



**North East
Derbyshire**
District Council

**Scrutiny
Annual Report
2024/25**

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Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2024/25

Business Scrutiny – Council Plan Objective ‘A Great Place to Work’

Chair – Councillor Suzy Cornwell

Vice Chair – Councillor William Jones

Communities Scrutiny – Council Plan Objective ‘A Great Place to Live Well’

Chair – Councillor Michael Durrant

Vice Chair – Councillor Graham Baxter

Environment Scrutiny – Council Plan Objective ‘A Great Place That Cares for the Environment’

Chair – Councillor Caroline Smith

Vice Chair – Councillor Frank Adlington-Stringer

Services Scrutiny – Council Plan Objective ‘A Great Place to Access Good Public Services’

Chair – Councillor Mick Smith

Vice Chair – Councillor Neil Baker

Introduction

This report provides an overview of scrutiny activity at the Council and the work of the four Scrutiny Committees (each comprising 9 Members) during 2024/25. It covers the main topics overviewed and scrutinised during the year, outcomes of this work and future plans of the scrutiny function.

29 of the 53 district Councillors currently sit on one or more Scrutiny Committees. Their purpose is to hold the Cabinet to account – to comment on proposals before decisions are taken, to input into policy development and to monitor performance against corporate priorities. The Council's approach to scrutiny aims to reflect the nationally recognised principles for good scrutiny, as set out in statutory guidance:

- Provides constructive “critical friend” challenge
- Amplifies the voice and concerns of the public
- Led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drives improvement in public services.

Throughout 2024/25, our Scrutiny Committees have conducted their functions in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

The focus of the Scrutiny Members over the next year will be on the challenges facing the Council, the Council's service provision and also the service provision of our partners. We aim to ensure that Scrutiny makes a valuable contribution through its work and looks forward to another year of collaboration with the Cabinet and officers of the Council to the benefit of our communities.

Organisation of the Work Programme

At the start of the municipal year each Scrutiny Committee plans what it wants to focus on at scheduled meetings. They consider the services delivered, performance, priorities and challenges of those services and develops a Work Programme for the year to provide Members with key areas to focus on.

The Work Programmes are reviewed at each meeting and then agreed by the Committee. Any Member can propose possible items for consideration for the Work Programme. Each item proposed is evaluated to determine its relevance and purpose by the Chairs of each Scrutiny Committee. If added to the Work Programme, the Senior Scrutiny Officer will work with officers to ensure that the appropriate information is presented to the Committee for review.

Other items included in the Work Programmes are information bulletins, brief updates on specific topics and areas of interest, statutory items, performance monitoring or fact-finding pieces of work for items the Committee may wish to scrutinise in the future.

The Work Programmes need to be flexible in order to address any issues that arise throughout the municipal year. A number of new topics were added to the Programme during the year and the timing of some of the items were varied to enable key items to be considered in a timely manner. The Scrutiny Committees will continue with their flexible approach to Work Programming to ensure that they are able to react to issues as they arise.

The Work Programmes are aligned to the priorities and outcomes of the North East Derbyshire District Council Plan 2023 to 2027.

Summary of the Work Undertaken During 2024/25

Each of the Committees has completed its Work Programme with the time available shared between consideration of key strategies and policies of the Council, performance monitoring, reviewing Cabinet decisions and identifying key areas for potential review.

2024/25 has again been a busy year for Scrutiny. During the year, 20 Scrutiny Committee meetings were held, and 35 topics were overviewed and scrutinised, excluding standing items relating to committee business and work programme planning.

The report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the four Scrutiny Committees during 2024/25. It details how the Council's Scrutiny function has worked to support delivery of the ambitions contained in the Council Plan. Scrutiny is an important non-political process carried out by Councillors on behalf of the residents of North East Derbyshire. Scrutiny raises standards by challenging the Council's performance and checking whether policies and services meet people's needs.

Further details of the topics the Committees covered as part of their Work Programmes for the year are highlighted below.

Business Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions. Topics covered included:

Shop Front Enhancement Scheme

Members were given an overview on the operation of the Shop Front Enhancement Scheme that was launched in April 2023 and funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The presentation covered how the Scheme worked and what the grants could be used for, the number of approved grants (which ranged from £500 to £10,000), challenges the Scheme had created, and examples of successful improvements to shops across North East Derbyshire.

The Committee were impressed with the positive impact this had made to a number of shops across the district and felt that this was a great Scheme for supporting the local businesses within the district. Members were also pleased to hear that work was continuing with officers approaching the shops locally to talk to them about the Scheme with a view to spending the remaining balance of the fund before the Scheme ended in March 2025.

"How's Business?" Survey

The Economic Development & Regeneration Manager delivered a presentation to the Committee to inform them of the recent results of a Business Survey that had been undertaken within the district. The survey covered a variety of sectors, views on employment/recruitment, business expansion and the opinions of these businesses on an array of different aspects.

The Committee felt the Survey provided a good insight into the views of our businesses locally and highlighted areas where the UK Shared Prosperity Fund may be of benefit going forward so that businesses can be supported.

Growth Strategy

The Council's Assistant Director of Regeneration & Programmes gave an overview of the Council's Growth Strategy and covered a wide range of elements including policy drivers, delivery mechanisms, housing, employment and skills, supporting businesses, town centre development and the visitor economy.

Members were informed that this was an evolving Strategy that was continuously changing in line with external factors such as Government changes. Given this, the Committee felt that an update on the position of the Strategy would be beneficial at the end of the municipal year with the Portfolio Holder being present.

The Portfolio Holder for Growth & Assets and the Assistant Director of Regeneration & Programmes attended the last meeting of the year (May 2025) to provide an update on the Strategy. The Members were informed that the Council were now working closely with the East Midlands County Combined Authority (EMCCA) and changes to the Council's Strategy were being made to align better with the EMCCA Growth Plan.

The Committee were given an overview of the key elements of the Strategy and highlighted what the priority areas would be going forward.

Members were grateful to the Portfolio Holder for taking time to discuss the Strategy, and appreciated the obstacles overcome by officers to get to this position. The Committee agreed that the key priorities within the Strategy would help steer the future Work Programme.

Public Transport Provision

The Bus Service Improvement Plan Technical Lead from Derbyshire County Council delivered a presentation to the Committee to inform them of the current bus service provision and expected changes in the County. The presentation covered details on current provision, the National Bus Strategy, DCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan, how funding is spent, works undertaken since 2023, bus service enhancements within the district, passenger satisfaction survey, plans for the future and electric buses. Members were informed that from April 2025 the responsibility for funding of public transport provision will be through the East Midlands County Combined Authority, so it was unclear as to what the service may look like in the future.

The Committee found the information useful, and they were able to highlight concerns around some bus services becoming more unreliable in recent years and the lack of services within the rural areas across the district. The officer present was able to note these for taking back to DCC. However, Members noted the changes that would be made to how the service was to be funded in the future and showed interest in looking at this further once the Combined Authority became the funding body.

East Midlands Chamber Economic Survey

The Chief Executive of the East Midlands Chamber presented the findings of the Chambers Quarterly Economic Survey that was open to all businesses across the East Midlands, not just Chamber members. The Committee were informed of the views of businesses across the region on areas such as business performance, views on the current state of the economy, how business was doing i.e. sales/orders, views on the workforce i.e. retention, recruitment and learning/development, finances and growing concerns.

Members were saddened to hear that generally the views from businesses were not very positive due to the impact from the current economic climate. The Chief Executive of the Chamber did inform them that having spoken to other Chambers across the UK, this was the view nationally and not just our region. However, the Committee were informed that overall, although business across the East Midlands was not being seen as performing well, it did appear to be a lot better than most regions in the UK.

The Committee noted that although this appeared to be a national concern, it did highlight that as an Authority we needed to do as much as possible to support our local businesses. Going forward the Committee wanted to hear more about some of the support the Council offered to businesses, and also for the East Midlands Chamber to come back at a later date with their survey results from a later quarter to see whether views had changed.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Outputs Achieved

Given the topics that had been covered so far during the year, the Committee were keen to find out more about what the Council had been doing to support the businesses in the district, with specific reference to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), a fund of just under £2.3m and had ended in March 2025. Therefore, the Programmes Manager and Interim Economic Development & Regeneration Manager presented the Committee with an overview of outputs achieved from the funding.

The Committee heard about the following:

- Business support i.e. Derbyshire Accelerator Programme, Vision Derbyshire Start-Up Programme, Shop Front Enhancement Scheme;
- Green and digital skills i.e. delivering courses aimed at businesses looking to diversify into green technology skills (electric/hybrid vehicle awareness, solar PV and heat pump installations etc). Also delivering courses aimed at businesses looking to bridge the digital skills gap within their workforce (AI, cyber security, digital marketing etc);
- Public realm works i.e. improvements around Dronfield including improved footpaths, additional handrails and benches, new landscaping outside the Leisure Centre and Civic Hall, improved lighting in the library gardens, car parking enhancements etc;
- Enhancing the district to increase visitor footfall i.e. variety of campaigns showcasing North East Derbyshire across different media, food and drink trails, seasonal events, “We Are North East Derbyshire” promotional video,

The Committee were impressed with the amount of work that had been undertaken by the Council's officers and the variety of support that had been offered and taken up by businesses across the district.

Members were keen to see this support continue, funding permitted. The Programmes Manager and Interim Economic Development & Regeneration Manager referenced some additional funding through the East Midlands County Combined Authority, however this was still to be confirmed. Once this was confirmed work would continue to progress with supporting businesses and providing some of the programmes/support already mentioned.

Asset Management Plan

The Committee had previously consulted on the draft Asset Management Plan, however the Plan had been further developed to incorporate key changes and comments from the wider consultation that had taken place.

The final draft of the Plan was presented to the Committee, and key changes were highlighted and discussed. One of the key concerns highlighted by our Members was about the Council's Leisure Centres and the new "Active" branding that was being promoted on the building frontage. The views were that the re-branding was visually pleasing but Members felt that the Authority should also be promoting, and making it clear, that our Leisure Centres are an NEDDC asset and the NEDDC Coat of Arms should be present on the front of our buildings.

Following that meeting, Members were provided with a full briefing on the new "Active" branding and were assured that the Council's Leisure Centres were all being promoted as an NEDDC asset and there had been a lot of work done to link the NEDDC logo into the new "Active" branding.

Communities Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions. Topics covered included:

Leisure Activities for Older Children/Teenagers

Following the outcomes from the Residents Survey, undertaken in November 2023, one of the key areas of improvement highlighted within that survey was activities for older children/teenagers.

The Committee had noted this area as a potential topic to review and picked this up as part of the 2024/25 Work Programme where a spotlight review was undertaken.

Members were impressed with the number of activities on offer, and that these services were well organised. Members also agreed that the staff delivering those services were a credit to the Council showing positive attitude and genuine care towards others. However, they did make a number of observations and spot potential areas for change/improvement including:

- Pricing structure for juniors
- Membership offering

- Engagement with older children/teenagers
- Targeted promotion

The Committee submitted several recommendations to Cabinet, which were subsequently accepted, and work is now underway in implementing the improvements/changes.

Voluntary Sector Grants

Members were given an overview of the Council's funding to voluntary and community sector infrastructure support organisations in 2023/24, they were informed of the amount of funding each organisation was awarded and presented with the outcomes of what the organisations had achieved during the year. The Committee found the report useful but felt that the information presented did not include enough detail about how much, in monetary value, this has supported our residents. Given this, the Committee felt it would be beneficial to invite some of the organisations to a later meeting so that they could present on the benefits of the funding.

Following the above, three of the organisations (Citizens Advice North East Derbyshire, Derbyshire Law Centre and the Volunteer Centre) were invited to the meeting in May 2025. Each of the organisations presented a detailed overview on how they spent the funding from North East Derbyshire District Council. Members were informed how the funding from the Council supports the local residents and communities, and that the support given to residents was of a much higher perceived value than the funding allocated. Examples of this were supporting people with debt reconciliation, access to benefits, access to work, rent arrears etc.

The Committee were impressed with the work done by these organisations and the positive impact they have in North East Derbyshire. Given this, the Committee now wish to include on their Work Programme the Voluntary Sector Grants, and invite organisations in annually, rotating attendance depending upon level of grant.

Five Year Housing Land Supply

The Council's Assistant Director of Planning informed Members of the current position on the Council's five-year housing land supply, and the potential implications of the current Government consultation on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). They were informed that due to one of the proposed revisions to the NPPF, the method for calculating housing need would significantly change, resulting in a huge increase in dwellings to be built (from 242 dwellings per annum to 611 per annum). The Committee were informed of the implications this could have for the Council if the change was imposed and the quota was not met.

The Committee expressed concerns with the proposals and agreed to have a further update once there was certainty about any changes to the NPPF.

Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Strategy

The Committee consulted on both Strategies, and the objectives of the strategies were shared together with the actions necessary to achieve them.

Members noted that the strategies aligned well with the Council Plan and felt that the strategies represented good work on sustainability and cost efficiency. However,

Members did suggest that liaison with Parish Councils could be utilised to further address furniture poverty to help those in need. Other elements of the strategies that the Committee raised as part of the consultation were around the impact of the Right to Buy scheme on the private rental market, affordable homes (the mismatch in household income and rent paid), and homelessness.

Going forward the Committee have agreed that it may be beneficial to look at homelessness/rough sleeping as part of a future Work Programme.

Met with the Police & Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire

The Committee invited the new Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Derbyshire, Nicolle Ndiweni-Roberts, to a meeting so that they could hear about her plans for the future and to also use it as an opportunity to raise a number of key concerns they had.

The Commissioner was joined by colleagues from the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) and she presented a breakdown of strategic priorities and an overview of the key partnerships that would be worked on.

Members also raised a number of key issues with the PCC and SNT, including:

- Police visibility
- Rural crime
- E-scooters
- Domestic violence
- Road safety

The PCC/SNT provided detailed and informative responses to all the concerns raised and advised of work either currently taking place or was due to take place within the areas of concern raised.

The Committee were grateful to the Commissioner and the SNT for taking time out of their busy diaries, the Members found the information really informative and felt they had a better understanding of the work being undertaken/due to be undertaken in reducing crime across the district.

Adaptations Policy Update

The Committee had previously been advised of some major changes to the Adaptations Policy, at the time there was some concerns about how these changes would affect the Council and what the cost implications would be. It was agreed that this would need further review once the Policy had been in place for at least 6 months to determine the impact of the changes.

Given the above, the Council's Housing Policy & Assurance Officer and the Head of Neighbourhood Services (RHL) were invited to a meeting to provide an update and outlined the implications of the changes made to the Adaptations Policy. This included a breakdown of the adaptation requests made under the amended policy, the impact on tenants and the impact on the Council/Rykneld Homes Limited.

Some Members had questions around the criteria for declining adaptation requests and the level of declines under the new Policy. The Committee were informed that the

policy update would lead to previously declined adaptation requests being accepted and that decisions to refuse adaptation could be appealed. The Committee felt that this represented a positive for tenants.

At the meeting the Committee were informed that there had been no major financial implications resulting in the changes to Policy to date.

Community Safety Partnership Annual Review

The Committee is statutorily required to review the Council's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) under the Police & Crime Act.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the work and performance of the CSP during 2024/25. The Committee heard about progress that had been made, what had been working well and the issues to overcome. The presentation also highlighted that the overall crime rate had reduced by 10% in the last year and detailed the areas that have contributed to the reduction.

Members raised some concerns around the disparity in what the Police define as anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the view of the Council, Officers and residents. In this context, Members heard the types of ASB being reported that are not considered by the Police, and the new approach for addressing ASB at community level was shared.

Various areas of work within the Partnership were outlined which included the Prevent agenda, Target Hardening Project, more targeted communications, Domestic Homicide Reviews, ASB case reviews, also community projects such as Lend-a-Cams/Wildlife Cams which are covert cameras put into people's homes/gardens to detect ASB and other crimes to make people feel safer, the Graffiti project where the Council are working with a graffiti arts project to develop an area in Dronfield that has seen, over the last few years, an increase in hate related and offensive graffiti, Scam and Fraud Awareness sessions, and Extreme Wheels.

The Committee heard about several Closure Orders that had taken place (5 closures in 5 months), the versatility of these and the types of Closures that had been undertaken, and also the positive impact this had made on the affected communities.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager discussed those areas that had worked well this year including the relationships with partner organisations such as the Police, Rykneld Homes, DFRS, Derbyshire County Council. Other positive steps forward were the ASB Tasking and Solution meetings, Corporate Enforcement Group and the Police Tasking meetings.

The Committee were informed of potential challenges/issues for the coming year, this included managing the expectations of the local community and managing the level of work that comes through including the diversity of work that is received.

Allocations Policy

The Council's Housing Strategy & Homeless Manager and Rykneld Homes' Head of Neighbourhood Services presented the Committee with the Allocations Policy as part of the consultation process. Members were informed of the key proposed

amendments and given an overview of the reasons behind the changes and how this differed from the current Policy.

The Committee raised questions around the proposed new banding system for non-emergency homeless. Members were advised of how this would work and were informed that those with other vulnerabilities would still have higher priority and those in the lower bands had access to alternative options such as supported housing. It was in this context that the Committee were informed of the impact of the new banding system, and how this would be monitored and acted on accordingly.

Members also raised questions around the reasons for reducing the numbers of refusals permitted, the process for assessing prospective tenant's medical situations and where Asylum Seekers/Refugees fit into the policy. All of the points raised by the Committee were answered with a detailed overview.

Environment Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions. Topics covered included:

Energy Performance – NEDDC Buildings

The Facilities & Contracts Manager and the Sustainability Officer delivered a presentation on what the Council was doing to make its buildings more energy efficient, this included details on reducing carbon emissions, decarbonisation, the Council's facilities, challenges, future projects and CO2 emissions.

Members raised concerns around the energy consumption at Coney Green Business Centre and the vacant Pioneer House. The Officers explained the reasons behind this, and gave an overview of how the consumption was measured in these areas and the steps being taken to reduce the levels of consumption.

Overall, the Committee were satisfied of the steps being taken by the Council to reduce energy consumption across its premises.

Biodiversity Net Gain

The Assistant Director of Planning attended a meeting to inform Members of the actions being taken by the Council to comply with its responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021 to further the general biodiversity objective. This covered:

- Assessing the current state of biodiversity in the district
- The production of a strategic district-wide Action Plan relating to biodiversity
- Viability of delivering 10% net gain on allocated sites that do not have an extant planning permission
- Consideration for a 'call for sites' for land available in the district for net gain 'offsetting'
- Establishing a 'bank' of land for biodiversity enhancement where 10% net gain is not possible on a development sites (both Council assets and privately owned land)
- Participation in the development of the Derbyshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

- Consideration into biodiversity enhancement policies as part of the Local Plan Review

The Committee also welcomed Hollie Fisher from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to explain the Trust's role in the assessment of the Council and other elements that the Trust was involved in, with specific relation to the biodiversity net gain action plan.

Members discussed a number of aspects and raised questions around biodiversity including engaging with schools, baselines for net gain, transparency of the call for sites process, the role of Parish Councils, requirement for housing developers to comply with biodiversity net gain, and agricultural land.

Committee asked why the Council was not aiming for a higher uplift of say, 20%, rather than the stated 10% uplift towards biodiversity net gain and were of the view that 20% would be better. Members were informed that the 10% was a starting point and that once further work had been undertaken it may be feasible to increase this to 20%, however viability considerations were key to this.

The Committee were interested to see what progress is made on biodiversity net gain and agreed that it should be part of the 2025/26 Work Programme.

Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)

The Committee welcomed the Net Zero Innovation & Delivery Manager from the Midlands Net Zero Hub, who had been invited to the meeting to talk about the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP). Members were given an overview of:

- The Midlands Net Zero Hub?
- What is Local Area Energy Planning?
- Energy Systems Catapult (the organisation) and their method for Local Area Energy Planning
- The Hub's approach in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
- Socioeconomic Benefits
- Timescales

Members discussed the level of funding involved for the Plan and the presentation referring to how the East Midlands County Combined Authority would fund the whole cost. The Net Zero Innovation & Delivery Manager explained that costs would be kept as low as possible, because LAEP would simulate decarbonisation pathways to find the most cost-effective route to net zero.

The Committee found the presentation useful and informative. The Council's Assistant Director of Regeneration & Programmes was present at the meeting, and as his team cover Climate Change, the Committee asked that, if possible, the Council were included in any discussions on the LAEP that involved the district.

Climate Change Strategy Action Plan

The Council's Climate Change Strategy Action Plan was presented to the Committee, and gave details on specific areas targeted over the last several months, including:

- The Carbon Disclosure Project Report
- Dronfield Active Environment Management System Audit
- Home Energy Advice Team Hub
- Promotion of National Vegetarian Week

Although Members found the information useful and gave them insight into the work being undertaken in tackling climate change, they suggested that it would be beneficial to see some measurable targets against the actions in the Plan. The Programmes Manager noted this as an action to be taken forward.

Re-Wilding and Wildlife Corridors/Verges and Planting to Improve Biodiversity

The Committee heard from the Assistant Director of Streetscene, who gave an overview of the work the Streetscene team were doing to improve biodiversity across the district. This included an explanation of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as well as a summary of current actions and plans in sustainability strategy.

There were questions raised over the Wingerworth Lido being taken over as a biodiversity site, and the reason behind this was clarified.

Members also had questions around perennial plants over seasonal plants, and also Parish owned flowerbeds as well as the width of verges in the district.

The Committee found the overview informative, and it answered a number of concerns/questions Members had about what the Council were doing on re-wilding, wildlife corridors/verges and planting to improve biodiversity.

New Legislation for Waste Management and Disposal

Committee received a presentation which provided an overview of the new legislation for waste management and disposal. The presentation detailed the new national strategy, including the legislative reforms, and the projected benefits of the new legislation. It also covered the potential waste management options to consider, the rough estimates of the costs associated with those options, and a breakdown of issues that need to be considered prior to implementation.

Members were informed that given the changes to legislation this would require new vehicles, mainly to deal with the food waste, and additional staffing will be needed to undertake the extra work required.

Members were informed on the amount of money set to be received as a result of the Enhanced Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation. Members discussed the potential options that had been presented and the cost implications. The Assistant Director of Streetscene clarified that the costs associated with the options did not take into account EPR funding as the amount that would be received was not known long term. Some Members had questions around how EPR funding was calculated, and they were informed that it was calculated using a model that officers did not have access to, but a Freedom of Information request had been submitted in this regard. The limited understanding of how funding was calculated was shared and discussed.

The Committee welcomed the Reforms as a positive change but agreed that there needs to be consideration given to their implementation. Members raised questions

relating to the recycling of glass, the size of new food waste caddies, and the likelihood of nationally standardised bin colours being introduced.

The Committee agreed that the Waste Reforms would result in significant changes to the Council's waste processes and increased costs. Given this, the Committee felt that it would be beneficial to have this on the Work Programme for 2025/26 once more information was available.

Air Quality Monitoring Update

Air Quality Monitoring had formed part of the previous years' Work Programme. The Committee learned about the types/sources of air pollution, Environmental legislation and the work already taking place to monitor Nitrogen Dioxide levels.

At the time, Members were pleased to hear that air quality was slowly improving across the district but felt that it needed to be monitored to see whether there were any changes to reported levels.

Therefore, the Council's Environmental Protection Officer, was invited to a meeting to give an overview of how air quality was looking across the district, and to advise on whether there had been any significant changes to report.

The Committee received an update on the air quality across the district. This included a breakdown of how air quality is measured (using NO₂ diffusion tubes), where the monitoring points are and an explanation of the threshold amount of NO₂ pollution that indicates whether air quality is of concern. Committee were pleased to hear that the district was comfortably under the threshold across all locations monitored, which meant the air quality was good and there were no major concerns from the Environmental Health team.

Energy Efficient Homes

The Director of Customer & Strategic Partnerships (Deputy MD) for Rykneld Homes and Head of Regeneration & Development for Rykneld Homes informed the Committee of the work Rykneld Homes were undertaking to improve the energy efficiency of the Councils housing stock. Information included an overview of social housing in the area, a look at the energy efficient bungalows in Danesmoor, the figures behind the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and the feedback from customers. Members were also informed of how the work undertaken benefits the area and the plan for energy efficient homes going forward.

Members were informed that the Danesmoor project had been seen positively, and Rykneld Homes had received a lot of positive comments from the tenants. Members were also informed that the project had been useful in terms of understanding the importance of engaging with customers early on in the process.

The Committee felt that the work undertaken so far was making a positive difference, particularly in terms of visual improvements to the streetscene.

Services Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions. Topics covered included:

Budget Monitoring

The Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the Council's budgets, and at intervals during the year have been presented with quarterly budget monitoring reports for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. The Director of Finance & Resources had also informed the Committee of revisions to the 2024/25 budget.

During the year the Committee were able to raise elements of the budget which they felt needed further clarification, this has included areas around budget variance and on specific projects such as the Fuel Island Project, Mill Lane Reception Refurb, Investment in Parking Solutions.

Overall, the Committee has concluded that the Council shows strong and stable financial health.

Joint Information & Cyber Security Policy

The Assistant Director of ICT presented the updated Joint Information & Cyber Security Policy to the Committee. Members were informed that the aim of the updated policy was to make sure standards of security were constantly being maintained, and the new changes also reflected specific policies on areas such as WhatsApp use, the use of Teams and Generative Artificial Intelligence.

The Members noted the changes and were pleased to see the new additions within the Policy.

Update on the 4-Day Working Week

The 4-day working week model had formed part of the previous years Work Programme. As it had been some time since the previous discussions on this topic, the Assistant Director of Governance was invited to a meeting to provide an update.

As part of the update the Committee were reminded that the previous report presented to them included information on the 4-day pilot at South Cambridgeshire Council. The current update included further details on the Government's guidance on the model, and independent evaluations on the pilot.

The Assistant Director of Governance advised the Committee that this Council had never actively explored the possibility of a 4-day working week.

The Committee found the update informative and acknowledged the Government's guidance however, a request was made that should the situation change either from Government or at the Council then this Committee wished to be informed.

People Strategy Action Plan

The Managing Director attended the Services Scrutiny Committee twice during the course of this years' Work Programme.

Early in the year the Committee were presented with the People Strategy Action Plan and were given an overview of the Action Plan which set out actions under the four cornerstones of the People Strategy:

- Nurturing a great culture
- Ensuring wellbeing
- Always improving
- Effectively communicating and engaging

At the end of the year the Managing Director returned to give an update on progress made against the Action Plan. Members were able to see the areas of progress and raised a number of questions around recruitment and retention, and also expressed their concerns around the impact that the development of the “Super Council” may have within this area.

The Committee agreed to review the Action Plan as part of the 2025/26 Work Programme.

Pre-Planning Application Fees

The Committee invited the Assistant Director of Planning to a meeting upon hearing about the implementation of a chargeable pre-application advice service at the Council.

Members were advised of the rationale behind the charging, they were also informed of the benefits of giving customers a clear set of expectations, and a cultural shift within the service towards frontloading the process by spending more time advising on schemes before a formal application was submitted. The Assistant Director of Planning highlighted the breakdown of charges that had been put in place.

Some Members of the Committee did not agree with charging for this service and given it had only just come into force the Committee requested that the item return at a later date with some quantifying data so that they could understand the impact of the charges.

The Assistant Director of Planning returned to the Committee several months later and was able to give an overview of the process following its implementation including enquiry levels, income achieved, issues highlighted and targets for the year.

Overall, the Committee felt that implementing the fees had been a positive step forward for the Council, and had created additional income at the same time.

Productivity Plan

The Director of Growth & Assets presented the Council's Productivity Plan and gave an overview as to why the Plan was required, how the Plan was put together, where it was published, and its next steps.

The Committee were informed that the Plan was a public-facing document. Also, the Plan had been submitted to the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, but it was unclear what they would do with the Plans from all Local Authorities going forward.

Members noted the detailed work that had gone into Plan and were interested to know what would happen with the Plans in the future.

The Council's Financial Resilience

The Corporate Finance Manager delivered a presentation to the Committee about the Council's financial resilience. The presentation gave detail on:

- Current financial climate
- Warning signs (financial difficulties)
- Lessons from S114 Notices at other Councils
- The Council's financial resilience
- Usable Revenue Reserves
- Council Tax

Members were informed that the Council's Financial Resilience was measured by the use of analysis and benchmarking. The Committee were pleased to hear about Financial Resilience and discussed the possibility of having a deeper look at this topic in general and how it is measured as part of a future Work Programme.

Relationship between NEDDC and Rykneld Homes

Several members of the Committee had expressed an interest in hearing how the relationship between the Council and Rykneld Homes worked and invited the Director of Finance & Resources to a meeting to provide an overview.

Members were informed that Local Authorities have to comply with housing standards and had been working with Rykneld Homes on the governance arrangements, and over the years had developed a strong relationship. The Director of Finance & Resources also advised that there was a formal contract in place between the Council and Rykneld which ran for 5-year periods, and the contract was last reviewed in 2021.

The Committee had a number of questions including the role of the 'Client Team' and the 'tenancy standard'. Members were provided with details responses to all questions raised.

The Committee acknowledged the relationship between the Council and Rykneld Homes, and the work being done to manage the relationship. However, they requested that if any major changes between the Council and Rykneld Homes occur that they be informed.

Housing Inspectors Report

The Director of Finance & Resources presented a report to provide an update on the recent inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The Committee was informed that the conclusion of the inspection was the Council being granted a C2 grade after the Regulator for Social Housing considered all four of the consumer standards. C2 was the second-highest of the four grades. The judgment highlighted several areas of good practice as well as a couple of improvement areas, including stock condition surveys and categorising and learning from complaints. Members were informed that Rykneld Homes already had a lot of this work underway before the inspection.

Members were informed that the next step was to work with the Regulator towards a C1 grade and that Rykneld Homes have this in progress.

The Committee were pleased to hear the outcome of the inspection, and that plans were in place to work towards a C1 grade. Members asked to be kept informed as and when this was achieved.

Second Green Bin Collections

Following the introduction of charging for those residents that have a second green bin, several members of the Committee had expressed concerns about this, and therefore invited the Assistant Director of Streetscene to a meeting so that they could understand the rationale behind the implementation.

The Committee were presented with an overview of the data from the second green bin collections scheme that had been introduced. This included a breakdown of the costs of the extra bins, where they had been requested across the district, and the expected income as a result of the scheme.

Members had a number of questions including the 3-month winter suspension, the growing season, the impact of the upcoming Reforms to Waste Legislation and the cost/income figures that had been set out in the report. The Assistant Director of Streetscene gave detailed responses to the queries raised and also informed the Committee that the implementation of charging had seen little negative feedback.

The Committee requested clarification on how green waste is disposed of, and a detailed breakdown was provided. In this context, the Members felt that there needed to be higher publicity around how green waste is disposed of, and also more consideration to promoting home composting to residents across the district. The Assistant Director of Streetscene noted these comments and agreed to take them on-board.

Update on Gully/Drainage Works

As part of a previous Work Programme the Committee had heard about the gully/drainage works being done across the district, and the contract in place with DCC. At the time there had been some changes to the works required and also a new system had just been implemented, and therefore the Committee wished for this topic to come back at a later date to see how works were progressing.

The Assistant Director of Streetscene was invited to a meeting to provide an update on the works to date, this included an overview of the new system introduced by DCC to monitor and record performance of the gully cleansing activities.

Committee discussed the contract between DCC and NEDDC for gully/drainage works, and Members heard that the new system had increased collaboration between the two Authorities. Members were updated on the terms of the contract and how the schedule of the team that operates the service was managed.

Members discussed specific locations where gullies get blocked. Members heard that a street cleaning review was taking place which may help in this regard, and that the Council were working with DCC on cleaning frequencies.

The Committee welcomed the update, as it was felt that this was an important issue for residents across the district.

Equality Policy

The Committee were asked to consult on the Policy following a number of changes that had been made. The Improvement Officer informed Members that the changes included the merging of two policies into one, and also had more elements added around mental health, wider disabilities and neuro conditions.

The Members noted the changes and were pleased to see the additions that had been made.

The Year Ahead – 2025/26

Following the appointment of Members to the Scrutiny Committees at full Council on 19 May 2025, discussions with the relevant Chairs and Vice Chairs have been undertaken to discuss the development of their Work Programmes.

In the coming year, each Scrutiny Committee will continue to receive regular performance updates to ensure that services perform well.

Work Programmes for the year ahead are in progress and will be reviewed at each formal Committee meeting. When considering topics to include within the Work Programme each Committee will assess its suitability for overview/review and will consider elements such as the number of people it affects living and working in North East Derbyshire, whether the issue is strategic and significant, and whether Scrutiny can add value and improve performance as a result of their input.

The future Work Programmes will be published with the Agenda for each meeting and will focus on issues that are of importance to the Council, local residents and businesses, as determined by each respective Committee.