



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny function at St Helens Borough Council during the 2020/21 municipal year. A great deal of productive work has been carried out in Scrutiny committees this year, delivering positive outcomes for residents, despite the unprecedented disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent pressures on Council and other services.

This has also been a year of transition due to the introduction of a new scrutiny committee structure adopted by the Council in July 2020. Under this new structure, there has been a number of positive outcomes arising from Scrutiny work during 2020/21 and the function is in a strong position moving into 2021/22.

Lockdowns and social distancing have meant that the scrutiny function has had to adapt to new ways of working with all meetings held by the Scrutiny Committees undertaken remotely. Councillors and Officers have adapted well to these changes.

Scrutiny Committee Chairs have maintained effective working relationships with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers through remote meetings and engagement with the public has also been facilitated through digital means.

Following the expiry of the temporary powers to hold remote meetings, public meetings of the Scrutiny Committees will return to meetings in person in 2021/22 until such time as the government decides to introduce further powers to enable Councils to operate hybrid meetings. However, the Scrutiny Function will look to continue to use agile working and remote meetings where it is useful to efficiently and effectively carry out its role and work with partners and the public for non-decision-making meetings.

Finally, thanks from the Scrutiny Committees go to Council Officers, Cabinet Members and partners who have committed to working with Scrutiny during this unprecedented and challenging year.

Details of the activity of each of the Committees during 2021/22 and the impact of their work are provided in this report.



WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

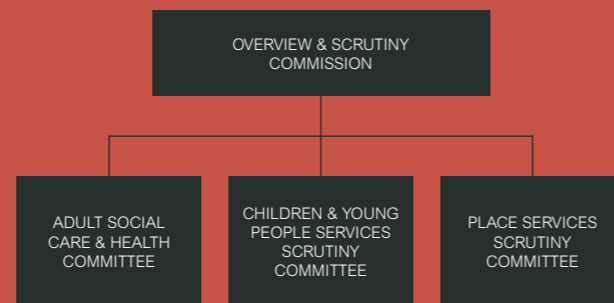
The purpose of Overview and Scrutiny (Scrutiny) is to hold decision makers such as Cabinet, Senior Officers and the managers of external organisations, such as Health Services Commissioners and Providers and Community Safety Partners, to account for decisions they have made or are planning to make, and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

Scrutiny is led by Councillors who are not involved in Cabinet. As elected representatives of the residents of the borough, Councillors involved in Scrutiny can highlight the needs and concerns of the public with decision makers to ensure services are designed and operated effectively to meet those needs.

Members of the public can contribute to Scrutiny by submitting ideas for items to consider and raising concerns about the quality of service or if there is a lack of provision. The public can engage with the Scrutiny Function by contacting the Scrutiny Team directly using the details provided at the end of this report, speaking to their local ward councillor, attending one of our public meetings or visiting the council's website.

In 2020/21, Scrutiny at St Helens Borough Council was carried out by an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission (Committee) and three thematic Scrutiny Committees with remits that ensure all aspects of the council and relevant Partners are covered.

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 regular meetings with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers to share information and discuss work programmes. Some Committees have co-opted members representing other organisations or sectors.



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

REMIT

The 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 and the Reset & Recovery Portfolios.

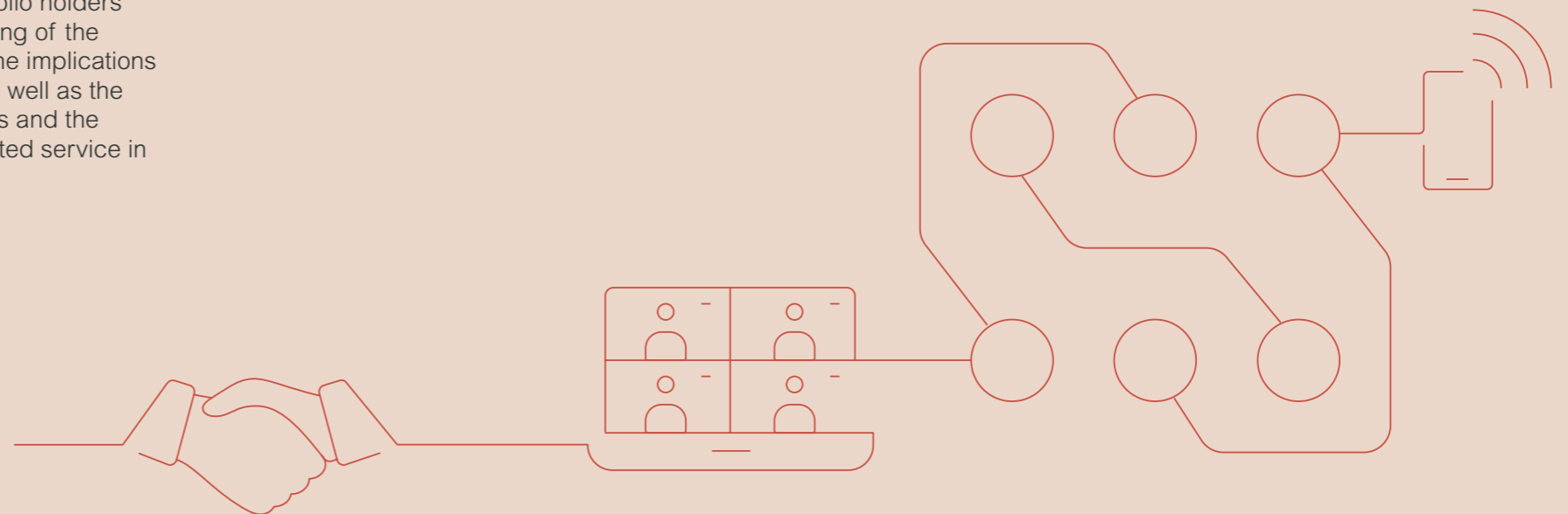
COMMISSION ACTIVITY

At the three committee meetings the Commission has held during this shortened municipal year, it has considered the Council's quarterly financial monitoring reports and the performance monitoring report for April to September 2020. In September 2020, the Commission received a comprehensive presentation on the Council's reset and recovery strategy for readjusting its activities following the Covid pandemic. This overview helped to inform the public of the Council's efforts to maintain quality service provision and will enable Councillors to monitor outcomes against the plans that were outlined.

In December 2020, the Commission recommended to Council changes to the constitution in relation to the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules, which were approved at the January 2021 meeting of Council. These changes will improve the way the Council deals with Call-In of Cabinet decisions.

The Commission carried out a Budget Scrutiny Task Group during January 2021 to assess the robustness of the budget setting process and hold portfolio holders to account for their understanding of budget decisions and the interrelationships between portfolios. The Task Group produced a statement on its opinion in relation to the budget setting process and presented this to both Cabinet and Council for consideration as part of the budget decision-making process. The cross-party Task Group found that the Covid-19 pandemic had created an unprecedented challenge for the Council in setting a balanced budget and maintaining delivery of services and that portfolio holders demonstrated a good understanding of the decisions they were making and the implications of those decisions on residents as well as the interrelationship between portfolios and the impact of decisions on each affected service in other portfolios.

IN SEPTEMBER 2020, THE COMMISSION RECEIVED A COMPREHENSIVE PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S RESET AND RECOVERY STRATEGY FOR READJUSTING ITS ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING THE COVID PANDEMIC.



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REMIT

The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny 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 five co-optees, who represent the primary, secondary and special school sectors and two representatives of faith communities.

COMMISSION ACTIVITY

The Committee's principal focus continues to be scrutiny of the Council's work to improve its delivery of social care services for children, following an inadequate Ofsted inspection rating in 2019. Senior officers report to each Committee meeting on progress against the Council's Improvement Plan and the challenges the service is encountering. In addition, the Committee Chair also provides a "critical friend" challenge as a member of the Children's Improvement Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. At the meeting of the Committee in December 2020, the Committee invited the Independent

Chair of the Children's Improvement Board to provide their perspective on the Council's improvement journey. The Committee's work on this issue has helped to keep the public informed about progress and provided reassurance that improvements are being made.

The continuing national concern with children's mental health led to the Committee following up on the 2019/20 inquiry into the lengthy waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with a report to the Committee in October 2020. Through this work the Committee has ensured that service providers remain focused on ensuring young people receive the care they need in a timely manner. A progress report on how strategies have impacted on performance is scheduled for July 2021 to enable the Committee to continue to keep on top of the issue.

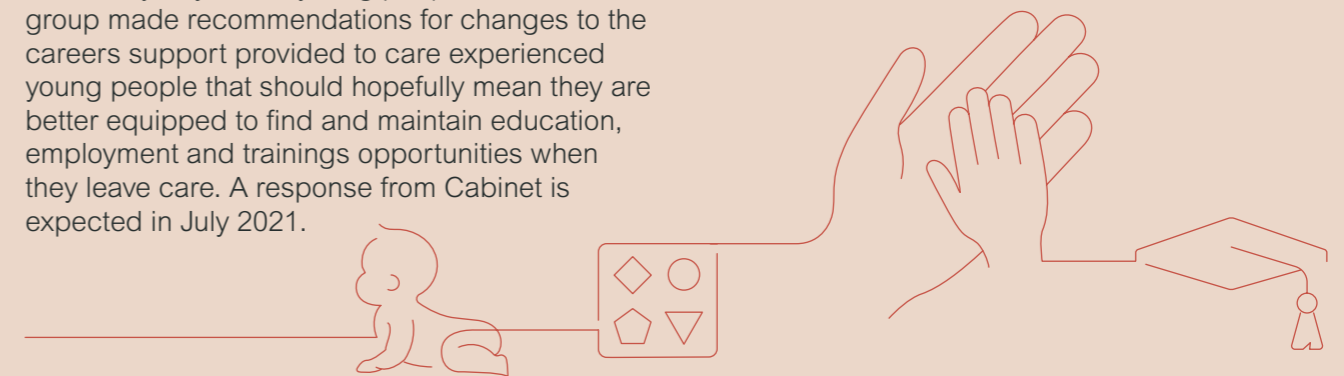
In response to issues raised by the Listening Ear parent carer forum, the Committee commissioned a spotlight review of mental health services for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). The spotlight review brought elected members, parents, and senior managers from the service provider (North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust) and the service commissioner (NHS St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group) together to discuss

progress. The commissioners and providers committed to improve the experiences for their young SEND clients. An update on progress is to be received in July 2021 where it is expected that the work of the spotlight review group will have helped to make improvements to the experience of young people with SEND and their parents when accessing mental health services. Also in relation to services for children with SEND, the Committee considered a progress report in on the Council's Improvement Plan for SEND services following an Ofsted and CQC inspection in 2018.

The Committee also commissioned a task group to look at how work opportunities for care experienced young people could be improved. The review took place between November 2020 and February 2021 and considered the barriers that care experienced young people face in trying to establish their careers, including the impact the pandemic had on the local economy and availability of jobs for young people. The task group made recommendations for changes to the careers support provided to care experienced young people that should hopefully mean they are better equipped to find and maintain education, employment and trainings opportunities when they leave care. A response from Cabinet is expected in July 2021.

The Committee continues to closely monitor the impact the pandemic is having on schools and children's learning and development. The Council's work with schools and the trade unions was reviewed at each meeting, covering for example pupil and staff safety, educational outcomes, SEND and looked after children. This work has enabled the public to see how robust efforts to maintain safety and attainment in schools has been during the pandemic.

The Committee also discussed how the Council would incorporate the lessons learnt from the recent Good Childhood Inquiry into action plans and strategies and followed up on a spotlight review report from 2019/20 on County Lines issues in St Helens to examine the response to the recommendations of the review by Cabinet. Holding officers and Cabinet to account for the plans they make should ensure they remain focused on achieving the desired outcomes.



ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REMIT

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee is the designated health scrutiny committee as required by Regulations and is responsible for monitoring the Integrated Care and 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 Board responsibilities. The Committee responds to any consultations carried out by the CCG and NHS providers in relation to substantial development of health services in St Helens. The Committee also leads on behalf of the Council in coordinating with other local authorities in relation to Joint Health Scrutiny Committees when required. The Committee is responsible for responding to items referred by Healthwatch St Helens and a representative from Healthwatch is a co-opted member of the Committee to foster good relationships between the Committee and Healthwatch.

COMMISSION ACTIVITY

Due to the unprecedented demand placed on the Council's Public Health team and wider NHS health partners due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee operated a streamlined programme of work for 2020/21. Over the course of the

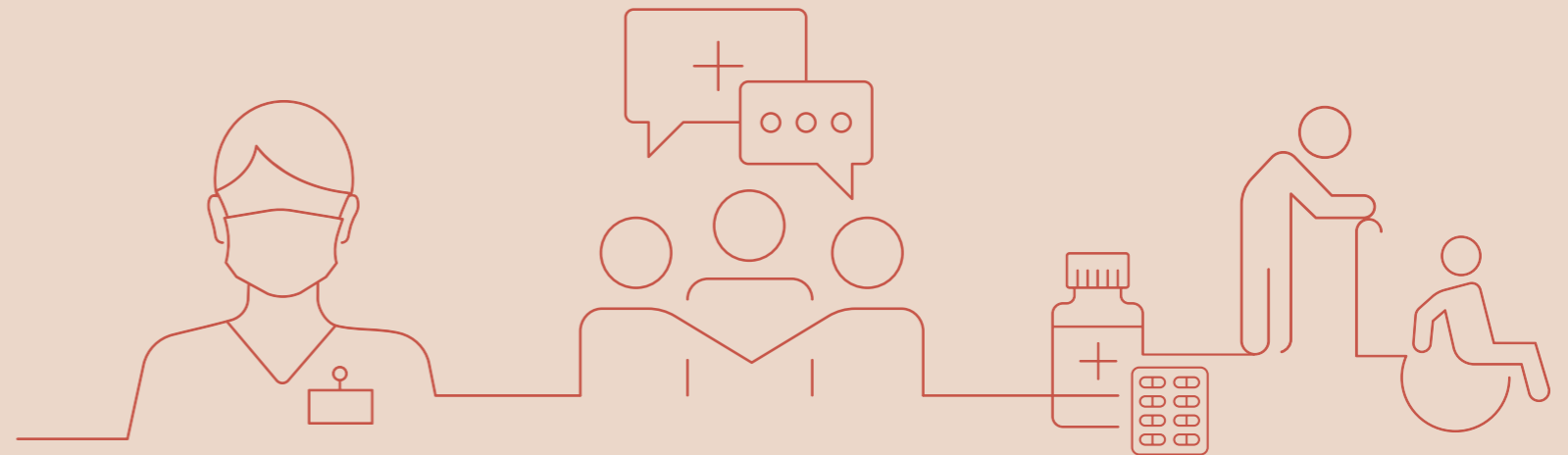
year, the Committee focussed on those topics of greatest urgency specifically related to COVID-19 including the support for care homes; support for staff in residential and domiciliary care settings; and the impact of COVID-19 on health services and care providers. By reviewing these issues on behalf of the public, the Committee has held service providers to account for the quality of service the public receives.

Furthermore, the Committee also considered the St Helens Suicide Prevention action plan and its impact on the rates of suicide in the borough. This was a follow up on previous reports to maintain a focus on service provision to support the continued improvement of services and reduce rates of suicide in the borough. The Committee also received a presentation on the demands on Contact Cares during the pandemic to consider ways that improvements to the service experienced by residents could be made; Committee members were able to draw on the experiences of the service their residents had shared with them to question officers and the Cabinet Member.

In March 2021, the Committee also approved the St Helens Borough Health Overview and Scrutiny Protocol. Although the Protocol is essentially based on the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health

Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, it is easy to read, sets the local context and creates an agreed way of working. The development of the Protocol has helped to build relationships between the Scrutiny Function and NHS commissioners and providers. It is hoped the protocol will improve communications between parties and increase understanding of health scrutiny rules to enable more health issues to be brought to Scrutiny.

However, the Government is currently considering a White Paper on changes to health and social care services provision, and as such the Committee will need to wait and see how changes in legislation impact on its role and relationships with health and care bodies in future.



PLACE SERVICES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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); Safe, 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-committee of the People's Board responsible for community safety). The Committee is able to request items for consideration from partners such as the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service; to support good relationships and communication there are co-opted members on the Committee from Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue.

COMMISSION ACTIVITY

During 2020/21, the Place Services Scrutiny Committee considered items on a wide variety of issues across the five cabinet portfolios within its remit. In both November 2020 and March 2021,

the Committee received presentations on the regeneration and management of St Helens Town Centre. The Committee also received a report and presentation on the Library Services COVID-19 response and an update on the St Helens Domestic Abuse Strategy which was adopted by the Council in March 2020 to consider progress in the implementation of the Strategy. The Committee's work on these issues has helped to inform the public about the work being done to keep libraries operational where possible and keep residents safe in their homes and communities during the difficult times of this unprecedented pandemic.

Other items considered by the Committee over the year include anti-social behaviour during Halloween and bonfire night; fly tipping and enforcement action; and the council's response to the national leasehold notice of motion which was approved by council in September 2019. By reviewing these issues the Committee is ensuring that the council and its Partners are doing all they can to ensure the borough is a safe and clean place for residents to live.

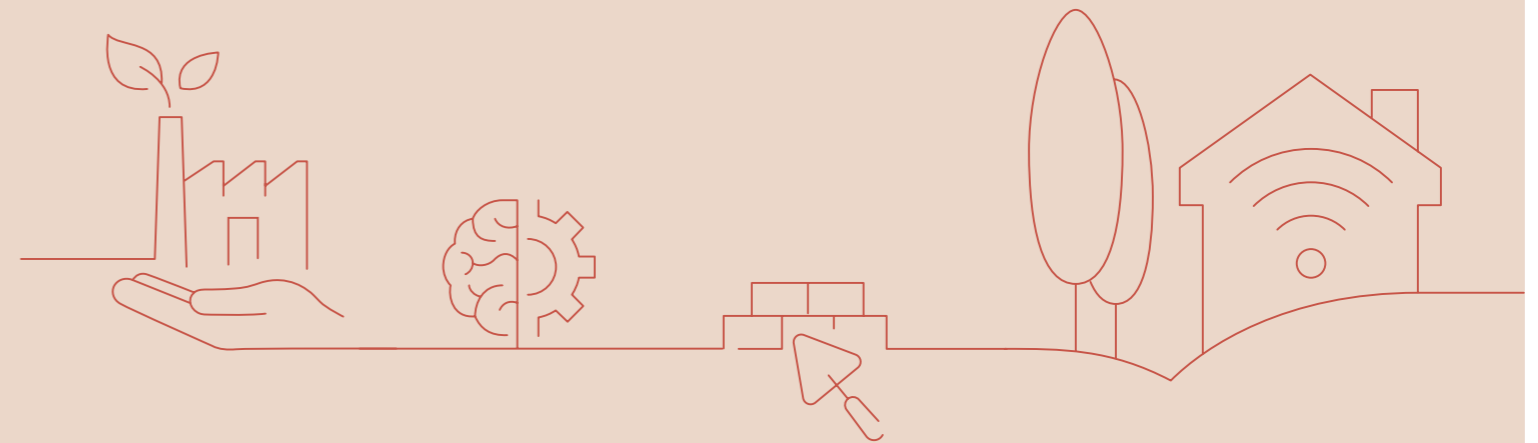
In January 2021, the Committee held a spotlight review into the Prevent Strategy and its operation in the borough. The findings of the review were presented and approved by the Committee in March 2021, with the response from Cabinet due

to be presented back to the Committee in July 2021. The Spotlight Review Group's work on this issue is aimed at helping to reassure the public that the Council and its Partners are working effectively to prevent and reduce the risks of terrorism across the borough.

During the year, the Committee has also received the Cabinet's response to the scrutiny review of the Council's Use of Paper and Plastics Task Group (from 2019/20). Reducing the use of paper and plastics by the Council is a key part of reducing the negative impact we have on

the environment. By continuing to monitor this issue the Committee will ensure that the desired outcomes of the Task Group's work are achieved.

In November 2020, Council approved a notice of motion that set out its commitment to adopting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Place Services Scrutiny Committee will monitor progress in embedding in decision-making the resolutions set out in the motion during 2021/22, to ensure that the work required is progressed and that the desired outcomes are achieved.



HOW TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SCRUTINY

The work of Overview and Scrutiny should be informed by the issues that matter to those who live or work in St Helens. A key component of how issues are prioritised within scrutiny work programmes is whether there is public interest in an issue.

Help us to ensure the work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees reflect the priorities of the public by telling us what you think we should focus on in 2021/22. Our Committees have the ability within the rules

governing overview and scrutiny to scrutinise anything affecting the borough, this means more than just council run services and includes health services, community safety (e.g. police and fire services), voluntary and community services, and regional/national services.

You can contact us by using the channels listed below or submit a suggestion for our work programme using the Scrutiny pages on the council's website.

CONTACT US

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