

Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22

An overview of scrutiny activity at West Sussex County Council in 2021/22

This was an election year for the County Council with 33 new councillors elected and 30 of these appointed to a scrutiny committee. A full programme of member training and induction for all scrutiny committee members ended with a work programme planning session in March 2022 focused on priorities for scrutiny for the year ahead. Learning from virtual working during the pandemic led to new approaches including hybrid meetings, virtual briefings and engagement with stakeholders and witnesses. Most committee meetings are held in person, but with the flexibility to work virtually, particularly for informal meetings. Scrutiny committees appointed their own chairs and vice chairs in the summer of 2021.

Scrutiny at West Sussex County Council

Information on [Scrutiny at the Council](#) is on the Council's website. For details of each committee, including membership, areas of responsibility, meeting dates, agendas, and minutes, use the links below:

- Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee ([CYPSSC](#))
- Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee ([ECSSC](#))
- Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee ([FRSSC](#))
- Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee ([HASC](#))
- Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee ([PFSC](#))

The Scrutiny Year at a glance

28 committee meetings held	7 key decisions previewed	hybrid technology enabled virtual participation	Witnesses from a range of partners and interests
3 task and finish groups for in-depth scrutiny	The voice of young people from the West Sussex Youth Cabinet	38% of business on policy development	All committee meetings webcast with 4,186 views

Scrutiny Impact

Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- ✓ Influence policy ideas or proposals before they are developed
- ✓ Spend time on matters critical to service outcomes for residents
- ✓ Provide meaningful challenge to the performance of services
- ✓ Show the difference scrutiny makes to service outcomes for residents

a) The value of scrutiny to the Council's business and its role in the County

Listen and engage: External witness input into scrutiny was provided by NHS Trusts, the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, a local charity for victims of sexual violence, Carers' Support West Sussex, Gatwick Diamond, the South East Climate Alliance and Sussex Wildlife Trust. CYPSSC Committee members carried out independent engagement with

local school governors and parents for feedback on children's progress at school. Healthwatch West Sussex, the health and social care champion, as well as having a seat on HASC, has provided reports on specific issues under scrutiny to ensure the patient voice is represented.

Working well in partnership: Hybrid working enabled partners such as the NHS to attend committee meetings virtually. The West Sussex Youth Cabinet continues to have a standing invitation to attend and speak at CYPSSC meetings and Healthwatch represented the voice of health and social care users at HASC on important items such as dentistry.

Learning and good practice: A scrutiny induction programme included input from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and Southeast Employers. HASC members used RNIB to better understand the needs of people with a visual impairment. Pre-meetings have been used to inform scrutiny work and programme planning and have helped members with the focus for scrutiny and key lines of enquiry.

More informal briefings/information sessions have been held to clarify issues and raise awareness, allowing more time for effective scrutiny in the formal meetings. Briefings were arranged for PFSC members on the Council's property joint venture, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Capital Programme (the latter open to all councillors). HASC received an NHS briefing on Stroke Services and future plans. Members of FRSSC visited the Joint Control Centre to inform its performance monitoring of the service.

Scrutiny Chairmen meet regularly to share learning and best practice and meet quarterly with the Cabinet. Cabinet Members are invited to attend committee business planning processes to help identify where scrutiny can add value.

Influence and impact: Scrutiny committees have sought a work programme balanced between strategic proposals (key decision preview), performance monitoring and policy development. During 2021/22, seven key decisions were previewed compared with 21 in 2020/21. A new style quarterly performance and finance report was introduced with each committee carrying out quarterly performance monitoring in public whereas only PFSC used to do this routinely. Feedback from scrutiny on performance monitoring is reported direct to the Cabinet. Data on scrutiny input into policy development was not previously gathered, but it formed 38% of main agenda items at scrutiny committees during 2021/22.



A hybrid scrutiny committee meeting in action

b) The value of scrutiny to service priorities – the focus of scrutiny

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee (CYPSSC)

- The Committee continued to hold the Executive to account through assessing the progress of the **Children First Improvement Programme**. CYPSSC identified priorities within the Programme to focus on for meaningful challenge, including a review of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the **Fostering Service redesign** where the Committee highlighted its views on diversity in recruitment and how councillors could support the promotion of foster recruitment. It also assessed the activity and improvements in services for children we care for ahead of an Ofsted monitoring visit and welcomed progress particularly in achieving outstanding Ofsted ratings at three residential homes.
- In July 2021 an additional meeting was held on the redesign of the **Early Help Services** and the input from public consultation, following on from previous input the Committee had in early 2021 to inform the aims and principles of the redesign. Members focused on what the proposals were seeking to achieve in the context of the Council's priorities and how they would deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families. Its recommendations to the Cabinet included ensuring sufficient resources to work with schools, partners and early years settings to identify and address the needs of children and families at an early stage and constant monitoring of the impact of the new service design to address any unintended consequences early. The Committee will scrutinise the impact of the new model after 12 months.
- In January 2022 the Committee reviewed the **attainment and achievement of children and young people across West Sussex**, the approach to addressing the attainment gap and the plans and actions in place to improve outcomes. The Committee heard evidence from Durrington Research School and its work with schools to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children. Members identified school readiness and mental health support as key areas that impact the attainment of young people and recommended that these be focused on in the development of the Council's new Education and Skills Strategy, to be developed in 2022. This will be subject to scrutiny by the Committee during 2022-23.
- Through the year, the Committee raised concerns about the impact of the pandemic on **Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**. A briefing on the work of the NHS, Public Health and the Children and Young People and Learning was provided to CYPSSC and HASC members. As the NHS is responsible for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), a further briefing will be sought to enable CYPSSC and HASC to identify how and when scrutiny could add value to this vital area of responsibility.

Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee (FRSSC)

- A key area of focus for the Committee has been the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) **Improvement Journey**, including measures to reduce risk, protect the public and promote the right values to encourage fairness and diversity, seeking assurance that improvements are on track. Members welcomed the improved financial data and how well the Service has addressed the need to support staff and increase the diversity of the workforce.
- The Committee has continued to review performance through the new **Performance and Assurance Framework**, enabling timely and constructive input and focusing on areas of concern. The Committee has been able to identify issues for further scrutiny, including the recruitment of retained firefighters (for a TFG during 2022/23).

- The Committee was able to influence the development of the **Community Risk Management Plan** at an early stage, making suggestions on the direction of travel such as the impact of retained firefighters in rural areas.

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

- The Committee scrutinised **post Covid-19 recovery planning by the NHS**, with an update from the NHS West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). It asked for evidence of the patient voice and engagement with residents and asked the NHS to ensure that further reports have a higher level of data. Members also raised concern with West Sussex MPs on the importance of ensuring staff from overseas are able to work within the NHS and the need for the committee to dig deeper into mental health service challenges at a future date.
- **Access to dentistry** across West Sussex was identified as a priority. In January 2022 HASC received an update from NHS England (responsible for commissioning dental services) and raised concerns about accessing NHS dentists, getting appointments, treatment backlog, fluoridation rates and the recruitment and retention of dentists. Access to dentistry for children we care for and children seeking asylum was considered at the request of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State to highlight the need to address the national shortage of dentists and to show that public concerns are being heard. It also asked NHS England for a plan for dealing with the backlog of appointments.
- The Committee was able to give early input into the new **Adult Social Care Quality Assurance** process, suggesting elements to include such as wider benchmarking data and a workshop for councillors on the audit process.
- In March 2022, HASC was consulted by the NHS on proposals to change **neonatal services** at St. Richard's Hospital Chichester. Members commented on the engagement strategy and highlighted the need to consult parents/families who had used this service and to include a full picture of neonatal services accessed by West Sussex residents, which includes Worthing and Brighton.

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee (CHESC)

- The Committee established three TFGs to input into plans for **On-Street Parking Management**, the **Gatwick Northern Runway Consultation** and the **Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan**. These facilitated timely and meaningful contributions to the decision-making process with each able to agree significant recommendations addressed by the Cabinet Member with comprehensive responses back to the groups.
- The Committee previewed the Council's proposed response to Highways England's **consultation on the proposed A27 bypass at Arundel** at a special meeting in February. Members for divisions most directly affected provided evidence and around 100 residents commented via email. After a comprehensive debate the Committee voiced concerns about aspects of the proposals, including the impact on local villages and the natural habitat, the potential financial impact on the County Council, and the reliability of the traffic modelling assumptions, whilst being supportive of the need for a bypass. The Committee's consensual approach to its output received praise from members and residents and its recommendations led to a strengthened consultation response.
- The Committee continued to monitor the **booking system in selected Household Waste Recycling Centres**, in particular scrutinising survey feedback from residents and

businesses and service data. Members triangulated the evidence with views from their divisions and supported the proposal to implement the pilot scheme permanently.

- The Committee previewed the **draft Local Transport Plan**, which was strengthened in line with the Committee's concerns around new settlements and the piecemeal nature of the County's cycling network.

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee (PFSC)

- **The Council Plan and Budget for 2022/23** were scrutinised before consideration at County Council in February 2022. They were reviewed together to ensure targets and objectives in the Plan were linked to the financial resources available and could be managed and monitored together. An all-member session was also held to enable each portfolio to be reviewed ahead of the PFSC session for more effective and efficient scrutiny.
- A new style **Quarterly Performance Management** process was introduced in 2021/22. The report includes improved information on performance targets, budget, workforce and corporate risk as well as a summary of the transformation programme and the impact of Covid. PFSC comments on the Quarter 1 report led to better formatting and content in later reports. Service scrutiny committees review data relevant to their portfolio, the chairmen feeding any issues into PFSC. The new process has worked well and has been well received by members as it enables a review of complete information in a timely manner. It also means that each scrutiny committee takes responsibility for their portfolio areas.
- The **economy** was recognised as a priority for scrutiny in 2021/22 due to the adverse impact of Covid-19. The Committee received reports on the Growth Deals Programme and progress to date in achieving the targets set in the Economy Plan, with specific scrutiny of the visitor economy (tourism) and how the Council is helping businesses across the county. The Committee will continue to monitor progress in achieving the economy targets through the quarterly PRR and will request further reports if required.
- Progress in developing the **Property Joint Venture** was reviewed by the committee. This is seen as an important step in making the best use of our resources in line with the Council Plan. An informal session was held to ensure all committee members understood the journey of the joint venture to date and this helped the scrutiny focus for the formal meeting.
- Scrutiny of future plans for the Council's **Customer Service Function** took place early to enable the Committee to influence proposals. The Committee made recommendations for how the partner organisation due to be appointed to deliver this service interacts with vulnerable customers and carries out staff training. The importance of communication between in-house and outsourced services was also highlighted.

Scrutiny Evaluation 2021/22

Each committee held an informal review of the year in March 2022 to discuss what had worked well, what could be done better, what new committee members need to know and to identify any priorities for the future work programme. The work programme planning session in March provided an opportunity to evaluate how well scrutiny was working and areas for development.

What worked well:

- Committees are building good relationships and developing ways of working together
- The flexibility of being able to meet in person as well as virtually

- The use of pre-meetings to help prepare for meetings and focus questioning.
- Different ways of working, such as briefings/information sessions to increase understanding.
- The range of issues covered in work programme planning and Cabinet Member engagement in this process. For FRSSC, the involvement of the whole committee in this was seen as beneficial.
- Task and finish groups (TFGs) enabling flexibility and the ability to deep dive into issues.
- Quarterly scrutiny of the Council's Performance and Resources Report has enabled more robust performance, budget and risk monitoring.

Areas for improvement:

- The 'Focus for Scrutiny' included in reports needs to be clearer and more outcomes-focused, helping to steer questioning in meetings.
- To have a better balance between proactive and reactive scrutiny, with more and earlier involvement in policy development.
- Ensuring timely scrutiny input into the decision-making process and time for proper consideration of scrutiny recommendations.
- Use of external witnesses/external subject matter experts to hear a range of views.
- More visits to be programmed, relating to the services being scrutinised and more information/briefing sessions to help members build their knowledge.
- Maximise time for discussion at meetings through keeping introductions and presentations short.
- To ensure scrutiny reports have clear summaries setting out the key points for review.

Future priorities:

Issues identified for future scrutiny will be shared with the committees for consideration as part of work programme planning. The importance of scrutiny input into the **Budget** process was highlighted, as well as the need for all scrutiny committees to ensure they are considering the impact of **Climate Change** in all matters. It was also suggested that **joint scrutiny** with district/borough councils should be considered for any cross-cutting issues.

Scrutiny Development

A scrutiny development action plan is in place, monitored and overseen by scrutiny committee chairmen. This ensures scrutiny continues to build on best practice and to identify and tackle areas for improvement. During 2021/22 this included:

- Chairmen meeting regularly to review the work programme and share best practice.
- Strengthened liaison with the Cabinet; Cabinet Members taking part in work programme planning to help identify where scrutiny may add value.
- Different ways of working including pre-meetings, informal briefings, task and finish groups, visits and independent evidence gathering by members.
- Chairmanship training for all scrutiny committee chairmen and vice chairmen.
- More focused pre-agenda meetings to help planning for committee meetings.

Future Plans for Scrutiny

Plans for Scrutiny in 2022/23 include:

- **The development of an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol** to describe the working arrangements between Cabinet and scrutiny committees. This is being developed through member engagement, including Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in June 2022, prior to formal approval by the Council's Governance Committee in the autumn.
- A review of the **Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee**, two years on.
- Continuing to strengthen **scrutiny input into monitoring performance** of the Council's priorities, as set out in [Our Council Plan](#).
- How to better demonstrate or **evidence the impact of scrutiny** within the Council
- Reviewing the scrutiny **business planning checklist** for work to be outcomes-focused and balanced between decision preview, policy development and performance monitoring.
- **Sharing scrutiny best practice** by liaison with Surrey County Council, including exchange visits by scrutiny committee members.
- **Raising the profile of scrutiny**, including consideration by scrutiny committees of proposing scrutiny debates at Full Council.

June 2022