

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22



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North Tyneside Council

Introduction

Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22.

This report provides an overview of the work of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, and sub-committees during 2021-22.

Although the year was impacted by the ongoing Covid pandemic, scrutiny has seen a welcome return to in-person committee meetings throughout the year, while continuing to benefit from the ability of members to meet remotely for informal and study group meetings. This flexibility and has been a useful to tool which has proved beneficial in allowed external organisations and contacts to easily attend and contribute to study group meetings and evidence sessions.

Scrutiny has continued to play an important role in scrutinising the Covid situation in the borough across the year, the response of the Council and external agencies to changing circumstances, and the plans for the recovery and future development of services.

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.

Over recent years there has been an emphasis on promoting and developing the policy development role of overview and scrutiny. As the scrutiny committees adapted their work through the pandemic, there has been a focus on scrutinising the ongoing covid situation, the recovery of services delivered by the Council and partners in the Borough, and also lessons learned and new ways of working. This has also included some scrutiny of policy development, with a number of scrutiny reviews underway contributing to the main themes and objectives set out in the new 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

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 October 2021 meeting to address the Committee and set out her priorities for the year.

During 2021/22 the Committee received information on the recovery programme objectives from a local, regional and national perspective and the impact on the Authority. It has considered the 2022/2026 Financial Planning and Budget Process, including the associated Engagement Strategy, and continued to scrutinise the Efficiency Savings Programme 2021/22, 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 and ten members joined the Sub-group. Two meetings were held with

information presented by officers from across all directorates, with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources also in attendance for the initial full day session. The Sub-group produced a report and conclusions which were subsequently reported to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and Cabinet as part of the budget-setting process.

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee: Completion of the review into the Engie Partnership

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee established a sub-group in 2020/21 to undertake a review of the partnership with Engie and the delivery of the contract which covers services ICT, Finance, Human Resources, Revenue & Benefits and Customer Services. The reviews findings were considered by Overview, Policy and Development Committee in June 2021, and referred to Cabinet. In August 2021 Cabinet provided a response to the recommendations and all recommendations were agreed.

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 and the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Following discussions with the Chair of the Sub-committee and the Head of Resources the following financial training sessions were held for the benefit of scrutiny members:

- Local Governance Finance & Financial Governance within North Tyneside.
- Treasury, Capital and Borrowing.

These sessions were open to all members and were held via Teams, with around 40 members attending one or more sessions.

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:

- Regular covid updates covering public health and adult social care;
- The recovery of Cancer services following disruption due to Covid;
- Suicide prevention in North Tyneside;
- Specialist drug and alcohol services in North Tyneside;
- The Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2020-21, and proposed changes to Board structures going forward.
- The role of the NHS in addressing Health Inequalities.

Members of the sub-committee are also represented 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. Members have provided regular updates to the Sub-committee following meetings of this Committee.

Home Care Study Group

The Sub-committee has established a Study Group to undertake a review of Home Care provision in the borough. and to review the recently established joint Home Care pilot with Northumbria NHS Healthcare Trust. The Study Group has six members and has met on a regular basis since November. The Group has gathered evidence from a range of Council officers and external organisations and contacts, including home care providers, Healthwatch, the North Tyneside Carer's Centre, Unison, front line care staff and carers of those in receipt of home care. The review is almost complete and the group will be producing a report with their recommendations to Cabinet in the next few weeks.

Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust: Annual Quality Account

The Sub-committee welcomed the opportunity to submit the annual statement to Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust for inclusion in the published Quality Account for 2020-21. This covered views on the Trust's performance over the year as set out in the Quality Account and the priorities identified by the Trust for 2021-22.

Economic Prosperity Sub-committee

During 2021-22 the Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee have focused on the following areas:

- The State of the Economy in North Tyneside and regional recovery plans for employment and transport;
- Good work pledge – the Sub-Committee have considered the outcome of the pilot Good Work Pledge developed by the North of Tyne Combined Authority, to enable employers to understand the key elements of “good work”, what they can do to achieve this for their employees, and what support is available to help them get there.
- Members have considered a range of information in relation to how the Council is supporting town centres, including work with local communities to preserve and develop town centres, learning from the experience of the pandemic, providing support where needed, and looking at innovative business and housing use for town centres, as well as retail. As part of this exercise Members asked to be presented with a range of information, including:
 - a) town centre maps showing the location and nature of vacant properties;
 - b) data relating to the numbers of licensing applications and planning applications for change of use;
 - c) a comparison of vacancy rates in high streets and shopping centres such as the Killingworth Centre; and
 - d) any information or research into the performance of town centres in North Tyneside
- Flexible Working – Exploring how the Council can support and benefit from new ways of working and the implications of change e.g. on business rate receipts and the development of co-working spaces in town centres.
- Office Property Market – The sub-committee spoke to specialists working in the office property market to better understand the issues facing the sector as a result of the pandemic.
- Successful Businesses - investigating success stories of businesses who have been attracted to the area and how they envisage the future in terms of an inclusive economy, a green industrial revolution, skills and training and the office property market.

Green Skills Sub-group

The Economic Prosperity Sub-Committee agreed to examine the Council’s approach to adapting to a green industrial revolution and ensuring people have the right skills for the future green jobs. Working in conjunction with members of the Children, Education and

Skills and Environment Sub-Committees, a sub-group was appointed to focus on how the local workforce might be equipped with the required skills, qualifications and accreditations to upgrade building insulation and ventilation and switch energy source from gas to green electricity.

The sub-group has met with a wide range of officers, stakeholders and partners to:

- a. Consider the steps required to ensure residential, public, commercial and industrial buildings in the borough have the lowest possible carbon emissions to support the Council's 2030 net zero ambition;
- b. Analyse the skills, qualifications and accreditations that will need to be gained by the local workforce so that:
 - i. they are equipped to deliver energy efficient buildings;
 - ii. the need for imported skills is avoided; and
 - iii. the borough benefits from the low carbon economic growth; and
- c) Identify sources of funding that could be accessed for skills and training from a variety of sources to support the local economy.

The Sub-group will review and reflect on this evidence with a view to making recommendations to the Elected Mayor and Cabinet on how the Council and its partners might stimulate the local training market so that the required skills, qualifications and accreditations can be taught to our residents by North Tyneside based providers.

Housing Sub-committee

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

- An update on Community Protection, looking at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on housing related anti-social behaviour;
- The impact of the end of the ban on evictions, brought in during the pandemic, and the support available to residents;
- Considering the benefits realised in relation to the Construction Project;
- Looking at quality control measures for empty homes prior to lettings;
- Monitoring progress on the delivery of affordable homes;

In January the sub-committee met with the Police and Crime Commissioner and received an update on the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan. The discussion focussed on women's safety, safety on public transport, low level crime and anti-social behaviour.

Environment Sub-committee

The Environment Sub Committee has considered a range of issues over the year including:

- the provision of facilities for electric vehicle charging in North Tyneside.
- Considering the Authority's procurement processes to see how they contribute to the Authority's environmental aspirations and how the procurement service can support each department to minimise its environmental impact through its purchasing processes;
- An examination of the work of the Authority in supporting businesses in the aspiration for a Plastic Free North Tyneside;
- An examination of the steps taken by the Authority to reduce food waste;
- The Young Mayor and the Youth Cabinet Member were invited to attend a meeting of the Sub-committee to advise on the environmental issues of concern to young people;

Culture and Leisure Sub-committee

The Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee have considered a range of items over the year. This has included:

- Information on the consultation on the Cultural Strategy ahead of the launch of the consultation;
- Active North Tyneside - receiving details of the Authority's Active North Tyneside programme;
- In March 2022 the Sub-committee held their meeting at Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum and considered a number of reports including a report on the Hadrian Wall 10-year investment plan, the Hadrian 1900 Festival, and plans for Jubilee beacons for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The meeting was preceded by an opportunity for members to have a guided tour of the site.

Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

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

In relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sub-committee has:

- Considered the response of the Council's Children's Services, Early Help and Social Care Services to introduce different ways of working, whilst maintaining the highest standards of safeguarding practice and support to children and families.
- Examined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and education, including infection rates and the number of outbreaks from September 2021, and an update on the vaccination programme in schools.
- Reviewed the work of the Local Authority officers in their support of schools during 2020-21, and the impact seen in pupils' attainment and wellbeing as a result of the pandemic.
- Considered information on the support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) during the pandemic. This included funding to schools for SEND support, and an update on data on children's attendance and exclusion data.

The Sub-committee has also received information on:

- the health of young people in the borough and health inequalities;
- learning from a Serious Case Review published in April 2021;
- the use and spend of the Poverty Intervention Fund which is aimed at alleviating the impact of poverty on families and individuals across the Borough;
- work undertaken in 2021 around exploitation including: Missing, Slavery, Exploitation (both criminal and sexual) and Trafficked (MSET), the current key priorities, work that had been completed to date by North Tyneside and partners in response to exploitation and an overview of the current cohort of children and young people at risk of exploitation and the interventions being completed with them;
- information on the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Policy, online safety concerns, the Ofsted review main findings, and work being done as a result of the findings of a recent safeguarding audit sent to schools on peer-on-peer abuse.
- the Signs of Safety model of best practice which North Tyneside Children's Services had adopted in 2017 in relation to child protection practice.

The Sub-committee also received an update on the action plan approved by Cabinet in response to the report of the Children's Readiness for School Sub-Group which had been completed during 2020-21.

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 have also been involved in some tailored training focussed on their role as scrutiny chairs and looking at scrutiny essentials and how to develop scrutiny going forward.



(Segedunum, March 2022)