



OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

For Council to review the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 at Annex A offering feedback and comments as appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

This report provides a summary of scrutiny work over the financial year 2023/2024, highlighting areas of impact and good practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Council:

1. Notes the summary of scrutiny activity provided and the key areas of impact highlighted in the report (para 10-32).
2. Notes the work of the Southwest London and Surrey Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (para 25) and endorses the decision to submit a joint request to the Secretary of State to consider a call-in.
3. Further notes that the Constitution will be updated to take account of changes to Health Scrutiny legislation and updated statutory guidance which removes local authority powers of referral to the Secretary of State replacing them with the current system whereby all interested parties can write to request that the Secretary of State consider calling in a proposal via a call-in request form.
4. Supports the areas of improvement identified by the report (para 33-34).

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Introduction

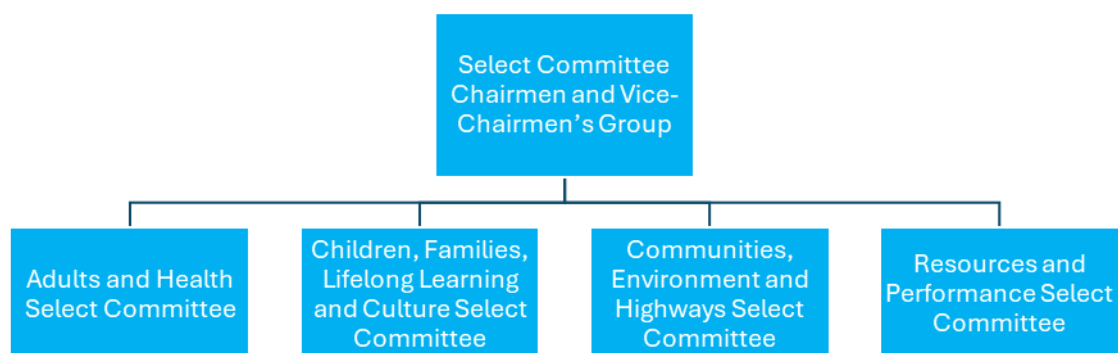
“Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions the executive is planning to take, those it plans to implement, and those that have already been taken/implemented.” - Statutory guidance on Overview & Scrutiny 2024

1. Scrutiny is an essential part of good governance and local democracy. The requirement for councils in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Statutory guidance¹ from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities describes the role of scrutiny committees and highlights their importance and legitimacy in law to act as a check and balance on the executive, to hold it to account, and to challenge and support it to deliver what residents need.

Overview of Scrutiny Activity 2023/24

“When scrutiny is conducted properly it is constructive and focuses on the priorities of local people”.

2. 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.



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

¹ [Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/Overview_and_scrutiny_statutory_guidance_for_councils_combined_authorities_and_combined_county_authorities.pdf)

- **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 72 substantive agenda items** comprising a mix of pre-decision scrutiny, policy development and performance updates. In addition, 3 private witness sessions were arranged to facilitate discussions with external organisations and campaign groups on the subjects of Road Safety and Speed Limit policy and working with Surrey Utility providers. The outcome of private sessions were reported to Cabinet to enable public transparency with recommendations published in the usual way and discussions held at public Cabinet meetings. Taken together the number of **scrutiny witness sessions facilitated and delivered increased by 14% on last year**. 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.

“The principal power of a scrutiny committee is to influence the policies and decisions made by the council and other organisations involved in delivering public services”.

5. Select Committees made **7 reports to Cabinet** including several recommendations in the following areas aimed at improving services to residents.

- Report of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group, June 2023
Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee
- Report on the New Draft Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy and 20 mph Speed Limit Policy, Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee, December 2023
- Report on Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report & HMICFRS Inspection: Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee, December 2023
- Joint Committee Report on Scrutiny of Draft Revenue & Capital Budget 2024/25 And Medium-Term Financial Strategy To 2028/29, December 2023
- Joint Committee Report on Scrutiny of Draft Revenue & Capital Budget 2024/25 And Medium-Term Financial Strategy To 2028/29, January 2024
- Report on Surrey Utilities – Water and Wastewater Services
Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee, December 2023

- Report on Council Motion on ‘Advertising & Sponsorship Policy’ Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee’s Greener Futures Reference Group, December 2023

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

- The Adult Learning and Skills Task Group
- The Additional Needs and Disabilities: Parental Experience Task Group
- The Digital Business & Insights (DB&I) Programme Task Group
- The Greener Futures Reference Group
- The cross-committee Budget Task Group
- The South-West London and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The Health Inequalities Task Group

7. In addition, the Communities Environment and Highways Select Committee established an additional workstream on Utilities, comprising a series of Special Committee sessions with Utility providers. Surrey also took the lead in establishing a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) to provide scrutiny of the Frimley Park Hospital Programme.

8. The last annual scrutiny report set out an objective to broaden the scope of **scrutiny methods** to include meetings in the community, increased use of data and novel ways of working including ‘scrutiny in a day’ reviews and the continued use of remote meeting technology to facilitate subject briefings or performance monitoring between public sessions. Responding to this objective, Committees undertook a range of scrutiny activity with briefings arranged on various topics including the Streets and Environment Services Task and Finish outputs, the Transformation Programme, the Youth Justice Plan, Family Safeguarding Model and Intensive Family Support Service. Scrutiny Member **visits** were arranged to the Surrey Fire and Rescue training facility, to the play for disabled children charity *Challengers*, the Corporate Parenting Commissioning team and Carrington School to see its new specialist school satellite hub. A visit to the Ringway depot at Meroo Guildford was arranged to take place in July 2024. Officers facilitated a **workshop** with scrutiny members to enable input into the developing approach to ‘Partnership in Towns’.

Adding Value – Scrutiny Impact and Outcomes
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“The purpose of scrutiny is to improve the lives of local people through improved public services” (A councillor’s workbook on scrutiny)

9. It is important to be able to demonstrate that scrutiny work adds value and makes a difference to local people. This section provides a summary of the key impact and outcomes of the work of the different Select Committees over the 2023/24 Municipal year.

Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

10. An Adult Learning and Skills Task Group made 20 recommendations on changes to adult learning and skills policy and provision in order to reach unskilled and economically inactive communities in Surrey, address an imbalance between types of provision in the East and West of Surrey and deliver relevant environmental commitments.

11. Shaping the Budget: Not wanting to bring forward historic overspends, and recognising the significant increased demand for statutory services, as part of its 2024/25 Budget scrutiny the Committee strongly argued for a budget envelope increase of £30m. Invited by the Leader to give its opinion on how additional funding from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities should be allocated, the Committee advocated for preventative services including additional support in schools for neurodiverse children and social worker recruitment and retention. A 2023/24 cut in funding for community-based play and leisure schemes for children with disabilities was also reversed for the following year after sustained pressure from the Committee to restore capacity.

12. Travel Assistance: Children and young people starting school in September 2024 who have applied for travel assistance, will now have their travel arrangements confirmed up to seven days before the start of term, as recommended by the Committee in December 2023. The Service also agreed to monitor the confirmation of travel arrangements within 10 working days for in-year requests.

13. EHCPs: Following the Committee's highlighting of an EHCP timeliness issue, Cabinet agreed additional funding for educational psychologists and increased SEN service capacity, which is helping to reduce the EHC Needs Assessments backlog. Additional needs metrics and performance data monitoring the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan timeliness recovery plan were added to the datapack received at each public Committee meeting. Also at the Committee's recommendation, the Service commissioned Internal Audit to undertake a dip sample audit of responses to parents and schools over a period of one month, in order to identify the quality and timeliness of communication on the subject of EHCPs. As a result, communication was recognised as an area in need of improvement and worked on as one of the key workstreams in the EHCP process end-to-end review and a SEND helpdesk call centre was established.

14. Additional Needs and Disabilities Task Group: An Additional Needs and Disabilities Task Group was established aimed at improving the support of and communication with parents and carers. Members have interviewed a case officer from each quadrant, held focus groups with 23 parents and carers, joined an ATLAS session to speak with young people and surveyed all Members on their SEND casework. Its report will go to Cabinet in the autumn.

15. Foster Care: The Committee encouraged the launch of the Foster Carer Charter, invited Surrey County Fostering Association to speak and compiled

15 suggestions to help recruit and retain foster carers in Surrey. Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting agreed to set up a working group, comprising children's social workers and foster carers and empower it to explore how relationships between these key stakeholders in the fostering process can be improved.

16. Alternative Provision: The Committee recommended criteria to measure the outcomes of individuals using alternative provision (AP), including how many are successfully reintegrated into education, educational attainment, and employment destinations. The Service agreed to develop KPIs to measure AP outcomes and also to work with Family Voice Surrey to co-produce guidance for parents making it clear when the Local Authority should consider making alternative provision for children.

Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee

17. Improving engagement with Utilities and outcomes for residents: The Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee initiated a series of special sessions with Surrey utility providers aimed at improving strategic engagement and delivering improvements for Surrey residents. Following a session with Water and Wastewater Utility companies including Thames Water, South East Water, SES, Affinity Water and Water Resources South East, the Committee made recommendations to Cabinet which were accepted. This included the establishment of a Task Force to deliver:

- Better coordination and communication around operational works on the road network.
- Better coordination between the local authority and water companies on flooding, drainage, sustainable solutions and environmental objectives.
- Better coordination on planning, new developments and strategic network.

Engagement by the Committee with private sector operators helped open channels of communication and provide a mandate for Council officers in seeking improvements for residents.

18. Streetworks: The Committee established itself as a champion for streetworks improvements for residents following a further session with Energy Utility providers. This captured a range of outcomes and outputs including greater sharing of information with distributed network operators (DNOs) on planning development opportunities; exploration of financial incentives for operators to work collaboratively with other utilities to minimise streetworks disruption; improved visibility and sharing of information prior to works commencing; and further engagement between the Council and Energy Utilities providers to improve communications with residents on streetworks.

19. Road Safety Strategy: The Committee engaged multiple stakeholders and interviewed a range of witnesses over several sessions to review speed limit policy and the Council's evolving Road Safety Strategy. A report was

submitted to Cabinet in December which expressed concerns about funding and urged further work to clarify the process of local community engagement. Cabinet welcomed the Committee's involvement which had a material impact in engaging important stakeholders and shaping the development of the Council's approach to 20 mph speed limits.

20. Highways Maintenance Services: The Committee scrutinised changes to Streets and Environment Services following the cabinet-led Task and Finish programme and continued to challenge improvements in highways maintenance services. The Committee reserved its right to schedule a special session to scrutinise the performance of Ringway and the Council's ability and effectiveness in managing that contract if it were not reassured following a visit scheduled early in the 2024 municipal year.

Adults and Health Select Committee

21. A Health Inequalities Task Group contributed to a better understanding of health inequalities in Surrey. This group reviewed the experience of individuals from BAME/GRT Communities, individuals experiencing Homelessness, Drug, and Alcohol abuse, and individuals experiencing Domestic Abuse and made 21 recommendations aimed at reducing health inequalities in Surrey.

22. Mindworks: Members collaborated with the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee to jointly scrutinise Children's Mental Health Services and the Mindworks' strategy to address the large backlog of children and young people with neurodiverse conditions waiting for diagnosis and treatment in Surrey. The Committees were not reassured that Mindworks has a strategy to handle the current situation and made several recommendations requiring Mindworks to demonstrate how it will regain the confidence of parents and schools and to publish its transformation improvement plan. Further scrutiny is planned once this has taken place. The Select Committee Chairs raised their concerns at May Council AGM and a further report of the Select Committees will be submitted to Cabinet in July 2024.

23. Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) – Frimley Park Hospital: The Council approved the establishment of the JHOSC for Frimley Park Hospital 19 March 2024. The JHOSC will operate formally as a statutory joint committee for the purposes of providing independent scrutiny to the Frimley Park programme. Frimley Park Hospital needs to be replaced because it was built in the 1970s using Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), which makes up around 65 per cent of the current hospital. The Trust have been included in the government's New Hospital Programme, which will see them build a new state-of-the-art replacement for Frimley Park Hospital by 2030. JHOSC Membership comprises Hampshire County Council, Surrey County Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council. The JHOSC will be hosted by Surrey County Council who led preparations for the first meeting of the JHOSC on 17 May 2024. Further meetings are planned in 2024 to scrutinise potential sites for relocation.

24. Reshaped Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships (AWHP) Transformation Programme: The Select Committee scrutinised Healthwatch Surrey on Discharge to Assess processes. Some of the issues raised in reports by residents were concerning poor communication. The Committee were informed that this would be addressed as part of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships (AWHP) Transformation Programme which the Committee requested to review to ensure alignment with the service's desired outcomes for Surrey residents.

25. South West London & Surrey JHOSC: The work of the South West London (SWL) and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) continued. This was established by the Local Authorities of London Borough of Croydon, London Borough of Merton, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, Surrey County Council, London Borough of Sutton, London Borough of Wandsworth, and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames to respond to consultation on proposals for substantial variation in very specialised paediatric cancer care affecting more than one local authority area and specific plans to move the Very Specialised Paediatric Cancer Care planned by NHS England, to the Evelina Hospital instead of either retaining the current Primary Treatment Centre based in the Royal Marsden Hospital (Sutton) supported by St George's Hospital Tooting, or the proposed alternative Primary Treatment Centre of St George's Hospital Tooting. The view of JHOSC members including Surrey is that the change will result in a lesser service to residents which will prove damaging to the specialised paediatric cancer care required for some of our most vulnerable residents. On this basis JHOSC authority members have agreed to jointly submit a request the Secretary of State to consider calling in the decision. **Council is invited to endorse this decision.**

26. An informal letter of intent has already been sent to the Secretary of State signed by all relevant authority leaders including the leader of Surrey County Council. Legal Counsel is preparing the joint request to be submitted following the election.

Resources & Performance Select Committee

27. Mitigating risks associated with staff turnover: The Committee made recommendations aimed at reducing voluntary turnover in the organisation and minimising resulting disruption. These included encouraging take-up of exit interviews and increasing the exit survey response rate, researching what Local Authorities with a declining voluntary turnover had done to achieve the trend, line managers giving leavers time to prepare a handover and ensuring an out of office reply that provides contact details of the leaver's successor.

28. Improving Accessibility: It also advised that the budget for reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities should not be finite and received assurance that all demand in this area is being met. On identifying that people with impaired vision were facing issues navigating Woodhatch, the Committee recommended representatives from Surrey Coalition of Disabled

People be given tours of Surrey County Council's corporate hubs in order to identify what challenges they encountered. This led to a schedule of works to improve accessibility, and the Coalition was invited back along with the Committee Chairman to inspect the works carried out.

29. Commercial Property: The Committee scrutinised the performance of the Council's trading companies, particularly its commercial property portfolio, which remained profitable. As part of its 2024/25 budget scrutiny it suggested the disposal of certain vacant property and, noting that the agile office strategy represents a reduction in offices, recommended this approach was kept firmly on track.

30. Removal of the payroll service to academies: After the Committee reviewed the Council's removal of the payroll service to academies, the Council agreed with its recommendations to consult stakeholders affected by a Cabinet decision before a decision is made, and that Cabinet decisions directly affecting stakeholders should be shared with them all at the earliest opportunity and at the same time as each other.

31. A Digital Business and Insights Task Group captured lessons learned from the implementation of the new MySurrey Enterprise Resource Planning software system. Members interviewed many people involved in the project to gain insight into their understandings of why the programme encountered difficulties, and produced a draft report making 16 recommendations intended to help strengthen the Council's processes for future projects. This report will be considered by Cabinet in July 2024.

Call-in

32. Scrutiny committees have the power to 'call in' cabinet decisions and to ask the executive to reconsider them before they are implemented. Cabinet members, officers and select committees continued to work constructively together to ensure early scrutiny involvement in the decision-making process and appropriate pre-decision scrutiny of upcoming cabinet decisions. As a result there were no call-ins during this period.

Improvements to the Scrutiny Function 2024/25

“When scrutiny is conducted properly it is constructive and focuses on the priorities of local people”. (A councillor's workbook on scrutiny)

33. To continue improvements to the function in 2024/25 and beyond a number of areas of focus have been identified by Members and officers. These are set out below. Local Government Association guidance states that good scrutiny should tackle priority issues of direct relevance to local people and issues where the unique perspective of councillors can add the most value. It also highlights the importance of scrutiny talking to a wide range of people, drawing them together and building consensus.

34. Future objectives are therefore to:

- 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. This will build on the good progress already made to engage with energy and water utility companies, parents and children with Additional Needs and Disabilities, the Police and campaign groups.
- 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.

Sources/background papers:

Select Committee agenda and minutes. Available here: [Committee structure - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/committees)

[Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422222/Overview_and_scrutiny_statutory_guidance_for_councils_combined_authorities_and_combined_county_authorities.pdf)

[A councillor's workbook on scrutiny | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/scrutiny)
