

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny function at St Helens Borough Council during the 2022/23 municipal year.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, inflation, and the cost-of-living crisis on the Council and other services, has continued, and demands on services have increased. However, a great deal of productive work has been carried out in Scrutiny Committees this year, delivering positive outcomes for residents.

Members of each Scrutiny Committee appreciate and are grateful to Council officers, Cabinet Portfolio Holders and external partners who have committed to working with Scrutiny during another challenging year.

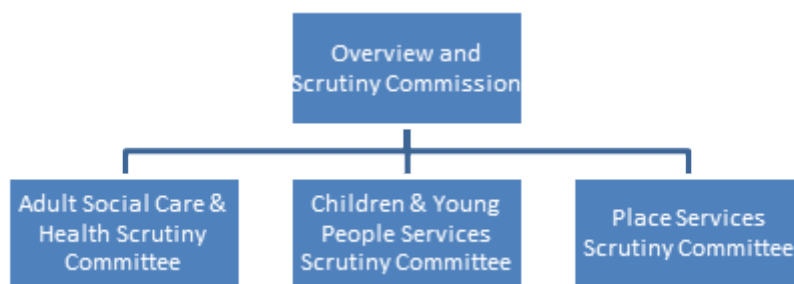
Details of each committee's activity during 2022/23 is described below.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

The purpose of Overview and Scrutiny (Scrutiny) is to hold decision makers such as Cabinet, senior Council officers, and the managers of external organisations, such as Health Services Commissioners and Providers and Community Safety Partners, to account for decisions they have made or are planning to make, and to examine the performance of services and the outcomes delivered for the residents of the Borough.

In holding decision-makers to account, Scrutiny plays an important role in the successful functioning of local democracy; and effective scrutiny helps to ensure that public services are more efficient.

Scrutiny at St Helens Borough Council is carried out by an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission and three thematic Scrutiny Committees, each with remits that ensure all aspects of the Council and relevant partners are included.



Scrutiny Committees can receive reports regarding services during public Committee meetings or carry out more in-depth scrutiny through Task and Finish Groups or Spotlight Reviews. Chairs of the Commission and Scrutiny Committees also hold meetings with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers to share information and discuss work programmes as required. Some Committees have co-opted members representing other organisations or sectors.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Membership:

Councillor Mancyia Uddin (Chair)
Councillor Niall Campbell
Councillor Robyn Hattersley
Councillor Derek Long
Councillor Trisha Long
Councillor Linda Mussell
Councillor Bisi Osundeko
Councillor Glen Richards
Councillor Brian Spencer
Councillor Michelle Sweeney
Councillor James Tasker

Co-opted: Voting

Mr D Thorpe, Church of England
Mr C Williams, Roman Catholic Church

Remit

The **Overview and Scrutiny Commission** is responsible for all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council, including monitoring and supporting the work programmes of the three thematic scrutiny Committees. The Commission is also responsible for monitoring the Finance & Governance Portfolio (known as Corporate Services Portfolio for the municipal year).

This report includes the action of the overarching Commission and the three thematic committees for 2022/23.

Committee Activity

The Commission met six times over the course of 2022/23 municipal year.

The Commission began the new municipal year by the allocation of seats to Scrutiny Committees in line with its terms of reference 2022/23.

As standing items, the commission considered the Revenue and Capital Outturn and the councils Performance Reports for 2022-2023. At subsequent meetings throughout the year the Commission considered the Council's quarterly financial monitoring and performance reports up to Quarter 3 in April 2023.

In October 2022, the Commission welcomed a presentation and a comprehensive update on the ICT Enablement and digital transformation (Community engagement and Inclusion) strategy. The presentation highlighted the changing ways that services are delivered and the processes involved in how services interact with residents and service users in order to become a digitally enabled council. The Commission welcomed the Council's continued transformation and recovery from the effects of the pandemic and further supported the work highlighted in terms of the digital transformation vision and the digital St Helens programme, promoting digital inclusion.

The Commission carried out a Budget consultation Scrutiny Task Group during January 2023. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission was requested to set up a budget savings consultation Task Group and was asked to review the £10.5m of savings proposed within the consultation document. At the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting on Monday 6 February, the recommendations proposed were presented. The recommendations highlighted which of the savings were recommended to be progressed in order to set a balanced budget for 2023/24. During the Task Group's meeting, the Executive Leadership Team were asked to explain the process they had undertaken to develop the budget saving proposals and the opportunities, challenges and pressures facing services within their department in 2023/24.

The Task Group also sought assurances as to whether the implications of all possible options regarding budget savings proposals were fully understood, as well as the opportunities for income generation that had been explored. Overall, the Commission was satisfied that the process for the Council Budget saving proposal for 2023/24 has been robust and offered its recommendation to Cabinet.

In February 2023 the Overview and Scrutiny Commission welcomed a report on St Helens and UN Development Goals. The purpose of the report was two-fold. Firstly, to provide the Scrutiny Commission with an overview of the background to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework and a brief update on the latest position from the United Nations in relation to global progress. Secondly, the report presented an initial examination of St Helens position in relation to the SDGs. The Commission subsequently agreed to monitor this report on annual basis and consider items for its work programme based the St Helens position in relation to targets and goals from this report.

Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee

Membership:

Councillor Trisha Long (Chair)
Councillor David Banks
Councillor Jeanette Banks
Councillor Donna Greaves
Councillor Anne McCormack
Councillor Terry Maguire
Councillor Bisi Osundeko
Councillor Janet Sheldon
Councillor Teresa Sims
Councillor Michelle Sweeney

Co-opted:

Mr D Thorpe, Church of England
Mr C Williams, Roman Catholic Church
Miss A Kirkham, Parent Governor, (Primary)
Vacant Parent Governor (Secondary)
Vacant Parent Governor (Special)

Remit

The **Children and Young People Services Scrutiny (CYPS) Committee** is responsible for scrutinising items relating to the provision of services to children and young people. This includes any services within the Children and Young People Portfolio, part of the Education,

Business and Skills Portfolio and relevant health services where they are provided predominantly to children and young people. Because the Committee's scope covers the Council's role as a local education authority, its membership is extended to include three co-opted members, who represent the primary, secondary, and special school sectors and two representatives of faith communities.

Committee Activity

The role of the **Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee** is to contribute to improvements in services for children and young people in the borough by scrutinising the work of Council services and partner agencies to improve children and young people's well-being, their life chances and reducing their vulnerability to harm.

Scrutiny was conducted through regular committee meetings and three focused spotlight reviews this year.

In each committee meeting, the principal focus continued to be scrutiny of the Council's work to improve its delivery of social care services for children and young people. This was achieved in two ways.

Firstly, the Director of Children's Services gave a progress report on the Council's Children's Services Improvement Plan at each committee. Her report, while detailing significant remaining challenges, has shown clear improvements in services, which have been recognised in Ofsted monitoring visits.

Secondly, Quarterly Performance Reports relating to Borough Priority 1, "Ensure all children and young people have a positive start in life", were scrutinised at each meeting. These reports also influenced meeting agenda items and other committee work.

The Committee chair also provides a "critical friend" challenge to officers as a member of the Children's Improvement Board.

Other key topics were also scrutinised in the main committee. In July 2022, members scrutinised the new strategy to recruit and retain social workers. Members chose this topic due to continued concern about the impact of staff churn on vulnerable children and young people and high caseload levels on social work staff. It was also a key issue identified in Ofsted reports. The Committee learnt about both the challenges and the good work the service was undertaking to improve the situation. Positive outcomes included an improvement in Social Workers' terms and conditions and the innovative approach of recruiting international social workers. The committee was pleased to see that its recommendations on this issue, of closer work with local colleges and universities, were now taking place. Members added further support by recommending speedier recruitment processes.

Other topics the committee scrutinised were outcomes of Ofsted Monitoring Visits; the borough's provisional school outcomes for the academic year 2021/22; and children and young people's access to healthy food and the arising actions to secure improvement.

In the last meeting of the municipal year, the committee monitored the implementation of the recommendations arising from two Spotlight Reviews conducted in previous municipal years: Increasing the Number of Foster Carers and Improving their Retention and Improving Employment Opportunities for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

New initiatives to increase the recruitment of foster carers and improve their retention are clearly being implemented. Although challenges remain significant, foster carer enquiries have increased and the service has arranged a range of activities, such as the celebration of foster carers at the Totally Wicked Stadium in the summer, to ensure foster carers feel valued. The committee found that good progress on recommendations to improve work opportunities for looked after children and care leavers was also being made. It was clear that services have continued to develop for these young people, leading to performance which compares favourably to both statistical neighbours and national data.

The Committee's spotlight reviews focused on:

- Improving School Attendance
- Reducing High Teenage Pregnancy Rates
- Reducing Harm to Children Caused by Alcohol and Substance Misuse During Pregnancy.

Because overall school absences in St Helens for the 2021/22 Autumn and Spring term exceeded regional and national averages, the spotlight review in November 2022, produced six recommendations aimed at developing a borough wide culture and expectation that attendance matters. Actions to achieve this include borough wide campaigning on the importance of school attendance, raising aspirations through enhancing the profile of careers education and the creation of a multi-agency school attendance board. It was also agreed that the committee monitors attendance, focusing particularly on persistent absenteeism and the work the Council and partners do to support families who experience this issue.

The second spotlight review held in December 2022 and January 2023, focused on the work to reduce high teenage pregnancy rates in St Helens. The outcome was twelve recommendations including the appointment of a Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Lead Officer to ensure more joined up work across the Council and partners on this topic, strengthening the use of data for commissioning and monitoring purposes, and enhancing the borough's work to raise aspirations, especially with vulnerable groups.

The third spotlight review, in April 2023, focused on reducing harm to children caused by alcohol and substance misuse in pregnancy. The three main objectives of the review: bringing together a range of partners together with Council officers to ensure a shared understanding of the scale and impact of this issue, ensuring an understanding of the work already in place and carried out by each agency on this issue, and the production of a set of achievable recommendations to further reduce this type of harm, were all achieved. The report and recommendations are scheduled to be prepared and presented in the 2023/24 municipal year.

Recommendations made in all meetings will be monitored in the new municipal year.

Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor Michelle Sweeny (Chair)

Councillor Janet Banks

Councillor Lynn Clarke

Councillor Tracy Dickinson

Councillor Derek Long

Councillor Trisha Long
Councillor Allen Makin
Councillor Linda Mussell
Councillor Brian Spencer
Councillor Kate Stevenson

Remit

The **Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee (ASCH)** is the designated health scrutiny Committee as required by regulations and is responsible for monitoring the Integrated care, health and wellbeing, culture and heritage (public health only) Cabinet portfolios. The Committee is also responsible for scrutinising the People's Board in relation to its health and wellbeing responsibilities. The Committee responds to any consultations carried out by the CCG, now ICS (*On 1 July 2022, integrated care systems (ICSs) became legally established through the health and care act 2022, and CCGs were closed down.*) and NHS providers in relation to substantial development of health services in St Helens. The Committee also leads on behalf of the council in co-ordinating with other local authorities in relation to Joint Health Scrutiny Committees when required and feeds back on the newly established ICS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated health Scrutiny Committee which met twice in 2022/23.

The adult social care and health scrutiny Committee is also responsible for responding to items referred by Health Watch St Helens and a representative from Health Watch is a co-opted member of the Committee to foster good relationships between the Two Committee.

Committee Activity

During 2022/23, the **Adult Social care and Health Scrutiny Committee** continued to receive performance reports relating to Borough Priority 2 – Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.

In July 2022 the Committee received a report on the new Integrated Commissioning Strategy. The considerable changes to the local health landscape will continue to be monitored by the ASCH Scrutiny Committee in the next municipal year. This strategy sets out how the council is planning to meet challenges by commissioning and developing a range of adult social care services to help individuals maintain or regain their independence. The key aim is to be sustainable and meet the challenge of demographic change, complexity of need, and to still achieve good outcomes for the citizens of St Helens recognising the way we support people needs to change. The Committee agreed a recommendation to continually scrutinise, support and monitor this strategy in the forthcoming municipal year.

A report from Warrington and Halton hospitals NHS Trust was taken to Committee in March 2022 regarding breast screening proposals. The report notified the proposal to consolidate and expand breast screening services at Bath Street (Warrington) and relocate breast screening services from the Kendrick wing at Warrington Hospital. The report set out the impact on service users from St Helens, who comprise up to 10% of existing Kendrick Wing appointments and describes the planned engagement and consultation process related to this proposal. A further report on the outcome of the consultation process was requested and presented to the ASCH Committee in October 2022.

The Committee was presented with a Homelessness report. This presented an update on the issue of homelessness in St Helens, providing data on the current circumstances in relation to demand, homelessness prevention, the use of temporary accommodation and

the activity being delivered to prevent rough sleeping in the borough. The Committee agreed to consider a review of the 'Complex Cares' initiative as part of the ASCH Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24.

Following a report in 2022/23 around suicide prevention and mental health, the Committee was motivated to ensure it monitored and scrutinised further the mental health and wellbeing strategy for St Helens. In April 2023 the Committee welcomed a presentation on suicide prevention and self-harm. The detail within the strategy has been developed with the engagement of a wide range of partner organisations and in discussion with representatives of local communities. The strategy builds upon the existing strong partnership work in St Helens to reduce suicide, and adopts the framework, values and principles of the Cheshire & Merseyside suicide prevention strategy published in 2022.

The long-term impacts of Covid, economic challenges and the rising cost of living are likely to be tough for local communities and businesses. It is therefore welcomed and timely to refresh the St Helens approach to reducing suicide and self-harm risk, including a new strategy, coordinated partnership action and clear accountability for that action and its impact.

Health regulations place a requirement on those local authorities that agree that a proposal is substantial to establish, in each instance, a joint overview and scrutiny Committee for the purposes of considering it. The 'Protocol for Establishment of Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside' sets out the framework for the operation of joint scrutiny arrangements in St Helens. This joint Committee will be formally consulted on the proposal and have the opportunity to comment. It will also be able to refer to the Secretary of State for Health if any such proposal is not considered to be in the interests of the health service. However, as of March 2023, the Joint health scrutiny Committee to consider the Eastern Sector Cancer Hub proposals had yet to meet and further clarity on the issue will be sought in the new municipal year.

Place Services Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor Robyn Hattersley (Chair)

Councillor John Case

Councillor Tracy Dickinson

Councillor John Hodkinson

Councillor Keith Laird

Councillor Anne McCormack

Councillor Damien O Conner

Councillor Geoff Pearl

Councillor Glen Richards

Councillor Kate Stevenson

Co-opted:

Police superintendent Steve Brizell, Merseyside Police

Joe Cunliffe, Merseyside Fire and Rescue

Remit

The **Place Services Scrutiny Committee** is responsible for scrutinising items concerning borough-wide economic development, environmental services (such as grounds

maintenance and waste collection), regeneration, housing, culture, tourism, leisure, and libraries. The Committee is responsible for monitoring the following cabinet portfolios: Regeneration and Planning; Environment and Transport; Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage (excluding Public Health); Safer, Stronger Communities; and Education, Skills and Business (excluding Education).

The Committee is also designated as responsible for scrutiny of crime and disorder issues. As such it is responsible for monitoring the safer St Helens executive board (a sub- of the people's board responsible for community safety). The Committee can request items for consideration from partners such as the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service. Therefore, to support good relationships and communication, there are co-opted members on the Committee from Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue.

Committee Activity During 2022/23,

The **Place Services Scrutiny Committee** continued to receive performance reports relating to Borough Priority 3 – Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all; Priority 4 – Support a strong, thriving, inclusive, and well-connected local economy; and Priority 5 – Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.

At the beginning of the municipal year, members of the Committee expressed interest in the council's Net Zero strategy in particular the investment into the UK's first custom-built, hydrogen-fuelled waste collection vehicle. Ahead of its integration into the council's fleet, Members completed a site visit to Hardshaw Brook depot to understand its merits and a demonstration of its green technology.

The FAUN Zoeller Bluepower is a hydrogen-electric hybrid vehicle that uses an electric motor for drive and a hydrogen fuel cell to charge the battery while the vehicle is operating, meaning zero carbon emissions while in operation. The vehicle is also dramatically quieter than traditional diesel vehicles and has been successfully piloted in Germany over the past two years. The council is hoping to invest in additional Blue-power vehicles in the future. Aside from the elimination of emissions that the vehicle will emit, the partnership with FAUN Zoeller - alongside the council's investment in electric as part of its wider fleet modernisation - will unlock development opportunities in green skills for staff with dedicated on-site support and training provided.

The vehicle could also be the subject of educational programmes in the community and with local schools and colleges, giving young people the chance to learn about hydrogen technology and the role it will likely play in powering the economy for years to come. It boosts the case for further investment in electric and hydrogen transport infrastructure in the borough and the wider Liverpool City Region.

Following a work programming meeting on 5th July 2022 and following a presentation by Merseyside Police Superintendent Steve Brizell in February 2022 on the St Helens local Policing strategic overview. The Committee agreed a task group on 'Violence Against Women and Girls'. The St Helens local policing strategy highlighted the problems within St Helens in relation to violence against women and girls (VAWG) and stimulated interest in conducting a review to develop understanding of the wider issues of VAWG, and the potential to develop recommendations to reduce gender-based violence in St Helens

The task group held a series of meetings between October 2022 and December 2022 and received evidence from a range of witnesses from across the council, external organisations, and stakeholders. Despite the good work that is being done, there is still a significant amount still to do and the council's scrutiny function will continue monitoring this issue and holding services to account to ensure improvements continue to be made as this

issue was agreed, needs to be a long-term priority. A report and a series of recommendations were agreed and submitted to cabinet at the place scrutiny meeting in April 2023.

The Committee commissioned a second task group after members decided to consider the council's emerging Inclusive growth strategy. In February 2023, during the public consultation, the Committee conducted a spotlight review of the development process of the St Helens draft inclusive growth strategy and to consider the robustness of the consultation process of the strategy. In doing so, and to assist the understanding of the Committee members, the Committee, was briefed on the work conducted by Metro Dynamics in producing an economic & skills baseline assessment report titled 'St Helens State of the Borough' and issued in April 2022 which recognises the urgent challenges facing the borough now and over the next 15 years.

The Committee also received reports throughout the year on the Council's domestic abuse strategy; the delivery of the domestic abuse support into safe accommodation strategy and provide an overview of the impact that the support provision has delivered to victims/survivors of domestic abuse in the borough; A safer St Helens report for the period 2021/22, outlining the activity undertaken by the partners within the local community safety partnership for St Helens borough, and an update on 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector' – Implications from the White Paper on private rented sector reform.

Contact Us

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