as part of the wider customer services programme. The idea of a hub was a one stop shop for the community offering not only advice and information, but services and activities that met the needs of locals. It was proposed there would be six main physical access points across the Borough connecting people with community assets and services, providing services, and coordinating and connecting with other 'spoke hubs, to support the ambitions of the Our North Tyneside Plan.
- Following the report to Cabinet of 26 November 2018, An Ambition for North Tyneside, a programme of masterplans was initiated to address issues of regeneration and redevelopment across North Tyneside.

The development of a North Shields Cultural Quarter has evolved from the successful bid to Historic England to create a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) and the investment through the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) to create a Cultural and Creative Zone (CCZ), within broadly co-terminus boundaries. A meeting at The Exchange and a walk around Howard Street was arranged to help members visualise what was planned.



- At its meeting on 28 March 2022, Cabinet received a report which set out a set of policy priorities for Wallsend Town Centre. These policy priorities were developed with the Deputy Mayor and following engagement with the Ward Councillors for Battle Hill, Howdon, Northumberland and Wallsend and were to inform a Masterplan for Wallsend which is identified as a priority in Our North Tyneside Plan 2021-2025.

The priorities were; to improve the quality of the housing offer in Wallsend; making the town centre and the neighbourhoods around it great places to visit and live; and about making sure Wallsend residents are connected to good jobs by using the full range of tools, including adult education services and apprenticeships and the transport infrastructure around the town to make sure people in the community, who need it, are supported to improve their life chances. The draft Masterplan proposed fourteen interventions that would deliver the three policy priorities for Wallsend, as identified by Cabinet.



- At the forthcoming March 2023 meeting, the new Director of the TWAM, Keith Merrin, is due to present progress on the work of the Museums, primarily around Sege Dunum and Stephenson's Steam Railway.

# Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

The Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee has considered a range of matters over the year including:

- An overview of the Prevent Duty and how the Authority was complying with the overall statutory duty and how this linked to those services responsible for children, education and skills.
- The activities of the Safeguarding and Children's Services in meeting the corporate parenting responsibilities of the Council during the Covid Pandemic.
- Ofsted Focused Visit to the Council's arrangements for the 'front door' through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Social Work Assessment Teams.
- North Tyneside Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Inclusion Strategy and the High Needs Recovery Plan
- Children in Care, Care Leavers and Safeguarding
- Elective Home Education
- Ambition for Education Plan

The Sub-committee continued to review children and young people's mental health, the universal mental health offer to train staff and pupils from North Tyneside schools in mental health awareness and the work of the Mental Health Support Teams in schools.



In July 2022 the Sub-committee met with the Deputy Headteacher at Spring Gardens Primary School who had taken part in the initial mental health pilot and discussed how the understanding of mental health had significantly improved in the school.

In September 2022 the Sub-committee met with the Deputy Director of Commissioning, NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) and received an update on the whole system work being under taken in relation to children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing in the Borough. There was discussion on the waiting time for specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) which was approximately six to eight weeks and the significant challenges in the system around the workforce and being unable to fill staffing gaps.

The Committee continued to monitor work undertaken in 2022 around children's exploitation including: Missing, Slavery, Exploitation (both criminal and sexual) and Trafficked (MSET) and an overview of the current cohort of children and young people at risk of exploitation and the interventions being completed with them.

## **Chairs and Deputy Chairs**

The Chairs and Deputy Chairs of all the Committees/Sub-committee have met on two occasions this year to consider the work of the Scrutiny Committee/Sub-committees.

The Chairs and Deputies received some introductory training about scrutiny with a particular focus on those new to the scrutiny chairing role. They also undertook focus group discussions on scrutiny priorities for the year ahead.

## **Future Scrutiny**

Preparation for the development of the 2023-24 overview and scrutiny work programmes is under consideration. The Chairs and Deputy Chairs usually have a role in discussing possible areas for review in order to prioritise topics for scrutiny during 2023-24. Elected Members, senior officers and the public are encouraged to suggest topics that scrutiny could usefully investigate.

When prioritising topics, Scrutiny Committee's give consideration as to whether the issue is timely and whether there is potential to have a positive impact on Council policy.

## **Regional Scrutiny**

Scrutiny members are part of the Regional Scrutiny Network coordinated via NEREO. This is a forum for representatives from all north-east local authorities and the North of Tyne Combined Authority to discuss any changes or issues in relation to scrutiny and to share best practice. Members have attended meetings of the Network over the year, supported by Democratic Services, with meetings mainly taking place via Teams.