

Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report 2023/24

March 2024



North
Tyneside
Council

Introduction

This Annual Report outlines North Tyneside Council's approach to Scrutiny during 2023/24 and summarises the work which has taken place across the whole breadth of the Authority's Scrutiny functions over the year to date.

It is hoped that this will be a helpful and informative summary for all stakeholders of the Scrutiny process in North Tyneside.

In 2022/23 the Authority worked with an external body, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, to undertake a member-led review of Scrutiny arrangements. In response to feedback received during that review, full Council agreed a new Scrutiny Committee structure at the Annual Council meeting in May 2023. From May 2023 Scrutiny has been delivered in North Tyneside Council through the following six new Scrutiny Committees:

- Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee
- Caring Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Family Friendly Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Green Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Secure Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Thriving Scrutiny Sub-Committee

This committee structure reflects North Tyneside Council's Council Plan themes. A lead Cabinet member (or Cabinet members) and a lead Director (or Directors) to act as main contact for support and provision of information required / requested by each Scrutiny Committee was identified in May 2023. These leads are summarised in the diagram shown at **Appendix A**.

The role of Scrutiny

Scrutiny is intended to support good decision-making by local authorities and contribute to the provision of better public services within a locality. Good scrutiny promotes transparency, accountability and inclusivity in the decision-making process.

Since 2000 all local authority decision making arrangements have been organised according to whether these decisions are executive (undertaken on the authority of Cabinet) or non-executive. The Executive (Cabinet) role has responsibility for all of the Authority's functions which are not the specific remit of any other part of the Authority.

Scrutiny is optimised when it challenges constructively to support the decision-making process. Overview and Scrutiny 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. For scrutiny to be effective, the process must be fair, constructive and aim for positive outcomes.

Developing the concept of Scrutiny as a 'Critical Friend'

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. The concept of the critical friend has guided and informed the approach to Scrutiny in North Tyneside as the new committees have been established and become embedded during 2023/24. A critical friend can be defined as:

*"a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working towards."*¹

¹ A Costa and B Kallick, "Through the Lens of a Critical Friend", *Educational Leadership*, 51(2), 49-51

Scrutiny Work Undertaken in 2023/24

The six Scrutiny Committees of North Tyneside Council held 35 formal programmed meetings over the course of the 2023/24 municipal year.

Work Programming

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee has been keen to ensure that the Scrutiny work programme could flex sufficiently to address any emerging areas identified as being of greatest benefit as the year progressed.

Each Scrutiny Committee Chair has sought to be open and inclusive in working with Committee members to identify topics for inclusion in the 2023/24 Scrutiny work programme. All Committee members have been encouraged to suggest potential areas for Scrutiny work, and this has been included as a standing item on the agenda for each scrutiny committee meeting. Cabinet members and lead Directors have attended Scrutiny Committee meetings to provide information as appropriate and where requested.

Work Performed by each Committee

A summary of the work considered at each Committee meeting during 2023/24 (and forthcoming Scrutiny matters planned for consideration at the final meetings in March) is summarised at **Appendix B**. Highlights of specific Scrutiny undertaken by individual committees is set out below.

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee (OSCFC) is the main Scrutiny committee within North Tyneside Council. A summary of all areas examined is summarised at **Appendix A**, with the following areas of work specifically highlighted:

Emergency Care

During 2023 OSCFC established a Task and Finish Group to undertake a detailed study of specific matters relating to Emergency Healthcare in North Tyneside. This followed debate at Council regarding this topic in March 2023, via a Council motion; and in response, a request from the Elected Mayor to the Chair of OSCFC to consider the establishment of a Task and Finish Group specifically to allow cross-party and evidenced examination of the matters included within the motion, which was agreed by the Chair of OSCFC. Membership of this Task and Finish Group was invited from all non-Executive members serving on North Tyneside Council. OSCFC considered and agreed the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group in June 2023.

Following evidence gathering sessions with senior officers of the Authority and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, two site visits to relevant Health care sites, namely North Tyneside General Hospital at Rake Lane in North Shields and the Northumbria Specialist and Emergency Care Hospital in Cramlington, took place in October 2023.

Findings and recommendations developed by the Task and Finish Group were reported to and agreed by both OSCFC and Cabinet. In January 2024, Cabinet formally accepted these recommendations and agreed a detailed Action Plan for implementation. The actions have been assigned to relevant officers from the Authority's Senior Leadership Team to manage and are being actively progressed at the present time.

Performance and Financial Management Reporting

During 2023/24 a refreshed approach to reporting in these areas was developed. Cabinet, and OSCFC, continued to receive regular reports presenting a full overview of both the service delivery performance and budget position across the Authority, but with added areas of highlight and

focus on key areas of service delivery, and the budgetary impacts of these areas. The forecast outturn at the time of each report to the end of the financial year was also provided. Important information on the position in relation to schools finance, the Investment Plan, developers' contributions and treasury management was also provided and scrutinised, in addition to specific detail on revenue and capital grants.

OSCFC also considered the programme of work in place to manage and mitigate budget pressures and to form part of the 2024-2028 Medium Term Financial Plan.

Budget Scrutiny

OSCFC considered the 2024/2028 Financial Planning and Budget Process, including the associated Engagement Strategy. A Budget Study Group, with membership invited from all non-executive members, was again established to examine and provide challenge to the budget process.

Additional Work

- The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee also received a presentation from the Elected Mayor in December 2023, setting out Mayoral priorities
- OSCFC examined performance update reports with respect to service deliver undertaken via the partnership with Capita
- OSCFC considered the current position with regard to Section 106 Agreements, and Spend and Project Delivery
- OSCFC also considered the Authority's arrangements with regard to Procurement (Supply Chain and Social Value)

(b) Caring Sub Committee

When established in May 2023 the remit of the Caring Sub Committee was agreed to cover the scrutiny of adult care, community services, health and wellbeing, mental health and emotional wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, welfare of vulnerable adults, older people, access to health services, benefits, independent living, personalisation, financial inclusion, public health and carers.

Over the year, the Sub-committee has scrutinised a range of topics, including:

- An overview of the strategic priorities for Adult Social Care
- An overview of Public Health and wellbeing
- Healthwatch North Tyneside – Annual Report and Update 2023
- Council support for Unpaid Carers
- North Tyneside Carers' Centre
- Adult Social Care Dashboard (Home Care in North Tyneside)
- Overview of Direct Payments
- Stopping the Start – a Smoke Free Generation
- Safehaven – Northumberland & North Tyneside Universal Crisis Service
- Northumbria NHS Foundation Trust Quality Account
- Strategic approach to Suicide Prevention in North Tyneside.

(c) Family Friendly Sub Committee

When established in May 2023, the remit of the Family Friendly Sub Committee was agreed to cover scrutiny in relation to schools, adult education, work based learning, 14-19 skills, safeguarding, child protection, early years, children's centres, youth offending, preventative services, substance misuse services, looked after children, youth services and play, Connexions, children's health and wellbeing and vocational learning.

Over the year, the Sub-committee has scrutinised a range of topics, including:

- Children's Services – Directorate Services and Strategic Priorities for 2023/24
- Attendance Strategy
- Youth Justice Plan
- SEND Performance
- Children and Young People Plan 2023/25
- Post 16 Skills Provision
- Home to School Transport Consultation
- Children's Services Safeguarding Update
- Ambition for Education (Refresh) 2024-28
- Update from Corporate Parenting Board
- Best Start in Life, School Readiness and Family Hub Offer
- Year of Voice of the Child

(d) Green Sub Committee

When established in May 2023, the remit of the Family Friendly Sub Committee was agreed to cover scrutiny in relation to the environment, energy use, climate change, carbon reduction, flood risk management and waste management, transport and the transport network, highways and road safety, safe walking and cycling. Over the year, the Sub-committee has scrutinised a range of topics, including:

- Update on Tree Management Review Policy
- Active Travel in North Tyneside
- Road Safety Report
- Waste Strategy
- Waste Strategy Reviews – Communications and Marketing
- Parking
- Waste Strategy Reviews – Re-use and Circular Economy.

(e) Secure Sub Committee

When established in May 2023, the remit of the Secure Sub Committee was agreed to provide scrutiny in relation to housing and community safety, inequalities, equality and diversity.

Over the year, the Sub-committee has scrutinised a range of topics, including:

- Review of NT Lettings Policy
- Building a Better North Tyneside – Housing Strategy Action Plan
- Tenancy and Financial Support Project 2023-26
- North Tyneside Council Cost of Living Support
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Affordable Homes Programme Update.

(f) Thriving Sub Committee

When established in May 2023, the remit of the Thriving Sub Committee was Thriving Sub Committee was agreed to provide scrutiny in relation to parks and open spaces, sport and leisure, libraries, arts development, heritage strategy, community centres and voluntary sector support.

Over the year, the Sub-committee has scrutinised a range of topics, including:

- North Tyneside Creates – a Cultural Plan for North Tyneside 2023-2030
- North west Village Plans
- Heritage and Tourism in North Tyneside
- Skills Gaps
- Employment Opportunities and Brownfield Investment.

Future Scrutiny

This has been the first year of Scrutiny under the new committee structure agreed in May 2024. Committees have worked hard to develop scrutiny within their respective remits, and to implement the good practice highlighted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2023. This should continue to be an area of focus for Scrutiny in 2024/25.

The identification of meaningful topics for Scrutiny, together with the development of clear objectives, will be important for Scrutiny in the new municipal year, together with training for Committee members which is in the process of being specified and arranged for the new municipal year.

During 2023/24 scoping meetings have taken place involving the Chair of OSCFC, members who have identified potential scrutiny topics and officers (where appropriate) to consider the suitability of matters / objectives for inclusion on the work programme. This collaborative approach has worked well and identified that some topics may not be suitable for detailed scrutiny study, but can be used to enhance understanding of processes within the Authority and contribute to an awareness of the context in which Scrutiny work is carried out.

