

ANNUAL REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

2021/22

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Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2021/22

Audit and Corporate Governance

Chair - Councillor M E Thacker M.B.E
Vice Chair - Councillor M Roe

Communities

Chair - Councillor K Tait
Vice Chair - Councillor B Lewis

Growth

Chair - Councillor B Strafford-Stephenson
Vice Chair - Councillor M Emmens

Organisation

Chair - Councillor S Clough
Vice Chair - Councillor H Liggett

1. A Summary of the Work Undertaken during 2021/22

- 1.1 Each of the Committees has completed its Work Programme with the time available shared between Scrutiny review work, consideration of key strategies and policies of the Council and performance monitoring. They have also discussed the impacts of the Pandemic on their areas.
- 1.2 The Committees have also been monitoring the delivery of action plans from a number of previous scrutiny reviews. Progress against the action plan on Business Centres and Industrial Units had been satisfactory and had been signed off as complete. Lead Officer responses had also been received from previous Scrutiny Reviews into Childhood Obesity and Residential Parking and updates on the delivery of these action plans will continue to be provided.

2 Current Scrutiny Reviews

- 2.1 Three Scrutiny Reviews were undertaken this year and a number of recommendations were made for improvement. These will be considered by Cabinet and if the recommendations are accepted they will be translated into action plans for delivery. Full copies of the reports and all previous reports can be viewed on the Council's intranet or by contacting the Senior Scrutiny Officer (damon.stanton@ne-derbyshire.gov.uk).

2.2 Potential 'out of hours' service

The Communities Scrutiny Committee decided to review whether or not there was sufficient demand for an out of hours service for the Council to provide.

A number of documents and evidence were considered by the Committee to help inform the review. These included active service requests from a number of different departments including Environmental Health, Streetscene, Planning Enforcement, Community Safety, and Rykneld Homes.

The Environmental Enforcement Team Leader and the Community Enforcement Manager (Bolsover District Council) provided scene setting presentations where the benefits of an out of hours service were outlined to the Committee, and current provisions were contrasted with the work and remit of the Community Enforcement Ranger at Bolsover District Council. The Committee then interviewed service managers to ascertain whether there was sufficient demand for an out of hours service and how it might work at the Council.

The review panel concluded that an out of hours service at this present time may not be needed due to a lack of demand, an unclear remit, and costs. Members agreed that the existing arrangements which the Council provided were sufficient and remained good value to residents.

2.3 Business Engagement

The Growth Scrutiny Committee chose to undertake a spotlight review into the Council's engagement with business. The Committee felt that this was timely given

the need to support the District's businesses following the Pandemic and emergence of economic uncertainties.

The review panel considered a number of documents including evidence submitted in the form of briefing papers from officers, project updates from the Council's Business Advisor, business skills audits, and project evaluations. They considered a scene setting presentation from the Director of Growth and the Senior Regeneration Officer and Urban Designer on the implementation of the Growth Strategy and how business engagement was being conducted.

Interviews were conducted with the Assistant Director – Economic Development, Regeneration and Housing Delivery, as well as the Council's Business Consultant, Business Advisor from D2N2, and the Chief Executive of a business in the District.

The review process identified a number of measures the Council was taking to engage and support local businesses within the District and promote economic growth. However, some areas for improvement which would enhance the current provision were identified around defining and communicating exactly what the Council offered so that the support was packaged in a clear and effective way.

The Committee agreed that there was scope for the review to be widened and therefore decided to expand and extend the review into the next municipal year. Other areas would be considered such as the Council's distribution of Covid-19 business grants where the Authority had received positive feedback from businesses, as well as other Council departments which had engaged with businesses in the District.

2.4 ICT & Transformation – Digital Transformation

The Organisation Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of ICT & Transformation – Digital Transformation. The Committee felt it was important to review this area following the pandemic and the accelerated move towards digital services to see how this has impacted staff and residents.

The Committee considered a number of documents which included the NEDDC Digital Skills Survey 2020, NEDDC Digital Transformation Strategy, and NEDDC Citizens Panel Summary Report November 2021. The Review Panel also considered specific data from service managers as to how their services were becoming more digitalised.

Scene setting was provided by the Director of Transformation and the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Climate Change. A number of Interviews were held including with the Projects and Development Manager, Customer Services Manager, Environmental Health Manager, Revenues and Benefits Manager, and Communications and Marketing Design Manager.

The review panel heard views from a wide range of stakeholders during the review process. Members were impressed with the scale of transformation which had taken place, however, concluded, some improvements could be made such as implementing cloud based IT systems for staff, a single 'sign on' system for

residents which would help streamline and simplify online services, and explore a partnership with Citizens Advice in assisting with their Digital Connect Project.

3 Scrutiny Committees

3.1 Audit and Corporate Governance

During the year the Committee met on seven occasions. The Committee has a busy schedule each year having responsibility for oversight and scrutiny on a range of financial and governance matters on a regular basis to ensure the Council's governance and accountability arrangements remain robust. In addition, the Committee has undertaken several financial scrutiny reviews to provide further assurance that financial and governance matters in place are effective.

At each meeting the Committee receives reports from both the Internal and External Auditors, summarising work undertaken during the reporting period and updating the Committee on any matters arising. The Committee receives a financial and risk update at each meeting, as well as scrutinising the Council's corporate debt position.

The Committee has responsibility for signing off the annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement each year and did so in September following presentation of the Audit Completion report from the External Auditor. The Committee recommended to Council that the Letter of Representation be approved. The Committee has responsibility for signing off the Accounting Policies each year, which was undertaken in February.

The Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the Medium Term Financial Plan before it is presented to Council for approval. This was undertaken in January alongside a detailed review of the Council's Treasury Management Suite of Strategies, prior to presentation to Council. The Plan is scrutinised periodically.

During the year, the LGA have established a forum for Audit Chairs to meet and share experiences and ideas with each other. The first meeting of the forum was facilitated by NEDDC with Councillor Thacker in the Chair.

In addition to all of the above, the Committee reviewed and scrutinised a number of other matters during the municipal year, some of which are detailed below:

- The Committee scrutinised the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.
- The Committee completed a self- assessment to review its own effectiveness and identify strengths/areas for development. This is best practice, as recommended by CIPFA and completed annually. Outcomes are added to the Committee's work plan and progress reviewed the following year.

- The Committee received a report on Ethical Investments and the Council's response for scrutiny.
- The Committee was provided with financial benchmarking data to review and provide assurance on the Council's Financial Resilience. This is a recommendation from CIPFA's Financial Management Code, which the Committee scrutinised during the last municipal year.
- The Committee reviewed proposed arrangements for the PSAA contract for external audit services, prior to approval by Council.
- The Committee received a presentation on the Council's response to Cyber Security, in the wake of the Cleveland and Redcar ransomware attack.
- The Committee received an update on the financial arrangements in place for collecting S106 contributions and asked for further information to be presented to a future meeting.
- The Committee scrutinised the Internal Audit report on Digital transformation.
- The Committee reviewed the Council's current investment strategy and made recommendations to Cabinet on proposed changes to approach, within the confines of the policy.
- The Committee began to undertake a review of the financial implications of implementing a residential car parking improvement programme, this work is still ongoing.

3.2 Communities Scrutiny Committee

During the year the Committee met on seven occasions. The Council's Partnership Officer attended the Committee to update on the progress of the Healthy North East Derbyshire Partnership during the 2021/22 year. The Partnership was established in 2015 and was chaired by the Public Health Localities Lead for North East Derbyshire and Bolsover at Derbyshire County Council. The NEDDC Partnership Team was responsible for managing the funding and commissioning the projects of the HNED Partnership. Members heard that there were a number of priorities in the Plan including building healthy communities, promoting healthy lifestyles, and supporting access to effective health and social care. Members were informed that Covid-19 continued to be felt on activities and the impact it had on wider health. The Committee was also updated on the progress of a number of projects including 'Walking into Communities', Digital Connect, and Living Well Programme. Members discussed the projects that the HNED Partnership were delivering and enquired about 'Vision Derbyshire', mental health and wellbeing, referral processes, and the Partnership's plans for the future. The Partnership Officer also advised that Public Health England had moved to a local approach and

that the HNED Partnership was part of a partnership between local health authorities.

The Committee is statutorily required to review the Councils Community Safety Partnership under the Police and Crime Act. The Community Safety Partnership Manager outlined for the Committee the performance of the Community safety Partnership during 2021/22. The Committee heard that figures and dates this year were compared with figures from 2019 as this avoided the abnormality presented by the pandemic.

The Committee heard that reported crime had increased by 9.1% which equated to an extra 474 crimes. This was on par with Derbyshire and the nation as a whole. Stalking and harassment had seen the largest increase which was at 20.1% and that public disorder had seen an increase of 132 crimes. The increases in Police recorded crime are thought to be mainly due to improved recording practices and more reporting. Specifically in Derbyshire stalking and harassment are now counted as separate crimes when a more serious crime is committed.

Various areas of work within the Partnership was outlined which included the Domestic Abuse Act, Prevent Strategy, Target Hardening Project, Community Triggers and Domestic Homicide Reviews. Members also heard about the tools and powers that could be utilised by the Partnership which included Criminal Behaviour Orders, Community Protection Warnings, and Fixed Penalty Notices.

The Community Safety Manager discussed Anti-social Behaviour week which was held nationally in July and what had worked well this year which included relationships with partner organisations such as the Police and Rykneld Homes.

The Committee considered a Housing update from the Housing Options Manager to give an overview of the Council's homelessness service. The update outlined a number of important elements that oversaw the service including a history of homeless legislation, what homelessness was, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018, and how the authority responded to homeless residents. Members heard how the Authority had responded to the Government's call for all homeless people to be brought into accommodation in March 2020 due to the pandemic, as well as current strategies to prevent and support those who were homeless.

The Streetscene and Waste Services Manager attended the Committee and provided an update on the service performance of Street scene. Members heard that Street scene was responsible for a number of services including waste and recycling, street cleaning, grounds maintenance and fleet management. The service had 135 frontline staff and 160 fleet vehicles where an estimated 3.4 million household property bins were emptied per year. Members were informed that due to the pandemic, the annual total of residual / domestic waste had increased by over 5000 tonnes together with a reduction in recycling collected. Street scene were also responsible for grounds maintenance which included the Council's parks and green spaces, maintenance on behalf of Parish Councils, environmental maintenance arrangements on highways, street cleansing, and trees and grass cutting.

The Committee received an update from the Improvement Officer on current communication provisions for residents with disabilities. A range of measures that the Council had in place were outlined such as subtitles on leisure centre screens, bespoke British Sign Language (BSL) videos and a BSL interpreter service. The Council had been given a 94% accessibility rating. More info on accessibility can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>

Members received Lead Officer Responses from their previous scrutiny reviews into Residential Parking and Childhood Obesity, as well as monitoring the implementation of the CCTV in Taxis Policy.

3.3 Growth Scrutiny Committee

During the year the Committee met on seven occasions. The Committee reviewed the work of the Partnership Team in support of growth. The Assistant Director – Transformation and Communications outlined the Partnerships Team’s contribution to the growth agenda. The Committee heard about a number of programmes and initiatives including the LEADER programme which had now ended, and the Covid-19 Discretionary Grants Scheme, as well as supporting the delivery of the Clay Cross Town Deal projects and helping to put in place a package of initiatives to be supported from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Members also heard about the Team’s support of the Voluntary Sector and community groups, the Armed Forces Community, and other indirect growth activity.

The Director of Growth and Economic Development and the Housing Strategy and Growth Manager attended the Committee to discuss the implementation of the Growth Strategy. It was based around the economic recovery post Covid 19 and what could be done to support the District’s economy in the future. Members discussed the importance of the Strategy for delivering investment and jobs for residents in North East Derbyshire, especially the economic impacts of the Pandemic. It was aligned with the D2N2 Local Enterprise partnership priorities which included the Green Agenda, IT and Broadband. The hope was this would maximise funding opportunities. Key priority areas were skills, town centre regeneration, the visitor economy and business engagement and support. Town centre regeneration projects such as the One Public Estate reviews at Eckington and Killamarsh, the progress of the Clay Cross Town Board and the Investment plan were considered. A skills audit had also been sent to 1201 businesses and that a sector analysis was underway to analyse business need.

The Committee also considered an update on apprenticeships from the HR & OD Manager which provided them with an overview of apprenticeships at the Council. Members were informed about how apprenticeships had been used since the apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017, and also the experiences of staff who had joined the Authority as an apprentice.

The Committee received a briefing from the Joint Housing Strategy and Intelligence Officer on the Council’s Housing Strategy 2021-24. Members heard how the Strategy set out the Council’s three key strategic housing priorities:

- Increasing housing growth and promoting home ownership;
- Improve existing housing; and
- Protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

The Committee discussed the importance of schemes which promoted home ownership such as the First Homes Scheme and Right to Buy Scheme, and received a comprehensive overview of housing related statistics for the District including housing growth, prices and ownership demographics.

Members considered an update on the Clay Cross Town Deal and the Masterplan for Eckington and Killamarsh from the Assistant Director for Economic Development. The Clay Cross Town Deal was made up of 10 projects and £24.1 million had been made available by Government to support its delivery. Collectively, they were intended to help Clay Cross become a thriving, industrious and sustainable town with a focus on enterprise, skills and learning, innovation and low carbon technology. The Masterplan projects for Eckington and Killamarsh had been developed so that preferred masterplan options could be selected as a basis for public consultation.

The Committee also considered the lead officer action plan on a previous scrutiny review on Business Centres & industrial Units which was signed off as complete, as well as a number of one-off items including updates on the management of assets, in-house services, procurement arrangements, and Dronfield Development.

3.4 Organisation Scrutiny Committee

During the year the committee met on seven occasions. The Annual Report of Human Resources and Organisational Development was considered by the Committee. This report outlined a range of employee related issues during 2020/21 which covered areas of recruitment and selection, employee health and wellbeing, health and wellbeing initiatives, organisation development and apprenticeships. Enquiries were made about the number of employees currently working for the council compared to other District Councils, the number of resignations during the year and the disparities in staff turnover between different services. Sickness absence and the target set by the Council were also discussed. The impacts of the pandemic on HR was also discussed as well as how they had supported other Council departments. Members heard about the corporate learning and development programme and the implementation of a new E-recruit system. Later in the year, the Committee received a further update on apprenticeships and degrees and heard from a number of staff who were currently completing MBA's.

The Committee reviewed progress on the Transformation Programme. The Director of Transformation highlighted the main areas that had moved forward and additionally the impact of the Covid pandemic on the following transformation streams: service transformation, transforming finances, digital organisation, organisational transformation and environmental transformation. A discussion on savings targets and headline projects to deliver these were informative, and Members enquired about digital skills in light of the pandemic and ensuring that residents could continue to access digital services. The Committee thanked the staff for the work they had done in transforming the Council and recognised that

the programme had been pushed forward very quickly due to the impacts of the pandemic.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Managing Director at Rykneld Homes which outlined the new five year agreement between the Council and Rykneld. This included a new Business Plan, Performance Management Framework, and Governance arrangements. The Committee heard about the work being done including repairs and maintenance, housing management, and regeneration and development. Members praised the work that had been completed by the team at Rykneld Homes Ltd.

Members also considered proposed changes to Members IT provisions including support and cybersecurity, and heard about the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

4 The Year Ahead 2022/23

After the appointment of members to the Scrutiny Committees at Council on 23 May 2022, work programmes for 2022/23 will be discussed and developed. Suggestions for Scrutiny review topics will be invited from stakeholders. These will be discussed at the first scrutiny meeting of the new municipal year to prioritise which subjects should be reviewed.