



St. Helens
Council

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

2018 -19





Chairman's Foreword

Commission Chairman 2018/19: Councillor David Baines

These are incredibly challenging times for local government, and scrutiny fully recognises the difficult financial context in which decisions about service delivery and spending plans have been developed.

We know that senior officers and Councillors have undertaken detailed work and many hard decisions have been needed in this time of continued central government funding cuts. The Commission and Scrutiny Chairmen have welcomed the opportunity to discuss these spending plans throughout the year with Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers and to understand the implications for departments and for service delivery.

Scrutiny has appreciated the co-operation of senior members and officers throughout the year and feels we have been able to work together constructively for the good of the Council and the Borough.

At our Commission meeting to discuss the 2019/20 budget, members were informed that we face unprecedented financial uncertainty. Scrutiny has an important role to play in helping to ensure decisions about spending and services are robust and effective, and throughout 2019/20 - under new Chairmanship - the Commission and other Scrutiny panels will inevitably continue to play an important role.

I would like to thank all members and officers who supported the scrutiny process in 2018/19, and in particular Scrutiny Officers Joanne Heron and Sally Houghton, and my fellow Chairs.



Councillor David Baines

What is Scrutiny?

St Helens Council is run by councillors elected by the people of St Helens. A small number of them form the cabinet (also referred to as the executive) which sets the direction, determines the priorities and takes the important decisions. The councillors in the cabinet hold powerful positions and it is important that they are held to public account for their actions. This is done through a system called overview and scrutiny and is undertaken by the non-executive councillors.

This is common to most local councils. They ensure that decisions are taken based on good evidence, including the views of those with an interest in the matter, and are in the best interests of the people of St Helens. Overview and scrutiny is selective in what it looks at so that it can add value to the most important services provided by the Council, its partners and contractors. Wherever possible it helps to shape policy through early discussions as well as scrutinising proposals before they are finally agreed. The scrutiny work programme is published on the Council's website.

There is an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission and five Scrutiny Panels:

- Health and Adult Social Care
- Audit and Financial Monitoring
- Children and Young People's Services
- Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure
- Safer Communities

Any Council member who is not a member of the Cabinet can undertake scrutiny. Non Councillors may be co-opted onto Scrutiny Panels and task groups. At St Helens we have a number of co-opted members who sit on our Children and Young People's Services, Health and Adult Social Care and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panels.

Each year Scrutiny Panels undertake one or more pieces of work (reviews) that focus on particular issues and consider them in greater detail than is possible during Panel meetings.

Scrutiny of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority -

The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority - covering the local authority areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral - was established on 1 April 2014 with the aim of improving: -

- the exercise of statutory functions relating to transport in the Combined Area
- the effectiveness and efficiency of transport in the Combined Area
- the exercise of statutory functions relating to economic development and regeneration in the Combined Area
- economic conditions in the Combined Area

In 2016, Steve Rotherham was elected as the Metro Mayor for the Liverpool City Region. To hold the Combined Authority and the Metro Mayor to account for their decisions and performance the Combined Authority has a Scrutiny Committee made up of members from scrutiny functions across the six local authorities.

During 2018/19, Councillors, J Banks, J Jackson and J De'Asha attended meetings of the scrutiny committee which received regular updates from and questioned the Metro Mayor, contributed to the budget setting for the combined authority and considered the following items:

- Air Quality
- Welfare Reform
- One Front Door operating model for inward investment to the Region
- Housing Strategy
- Careers Service
- Tourism, Culture and Marketing for the Region
- EU Funding and Brexit



More information about the work of the LCRCA Scrutiny Committee can be found in its own annual report for 2018/19 via the Combined Authority's web pages (<https://moderngov.merseytravel.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=365&Year=0>).



Budget and Performance Monitoring

The Audit and Financial Monitoring Overview and Scrutiny Panel, chaired by Cllr Richard McCauley has scrutinised the Budget Monitoring reports and the Corporate Financial reports on a frequent basis and sought information and explanations in respect of any identified issues of concern.

The Panel regularly requests supplementary performance indicator reports for each portfolio and calls in officers to explain areas of underperformance.

A feedback loop to the Executive is provided via a standing item on the cabinet agenda to address issues arising from scrutiny. There is also a standing item on the Audit and Governance Committee agenda to consider the Panel Chair's report on items scrutinised, highlighting issues the Panel wishes to draw to the committee's attention.

Scrutiny Reviews: Task and Finish Groups

Review of Children's Services Ofsted Action Plans

During August 2018, Ofsted undertook a focused visit on Children in Need and Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan. Several significant problems across children's services were found and Ofsted issued three Priority Action Notices and action plans were established to address the notices.

Following the visit, a Children's Improvement Board and associated improvement plan has been established to address Ofsted's recommendations. With this in mind, it was recognised that the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel has a role in establishing what lessons can be learnt from the past and how best to take this learning forward into future practices.

The Scrutiny task group looked at the points from these action plans, received updates from the Children's Improvement Board, and learnt about current working practices and cultures within the service. The task group met fortnightly over several months, hearing from officers at various levels and from a selection of Children's services.

A report setting out recommendations was submitted to Cabinet in July 2019. We are awaiting feedback from this.

Hate Crime

Members of the Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held a joint agency meeting to discuss Hate Crime. Partners included Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, various Council officers also attended. Members learnt about the current levels of local Hate Crime incidents, reporting methods and the work being undertaken in the community.

Members were pleased with the excellent work being undertaken by the Council and our partners in tackling Hate Crime and that people felt more comfortable in reporting incidents. Work with housing associations, schools and local charities continues to strengthen and a dedicated Hate Crime Coordinator from Merseyside Police is now working in both Knowsley and St.Helens areas.

A report with recommendations was presented to Cabinet in April and a positive response was received from Cabinet in June.

Collection of Council Tax Arrears

Following concerns raised by several members the Audit and Financial Monitoring Overview and Scrutiny Panel established a small task group to look at how the Council Collects its Council Tax Arrears.

Members met on several occasions, meeting with the Assistant Director – Service Delivery to obtain background information, officers from St.Helens Citizens Advice Service and two local Enforcement Agencies, Rundle & Co Ltd and Jacobs.

Members of the task group were pleased to hear of the good partnership work undertaken between the Council and local Citizens Advice officers and hoped this could be expanded on to further assist local residents. We also listened to the officers from the Enforcement Agencies to gain their prospective on debt management.

Recommendations around early identification of vulnerable clients and enhanced partnership working were made in the report which was presented to Cabinet in June. We hope consideration to the implementation of the recommendations made will enhance the recovery of outstanding debts to both the Council and the residents of St.Helens.

Home Care Visits

Members of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel met with officers to talk about health care visits for people in their own homes (Domiciliary Care), and the contract monitoring processes involved. This is becoming ever more popular and helps to enable people to stay in their own homes for much longer.

Currently, 37 providers can delivery care within the borough, these contracts are closely monitored, and service users are frequently asked to give feedback to ensure contracts are adhered to and that service users are receiving the service expected.

Members were pleased to learn that working relationships between the Council's monitoring officers and providers is good and that in the main, service users are happy with the service they receive. If a quality concern is raised, then officers act swiftly to resolve the issue.

A report with recommendations was presented to Cabinet in April and a response was received in July which will be reviewed by the Panel in December.

Kershaw Day Support Centre

The Health and Adult Social Overview and Scrutiny Panel were invited to visit the Kershaw Day Support Centre in Earlestown following an excellent presentation by the Manager at the February Panel meeting.

Several members attended the centre to see for themselves the wide selection of day care facilities for people living with Dementia, Alzheimer's Disease or other memory impairment, Mental Health, Learning Disabilities, Physical Disabilities or Social Isolated people that the centre offers.



Kershaw has recently been awarded the Dementia Care Matters – Butterfly Model National Accreditation Award, Level 2, 'highly skilled in good person-centred care', and are now working hard to obtain Level 1. The centre was refurbished in 2014 with the service users and their carers helping to choose paint colours, pieces of furniture and themed activity rooms and corridors.

Members were very pleased with the centre, it's service offer, and most of all, the staff commitment and, attention to detail. The centre had a lovely homely feeling and members hoped that the provision could be extended to help more people.

A report with some recommendations was presented to Cabinet for consideration in April and a response was received in July which will be reviewed by the Panel in December.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Following several reports presented to the Children and Young People's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel with regards to CAMHS, members raised concerns and have recently established a small task group to work with our commissioners and partners for CAMHS to monitor the service going forward.

Members attended a Parent Carers Forum to hear their experiences of using the service. These accounts have now been fed back to North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, the providers for CAMHS, the Council Commissioners and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Members were pleased to hear that extensive work on improving the service is currently underway by the provider. The task group will carry on with its work during the summer and are looking forward to an update from to North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust at the Panels September meeting.

Scrutiny Panels – Formal Panel Work

In addition to task and finish group work, Panels have been busy looking at various other issues. This has been undertaken either in the form of regular in-depth reports being presented to Panels or one off special meetings which gives scrutiny members the opportunity to look at specific issues in more depth.

Issues scrutinised during 2018/19 have included:

Environmental, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel



Chairman: Cllr Martin Bond

St Helens 150th Anniversary Celebrations

Members continued to receive updates on the 150th anniversary celebrations for St. Helens. A number of events were programmed throughout 2018 and members discussed the strategic aims and specific aims and objectives for the programme of events. Concerns were raised with regards to the sustainability of the projects after 2018 and the high cost implications. Progress reports were received throughout 2018 with details of costs. The Panel learnt that the events held had been successful and well received by the public.

Selwyn Jones Leisure Centre

Members continued to receive updates on the refurbishment of Selwyn Jones Leisure Centre.

Funding has been agreed with Sports England and communication with local user groups will continue through the building process. Plans will include a large fitness suite, an exercise studio, a group exercise bike studio; a coffee shop and an adventure play area for under 11's. Members will be kept updated during the refurbishment process.

Central Library

The Cabinet member for Libraries and Leisure, Councillor Anthony Burns attended panel to give an update on Central Library. There had been extensive damage to the ceiling and roof of the library and the cost of repairs would be considerable.

Members were updated on the relocation of the library service and several other town centre locations had been suggested. Other libraries in the borough are operating extended opening hours to ensure service users can access library services.

Members emphasised to the Portfolio holder and officers the importance of ensuring the Town Centre has library facilities and look forward to the outcome.

Homelessness Strategy and Homelessness Reduction Act

The Panel undertook a review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in 2016 and have continued to receive in-depth updates on its progress. A Town Centre Joint Agency Group (JAG) has been established, representatives from the Police, Council and Housing Providers are working closely to tackle homelessness within the borough. The JAG has identified key areas of work and continues to work towards these.

Funding has been received for the Liverpool City Region and this has been allocated to fund additional posts for two years to address the demand on the service.

Fly-Tipping – Costs and Enforcement

Members requested officers to report on fly tipping within the borough. All local authorities are required to submit quarterly data to Waste Data Flow. Members learnt that there had been a very slight increase in fly tipping incidents in the past 12 months, however, there had also been a reduction in clearance costs.

Members were pleased to hear that officers continue to enforce fly tipping, including issuing Fixed Penalty Notices, and ultimately prosecutions.

Parks and Ranger Service

A Council review of the Parks and Ranger Service was being undertaken in Spring 2019. Community engagement is key in the consultation process and Members were pleased that a number of public consultation events had been held in the Town Hall to gain the thoughts and comments of residents. The review is expected to be completed by Summer 2019, with the confirmation that a commitment to keep the Ranger Service up to 2020 had already been agreed.

The panel will be kept up to date on the review progress and outcomes.

Children and Young People’s Services Scrutiny Panel



Chairman: Cllr Nova Charlton

Traded Services for Schools

The panel continues to receive updates on the implementation of the new Traded Services for Schools platform. The platform ‘Service for Schools’ is an on-line portal whereby schools can purchase Councils services such as catering, Internal Audit, Governor Services, grounds maintenance etc. in the form of Service Level Agreements (SLA) and has been live since April 2018.

The Panel wished to ensure that the level of school’s engagement and the quality of services remained high.

Members were pleased to hear that an analysis of service buy back from schools during the 2018/19 financial year had indicated no significant reductions in levels of take up and overall school reaction had been very positive in terms of service quality and costs.

Performance of Secondary Schools in Academic Year 2017/2018

The Panel received an in-depth report of the current position of various St Helens institutions at Key Stages 4 and 5 for the academic year 2017/2018.

Some improvements in Key Stage 4 are required to ensure pupils achieve the desired outcomes that are comparable nationally. The panel was reassured that the help and support from the Local Authority would have a positive impact on future outcomes and that any weaknesses would be addressed to deliver significant improvements. Members were also pleased to hear that all schools had engaged and bought into various levels of service.

The panel will receive further updates during 2019/2020.

Children’s Improvement Board

Following the 2018 Ofsted focused visit on Children’s Services the Children’s Improvement Board (CIB) was formed. The Panel members heard from Linda Evans, Chair of the Board, about the CIB role, progress so far and it’s aims and objectives.

The Ofsted action plan improvements will be driven and monitored by the CIB. Various officers from the Council and its partners sit on the board, including two independent members, the Chair of the CYPS Scrutiny Panel and an opposition member to act as critical friends.

Updates have also been received from the Chair of the CYPS Scrutiny Panel on a regular basis as part of the Ofsted in-depth Scrutiny task and finish group and members were pleased of progress so far.

PAUSE

The PAUSE programme is a national initiative to work with women who have experienced – or were at risk of – repeat pregnancies that resulted in children being removed from their care. PAUSE gives women the chance to ‘pause’ and take control over their lives, breaking a destructive, traumatic, cycle to both them and their children.

Members welcomed the introduction of the programme in St Helens and were pleased to hear of the success of the St Helens pilot scheme and that it would be supported by the Council for the next 18 months. We look forward to further updates on the continued success of the scheme and the long-term impacts reducing children being taken into care.

St Helens Safeguarding Children Board

The 2017/2018 St Helens Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report was received by panel members in Autumn 2018. The report outlined the strategies and activities that have been undertaken over the past 12 months and what had been achieved.

The report had been published prior to the 2018 Ofsted inspection, and its key challenges were outlined. Assurances were welcomed, that the key areas for improvement identified were underway. Members acknowledged the importance of the board and its key partnership work such as the Operation Encompass safeguarding partnership, it's work with schools and the key role in safeguarding the children of the borough.

Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel



Chairman: Cllr John Fulham

Knife Crime

Throughout 2017/2018 the Panel has received several reports and updates on Knife Crime within the borough, including work the Council and its partners have been undertaking. This year members received a further update on the work of the Young Advisors Knife Crime Workstream and the multi-agency approach.

The Young Advisors working on the 'Cut it out #nomoreknives' campaign developed a presentation for schools to deliver to pupils, aged 10 and above, alongside the presentation, lesson plans and activities were also provided. These had been provided by the Ben Kinsella Trust.

Briefing sessions have been delivered and members were pleased to hear that an increased number of young people have engaged in conversation about knife crime. The promotion of the campaign has been delivered with the Danny Fox Foundation. Partnership working also includes Merseyside Police, Youth Justice Service, Council communications Team and Children's Social Care. The panel were pleased to hear the work is ongoing and look forward to future updates.

Prevent

The Panel received a presentation on the PREVENT Strategy, this is part of the Governments overall counter terrorism strategy CONTEST, aimed at reducing the threat to the UK from terrorism. The updated strategy gives a greater focus on a coordinated response from Public Sector organisations.

The UK faces several different threats of terrorism and the members were reassured to hear that the Council would be developing an action plan to identify local areas in response to the PREVENT agenda. This will provide an operational framework and provide clear guidance for partnership response to terrorism and related activity.

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme

The Resettlement Officer attended panel to talk about the implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (SVPR) in St.Helens.

Work started on the programme in January 2017 to resettle approximately 60 Syrian refugees in the borough. At the time of the meeting in December 2018, 96 refugees had been resettled, including 10 children from the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme and 22 individuals as part of the Family Reunion Scheme.

Members were pleased that St.Helens has been able to offer a new, safe life for these people and hoped that this could be continued in the future.

Domestic Abuse

At the start of Autumn the panel received a report on the Councils Tackling Domestic Abuse – St.Helens Strategy 2018-2023 by the Assistant Director – Children’s Social Work. The strategy has been developed to reflect local needs and the framework for partner agencies to respond to Domestic Abuse (DV) effectively.

This is a partnership strategy and each partner has specific priority areas to ensure its outcomes are achieved. Members were pleased to hear that a new DV Strategy Group is to be established, this being supported by an DV Operational Group.

Merseyside Police Service and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Updates

Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service have given verbal updates at panel meetings throughout the year. Current topics are discussed and updates on previous issues are given to keep members of the Panel informed of the work that partners are undertaking.

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel



Chairman: Cllr Dave Banks

Contact Cares

A presentation to the panel was delivered by the Assistant Director of Contact Cares in February 2019. This updated members on key changes within the St.Helens Cares system and the establishment of Contact Cares.

This is a single point of contact system for health and social care to provide information for statutory, non-statutory and voluntary/third sector services. Members raised questions with regards to end of life care and staff training, including first aid and for first point of contact staff and the importance of current IT equipment, they were also pleased at the joint working and requested future updates as the system progresses.

Social Prescription Pilot Scheme

A report was provided to the Panel to update members on the progress of the six month pilot scheme of Social Prescribing. The pilot scheme saw 85 patients taking up the offer of social prescribing at four GP practices.

Social Prescribing is part of the NHS Five Year Forward View by which health professionals such as doctors prescribe an alternative option to medicine to help people. This could be someone who is socially isolated with poor wellbeing, that would benefit from moving house into community living being given support and advice, or loneliness being helped by encouragement to attend social coffee mornings or community groups.

Since the scheme was in its infancy more time was needed to ensure the outcomes have had the desired impact, but feedback available was that the project has the potential to make a difference to people's lives. The panel will receive an update in the forthcoming year.

Infant Feeding Strategy

Following the Scrutiny review in 2017, panel members were keen to hear about the progress made on the Infant Feeding Strategy. The strategy for 2016-2019 has four key priorities, strategic awareness, social movement, information and support, and training and data.

An update report showed that there has been an increase in breastfeeding rates within the borough, but we are still below the National and North West rates. The Infant Feeding Group has been re-established in 2018 and work continues the recommendations made by the Scrutiny review.

Urgent Care Activity / Pathway

Members received a presentation detailing the Winter Plan which is produced and developed at a local level and approved by NHS England. A working group had been established to ensure that over Winter the health care system can deal with the pressures from increased demand for services during these months.

Discussion included staffing levels, the demand on services, initiatives, pathways and escalations. The panel gained assurance that plans were in place to ensure that residents of the borough would receive health care services in time of need. This would be, implemented, in part, by ensuring good hospital flow of patients, extra beds being made available and employing extra staff to support acute care.

Healthwatch Updates

Jayne Parkinson from Healthwatch has kept the Panel updated on current Healthwatch work throughout the year, giving reports at each meeting on current engagement work and ongoing task and finish groups.

Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel



Chairman: Cllr Richard McCauley

As well as conducting the Council Tax Arrears Task and Finish Group, the Panel has spent the year reviewing Internal Audits Reports and speaking to officers about the outcomes, reviewed the Council's financial statements and budget monitoring, and regularly reviewed the performance reports for each of cabinet portfolios.

Looking Forward to 2019 -2020

Having concluded the work undertaken by the Panel's in 2018/19, it is now time to turn our attention to the development of the work programme for 2019/20.

Key to developing the work programme is making sure that chosen topics align with the priorities set out in the Council Plan and planned budget reductions and that by undertaking task and finish group work this adds value. Liaison with Portfolio Members will continue to play an important part in our work and their attendance at Panels will provide us with a comprehensive overview of the key challenges within their portfolios.

How to find out more about Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny should reflect the issues that matter to those who live or work in St Helens. Help us by telling us what you think we should focus on in 2019/20. We have the scope to look at any issue that reflects St Helens not just council related services

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

Contact Us

Email: scrutiny@sthelens.gov.uk

Tel: 01744 676277/676276

Write: Overview and Scrutiny, St Helens Council, Town Hall,
St Helens, Merseyside WA10 1HP