

Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

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23 May 2023

Surrey County Council Scrutiny Review

- All of this year's meetings in public have taken place in-person at Woodhatch but Select Committees continue to use remote video technology to hold all sorts of preparatory meetings and witness sessions.
- Select Committees continue to conduct pre-decision scrutiny of the most important executive decisions and make reports to Cabinet.
- Select Committees have improved their use of external witnesses to complement the evidence gathered from within the Council.
- Scrutineers have engaged with a number of issues of high importance including children's services improvement, home to school travel assistance, mental health services, access to primary care, the Greener Futures programme and the council's budget setting.
- The Council's budget setting process this year included three briefing stages for each of the Select Committees before four formal sessions in December.

Outputs 2022/23

- The four Select Committees held a total of **21 public meetings to consider 68 substantive scrutiny items** with a continued focus on pre-decision scrutiny.
- Select Committees made frequent use of informal, online meetings to receive briefings on new or complex policy areas before formal scrutiny.
- Select Committees made **11 reports to Cabinet totalling 53 recommendations**, the majority of which were accepted by the Cabinet.
- We have run three task & finish groups this year on: Adult Learning, Health Inequalities and the cross-committee Budget Task Group.
- Select Committees also used a number of sub-groups to stay in touch with officers on ongoing scrutiny topics e.g. the Greener Futures climate change work and to monitor service performance.

Adults and Health

- 1. Mental Health Improvement Plan:** The committee held two formal meeting items (June 2022, October 2022) to examine improvements to Mental Health Services and the degree to which Mental Health Task Group recommendations are being implemented. The committee recommended the collation and sharing of data to indicate areas of need and to inform prioritisation exercises.
- 2. All-Age Autism Strategy:** The committee held a formal meeting item in June 2022 to examine the effectiveness of the various workstreams. It recommended further improvements to reduced waiting times for diagnoses and increased employability prospects for residents with Learning Disabilities & Autism.
- 3. Mindworks:** In collaboration with the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee, the committee held a formal meeting item on Children's Mental Health Services in February 2022; during which both committees recommended for the formulation of SMART Performance Metrics to measure the performance of Children's Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Services.
- 4. Access to GPs:** The committee held a formal meeting item on this in April 2023, whereby improvements to GP access were reviewed. The committee recommended for the swift rollout of Cloud-Based Telephony Systems and enhanced support for vulnerable residents, including those with limited technology access.
- 5. Access to Dentistry:** The committee held a formal meeting item on this in February 2023, the timing of which was crucial given the delegation of dentistry commissioning from NHS England to regional Integrated Care Systems. The committee recommended for increased access to NHS Dentistry for vulnerable residents and for improvements to NHS contracts to encourage Dentists to perform NHS treatments.
- 6. Accommodation with Care & Support Strategy:** The committee held an extra-formal meeting in November 2022 to examine the provision and expansion of Extra Care & Supported Independent Living Accommodation.

Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture

1. The Committee recommended changes to the reporting the outcomes of **children's home inspections** to Members; these are now routinely shared on the Members' Portal following a review of the closure of a home in Surrey.
2. The Committee reviewed and endorsed the Council's strategic approach to growing capacity in children's homes, with the aim that 80 per cent of Surrey's Looked After Children live in the county.
3. The **Committee's Performance Sub-Group** developed a set of key indicators measuring Children's Services progress against Ofsted recommendations following the January 2022 inspection. The Directorate agreed to share an overview of performance data at every formal meeting, including external assessment ratings and turnover of social workers and foster carers.
4. The Committee is involved in a **Local Government Association pilot training offer to help improve scrutiny effectiveness**. Members received feedback on an observed formal meeting and took part in workshops on best practice and work programming.
5. The Cabinet agreed to incorporate several recommendations made by the Committee into the **Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy 2023–2026**, including producing an easy-read version and a series of webinars for parent carers.

Continued

6. In recognition of the challenge of **recruiting social care staff**, Members made a series of visits to quadrants where they met with service managers and social workers to better understand the issues they face. Multiple resulting recommendations on stabilising the children's social care workforce were welcomed by Cabinet and led to, for example, guidance supported by trade unions for staff experiencing discrimination and every single leaver offered a face-to-face exit interview with a colleague of their choice. There was also additional funding for recruitment and retention in the 2023/24 budget following the Committee's recommendation that these should be prioritised.
7. Against a backdrop of labour and skills shortages and the cost-of-living crisis, a Committee Task Group on **adult learning and skills** has taken evidence from Surrey Adult Learning, South Orbital College Group and Surrey Chambers of Commerce and is finalising its report.
8. Members collaborated with the Adults and Health Select Committee to review the children's emotional wellbeing and mental health services provided by **Mindworks** Surrey.
9. The Committee looked at the impact of home to school transport pressures on families, and many of its recommended amendments to the **Home to School Travel Assistance Policy** were agreed by Cabinet. These include a commitment that all parent carers in receipt of a mileage allowance are, as a general rule, paid for a return rather than one-way journey to the child's setting, backdating this policy to September 2022 and reimbursing recipients.

Communities, Environment & Highways

1. The committee has kept an overview role with regard to the Council's **Greener Futures** programme overing its views to officers through regular meetings of a Member Reference Group.
2. It also has had sub-groups meet on the **Highways Maintenance Contract** over a number of years and on **Electric Vehicle Charging**.
3. The committee has made recommendations to Cabinet on a broad range of topics: *Your Fund Surrey, Greener Futures, the Skills Plan for Surrey, Surrey Strategy for Accommodation, Housing & Homes and Delivering in Partnership – Towns Approach*.
4. The committee held **performance reviews** of the Surrey Fire & Rescue Service and Environment, Transport and Infrastructure.
5. Another key topics for the committee have been **transport** with a focus on the future of bus services and the potential for a **devolution** deal for Surrey.

Resources and Performance

1. All four select committees were briefed on the **budget-setting process** earlier in the year, in July, and following the Committee's scrutiny of the Council's draft 2023-24 budget, Cabinet agreed to also undertake initial equality analysis earlier in the budget-setting process for 2024-25, enabling potential likely impacts and mitigations to be shared with select committees in December.
2. Three meetings of the **Budget Task Group** held throughout the year took a deep dive into the financial positions of all directorates and discussed the impact on services and residents of increasing rates of inflation.
3. The Committee considered a **responsible tax conduct motion** referred by Council and, in agreement with its recommendations, the Council signed up to the Fair Tax Declaration, with certain exceptions.
4. The Committee held four **performance monitoring sessions**, reviewing key performance indicators to monitor the services under its remit.
5. The Committee has supported the Council's **Agile Office Strategy**, which seeks to reduce costs and environmental impact.
6. The Committee has also had an overview of **workforce challenges** and the rollout of digital infrastructure in Surrey, and has asked the service to produce a business plan for the Council's **Data Strategy Transformation Programme**.
7. The Committee heard evidence from Citizens Online and is to nominate Members to engage with their work on minimising **digital exclusion**. It has asked for a commitment from Cabinet to ensure that an alternative form of contact to online remains available while their work is ongoing.

Task & Finish Groups

1. Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee - Adult Learning & Skills Task Group: Against a backdrop of labour and skills shortages and the cost-of-living crisis, a Committee Task Group on adult learning and skills has taken evidence from Surrey Adult Learning, South Orbital College Group and Surrey Chambers of Commerce and is finalising its report.

2. Adults and Health Select Committee - Health Inequalities Task Group: aligned its research with the Health & Wellbeing Strategy by narrowing its focus to three priority population groups:

1. *Ethnic Minority Groups.*
2. *Residents experiencing Homelessness.*
3. *Residents experiencing Domestic Abuse.*

The group found through numerous witness sessions that these groups have increased susceptibility to poorer Health Outcomes, and therefore aims to highlight the health disadvantages experienced by these group and to make recommendations to address these. The Task Group expects to submit its final report by June 2023.

The Future of Surrey County Council Overview & Scrutiny

- To continue the improvements to the function in 2023/24 a number of areas of focus have been identified by Members and in having due regard to the statutory guidance:
 - Offering training and development on the role and purpose of scrutiny via an external provider for Members and Officers.
 - Increasing public participation in scrutiny processes as witnesses, co-optees and through stakeholder engagement in the development of committee forward work programmes.
 - Broadening the scope of our scrutiny methods to include meetings in the community, increased use of data and novel ways of working such ‘scrutiny in a day’ reviews and the continued use of remote meeting technology.

Next Steps

- Regular Select Committee update at three Council meetings per year.
- Implement a training and induction programme for Members and Officers in early summer.
- Planning sessions with new committee memberships in June and July to set relevant forward work programmes that align with Council priorities.

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