



**North East
Derbyshire**
District Council

**Scrutiny
Annual Report
2023/24**

Contents

Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2023/24	3
Introduction	4
Summary of the Work Undertaken During 2023/24	5
Scrutiny Committees – Work Programmes.....	5
Business Scrutiny.....	5
Business Base Analysis.....	5
Clay Cross Town Deal Programme	5
UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).....	6
Residents Survey Results	6
Digital Derbyshire – Digital Connectivity	6
Asset Management Strategy	6
Communities Scrutiny	7
Council Tax Premium on Empty Homes Policy.....	7
Damp and Mould in Homes	7
Residents Survey Results	8
Adaptations Policy.....	8
Annual Review of the Council’s Community Safety Partnership (CSP).....	8
Environment Scrutiny	9
Energy Efficient Homes (Danesmoor).....	9
Biodiversity Net Gain – Environment Act	9
Residents Survey Results	9
100% Plant-Based Council.....	10
Climate Change Strategy	10
Air Quality Monitoring	10
Services Scrutiny	10
Equality Plan	10
Annual Review Letter – Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO)....	11
Engagement & Improvement Strategy.....	11
Budget Monitoring	11
Four-Day Working Week	11
Talent Pipeline Strategy	12
Residents Survey Results	12
People Strategy.....	12
Gully and Drainage Cleaning.....	12
The Year Ahead – 2024/25	13

Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees 2023/24

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

Chair – Councillor Suzy Cornwell

Vice Chair – Councillor Steve Clough

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

Chair – Councillor Stuart Fawcett

Vice Chair – Councillor Michael Durrant

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 Heather Liggett

Introduction

May 2023 saw a change in the Council's administration. With this came a change in the Council Plan and its objectives. Given these changes it seemed more appropriate to realign the Scrutiny Committees to reflect the Council Plan objectives.

The Council's Constitution and Terms of Reference were amended to reflect the changes to the Scrutiny Committees.

At the start of the Municipal Year the then Senior Scrutiny Officer left the Authority, and this left the Scrutiny Committees without a designated Officer for several months until the role was filled in January 2024. Prior to the recruitment of the new Scrutiny Officer the Council's Governance Manager provided support where possible.

Throughout 2023/24, our Scrutiny Committees have conducted their functions in accordance with their Terms of Reference.

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 look forward to another year of collaboration with the Cabinet and officers of the Council to the benefit of our communities.

Summary of the Work Undertaken During 2023/24

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.

Scrutiny Committees – Work Programmes

Given the changes in the Council's political administration, Council Plan and aligning the Committees to be in line with the Council Plan objectives the first meeting of the municipal year for all of the Scrutiny Committees was to provide Members with a remit of their Committee. This included going through their terms of reference, an overview of how the Committees will operate and ways of working. At the first meeting each Committee also considered their Work Programme for the year ahead.

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

Business Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions.

Business Base Analysis

The Council's Senior Regeneration Officer and Urban Designer attended the Committee to present an analysis of the business base in the District, this included detailed information on the areas of the analysis and the reasons for the analysis. It also included graphs to display the sector split into number of businesses, employment, enterprises, micro-businesses, business start-ups and survivability. Members were also shown a map setting out the locations of different types of businesses in the District.

The Committee were informed that a lot of people were commuting outside of the District for their jobs.

The Committee discussed what the Council were doing to attract businesses to the District and were informed of what was currently being done and the support available, however the Senior Regeneration Officer and Urban Designer explained that one of the largest issues was having enough land, however the Council were looking at opportunities available.

Clay Cross Town Deal Programme

The Committee received an update on the progress of the Clay Cross Town Deal Programme from the Assistant Director of Regeneration and Programmes, which included updates on milestones, Clay Cross Active, the Town Centre regeneration, the Low Carbon Challenge Fund and the rail and energy strategy.

Members discussed how jobs were created by the Scheme and how this compared to the target set, and were informed by the Assistant Director of Regeneration and Programmes that jobs created could start to be counted once the construction phase had commenced, and ultimately once the site was built and the new retail and hospitality businesses were open to trade.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

The Council's Assistant Director of Regeneration and Programmes delivered a presentation to the Committee to inform them of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The Committee were given a financial overview, details of the delivery mechanisms and budget commitments.

Residents Survey Results

The Committee were informed of the outcomes of the Residents Survey that had been undertaken. The Members were informed that the purpose of the survey was to further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services.

The Committee discussed the findings and highlighted some areas that may be of interest, namely those around shops and access to jobs, in the future Work Programme.

Digital Derbyshire – Digital Connectivity

Digital Derbyshire (Derbyshire County Council) delivered a presentation to the Committee to provide further information on digital connectivity and internet access across the District.

Members were informed about areas with superfast and fibre coverage, broadband availability, mobile phone coverage and projects being undertaken to increase speed in certain areas.

The Committee were informed that there was a procurement process underway to procure equipment that could be used to measure connectivity within certain areas.

The Committee discussed coverage across the District and those areas where reports of low coverage ("not spots") were being flagged up by local residents/businesses. Members expressed their concerns that there was still a lot more work to be done to improve coverage across parts of the District and the need to follow this up at a later stage to see whether progress has been made.

Asset Management Strategy

The Committee consulted on the Asset Management Strategy that was in the process of being updated and revised. The Council's Assistant Director of Property, Estates and Assets presented the Strategy to Members and gave a brief overview of its purpose and aims.

The Committee were very positive and felt the Strategy was informative and well laid out, with particular reference to the usefulness of highlighting the relevant documents that support each element of the Strategy.

Communities Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on four occasions.

Council Tax Premium on Empty Homes Policy

The Committee were informed of the Council's Council Tax Premium on Empty Homes Policy. The Assistant Director of Communities informed the Committee about proposals to impose a Council Tax premium (or additional charge) on those homes which had been empty for two or more years and to encourage the owners to occupy, offer to rent or sell them for owner-occupation.

Members discussed the problem of empty homes in the District and the impact with which unoccupied homes can have on local communities. Members also discussed the income that might be generated from a premium and how this could be used by the Council to help owners bring their properties back into use.

The Committee were informed that the creation of an Empty Homes Officer post was to be created to support this work and that the post would be self-funded with the first year being funded from the available grant to give the scheme time to get established.

Damp and Mould in Homes

The Managing Director of Rykneld Homes informed the Committee of the national damp and mould in homes issue, including the 2020 death in Rochdale of Awaab Ishak, the changes needed and led by Government, the Housing Ombudsman/Regulator and changes to the Regulation of Damp & Mould.

The Committee were informed of the steps already taken by Rykneld Homes, in terms of Council owned properties, including a Damp & Mould Policy, new processes and a specialised trained team to support the work.

The Members were presented with a "Condensation and Mould" leaflet that was to be distributed to tenants. The leaflet set out steps to prevent damp and mould, and guidance for when both are found in homes. Members found this highly informative.

The Managing Director of RHL also updated the Committee on disrepair claims and the impact this has on service delivery. RHL proactively manage such cases and always prefer to work with tenants directly on such issues rather than through legal recourse however sometimes this is the only option available.

The Committee were also interested to know what the Council were doing with regards to damp and mould issues in privately rented homes and were informed that Environmental Health and its Private Sector Team were the relevant service to speak to regarding this. Given this, Environment Health were invited to attend at a later date to provide an overview from their perspective.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Health and the Housing & Public Health Team Manager informed the Committee of the steps they had taken to support tenants in privately rented properties. Members were informed that when private tenants contact

with the Council about damp and mould issues the tenant is advised to firstly make contact with the landlord, and if the landlord fails to address the issue the Council would then intervene by making contact with the landlord. The Committee were pleased to see that the Council and Rykneld Homes were taking measures towards this issue.

Residents Survey Results

The outcomes of the Residents Survey that had been undertaken was presented to the Committee. The Members were informed that the purpose of the survey was to further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services.

The Committee discussed the findings with particular interest around the responses for activities for older children/teenagers, with a view that it may be a topic the Committee wished to explore at a later date.

Adaptations Policy

The Council's Housing Intelligence and Assurance Officer informed the Committee of the recent changes to the Council's Adaptations Policy. They were informed that the Policy required amending due to a Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman complaint, which related to recent changes in case law. The Housing Intelligence and Assurance Officer also made clear that this policy only applied to Council tenants.

Members were given an overview of the implications following the changes and highlighted that adaptation costs were likely to rise in the future.

The Committee discussed the changes and had particular concerns about the cost implications. Given this the Committee has agreed to review this at a later date to determine how the changes in policy have affected the Council.

Annual Review of the Council's Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

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

The Community Safety Partnership Manager outlined for the Committee the performance of the CSP during 2023/24. The Committee heard that reported crime had increased by 5.4% since last year which equated to an extra 4620 calls/reports. Stalking and harassment had seen an increase of 10.2%, this was reflective with how the Police were now reporting these crimes as well as some high-profile cases. Burglary had seen an increase of 6.1%. Shoplifting had significantly increased by 27.3%, this has been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Public Disorder had seen an increase by over 68 crimes this year. However, the stats reported were on par with Derbyshire as a whole.

Various areas of work within the Partnership were outlined which included the Domestic Abuse Act, Prevent Strategy, Target Hardening Project, community projects including Extreme Wheels, ASB Case Reviews, Wildlife Cams which are covert cameras put into people's homes to detect ASB and other crimes to make people feel safer, and Domestic Homicide Reviews.

The Committee heard about the tools and powers that could be utilised by the Partnership which included Community Protection Warnings, Community Protection Warnings, Fixed Penalty Notices and Closure Warnings.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager discussed those areas that had worked well this year including the relationships with partner organisations such as the Police and Rykneld Homes, the ASB Tasking meeting, Corporate Enforcement Group and the Police Tasking meeting.

The Committee were informed of potential challenges/issues for the coming year, this included managing the expectations of the local community, managing the level of work that comes through including the diversity of work that is received. The Safer Streets 4 and UKSPF funding were also due to end this year, which supports the ASB work mainly Extreme Wheels initiative, so funding will be limited after this point. However, further funding options are being followed up to help fund this area of work.

Environment Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions.

Energy Efficient Homes (Danesmoor)

The Committee heard from the Director of Property Services & Development (Rykneld Homes) who gave an update on energy efficient homes work undertaken by Rykneld to 9 new bungalows at Pine View in Danesmoor.

Members were informed that a range of energy-efficient technology had now been provided to the properties, including extra-wide cavity walls, solar panels and charging points for electric vehicles.

The Committee discussed the programme of works on existing Council owned properties, different heating methods and the challenges this may bring.

Biodiversity Net Gain – Environment Act

The Assistant Director of Planning attended the Committee to discuss the Environment Act, the implications of the Act for the Council and Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

The Committee were informed that the Environment Act placed specific requirements on Councils to ensure the delivery of biodiversity net gain, and the steps the Council had taken to meet this.

Members were keen to look at this aspect further at a later date.

Residents Survey Results

The Committee were informed of the outcomes of the Residents Survey that had been undertaken. The Members were informed that the purpose of the survey was to further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services.

The Committee discussed the findings and the relevance they had for the Council and this Committee.

100% Plant-Based Council

The Committee looked into the Council becoming 100% plant-based food, this followed on from the full Council meeting on Monday 29 January 2024 where a motion moved and seconded by Councillor F Adlington Stringer and Councillor H Wetherall which called on the Council, in line with its Climate Change Strategy, to commit to 3 key commitments.

Council accepted that these issues could not be resolved at the meeting and with this in mind an amendment to the motion was agreed so that the Environment Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider the three proposed commitments, assess their advantages and disadvantages and, finally, to make any recommendations for action.

The Committee undertook this spotlight review and heard from Leisure Services as well as undertaking significant desktop research. A number of recommendations were put forward to Cabinet at its meeting on 20 June 2024.

Climate Change Strategy

The Programme Manager and Sustainability Officer consulted the Committee on the Council's Climate Change Strategy. Members were given an overview of its purpose and advised that the Strategy had been updated to better align with the Council Plan.

The Committee discussed the Strategy and felt that it reflected the current Council Plan's vision and priorities.

Air Quality Monitoring

The Service Manager (Commercial & Environment) and the Team Manager (Environmental Protection) presented the 2024 Air Quality Annual Status Report and informed the Committee of the Council's current position on air quality monitoring, and what the Council would be doing to monitor air quality in the District in the future.

The Committee learned about the types/sources of air pollution, Environmental legislation and the work already taking place to monitor Nitrogen Dioxide levels.

Members were pleased to learn that air quality was slowly improving but were keen to keep monitoring air quality in the District.

Services Scrutiny

During the year the Committee met on five occasions.

Equality Plan

The Improvement Officer presented a report to notify the Committee and seek comments on the proposed Equality Plan and objectives for 2023-27. Members were informed that the document sets out the Council's legal responsibilities, approach to equalities and equality objectives, it also included profiles of the District and the Council's workforce.

Annual Review Letter – Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO)

The Committee were informed of the Annual Review letter of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO). The Customer Service Manager explained that during the period 2022-23, two complaints had been upheld, both relating to Planning.

The Committee were initially concerned that both were related to Planning but the Customer Service Manager gave an overview of the complaints and advised that Planning issues could be very complex, which was why complaints like these were often made towards Planning & Development Services.

Engagement & Improvement Strategy

The Director of Finance & Resources consulted with the Committee on the Council's Engagement & Improvement Strategy and informed that the Strategy would aim to improve engagement with residents, partners and businesses.

The Committee were looking forward to seeing how the Strategy progressed.

Budget Monitoring

The Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the Council's budgets and 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 also informed the Committee of revisions to the 2023/24 budget.

Members also considered budgets of the Council's leisure facilities and expressed concern that some areas had not achieved a budget surplus. This was explained to Members and they were informed that the primary reason for this had been due to increasing energy costs.

The Director of Finance & Resources also informed the Committee of the Council's Financial Resilience, which meant its ability to remain viable, stable and effective over a sustained period, and being able to face pressures and demands and adapt to unforeseen changes. The Committee were given details into areas such as the current financial climate and the warning signs of not maintaining good financial health.

The Committee discussed the Council's resilience and concluded that the Council showed strong and stable financial health.

Four-Day Working Week

The Committee were presented with information relating to a four-day working week which came as a result of Members discussing the subject at the informal Services Scrutiny Committee on 11 July 2023, where Members mentioned a pilot being carried out at South Cambridgeshire District Council. Members were also presented with an attachment where Lee Rowley MP had submitted his concerns about the pilot scheme to South Cambridgeshire District Council.

At the time, the Managing Director informed the Committee that Central Government had not yet issued any guidance on the issue so for the time being, the Council would monitor what unfolds at South Cambridgeshire District Council. He also confirmed that this was not something being considered by the Council.

Members discussed the subject and were keen to be informed of any progress in future.

Talent Pipeline Strategy

The Managing Director delivered a presentation to the Committee to inform them of the Talent Pipeline Strategy, which was aimed at a longer-term approach to recruitment and development. The presentation summarised aspects of the Strategy such as the Council's workforce profile and how the Strategy would be promoted. The Committee discussed the Apprenticeship Levy and the advantages/disadvantages of using volunteers.

Overall the Members felt that steps taken in the Strategy were very positive. Later in the year the Committee were given an update on the Strategy including a summary of achievements since its launch.

Residents Survey Results

The Committee were informed of the outcomes of the Residents Survey that had been undertaken. The Members were informed that the purpose of the survey was to further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services.

The Committee discussed the findings relevant to their remit, namely access to health services and public transport provision, but it was felt that both areas would be difficult to scrutinise because neither came within the responsibilities of the Council. However, with the role of Scrutiny also being there to "influence" partners it was agreed that the areas maybe something the Committee wished to look at further at a later date, time permitting.

People Strategy

The Managing Director gave an overview of the new People Strategy, and informed the Committee that the four main objectives of the Strategy were to nurture a great culture, to ensure wellbeing, to always improve and to effectively communicate and engage.

The Committee were informed that the Strategy would be supported by an Action Plan which included a number of areas to measure success, and a Working Group would be set up to include Members of this Committee to monitor the progress of the Strategy.

Members discussed the Strategy and were keen to be kept informed of progress made.

Gully and Drainage Cleaning

The Committee were given an overview of how the gully and drainage cleaning system operated. They were informed that keeping gullies clean and fully operational was the responsibility of Derbyshire County Council, who contracted the clearance works through an agency agreement to the Council, and the Council receive an annual fee for delivering the service.

The Assistant Director of Streetscene and the Streetscene & Waste Services Manager informed the Committee of the cleaning frequency, methods for cleaning and what was being done to help reduce flooding.

The Committee discussed the service and expressed concerns that there were several drainage/gully pots along the A61 and other areas of the District that do not appear to be cleaned as frequently. The Committee were informed that the Council was currently undertaking a Street Cleansing Review which should address specific areas of concern i.e. those prone to flooding. The outcome of this review would be shared with the Committee.

The Year Ahead – 2024/25

Following the appointment of Members to the Scrutiny Committees at full Council on 20 May 2024, Work Programmes will be discussed and developed.

Suggestions for Scrutiny Review topics will be considered. These will be discussed at the first Scrutiny meeting of the new municipal year to prioritise which subjects should be reviewed.