



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Annual Report

2022/23



Ambitious Stockport, creating opportunities *for everyone*

Foreword

Councillor Colin Foster

Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

How does scrutiny work?

Role and remit

- 1.1 The Leader of the Council and seven Cabinet Members are responsible for the strategic management and decision making of all council services. Every council which operates "executive arrangements" (those that have a Leader and Cabinet – such as Stockport Council) must have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Overview and Scrutiny does not make decisions, it acts as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet (and partners) and undertakes evidence-based reviews and makes recommendations to the Cabinet. It is an essential element of governance arrangements in the council and seeks to improve policies and services for the people of Stockport by encouraging openness and accountability about the way decisions are made. Overview and Scrutiny can scrutinise and review the work and policies of the council and hold Cabinet Members and Chief Officers to account for their actions. It can also be consulted by the Cabinet or the council on the development of draft policies, action plans and reviews. It can also call-in Cabinet key decisions and initiate reviews of council services, functions or policies. It is not a mechanism for the handling of individual complaints, intervening in planning applications or acting as an appeals mechanism.
- 1.2 Five Scrutiny Committees made up of non-executive councillors are ultimately responsible for calling and holding the Cabinet to account and taking a lead in reviewing policy and matters of strategic direction. They also consider other issues relating to services provided by the council and, in some cases, services provided by partner organisations. The Committees assist in shaping new policies and monitor performance information against the standards we have set ourselves. The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee co-ordinates the overall work of the scrutiny committees
- 1.3 For the 2022/2023 municipal year, the Council appointed the following five Scrutiny Committees:

Scrutiny Committee	Membership	Cabinet portfolio(s)
Adult Social Care & Health	9 members	Health & Adult Social Care
Children and Families	9 members	Children, Families & Education
Communities & Housing	9 members	Climate Change & Environment Communities & Housing

		Highways, Parks and Leisure Services
Corporate, Resource Management & Governance	9 members	Finance & Resources
Economy & Regeneration	9 members	Economy & Regeneration
Scrutiny Co-ordination	The 5 Scrutiny Committee chairs.	

- 1.4 Each year, each of the Scrutiny Committees typically undertake a scrutiny review that focus on a particular issue, considering it in greater detail than is possible at the programmed Committee meetings. These reviews are undertaken by a Review Panel and will normally last around six months and may include a mixture of interviews with relevant officers, research of best practice elsewhere, meetings with service users and community groups and consultation with wider parts of the community and experts in their fields. Some scrutiny review panel meetings are held in one session for up to 4 hours and the reports then drafted and finalised; these are known as “deep dive” scrutiny reviews.
- 1.5 As with those reviews undertaken during the 2021/22 municipal year, this year’s scrutiny reviews have continued to take place remotely. One of the recommendations from the 2020/21 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee was to continue with Scrutiny Review Panels online where appropriate to assist in accessibility for the panel members and increase the breadth of expertise available to invite to attend the panel meetings given that they do not have to travel and attend a meeting in Stockport.

Scrutiny activity during the year

Performance and Resource Monitoring

- 2.1 Three times during the year, the Scrutiny Committees had the opportunity to monitor the performance of each of the Cabinet portfolios and the Council service areas that fall within the remit of that Committee. The performance is assessed against the priorities set out in each of the Portfolio agreements agreed at the start of the year. The Committees also receive reports on request which cover the council services within their remit.
- 2.2 In addition, following agreement by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in November 2021, a standing item is included on the agendas for each meeting where the quarterly reports are not on the agenda entitled 'portfolio dashboards' to allow scrutiny committees the opportunity to continue to monitor performance between the regular reporting schedule.
- 2.3 The web-based Performance Dashboards have been developed to support Members alongside the regular Performance and Resources reports considered by Scrutiny Committees. The dashboards were launched in November 2020 and are aligned to the seven Cabinet Portfolios. They support the council's ambitions to develop digital solutions and ensure intelligence-led decision making.
- 2.4 This work was undertaken in engagement with the Lead Cabinet Member along with Scrutiny Chairs, and the dashboards are updated twice a year, alongside the reports. The regular Portfolio and Corporate Reports each contain a unique hyperlink to the respective Portfolio Dashboard 'landing page' which will enable Members – and any interested members of the public – to access the latest data for each portfolio.
- 2.5 The Dashboards are intended to complement, rather than replace, the written reports, and are designed to be easily accessible and intuitive to use. Whilst the reports focus on highlights and exceptions, the dashboards provide access to the full set of portfolio measures, including historical trends and comparative data where this is available. The following pages provide a series of screenshots illustrating the different views available on the Portfolio Dashboards.

Scrutiny of External Bodies

- 3.1 Overview and scrutiny committees have accumulated a number of powers to undertake 'external scrutiny' of specific additional bodies. These include:
 - Provision for 'health scrutiny' – of health bodies and authorities. Local authorities have the power to scrutinise health bodies and providers in their area or to set up joint committees to do so. They can require members or officers of local health

bodies to provide information and to attend health scrutiny meetings to answer questions.

- Provision for a 'crime and disorder committee'. These are mandatory committees for all local authorities, which must scrutinise the delivery of crime and disorder strategies. Authorities which are delivering these strategies and which are subject to a report from such a committee must respond to the report and have regard to it when exercising its functions. They are also subject to a requirement to provide information and attend meetings of the committee to answer questions.

Committee meeting data

Scrutiny represents one of the most intensive areas of work within the democratic and governance arrangements of the council.

Across the five service-based scrutiny committees there were 32 individual meetings (including two extraordinary meetings), considering 226 items of business amounting to 5,106 pages of written reports which were considered over the 52 hours that the committees cumulatively met over the 2022/23 municipal year.

Scrutiny Review Panels

- 4.1 During the municipal year 2022/23 each of the Scrutiny Committees planned to undertake at least one Review either individually or jointly with another scrutiny committee and finalise any Reviews that were outstanding from the 2021/22 municipal year.

Adult Social Care & Health

Ambulance Wait Times

Membership: Councillors Gary Lawson (Lead Councillor), Angie Clark, Lisa Smart and Wendy Wild.

The commencement of the scrutiny review on Ambulance Wait Times has been delayed largely relating to the context around the ambulance service including increased demand, resourcing and industrial action and staffing changes within the service supporting the review. At the meeting on 15 June 2023, the Committee agreed that in view of the importance of the issue the 2022/23 Scrutiny Review on Ambulance Wait Times should be continued within 2023/24 municipal year.

The current position is that the Scrutiny Review will be support by the Urgent Care Team, NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care. The Scrutiny Review Panel will be provided with the Lead Officer contact details and the clerk will update the officer on the requests for data and visits the Scrutiny Review Panel made to date in order to progress the work of the Scrutiny Review Panel during the course of the 2.23/24 municipal year.

Children & Families

Growth in Free School Meals

Membership: Councillors Linda Holt (Lead Councillor), Shan Alexander, Colin Foster Sue Glithero and Frankie Singleton.

Aim of the review

As part of the Scrutiny Work Programme approved by the Council for the municipal year 2022/23, the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee directed a review in respect of School Place Sufficiency and agreed to understand the growth in children eligible for free school meals in Stockport and assess its impact, as follows:-

- To review in detail the growth in numbers of children eligible for free schools meals, looking at regional and national comparisons, comparisons between primary and secondary schools and examining the potential cause of this growth.
- To assess the impact this growth in free school meals eligibility has on school meals and food.

- To review the wider impacts of this growth in deprivation, looking in detail at financial impacts and potential impacts on education and learning

Methodology

The Review Panel agreed that the Scrutiny Review would be heard across two sessions held in December 2022 and February 2023 with the key individuals invited to attend and present information relation to place planning.

At its first meeting on 14 December 2022, the Review Panel considered a presentation by Tim Bowman, exploring the growth in FSM at borough, ward and school level. The report also outlined comparison to regional and national figures. The second meeting on 8 February 2023 considered a presentation by Tim Bowman and Lynn Perry explaining the impacts of school funding and the outcomes delivered by Stockport schools for the those children who are in receipt of eligible for benefits-led Free School Meals.

The Panel concluded that there has been a significant increase in the number and percentage of children eligible for FSM in Stockport, however, this increase has been less pronounced than in other GM boroughs.

Whilst the funding aligned to the increase in the number/percentage of children eligible for FSM will continue to flow through the appropriate funding streams, it will be appropriate to measure the impact any further increase in FSM children/funding has on the ability of schools to ensure all pupils are achieving their desired outcomes.

Schools utilise well considered evidence informed methods to support children eligible for FSM to achieve well. Despite this outcomes for children eligible for FSM need to further improve.

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14 March 2023:-

- The LA must ensure the deployment of funding assigned to meeting the needs of children eligible for FSM is effective, embraces identified best operating practice and ensures all Stockport schools are inclusive and enhances education for all pupils.
- The LA and its schools should consider the possibility of investing in systems that would support schools to identify all the children entitled to FSM to enable them to secure as much funding as possible.
- That officers undertake further work to understand what if any issues there are in relation to access to free school meals within Early Years settings and post -16 (16- 18 year olds).
- Consideration should be given to the way in which food providers who support schools at lunchtime consider the impact of their practice upon children entitled to FSM.
- To endorse the Poverty Proofing/Local Matters approach as a way forward with an expectation that all schools should engage with the project.
- Subject to agreement at Full Council in February to work with school leaders to implement the Stockport Cost-of-Living Free School Meals Guarantee.

Communities & Housing

Access to Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points

Aim of the review

The Council's Transport policy and Climate Action Now both encourage the use of zero emission vehicles rather than diesel or petrol engines. The policies both encourage the use of more sustainable modes of transport where practicable including the use of public transport or active travel modes as a priority but recognise the need for cars, vans, etc for certain journeys.

In order to encourage the switch to electric vehicles it has been recognised that the provision of electric vehicle charging points is of fundamental importance.

Many residents and businesses have private driveways or parking where they can install their own charging points however it is important that all residents and businesses should be able to access suitable provision of these facilities in appropriate locations. As the demand for electric vehicles grows then the number of available charging points required to support them also needs to increase.

The provision of suitable electric vehicle charging facilities is key to encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles within Stockport.

The aim of the proposed Scrutiny Review of Electric vehicle charging opportunities in Stockport was therefore to focus on:

- Reviewing the existing zero emission charging policy for Greater Manchester and Stockport.
- Review existing and proposed planning policy and advice to encourage the provision of electric vehicle charging facilities in new developments.
- Investigate and review the existing provision of publicly available electric charging facilities in Stockport and the potential options to increase that provision.

Outcomes

However, during the course of the municipal year, it became clear that progress on the council's proposals to improve electric vehicle charging infrastructure was progressing at far greater a pace than had been anticipated when the review was first proposed.

It had been identified as part of this work that there was an acknowledged need to improve charge point provision, including to the east of the borough in Romiley and Marple and the south and southwest of the town centre.

It was therefore proposed that the Council enter into an arrangement with Iduna as the delivery partner for electric vehicle charging infrastructure (EVCI) on a lease basis for 21 proposed sites throughout the borough.

Under these arrangements, Iduna as the supplier will: purchase, install, operate, and maintain the EV chargers i.e., no financial outlay for the third party, in this case the

Council, granting the lease. The Council, as the third party, will be responsible for granting the lease / providing the land for Iduna to install on, maintain and use the EV chargers.

Some of the proposed locations would result in the provision of EVCI to new areas of the borough such as the Heaton, Marple, Reddish and Romiley. However, they would also expand locations such as the Bramhall, Cheadle and the Town Centre.

The Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee considered the report in November 2022 and endorsed the proposed arrangements. Area Committees were also consulted on the potential location for EVCI in November 2022 and formal approval was given to the proposals by Cabinet in December 2022

Corporate, Resource Management & Governance

Review of local government financial and governance sustainability.

Membership: Councillors Mike Hurleston (Chair), Jilly Julian, Carole McCann, Tom McGee and Janet Mobbs

Aim of the review

The purpose of the review was to provide assurance that the processes and systems in place in Stockport are robust and to further provide assurance and mitigation against the recent examples of financial and governance failures in local government.

The review aimed to discuss and explore the key causes of recent failures in financial and governance arrangements in local government; test the arrangements that we have in place within Stockport considering the recent high-profile reports on financial and governance arrangements in certain local councils; and, to discuss and explore any learnings that should be applied within Stockport.

Methodology

The panel met twice to consider the scrutiny review. The first meeting 19 December 2022 considered the scoping of the report. The panel received a report that provided:

- The legislative background for financial and governance arrangements in Local Government;
- Recent examples of failures of financial and governance arrangements in Local Government;
- Key causes and lessons that can be learnt; and,
- Arrangements we have in place in Stockport.

The meeting considered recent examples of reports in the public domain following the issuing of Section 114 notices, independent best value reports and examples where external assurance reviews had been instigated by Government or councils themselves.

The second meeting on 2 February 2023 considered proposed actions and improvements that could be made to strengthen further Stockport's response to Local Government financial and governance sustainability

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14 March 2023:-

(1) Further development of the Member induction, and ongoing training and development:

- Enhanced new member training (to include decision making and case studies of where the wrong decisions have been taken);
- A programme of update or 'top-up' training be provided to Members to ensure that emerging legislation or changes in practice were being appropriately cascaded;
- Further designation of mandatory training akin to the existing planning, licensing and employment law training that Members must receive to sit on committees;
- Development of Member specific on-line Finance and Governance for
- Members training module (as well as face to face training); and, Greater visibility on current development and training opportunities:
 - Externally provided Treasury Management Training; and,
 - Audit Committee deep dives into risk areas.

(2) An annual monitoring report be provided to the Corporate, Resource Management & Governance Scrutiny Committee that provides assurance that Member and Officer training requirements have been met.

(3) There is a continuation of regular reviews of the Constitution ensuring that it and associated frameworks and standards are reviewed and updated against best practice.

(4) Members are engaged in the development of Environmental, Social and Governance policies within the Treasury Management Strategy

Economy & Regeneration

Economic and social case for Metrolink in Stockport

Membership: Councillors David Meller (Chair), Will Dawson, Louise Heywood and Oliver Johnstone.

Aim of the review

The need for good quality public transport is a key element of Greater Manchester and Stockport's transport policies and supports the environmental, economic, and social wellbeing of residents, organisations and businesses in the borough. In order to create appropriate business cases to support the investment in bringing Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport, these benefits need to be clearly understood and articulated.

It was therefore agreed that the Scrutiny Review of the Economic and Social Case for Metrolink in Stockport focus on:

- reviewing the historic strategies and plans that have supported the case for Metrolink and tram train in Stockport in order to clearly identify potential future schemes and how they fit into the overall transport policies for Stockport and Greater Manchester and understanding the historical justification for schemes;
- review and identify key policies and programmes that Metrolink/ tram train would support in Stockport; and
- investigate and review the impact and benefits of Metrolink and similar rapid transit schemes in other areas of Greater Manchester and the country, as well as considering the effect that covid-19 has had on those schemes

Methodology

The panel met on four occasions between October 2022 and February 2023 and followed the timetable set out below:

- Meeting one (12 October 2022) – scope the review
- Meeting two (30 November 2022) - focus on evidence gathering
- Meeting three (7 February 2023) – presentation from an officer from Transport for Greater Manchester and panel discussion
- Meeting four (21 February 2023) – final meeting to discuss and agree recommendations for final report

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 14 March 2023:-

- Requests that the Cabinet consider the Scrutiny Review Panel findings and recommendations at their meeting scheduled to be held on 14 March 2023 and provide a response to the report to members of the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee within six months of the report's consideration.

- The panel's findings show that Metrolink would be of great benefit to Stockport's residents. The panel requests that the Cabinet review the current barriers to acquiring Metrolink/ tram train in Stockport, and consider options/ next steps to addressing the current barriers and support progression of a scheme.
- Write to the Greater Manchester Transport Committee, as the committee for having oversight across all aspects of Greater Manchester's transport network, providing them with a copy of the work of the panel for their information, and requesting that the Stockport committee members reiterate the council's commitment and eagerness to bringing Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport to the wider committee.
- Write to the Mayoral Development Corporate providing them with a copy of the work of the panel for their information and to demonstrate the council's commitment and eagerness to bringing Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport.
- Write to Transport for Greater Manchester expressing the panel and Stockport Council's thanks for partaking in the review and reiterate Stockport's commitment and eagerness to bringing Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport.

Local scrutiny

Werneth Area Committee

Sewage in Rivers And Waterways

Membership: Councillors Lisa Smart (Chair), Angie Clark, Stuart Corris, Mark Roberts, Vince Shaw and Sue Thorpe.

Background

Under the Council's constitution, area committees have delegated powers to undertake local scrutiny reviews on matters that relate to the committee's geographic remit.

The Werneth Area of Stockport is home to several rivers and waterways, including the River Goyt, the Mersey, and the Tame. Unfortunately, these waterways have been subject to sewage pollution, which can have significant environmental and health impacts.

Aim of the Review

Local rivers provide a key amenity for the area and are used for agricultural and recreational purposes as well as providing wildlife corridors and an important habitat. The review was undertaken to understand the condition of our local rivers and the key types of pollution affecting it. The review also heard evidence from key stakeholders – United Utilities, the Environment Agency and Mersey Rivers Trust.

At its meeting of 17 October, 2023, the Werneth Area Committee agreed the Scrutiny Review of Sewage pollution in local waterways and rivers focused on: -

- Understanding the issues affecting local waterways and rivers and understanding key stakeholder concerns regarding water quality,
- Reviewing the work already being undertaken by key stakeholders,
- Identifying opportunities to improve local residents' understanding of local waterways and rivers water quality and how they can contribute to its improvement,
- Identifying opportunities for future joint working opportunities to improve local water quality.

Methodology

The Panel met on three occasions as part of the Area Committee meetings between June 2022 and March 2023 as part of the Area Committee meetings and followed the timetable set out below: -

- Meeting One (17th October 2022) – Scope the Review and initial evidence gathering.
- Meeting Two (23rd January 2023) – Focus on evidence gathering from stakeholders
- Meeting Three (17th April 2023) – Final meeting to discuss and agree recommendations for final report.

Recommendations

The Area Committee made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 27 June 2023:-

- The panel notes that change is needed at a national level to bring about change at a local level. As such, the panel requests that the leader of the council write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs asking her to bring about the legislative changes needed to clean up our rivers and put a stop to sewage pollution. Specifically, that should include:
 - The introduction of a legal requirement for water companies to report sewage discharge in real-time and warn local people when untreated sewage is released into our rivers.
 - The establishment of a new independent environmental watchdog to hold water companies to account and ensure they meet their obligations.
 - The establishment of a new duty of care on water companies to ensure they do not pollute rivers with sewage.
 - The establishment of a new fund to support farmers in reducing their environmental impact, including measures to reduce pollution from agricultural runoff.
 - Increased investment in wastewater infrastructure to ensure that sewage is properly treated before being discharged into rivers.
 - A review of the regulatory framework governing water companies to ensure that it is fit for purpose and can effectively protect the environment.
- The panel asks that the Chair of the Scrutiny Review write to United Utilities to invite them to a future meeting of the Werneth Area Committee to detail their plans invest in sewage treatment and to stop sewage dumping in local rivers.
- A request should also be made of United Utilities that they should increase monitoring and reporting of sewage discharges into local rivers. This could help to identify problem areas and ensure that the company is taking appropriate measures to reduce pollution. This reporting should include signage to inform the local community that local rivers are not safe to swim, canoe or paddle in as they are used for sewage dumping.
- Ask that the Cabinet consider the Scrutiny Review Panel findings and recommendations at a future meeting and provide a response to the report to members of the Werneth Area Committee within 6 months of the report's consideration.
- The panel's findings show that the poor water quality in our rivers affects residents, businesses and local wildlife, and every effort should be made to reduce that pollution as quickly as practicable. The panel requests that Council officers continue to work with the EA, UU, Mersey Rivers Trust and other key stakeholders to achieve this aim.
- The panel requests that the council, where possible, holds all stakeholders (including but not limited to United Utilities) to account for their actions and their compliance – or non-compliance – with relevant legislation.
- The panel recommends that a review of the Council's planning policies be undertaken with a view to making changes where needed to use the powers of the council to reduce the percentage connected to combined sewers.
- The panel requests that the Council considers what more can be done to promote improvements to the condition of its watercourses including rivers, streams, reservoirs and ponds, working with landowners, friend's groups and other partners.

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- Recommend that the Werneth Area Committee also review the sewage leak that occurred in Otterspool and see if there are any lessons that can be learned by United Utilities and by the council including improving the transparency to the public regarding any future sewage leaks.
 - Recommend to the members of the Werneth Area Committee in the 2023-24 municipal year that they undertake Part 2 of this review. That second part should strive to answer the following questions:
 - What can be learned from the recently released 2022 sewage outflow data as it relates to rivers within the Werneth area?
 - What specific local infrastructure investment is needed to improve water quality in local rivers?
 - Should bathing water status be sought for rivers within the Werneth Area as a way of driving change?

Call-ins

Between 17 May 2022 and 23 May 2023, there were 461 executive decisions taken. Of these, 285 were taken by area committees, 90 by individual cabinet members and the remaining 86 were taken by the Cabinet. 52 of those Cabinet level decisions were key decisions, notice of which had been published in the Forward Plan 28 days in advance of the decision being taken by the Cabinet.

None of these decisions were subject to the call-in procedure.