

Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/2025

Foreword (Chair's Review)

This report covers the period 1 May 2024 – 31 April 2025. This was expected to be the final year of the Council term with County elections taking place in May 2025 and large numbers of new Councillors appointed. As such, the focus for Scrutiny early on was on clarifying scrutiny ways of working and putting in place solid foundations for the induction of new Councillors to scrutiny Committees and appointment of a new Executive in May. The Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs took the lead in developing an Executive Scrutiny Protocol to capture ways of working between scrutiny and the executive and to set out the necessary principles and processes to underpin effective purposeful scrutiny at Surrey. The anticipated elections were subsequently postponed, nevertheless, I am pleased that this Protocol was endorsed by Council in March 2024 and added to the Constitution as it provides a useful framework for effective working between scrutiny and the executive for the remaining period of the Council.

The publication of the Government white paper on Devolution and the postponement of elections has significantly changed the operating context for the Council including scrutiny. From February to May Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs were involved in numbers of briefings and meetings on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (D&LGR) and were invited to act as a sounding board, to provide insight and challenge and a Member steer on developing proposals. In April the Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs group submitted a report to Cabinet with recommendations which were endorsed.

Despite new pressures and uncertainties arising from LGR during this period, Chairs of the four scrutiny Select Committees continued to drive forward their work programmes with a strong focus on resident priorities and the improvement of services for the benefit of everyone in Surrey particularly the vulnerable. Committees continued to provide challenge to the Cabinet, conduct reviews of service and partner performance and positively contribute to policy development. This report has not attempted to list all the work Select Committees have carried out during the year, but it seeks to showcase some particular successes and reflect the range of different approaches which can be taken to help the Council meet the challenges it faces.

Select Committees have to do more than just scrutinise decisions after they have been taken. They must be involved early in the process to help shape policies and strategies and ensure that when decisions are made they have taken into account a wide range of views and perspectives. Working together with the Executive to identify potential areas where scrutiny can add value has been another priority for Scrutiny this year. The establishment of quarterly forward planning

meetings between Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Committee Chairs has raised the level of engagement on scrutiny forward planning and led to increased assurance that scrutiny is focused on strategic and organisational priorities or where it can most add value for the benefit of the Council and residents.

As we look ahead to local government reorganisation and prepare for the establishment of new shadow unitary authorities in 2026, I believe the role of scrutiny is more important than ever in helping this organisation deal with the challenges it faces and harnessing the wisdom and expertise of members to help Surrey move forward effectively into a new era for local democracy.

I wish to express my thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Members for the tireless work that they do to provide assurance to the executive and residents and critical friend challenge where necessary. I would also like to thank the Scrutiny Team and all those witnesses and members of the public who have engaged with Scrutiny over the past year.

Councillor Hazel Watson
Chair of the Select Committee Chair & Vice Chairs Group (SCCVCG)



Introduction

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has identified four principles of good scrutiny:

1. Provides 'critical-friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.
2. Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard.
3. Is carried out by 'independent minded councillors' who lead and own the scrutiny role
4. Drives improvement in public services

Surrey Council's new Executive Scrutiny Protocol endorsed at Council in March 2025, sets out a positive vision for scrutiny supporting the continuous improvement of the Council and the services it delivers in the following ways:

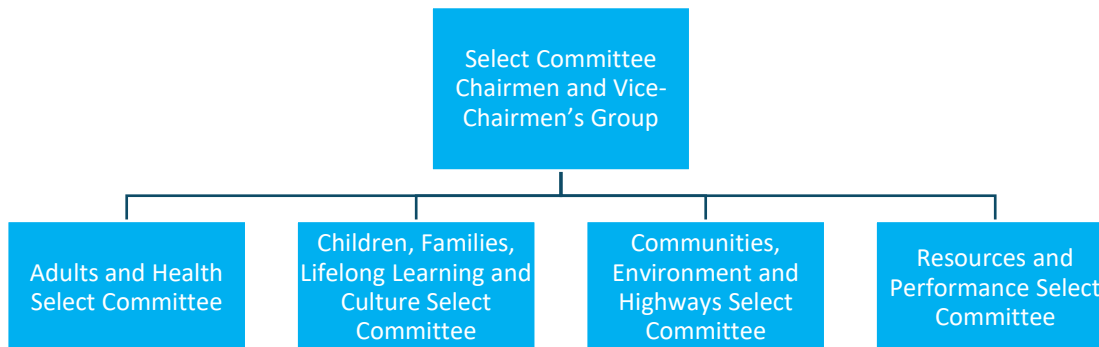
- Act as a strategic function of the Council bringing additional capacity and insight to help council understand and address complex problems
- Assist the council to understand and act on the big strategic risks it faces
- Assist the council in better understanding the views and concerns of local people
- Support the proportionate and productive review of performance and finance information
- Assist in the development of major, strategic policies
- Provide assurance to council's leadership.

The case studies in this report are structured around these aims and provide a useful reminder about where the focus of scrutiny should be. The fact that there are good examples to share against each of those principles is an endorsement of what has been achieved through Select Committees this year. Nevertheless, as well as highlighting the successes from the past year, this report acknowledges that further progress needs to be made and with local government reorganisation fast approaching, this learning should be factored into thinking for the development of new scrutiny functions in shadow authorities' by relevant members and officers when the time comes.

Surrey County Council's select committees will remain in place until Vesting day (April 2027) and continue to have a role to play in scrutiny of ongoing service delivery while Surrey remains responsible, and in providing oversight and scrutiny of the effective management of the transition. The priority aim over the coming months will be to ensure that Members are provided with the information and understanding necessary to perform effectively in this space and that the Council makes the most of their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to help ensure that Surrey ends well in 2027.

Section 1: Overview of Scrutiny Activity

The structure of Overview and Scrutiny was unchanged over this period and there continued to be four Select Committees and one overarching Select Committee Chairmen and Vice Chairmen's Group.



Adults and Health Select Committee (AHSC)

Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (CFLLC)

Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee (CEHSC)

Resources and Performance Select Committee (R&P)

3. Committees continued to work to provide meaningful and constructive scrutiny input in the following areas:

- **pre-decision scrutiny** of upcoming cabinet decisions
- **policy development**, working with services to develop and shape policy and feeding in resident concerns.
- **performance monitoring**, reviewing service delivery improvements and outcomes for residents and monitoring the implementation of policies or decisions.

4. The four Select Committees held a total of 21 **public meetings to consider 49 substantive agenda items** comprising a mix of pre-decision scrutiny, policy development and performance updates. In addition, each Select Committee held a range of briefing sessions, workshops and site visits to improve their understanding of key issues and to facilitate scrutiny member input into the development of Council policy and thinking. Select Committees made 18 **reports to Cabinet** including several recommendations in the following areas aimed at improving outcomes for residents.

- CFLLC report to Cabinet on CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING (CFL) ADDITIONAL BUDGET ALLOCATION (June 2024)
- CFLLC report to Cabinet on SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (AP) CAPITAL PROGRAMMES AND SPECIALIST SUFFICIENCY TO 2031/32 (June 2024)
- R&P report to Cabinet on REPORT OF DIGITAL BUSINESS & INSIGHTS (DB&I) TASK GROUP (July 2024)

- CEHSC report to Cabinet on ROADS SAFE STRATEGY (July 2024)
- R&P - Report Of The Resources And Performance Select Committee to Cabinet on CUSTOMER TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (July 2024)
- AHSC & CFLLC Joint report to Cabinet on MINDWORKS AND THE NEURODEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAY (July 2024)
- CFLLC report to Cabinet on HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE (September 2024)
- RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE report to Cabinet on Project Libra (September 2024)
- CFLLC report to Cabinet on REPORT OF THE ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES: PARENT AND CARER EXPERIENCE TASK GROUP (September 2024) – Response to October Cabinet
- CEHSC report to Cabinet on Call-in of Cabinet decision, London Road Guildford Active Travel Scheme (November 2024)
- Joint Select Committees report to Cabinet on interim BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS (November 2024)
- CFLLC report to Cabinet on CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL (CNIS) (November 2024)
- Joint Select Committees report to Cabinet on SCRUTINY OF 2025/26 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2029/30 (December 2024)
- CFLLC report to Cabinet on ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (AP) (February 2025)
- RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE report to Cabinet on Customer Transformation Programme Update (February 2025)
- RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE report to Cabinet on Unit4/MySurrey Stabilisation Board Report (February 2025)
- CESHSC report to Cabinet on RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (April 2025)
- REPORT OF THE COUNCIL'S SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS GROUP to Cabinet on DEVOLUTION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (May 2025)

6. The following **Task Groups, Member Reference Groups and Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees** were also in operation:

- The Additional Needs and Disabilities: Parental Experience Task Group
- The Digital Business & Insights (DB&I) Programme Task Group
- The Greener Futures Reference Group
- The South-West London and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)
- Frimley Park Hospital Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)
- Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation Member Reference Group

Section 2: Scrutiny Impact

Key aspects of scrutiny activity carried out during 2024/25 are set out below based on the overarching aims for effective scrutiny set out in the Executive Scrutiny Protocol. Scrutiny may not always achieve direct identifiable impacts, sometimes its impact is more subtle creating momentum for long term change or adding pace and urgency to an already identified area for improvement. Even where a scrutiny does not lead to actionable recommendations, sessions still play a valuable role in raising public awareness, providing transparency and assurance to residents that community concerns are being addressed and assurance to the Council. This report reflects upon the tangible and intangible impacts of scrutiny.

“Do not underestimate the power of the intangible impact of scrutiny influencing governance, public trust, and decision-making in ways that are not always immediately visible – these are not necessarily measurable and at times they might be almost invisible but they do contribute to the value and impact of scrutiny.”

CfGS Practice Guide on Demonstrating Impact in Scrutiny

Scrutiny Aim: ‘Assist in the development of major, strategic policies’. Scrutiny should influence policy ideas and strategic proposals before they are finalised.

Select Committees have to do more than just scrutinise decisions after they have been taken. They must be involved early in the process to help shape policies and strategies and ensure that when decisions are made they have taken into account a wide range of views and perspectives. The following are examples of scrutiny’s involvement in shaping policies and approaches.

Road Safety Policy and Speed limits: In July 2024 the Community, Environment and Highways Select Committee scrutinised the Updated Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy and submitted a report to Cabinet with recommendations. This represented the culmination of a number of stages of engagement with scrutiny members in the development of the new road safety strategy and speed policy for Surrey. Through its multiple sessions including a session with the Police and external stakeholders, the Committee was able to influence the final policy. Recommendations were made to clarify the role of the local Councillor in 20mph scheme proposals and the process for local engagement and consultation plus more detailed targets to monitor progress and assess impact. In its response to the Committee in September 2024 Cabinet expressed gratitude for the work of the Select Committee in assisting in the development of the new Surrey RoadSafe Strategy and associated 20mph speed limit policy.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan: The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee reviewed the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) presented by the Cabinet Member for the Environment. The ROWIP contains the Council’s proposed actions to both maintain and improve rights of way in Surrey (including footpaths, bridleways, byways) to meet the public’s current and future needs. The session provided an opportunity to raise public awareness of the plan for maintaining and improving rights of way and for Councillors to provide feedback ahead of finalisation. Committee input resulted in agreement that there should be regular communications to councillors and the public highlighting progress, including where *rights of way* have been cleared and where this has enabled or underpinned other strategic objectives

such as Safe Routes to School and public health. A report was made to Cabinet with recommendations which were endorsed.

Review of patient access to Urgent and Emergency Care: The Adults and Health Select Committee held a session with Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust on work underway to standardise access to urgent and emergency care services for local people, specifically through the redesignation of Minor Injury Units/Walk in Centres (MIU/WICs) to Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs). The Committee wanted to understand the impacts on patient access to Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) and the challenges and benefits to this change. The session raised public awareness of the changes and provided assurance that these were being undertaken to simplify choice and improve access for patients to urgent and emergency care services. The Committee emphasised the importance of clear communication with the public and the need to evaluate and report back on improvements achieved, particularly in terms of health outcomes.

In December the CEH Select Committee scrutinised Surrey Fire and Rescue Service' (SFRS) **Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)**. This is the strategic plan for SFRS from 2025-2030 the aim of which is to balance current resources, ensuring that they are in the right place to provide fire and rescue cover for the whole of Surrey aligned to risk. The Committee provided scrutiny of the final proposals ahead of endorsement by Cabinet in January. The Committee encouraged the Fire Service to explore closer working relationships with Health partners and to continue to promote a preventative approach to risk.

Shaping the Budget: Select Committees were engaged early in the budget setting process. Following an initial budget briefing in July 2024, each Committee selected two areas for budget deep dive to explore in more detail specific risks and opportunities relating to the development of the 25/26 budget with support from Finance and Service officers. Interim recommendations arrived at following budget deep dives were submitted to Cabinet to consider alongside the draft budget proposals in November. This is the first year that Select Committees have formulated recommendations to Cabinet this early in the process, creating a greater opportunity to influence the final budget recommended to Council by Cabinet. Each Committee then held a public scrutiny session in December to consider the draft revenue and capital budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2029/30) with recommendations submitted to Cabinet on 17 December 2024.

Scrutiny Aim: 'Assist the Council in better understanding the views and concerns of local people.'

By investigating issues of concern to Surrey residents, scrutiny is an important tool through which the public can make their voice heard. The following are examples of how scrutiny has focused on issues of public concern over the past year bringing attention to priority matters for residents and achieving real benefits

Pediatric Cancer Care in Surrey: following a decision taken by NHS England in March 2024, that Evelina London Children's Hospital should be the future children's cancer centre for children living in south London and much of southeast England, the South West London & Surrey Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) wrote to the Secretary of State to request that he use his powers to *call in* the decision by NHS England to move the Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre (PTC) to Evelina. Having considered the available evidence, the Secretary of

State concluded that the criteria for ministerial intervention had not been met, nevertheless, JHOSC engagement in the issue delivered real results to address a number of priority areas of concern for Surrey and South West London residents associated with the move, including increased travel and parking costs. The Chair of the Adults and Health Select Committee (Trefor Hogg), a Member of the JHOSC reflected: *“We may not have got the hoped for call-in by the Secretary of State on Paediatric Cancer Care, but it has meant that significant improvements were made to accommodation and travel support for families of children being treated, improvements to the necessary transfer, more effort to treat patients near to home if possible, and better support for staff moving work location.”*

Children not in School: A scrutiny session on Children Not in School in Surrey explored how many children of statutory school age are not registered at school or suitably (electively) home educated, the range of reasons and the impact. This drew attention to a need to more closely monitor and drive up school attendance. The Service agreed to carry out further work to better understand the circumstances leading to absence, auditing and dip sampling on a regular basis, with particular attention being paid to vulnerable groups such as children with a social worker, those severely absent and those electively home educated.

EHCP Process and Recovery Plan: The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (CFLLC) held a session to review progress of the *Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Recovery Plan* which aimed to bring timeliness in line with statutory obligations, and reviewed lessons learned from an *End-to-End Review of the EHCP statutory process*. Scrutiny members applied pressure to ensure that improving communication was a cornerstone of the Service’s review of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process and recommended carrying out a golden thread analysis of touch points with parents and carers within the process. The Service looked at the key points when families need information and are building these into planning a parent portal project to allow greater parental oversight of the process and was encouraged not just to rely on complaints data as feedback on its EHCP improvements, but to actively seek parental feedback on whether their child’s outcomes have improved. The Service has since introduced a questionnaire to parents and carers to enable them to report their experiences at four points in the process. The Committee has over time maintained its interest and oversight in the timeliness of EHCPs, which has steadily increased since the issue was brought to the fore by the Committee in 2023 - 81% were completed on time in January 2025 compared with 16% in October 2023.

Mental Health: Adults and Health Select Committee (AHSC) maintained its thematic focus on mental health services to ensure that residents with mental health issues are adequately supported in Surrey. The Committee held an evidence session with Surrey County Council colleagues and the Chief Operating Officer at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SaBP) concerning *The Mental Health Improvement Plan*, to understand to understand the scale of the of people of working age in Surrey out of work because of mental health issues and to consider how these could be addressed to deliver improvements for residents, especially those experiencing the poorest health outcomes within the 21 Health and Wellbeing Strategy Key Neighbourhoods. This session enhanced public confidence in the work of the Council to reduce health inequalities and ensure no one is left behind. Separately, CFLLC and AHSC held a joint scrutiny session with the **Mindworks** service aimed at supporting Children and Young People’s emotional wellbeing and mental health in Surrey. Scrutiny members applied pressure to see improvements in the delivery of services to regain the confidence of parents and schools. A

number of recommendations were made. Both Committees continue to review progress and to maintain public pressure to deliver improvements.

Utilities Engagement and Streetworks: The Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee requested an update on efforts to improve strategic engagement with Surrey Utility companies and to deliver improvements in the management of utility company streetworks for the benefit of road users and residents. A Streetworks Taskforce was established in July 2024 on the recommendation of the scrutiny Committee following a series of sessions with private sector utility providers including Thames Water, National Grid, SES and others aimed at improving strategic engagement and addressing disruption caused by utility companies on Surrey roads. Surrey's Taskforce was referenced in Parliament as a leading example of efforts to improve coordination between utilities, local authorities and other stakeholders to minimise disruption to residents. The Committee heard that important outcomes had been achieved including a cross-sector Communications group to identify best practice and joint protocols to improve signage of works on the road network. The authorities engagement with water companies has also improved, leading to better responses to flood risk and supply enquiries.

Scrutiny Aim: Support the proportionate and productive review of performance.

Scrutiny should conduct proportionate and productive review of performance and finance information and provide meaningful challenge to service performance in identified areas of concern.

New Frimley Hospital:

Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust has been granted funding approval for a new state-of-the-art replacement for Frimley Park Hospital due to the fact that 65 per cent of the current hospital is made of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). A Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee was established to scrutinise this proposal, chaired by the AHSC Chair Trefor Hogg. The JHOSC met several times to hear from Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust and NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board on progress towards identifying a new hospital site. The Committee were updated on contingency planning and how the building is being kept safe and services maintained, as well as on the New Hospital Programme. The Committee probed risk management in relation to the RAAC maintenance works, transformation opportunities and received updates on the Frimley Park Hospital extension (M-Block) a new diagnostic centre. The Chair of the Adults and Health Select Committee and Chair of the JHOSC reflected that:

"This is an incredibly challenging project for Frimley Health that represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform services and position Frimley Park Hospital for the long term as an acute care centre of excellence."

Highways Maintenance: In April 2025 the Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee scrutinised the Highway Term Maintenance Contract Performance. This work is provided for the County Council by Ringway. The Committee has taken a long-standing interest in both Ringway and highway maintenance, including a detailed site visit to the Ringway Depot in July 2024. The Highway Term Maintenance Contract constitutes a significant outlay for the County Council as Ringway has addressed 144,000 potholes, winter gritting, 350,000 gully cleans, 227 miles of road resurfacing, and 94 miles of pavement works. Committee questioning probed

Ringway's ability to maintain quality and efficiency of operations and explored the key risks to Ringway's performance and the steps that the Council is taking to mitigate these. The session provided public transparency and assurance over performance, demonstrating that Ringway's performance is objectively good with the required standards mostly being met across most Performance Indicators each month with performance dips from time to time often due to external factors such as severe weather events.

Cancer and Elective Care Backlogs: The Adults and Health Select Committee took evidence from Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust and Frimley NHS Foundation Trust on Cancer and Elective Care Backlogs to scrutinise the progress made to address backlogs and the actions planned to reduce them further. The Committee provided public visibility of an important issue of concern to residents and sought reassurance that a process for reducing patient wait times was in progress. Future updates on the matter were requested.

Alternative Provision: The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (CFLLC) shone a spotlight on the issue of Alternative Provision (AP). This relates to the statutory duty on local authorities under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to arrange suitable and (normally) full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons, would not receive suitable education without such provision. Increased focused by the Service on reviewing individual support packages has led to good progress increasing the percentage of children receiving at least the 15-hour minimum a week education set by the Department for Education (45% up from 23% eight months earlier). The Committee returned to monitor progress on this issue in December to keep up momentum towards this goal. Scrutiny members encouraged the consideration of quality of provision. New guidance is now being produced for schools on roles and responsibilities for commissioning Alternative Provision.

Home to School Transport: At its July meeting Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (CFLLC) received an update report on the Home to School Travel Assistance (H2STA) Improvement Programme undertaken by the Surrey School Travel and Assessment Team (SSTAT) and the current performance of the service provided to children and young people in Surrey. Concerns were expressed around the ongoing budget deficit and communications between Council teams and parents. The Committee made recommendations to Cabinet. Subsequently the Surrey School Travel and Assessment Team have revised all aspects of their communications strategy, ensuring parents are better informed about what they are entitled to in terms of home to school travel assistance and should be informed well in advance of any changes being implemented. Recommendations also encouraged the school travel team to work more collaboratively with the SEND team. Family Voice Surrey surveys show a significant improvement in communicating transport arrangements in November 2024 compared with a year before.

Corporate Performance: The Resources & Performance Select Committee continued to monitor corporate performance in a number of important areas and to seek assurance that Best Value is being achieved in expensive Council programmes such as Customer Transformation. The Committee reinvigorated scrutiny involvement in Land and Property to ensure well-led services managing the council's assets and estate and that levels of risk to public money are appropriately managed. In October 2024 the Committee reviewed the annual report of the Strategic Investment Board, including consideration of the council's directly-held property portfolio and the property held in portfolio by Surrey Property Group, one of its Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCs).

Future work is planned including scrutiny of the Asset and Place Strategy and maintenance backlog, later in 2025.

Scrutiny Aim: Act as a strategic function of the Council bringing additional capacity and insight to help council understand and address complex problems

Digital Business and Insights (DB&I) Lessons Learned : A Task Group of the Resources and Performances Select Committee. Members conducted a 'Lessons Learned' analysis of the *MySurrey* ERP replacement project¹ with the aim of gaining an understanding of the factors that contributed to the delay in the implementation of the Unit4 product, the additional cost to the Council, and what could have been done to avoid this outcome. The programme suffered a large increase in budget, with an end cost to the Council of £27.9m against an initial budget of £16.6m. 'Go-live' was originally intended for December 2021 and eventually achieved in June 2023, some 18 months behind the original target date. Additional technical and '*business-as-usual*' support was required to resolve a significant number of problems post-project implementation, particularly in Payroll. The review found that a lack of understanding of the complexity of the project at the outset, was at the heart of the delay and overspend that the Council incurred. The original implementation timeline and expectation of 15 months was unrealistic and proved damaging. Business readiness emerged as the key issue which could have made a material difference to the time required to complete the project and its eventual cost. Cost and time pressures damaged stage control and resulted in a tendency to progress through programme stages with issues unresolved, or to run core project stages concurrently, which caused further problems. The Task Group reported to Cabinet in July 2024, making 18 recommendations intended to ensure the Council did not make similar mistakes in future projects.


Additional needs and disabilities: parent/carer experience - The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee completed a Task Group on the experience of parents and carers of children with additional needs and disabilities. The Committee heard from residents first-hand through focus groups with parents and carers, enabling the report to provide valuable insight into the perceived barriers encountered by service users in accessing support for their children. The task group report provided insight into the viewpoints of parents and carers for consideration by the Service in its concurrent review of the EHCP process and assisted the Council's corporate priority of empowering communities. The Task Group identified a number of changes and improvements required to better support the families in their quest to meet the educational needs of children with *additional needs*. Improving communications with parents emerged as a key area for improvement. A report was made to Cabinet with recommendations many of which are being, or are due to be, delivered. This includes the additional recruitment of case officers and a mandatory SEND qualification for all case officers, giving greater transparency of the Education Governance Board's decision-making process, and taking a more person-centred approach to communications. The Task Group's work received recognition from the academic community, with one lecturer writing to the Committee to corroborate its findings and applaud their efforts, particularly in enabling parent and case officer voices to be heard.

¹ Enterprise Resource Planning software is a category of business management software that typically integrates organisations' key functions such as payroll, HR and employee data

Section 3: Select Committee Reflections

This section includes reflections from the Chairs of the Select Committees and highlights other areas of Committee work not already covered in the report.

Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee

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|  | <p>Chair's Reflections: Councillor Keith Witham</p> <p><i>"I am pleased that the Committee has continued to focus on priority matters of importance to our residents, especially Highways maintenance and the state of Surrey's roads, verges and rights of way and that we have been able to provide reassurance to the public that improvements are being made.</i></p> <p><i>The Committee has contributed to the development of a number of Council policies and strategies and continues to advocate for progress towards climate change goals.</i></p> <p><i>It has been rewarding to see that the Committee's interest in utilities engagement and joint working has given impetus to Council efforts to improve collaboration with private sector partners on issues such as sustainable development, green infrastructure and planning issues; and to see that the Streetworks Taskforce recommended by this Committee is delivering real improvements in joint working and best practice around roadworks and signage to minimise disruption to residents."</i></p> |
| <p>Additional Hilights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Change and Climate Adaptation: The Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee maintained its focus on environmental issues and climate change which continue to poll as matters of importance to residents. In October 2024, the Committee scrutinised progress against the Climate Change Delivery Plan and asked Cabinet to reconfirm its commitment to achieving the 2030 and 2050 Net Zero targets. A scrutiny session was held on the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy with a report provided by the Flood and Climate Resilience Team, updating on progress progress and actions on climate change adaptation.• SFRS Performance: The Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee (CEHSC) continued to review the performance of the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) in biannual performance monitoring sessions and to monitor progress addressing recommendations from the inspection carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). | |

Adults and Health Select Committee



Chair's Reflections: Councillor Trefor Hogg

"The Health and Social Care landscape is of course vast and complex with many interactions and a potentially infinite demand for services. Our approach throughout must concentrate on the issues that have major impact on residents, and we must maintain our position as a "critical friend" who aims to help providers deliver better outcomes for residents by guiding those providers. Sometimes, it is the questions we ask that form that guidance by pointing providers to issues they have missed or not given priority to, and sometimes the guidance becomes more formal as recommendations. The point is that just by making our presence known and felt we can help create a shift of direction toward better outcomes. Publicising what is being looked at also helps the public become part of that interaction. It isn't always something large, it can be the cumulative effect of many small decisions being improved because the decision makers knew their decisions were likely to be brought out into the open and discussed."

Additional Highlights:

- The Committee drew attention to the **Joint Health and Social Care Dementia Strategy for Surrey 2022/27** which involves collaboration between this Council, Surrey and Borders NHS Partnerships Trust, and Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust. The Committee scrutinised the need for further work to be undertaken to analyse dementia diagnosis rates by GPs at practice levels, and to further explore and act on any unexpected variation, particularly within Surrey's priority populations who are often overlooked and often most at risk of experiencing poorer health outcomes.
- The Committee scrutinised the implementation of **Right Care Right Person (RCRP)** in Surrey and made recommendations aimed at emphasising the importance of all parties agreeing on a common approach to monitoring and identifying and preventing vulnerable people being subjected to less-than-optimal support.

Children's Families and Lifelong Learning Select Committee



Chair's Reflections: Councillor Fiona Davidson

"The focus of the Committee in the past year has been on scrutinising how policy and practice impacts on the lives of children, young people and families.

We have heard moving stories of the impact of failures with SEND provision and Alternative Provision on the well-being and mental health of some of the most vulnerable residents in our county. We have learned how mainstream schools struggle with children who cannot cope with emotional and sensory overload. We have celebrated and commended significant progress on Home to School Transport, but we have been disappointed that so many of our recommendations in other areas have either not been accepted, have been watered down, or are taking an extraordinarily long time to deliver. We were particularly disappointed that only 4 of the 22 recommendations of the SEND Task and Finish Group's recommendations were fully accepted, given the very positive reception to the report from key stakeholders.

Select Committee scrutiny can provide powerful insight and intelligence from the real world in which Councillors interact with their communities on a daily basis. We look forward to continuing the vital role of providing a voice for residents."

Additional Highlights:

- **Family centres**, which support families to find solutions to parenting and relationships challenges, are now able to apply for an uplift to cover inflationary pressures in the next financial year, after the Committee successfully recommended in the previous year that a mechanism for ensuring providers could apply for uplifts was built into the lifetime of all contracts.
- **Preparing for Adulthood** events, a highly valued source of information for parents which had ceased, are taking place again this year at the Committee's request.

Resources & Performance Select Committee



Chair's Reflections: Councillor Bob Hughes

"Many of the areas the Committee scrutinises are about the mechanics of running a complex Council, but they all impact on the people of Surrey.

We have continued to keep a close eye on the progress of the My Surrey IT system with all its complications and delays. The Committee recognises the importance of making it a system that will make administering the Council's resources smoother,

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| | <p><i>consistent and will be able to facilitate the local government changes.</i></p> <p><i>The property portfolio is complex and subject to a volatile property market. We continue to monitor the work of the Surrey Property Group's value and activity on behalf of council Tax payers.</i></p> <p><i>We monitor the customer facing help desks and responses to queries from residents. We will continue to monitor the transformation of the various customer services to ensure value for money, sustainability of changes and the speed and quality of responses. All this with an eye to local government reforms coming along quickly."</i></p> |
| <p>Additional Hilights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee maintained oversight of the Council Customer Transformation Programme with a focus on monitoring the risks inherent in delivering complex programmes. A report and recommendations were made to Cabinet requesting a review of any future spending and investment in light of local government reform. • The Committee provided continued oversight and scrutiny of Unit4/My Surrey performance in the context of the ongoing challenges and work to resolve issues and stabilise the platform. The Committee highlighted its continued concern to the executive about the number and nature of outstanding issues, the cost and impacts to the council and its staff. | |

Section 4: Update on areas for development identified in 2023/24 and Scrutiny function improvements

Last year's annual report identified the following priorities for improvement:

- i) Improve Work Programming & horizon scanning** embedding a more consistent and proactive approach across all Committees to ensure that scrutiny is focused on strategically important issues, issues of major concern to residents and aligned with Executive decision making; and that the role of Members to regularly review and challenge the work programme is understood and enacted.
- ii) Continue to increase public participation and engagement of external bodies and organisations** in scrutiny to increase stakeholder engagement and understanding of issues of concern.
- iii) Secure additional training and development** on scrutiny methodologies and best practice from an external provider in relation to Financial Scrutiny and Task and Finish Groups.

Important steps have been taken to improve the scrutiny function with a specific focus on increasing joint working between scrutiny and the executive to identify areas where limited scrutiny resource can add value for the benefit of the Council and to improve business planning and timely identification of issues for pre scrutiny or policy development. New arrangements were introduced for quarterly planning meetings between Committee Chairs, Cabinet Members and Corporate Leadership and strengthened at working level through improved relationships and more regular engagement between scrutiny officers and directorate business managers. This has resulted in improvements to work programming and horizon scanning and a more collaborative One Council approach.

Efforts have been made to increase public participation and external engagement in scrutiny activity. A notable success includes the involvement of parents and carers in the Additional Needs and Disabilities Task Group. Scrutiny members received training in Budget Scrutiny and ongoing financial monitoring from industry experts at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and refresher training was also provided on scrutiny methods and selection criteria to focus limited scrutiny resource on issues of strategic importance.

Scrutiny evaluation to understand impact

In addition to the areas identified in last years annual report, improvements have also been made in scrutiny evaluation. A new informal end-of year assessment process was introduced to consider the impact of scrutiny in the different select committees, including tangible and intangible impacts and the extent to which recommendations were implemented. This has led to improved appreciation of the need for scrutiny activity to deliver benefits, a more nuanced understanding of the range of scrutiny impacts not just in terms of changing policy or shaping decisions but also in raising public awareness and confidence in the work of the Council and its understanding of the concerns of residents. The process helped identify further areas for improvement in future years

elaborated below including the need for more robust monitoring of the implementation of scrutiny recommendations.

Meaningful challenge to service performance

Improvements have also been identified to standardise **performance monitoring** across Select Committees and increase the regularity with which performance against priority performance indicators is monitored at public scrutiny sessions. A new cross-Council approach is being implemented for quarterly assurance reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny which will bring specific benefits to the Adults and Health Select Committee and Communities Environment and Highways Select Committee who receive less regular performance information than the other Committees. Work is underway to resolve outstanding issues relating to the continued provision of valued performance information to CFLLC and R&P.

Looking forward

How we can improve

In the same way that scrutiny seeks to ensure continuous improvement in the services reviewed to ensure that they meet the changing challenges they face, Select Committees themselves need to look at how they work to ensure that they provide a valuable resource and maximize their effectiveness. This section outlines some of the improvement areas identified for the coming year and explains the priorities for the Scrutiny Team in Democratic Services in supporting that improvement process.

More robust monitoring of Select Committee recommendations– Although many scrutiny recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, it is not always clear if a recommendation is endorsed, not endorsed or endorsed in part. Further clarity on this is needed. There is also a need for more robust monitoring of the implementation of recommendations so that Committees can truly understand their impact. Committee ‘recommendations trackers’ are in place but are not always actively monitored by members to assess whether further actions or follow-up may be required. It is worth noting that there is variation in when Select Committees make formal recommendations to Cabinet (via a cabinet report), with some recommendations submitted more informally in direct correspondence to Officers and individual Cabinet Members where they fall below a certain threshold of significance or action.

Developing actionable recommendations: Developing meaningful evidenced and actionable recommendations continues to present a challenge. This is easier in the case of longer in depth Task and Finish type reviews which allow for careful consideration of a range of evidence. Developing recommendations from a single scrutiny evidence session is more challenging, particularly where Chairs wish to formalise recommendations in Committee. Additional guidance has been included in the Executive Scrutiny Protocol and this will be a continued area of focus for scrutiny.

Increased public engagement and opportunities for external stakeholders to contribute to the scrutiny process. The scrutiny team will continue to work with Members to increase the number of opportunities engage the public and partners in scrutiny either through formal public

sessions, informal meetings in different venues or by ensuring accessibility of reports. It is important that scrutiny Members hear evidence from a range of people, not just Surrey County Council Officers. Scrutiny needs to continue to identify opportunities to engage external stakeholders to add to the breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the issues that come to scrutiny.