
Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

This report provides an overview of scrutiny activity at the County Council and the work of the five scrutiny committees between April 2024 and March 2025. It covers the main topics scrutinised during the year, outcomes of this work and plans for future work, to enable an assessment of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function.

Scrutiny at West Sussex County Council

The purpose of scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account – to comment on proposals before decisions are taken, to input into policy development and to monitor performance against corporate priorities. During 2024/25, 48 of the 70 county councillors sat on one or more scrutiny committees. The Council aims to reflect nationally recognised principles for good scrutiny, set out in [statutory guidance](#):

- provides constructive “critical friend” challenge
- amplifies the voice and concerns of the public
- led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drives improvement in public services

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

- Children and Young People’s Services Scrutiny Committee ([CYPSSC](#))
- Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee ([CHESC](#))
- 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

25 committee meetings held	74 topics scrutinised	4,268 views of committee meeting webcasts	3 task and finish groups for in-depth scrutiny	67 hours in committee meetings & task and finish groups
8% of topics on key decision preview	11% of topics on policy development	11% of topics monitoring the budget	56% of topics monitoring performance	38% of HASC work on health scrutiny (NHS)

2024/25 Overview

74 topics were scrutinised during 2024/25, excluding items relating to committee business such as appointments and work programme planning. Since 2022/23, all scrutiny work programme topics have been categorised to track the balance between **key decision preview**, **policy development** and **performance monitoring**, as well as other work. The table below sets out the main categories of scrutiny activity, apart from scrutiny of NHS services carried out by HASC – which amounted to 38% of its activity during the year (compared with 33% in 2023/24 and 10% in 2022/23).

Category	CYPSSC	CHESC	FRSSC	HASC	PFSC	Total
Key decision preview	0	4	1	0	1	6 (8%)
Policy development	2	4	2	0	2	8 (11%)
Quarterly scrutiny of the Performance and Resources Report	4	4	4	4	4	20 (27%)
Service specific performance	6	4	0	1	10	21 (28%)
Improvement programme monitoring	1	0	0	2	0	3 (4%)
Budget scrutiny	1	1	1	1	3	7 (10%)

Compared with scrutiny activity carried out in 2023/24, areas of difference are:

- A decrease in input into policy development, from 18% to 11%.
- A decrease in key decision preview from 11% to 8%, although HASC did consider an NHS proposal for substantial variation in service in its health scrutiny role (similar to pre-decision scrutiny).
- An increase in service specific performance scrutiny from 14% to 28%
- A decrease in the monitoring of overarching improvement programmes from 8% to 4%. This reflects the fact that scrutiny is drilling down into some more specific elements of service performance.

Input into policy development can provide an opportunity for earlier influence than through key decision preview and may mean that proposed decisions are not then identified for preview as scrutiny has happened at a more useful time.

Scrutiny committee chairmen assessed the balance of scrutiny activity as part of their end of year review and felt that it reflected the issues and challenges facing the Council during the year and that committees had prioritised topics appropriately. Their view was that scrutiny had been robust, proportionate and constructive, but that it is important for each committee to monitor the balance of their own work programmes. As the Local Government Reorganisation programme progresses, chairmen felt that the impact on Council business could have implications in future for the balance of scrutiny work programmes.

Chairmen agreed that they have a key role to play in ensuring scrutiny focuses on priorities, provides meaningful challenge and that there is a clear, shared understanding of the outcomes of scrutiny, including agreed next steps.

Update on areas for development identified in 2023/24

1) Continuing to provide robust scrutiny of the Council's budget plans

- All scrutiny committees carry out scrutiny of budget plans relating to the portfolios they scrutinise. PFSC takes an overarching role in scrutinising budget plans, including through regular monitoring of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The **Council Plan and Budget for 2025/26** were scrutinised prior to approval by the County Council in February 2025. Three informal all-member sessions were held during the year to ensure all councillors were engaged and had opportunity to input into the development of the Plan and Budget at an early stage and this should be seen as valuable and timely scrutiny. Output from these sessions also informed scrutiny by PFSC, with conclusions provided to the Cabinet. Feedback from members on the process was very positive, suggesting it had enabled timely and valuable engagement, that they felt more involved in the process and that their comments had more impact.

2) Monitoring service improvement plans including external inspections

- CYPSSC has scrutinised areas of improvement identified in the 2023 Local Area SEND (special education needs and disabilities) Inspection, with each committee meeting focusing on a different area of the Improvement Plan to assess progress and how work is improving outcomes for children, young people and families. It also set up a joint task and finish group (TFG) with HASC to hold the NHS to account on areas of improvement identified in the areas covered in the inspection for which it is responsible.
- HASC has monitored the improvement journey of the **South East Coast Ambulance Service** NHS Foundation Trust, following inspections by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in 2022 that raised performance issues. The Committee concluded that the Trust's 999 and 111 services have improved in line with requirements. HASC has also been monitoring the **Adults' Services two-year improvement programme 2023/25**, to assist the delivery of the Adult Social Care Strategy and prepare for the CQC assurance of the service.
- FRSSC reviewed the outcomes of the final (Phase Two) **Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report** in March 2025, focusing on learning relevant to the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

3) All scrutiny members to own and be part of work programme planning

- Committees' work programmes are reviewed at every meeting. The Forward Plan of Key Decisions is also reviewed at all meetings, enabling all members to identify proposals for preview.
- All committees other than FRSSC have a cross-party business planning group (BPG) to carry out work programme planning. BPG agendas and actions are circulated to all committee members, to enable them to feed into business planning. For FRSSC, the whole committee carries out this task.

4) Effective prioritisation to support robust meeting management, avoid overrunning and avoid topics with limited ability to influence outcomes

- A 'focus for scrutiny' is identified at the earliest stage when identifying topics for scrutiny work to identify the objectives and desired outcomes for scrutiny. All committee reports include this focus as well as key lines of enquiry to assist members' preparation and questioning.
- Most scrutiny committee meetings have been scheduled to run for less than half a day and there was a decrease in the total duration of meetings by eight hours compared with 2023/24.
- Feedback from scrutiny committees suggests prioritisation remains an issue for ongoing monitoring as part of the work programme planning process, with some meetings overrunning or having too many items for effective input.

5) Ensuring scrutiny is always open and transparent

- All scrutiny committee meetings are held in public and webcast. The outcome of any task and finish group work is either reported to a formal committee meeting or to the decision-maker (so published separately on the website).
- On occasion, scrutiny members may be given the opportunity for informal briefings on topics of interest or to provide comment on proposals where the timing of committee meetings does not fit with the decision-making timeline.

6) Actively seeking opportunities for early influence of policy development, including by task and finish groups (TFGs)

- Three TFGs took place during 2024/25, including a cross cutting TFG for HASC and CYPSSC. There were two TFGs in 2023/24 and three in 2021/22. The use of TFGs to help inform policy at an early stage will continue to be considered through the business planning process. Feedback on the benefits of TFGs will be sought from the Committees as a future measure of their value.

7) Using the Performance and Resources Report (PRR) to identify issues of strategic importance for further scrutiny

- End of year feedback from scrutiny committee members identified performance monitoring as working well, with a notable increase in performance-related scrutiny items, from 14% in 2023/24 to 30% in 2024/25. This indicates that committees are using the PRR to identify issues for more in-depth scrutiny.
- Following feedback, a 'direction of travel' arrow has been added to each Capital Project within the PRR to show any change since last quarter.

8) Ensuring the role of co-opted members is clearly defined and understood

- The co-opted members of HASC and CYPSSC have all received training and guidance in their role and their committee's role. Specific induction sessions are arranged for any newly appointed co-opted members.

9) Use of external witnesses

- This is an ongoing priority, as it is recognised that external witnesses can bring added value to the scrutiny process. In 2024/25 there was input from twelve witnesses into scrutiny (ten in 2023/24 and eight in 2022/23). These included Sussex Police, the Independent Chairman of the SEND and Alternative Provision

Board, the University of Bedfordshire, NHS organisations, Electric Vehicle organisations, dentistry representatives, doctors and Diabetes UK.

- Members of the West Sussex Youth Cabinet are also in regular attendance at CYPSSC and attended 4 of the 5 meetings. A representative from the Young Voices SEND Group also attended a meeting of the Committee.

Scrutiny impact and value to the Council's business

Key aspects of scrutiny activity in 2024/25 are set out below, based on the four overarching objectives for effective scrutiny agreed by the County Council in 2019.

Influencing policy ideas or proposals before they are developed

- a) PFSC held an informal session in January 2025 to contribute to the new **Economic Strategy** ahead of the Strategy being presented for formal scrutiny in March. This enabled members to influence the content and ensured their views were considered ahead of the Strategy being finalised and approved.
- b) Through the scrutiny of different areas of the SEND Improvement Plan during 2024 -25, CYPSSC members have been able to recommend areas for inclusion in the **SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2030** at an early stage of its development. These included information on the trajectory and timescales for the provision of special school places and a focus on creating local school places. The Committee will scrutinise the draft Strategy in full in 2025/26.
- c) PFSC reviewed the new **Social Value and Sustainable Procurement Strategies** before they were agreed. The Committee also assessed the implications of the **new Procurement Act** to seek assurance on the way these were addressed. It identified several areas for additional clarity in the report plus extra training for contract managers as a future priority as well as the need to consider veterans in initiatives relating to social value.
- d) An important part of effective decision-making is the **call-in process**, through which councillors can request that proposed decisions be scrutinised before implementation. There were two requests for decisions to be called-in during 2024/25, but neither met the criteria for acceptance. The number of requests is generally low, with two in 2023/24, one of which was accepted. This may be an indication that the scrutiny process is working well. The need for the call-in process to be explained has been raised through scrutiny end of year reviews, to ensure councillors know its purpose and the criteria to determine requests.

Spending time on matters critical to service outcomes

- a) FRSSC had early input into the **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Annual Statement of Assurance**, which sets out how we can show whether an efficient and effective fire service is provided to the residents and visitors of West Sussex ahead of this being approved by Cabinet. It also reviewed its previous work on **retained firefighters** and fed the outcomes of its task and finish group into national work on this issue, as well as a new performance measure to monitor availability and more flexible training opportunities.
- b) HASC held **NHS providers** to account for plans impacting on local residents, including changes to the opening hours for the Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre and the closure of Zachery Merton community hospital in Rustington. The Committee highlighted the concerns of the public and sought assurance that

changes were communicated well, had good rationale and assessed the impact on patients. The Committee is monitoring commitments made by the NHS in response to its recommendations, to ensure timely updates are provided to the public. HASC also scrutinised aspects of **NHS service delivery**, with sessions on winter planning and the provision of primary healthcare, focusing on capacity to meet current and future demand.

- c) CHESC scrutinised the **Climate Action and Adaptation Plan 2024-27** prior to its adoption. The Committee was reassured that the target for the County Council's operations to be carbon neutral (excluding supply chains) by 2030 remained realistic.
- d) PFSC set up a TFG to look at how **grants** are sourced and applied for at the Council, following member suggestions in the 2024/25 Budget process, on ways to raise income. The TFG met once and was satisfied with the processes in place and made two recommendations to the Cabinet Member: to continue to lobby the Government to simplify grant funding processes and reduce the number of grants subject to competitive bidding, and to utilise the Oracle Fusion system (when implemented) to hold information for grant funding bids and to improve performance monitoring.
- e) PFSC scrutinised the new **West Sussex Economic Strategy** ahead of it being agreed by the Cabinet. It saw this Strategy as key to economic growth in the area and recognised the need to invest in high growth, highly skilled jobs whilst also managing the environmental impacts of growth. The adaptability of the Strategy to change was welcomed, especially in relation to the devolution and local government reorganisation programmes.
- f) CYPSSC considered proposals for changing **Millais Secondary School in Horsham** from all-girls provision to a co-educational school. A public consultation had taken place which gained a large number of responses from residents, parents and students, demonstrating the importance of the matter for the community. The Committee heard from the local members to understand the different views relating to the reasons of the proposals and how they were being seen. It recognised the rationale for change and recommended that lessons learned from similar processes be taken into account for this and future projects.

Meaningful challenge to the performance management of services

- a) All scrutiny committees carry out quarterly performance monitoring in public, through review of the **Performance and Resources Report (PRR)**. The PRR covers performance targets, budget, workforce and corporate risk. It links to the Council Plan's key performance indicators and priorities. Additional information on the capital programme and workforce is included at the request of PFSC. This enables more effective scrutiny of corporate risks relating to capital projects and staff retention, recruitment and absence. Scrutiny committees focussed their attention on red/amber KPIs and areas of performance and budget concern in 2024/25 to be more efficient in using committee capacity to add value. FRSSC had the opportunity to scrutinise the work on the joint service contract with other fire authorities, which highlighted performance issues that resulted in changes to future contracts.
- b) HASC has had early input into preparation for the **Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of Adult Services** continuing to review the self-assessment reports and deep dives into specific areas of the Service. It has continued to monitor the two-year **Adult Social Care improvement programme** to support

delivery of the Adult Social Care Strategy. The outcomes of the CQC inspection (in February 2025) will be reviewed when available. A specific area of focus for HASC was on the **workforce challenges** and it sought assurance on the planned action to deal with this. It also identified the performance of sexual health services as an area for future monitoring.

- c) CHESC scrutinised the progress and outcomes of the County Council's **Electric Vehicles Charge Point Programme**, having endorsed the Strategy in 2019. The Committee focussed on the challenges of the initial phases, and actions to address these, and recommended several mitigatory measures. Members also challenged the project risks, both financial and technological, questioning the Chief Executive of the company delivering the work.
- d) FRSSC has continued to review **Fire and Rescue Service performance** through the Performance and Assurance Framework, which is aligned to the delivery of strategic commitments in the Fire and Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan. The Committee monitored the impact of the Joint Fire Control Centre, specifically the maintenance of satisfactory response times. The benefits of working with Council services were highlighted, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable adults.
- e) PFSC has monitored replacement of the **Council's business management system** with Oracle Fusion. The implementation programme has been monitored to ensure it remains on-track for time and budget as well as achieving the benefits identified. Oversight has sought assurance that plans are on track, action is being taken to resolve any identified risks, and problems experienced previously are not repeated.
- f) As part of its scrutiny of the **SEND Improvement Programme**, CYPSSC has assessed the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) recovery plan to reduce the time taken to issue EHCPs and how the sufficiency of SEND school places is being addressed. It welcomed the work on improvement and has maintained a focus on the communication with children, young people and families as well as gaining feedback to continue to improve services. A joint CYPSSC and HASC TFG on **NHS areas of responsibility** arising from the Local Area SEND Inspection focused on the support being provided to children and young people waiting for assessment, including for neurodevelopment assessments, **Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services** (CAMHS) and speech and language therapy, as well as the quality and timeliness of health input into EHCP assessments. The TFG made a number of recommendations including the need to focus on reducing waiting lists as well as providing support for those waiting for support, and these will be monitored by HASC.

Showing the difference scrutiny makes to service outcomes for residents

- a) Access to **dentistry** across West Sussex remains on the HASC work programme, and in January 2025 it received an update from NHS Sussex. The Committee focused on work underway to change the central NHS dentists' contract and agreed to write to all West Sussex MPs to support the changes needed to national practice. HASC also scrutinised access to appropriate **diabetes technology** following a suggestion from a member of the public. Members were able to seek assurance that NHS Sussex is following national guidance to help residents gain access to new technologies to aid the management of diabetes.
- b) CYPSSC scrutinised the implementation of a new **Adult Learning Service** delivery model in September 2023. It welcomed progress made, the breadth of the service

since its implementation and that work that is being progressed to develop a venue for adult learning courses. Members highlighted the importance of learning for vulnerable adults and of measuring the impact of this work, including looking at ways to measure the success of the service as a whole.

- c) A CHESC TFG continues to act as a critical friend to the Cabinet Member on work aligned to delivery of the **Bus Services Improvement Plan**, as well as on matters relating to West Sussex's bus network more generally.
- d) PFSC carried out scrutiny of the Council's new **Digital Strategy** which will have an impact on residents as well as Council staff, as ways of contacting the Council may change. The Committee supported the changes being proposed and the engagement and communication being carried out to ensure the new processes are in the best interest of customers and are fully understood by residents.

Scrutiny Evaluation 2024/25

Scrutiny committee end of year reviews

Each scrutiny committee held an informal end of year review to consider what had worked well and less well during the year and to identify priorities for future. These were earlier than usual, in January, as the annual report was planned to be produced prior to elections in May 2025. 37 committee members provided feedback:

Worked well	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-meetings, where held • Effective and fair chairing • Reports contain relevant and appropriate information • Good collaboration between Scrutiny and the Cabinet and good relationships with partners such as the NHS • Scrutiny input into the budget and service performance • Performance monitoring through quarterly review of the PRR • Monitoring outcomes through the recommendations tracker • Good officer support and some excellent witnesses • Prioritisation of issues by BPGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage business better to avoid scheduling too many items for agendas and avoid over-running • Improving attendance at pre-meetings through clarifying their purpose and value • Ensure understanding of key processes, including call-in, the role of TFGs, BPGs' role, the role of co-opted members, how to deal with topics that cut across several committees' remits • Ensure members have access to relevant supporting information • Explore different ways of working, including through informal meetings (to enable witness input and more informal dialogue, outside of the constraints of formal meetings) and meetings held at different venues

Cabinet member feedback

Comments from the Cabinet on the effectiveness of scrutiny during the year are summarised below:

- Regular meetings between Cabinet and Scrutiny Chairs are very useful, providing an opportunity to review priorities; to identify where scrutiny can

input and add value; to take an overview of key issues; and to reflect on the role of scrutiny.

- The PFSC work programme has reflected key priorities during the year. Scrutiny input on the careers and skills TFG has been valuable with some good outcomes and evidence of impact. Scrutiny by HASC has been good overall, with effective contribution from NHS partners and good levels of attendance. CYPSSC was also identified as working well.

Review of Council governance arrangements

A review of the Council's governance arrangements was carried out by the Governance Committee between November 2024 and April 2025. A survey of all councillors had 27 responses. Feedback on scrutiny included that 63% of respondents rated the effectiveness of scrutiny as excellent or good. The effectiveness of scrutiny business planning groups was given a high overall ranking, and the majority of respondents felt the challenge provided by scrutiny and its influence on policy development were effective. Views were more mixed on the input from scrutiny committee chairs at public Cabinet meetings and on the engagement of all scrutiny committee members in work programme planning (with 44% of respondents seeing these as being effective). Having reviewed this, and feedback from senior officers, Governance Committee concluded that the scrutiny function is working well overall and that no changes are required.

An outcome of this review is that the Governance Committee has asked the Member Development Group to consider how to:

- Ensure members have a good general level of understanding about governance arrangements.
- Raise awareness of where to find information about governance of specific interest to members and member meetings.
- Support members' ability to be well prepared for and participate effectively in meetings.
- Ensure chairmen have the necessary training and guidance to manage meetings and appropriately guide and steer member questioning.

Elements of this work will pick up on some of the areas for development identified through the scrutiny committee end of year reviews.

Priorities for 2025/26

Subject to review by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in June 2025, areas for scrutiny development in 2025/26 are set out below. These will be monitored by the scrutiny chairmen.

- 1) Continue to provide robust scrutiny of budget plans
- 2) Continue to monitor service improvement plans and the outcomes of any external inspections
- 3) Continue to ensure scrutiny members own and are part of the work programme planning process
- 4) Effective prioritisation of committee business to ensure shorter agendas, enabling robust scrutiny and avoiding meetings over-running

- 5) Clarify the purpose and value of pre-meetings, with the aim of increasing attendance at these
- 6) Ensure the governance procedures relating to scrutiny are clearly described and communicated
- 7) Ensure clarity on the outcomes/conclusions of topics scrutinised and any next steps to be taken
- 8) Engagement in the local government reorganisation or devolution programmes as and when appropriate

Scrutiny committee work programme planning for the year ahead is in progress and will be reviewed at each formal committee meeting.

Other useful information on scrutiny

- The [scrutiny section](#) of the County Council's website, which includes an [Executive-Scrutiny Protocol](#) and copies of previous years' [scrutiny annual reports](#).
- The Council's Constitution includes the terms of reference for scrutiny committees ([Part 3](#), Scheme of Delegation) and the rules and procedures for scrutiny ([Part 4, Section 1](#), Standing Orders).
- The national [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) provides a range of useful reports and guidance on scrutiny.

Agreed by Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee, 30 June 2025