

Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees 2021 to 2022

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What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a key component of the Council's political structure. Many of the Council's important decisions are taken by Cabinet, a group of eight councillors to whom the County Council has given its powers to take decisions relating to policies and procedures on its behalf.

The term 'scrutiny' derives from the Latin word 'scrutinium / scrutari' which means 'to search'. In the context of local government Scrutiny's role is to research and examine policies and decisions to assess whether they could be improved or strengthened to deliver better services for residents and visitors to Denbighshire. Scrutiny is often referred to as the Council's 'critical friend', its purpose is to provide constructive criticism in order to continually seek improvements to services, secure better decisions and realise better outcomes.

Scrutiny Committees cannot take decisions, but they can influence policies, review decisions taken by Cabinet and Officers, make recommendations, and examine a range of topics that affect residents, local businesses and visitors to the county.

Scrutiny in Action

Scrutiny should at all times work in an impartial way. It should not be influenced by party politics, its focus should be on improving the lives of residents and on securing better outcomes for the county area.

Whilst Scrutiny Committees have an active role to play in developing policies and reviewing performance. They also have the responsibility of holding the Cabinet and other decision makers to account on the decisions they make.

If a Scrutiny Committee believes that an issue should be looked at in more depth before a decision is implemented, it can request a review under the "Call-In" procedure which will allow Scrutiny Committees to formulate alternative proposals.

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How does scrutiny work in Denbighshire?

Scrutiny acts as a 'critical friend' to the Council's leadership, driving improvements not only to services delivered by the Council itself, but to services delivered in partnership with other public services in the area by enabling the concerns of the public to be heard.

The Council's scrutiny work is undertaken by three thematic, cross-cutting Scrutiny Committees, meeting approximately every 7 weeks and comprising of 11 elected members from all political parties/groups on the Council.

The three committees in Denbighshire are:

- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
- Performance Scrutiny Committee

When examining education matters representatives appointed by the Church in Wales and the Catholic Church, along with representatives elected by parent governors, also serve on the committees. When dealing with education matters these representatives have full voting rights. Two of the three parent governor representative posts on Scrutiny are currently vacant. If you are a parent governor at one of the Council's secondary or special schools, and would be interested in representing your sector on Scrutiny please get in touch with us (contact details can be found in the 'How residents can participate in Scrutiny' section towards the end of this report). We would love to hear from you.

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Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny committees serve on the Council's Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) along with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee and the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee. This Group acts as a co-ordinating group for the committees' work. Requests for items to be considered by a scrutiny committee, be they from county councillors, Council officers, residents, businesses, other public services/organisations or the general public are examined by this Group to determine whether they meet the criteria for Scrutiny, or whether they would benefit from being considered by another forum or group. The explanation on the PAPER test on the following page illustrates the criteria and process for determining whether a topic is suitable for scrutiny.

During 2021/22 a total of 19 requests for items to be scrutinised were considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group. Of these 19 requests:

- 10 were submitted by county councillors
- 8 by officers
- 1 was a request from a neighbouring local authority seeking regional support from Scrutiny to representations it had made to the Welsh Government.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group ensures that the scrutiny committees' work programmes are balanced and that subjects are not duplicated. It also has a role to play in supporting and strengthening the Council's scrutiny function through the identification of best practice, training or development opportunities for scrutiny committee members and helping to implement any necessary changes to scrutiny practices.

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The process for determining a topic's suitability for scrutiny

Step one: considering the request

Proposal form or request received and careful consideration given to reasons behind the request.

Step two: does it stand up to the PAPER test?

- **Public interest:** is the matter of concern to residents?
- **Ability to have an impact:** can Scrutiny influence and change things?
- **Performance:** is it an underperforming area or service?
- **Extent:** does it affect a large number of residents or a large geographic area?
- **Replication:** is anyone else looking at it?

If not, then no further action is required by a scrutiny committee and the request should be referred elsewhere or information requested.

If yes:

Step three: assessment and planning (this will be done by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group)

- Determine the desired outcome(s)
- Decide on the scope and extent of the scrutiny work required and the most appropriate method to undertake it (i.e. committee report, task and finish group inquiry, or link member to pursue etc.)
- If task and finish group route chosen, determine the timescale for any inquiry, who will be involved, research requirements, expert advice and witnesses required, reporting arrangements etc.

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Scrutiny's work during 2021/22

While 2020/21 was a year that no one will forget in a hurry, 2021/22 was the year when Scrutiny like everyone else tried to adapt to live with COVID. As a result, quite a significant amount of Scrutiny's work focussed on Council services' recovery from responding to the pandemic and their efforts in transforming service-delivery from reacting to situations caused by the pandemic to proactively factoring-in pandemic mitigation measures into their service delivery plans in order to either return to 'business as usual' or to deliver their services in new ways going forward.

Council committee meetings, including Scrutiny Committee meetings, continued to be held via video conferencing throughout the year. As a result, all Scrutiny Committee meetings are now webcast live on the Council's website, with a recording of the webcast available on the website following each meeting. In future all Scrutiny Committee meetings will be held as 'hybrid meetings', which means committee members will have the option of attending the meeting in person at the designated venue, or to attend the meeting remotely via video conferencing. All meetings will continue to be webcast and therefore available on the Council's website.

During 2021/22 Scrutiny focussed its work on a mix of examining COVID-19 recovery work and continuing its work in supporting the Council to deliver its corporate priorities and ultimately its Corporate Plan by then end of the Council's term of office in May 2022. By examining COVID-19 recovery work, particularly the lessons learnt during the Council's response to the pandemic, Scrutiny was able to identify successful practices and recommend any adaptations required prior to the methods being used for delivering Council services going forward.

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Scrutiny and the Council's Corporate Priorities during 2021/22

The Council's Corporate Plan and its priorities were set and agreed at the start of the Council's term of office in 2017, with the aim of delivering the entire Plan by the time its term came to an end in 2022

The Corporate Priorities for the 2017 to 2022 Council term were:

Housing: ensuring that everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs

Connected Communities: making sure communities are connected and have access to goods and services locally, online and through good transport links

Resilient Communities: making sure that the Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience

Environment: securing an attractive and protected environment which supports well-being and economic prosperity; and

Young People: creating a county where young people will want to live and work and have the skills to do so

Due to the prolonged nature of the pandemic and its impact on all aspects of everyday life Scrutiny in 2020/21 revisited the corporate priorities in order to make sure that they were still relevant in a post-pandemic Denbighshire. It concluded then that the priorities adopted by the Council back in 2017 were more relevant than ever, as the way people lived their lives had changed during the pandemic. The importance of good quality safe housing, connected and resilient communities, an attractive environment and young people and their futures were now more important than ever.

The Council is fortunate in that its thematic scrutiny committee structure provides sufficient flexibility to enable any of the committees to examine various aspects of the Authority's progress in delivering its corporate priorities.

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Pandemic response and recovery work, the Council and other agencies' response to major flooding incidents in Denbighshire, along with local, national and global initiatives to tackle climate change featured in the work programmes of all three scrutiny committees during the course of the year as part of Scrutiny's efforts to support the delivery of the Resilient Communities and Environment corporate priorities.

The remaining corporate priorities relating to Housing, Connected Communities and Young People were not forgotten with scrutiny examining the plans in place to deliver the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy, Road Maintenance and Sustainable Travel plans, along with the proposed new 'Curriculum for Wales' and the requirements placed on the Council as part of the 'Additional Learning Needs Transformation'

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Call-in of Cabinet decisions

The Council's Call-In Procedure was only invoked once during 2021/22 when a decision taken by the Council's Cabinet on 15 February 2022 was called in to Scrutiny for review. This decision related to a 'Proposed Scheme of Delegated Decision Making for Land Acquisition (Freehold and Leasehold) for Carbon Sequestration and Ecological Improvement Purposes'.

As this decision did not require to be implemented urgently the decision-maker (Cabinet) and the Chair of Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to waive the 5-day period set-out in the Council's Call-In Procedure Rules to hear the review. This enabled Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider the basis for the call-in and review the evidence upon which the Cabinet had taken its decision and its next meeting, which was on 10 March 2022.

Having considered the evidence presented to it in relation to the decision taken by Cabinet the Committee agreed to request Cabinet at its next appropriate meeting to reconsider its original decision with a view to expediting the process for purchasing land. The Committee recommended minor amendments to the wording of the Proposed Scheme and requested that Cabinet should work with the Farming Unions and the Federation of Young Farmers Clubs to seek comprehensive responses from those organisations in relation to the Proposed Scheme prior to reconsidering the decision.

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Positive outcomes of the scrutiny process

One of the main objectives of the scrutiny process is to add value and to try and ensure that decisions taken by the Council have a positive impact on the lives of people who live, work and visit Denbighshire. There is an expectation for Scrutiny to evidence the benefits it has added to the decision-making process and how those benefits manifest themselves in better outcomes for businesses and residents of the county. Such benefits are generally difficult to evidence, but the overall objective of Scrutiny is to support better decision-making which in turn delivers better services.

During the term of the current Council Scrutiny has been keen to promote the benefits and value of scrutiny to residents and organisations in the county, encouraging them to get involved with the scrutiny process. Whilst this has proved difficult at times it was pleasing during 2021/22 to receive a request from students at Ysgol Dinas Bran to contribute to the discussion on eradicating the use of single use plastics and carbon reduction in the school meals service. Similarly, contributions from service-users' families into the discussion on the future of Meifod Wood Products helped Scrutiny to ensure that its recommendations balanced the wishes of service-users with those of the Council. Scrutiny's recommendations in respect of both these matters were endorsed and approved by Cabinet.

A number of the members of the Flood Risk Management and Riparian Land Ownership Task and Finish Group stated that that they felt that the existence of the Group had helped improve open dialogue between various stakeholders and built a level of mutual trust between them. It was pleasing to receive the following comment from one of the partner organisations

"I've enjoyed being part of this group and I look forward to contributing in the future too. I think there have been many positive outputs from the group's efforts".

Members of the Working Group charged with overseeing the development of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment felt that the establishment of this Group by

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Scrutiny had contributed greatly towards greater stakeholder engagement with the process. As a result, they suggested that a similar approach should be taken in due course when selecting potential sites for consideration for development as residential gypsy and traveller accommodation sites.

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Communities Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Huw Williams (**Chair**)



Cllr. Graham Timms (**Vice-Chair**)

This Committee examines matters that directly affect local communities and residents' daily lives. These may be matters within the Council's direct control or aspects of day to day life which the Council may be able to influence.

As Denbighshire's communities, like the Council itself, continued to deal with the pandemic and its impact throughout the year the Committee following examination of the work in hand to maintain Council office buildings in preparation for staff to return to work, then focussed its work on the delivery of services for the future.

During the first pandemic lockdown period Denbighshire residents became increasingly aware and appreciative of the area where they lived. Everyone valued the fact that they could go for a walk or exercise and enjoy the beauty of the local natural landscape and environment right on their doorstep. As part of its work to combat the effects of climate change the Council has introduced a number of environmental initiatives. One such initiative is the Wildflower Meadow Project, where designated areas of grassland in urban areas are managed and nurtured to develop into wildflower habitat to support the recovery of bees and other pollinators. The Committee examined the effectiveness of the Council's publicity and engagement with residents in relation to the establishment of these sites and

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recommended measures to strengthen engagement activities as the wildflower meadows are rolled-out across the county.

While the above initiative attempts in part to redress the effects of climate change the county's residents cannot unfortunately escape the forces of nature when they do unleash themselves. When that happens Scrutiny has an important role to play in examining the findings of statutory investigations into such events. During 2021/22 the Committee considered findings of the investigations into the floods caused by both storms Ciara in February 2020 and Christoph in January 2021. Whilst it is important that the Council learns lessons from its response to these events, it is also acknowledged that neither it nor its partner organisations can stop the forces of nature, they just have to learn how best to prepare for them and deal with their consequences.

With a view to mitigating the risks of flooding and their catastrophic consequences on residents and businesses across the county the Committee has been proactive in establishing a Flood Risk and Riparian Landownership Task and Finish Group in a bid to bolster working relationships with all public bodies and individual landowners in reducing the risk of flooding. More detailed information on the work of the Task and Finish Group can be found elsewhere in this report. Towards the end of the Council year the Committee considered the findings of the Task and Finish Group's work and endorsed their recommendations, which will hopefully help residents understand the responsibilities of all householders and land owners whose properties abut any types of watercourses and help signpost them to useful information sources about flood management responsibilities and measures they can take to reduce the risk of flooding.

Flood risk mitigation responsibilities in relation to the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter were examined by both the Task and Finish Group and the Committee. In addition to the risk of flooding from these watercourses both towns are also at risk from flooding from the sea. Work is therefore underway in an attempt to mitigate the risk from this type of flooding through the development of coastal defence schemes for both Rhyl and Prestatyn. These

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types of schemes are long-term, complex, expensive projects therefore extensive stakeholder and community engagement is required. The Committee examined the scope and findings of the engagement exercise undertaken and concluded that it was satisfied with the approach taken.

Environmental issues have come to the fore in recent years, with particular focus on the effects of global warming and the human race's seemingly heedless approach towards the world which we share with other species. Denbighshire has been successful over a number of years in achieving high recycling rates for its household waste. However, with national recycling targets being raised in an attempt to reverse the effects of climate change the Council has agreed to change its service model for collecting and dealing with household waste, including recyclable waste. The new waste and recycling service model is in the process of being developed with a view to it being rolled-out across the county by the summer of 2023. Under the new service model residents will be expected to sort their recycling into different containers prior to collection. However, they will also be able to recycle goods and materials which cannot currently be accepted for recycling under the present 'blue bin' recycling service. Consequently, the Committee has been examining the proposed new model and its benefits and providing input into the multi-faceted plan for communicating the changes to residents which will commence in the near future. This work will continue into the new Council's term of office; Scrutiny will continue to monitor its progress in order to ensure a smooth transition into the new service-delivery model.

Concerns have recently mounted with regards to large corporate and commercial entities purchasing prime agricultural land for the purpose of planting trees in a bid to offset their carbon usage. Therefore, when Cabinet took a decision on a 'Proposed Scheme of Delegated Decision Making for Land Acquisition (Freehold and Leasehold) for Carbon Sequestration and Ecological Improvement Purposes' a number of non-Cabinet members raised concerns about the rationale behind this decision and as a result the decision was 'called-in' for scrutiny under the Council's Call-In Procedure. Communities Scrutiny Committee examined the decision and the reasoning behind it in detail. More information

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on the outcome of the scrutiny process can be found in the 'Call-in of Cabinet Decisions' section of this report.

In addition to the county's natural landscape the Council's corporate priority relating to the 'Environment' also covers its built environment and ensuring that any new buildings or modifications to existing ones comply with national planning regulations and local planning policies and conditions. Contraventions of planning regulations can lead to unsightly buildings, not in keeping with their local neighbourhoods, and impact on the health and well-being of those living nearby. With a view to remedying alleged breaches of planning permissions and supporting those affected by such incidents the Council some years ago developed a Planning Compliance Charter to aid residents and businesses alike to understand how the planning compliance function operated and their rights under the process. A revised version of the Charter, which aimed to further increase the efficiency of the planning compliance process, was examined and endorsed by the Committee in early 2022. Whilst structural developments and renovations could potentially damage and change the local environment if not controlled and regulated effectively, inappropriate naming or renaming of properties, developments or streets etc. could also harm the character of the local area if they were given names that did not have regard to area's ethos and its history. In order to allay concerns in relation to this the Committee examined the matter of 'Safeguarding Welsh Place Names in Denbighshire' in order to make sure that the Council was utilising all powers available to it with regards to safeguarding the area's character, culture and history.

Being acutely aware that the regular maintenance programme for the Council's housing stock had been severely impacted by the pandemic the Committee examined the findings of the Council Housing Tenant's Survey, which summarised the tenants' views about their homes and neighbourhoods. Whilst the overall satisfaction rates with the maintenance work had been lower than in previous years, this was understandable as only emergency maintenance work had taken place during the lockdown periods. With an action plan now in place to address any shortcomings, deal with backlogs and arrangements in hand for

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the recommencement of community gatherings and activities following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, the Committee was satisfied that every effort was being made to improve satisfaction levels.

As reported previously unauthorised encampments by members of the gypsy and traveller communities periodically cause tensions and distress to local residents and businesses. Last year it was reported that the Committee had agreed to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to monitor the development of a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). This Assessment is a requirement of the Local Development Plan (LDP) process which the Council is currently developing. The Task and Finish Group's role was to ensure that the GTAA was developed in line with Welsh Government Methodology, and to support the development of a stakeholder engagement plan for the project. Due to the potential contentious nature of this area of work Scrutiny wanted to be involved with the work from an early stage to ensure engagement took place with all stakeholders when developing a Needs Assessment. During the year the Task and Finish Group reported on its work to the Committee on two occasions. Firstly, to present a progress report on its work and to seek the Committee's endorsement of its proposed Engagement and Communications Plan, and finally to present its conclusions on the process followed for developing the GTAA and in communicating with stakeholders. The Committee was satisfied that the process followed was in line with WG guidance and that the stakeholder engagement aspect had met Scrutiny's expectations. In addition, when recommending that Cabinet approve the draft GTAA for submission to WG, the Committee agreed with the Task and Finish Group that it may be beneficial for the new Council to adopt a similar approach when considering potential locations for any proposed residential sites in future.

As part of its work to support the delivery of the Connected Communities corporate priority the Committee examined the Council's Highways Maintenance Policies for Unclassified Roads. It wanted assurances that roads which fell into the 'unclassified' category, which account for 44% of the county's highways network and which are predominately located in

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rural areas, would receive their fair share of the additional funding allocated to the overall highways maintenance budget. Safe and accessible infrastructure is key to securing the sustainability of the county's rural areas.

The following link will take you to [information about the Communities Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

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Partnerships Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (**Chair**)



Cllr. Emrys Wynne (**Vice-Chair**)

This Committee is responsible for examining the effectiveness of services provided by the Council either in collaboration, or in partnership, with other public sector organisations, and for making sure that those services are meeting the needs of residents. As the Health Board continued to focus its work on responding to Covid-19 the Committee was unable to restart its regular schedule of meetings with Health Board representatives. However, it did meet with Health Board representatives to examine the development of Heart Failure Services and their impact on the county's Social Care Services. There had been some uncertainties surrounding the long-term sustainability of heart failure services in the area due to the temporary nature of the funding streams allocated to support these services. The Committee received reassurances from the Health Board that financial stability had now been provided to secure the delivery of community based heart failure services for the short to medium term.

The importance of effective partnership working on both a local and regional basis came to the fore during the response stage to the Covid-19 pandemic, with various organisations, both public and private along with the voluntary sector working alongside each other to help deliver services to the vulnerable in their hour of need. In line with its remit the Committee, during the course of the year, examined a number of annual reports which focussed on services delivered in partnership. Among the annual reports scrutinised were

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those of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board, the Annual Report on Safeguarding Adults in Denbighshire and the Annual Report of the Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership, all of whom have safeguarding responsibilities for people of all ages. The Committee is the Council's designated crime and disorder scrutiny committee and therefore has certain responsibilities in relation to scrutinising the Community Safety Partnership's (CSP's) plans and performance in delivering its priorities to reduce crime and disorder, which include reducing reoffending, tackling domestic abuse and modern day slavery, along with counteracting 'County Lines' activities.

Partnerships is also the designated Committee with responsibility for scrutinising the work of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB), whose objective is to deliver long-lasting investment and change that will facilitate long-term economic growth and sustain well-paid employment and career opportunities across the region. Currently the Board's work is still very much in the business case project planning phase, therefore the Committee was keen to ensure that robust business cases were continually being developed and challenged, despite the delays caused by Covid, to make sure that they will eventually lead to economic growth across the region.

The Committee continued its work in examining the effectiveness of the multi-disciplinary service established to deliver homelessness services across the county. During the initial Covid-19 lockdown period the Welsh Government had set out its vision for delivering homelessness and housing-related support services during the pandemic, and in the post-pandemic era. This had necessitated the Council to review its model for delivering services to these extremely vulnerable residents. In order to make sure that sufficient support and resources are available to deliver these services now and in future the Committee has during the year, and will in future, continue to monitor the service provision and its effectiveness in delivering the desired outcomes.

With a view to making sure that the Council and its partners plan their future services to meet the needs and preferences of residents the Committee had an opportunity to

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examine the latest regional Population Needs Assessment. This Assessment included the specific needs identified for Denbighshire's population going forward. By identifying local needs and priorities the Council and its partners can ensure that their services are planned and co-ordinated to meet those needs. Meeting the needs of an ageing population will place additional pressures on local authorities and their partner organisations, with additional capacity to meet service demands being provided by the voluntary sector. The Committee had an interesting and constructive discussion with the Chief Officer of Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC) on his vision for DVSC, the services the organisation facilitated within the community to help support resilience amongst the population and which assisted to reduce dependency on statutory social care services. A further meeting with DVSC will be held during the forthcoming year.

As part of its work focussing on Council services and the wider economy's recovery from the pandemic the Committee examined the effectiveness of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) initiatives and other business support packages to aid the post Covid-19 recovery of town centres. It also conducted a further evaluation of the effectiveness of the Welsh Government funded Covid-19 Active Travel Plan Schemes across the county in order to ensure that the lessons learnt from these particular short-term emergency funded schemes could be applied to similar emergency funding that may become available in future. The Committee also wanted to understand the benefits identified during the Covid-19 Active Travel Schemes which may be adapted and applied to future carbon reduction or ecological work to address the climate change and ecological emergency. Having regard to environmental and ecological concerns the Committee again examined the Council's Highways Grass Verge, Hedge Maintenance and Pesticide Application Policies, to make sure that they conformed with all recognised national guidance, were as eco-friendly as possible, whilst also ensuring the safety of all road users.

The following link will take you to [information about the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website.](#)

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Performance Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Arwel Roberts (**Chair**)



Cllr. Hugh Irving (**Vice-Chair**)

Performance Scrutiny Committee plays a crucial role in ensuring that the Council delivers quality services to residents and in supporting the Council to deliver its Corporate Plan by 2022. To fulfil this role, it regularly monitors the delivery of a number of the Council's plans and strategies such as the Housing and Homelessness Strategy, progress made in delivering Corporate Plan priorities, along with the Authority's performance in responding and dealing with enquiries and complaints about Council services. Risks to service delivery are reviewed by the Committee on a six-monthly basis in order to make sure that the Council has identified the right risks and developed appropriate measures to diminish the potential impact of those risks on residents and businesses in Denbighshire.

Historically, this Committee has played a key role in monitoring educational achievement in the county. This was done by scrutinising teacher assessment and external examination results data. As a result of the pandemic benchmarking data that would assist officers and committee members to compare Denbighshire students' educational progress and achievements with those in other local authority areas has not been available. Therefore, the Committee with the assistance of the co-opted education representatives focussed their attention on examining how GwE and the Council's Education Service were preparing and supporting schools to implement the new 'Curriculum for Wales'. They also examined the progress made in implementing the statutory requirements introduced as part of the Additional Learning Needs and

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Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, highlighting the pressures faced by the Council in implementing these requirements without the provision of additional financial resources.

Consideration of the Director of Social Services' Annual Reports for 2019/20 and 2020/21 highlighted the tremendous efforts, dedication and sacrifices made by frontline staff in order to ensure that Denbighshire's most vulnerable residents received the care and services they required during unprecedented times. Responding to the pandemic had tested services and communities' resilience to the extreme, but both had adapted and responded to the challenge and the lessons learnt along the way would help shape future service delivery. Examination of the Library Service Standards and Performance data for 2020/21 reinforced the adaptability and resilience of Council services to rise up and meet the challenges posed by the pandemic and their willingness to support residents' well-being during a time of crisis. Going forward all these services will have a key role in building community capacity, cohesion and resilience.

As responding to rules and restrictions associated with COVID-19 was being treated as part of the Council's normal day to day business in 2021/22 the Committee examined the long-term effects of the pandemic on staff absences and turnover in the Council itself, particularly given the fact that some frontline staff had faced immense physical and mental strain during the last 2 years and also the reality that new ways of working were being introduced across both the public and private sectors, which meant that some staff could permanently work from home. The Committee wanted assurances that the Council was adapting and evolving at a sufficient pace to enable it to retain skilled staff on all levels whilst also attracting the best talent to shape and deliver services in Denbighshire in future.

The Committee was committed to ensuring that adapting to living with Covid was not confined to supporting the majority of residents to adjust to this 'new normal'. It was also keen for the quality of lives for the county's most vulnerable residents to be improved in a safe environment. To this end it supported a call for the work opportunities services for

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people with learning disabilities at Meifod Wood Products to be re-started as soon as maintenance work on the building and a Covid-safe working environment was put in place. In order to secure this much valued service's future it recommended to Cabinet that it should explore all opportunities available to improve and develop Meifod's long-term future sustainability.

Climate change and carbon reduction was also a feature of the Committee's work during the year with the Committee examining progress made in developing a Sustainable Travel Plan for Denbighshire which would in the long-term link into regional and national travel plans. This work is very much in its infancy and given the high profile given to climate change and carbon reduction work globally, its delivery will focus prominently in the work of the new Council. To secure maximum gain from carbon reduction work efforts need to be co-ordinated on all levels, this means that individuals and organisations have to work together to achieve the ultimate ambition. However, even the smallest contribution will help deliver the final goal. For this reason, the Committee, at the request of the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Working Group, examined the progress made by the Council's School Meals Service in reducing its use of single-use plastic and non-recyclable goods in the supply, preparation and serving of school meals. Students from Ysgol Dinas Bran, Llangollen joined in the discussion on this topic and constructively contributed to the debate. Whilst the Committee understood that reducing dependency on single-use plastics had not been possible during the pandemic it felt that from now on every effort should be made to use recyclable packaging and re-useable utensils to provide meals to pupils. However, it did acknowledge that the additional costs associated with using recyclable products and non-single use utensils, the need to educate pupils to return or appropriately dispose of them, along with the new requirements to supply a free school meal to all primary school pupils in future, would place additional pressures on the Service's finances. This led to the Committee seeking Cabinet to correspond with the Welsh Government to seek it to provide sufficient funding to local authorities throughout Wales to enable them to deliver a fully nutritional, ecological and financially sustainable School Meals Service. Cabinet agreed with this request to correspond with Welsh Government but it also went a step further and decided to also seek broader support to

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lobby the Government on this point from the wider local government community in Wales, through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

The following link will take you to [information about the Performance Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

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Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) was established by Conwy County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council for the purpose of fulfilling their statutory duty of scrutinising the Joint Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board (PSB). It is made up of 16 members, 8 from each Council reflecting the political balance of their respective authorities. In 2021/2022 the Chair of the JOSC passed to Denbighshire County Council, when the former Vice-Chair Councillor Graham Timms was elected Chair. In accordance with the Committee's terms of reference a representative from Conwy, Councillor Nigel Smith, was elected Vice-Chair. During 2021/22 the Committee met to examine the Public Services Board's Annual Report for 2020/21 and to consider how the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee could continually strive to improve its effectiveness by undertaking regular self-evaluation exercises and involve a wide range of stakeholders in its scrutiny work.

As part of its preparatory work for the term of the new councils the Joint Committee has examined the approach taken in developing the new Well-being Assessment, including the various methods used to engage with stakeholders and the wider population on the areas for inclusion in the draft Well-being Assessment. The Committee also fulfilled its role as a statutory consultee on the draft Well-being Assessment itself by examining it in detail. In its response to the consultation on the draft Assessment it recommended to the Public Services Board and its partners that, when developing and delivering the new Well-Being Plan, every effort should be made to use their procurement powers to source goods and resources as locally as possible in order to support employment, the local economy, residents' well-being and sustain the Welsh language and culture whilst also reducing carbon emissions.

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Cllr. Graham Timms (**Chair**)



Cllr. Nigel Smith (**Vice-Chair**)

Membership

Conwy County Borough Council

- Cllr. Geoffrey David Corry
- Cllr. Chris Hughes
- Cllr. Ifor Lloyd
- Cllr. Donald Milne
- Cllr. Elizabeth Roberts
- Cllr. Harry Saville
- Cllr Nigel Smith (Vice-Chair)
- Cllr. Joan Vaughan

Denbighshire County Council

- Cllr. Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones
- Cllr. Meirick Lloyd Davies
- Cllr. Rachel Flynn
- Cllr. Hugh Irving
- Cllr. Melvyn Mile
- Cllr. Arwel Roberts
- Cllr. Graham Timms (Chair)
- Cllr. David G Williams

The following link will take you to [information about the Joint Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website.](#)

Task and Finish Groups

Scrutiny continued with its use of Task and Finish Groups to undertake detailed policy development work on its behalf during 2021/22. Progress of the work of the task and finish group examining potential future delivery models for **Adult Social Care Services** was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as a number of the services under review were closed for an extended period of time. As the Authority prepared to re-open some services the Group examined potential options for safely re-opening the work opportunities service delivered at Meifod Wood Products for people with learning disabilities. Whilst acknowledging that maintenance work was required on the premises at which this service was delivered the Group was resolute that Meifod should be re-opened as a Council-run service at the existing building. It also recommended that additional investment should be provided to the business to enable it to invest for the future. As part of any future investment it recommended that all opportunities for new ways of working and developing Meifod should be explored in a bid to secure its long-term sustainability.

As reported in last year's Annual Report climate change and in particular the frequency and severity of flooding incidents across Denbighshire was a growing concern for councillors and their communities. Communities Scrutiny Committee was therefore keen to explore whether working relationships and communication channels between all flood risk agencies, landowners, and tenants of land which have main rivers or watercourses flowing through them needed to be strengthened in order to potentially reduce the damage caused by flood water during periods of severe weather. It established a **Flood Risk Management and Riparian Land Ownership** Task and Finish Group in early 2021, whose membership included representatives from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, Farming and Landowner representatives, and county councillors representing each of the Council's Member Area Groups (MAGs). The purpose of this Task and Finish Group was to examine potential methods for strengthening communication methods and building effective working relationships between all parties. The Task and Finish Group concluded its work and reported its [findings and recommendations](#) to Communities Scrutiny Committee in March 2022. Communities

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Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Group's recommendations, which included the relaunch of the Council's 'Flood' web information page to include links to NRW and Dŵr Cymru information pages to make it easier for residents to quickly access information, plans for distributing information in relation to riparian landownership responsibilities in the vicinity of the Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter, and the Group's intention to meet on an annual basis for information sharing and forward planning purposes.

Mention was also made in last year's Annual Report to the Working Group established to assist with the development of a stakeholder engagement plan for the **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)** process. This Group provided Communities Scrutiny Committee with an initial report on the progress of its work, and sought approval for its Communication and Engagement Plan, prior to commencing the stakeholder engagement in mid-2021. At the end of the year the Group reported again to the Committee on its work and the conclusions of the stakeholder engagement exercise undertaken to inform the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. The Committee endorsed the approach taken in undertaking the engagement exercise and in developing the assessment and recommended to Cabinet that it approve the Assessment for submission to the Welsh Government. It also agreed with the Working Group that it may be worthwhile for a similar approach to be adopted in due course for the proposed site location selection process for residential pitches.

Additional work

As in previous years Scrutiny Committee members have continued with their scrutiny roles outside of the formal committee meeting arena. They have represented their committee on various groups such as Service Challenge Groups and the Council's Strategic Investment Group (SIG) etc. Under the standing business item on all Scrutiny Committee meeting agendas representatives report back to their committees on the discussions, recommendations and decisions taken at the meetings they attend.

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Scrutiny requests from residents

For a number of years Denbighshire's scrutiny committees has operated an established mechanism which enables residents to draw matters of concern to Scrutiny's attention. This is facilitated through the completion of a Scrutiny request form, available on the Council's [website](#), or from the Scrutiny Co-ordinator. Completed scrutiny request forms are presented to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, in the same way as requests received from councillors, officers or other organisations for consideration and determination on whether the subject merits examination by one of the Scrutiny Committees, or whether greater benefits could be achieved if the matter was examined by another forum.

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How can residents participate in Scrutiny?

Would you like scrutiny to look at a particular matter?

You can raise a matter for consideration by one of Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committees by filling out the Scrutiny Request Form (overleaf) or by downloading the form from the Council's website and submitting it by e-mail. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny committees meet periodically to decide how to allocate the work of the scrutiny committees and will consider if any matter raised should be examined in detail by one of the committees, or if another course of action should be pursued. This can range from a referral to the service responsible, to full scrutiny of the matter by one of the scrutiny committees, or even the establishment of a specialist 'task and finish group' to investigate and report on a particular matter.

Would you like to attend a meeting of a scrutiny committee?

Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committee meetings are generally open to the public, and residents of Denbighshire and the general public are encouraged to attend or watch the webcast on the Council's website. A list of upcoming scrutiny committee meetings and the matters to be discussed are available on the 'Scrutiny' page of the Council's website.

If you wish to take part in the discussion on a particular matter you will require the permission of the Chair of the committee (further details overleaf).

Occasionally some items being discussed by a committee will contain confidential information and cannot be discussed in the usual public forum. Any such items (referred to as 'Part Two (II)') will be clearly identified when the meeting papers are published, and the Chair of the committee meeting discussing a 'Part II' item will make it clear that the meeting should continue without the press and public in attendance in order to avoid divulging confidential information.

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Would you like to speak to a committee on an item being discussed?

Members of the public are very welcome to attend scrutiny committee meetings, either in person or via video link, but will require the permission of the Chair of the committee if they wish to speak or make representations at a committee meeting. If you wish to submit evidence to a committee, or address members on your experience in relation to a subject under discussion, please contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator in advance of the meeting so that this can be arranged and any paperwork can be circulated to members of the committee.

Occasionally scrutiny committees may wish to 'co-opt' an individual with particular experience or expertise to become a temporary member of the committee or ask them to contribute to an inquiry as an expert witness.

Keeping up to speed with decisions made by Denbighshire's scrutiny committees

You can keep track of what is being discussed at each scrutiny committee meeting, as well as any other public Council meeting, by visiting the 'meetings' page of the Council's website. The latest 'work programme' for each of the scrutiny committees is available with the meeting papers for each meeting and the confirmed agenda for each meeting will usually be available 5 - 7 days before the meeting is due to take place.

The minutes of previous scrutiny meetings and a record of the decisions made are also available on the Council's website, as are the recordings of recent scrutiny committee meetings..

Further advice or information is available by contacting the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Rhian Evans on rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk (01824 712554), the Democratic Services Officer, Karen Evans, on karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk (01824 712575) or by sending an e-mail to the following general e-mail address: democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk .

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Scrutiny request form

Is there something you would like scrutiny to have a look at?

Please give a brief description of the topic you would like to be considered by one of the Scrutiny Committees and why you think it should be considered

Would you like to attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee?

YES / NO

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It would be useful if you could give us the following details so that we may respond to your request

Your name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Telephone number:

Please return this form to:

Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Legal, HR and Democratic Services

PO Box 62

Ruthin

LL15 9AZ

or e-mail it to democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk