

Scrutiny Annual Report

2023/24



Foreword

Councillor Colin Foster

Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

To be completed

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 2023/2024 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 & Transport	9 members	Communities, Culture & Sport Parks, Highways & Transport Services

Corporate, Resource Management & Governance	9 members	Finance & Resources
Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change	9 members	Economy, Regeneration & Housing Climate Change & Environment
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 2022/23 municipal year, most of 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 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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

- 4.1 Scrutiny represents one of the most intensive areas of work within the democratic and governance arrangements of the council.
- 4.2 Across the five service-based scrutiny committees there were 31 individual meetings (including an extraordinary meeting of the Communities & Transport Scrutiny Committee), considering 225 items of business amounting to 4,508 pages of written reports which were considered over the 53 hours that the committees cumulatively met over the 2023/24 municipal year.
- 4.3 A breakdown of the data relating to each meeting can be found below.

Adult Social Care & Health

Meeting	Start	End	Duration	Reports	Pages
15/06/2023	18:00	19:19	1.3	5	110
07/09/2023	18:00	19:06	1.1	4	90
12/10/2023	18:00	19:26	1.4	5	45
23/11/2023	18:00	19:56	1.9	6	127
18/01/2024	18:00	19:05	1.1	5	70
29/02/2024	18:00	19:40	1.7	7	138
6			8.5	32	580

Children & Families

Meeting	Start	End	Duration	Reports	Pages
14/06/2023	18:00	19:19	1.3	4	69
06/09/2023	18:00	19:30	1.5	5	33
11/10/2023	18:00	19:03	1.1	6	45
22/11/2023	18:00	20:20	2.3	8	173
17/01/2024	18:00	19:35	1.6	9	147
28/02/2024	18:00	19:49	1.8	7	114
6			9.6	39	581

Communities & Transport

Meeting	Start	End	Duration	Reports	Pages
12/06/2023	18:00	20:11	2.2	10	268
29/06/2023	18:00	20:49	2.8	1	3
04/09/2023	18:00	19:40	1.7	6	54
09/10/2023	18:00	19:55	1.9	7	98
20/11/2023	18:00	20:16	2.3	6	143
15/01/2024	18:00	21:01	3	7	94
26/02/2024	18:00	21:08	3.1	9	90
7			17	46	750

Corporate, Resource Management & Governance

Meeting	Start	End	Duration	Reports	Pages
13/06/2023	18:00	19:27	1.5	10	194
05/09/2023	18:00	19:04	1.1	9	166
10/10/2023	18:00	19:04	1.1	5	92
21/11/2023	18:00	19:28	1.5	10	214
16/01/2024	18:00	19:17	1.3	9	201
27/02/2024	18:00	19:17	1.3	13	208
6			7.8	56	1075

Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change

Meeting	Start	End	Duration	Reports	Pages
15/06/2023	18:00	20:44	2.7	10	266
07/09/2023	18:00	19:36	1.6	7	197
12/10/2023	18:00	19:29	1.5	10	85
23/11/2023	18:00	20:00	2	9	400
18/01/2024	18:00	19:14	1.2	10	276
29/02/2024	18:00	19:17	1.3	6	298
6			10.3	52	1522

Use of Urgency Provisions

General Exception Notices

- 5.1 If a matter which would be a key decision cannot be included in the Forward Plan or 28 days' notice cannot be given then, the decision may still be taken if it is impracticable to defer the decision to ensure that notice has been published.
- 5.2 In such cases, Democratic Services must inform each member of the relevant Scrutiny Committee including reasons why compliance with the requirement to provide at least 28 clear days' notice was not practical in that case and make copies of that notice available on the website.
- 5.3 A General Exception Notice can only be issued where there is at least five clear days between the date the notice was issued, and the date of the meeting.
- 5.4 During 2023/24, three such notices were issued as follows:-
 - June 2023 - Marple Active Communities Hub
 - January 2024 - Draft Council Plan 2024/25
 - February 2024 - Stockport County FC - Memorandum of Understanding

Special Urgency Notices

- 5.5 Where the meeting where the matter is due to be decided is less than five days away, then the decision can only be taken if the Chair of the body making the decision, obtains the agreement of the Chair of a relevant Scrutiny Committee that the taking of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.
- 5.6 As soon as practicable after agreement has been obtained, a Special Urgency Notice must be published and sent to all members of the relevant Scrutiny Committee and made available to the public at the Town Hall and on the Council website, setting out the reasons for urgency and why the decision cannot reasonably be deferred.
- 5.7 No such notices have been published during 2023/24.

Scrutiny Review Panels

- 6.1 During the 2023/24 municipal year, 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 2022/23 municipal year.

Adult Social Care & Health

Adult Social Care & Health IT Systems and Data

Membership: Councillor Geoff Abell (Lead Councillor), Gary Lawson and Karl Wardlaw.

Aim of the review

Following concerns around the narrative presented to the Committee that there were recording and data quality issues with the case management system used by Adult Social Care which was impacting on performance reporting, it was determined that the Council Meeting be recommended to include “Adult Social Care & Health IT Systems and Data” within the 2023/24 Scrutiny Work Programme.

The aim of the review was to understand the issues in relation to recording, data quality and reporting and to seek assurances that the challenges with data and IT systems were not a barrier to practitioners undertaking assessments in their role and there was no impact on Stockport residents getting the support they required.

Methodology

The Panel met on ten occasions in the period of September 2023 to February 2024 to gather evidence and make recommendations. The Panel followed the timetable set out below:-

- Meeting 1 - Scoping (29 September 2023)

Evidence Gathering

- Meeting 2 - System demonstration (13 November 2023)
- Meeting 3 - Understanding the expectations around practice – discussion (30 November 2023)
- Meetings 4-7 - Feedback from practitioners – discussion (week of 4 December 2023)
- Meeting 8 - Understanding how data input converts to data output in the context of portfolio performance – discussion (26 January 2024)

Reporting

- Meeting 9 - Scrutiny Review outcomes meeting to establish the proposed content and recommendations of the final report (1 February 2024)
- Meeting 10 - Draft final report (with recommendations) considered and signed off by the Scrutiny Review Panel (16 February 2024)

Recommendations

The Panel noted that Adult Social Care had commenced a systematic programme of system development, with the aim of improving end-user experience, maximising service efficiency and driving up data quality. This is supported by Systems and Business Intelligence Teams and sits within a wider ASC Transformation Programme. The Scrutiny Review Panel found that a number of changes within the wider transformation programme have already addressed, or will address, some of the findings of this review.

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 March 2024.

(1) In relation to **system training and ongoing support** the following recommendations are made:-

- Peer mentoring to be explored in teams or across the service where more senior practitioners are available to mentor junior or newer practitioners. To the role of system champions should be considered.
- Amend future versions of the LAS Systems Newsletter should include a section titled 'Did you know' with short summaries of existing LAS functionality and features which support good recording practice.

(2) In relation to **duplication and efficiency** the following recommendations are made:-

- Whilst it is noted that copy forward functionality is already utilised and further considered in upcoming system review projects, it is recommended that a wider review of copy forward usage is undertaken to ensure this is being maximised where relevant and appropriate, avoiding duplication of effort for practitioners.
- The maximum file size limit for single document uploads should be reviewed and consideration be given an increase to enable larger court reports to be saved.

(3) In relation to **data recording and reporting** the following recommendations are made:-

- Where system reviews take place, opportunity should be taken to review the data that is collected to ensure that it remains a statutory requirement and that it is necessary, relevant and proportionate.
- To ensure that the produced data reports and dashboards are utilised, the Business Intelligence Team should run periodic audits of usage and take decisions to discontinue or cease development of under or non-utilised reports and dashboards in agreement with Adult Social Care.

(4) A number of recommendations are made but it is acknowledged that these have been addressed by already implemented transformation projects or will be addressed in upcoming scheduled projects.

- Where off-system templates are used in DoLS, these forms should be embedded in Liquidlogic to support more efficient flow through the system.

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- All core processes in relation to: Care Act Assessments & Plans, Brokerage forms and processes, Carer Assessments & Plans, Safeguarding and DoLS processes should be reviewed with the view to streamline and shorten both the process and form content(s) and reduce duplication wherever appropriate and feasible.
 - Practitioners should be included in developing and testing changes to DoLS processes and forms.
 - Opportunity should be provided for practitioners and managers to submit system change suggestions or initiatives.

Children & Families

Services for Young People

Membership: Councillor Janet Mobbs (Lead Councillor), Shan Alexander, Jake Austin, Colin Foster, Becky Senior and Dallas Jones

Aim of the review

As part of the Scrutiny Work Programme approved by the Council for the municipal year 2023/24, the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee requested a scrutiny review to consider the youth provision, provided without charge and the breadth of opportunities for adolescent young people in Stockport aged 11 to 16 years old.

The specific focus of the review was agreed as:

- To understand the demographics of the adolescent population across the borough.
- To scope and map the provision available delivered via the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector and the Council.
- To understand the infrastructure and connections across the provision.
- To understand how provision is funded.
- To identify any areas that would benefit from being strengthened.

Methodology

Two presentations to the review panel took place including a scoping report and delivering the evidence gathered on 17 of October 2023 and an update on 23 of November 2023.

Officers who attended the review panels to provide their insight and experience to the panel were:

- Heidi Shaw: Director, Family Help and Integration Stockport Family
- Megan Mayhew: Strategic Participation leader
- Donna Higgins: Strategic Participation Leader
- Susan Scott: Team Manager Youth Justice and Targeted Youth Support
- Amanda Aylward: Virtual School Headteacher
- Sarah Kelly: Assistant Service Lead Youth Justice and Targeted Youth Support

A survey was also sent out to gather information and data from representatives of the VCSFE sector regarding free youth provision offers to young people aged 11-16 years old.

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 March 2024:-

- (1) Support the Council's Digital programme in the development of a single directory solution for the borough, bringing in the existing RTime mapping of activity and streamlining the recording of groups and activity across our wider programmes, such as

HAF, Family Hubs, Leaving Care Local Offer and SEND Local Offer. This work will mean less duplication of effort across the system for both the service and groups. As part of this work there will be an opportunity to identify where more provision is potentially needed.

(2) Develop a wider communication strategy to improve communication to residents regarding the youth provision in Stockport. This will be a key feature of the Neighbourhoods and Prevention programme bringing services closer to where young people live, learn and play.

(3) Ensure there is a robust and widespread cross section of young people's voices fed into the youth provision offer in the borough on a sustained basis. Working with L!sten to guide and inform this engagement.

Communities & Transport

Stockport's Communal Corridors: Securing the safety, cleanliness and biodiversity of our streets and passageways

Membership: Councillor Matt Wynne (Lead Councillor), Rachel Wise, Tom Morrison and Helen Hibbert.

Aim of the review

The objective for the review was to better understand the current process and service efficacy delivered to residents, and identify options for improvements to that service and betterment of the community environment.

The Panel determined to review two specific areas:-

- The current process and protocol around cleaning our gullies, recognising that resident perception is that gullies are not cleaned as regularly as previous, and this is more apparent following weather events with increased levels of pooling water on our streets and roads.
- The improvements which can be made, when communities come together to, not just clean, but beautify our environment for the enjoyment of all.

Methodology

The panel met on several occasions and considered two key elements as part of the review, highway drainage gully emptying and the potential to green alleyways.

The highway drainage gully emptying sessions focussed on receiving data and information from officers and reviewing and exploring that information.

The potential for greening alleyways was explored as a discussion with several key stakeholders attending the panel to give their views and experience.

The Panel followed the timetable set out below:-

5 October 2023 - Scoping session

5 December 2023- Street cleansing, drainage, gullies and grids

10 January 2024 - Alleyway greening

7 February 2024 - Wrap up and pre-report meeting (informal)

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 18 September 2024:-

- (1) Define and develop performance measures to improve understanding and visibility of street cleansing programme.
- (2) Addressing the root cause of blockage by collaborative working.
- (3) There should be a named point of contact within the Council for Members, residents, volunteers and those involved in environmental groups. This would serve to improve relationships between volunteers, groups, and the Council.
- (4) Introduction of Guidance displayed on the public website produced for volunteer groups who are interested in community greenspace projects. This guide will be colourful, interactive, user friendly, showing best practice, case studies and in simple language demonstrating ways to 'get on' with volunteer activities within the public realm and where help and support is. This should come to all Area Committees for consideration upon final draft.
- (5) A universal guidance document on the creation of agreements between groups and the Council should be developed and made available to the public. Issues to cover include advice on the position for adopted / unadopted passageways, those with vehicle access rights, gated alleys and also consider location of utility services, the width for access to maintain the surface / structure, the weight of any planters / structures to enable repairs and ensuring the Council had access to clean, weed spray etc. This should come to all Area Committees for discussion and consideration upon final draft.
- (6) Consideration of a reduction of mowing some grassed areas to encourage biodiversity and wildflower growth, where this is considered to be appropriate.
- (7) Consider options to allow the use of public buildings and community centres for meetings of more Volunteer groups.

Corporate, Resource Management & Governance

Financial Impact of Bus Franchising

Membership: Councillor Carole McCann (Lead Councillor), Ian Hunter, Jeremy Meal and Charlie Stewart.

Aim of the review

As part of the Scrutiny Work Programme approved by the Council, a review by the Corporate, Resource Management Governance Committee was agreed of the Financial Impact of Bus Franchising.

The review considered the current funding of transport in Greater Manchester and the impact on Stockport MBC, the current approach to fares and ticketing and key risks identified. The review also explored the current budget, medium term financial plan for franchising alongside patronage, revenue and growth plans as well as current and future plans to manage the franchised network including performance measures and network area reviews.

Methodology

The panel met three times to consider the scrutiny review. The first meeting on 14 November 2023 considered the scoping of the report. The panel also received a presentation that provided:

- An overview of transport finance, bus franchising and reform;
- Current funding of the transport levy and the Statutory Charge and its implications for Stockport MBC;
- The current approach to fares and ticketing; and,
- Current Key risks.

The meeting considered the presentation and identified a number of key lines of enquiry for the second meeting which colleagues from TfGM were asked to provide further detailed information to the review panel.

The second meeting on 12 December 2023 considered a presentation from TfGM colleagues that provided detailed information on:

- 2024/25 Initial Budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- Patronage & Revenue and Growth Plans;
- Network Performance and changes to services through a series of Network Reviews once franchising has taken place.

The final meeting of the panel met on 4 January 2024 to consider proposed conclusions and recommendations that could be made to ensure greater visibility and oversight of the financial impact of bus franchising moving forward.

Recommendations

The panel made the following recommendations in its Final Report which were considered and adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 30 January 2024:-

(1) Support the establishment of a local authority level group, comprised of cross-party representation and officer support, to effectively feed into the development of the Bee Network agenda in Stockport's interests as we prepare for the start of the south GM franchise in 2025.

(2) Note that short and medium term financial and patronage performance indicators will be reported via a combination of GMCA financial monitoring reports and regular service delivery updates to the Bee Network committee. TfGM be requested to provide suitable information to give assurance about the resourcing of newly franchised service, such as the overall Peak Vehicle Requirement and this information should be shared with relevant committees and local authority level groups within Stockport.

(3) An annual monitoring report be provided to CRMG Scrutiny Committee that provides assurance on the financial, quality, performance and risk management of bus franchising and transport provision funded by the transport and statutory charge.

(4) The Cabinet alongside TfGM and the GMCA continue to lobby for a fairer transport settlement for Greater Manchester and Stockport.

Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change

The accountability of Social Housing providers to the Council and the residents of Stockport

Membership: Councillor Dena Ryness (Chair), David Meller and Claire Vibert.

Aim of the review

In June 2023, members of the Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee agreed to conduct a review into the accountability of social housing providers to the council and residents of Stockport. Members of the Scrutiny Review Panel then agreed the following scope for the review at their meeting on 21 September 2023:

- To gain an understanding of where social housing providers are accountable and the current mechanisms for this accountability for each of the different types of social housing providers in Stockport. It was suggested that a simplified table would enable members to see where accountability was strong, and any gaps across the piece that could be scrutinised further.
- To gain an understanding the risks of lack of accountability.
- Examples of social housing providers operating in three other local authority areas to gather learning.
- Over the course of the review, to invite other stakeholders such as Greater Manchester Police (GMP) (who worked closely with housing teams) to speak to the panel to get their views on the accountability of social housing providers to residents.

Current position

Since then, members have considered the condition of social housing stock, the routes by which residents of social housing could seek help in addressing problems, and detail as to how providers respond to issues raised by residents. The Panel also heard from Councillor Rachel Wise about the responsibilities of the Member Committee, of which she is a member, in its role to oversee the work of Stockport Homes Group (SHG) as an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) of the council.

The Scrutiny Review Panel work into the Accountability of Social Housing Providers to the Council and Residents of Stockport has experienced some delays and members of the Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee agreed at their meeting on 13 June 2024 that the review should be continued for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The panel are currently in the 'evidence-gathering' phase of the review, which is scheduled to be completed by Christmas. The Chair of the Panel is collating feedback from SHG tenants to inform the work the review. The Panel, Clerk and Lead Officer are conducting research into other local authority areas to enable a broad comparison of what mechanisms of accountability are in place for the local authorities and their ALMOs.

Members of the panel will then consider the draft final report in January 2025 for onward submission to the parent Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Call-ins

- 7.1 Between 23 May 2023 and 21 May 2024, there were 511 executive decisions taken.
- 7.2 Of these, 234 were taken by area committees, 90 by individual cabinet members and the remaining 71 were taken by the Cabinet. 40 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.
- 7.3 None of these decisions were subject to the call-in procedure.
- 7.4 The remaining decisions were those taken by officers that require publication under The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, largely because they relate to minor contract award decisions or where they record decisions taken by officers under delegation from the Cabinet or a committee meeting. While these decisions are publishable, they are exempt from the call-in procedure.