

Report to	County Council
Date of meeting	18 May 2021
Report author	Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group/Rhian Evans, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Presented by	Councillor Graham Timms (Chair of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group)
Title	Annual Report of the Council's Scrutiny Committees 2020/21

1. What is the report about?

The Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report to Council for 2020/21

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To present to Council the Scrutiny Committees' annual report on their activities during 2020/21.
- 2.2 To comply with Section 7.4.4 of the Council's Constitution which stipulates that scrutiny committees must report annually to full Council on their work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Council considers the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees for 2020/21 and comments accordingly.

4. Report details

- 4.1 The Constitution of Denbighshire County Council stipulates that the Authority's Scrutiny Committees will report annually on their activities during the year to County Council.
- 4.2 This year's Annual Report is attached at Appendix 1. It provides the reader with a brief introduction on what scrutiny is and how scrutiny operates, along with an overview of the work the committees and their members have undertaken during the course of the year. It also includes information on how residents can participate and contribute to the scrutiny process. Upon approval the report will be translated and be made available on the Council's website.
- 4.3 The report outlines Scrutiny's important role in relation to supporting the Council's work to deliver its corporate priorities and Corporate Plan, including its regular monitoring of the Plan's delivery. As in previous years the Scrutiny Committees during 2020/21 have undertaken a mix of pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny, with individual committees focussing their work on a number of specific areas, such as corporate performance, the effectiveness of partnership arrangements in delivering services, and community and economic benefit.
- 4.4 However, 2020/21 was not a normal year. From mid-March until early September 2020 all but urgent Council decision-making was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Scrutiny committees, like other Council committees were unable to hold meetings to conduct their business until secure virtual meeting platforms were established.
- 4.5 As the effects of the pandemic permeated into every aspect of daily life all scrutiny committee work programmes required to be reviewed to evaluate their relevance in post-pandemic Denbighshire. To facilitate this the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) devised a way forward which combined examining Council services' recovery plans from responding to the pandemic with the scrutiny committees' priorities pre-COVID. The attached report describes how this task was undertaken and the outcomes from it.
- 4.6 The SCVCG felt that it was important for scrutiny committees to focus on examining the various COVID-19 recovery plans during their first meetings, as these would form

the foundation for Scrutiny's work and priority areas going forward. Learning lessons from responding to the pandemic would be key for devising or adapting policies and services that would be fit for the future. Details of the COVID-19 recovery priorities examined by Scrutiny can be found in the 'Scrutiny and the COVID-19 pandemic' section of the report.

- 4.7 Once satisfied that the Council's corporate priorities were still relevant for the remainder of the Council's term, Scrutiny continued with its regular monitoring of the Authority's performance in delivering those priorities. It also rescheduled all relevant outstanding items of business listed on the committees' forward work programmes pre the pandemic on to the committees' future forward work programmes. Details of those topics examined to date can be found in the sections on the individual committees within the report. The remainder of the subject areas will be examined during the final year of the Council's term of office.
- 4.8 Public engagement and encouraging residents to interact with Scrutiny has always been challenging, although in recent years the number of requests received have increased. Nevertheless, it came as no surprise that in 2020/21 Scrutiny only received one request from a member of the public for an item to be scrutinised. This related to a specific COVID-19 Active Travel Scheme in one of the county's towns. In line with its strategic approach for examining matters the SCVCG decided to focus the scrutiny of this topic on the process followed for developing and implementing these schemes across the county.
- 4.9 As life slowly returns to some form of normality the SCVCG hopes that the number of requests received from residents for Scrutiny to examine matters will increase. All county councillors are asked to draw residents' attention to the method for requesting Scrutiny to examine matters of concern to them. The relevant Scrutiny proposal form can be found at the back of the attached Annual Report or on the Council's website by following this link: [Public Scrutiny Request Form](#)
- 4.10 When considering a request for a topic to be scrutinised, be the request from a councillor, an officer or a member of the public, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) applies the following criteria to determine whether the item merits scrutiny:
- is it a matter of public interest?

- does Scrutiny have the ability to influence or change things?
- does it relate to an underperforming service?
- does the matter affect a large number of residents or a large geographical area?
- is anyone else looking at it?

4.11 As well as information on the work of Denbighshire's own scrutiny committees the report also contains an update on the work of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) established by Conwy and Denbighshire councils to examine the work of the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board (PSB). Information is also contained within the report on the work of the various task and finish groups established by the Scrutiny Committees, including details of new task and finish groups established towards the end of the 2020/21 Council year.

4.12 Despite the problems encountered as a result of the pandemic Scrutiny did manage to continue with its practice of inviting partner organisations to meet with committee members to examine how services and outcomes for residents can be improved through effective partnership working. Amongst those who attended during 2020/21 were Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB). Whilst the Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport was unable to accept an invitation to attend a Scrutiny Committee meeting to discuss the COVID-19 Active Travel Scheme funding, he did provide written evidence to the Committee for consideration. The Health Board of course had to give priority to responding and managing the public health situation, therefore meetings involving representatives from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) had to be rescheduled. Health Board representatives will be attending Scrutiny early in the new municipal year and periodically throughout the remainder of the Council's term of office.

4.13 Scrutiny is expected to evidence the outcomes of its work. Generally, this is not as straight forward as it sounds as a lot of Scrutiny's work, particularly its pre-decision work, forms part of the larger picture in improving policies and services to residents. However, this year it is pleasing to report that the results of Scrutiny's efforts in the wake of the Llantysilio Mountain fire in 2018 have been realised. One of the recommendations that stemmed from Scrutiny's review into the fire and its impact on the area was a recommendation that a Moorland Management Officer post be created. An officer was appointed to this post in early 2021. As well as delivering the objectives laid out in the Scrutiny report this officer will also now have an

important role to play in supporting aspects of the Council's Climate and Ecological Change Strategy. This is a clear example of what detailed, effective scrutiny can achieve and the added value it can provide corporately.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Effective scrutiny will assist the Council to deliver its corporate priorities in line with community needs, residents' wishes and within budget.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The publication of the Annual Report forms part of the regular committee reports despatch to county councillors and other recipients, therefore there are no additional costs entailed with its publication. The Annual Report upon approval will be available on the Council's intranet and website.

6.2 Any costs incurred with respect of the work of task and finish groups will be met from within existing budgets

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

A Well-being Impact Assessment (WBIA) is not required for this report as no decision or change of policy is being sought. The Annual Report is presented solely to inform councillors and residents of the Scrutiny Committees' work during the preceding twelve months and as a means of outlining potential future areas of work.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Members of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) have been involved with the process of drafting the Annual Report and its proposed contents.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no significant financial implications resulting from this report. As mentioned in paragraph 6 above any costs relating to the production of the Report will be

contained within existing budgets, as will any costs arising from the establishment of task and finish groups.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

No risks have been identified with respect to the consideration of the Committees' Annual Report.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000

11.2 Section 7.4.4 of the Council's Constitution.