

# Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees 2023 to 2024

Appendix 1



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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 nine 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.

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.

## 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. All three parent governor representative posts on Scrutiny are currently vacant. If you are a parent governor at one of the Council's primary, secondary or special schools, and may 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 really like to hear from you.

## 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 scrutiny 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 2023/24 a total of 20 requests for items to be scrutinised were considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group. Of these 20 requests:

- 2 were submitted by county councillors
- 14 by officers (although that 2 of these resulted from Notices of Motion put forward by councillors and discussed by County Council)
- 3 requests were received from individuals or organisations external to the Council.
- 1 request was received from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee on behalf of the Committee

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.

## **The process for determining a topic's suitability for scrutiny**

### **Step one: considering the request**

Proposal form or request received and careful consideration is given to the 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 will be referred elsewhere, or information requested and shared with the individual or organisation who submitted the request.

**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 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.

## **Scrutiny's work during 2023/24**

Scrutiny Committee meetings are now held as 'hybrid meetings'. This gives committee members, officers and external partners or organisations invited to attend a scrutiny committee meeting the option of attending in person at the designated venue, or remotely via video conferencing. This flexibility eases the pressure on people to travel from one location to the other, releases more time to undertake other work during the day and helps reduce the county's carbon emissions by cutting down on unnecessary journeys. As 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, residents are able to either follow committee discussions live or catch-up with items which interest them later, whichever is more convenient for them.

During 2023/24, having played an integral role in supporting the Council through the pandemic and the recovery work that followed, Scrutiny had to adjust to dealing with the initial stages of changes to service delivery methods in the wake of the severe budget cuts facing the Authority and other public service organisations for the foreseeable future. This work is currently very much in its infancy. It is anticipated that over the coming years Scrutiny will be heavily involved with the work taking place to transform the delivery of Council services going forward.

## **Scrutiny and the Council's Corporate Priorities during 2023/24**

The Council's Corporate Plan ['The Denbighshire We Want'](#) and its priorities for 2022 – 2027 was agreed in October 2022, the Plan sets out what it is that the Council wants to achieve for the benefit of local residents and communities over the next five years. The Corporate Priorities for the 2022 to 2027 Council term as originally agreed are listed below. Beneath each heading are examples of the types of actions that will help deliver each priority:

**1. A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs:** ensuring that everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs.

- Ensuring that people can access quality housing that meet their needs.
- Helping people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Working to prevent homelessness.

**2. A prosperous Denbighshire**

- Supporting economic growth.
- Developing a plan to grow Denbighshire's businesses in the future.
- Providing advice and support for business growth and helping local communities to thrive.

**3. A healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire**

- Delivering high standards of social care.
- Supporting people of all ages to live well and be safe.
- Helping people to live independently, providing support when needed.

**4. A learning and growing Denbighshire**

- Supporting parents, and young children in the early stages of their development.
- Making sure everyone has fair opportunities to learn.
- Providing quality buildings and facilities that support learning and thriving communities.



- Supporting people to learn new skills, volunteer and find good jobs.

#### **5. A better connected Denbighshire\***

- Maintaining a quality road network and enabling people to access education, employment, services and activities.
- Supporting communities with improved digital networks and skills.
- Working to support personal and community well-being.
- Supporting our green infrastructure.

#### **6. A greener Denbighshire**

- To become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive organisation by 2030.
- Looking after and improving the natural environment.
- Working with communities to cope with and reduce the impacts of climate change.
- Improve recycling rates and reduce waste.

#### **7. A fairer, safe, and more equal Denbighshire\***

- Working to address the inequality and poverty faced by our communities.
- Ensuring that everyone receives the same standard of service to support their well-being.
- Promoting and celebrating diversity within our communities.

#### **8. A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language\***

- Ensuring that everyone can access services in Welsh naturally at all stages in their lives.
- Supporting the broader use of Welsh and the celebration of Welsh culture.
- Developing a strategy to promote Denbighshire's rich culture, heritage and natural assets.

## 9. A well-run, high performing Council

- Embedding a positive culture of ambition, transparency and improvement.
- Developing close and trusted relationships between our staff, elected members and our communities.
- Ensuring the Council is well-run and good value for money.
- Ensuring Denbighshire County Council is a good employer and an excellent place to work.

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. Performance Scrutiny Committee monitors the Council's progress in delivering the Corporate Plan in its entirety.

\* During the autumn of 2023 the Committee, acutely aware of the prolonged period of financial constraints facing the Council and the fact that it would have fewer employees available to help deliver its ambitions, questioned whether the Plan in its original format was now too ambitious to deliver. As a result a review of the Plan's objectives was undertaken and County Council in February 2024 approved a revised Corporate Plan for 2022 to 2027. This revised Plan now contains six rather than the nine original Corporate Themes, with the following themes:

- A better connected Denbighshire
- A fairer, safe and more equal Denbighshire
- A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

not being discarded, but rather subsumed into the remaining corporate themes. This will ensure that the Council will still strive to deliver them by the end of its term in office as part of its day-to-day business, rather than as stand-alone objectives.

## **Call-in of Cabinet decisions**

The Council's Call-In Procedure was only invoked once during 2023/24. The call-in related to a decision taken by the Council's Cabinet to reduce the opening hours of the Council's Libraries and One Stop Shops, this particular decision formed part of the Council's budget setting process. A public consultation on the proposals had attracted a very high number of responses, the overwhelming majority of which were against the proposed reduction in hours and service. Communities Scrutiny Committee held a special meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to consider the decision.

During its review the Committee heard that there was no appetite amongst the majority of elected members or residents for library services and hours to be reduced. Nevertheless, the Council was facing unprecedented budget pressures for the foreseeable future which required every service it operated to be reviewed to realise financial savings that would enable the Council to agree a balanced budget, something which it was compelled to do by law. The proposals agreed by Cabinet in relation to the Library and One Stop Shop Service would ensure that each of Denbighshire's libraries and one stop shops would remain open, albeit that they would be open for fewer hours per week. Cabinet were of the view that by adopting this approach it would provide an opportunity for services to be expanded and enhanced once again, if and when the financial climate improved. Having considered all the evidence presented to it Communities Scrutiny Committee felt that it would be better if the decision's implementation was paused until exploratory work with external organisations, such as city, town and community councils along with other public and private organisations had been completed with the aim of securing sufficient resources to keep these services open as per their current operating hours. The Committee therefore requested that Cabinet postpone the implementation of its decision until all the exploratory work had been undertaken.

Cabinet considered and acknowledged Scrutiny's recommendations but confirmed its original decision on the basis that the savings required to be realised from the outset of the 2024/25 financial year. However, it agreed to establish a working group of councillors, officers and other stakeholders to explore ways of developing a county-wide sustainable

funding model for Library/One Stop Shop services. This Libraries Task Force will report its initial findings to Performance Scrutiny Committee during the second half of the 2024/25 financial year.

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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, in the main, are generally difficult to evidence, but the overall objective of Scrutiny is to support better decision-making which in turn delivers better services. Therefore, the earlier Scrutiny is involved with the decision-making process the better, this is usually referred to as 'pre-decision scrutiny'.

Pre-decision scrutiny of any proposals gives Scrutiny members more time to shape and influence decisions which should lead to better, evidence-based decisions being taken which in turn will deliver better outcomes for all. During times of financial austerity involving Scrutiny as early as possible in shaping how the Council will fulfil its role in delivering services is particularly important as it can act as the residents' advocate and voice in shaping future service delivery models.

## Communities Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Huw Williams (**Chair**)



Cllr. Karen Edwards (**Vice-Chair**)

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

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.

Many of the reports considered by the Committee in the 2023/24 municipal year related to services being reviewed under the Authority's budgetary measures. The Committee scrutinised proposals, provided feedback and in some cases made recommendations for further investigation before decisions were made by Cabinet.

As mentioned earlier in this report Cabinet's decision relating to the reduction in opening hours of the county's One Stop Shops/libraries was called in for review by the Committee, with members resolving to refer the decision on the '**Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal**' back to Cabinet for further consideration; and furthermore recommending to Cabinet that it postpone the implementation of the decision until further exploratory work was done to identify alternative funding sources available to the Council or other partner bodies whether in the private or public sector.

Continuing with the review of services to identify potential savings a draft proposal for the potential transfer or closure of the **County's Public Conveniences** was submitted for consideration. The Committee raised concerns on the potential impact on residents, businesses and tourists and requested that a further report be presented addressing all their concerns before any proposal to close or transfer public conveniences was considered by Cabinet.

One of the Council's corporate priorities is to have a more prosperous Denbighshire, economic development and regeneration are key to delivering this priority. As part of its work in supporting the delivery of this priority the Committee continued to monitor the work of the **Rhyl Regeneration Programme Board** in managing and delivering the myriad of projects aimed at rejuvenating the town centre and its tourist attractions for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. As this is a long-term vision which is reliant upon a number of large and medium scale projects being delivered, a number of which rely on a range of external funding streams to finance them, the Committee will continue examining the progress made during the forthcoming year.

As part of the Council's budget setting process **Car Parking Tariffs** and operational hours were reviewed for the first time since 2016. It was acknowledged that the proposals would be unpopular but were necessary due to the pressures on the Council's budget and in order to secure future investment in the county's car parks. During their consideration of the proposals the Committee raised concerns over the removal of the 30-minute tariff and the impact of charging for parking after 5pm on community groups and events. Consequently, they recommended that officers explored further the following proposals prior to implementing the proposed changes:

- the introduction of discounted/cheaper tariffs for evening parking (i.e. between 5pm and 11pm so as not to disadvantage or discourage people from attending community groups/events),

- the potential of keeping the free 30 minutes parking or introducing a lower tariff for up to 30 minutes; and
- the potential of having free car parking all day on Saturdays on the run up to Christmas rather than the current practice of after 3pm every day.

The Committee examined in detail the **draft Car Park Investment Plan** including the improvements that would be delivered as part of the plan. The most significant improvement delivered during the term of the current investment plan had been to ensure that the majority of the Authority's pay and display machines had been networked to accept card payments and contactless methods as well as cash payments. In addition, twelve car parks across the County had seen the installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points, providing enough charging points to be able to charge over 70 electric vehicles at any one time. The EV charging hub at West Kinmel Street Car Park in Rhyl was the second largest EV hub in the UK. The new Investment Plan for the forthcoming years focused on the physical infrastructure of county council-owned car parks. However, expectations would need to be managed effectively given the budget constraints faced by the Council for the foreseeable future.

Denbighshire continued its commitment to lessen its impact on climate change by updating its service model for **collecting and dealing with Household Waste** both residual and recyclable. The Committee considered regular updates on the progress of the **new Waste Transfer Depot** in Denbigh – including a site visit – while it was awaiting the necessary licence from Natural Resources Wales to initiate operations. The Committee also examined the Service's proposals to update their Waste collections policy, which included the new model Trolley Boxes whereby residents will be expected to separate their recycling prior to collection, and the introduction of a pilot scheme for the collection of Absorbent Hygiene Products (AHP) prior to it being rolled-out county wide when the Waste Service Model change is implemented over the summer of 2024. The Committee was



keen to seek reassurances that details of the changes would be communicated effectively to Denbighshire's residents and to local City, Town, and Community Councils.

Mindful of the Authority's core priority of realising a Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs – several items were presented by Housing Services for the Committee's consideration. Amongst these was a report on **Housing Rent Increase and Budgets 2024/25** which asked the Committee to consider the proposed increase in rents versus their impact on household affordability and subsequent housing investment budgets, together with the pressure faced by the Council to meet the new Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). The Committee was reassured that if the maximum increase allowed was approved, weekly rents would remain within the affordability bracket of those households with the lowest levels of earned income.

In a bid to ensure that the Council's own Housing Service and its housing stock are meeting tenants' needs and expectations the Committee examined the Council's **Community Housing Tenancy Management** processes, its **Housing Maintenance Voids Process** along with the results and findings of the **Council Housing Tenant Feedback and Satisfaction Survey**. By examining all these aspects relating to the provision and management of the Council's housing stock the Committee was able to have a full overview of the way the Service managed its stock and interacted with tenants to ensure that the housing provided was affordable, represented value for money, well managed, and met tenants' needs to a satisfactory standard.

A report on Denbighshire's revised **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA)** was reviewed to determine if the process undertaken in revising the assessment complied with the statutory guidance provided by Welsh Government. The revised assessment had concluded that 18 residential pitches would be required in Denbighshire by 2033, but that there was no evidence of a need for a transit site in the county. At the conclusion of its review of the process undertaken for revising the assessment the Committee was satisfied that the Council had complied with Welsh Government guidance.

The Committee regularly asks for update reports on items it has previously scrutinised which impact on Denbighshire's communities. In early 2023 the Committee considered a Cabinet decision relating to the **Recommendation of the Regional Fee Setting Group** which had been called-in for scrutiny. The outcome of the call-in process was reported in last year's Annual Report. Whilst the Committee did not recommend that Cabinet reconsider its decision, they did ask for an update on the extent of **engagement with Care Forum Wales and care providers** when discussing fees/costings going forward. The Committee was advised that Care Forum Wales (CFW) had supported the North Wales Regional Care Fees Group (NWRCFG) to engage with providers through workshops and surveys. In addition care brokers from the Adult, Social Care and Homelessness Team were in regular contact with providers. Looking forward to 2024/25 it was proposed to take an even more proactive approach to engaging with providers in the fee setting process. As part of this process a programme of visits was planned by the Adult Social Care and Homelessness Service management in partnership with commissioning staff from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to conduct open dialogue about the cost of care and ensure providers were actively engaging with the fee setting process.

## Partnerships Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Joan Butterfield (**Chair**)



Cllr. Pauline Edwards (**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.

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

The effect of budgetary pressures on all public sector providers will undoubtedly result in greater expectations for more regional and sub-regional partnership working arrangements going forward. As partnership working arrangements continue to evolve, the Committee continued its work in examining the effectiveness of services already delivered in collaboration or partnership, with other public sector organisations, private companies and voluntary groups, making sure that they meet the needs of residents.

The number and types of services delivered in conjunction with external providers are extremely wide-ranging, from social care to economic development, housing to community safety. Each and every one of these partnership arrangements aim to improve the lives of residents whilst also contributing towards the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

In a bid to support the Council to deliver its corporate priority of realising a prosperous Denbighshire the Committee discussed with representatives from the **North Wales Economic Ambition Board** its work and achievements during 2022/23 along with its priorities going forward. Back in 2018, as part of the work to regenerate Rhyl town centre, the Rhyl Business Improvement District (BID) was established. This initiative gave local businesses the power to collectively raise funds to deliver improvements to the local area. The legislation permitting the establishment of business improvement districts stipulate that they can only operate for a period of up to 5 years, before a re-ballot needs to be conducted to enable a BID to continue functioning. At the beginning of the 2023/24 Council year the Committee undertook a pre-decision exercise on the proposals put forward for undertaking the **Rhyl Business Improvement District (BID) RE-ballot**. The Committee's views and recommendations were presented to Cabinet when it discussed whether to proceed with a ballot for a second five-year term for the BID.

In the wake of the tragic death of an 8-year-old boy in England, Performance Scrutiny Committee last year examined the Council's procedures for dealing with reports of mould and condensation in the Council's own housing stock. Partnerships Scrutiny Committee were of the view it would be wise to seek assurances from other housing landlords in the county that they were meeting their obligations in dealing with such problems. A discussion took place with a number of rented housing providers to seek assurances that policies and procedures for dealing with **Mould and Condensation in Registered Social Landlords' (RSLs) Housing Stock and Private Rented Sector Properties** were sufficiently robust and offered adequate protection to families in the county living in properties owned by them. In recent years the demand for private rented housing has increased significantly. This increase in demand combined with a shortage in supply resulted in properties in some areas becoming extremely expensive to rent. Consequently, some families were experiencing difficulties in finding suitable homes within their local communities. With a view to ensuring that families in Denbighshire are supported to find affordable homes which meet their needs the Committee examined the policies and methodologies used by the Council and other housing providers in the area for **Setting Affordable Rent Levels**.

The Committee continued its monitoring of a variety of partnership working arrangements with which the Council is involved to make sure that all agencies are working effectively together to protect the most vulnerable residents in the county. In fulfilling this role, the Committee examined the **Annual Report on Safeguarding Adults in Denbighshire for 2022/23** to make sure that any allegations of inappropriate behaviour towards vulnerable adults in the county were dealt with promptly, effectively and in line with national guidance. In its capacity as the Council's designated committee for scrutinising crime and disorder matters it examined the performance of the **Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** through consideration of its Annual Report for 2022/23 along with its proposed activities and priorities for 2023/24. Furthermore, in fulfilling its crime and disorder role it invited a representative from North Wales Police for a discussion on how the **Police worked in partnership with other public and private sector agencies in Denbighshire's Communities** and the benefits realised from this work. This discussion provided an insight into how the Police, local authority and other public, voluntary organisations and private businesses collaborate across the county in a bid to reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity through the provision of intervention initiatives and educational support. It also enabled the Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions put in place.

Time was also set-aside during the year to examine the work done regionally by the Health Service, local authorities, Police and the voluntary sector, via their membership of the **North Wales Regional Partnership Board (NWRPB)** to improve the delivery of health and care services across North Wales and in improving the general well-being of the area's population. Faced with an ageing population and escalating costs for service-provision across the public sector this Board plays an important role in devising ways to manage future demand for services whilst meeting the needs of the individual with ever diminishing financial resources.

Finally, the Committee has continued with its programme of regular meetings with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in a bid to secure the building of a replacement facility in place of the former Royal Alexandra Hospital in Rhyl. The ultimate aim is for the **North Denbighshire Community Hospital Project** to be far more than a replacement hospital building. The ambition is for it to be a bespoke facility that will deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century integrated health and social care services for the north Denbighshire area. The repeated delays in agreeing plans and securing funding for this much needed facility is a cause of grave concern for elected members and residents alike. Consequently, following their latest meeting with Health Board representatives, the Committee wrote to the newly appointed First Minister seeking him to earmark the development of this new hospital as one of the Welsh Government's top priorities for North Wales. The Committee will continue monitoring the project's progress and delivery going forward.

## Performance Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Hugh Irving (**Chair**)



Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (**Vice-Chair**)

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

Performance Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in ensuring that the Council delivers quality services to residents and in supporting it to deliver its Corporate Plan. In undertaking its performance management role the Committee annually reviews the **Council Performance Self-Assessment** and twice a year examines the Authority's performance in delivering its **Corporate Plan**. The Committee also has responsibilities for making sure that the Authority has identified any risks to the accomplishment of its objectives or potential disruptions to service delivery, and to ensure that it has developed adequate actions to mitigate the likelihood of those risks happening. In fulfilling this role the Committee twice a year reviews the **Corporate Risk Register** to make sure that the Council has identified the most serious risks to its ability to deliver services and has put in place sufficient measures to reduce the risks of disruption to the delivery of these vital services to residents.

Growing demand and the pressures faced by both children and adults social care services across the UK are well documented. As part of its work to ensure that the Council meets its statutory obligations in delivering these services to the most vulnerable within our communities the Committee examined the **Draft Director of Social Services Annual Report for 2022/23**. This report not only provides information on the services'

performance in meeting its statutory duties, but it also outlines the priorities for the following year.

In addition to monitoring the delivery of the overarching Corporate Plan the Committee also regularly examines progress made in delivering other strategies, plans and work which underpin the Corporate Plan, such as the **Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan** and the Council's performance in responding to residents' complaints submitted under the **'Your Voice' Complaints Procedure**. As mentioned earlier in this report, it was this Committee that raised concerns during its regular monitoring of the Council's performance in delivering the Corporate Plan on whether, given the current and anticipated future financial situation facing public services, the Council could fulfil all the ambitions set out in the Plan as originally expected. Consequently, the Council agreed to reduce the number of themes in the Plan from nine to six, incorporating three of the original themes into the remaining six (further information can be found in the section on 'Scrutiny and the Corporate Plan Priorities during 2023/24')

**Internet Connectivity** continues to be a problem in some areas of the county. Not only is this a barrier to economic development, it also hinders individual households from being able to transact payments or access information and essential services, which is a particular problem when services no longer have a physical base nearby. The quality and speed of internet access, particularly in rural areas, is an obstacle for children and young people who require access to undertake research or complete education related tasks. During the year the Committee has twice met with a representative from Openreach and officers from the Council's Digital Team to discuss the latest fibre roll-out plans and explore potential solutions to try and plug gaps, as well as the provision of information to residents in hard-to-reach communities to signpost them to relevant schemes or support that will enable them to access digital services.

When the Council adopted its **Climate & Ecological Change Strategy** for the period 2021/22 to 2029/30 in February 2021 it undertook to review it on a three-yearly basis. The



first refresh of the Strategy was therefore due to be undertaken during 2023/24. As part of the preparatory work for that refresh the Committee was consulted on the proposed approach to be taken when reviewing the Strategy. During the forthcoming year the Committee will undertake pre-decision scrutiny of the revised Strategy before it is presented to Cabinet and Council for approval.

During the COVID-19 pandemic working arrangements and practices changed considerably. In the post-pandemic era a considerable number of private and public sector occupations can now be fulfilled by people working from their homes. As a result, the Council similar to other employers has at times experienced some difficulties in recruiting employees, particularly to certain roles or specialist posts. The Committee examined the Authority's staff sickness and turnover rates along with its **Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Planning** procedures in order to make sure that they were compatible with the new ways of working. In May 2023 Audit Wales published a report called '**Are the Council's Corporate Support Functions Effective?**'. This report contained two recommendations relating to recording when Human Resource policies were reviewed and the need for Internal Audit to include the sustainable development principle of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as an integral element in its review procedures. The Committee examined the services' progress in delivering the actions arising from this Audit Wales review, seeking assurances that the Council's support services were sufficiently resourced to effectively support frontline service delivery.

As in previous years the Committee considered the **Library Service's Performance** in delivering its services in line with the national requirements set out in the Welsh Public Library Standards. The data provided on the Service's performance during 2022/23 was similar to previous years showing that the Service was performing extremely well. However, the Committee being acutely aware of the financial situation facing the Council including the cuts already agreed to the Library Service's opening hours as a contribution towards helping the Authority to set a balanced budget for 2024/25, registered its concerns on the Service's ability to sustain its high-performance levels going forward. With a view to securing the Service's future sustainability the Committee requested that the Working

Group, established to measure the impact of the reduction in opening hours and also tasked with exploring potential alternative solutions for delivering services provided at libraries and One Stop Shops, present its findings to the Committee for detailed scrutiny during the forthcoming year.

Under the Council's thematic scrutiny committee structure Performance Scrutiny Committee is the main committee that deals with the scrutiny of education related topics, as generally they impact in one way or another on performance related matters, be it on an individual's performance or collectively the performance of a school, the local education authority or external organisations that support the delivery of education. During the year the Committee focussed some considerable portion of its time on scrutinising pupils, schools and the local education authority's performance in re-establishing, adapting and supporting the delivery of education to the county's learners following the Covid pandemic. It is widely acknowledged that Covid lockdown periods had a detrimental effect on pupils' educational attainment and their engagement with education in general. With a view to supporting Denbighshire's learners to actively engage with the education provision on offer the Committee examined the Council's policies relating to a **Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being** to ensure that the curriculum is planned and delivered having regard to the emotional and mental well-being of every pupil. Another legacy of the pandemic period are school attendance rates therefore the Committee considered the measures taken by the Council's Education Service to **Promote School Attendance and Engagement in Education** in a bid to make sure that all possible steps were being taken to maximise pupil engagement with the education on offer and enhance future career prospects to improve life outcomes. Some pupils' families choose for their children to be educated at home, the number of **Elective Home Education** pupils has also increased in the post-pandemic period. Whilst the local authority is not responsible for the delivery of education to home educated pupils it does have safeguarding responsibilities for them. The Committee was therefore keen to examine the policies, procedures and approach taken by the Education Service to support and monitor the delivery of Elective Home Education and to ensure that pupils educated at home were kept safe.

With the **Curriculum for Wales** now being statutory in all primary schools in the country and from September 2023 being introduced to Years 7 and 8 in secondary schools the Committee continued its work monitoring its introduction and rollout. During the forthcoming year the Committee plans to evaluate how the curriculum has been embedded in schools and across all key stages, the advantages and/or disadvantages of the new curriculum, as well as its impact on staff recruitment and retention. It also continued with its work on monitoring the Council's compliance with its statutory duties under the **Additional Learning Needs** and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act, 2018. As the requirements of the Act have to be fully implemented by 2025, the Committee will continue to monitor the Council's compliance with the Act's requirements and the effectiveness of the funding provided to meet the requirements of the Act.

The Committee also continued monitoring the progress made by **Christ the Word Catholic School** in delivering the action plan and improving standards following the May 2022 Estyn Inspection report. Further monitoring of the action plan's delivery will continue during the forthcoming year. Work continued on monitoring the progress made in planning and implementing the **Delivery of Welsh Medium Curricula and Non-Curricula Provision** across the county in line with the Welsh Government's vision for the Welsh language. As this is a long-term ambition, and due to the unforeseen obstacles encountered as result of the pandemic, the Committee has undertaken to continue monitoring the Council's progress in delivering its objectives in relation to this provision.

Having regard to the disruption caused to Denbighshire's learners in recent years by the pandemic the Committee has undertaken to continue examining and monitoring a number of the above areas going forward in order to make sure that the county's pupils are provided with every opportunity to realise their full potential, and to ensure that performance at all levels will eventually exceed pre-pandemic levels and realise the ambition that Denbighshire truly is a 'learning and growing' county.

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

The Conwy and Denbighshire Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) was established by both authorities during the term of the previous councils for the purpose of fulfilling their statutory duties of scrutinising the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board (PSB). This Committee comprises of 16 members, 8 representing Conwy County Borough Council and 8 representing Denbighshire County Council. Each Council's representation on the JOSC reflects the political balance of their Council. The JOSC's terms of reference specifies that the Chair and Vice-Chair will alternate every two years between the elected membership of Denbighshire and Conwy councils. Dependent on which Council's turn it is to Chair the JOSC, the Vice-Chair will be appointed from amongst the other Council's representatives on the committee. In 2023/24 it was the turn of the Chair to be appointed from amongst Conwy's representatives on the JOSC and therefore Councillor Cheryl Carlisle was elected as Chair, with Denbighshire's Councillor Gareth Sandilands appointed as Vice-Chair. This Committee meets twice per Council year.

As reported in last year's Annual Report the focus of the JOSC's work during 2023/24 would be examining how the PSB was managing risks, as well as the Board's progress to date with the initial implementation of its Local Well-Being Plan. In line with that undertaking the JOSC examined the **PSB's Risk Register**, which details the major risks identified as potential barriers to the PSB's ability to fulfil its statutory duties and deliver its Well-Being Plan. Having examined the Register and the rationale for the mitigation measures put in place the JOSC was satisfied that relevant and sufficient steps had been taken to try and reduce the potential impact of those risks to the PSB fulfilling its obligations. Following consideration of the initial progress made by the PSB in implementing the delivery of its **Local Well-Being Plan 2023/2028** the JOSC was satisfied that sufficient steps had been taken by all PSB partners at this early stage to embed and support their collective ambitions to improve the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being for the area as laid out in the Local Well-Being Plan. The JOSC will continue with its work in monitoring the delivery of this Plan in the years that lie ahead.

In addition, with a view to sustaining all partners' commitment to the PSB and its objectives during times of financial constraints the JOSC has agreed to continue to invite each PSB partner in turn to future meetings to discuss with them their organisation's contribution to the work of the PSB, as well as the benefits to their organisation of being a member of the PSB. During 2023/24 representatives from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) attended JOSC meetings for this purpose.

All the themes and objectives of the PSB's Local Well-being Plan dovetail and complement each Council and partner organisation's own strategic plans.

It is important to stress that the JOSC's powers to scrutinise PSB partner organisations only extends as far as their contribution to the work of the PSB. The Joint Committee does not possess powers to scrutinise individual organisations' policies or their performance in delivering services outside of their role and responsibilities on the PSB.

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



Cllr. Cheryl Carlisle (**Chair**)  
**Chair**)



Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (**Vice-**  
**Chair**)

### Membership

#### Conwy County Borough Council

- Cllr. Cheryl Carlisle (Chair)
- Cllr. David Gerard Carr
- Cllr. Bernice McLoughlin
- Cllr. Angie O'Grady
- Cllr. Stephen Anthony Price
- Cllr. Kay Redhead
- Cllr Austin Roberts
- Cllr. John Roberts

#### Denbighshire County Council

- Cllr. Joan Butterfield
- Cllr. Kelly Clewett
- Cllr. Pauline Edwards
- Cllr. Alan Hughes
- Cllr. Paul Keddie
- Cllr. Terry Mendies
- Cllr. Arwel Roberts
- Cllr. Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (Vice-Chair)

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

## **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-ordinators. 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.

### **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 can be found 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.

### **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 one of the Scrutiny Co-ordinators 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 recommendations 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 recommendations 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-ordinators, Karen Evans on [karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk) (01824 712575) or Rhian Evans on [rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk) (01824 712554), or by sending an e-mail to the following general e-mail address: [democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto: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

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-ordinators

Legal, HR and Democratic Services

PO Box 62

Ruthin

LL15 9AZ

or e-mail it to [democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk)