

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At Chesterfield Borough Council, our Overview and Scrutiny function continues to be an active and integral part of the council's governance arrangements. During 2022/23, our scrutiny members have acted as a critical friend to the development and implementation of key council policies, engaged in the development of consultation exercises and communications campaigns and provided robust challenge to current policy, plans and practices. This work has supported the council's vision of always putting our communities first.
- 1.2 During the year different approaches to scrutiny engagement have been utilised including reports, presentations with question and answer sessions, focus groups and working groups. This has enabled scrutiny to take an in depth look at a specific policy areas, plans and data sets and provided a variety of opportunities for all scrutiny members to contribute to the discussions and add value and challenge to key activity.
- 1.3 The council's three overview and scrutiny committees in 2022/23 - Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum, the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee, have had yet another busy year during 2022/23 and this is captured within the report.
- 1.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Chairs for 2022/23 former councillor Lisa Collins and Cllr Jenny Flood would like to take this opportunity to thank all the officers and members who have been involved in supporting and assisting in the overview and scrutiny process over the past year.

2.0 Pre-decision scrutiny

- 2.1 The council's approach is to support and enable good pre-decision scrutiny. Pre-decision scrutiny provides opportunities for scrutiny members to fully challenge and inform important decisions before they are made. It has a number of benefits for the council and communities including:
- Early and proactive involvement is likely to produce a better informed, better quality, more robust decision making
 - It provides opportunities for wider member involvement in decision making, followed by greater ownership and support for decisions
 - The need to suspend decisions already made through use of call-in mechanisms are less likely which can be a challenge due to implementation timescales and risks

2.2 Pre-decision scrutiny requires time and varied opportunities for overview and scrutiny members to get involved early and often happens at a much earlier stage than issues appearing on the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions. The approach set out in 1.2 has helped increase engagement at a much earlier stage and add greater value to the development of policies and plans and also helped to identify potential check and challenge areas pre and post decision making.

3.0 The Forward Plan

3.1 A standing item for noting on each scrutiny committee agenda is the council's Forward Plan. The Forward Plan is a document that contains details of the key, private and, where possible, non-key decisions the Cabinet, cabinet members or officers are likely to make over a four-month period. It is a legal requirement to make public the details of key or private decisions 28 days' in advance of the decision.

3.2 As well as being an important document for the public, the Forward Plan helps to provide overview and scrutiny with the opportunity to monitor the executive decision-making programme and undertake pre-decision scrutiny. Scrutiny members have been encouraged to have early conversations with the scrutiny chairs when an item appears on the forward plan that they feel requires scrutiny involvement.

3.2 Scrutiny members value the forward plan as a key tool in planning their work and recognise that, in order to carry out pre-decision scrutiny, items should be added in a timely manner.

4.0 Overview and Scrutiny 'Call-in'

4.1 Scrutiny law allows for an overview and scrutiny committees to investigate, make reports and recommendations on Cabinet decisions that have been agreed but not yet put into action. Legislation allows for action on these decisions to be suspended pending a scrutiny inquiry. This process is referred to as scrutiny 'Call-in'. Following any scrutiny call-in inquiry, the scrutiny committee may request Cabinet reconsider its decision on the basis of the further evidence gathered.

4.2 During 2022/23 no 'call-ins' were made.

5.0 Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum activities and achievements

5.1 Throughout 2022/23 the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum undertook both pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny, receiving reports and influencing decisions on the policies, strategies, plans and services outlined below.

5.2 People Plan

Chesterfield borough council developed its workforce strategy – known as the People Plan 2019 – 2023 in December 2019. Scrutiny had previously engaged in the development of the plan and was now undertaking a check and challenge review of progress. A key part of these activities included a look back on how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted employees and services delivered and what could be learned for the future. This included the importance of key schemes such as the Employee Assistance Scheme and Mental Health First Aiders programme.

Scrutiny members also considered the latest findings from Investor's in People – where Chesterfield Borough Council was awarded the Gold standard and also some of the emerging pressures points for future years including hybrid working, reward and recognition and recruitment challenges. This session helped to inform the early stages in development of the next iteration of the plan.

5.3 Arvato and Kier Transition Plan – Lessons Learned

Scrutiny members had previously helped to shape the Arvato and Kier transition plan which enabled the return of key Council services from public private partnership provision to direct Council provision. This scrutiny meeting considered the evaluation and lessons learned following the transition and helped to provide focus for key areas to consider for further monitoring and any future similar projects.

5.4 ICT and Digital Improvement Programme

Scrutiny have been a key stakeholder in the ICT and Digital Improvement Programme since its development in 2018. The key strands of people, digital, applications and enabling technology have benefitted from early pre-decision scrutiny as well as post decision check and challenge during the delivery of the programme.

At this check and challenge session, scrutiny members took a deep dive into the savings forecast and delivered alongside the benefits to both Chesterfield Borough Council and our customers. The progress on the MyChesterfield digital account and plans for further future development also formed a key part of the discussion with members expressing views around potential barriers to access but also around opportunities for future service expansion.

5.5 Cost of living

This is a issue raised by scrutiny members during the year. At the pre-agenda meeting in September, the scrutiny chairs had discussed the increasing concerns about the cost-of-living crisis and impact this was having on residents. A piece of work was commissioned internally that summarised the current support available through government schemes, the council, partner agencies and organisations to address the cost-of living crisis. The report also informed a discussion about where support should be targeted, how the availability of support is communicated and to consider what questions scrutiny could ask when looking at future scrutiny topics.

The discussion helped to build up the Council's and other partners response including the cost of living web resources, information sheets for members, businesses, employees etc. and the warm hub programme and mapping.

5.6 Climate Change

Throughout 2022/23 scrutiny performed a valuable check and challenge role which helped to drive performance and maintain progress on the 2020 – 2023 Climate Change Action Plan. In addition this year, scrutiny also supported the development of the consultation which helped to shape the Climate Change Strategy 2023 – 2030 and held workshops to feed into the consultation and strategy development. This engagement helped to strengthen and widen the consultation and associated communication plan as well as adding valuable insight from scrutiny members experiences of working with residents and local groups.

5.7 Council Plan

Like with Climate Change, scrutiny perform an important check and challenge role throughout the life of the plan but in 2022/23 they helped to support the development of the new plan. The topic areas and key concerns raised during scrutiny committee meetings etc. were used as part of the evidence gathering and later down the line a presentation with the opportunity for comment and questions took place at an overview and performance scrutiny forum meeting as key themes for the new Council Plan 2023 – 2027 were taking shape.

5.7 Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

Following the Covid-19 pandemic scrutiny members requested an update on how emergency planning and business continuity functions worked both at Chesterfield

Borough Council and at the wider local resilience forum level. An in-depth presentation was given, with the opportunity to ask questions regarding particular areas of interest such as the new Protect Duty (Martin's Law) and how that could shape future activity.

6.0 Community, Customers and Organisational Scrutiny Committee

6.1 In 2022/23 the Community, Customers and Organisational Scrutiny Committee focused on pre-decision scrutiny and helping to shape a number of key plans and activities both internally and into external and partnership spaces.

6.2 Local Government Boundary Review Communications Plan

In 2021/22 the Local Government Boundary Commission concluded a review of electoral arrangements for Chesterfield Borough Council which would see wide ranging changes including a reduction in councillor numbers from 48 to 40, a reduction in wards from 19 to 16 and widespread boundary and name changes for wards. These changes take place from the May 2023 elections.

This is a really good example of early engagement helping to shape practice. In July 2022 scrutiny considered the challenges and opportunities around communicating to the electorate the changes around electoral boundaries following the Local Government Boundary Review Commission Review. Key consideration was given to the financial and legal limits with the communications plan and an analysis of the draft plan for effectiveness, climate change and equality and diversity impacts. A range of suggestions were made to enhance the communications plan to improve the reach in terms of all the electorate but also for harder to engage groups.

6.3 Outside bodies nominations

Another area identified as requiring some focus following the boundary commission review included nominations for outside bodies. Scrutiny helped to categorise the bodies e.g. sector support agencies, consultative committees, partnerships etc. so that it is easier for officers, members and the public to understand why we engage with certain activities and not others. Scrutiny also helped to scope an officer review of all outside

bodies which helped the Council to streamline and update the list in advance of the May 2023 election.

6.4 Member Induction Programme

Alongside the Member Development Group, Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee members were able to help shape the new member induction programme to be implemented after the May 2023 election. Members used their first hand knowledge to help prioritise the learning and development sessions, identify gaps and additional support required to enable full participation. The new induction has been a true collaboration between officers and members and will hopefully increase engagement levels.

6.5 Crime and Disorder

The Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee also acts as the Council's crime and disorder panel – scrutinising a range Chesterfield Community Safety Partnership delivery activity. A key focus during 2022/23 was the development of a new integrated approach to reducing anti-social behaviour and also reducing violence within our night-time economy. This included pre-decision scrutiny around the new Anti-social behaviour strategy and action plan to ensure that its potential for improved outcomes was maximised before it went into the formal decision making space.

7.0 Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

7.1 In 2022/23 the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee undertook both pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny, receiving reports and influencing decisions on the policies, strategies, plans and services outlined below.

7.2 Skills action plan refresh

The progress on the current Skills Action Plan was discussed in a check and challenge session to help drive current performance. Following this session a workshop was held where scrutiny members engaged with two key questions:

1. What should be the key priorities in the refreshed Skills Action Plan?
2. What is the role of the council in delivery of skills & employment activity and where can we add most value?

This early engagement helped to identify other key stakeholders, information required and a range of opportunities to be considered during the development of the next skills action plan.

7.3 Private Sector Housing consultation

Scrutiny members considered a number of new policies which will help to shape and improve private sector housing conditions. These included new policy and requirements around energy performance certificates, houses of multiple occupation licensing and conditions and park homes requirements. Discussion and questions helped shape the final versions of the policies before final decision.

7.4 Council Housing improvements

A check and challenge session was held around a range of Council housing issues including the delivery of the decent homes standard, the turnaround on vacant residential properties and the impact of Covid-19 on the backlog of repairs and maintenance. Scrutiny members took a deep dive into key data and the mitigation plans developed to improve upon current performance.

7.5 Recycling communications plan

An area of concern identified by Enterprise and Wellbeing scrutiny committee members was how the Council could improve recycling rates. A draft communications plan was considered with members making suggestions to make the plan more impactful for local communities and help to drive up recycling rates.

7.6 Measuring the success of town centre projects

Scrutiny members received a presentation which gave an update on key improvement projects for Chesterfield Town Centre. The discussion focused on how to measure success of the projects and how to demonstrate their impact. As these are long-term projects in many cases, this will be an area of future check and challenge for scrutiny members.

8.0 Learning and Development

8.1 Scrutiny plays an important role in identifying and delivering learning and development for members. Development needs that are identified through scrutiny committees or project groups are fed into the member development group so that they can form part of

a rolling training programme covering all members. In addition, a programme of member briefing sessions has been established to provide topical advice and updates to help members carry out their responsibilities effectively.

9.0 East Midlands Councils’ Regional Scrutiny Network

9.1 The East Midlands Councils’ Regional Scrutiny Network is a forum for learning, sharing, promoting, supporting and developing the scrutiny function across the region. The Council plays a proactive role in supporting and contributing to the work of the network which meets on a quarterly basis. Chesterfield Borough Council has continued to engage and utilise the collaboration and shared learning available.

- 9.2 Key exploration and development areas for 2022/23 included:
- Different approaches to scrutiny of Council budget setting processes
 - Training needs for scrutiny members
 - Utilising performance data effectively
 - Call in arrangements

10.0 Changes for 2023/24

10.1 Since the development of the three committee scrutiny model in 2015 there have been significant changes around council responsibilities, structures and partnerships. With the reduction in Council size due to the Local Government Boundary Review, 32 scrutiny places is considered to be unsustainable, however overview and scrutiny is an important check and challenge point within the Council. Overview and Scrutiny meetings have traditionally taken place in the evening (unlike other committees) so provide an opportunity for elected members who have caring commitments or work commitments during the day to still engage effectively in committee responsibilities. It is therefore important that there are a significant number of committee places allocated to this work.

10.2 From May 2023, the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees has been reduced from three to two. The overall number of overview and scrutiny places has decreased from 32, but the actual number of members engaged has increased, helping to increase overview and scrutiny oversight and provide much needed evening committee places.

10.3 The new committees are:

Scrutiny Select Committee – Resilient Council	Scrutiny Select Committee – Economic Growth and Communities
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<p>Responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance and decision making• Council Plan and performance management• Finance including Medium Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management, tax, income streams and capital programmes and Housing Revenue Account• Customer services• Human resources including people plan and learning and development• Information technology, data and information assurance and access• Health and safety• Risk Management• Emergency planning and business continuity• Asset Management• Communications• Call In and petitions related to the above	<p>Responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic growth and planning• Visitor economy• Skills• Health, wellbeing and cultural offer• Housing• Services to vulnerable people including Careline• Revenues and benefits services• Community Safety including Crime and Disorder Panel• Climate Change• Call In and petitions related to the above
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