



Committee and Date

Council
15th December 2022

Item

Public

Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22

**Responsible
Officer**

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1. Synopsis

The Council's five Overview and Scrutiny committees looked at a wide range of key topics between them in 2021/22 which are summarised in this paper.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Shropshire Plan includes 'Healthy Organisation' as a priority outcome and the Strategic Objective that "We will ensure councillors are supported to advocate for their constituents but to also be ambassadors for the council". This report shares the annual statements for 2021/22 for the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee, the People Overview Committee, the Place Overview Committee, the Communities Overview Committee and the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2 During 2022/23 the Council invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to carry out a Peer Review of Overview and Scrutiny. This took place in September and October 2022. The report is expected late November and December 2022 and will be used to inform the development of Overview and Scrutiny at the council, including the delivery of action plans that respond to the recommendations that are accepted.
- 2.3 The annual statements for each overview and scrutiny committee for 2022/23 will be reported to Council during 2023/24

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. Members are asked to consider and comment on the 2021/22 annual statements for each overview and scrutiny committee.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Effective Overview and Scrutiny is a feature of the Council's governance arrangements, particularly where the Council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range of factors that could result in risks to Council of not doing O&S effectively.
- Failure to challenge and hold decision makers to account.
 - Failure to link O&S work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management – failure to demonstrate added value
 - Failure to carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-based recommendations.
 - Failure to engage partners and providers.
 - Failure to ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources.
 - Failure to ensure that O&S can operate as the voice of communities.
 - Failure to draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.
- 4.2. To mitigate, tolerate or eradicate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:
- Operating in an apolitical manner.
 - Clarity of vision and purpose
 - Overview and Scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
 - Effective engagement and commitment by Members and officers at all levels, including Cabinet, Opposition Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and Senior Officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
 - Robust Work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
 - Access to and availability of robust data and intelligence
 - Good relationship with partners and providers
- 4.3. Overview and Scrutiny Committees have remits that cover the breadth of the work of the Council, as well as looking externally including Health Services and provision through Health Overview and Scrutiny requirements.

- 4.4. Topics for Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes are identified based on a number of different considerations which including an understanding of risks to the Council, employees, people who use services, to service themselves, and to communities. These may be identified through reviewing performance information and comparing with others, changes to national and local policies, budget information, feedback from customers/service users, feedback from partners/providers, and reports from regulators.
- 4.5. During overview and scrutiny work evidence will be gathered that builds on this understanding to inform the development of conclusions and evidence-based recommendations.
- 4.6. The use of external peer challenge such as that offered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny provides objective review and feedback about opportunities to develop the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no direct financial implications associated with the annual statements of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees that are set out in this report.
- 5.2. Effective overview and scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of "what works" at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of what the situation locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. All reports to Overview and Scrutiny committees, as with all council committees, include appraisals of the impact of the report content on climate change.
- 6.2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes directly link to the Shropshire Plan priorities, including Healthy Environment which is built around climate change and carbon reduction, and the natural and historic environment.

- 6.3. Climate change and carbon reduction related issues are directly identified in the remit and therefore focus of the Place Overview Committee i.e.
- delivery of the agreed lower carbon footprint and emissions targets, including air quality, by the Council and its partners;
 - actions to protect, enhance and value Shropshire's our natural resources and respect the historic environment;
 - arrangements to safeguard and promote a clean and green environment;
 - the delivery of work to reduce landfill and waste;
 - management and development of the physical and digital infrastructure

7. Background

- 7.1. Overview and Scrutiny Committees report to Council annually as part of the organisation's governance arrangements. This includes the work that they have completed in the previous 12 months and the impact they have had through their evidence-based recommendations.
- 7.2. This report sets out the annual statements for 2021/22 for:
- Performance Management Scrutiny Committee
 - Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - People Overview Committee
 - Place Overview Committee
 - Communities Overview Committee
- 7.3. The Council also invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out a Peer Review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. This was carried out in the early Autumn 2022. The outputs of this peer review will be used to help inform the opportunities and options to develop the council's Overview and Scrutiny function moving forwards.
- 7.4. The full CfGS report will be made available to all Members, and they will inform the response to the accepted recommendations and the development of how the council carries out overview and scrutiny.

8. Annual Scrutiny statements

8.1 Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

- **Financial Strategy task and finish group**
The committee formed a task and finish group to explore in greater depth how services were adapting to rapid changes in service demand and tighter financial constraints. It recognised how the council had responded creatively to deliver better services for less, focussing on these projects and initiatives

that would redesign services and meeting. The committee agreed to forward these priorities schemes for scrutiny by the respective thematic scrutiny committees.

- **Financial monitoring**

As well as scrutiny of the financial strategy through its task and finish group, the committee had regular oversight of quarterly financial monitoring, allowing it to monitor adherence to plan and to hold directors and portfolio holders to account for outcomes. The committee members tracked and monitored the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on budgets, and in doing so considered distortions in service demand and the high levels of emergency funding. It scrutinised the dispersal of emergency funding and highlighted the difficulty in setting budgets in the light of continued uncertainty about future funding or service demand.

- **Performance monitoring**

Throughout the year the committee received the regular quarterly performance monitoring report. Although this presented a useful snapshot of performance, the committee increasingly asked for more comprehensive performance information. Officers presented proposals for such information to be available online, updated in as the data became available, to allow all elected members to appraise performance and raise issues of concern. The committee continues to press the move at pace to deliver tools and access to the data vital to their delivering good oversight and scrutiny in holding decision makers to account.

- **Shropshire's Economic Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Framework**

The committee looked at the work of the Economic Task Force, and its twin role of supporting businesses during the pandemic and the orientation of its strategy to adapt to changes arising from the pandemic. The committee were appreciative of the work of the economic growth team in disbursing grant relief to businesses during the pandemic.

The committee recognised the framework identified both positive and negative impact of the pandemic, using these to inform and adapt its economic strategy.

It noted the interdependence of key infrastructure projects around Shropshire, and their salience in generating prosperity throughout the area. The committee looked forward to seeing this work informing the development of the next version of the Economic Growth Strategy.

- **New Civic Centre**

The committee chose to look at this topic in the context of how a new civic centre would support future workforce planning and operations. In creating a new civic centre, the council wished to reinforce and further evolve new ways of working including the continued use of technology to allow people to work from home. Relocating into Shrewsbury town centre was also expected to bring footfall to the retail centre and the redevelopment of the Riverside area provided such an opportunity. Members were critical of a perceived lack of civic space in the proposals and questioned the extent to which access for

those of limited mobility would be considered. These, alongside other considerations, were included in the report to Council that informed the debate and decision to proceed with the development.

- **Complaints, compliments and comments**

The committee received the annual Customer Feedback report 2020/21 which sets out resident feedback to the council through complaints, compliments and comments. The committee noted the high number of complaints concerning highways matters and referred the matter to the Place Overview Committee. The Improvements to highways operations and performance, including better communications with residents became key themes for the Place Overview Committee in its work programme.

- **Climate and Ecology Bill**

In response to a request from Council, the committee convened a task and finish group to agree a response to the Climate and Ecology Bill on behalf of Shropshire Council. It agreed to endorse most of the Bill but could not support the proposal for a citizens' assembly.

- **The Shropshire Plan**

The committee endorsed the publication of The Shropshire Plan, the council's corporate plan. It approved of its thematic approach the underlying policy and service plan framework, and the ambition to track and monitor progress against the plan through rigorous, widely available performance management information. The committee stressed the vital importance of timely and comprehensive performance management information relevant to the priorities and the services and developments taking place to deliver them. They highlighted that it would be challenging to monitor and evidence progress and impact with the plan without them.

8.2 Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- **Delivering Public Health Outcomes**

The committee continued to monitor closely the change in strategy in how public health funding is spent. The council had moved to tackle the wider determinants of health, in particular housing, allowing it to focus on providing more comprehensive services for its most vulnerable residents. The committee challenged the council's approach and scrutinised its performance monitoring and project spend. The committee recognised that this constituted a long-term strategy whose benefits would become apparent many years later and agreed to focus future scrutiny onto the projects and services directly.

- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**

The committee was critical of the failure of the council, through the Health and Wellbeing Board, to commission and complete the local authority's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), a key statutory document on which partnership health planning should be

based. The committee continued to monitor progress as the council completed its Special Educational Needs JSNA and developed its proposals for place-based assessments to mirror the council's place-based planning.

- **Adult Mental Health Services**

The committee received a programme of briefing on the range of support services for mental health across adult services. These included housing for adults with significant and enduring mental health problems, and adults with learning difficulties with individual capacities for independent living. The committee heard how mental health teams were working more closely with drug and alcohol teams to provide holistic care and agreed to focus a future work programme item on this vital component of service support.

- **111 Services**

Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) provided the committee with the results of their review of the triage of 111 non-emergency services. A programme to offer GP appointments directly had not achieved its intended level of uptake. Members sought assurance that the CCG considered the demographic profile and associated age-related changes in demand when assessing service capacity. The committee learned that a review of high-intensity service users had provided an opportunity to identify and provide more appropriate care to these users, reducing the burden on the service in turn. Member referred this matter to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, asking that it also scrutinise ambulance response times.

- **Independent Living**

Members took part in two online briefings on how the council promoted independent living through assistive technology and new housing developments that catered for the needs of adults with additional support needs. The committee supported the focus on promoting independent living and using technology to achieve that.

- **Health in All policies**

Following its decision to focus on the delivery of projects and services to realise the public health outcomes framework, the committee placed its focus on emerging Health in All Policies approach, embedding the council's public health duty into all of its policy and priorities. Public Health were working closely with the development of Local Transport Plan 4, the first major council policy to embed this approach. The committee endorsed this approach to setting policy.

- **Winter Plan**

The committee scrutinised the learning at the end of the operation of the council's winter plan, seeking to identify areas of focus as the

local authority prepared for the coming year's winter pressures. The committee received reassurance around effective and close working with the voluntary and community sector. And heard that the additional winter bed capacity worked very well in increasing transfers of care from hospitals.

Members felt that the public perception of the discharging process was that it was slow, and it would be appropriate for this to be scrutinised. Members were advised that the team would be looking at the journey to discharge, which was complex, and that there was a lot of work taking place surrounding this which could be presented in the future to give the committee and communities more assurance.

- **Joint commissioning**

The committee looked at the emerging integrated approach to commissioning with health partners. Members raised concern that partnerships cannot be successfully formed when data is not being shared. Members were advised that joint dashboards had been set up and data sharing protocols were being developed. This would enable scrutiny of progress and impact and the holding of decision makers to account. It was noted that local decisions would be considered by a local board before being implemented and that the council had a strong voice when it came to decision making.

8.3 People Overview Committee

- **Young People's Substance Misuse Services**

Following the committee's scrutiny of criminal exploitation, it scrutinised more closely services supporting vulnerable children and young adults. The committee were assured that the service worked closely with other agencies, highlighting the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

- **School Places**

Members of the committee raised concerns that future housing growth in areas of the county could result in a lack of school places for those communities. Following their work over several meetings they were reassured and concluded that school place planning processes were robust and embedded into strategic planning for housing growth.

- **Covid19**

During the year the committee explored the short and longer-term impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the lives of children and young people. The members supported the council's work to commission out of term support to vulnerable families. The committee tracked the increase in children becoming looked after, as well as the drop

in attainment in some children who had attended school remotely during the pandemic. These concerns informed the committee's work programme.

- **School exclusions**

This topic was a priority identified from the committee's earlier work into criminal exploitation. The committee members were concerned by the rising number of children being expelled from school and that their increased vulnerability to exploitation. Members focussed on the high prevalence of children with a special education need and recognised the benefits of keeping these children in mainstream education where possible. The committee recognised the central role that Early Help service played in supporting children who were at risk of being expelled from school, and in doing so welcomed the increased budget allocated to the service.

- **Stepping Stones**

Shropshire Council's Financial Strategy task and finish group asked the committee to scrutinise the implementation and performance of Stepping Stones, the council's holistic, psychologically informed service, providing wrap around, customised support for looked after children, young people and adults. The committee welcomed a project that had demonstrated creativity and focus to deliver better care for children by moving them from residential care, often some distance from Shropshire, into home environments.

- **Recruitment**

A recurring theme throughout the year, and a focus of the Financial Strategy task and finish group, was how Shropshire Council responded to the national shortages in critical staff such as social workers and youth workers. The committee endorsed both services commitment to their workforce by developing apprenticeships and graduate training development programmes. As a result of this the youth service had been able to be fully staffed.

- **Youth Work**

The committee praised the service on its commitment to developing its work force, filling all the posts despite a shortage of qualified workers. It pressed the service to seek clarity on funding through town and parish council services, who were central to services throughout Shropshire.

8.4 Place Overview Committee

- **Highways Improvement Plan**

The committee were broadly supportive of the plan but raised numerous

concerns about its implementation. They expressed dissatisfaction with the MyShropshire portal for reporting highways repairs and repeated their earlier concerns about gully cleansing. Since the committee considered this topic Shropshire Council has adopted a new portal for repairs, FixMyStreet and has increased the amount of gully cleansing that it carries out.

- **Winter Maintenance**

The committee formed a working group to look in detail at the council's current winter maintenance service. The group made numerous recommendations, particularly around better communication with town and parish councils and empowering local communities to manage their own gritting outside of the council's strategic gritting routes. As a result of this work, the council has improved the availability and replenishment of gritting bins and has improved its communication with town and parish councils through the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC).

- **Road Traffic Collisions**

At the request of the Head of Transport and Environment the committee scrutinised an analysis of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions. It recommended that the Public Health team be involved from the outset in developing the Local Transport Plan. Since then, Public Health have been pivotal in developing the health impact assessment informing development of the plan.

- **Fireworks**

The committee considered in depth the role the local authority could take in restricting the sale and discharge of fireworks. It instructed officers to write to Government to urge further restrictions on the sale of fireworks, and to reduce the maximum permitted noise level of fireworks intended for public displays.

- **Kier and WSP contracts**

The committee continued to monitor the council's contracts with Kier and WSP to provide highways professional and operational services. The committee was positive about the evolution of the contract with Kier, in particular the adoption of a hybrid contracted/in-house services. The committee believed that this would deliver a more responsive service while reducing costs.

- **Highways diversions**

Following concerns from councillors, the committee scrutinised current arrangements for putting into place highways diversions. Following their concerns, Kier recruited a communications officer to work with local communities when a diversion needed to be put into place. The committee also supported a move to longer-term certainty of funding for highways, which would allow the service to plan work better and therefore have more time to support works with effective communications.

- **Signs and banners task and finish group**

On behalf of a previous task and finish group, the committee continued to press Cabinet for a response to some of the group's recommendations around on-street advertising. The committee also asked the council to review

its charges for housing development signs.

- **Planning Committee Structures**

Council asked the committee to carry out a review of the impact of the reduction in number of planning committees from three to two. It carried out a survey of unitary and town and parish councils, as well as a desktop review of structures in other local authorities. The committee rejected the assertion that the reduction has degraded the quality of planning decisions, but made recommendations about ensuring regular training for Members about how to respond to planning applications.

- **Planning enforcement**

Members of the committee wished to scrutinise the impact of changes to the planning enforcement service. The committee made recommendations that it believed would improve communication of successful planning enforcement activity to the public and to elected members.

- **Local Transport Plan 4**

Scrutiny of the development of the plan resulted in members recommending that continued LTP development ensures that council decisions in February including the sustainable transport hierarchy principles, the involvement of public health and pathways to net zero including interim targets, are fully embedded.

- **Post Covid-19 Economic Renewal**

The committee focussed on the impact of the pandemic on retail centres in Shropshire, noting that Shrewsbury in particular had experienced a strong recovery in footfall and spending following the easing of pandemic regulations. Members agreed that future scrutiny of the Economic Growth Plan should focus on supporting those sectors that had been most severely impacted by the pandemic.

8.5 Communities Overview Committee

- **Burial Capacity**

The committee received two updates on work to ensure sufficient cemetery capacity in Shropshire. It agreed that this was an ongoing issue that needed to be kept under review and asked that regular updates be provided to the committee in future.

- **Public Rights of Way**

Committee members expressed concern at the reduction in accessibility of public rights of way caused by the pandemic and the inability of volunteer groups to operate and maintain the paths. The committee also noted that the service was hampered in its ability to do more work to maintain paths by an inability to keep and use income it had generated. It called on the council to explore how the service could retain this money for this purpose in future.

In a further meeting the committee also raised concern at the staff shortages in the service, as well as ongoing requirements to bridge repairs to keep rights

of way open. It sought assurance that the council would recruit to fill these posts, and that funding would be made available to effect repairs to address compromised safety.

- **Rural transport**

The committee heard how the council was seeking new ways to deliver public transport in rural areas. It aimed to move from limited scheduled services to a demand-responsive service that would serve more destinations more frequently and could link better to scheduled rail services. The committee supported the proposals and asked that any changes to services and plans be brought to the committee in due course.

- **Libraries Strategy**

The libraries service provided the committee with initial thoughts that it proposed to develop into a formal strategy in due course. The committee members recommended that any future strategy recognised the pivotal role libraries played in communities, particularly in rural communities. They also recommended that the strategy made full use of commercial opportunities to ensure the long-term sustainability of facilities.

- **Community and Rural Strategy**

The committee received a draft of the strategy. Members suggested that the strategy needed to be brought to grass roots level and recognise the huge resources available in rural parishes and towns. It advised that ongoing development of the strategy should be undertaken with parishes as they had a good understanding of their own needs. It recommended that low level financial input may be needed in order to enable them to provide support in their own locality.

- **Armed Forces Covenant**

The committee endorsed the covenant and agreed that it would recommend that ex-service staff should receive greater priority for consideration in the housing allocation policy. It agreed to make this recommendation when it considered a revised Housing Allocations Policy later in the year.

- **Domestic Abuse**

Following the publication of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the committee was keen to learn how the council intended to put its new legal duties into place. It asked that a draft strategy for the council was produced and published for agreement in due course, and recommended that the council seek White Ribbon Campaign accreditation.

- **Flooding**

The committee asked for an update on previous recommendations and other learning resulting from flooding throughout Shropshire in late 2019 and early 2020. It was assured that much of the learning from that flooding had been put into place, in particular a new Severe Weather Plan and Flood Action plan. It noted that considerable volunteer effort that had been deployed to mitigate the impact of flooding and recommended that Shropshire Council

create a reserve of volunteers, from inside and outside of the council, who could be deployed to respond to other incidents or emergencies.

- **Strategic Housing Review**

The committee scrutinised a review of the housing revenue account management function. It agreed with the review that STAR Housing be retained and not merged with the council's Cornovii Developments.

- **Blue Badge Scheme**

Committee members raised concerns that efforts to digitalise council functions had made it considerably more difficult to apply for a Blue Badge for some people, particularly older residents. The committee recommended that the service work with AgeUK locally to identify ways to support applicants who were unable to use digital services.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas, papers and minutes for May 2021 to March 2022.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

All

Local Member

All

Appendices

None