



Scrutiny Annual Report

2023–24

**Sunderland
City Council**

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Foreword



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the council's Scrutiny Annual Report. The report provides an overview of the work of scrutiny during 2023–24 and sets out the contribution it has made to the good governance of the council. It also looks at how the scrutiny function will remain fit for purpose for the year ahead and the challenges we face moving forward.

The council, along with other local authorities across the country, continues to operate within a harsh financial climate. The level of funding made available to local authorities is insufficient to meet both the increasing demand for services and the increasing cost of providing them. Inflation continues to adversely impact the costs of the services provided by the council. This is a problem across the board but particularly an issue in the adult and child social care sectors, where we are facing a perfect storm of rising costs, workforce shortages and increasing demand.

At the same time as these financial pressures, the city continues to face a number of major challenges. These include regenerating the local economy, improving educational attainment and skills and tackling economic and social inequalities. There also remains the problems of improving the long-term health of our residents, tackling child poverty and the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis.

With the council and our partners required to deliver ever greater efficiencies and financial savings, the need for robust, evidence-based scrutiny becomes ever more pressing.

To meet these demands, we have continued to adapt and improve the scrutiny process, helping to ensure that resources are targeted on front-line and key priority services. We have stressed the importance of being customer focussed - using robust data and information to understand our resident's needs and maximising opportunities through the use of technology for both our customers and internal users, so that people self-serve wherever possible thereby eliminating duplication and making activity more efficient.

In the years ahead, the council will need to operate within an ever-tighter regime of financial constraint, while demand for our services continues to grow. With the council and our partners required to deliver ever greater financial savings, the need for cooperation and partnership working becomes ever more pressing.

Despite the challenges faced nationally and locally, considerable progress is being made in a number of areas. In August 2021, an Ofsted Inspection of children's social care services in Sunderland resulted in an outstanding rating. It is pleasing that the level of improvement is being maintained and indeed built upon and we look forward to further developments moving into the future across the whole range of children's services.

The council continues to be ambitious and investing in the city is a key element of the City Plan. Good progress is also being on a range of regeneration projects; including the development of Sunderland Riverside and the former Vaux site, the forthcoming Culture House development on Keel Square, Sunderland Rail Station, the International Advanced Manufacturing Park and the Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor. All of these developments bode well for the future transformation of the city centre and long-term economic prosperity of the city.

Sunderland continues to be involved in a number of joint scrutiny arrangements for health provision across the area. Members are also actively involved in the joint



arrangements that cover the North East and North Cumbria, looking at the Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Systems. These joint arrangements will remain of key importance over the coming year as both are concerned with service reconfiguration and development and how services are delivered across Sunderland and the North East.

Scrutiny in Sunderland has also made a significant contribution to regional scrutiny arrangements. Throughout the year, we have represented the council on the NECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee which looks at matters of significant importance to residents across the region, focusing particularly on economic development and transport issues.

No doubt, the next twelve months will bring further challenges. However, I do believe that with the cooperation of fellow members, partners and the support of our officers we will rise to meet these challenges in the year ahead.

Finally, and most importantly, the Committee would like to place on record its thanks to all those staff within in the council and in our partner organisations who have worked tirelessly in support of our local communities.

Councillor Katherine Mason-Gage
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

Scrutiny Coordinating Committee



Chair: Cllr Katherine Mason-Gage

Vice-Chair: Cllr Tracy Dodds

Committee Members: Councillors Mark Burrell, Michael Hartnack, Beth Jones, Lindsey Leonard, Ciaran Morrissey, Antony Mullen, Alex Samuels, Pat Smith, Melanie Thornton, John Usher and Peter Walton.

I am pleased to be able to present the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's annual report that provides a summary of the work of the Committee over the last municipal year. It has been another challenging year with both global and domestic events impacting on everyone's lives. The Committee has looked at a number of issues through its work programme and Members have contributed and engaged throughout the year.

Budget and financial scrutiny remains one of the key remits of the Committee. A range of comprehensive reports are submitted to the Committee over the municipal year including around the Capital Programme, proposed Council Tax, Revenue Budget and the Budget Planning Framework and Medium-Term Financial Plan. Members of the Committee continue to monitor and challenge the budget as well as continuing to acknowledge the current financial situation for the local government sector.

Performance management is another cornerstone of the Committee's work

programme, and we continue to monitor and challenge council performance, achievements and progress against a range of issues across the key themes of Dynamic Smart City, Health Smart City, Vibrant Smart City and Organisational Development. This year has seen further developments with the presentation of performance information focusing on a different key theme for each quarter and inviting relevant key officers for that area to attend. It is hoped that this provides a greater focus and benefit to the Committee and will be reviewed during work planning sessions for the new municipal year.

The Committee also established a task and finish working group during the year to look at the health and wellbeing of the workforce. The working group has looked at how the council supports the health and wellbeing of the workforce through policy development and key initiatives as well as identifying the challenges and key achievements in employee health and wellbeing. The report and recommendations are aimed at supporting and highlighting the work that is already taking place around this important area of work, as well as recognising some of the key challenges that still exist. The report will be submitted to Cabinet in the new municipal year.

In addition to this piece of work, the Committee also received an update on the current position in relation to sickness absence. The Committee was interested in better understanding the sickness absence position within the council and the measures to support employees to remain healthy at work. This was aligned to the Organisational Health performance measures and the task and finish working group that was also taking place at the time. There was a good level of discussion, and it provided the Committee with an overview of the situation and the various initiatives and support for employees within the council.



The Committee has continued to monitor the vision and delivery of the Smart City programme, particularly in the context of the impact on City Plan aspirations. Concerns were raised during discussions at the standard of the reinstatement work undertaken by fibre broadband providers following the installation of cabling. Members concerns were to be passed to the relevant officer for further investigation and ensure appropriate rectification. Members also acknowledged the importance of this work in terms of strengthening partnership working, extending ultra-fast broadband across the city, introducing a Sunderland App and enabling digital inclusion.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to make life difficult for people across the UK and is attributable to factors that are beyond the influence or control of local Councils. The Committee took an active interest in the actions being taken across our city to support residents with their financial wellbeing. Members highlighted a number of issues to officers from their own experiences including around foodbank usage, welcome spaces, Household Support Fund, policies on evictions, money advice and interacting with those harder to reach residents. The Committee recognised the positive and supportive work that was being undertaken through the ongoing development of the Links for Life project, the production of a fuel

poverty action plan, boiler replacements for those in crisis, identifying the most vulnerable households and supporting emotional health and financial resilience through partnership working with the voluntary and community sector.

The updated City Plan and indicative timeline assurance process were also submitted to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee for consideration during the year. Members received a comprehensive overview of the updated plan and provided a number of comments and observations including around addressing the decline of the City's retail and leisure offer, greater reference to partner involvement and the terminology used in the plan. These comments were to be reported back to Cabinet and given further consideration with the continued updating and development of the plan in the future.

In finishing this summary of the work of the Committee, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Members for their support, contribution and continued cooperation throughout the year. I would also like, on behalf of all Members of the Committee, to put on record our appreciation to officers and partners for providing their expertise and knowledge to the work of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee.

Councillor Katherine Mason-Gage
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee



Chair: Cllr Alex Samuels

Vice Chair: Cllr Dominic McDonough

Committee Members: Councillors Joanne Chapman, Margaret Crosby, Allen Curtis, Richard Dunn, Paul Gibson, George Smith, Pat Smith, Dianne Snowdon, David Snowdon and Melanie Thornton.

Co-opted Members: Ann Blakey (Roman Catholic Diocese)

At the start of the year, the Committee held an initial scene setting meeting to consider its priorities for the year and establish an annual work programme.

A good deal of valuable data was also derived from the recent Healthy Related Behaviour Study report, which this year contained a particular focus on the effect of the Covid pandemic. The main concerns highlighted included having enough money in the family, having enough food to eat, being lonely and struggling with schoolwork. As well as informing our own work programme, the Committee was pleased to hear that the information derived from the survey will be shared with key stakeholders and inform the planning and delivery of future services.

The Committee received a particularly positive report on the progress being made by the Early Help service and the development of the Family Hubs. It is clear

that Early Help services are having a positive effect on the numbers of children requiring statutory services, and that prevention work is reducing the numbers requiring targeted early help support. Funding, as ever, remains a challenge, but there is a clearly a real commitment to early intervention and family support and ensuring that children and families get the appropriate level of support at the right time, delivered by skilled professionals,

We heard that four Family Hubs have recently been established in Washington, Bunny Hill, Hetton and Thorney Close; with fifth shortly opening in Hendon. Each provides a wide range of activities. Initial feedback on the operation of the Hubs has been highly positive. The activities of the Hubs are being promoted via a number of channels including social media and the use of posters / leaflets containing QR code links.

At the start of the year, the Committee was keen to look more closely at the recently announced Early Years Entitlements Expansion and National Wraparound Childcare Programme which is intended to provide a phased expansion of childcare support for eligible working parents in the city. While recognising the potential benefits of the programme, the Committee are concerned about practical challenges involved in its implementation. The Committee will look to monitor its progress in the year ahead.

In January 2023, a Joint Targeted Area inspection (JTAI) was undertaken into children and families who need help and an action plan for improvement was developed. While there was no formal grading system, the outcome of the inspection was categorised as positive. The Committee heard about the progress being made across the action plan including communication and involvement of all partners in meetings, increased staffing capacity to allow the consistent involvement of health practitioners; analysis of children's ethnic identity, cultural heritage

and diverse needs; the timeliness of early help assessments and finally the quality and effectiveness of the LSP's multi-agency audits. The Committee considered that good progress is being made and we will look to continue to monitor developments in the year ahead.

In December 2022, HM Inspectorate of Probation published the outcome of its inspection of Youth Offending Services in Sunderland. The service received an overall rating of 'Good'. We heard that the service had identified a number of priority areas for development including reducing the number of first-time entrants; reducing reoffending and tackling disproportionality and identify overrepresented groups. Again, it was felt that good progress was being made in addressing areas of improvement.

For a number of years, the Committee has received regular update reports on the delivery of the city's children and adolescent mental health services. We heard from Sunderland ICB about the issues and challenges they face, in terms of a rapidly increasing demand for services. Additional funding has been secured for extra staff resources and a service redesign project has been undertaken to improve the service delivery model. However, there remains uncertainty over the potential long-term demand, including that generated by the Covid pandemic on child mental health. This is clearly an issue that will need to be closely monitored in the years ahead.

Building on our work last year, the Committee received an update on SEND provision in Sunderland. We heard that during the year, the service has conducted a Delivering Best Value review, the findings of which reflect the way in which the rise in the High Needs Budget (HNB) has been driven by a rise in the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's). The review has focused on the key areas of need and the effectiveness of current provision and has resulted in a number of concrete proposals to improve and expand the future delivery of the service. The Committee commended the work being undertaken in relation to SEND provision in the city and looked forward to the introduction of the proposed improvements.

Following the end of the agreement between SCAS and Grace House to provide the short breaks service, the Committee asked for a report on the background to the issue and the plans moving forward to provide alternative care for children with complex and additional needs. During the year, the Committee has continued to monitor progress with regard to the new delivery model and engagement with families.

The Committee also received an update report on the work of the Virtual School which has a duty to promote the education of Cared for Children. We heard that considerable progress was being made against a range of performance indicators including admissions, educational attainment, and attendance. Once again, the Committee commended staff on the progress being made and looked forward to further improvements moving into the future.

At the start of the year, the Committee heard about Northeast Fostering Pathfinder Project; a regionally focused programme for fostering recruitment and retention. The project has three components that together create a holistic package of intervention to boost foster carer numbers including Regional Support Hub, Regional Foster Carer Recruitment Campaign and Retention Support. The Committee commended the initiative and hoped that support from the Government would be continued into the future.

The Committee received a report on the work going on to support children and young people who were unaccompanied and seeking asylum. We heard that TFC had developed staffing expertise and pathways to help meet the needs of these young people. However, the challenges and resource implications were considerable and continued to place very significant demands on the service.

The Committee received an update report on school attendance and how children and young people are supported to increase their attendance at school. As with the rest of the country, schools in Sunderland have been experiencing an increase in rates of school absence. We heard that the main contributing factors are the recovery from Covid, mental and physical health, disengagement from



school, unmet special education need, and a breakdown in the parent/carer/school relationship. We also heard that the challenges that families in Sunderland face are likely to continue and indeed become more challenging and complex. The attendance team will therefore continue to adapt and develop the vital support provided to schools to meet the needs of our children, young people and families and better understand and tackle the barriers to school attendance.

Of continuing concern for the Committee has been the increase in elective home education. While parents have the right to home educate, we are concerned at the potentially detrimental effect on some children. At present, local authorities have only limited powers in this area and we feel that more powers should be made available. We also feel that more detailed, up to date information needs to be kept on elective home education and children missing from education. This is an issue we will be looking to go into in greater detail in the year ahead.

In order to discuss the operation of apprenticeships in the city and the implications of the introduction of the new T Level qualification, the Committee met with Iain Nixon and Judith Quinn from Sunderland College. We heard that as the main provider

of apprenticeships in the city, the College is committed to working with the business sector and helping to provide our young people with the skills to meet future job opportunities. There were concerns that the requirements set for the T Level qualification could act as a barrier for some young people and that the implications of this would need to be monitored.

Following on from outstanding Ofsted rating received, the Committee has continued to receive periodic performance reports in order to demonstrate that the level of improvement was being maintained and we will continue to monitor the progress into the future. The Committee has also received regular update reports on Children Services Customer feedback reports. I am pleased to see that these show a continuing reduction in the number of complaints.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their contributions and to thank all the officers and witnesses who gave up their time to attend and provide insights into the services they provide and the challenges they face.

Councillor Alex Samuels
Chair of the Children Education and Skills
Scrutiny Committee

Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee



Chair: Cllr Mark Burrell

Vice Chair: Cllr Lindsey Leonard

Committee Members: Councillors, Michael Dixon, Heather Fagan, Stephen Foster, Logan Guy, Sam Johnston, Michael Mordey, Stephen O'Brien, Lynda Scanlan, Jimmy Warne and Sue Watson

During the year, the Committee's work programme has focused on a range of issues affecting the economic prosperity of the city and the opportunities and challenges we face.

In relation to regeneration, the Committee received a progress report on a number of major projects taking place in the city. These include the Culture House, which will provide a new state of the art library and cultural hub; the refurbishment of the Elephant Tea Rooms Building, the development of Keel Square, plans for the Crowtree site and the opening of the new Rail Station.

Toward the end of the year, we also received an update on the work of Siglion. We heard that the main priorities for Siglion was to improve the concentration of new economic activity in the city centre, create a city centre that supports higher value job creation, bring back into use dormant areas such as the former Vaux site, offer a wider choice of housing to the market and position Sunderland as a place to invest.

We also heard from Catherine Auld (Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration) about the progress of schemes being funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which is designed to replace the previous European Structural and Investment Funds. The total amount of funding allocated to Sunderland is £16.57m over three years from 2022–23 - 2024–25. The funding will support projects across three investment priorities: communities and place, supporting local business and people and skills. We heard in detail about the development of the programme in Sunderland which will reflect the priorities set out in the City Plan and the processes by which funds will be allocated.

In 2021, the Committee set up a Working Group to consider the regeneration of the Sunnyside area and during the year, we have continued to monitor the progress being made. We feel that while the challenges facing Sunnyside are highly complex and deep rooted, there are a number of positives and opportunities. Sunnyside is an attractive area close to the city centre and possesses a historic core. It is increasingly proving attractive to social enterprise, early stage businesses and an emerging cultural and creative services sector. In the years ahead, the Committee looks forward to the implementation of the Sunnyside Masterplan which will be crucial in delivering long term sustainable improvement of the area.

Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture outlined the important contribution made by the cultural sector to the economic prosperity of the city. For the future, we heard that the opening of the Culture House and the Museum redevelopment should substantially improve the cultural offer in the city. Attendance figures were now on the rise, though it was recognised that it could be several years before we see attendance figures back up to pre covid levels.

In setting its work programme the Committee asked for an update on development of screen industries in the city. We heard that early in 2021, the BBC had announced that it would invest up to £25m in the region, with regional partners seeking to commit £11.4m over a five year period. A new North East Screen Industries Partnership (NESIP) has been developed and with the support of North East Screen (formerly Northern Film and Media) a number of new productions have been developed or filmed in Sunderland. The Committee also heard about exciting plans for the proposed development of Crown Works Studios, which it is estimated will create 8,000 new jobs regionally in a wide range of fields and professions. The proposed Studios will be one of the largest in Europe, with 20 sound stages located on the south bank of the River Wear generating in the region of £336m a year.

Sharon Appleby of the Sunderland Improvement District (BID) updated us on the work of the BID in supporting local businesses in the city. This included events such as the Summer Food and Drink Festival and the March Restaurant Week, together with a summer and seasonal programme of family activities. We were pleased to note that following the Covid pandemic, footfall and retail spending in the city centre has begun the process of recovery and that the development of Sunderland Riverside should provide an added impetus for the growth of the independent retail sector.

The Committee also received an update from Natasha McDonagh, Sunderland Chamber of Commerce and Rhiannon Bearne, North East Chamber of Commerce on the economic challenges facing the city and the region. These included long term recovery from the Covid pandemic, the challenges for many businesses arising from the UK's exit from the European Union and the nationwide downturn in the high street retail sector. However, on a positive note, it was felt that the Sunderland economy retained strong foundations and that many opportunities existed, particularly in the engineering, manufacturing and the software sectors.

The Committee received an update on a wide range of events organised in the city, including the Festival of Light, the Triathlon and the Kings Coronation. It was noted that

moving forward a greater emphasis would be placed on facilitating smaller community based events, with a wider geographical spread which were less at risk at cancellation and often more cost effective. The council was also looking to work more closely with local communities and partners such as the BID.

Last year, the Committee was consulted on the refresh of the council's Housing Strategy. This year, the Committee has focused on the progress being made in a number of key areas; including the approach being taken to dealing with empty properties and the operation and challenges facing the council's homelessness service. The Committee commended the efforts of staff in an area of work that was seeing increasingly higher pressure and demand.

The Committee met with representatives from a number of social housing providers including Gentoo, Thirteen Group, Believe, Karbon Homes and Bernicia to discuss the challenges they face and any operational issues relating to housing management. The issues raised included the treatment of and responsiveness to complaints, the effect on residents of the cost of living crises, anti-social behaviour, stock condition and damp and mould. We heard that increases in building costs had also had an impact; it was now considerably more expensive to build houses and it was becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain skilled workers. Substantial investment was being made in the sustainability agenda, with there being a drive for greater energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.

Members stressed the importance of ensuring clear lines of communication between housing associations and their tenants and also between housing associations and local councillors. It was noted that partnership working between housing associations was good and that the council's housing team was now holding formal group meetings in order to discuss housing issues in the city.

In setting its work programme for the year, the Committee asked for an update on operation of Environmental Services within the city and its plans for the future. We heard that the Pallion Household Waste and Recycling Centre had now opened and was proving a



great success. The electric refuse collection vehicle (RCV) had begun operations and the fleet service had introduced 24 new refuse collection vehicles during the year. Cemetery regulations have been improved and remedial works to cemetery lawn sections were ongoing.

The Committee's views were sought on the Feed and Food Controls Service Plan 2023/2026. This document will provide the basis for undertaking food safety enforcement and ensuring standards of cleanliness and food hygiene across the city. The Committee commended staff on their hard work in this important area of work.

Toward the end of the year, the Committee considered the council's Road Safety Annual Report 2022 which provided details of a range of road safety works and initiatives, including the introduction of road safety schemes, educational programmes, training courses and road safety campaigns. The report also provided data analysis relating to accidents and collisions which at this point remain relatively stable.

We also heard received an update on the council's Highways Maintenance Programme for 2024/25 which included details of planned and ongoing work. The report highlighted the major challenge we face in resourcing the long-term maintenance of our road network moving into the future.

In 2022, the Committee was consulted on the Draft Local Cycling and Walking

Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This document sets out the long-term approach to the development of local cycling and walking networks in the city. As part of this year's work programme, the Committee received an update on the planned programme of infrastructure improvements to the cycling network. The Committee emphasised the importance of consulting with local communities before such works are undertaken.

In March 2019, the council declared a climate emergency. In response, a city-wide 2030 Shadow Board was established, bringing together partners from across the city, with the ambition of the city becoming carbon neutral by 2040 and the council carbon neutral by 2030. The Committee received a report on the progress being made on the Low Carbon Framework and Action Plan that reflected the importance of fully involving partners from throughout the city if the goals are to be achieved.

All in all, it has been a very busy and productive year for the Committee. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Committee and everyone else involved for their hard work and commitment, together with the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders who attended and contributed to the meetings during the year.

Councillor Mark Burrell

Chair of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee



Chair: Cllr John Usher

Vice-Chair: Cllr Beth Jones

Committee Members: Councillors Malcolm Bond, Chris Burnicle, Michael Butler, Adele Graham-King, Ehtesham Haque, Juliana Heron, Catherine Hunter, Mel Speding, Peter Walton and Michael Walker.

As Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee I am delighted to be able to share with you the work the committee has undertaken during the year. People's health and wellbeing are extremely important as are the services that provide support and guidance and assist us all when we are unwell. With global events continuing to impact on everyday life and rising costs for fuel, utilities and food, pressures remain on health and social care services across the city. The annual report provides a summary of some of the issues looked at by the committee through its wide and varied work programme.

The Committee once again received the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for 2022/23. The report explores the concept of the commercial determinants of health, its impact on health outcomes, and recommendations to address them. The report focuses on the main unhealthy commodity industries which impact on health, including food and drink, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, working conditions and benefits. The report provides several recommendations

for a local public health approach and the committee will be interested to monitor progress in several areas detailed within the report. To this end the Committee received an update on the recently developed alcohol strategy looking at progress against key objectives.

The Sunderland Alcohol Strategy had been launched in July 2023 and sets out three objectives around strategy, prevention and early intervention and from that seven key priorities which have formed the basis of the partnership action plan. The Committee acknowledged that the action plan was a living document which would allow adjustment for emerging trends and allow partners to continually develop the action plan. On this Members queried the social changes post-covid and the rise in drinking at home, rather than in the more traditional public house setting, and if the strategy would be able to capture this, it was something our public health professionals would look to follow up on.

With access to NHS dentist services in the news over the last year, the Committee continues to monitor the NHS dentistry situation in Sunderland with the Dental Commissioning Lead in attendance at our meeting in July 2023. A wide range of issues were covered including NHS commissioned capacity, pressures and challenges, the NHS dental contract and local actions. Members raised concerns around access to NHS dentists in Sunderland and raised important issues around ensuring that quality information was provided to residents when practices ceased NHS provision. The Committee also requested that dental practices be asked to update the NHS website to ensure the information was up-to-date and accurate.

Suicide prevention is an extremely important issue, and the committee received an update on the whole systems approach to prevention in Sunderland. The development

of a local Suicide Prevention Action Plan is recommended by government and the responsibility for such a plan and strategy lies with the local authority, through Sunderland's Health and Wellbeing Board. Members discussed a number of issues relating to suicide prevention including the suicide prevention partnership, learning from suicide attempts data, raising the profile of suicide prevention in the city and ensuring that new public building projects involved discussions around suicide prevention at the planning stages. Members of the Committee also had the opportunity to undertake suicide prevention training conducted by Sunderland MIND as part of the further action on this issue, and this offer remains open to all Members.

From 31 January 2024 health scrutiny committees will no longer be able to formally refer matters to the Secretary of State for Health that relate to reconfigurations of local health services, as this power is removed. The Committee were briefed on the broader powers for the Secretary of State to intervene in local service reconfigurations and the process that replaces the former arrangements. Despite this change other aspects of health scrutiny remain unchanged, and Members were informed that the Committee's status as a statutory consultee on substantial variations still exists. Health and care providers will also still be required to engage with scrutiny committees as they currently do. It will be important that we continue to work both collaboratively and proactively with our health colleagues to observe the principles of best practice set out by the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the benefits of scrutiny continue to be realised.

With Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) now abolished and replaced with Integrated Care Partnerships, the Committee is keen to continue to foster the positive working relationships and dialogue with the local Integrated Care Board (ICB). The Committee, therefore, continues to receive performance updates from the ICB covering a range of issues including indicators relating to the key areas of Urgent Care; Planned Care; Cancer; and Mental Health. Members highlighted a number of issues around the challenges of mental health provision, performance against national indicators, waiting times and the

proposed developments in urgent care. The Committee continues to acknowledge the fundamental role that Sunderland ICB has in the delivery of health services across the area and will continue to monitor and challenge, where appropriate, around performance.

The Committee is also represented on the joint scrutiny committee for the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System and North and Central Integrated Care Partnerships. The joint committee provides an opportunity for key stakeholders within the ICP to engage with all local authorities within its footprint on region-wide issues which have included health and care of the workforce, children's mental health provision, healthy and fairer programme and strategic options for non-surgical oncology services. In moving forward, and in light of the changing legislation around health scrutiny, the intention will be to provide updates to the committee from these meetings in the new municipal year.

The winter period remains a challenge for all facets of the health service and the Committee continues to take a critical interest in the winter resilience plans for the city. Members welcomed the establishment of 'Transfer of Care Hub' which looked to enable the quick discharge of patients from hospital to home or a community setting. Members also acknowledged the Covid and Flu vaccination programmes including cohort eligibility and campaign timings, as well as the interdependencies of the winter plan with other service developments. Winter planning will continue to feature on the Committee's work programme as an important issue to provide assurances that plans remain robust and fit for purpose.

The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) continues to provide an annual performance update to the Committee which provides an overview of the ambulance trust's performance against key indicators. The Committee made comments around the recruitment and retention of staff and it was reported that NEAS had implemented a new clinical framework of progression for ambulance staff in terms of career advancement and specialisation. Members also noted that NEAS were looking to review their ambulance stations across the area in terms of their condition and location.



There is clearly the potential for further discussions around this in the future. Members were also pleased to recognise the progress and challenges around the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of the ambulance trust and requested that future reports to the Committee reference actions and progress around areas identified for improvement.

Following inspection in June and August 2022 by the CQC, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust (STSFT) was given an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' from the previous rating of 'Good'. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee were interested in seeking assurances from STSFT that steps had been taken to address the actions highlighted in the CQC inspection report. Members received an initial presentation which provided information around the Trust's action plan and progress to date but Members felt that this did not provide the assurances required and requested more detailed information be submitted to the committee.

It is important that members, and the committee as a whole, are satisfied with the information provided and sometimes follow-up actions are required to fully scrutinise the

issue under consideration. STSFT submitted a more detailed action plan to the committee, and members were pleased to recognise the progress that had been made. STSFT had made significant progress with only nine outstanding actions from 46 identifiable actions from the CQC, and the expectation was that these actions would be completed by 31 March 2024.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of myself and the committee, to thank Members, officers, partners and stakeholders who have continued to contribute and work with the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The City Plan and the Director of Public Health's Annual Report highlight the importance of health and the challenges that we face as a city in addressing those fundamental health issues. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee will continue in its role to act as a critical friend to monitor and challenge service providers in the delivery of health provision across Sunderland.

Councillor John Usher
Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

The year ahead

Overview and scrutiny is an integral part of the council's governance and decision making structure, contributing to the council's budgetary and policy making function as well as holding the executive to account for its actions. This report provides an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the last year and recognise the challenges we face in the year ahead.

Clearly, the next few years will continue to be challenging for the council; operating as it does within an environment of constrained resources and increasing demand for services. This represents a major challenge for us all. In terms of scrutiny, it is important that we help the council to make the best use of the resources available and ensure that frontline services are delivered to the highest possible standards.

Moving forward, we will need to address a broad range of issues, not least the long term economic, social and health consequences of the Covid pandemic and the increasing demands placed on our adult and child health services. We also face the challenges of increasing child poverty, the cost of living crisis and its effect on household incomes and the decline of the high street retail sector. We also need to improve educational attainment and tackle its consequences for health and economic inequalities.

As a Council we must ensure transparency, open communication and meaningful public engagement to help us to build trust between ourselves and the people we work for and represent. We also have a vital role in fostering social cohesion and a sense of shared purpose within our local communities.

The pace of technological advancement poses both opportunities and challenges for local government. The adoption of digital tools and platforms is crucial for improving service delivery, enhancing communication and streamlining administrative processes. However, a digital divide remains, with some communities still lacking access or ability to navigate essential technology. In future we need to ensure that all residents can benefit from the opportunity's technology offers.

Scrutiny will also continue to play an active role in the changing delivery of health services across Sunderland and the region. It is certainly an area where financial, social and environmental factors will drive change in the sector. We will continue to monitor and challenge health partners through our own Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee with South Tyneside and also regionally through the North East Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Through these joint arrangements we are able to represent the concerns and needs of the Sunderland population and ensure that Sunderland residents views are represented and considered in looking at service reconfigurations.

There are also positive changes on the horizon with the new devolution deal for the North East seeing significant economic benefits of a £1.4bn investment over the next 30 years. The reforms will provide a directly elected mayor for seven local authority areas, including Sunderland, across the North East with the first election taking place in May 2024. The North East Mayoral Combined Authority will enhance adult education provision in a way that meets the needs of business and the community, while allowing them to kick start regeneration by supporting the construction of affordable homes on brownfield sites. There will also be funding available for the new combined authority to shape and improve local rail and bus services.

We continue to monitor the progress being made in implementing the council's City Plan for 2019–2030 and the measures being taken to make Sunderland a more dynamic, healthy and vibrant city. A key to this will be our ability to work closely and collaboratively with our partners and make the most of the resources available in the city.

Once again, I would like place on record our thanks to everyone who contributed to the work of scrutiny over the last twelve months and look forward to having another productive year ahead.

Councillor Katherine Mason-Gage
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

Scrutiny on a page

The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, the three thematic scrutiny committees, North East Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee (NECA) and the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) tackle a large range of issues over a municipal year. In order to fully appreciate the variety and breadth of the subjects covered. Below is an extensive, though not exhaustive, summary of the work of scrutiny in Sunderland.

- Alcohol Strategy Update
- Annual Low Carbon Progress Report
- Budget and Finance Reports
- Changes To Health Scrutiny Legislation
- Children Services Customer Feedback
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health
- City Plan Update
- Cost of Living
- Culture Sector and the Local Economy
- Cycling Infrastructure
- Dental Services Update
- Draft Sunnyside Masterplan
- Early Health Update
- Elective and Diagnostic Backlog
- Elective Home Education
- Empty Properties
- Environmental Services Update
- Food Law Plan
- Fostering Pathfinder
- GP Access Update
- Highways Maintenance
- Housing Provider Consultation
- ICB Sunderland Update
- Mental Health Update
- NHS FT CQC Inspection Action Plan
- North East Ambulance Service Update
- Oral Health Improvements
- Performance Management Reports
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment
- Public Health Annual Report
- Regeneration of the City Update
- Respite Care Services
- Road Safety Annual Report
- Safer Sunderland Annual Report
- Schools Attendance
- Screen Industries Update
- SEND Update
- Short Break Update
- Sickness Absence
- Siglion
- Smart Cities Update
- SSAB Annual Report
- Suicide Prevention Update
- Sunderland BID
- Sunderland NHS FT Recruitment
- Task and Finish Working
- TfC Performance Report
- Triathlon Feedback
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Vulnerable Pupil Update
- Water Quality
- Winter Planning
- Wraparound Child Care
- Youth Justice Plan 2021–24



**Sunderland
City Council**