

# Scrutiny Matters

## Scrutiny Annual Report

2012/2013



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## Foreword

I take great pleasure in being able to introduce Sunderland City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2012/13.

It has been an exciting and challenging year for our Scrutiny Function following significant changes to the Council's governance arrangements in May 2012. As part of such changes, we are now operating within a new scrutiny structure, to reflect the role of scrutiny in the undertaking of our key statutory functions and to provide the opportunity to be more focused, flexible and responsive in our efforts with regard to the ever changing landscape of public services.



The new scrutiny 'commissioning model' brings together all of the core scrutiny activities into the one Scrutiny Committee, supported by six Lead Scrutiny Members each with specific remits. The Lead Scrutiny Members have a key role in assisting the Scrutiny Committee in carrying out detailed investigations through the work of their supporting Scrutiny Panels into key issues, ensuring that scrutiny is constructive and adds a real value to the work of the Council and its partners on behalf of the communities we serve.

In this first year of the operation the new scrutiny model has been a learning process for all Members involved along with officers, partners and members of the public. Everyone involved has continued to show a real commitment to undertaking effective and robust scrutiny, with smaller groups of members addressing issues quickly and flexibly on a relatively informal basis, as illustrated later on in this report.

Building upon previous years' successes, we held our Annual Scrutiny Debate in May. This event continues to be a key date in our council diary in supporting members of the Scrutiny Committee and its Panels in selecting the priority areas for review in the year ahead. The event continues to be very well supported by my colleagues, senior officers, partners and voluntary and community sector representatives. As part of this high profile event, we continue to promote the importance of scrutiny and showcase our achievements through the delivery of a short film – 'Scrutiny in Action'. To me the film coverage always re-emphasises the difference effective scrutiny can make on how well public services are being delivered and how they could be improved, from the point of view of those receiving and using those services

Another memorable occasion worthy of mention is the Parliamentary Select Committees Event held here in Sunderland back in March for the North East local authorities. The event highlighted the comparisons and learning opportunities between the Parliamentary Select Committees in Westminster and the work of local government scrutiny as well as the strength of such arrangements in bringing Members together to tackle key issues. Overall this event was a huge success and provided a good opportunity to network with other scrutiny colleagues.

Finally, I would like to thank everybody who has contributed to delivering a successful scrutiny work programme this year and I strongly believe that the building blocks are in place to ensure the work of scrutiny supports our transformation journey to becoming a Community Leadership Council.

**Councillor David Tate**  
**Chair of the Scrutiny Committee**

## **Scrutiny Arrangements in Sunderland**

The democratic governance arrangements in Sunderland consists of the Leader of the Council, a Deputy, a Cabinet Secretary, five portfolio holders and five cabinet policy members. The decisions of the Cabinet are held to account by the Scrutiny Committee, supported by six Scrutiny Panels. In addition there are five local Area Committees and Place and People Boards in each area.

### **What is Scrutiny?**

Scrutiny aims to make sure that public services and policies best meet the needs of the residents of the city. It does this through:

- Policy review and development;
- Holding the Council's Executive and its partners to account;
- Investigating issues of local concern; and
- Working with partners to improve services to the local area.

### **The Scrutiny Model**

The Scrutiny Committee acts as the overarching Committee with responsibility for all matters in relation to the improvement, delivery and performance of public services. It considers all matters which impact on the economic, social and environmental well-being of those who live, work and visit the city and is the designated scrutiny committee for statutory health and crime and disorder scrutiny.

If the Scrutiny Committee thinks that more in-depth investigation of a particular issue is needed it will commission work to the most relevant of the six Scrutiny Panels, which are chaired by a Lead Scrutiny Member. The Panels will contribute to and inform the overview or scrutiny process significantly through focused policy review work and one-off investigations.

A Scrutiny Panel is a small, informal group of scrutiny councillors who carry out specific work as requested by the Scrutiny Committee. A Panel will investigate specific issues and make suggestions on how things can be improved. The detailed work a panel undertakes allows panel members to gain a wider understanding of the issue and arrive at informed findings and recommendations.

Although the Panels are informal, they take a structured approach to the examination of a particular issue with the aim of identifying the key issues and seeking to suggest solutions. Panels will carry out a scoping exercise to identify a detailed remit and terms of reference, resource implications, the need for additional expertise, and existing research and supporting documentation.

Shorter "spotlight" reviews are appropriate for specific topics in a shorter space of time. The approach may include an evidence gathering day, via "interviews" and discussion groups with officers, members and other stakeholders.

When the Panel has finished its investigation, the Lead Scrutiny Member will present the work to the Scrutiny Committee. If the Scrutiny Committee formally supports its findings and subsequent recommendations, it will be considered by the Cabinet and, where relevant, partners thereafter.

### **How does scrutiny make a difference?**

On a regular basis the Scrutiny Committee will enhance the work of the Council and partners by holding officers and partners to account on key issues, areas and policies being developed. The impact of the work of scrutiny is also be evidenced over time by the implementation of its recommendations by the Cabinet and partners. The monitoring of delivery of scrutiny's recommendations over a period of time builds up a portfolio of evidence of scrutiny's role in service improvement.

## The Scrutiny Committee

As a Scrutiny Committee we have been working together to adopt and embed the new scrutiny arrangements with Members, officers and partners.

Much of our work has been around commissioning policy reviews and one off issues of concern to the six Lead Scrutiny Members and their supporting Panels, monitoring progress and considering the outcomes of their policy reviews and investigations.

We have also undertaken a significant amount of health scrutiny and enhanced our understanding of the health reform agenda. To that end, the Committee met with key representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and considered the city's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy which sets out the Health and Wellbeing Board's priorities over the coming years. In addition we have looked at three changes to healthcare provision in the city, one of which we considered to be so significant it was commissioned to the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Lead Member and Panel who undertook a comprehensive piece of work which resulted in us being able to provide detailed feedback on the proposals to the Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Scrutiny Committee continues to be consulted on a number of key budget and policy framework documents which we have discussed and debated and provided comments to Cabinet and Full Council. We have also been consulted on other key issues for the city such as the Future of Libraries and the Community Resilience Plan. It is through the reporting to Committee that Members can provide challenge to help directorates and service areas to further develop such plans.

Building on existing good practice, the Scrutiny Committee met with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Secretary as part of the budget consultation process for 2013/14. The meeting allowed for some thought provoking discussion with Cabinet and Scrutiny Members about the financial challenges the Council and the city faces over the next year and beyond.

Cabinet members have continued to show their commitment to scrutiny, having attended both the Scrutiny Committee and individual Scrutiny Panels over the year to feedback on the proposals to implement our recommendations and give evidence to policy reviews.

I also take the opportunity to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Panels throughout the year and am impressed by how quickly everybody has adapted to the new way of working and the level of commitment that continues to be shown by each individual Panel in the work they have undertaken on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Scrutiny Committee members for their hard work, dedication and commitment to scrutiny, officers of the Council and the residents of Sunderland.

Insert library picture

**Cllr David Tate**  
**Chair of the Scrutiny Committee**

## Scrutiny Panels – Reports from Lead Scrutiny Members

### Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel

#### Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Christine Shattock

**Panel Members:** Councillors Jill Fletcher, Ronny Davison, Alan Emmerson, Rosalind Copeland, Darryl Dixon, Lisa Smiles

I am very pleased to be able to report on the work of the Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel in this, its first year of operation. The Scrutiny Panel has had a very active year completing two spotlight reviews dealing with themes and issues important to both the Council and the people of Sunderland.

The first spotlight review undertaken by the Panel was around how mental health services are signposted and accessed by people in Sunderland. The Panel held focus groups with key stakeholders, visited organisations and resources across the city and held discussions with relevant Council officers to gather evidence and form the recommendations. The Panel was able to focus on how people access mental health services in the city from a range of perspectives and have made recommendations that aim to strengthen the awareness and access to mental health services in Sunderland for those who need them.

Our second review focused on the difficult issue of empty properties in Sunderland and we gathered evidence from a range of sources. One aspect of this review was the opportunity to experience first-hand the work of the Empty Homes Team and garner a true insight into the work that the team undertakes. This is one of the real assets of the scrutiny function, that ability to explore issues in a variety of ways, taking Members out of the Civic Centre and into the city. The Empty Homes Team were also able to highlight the extensive nature of their work in getting empty homes back into circulation. The review has developed a number of conclusions and drawn on the evidence to develop recommendations that will help the city develop and move forward in a proactive way in dealing with empty properties across the city.

The Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel has delivered on a very demanding and important series of issues and that has only been possible through the contribution and dedication of Panel members, officers and key stakeholders. The Panel has achieved a great deal in this first year of operation. I look forward to the coming year and the challenges this will bring and I feel sure that the Panel will build on these early successes.

Insert CS signature

Cllr Christine Shattock



### Public Health, Wellness and Culture Panel

#### Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor George Howe

**Panel Members:** Councillors Dianne Snowdon, Debra Waller, Louise Farthing, Fiona Miller, Julia Jackson, Rebecca Atkinson, Paul Maddison

The Panel was commissioned to review the transition of public health into the local authority. The review looked at the development of a local public health system designed to have the greatest potential for improving health, not just within the Council but with all local partners. Our focus was on transformation, looking at how strategies are going beyond the practical steps of transition to develop a local vision for

public health. It is hoped that our final report will contribute towards the debate about what effective local government leadership of public health looks like.

The Panel was also commissioned to prepare a response to a significant public consultation on improving urgent and emergency care services in Sunderland. Members of the Panel participated in a number of consultation events and we accounted for all of the views expressed by stakeholders during the consultation in compiling our final report. We concluded that the proposals present an ideal opportunity to develop a consistent urgent care strategy that benefits everyone in the city. It is vital that the delivery of the integrated model is kept under constant review and measures to counter negative impacts are taken to ensure this new arrangement is better for everyone.

During this health transition year we were also commissioned to develop a partnership protocol. The health reforms provide an opportunity to redefine relationships between clinicians, other professionals, people who use services and communities. Local structures and ways of working will be different. With a focus on the fundamental principle of improving outcomes for local people, there are opportunities for bodies to work together in a way that adds value to each other's work. Through the use of a jointly agreed health protocol we can hopefully build strong, effective and accountable relationships.



I would like to take the opportunity to give my thanks to colleagues, officers and partners for their contribution to our work

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "G. Howe".

Cllr George Howe

## **Children's Services Scrutiny Panel**

### **Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Bob Francis**

**Panel Members:** Councillors Amy Wilson, Mary Turton, Linda Williams, Doris MacKnight, Anthony Farr, Philip Tye, Robert Oliver

The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has had a busy year and Members have been involved in a number of key pieces of work. The new model of working resulted in the Panel being asked to undertake two spotlight reviews – one on the implementation of the Education Act 2011 and another on the involvement of children and young people in service design and delivery.

The spotlight reviews have allowed the Panel to look at two key issues in a focused and measured way. Members have, through these spotlight reviews, been able to visit schools, discuss themes with young people and explore ideas with Council officers and key stakeholders. The aim, at all times, has been to look at how we can help to improve or develop our services for the people of Sunderland in these challenging times.

We have found that one of the strengths of the new scrutiny model is the ability for the Scrutiny Committee to commission work to the Panels in a timely way. Our Panel was commissioned to look at the waiting times for accessing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) following the outcomes of the announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services in Sunderland. The Panel has held meetings with new service provider, Northumberland Tyne and Wear Trust, and continues to closely monitor the progress of service waiting times, with the Trust welcoming the opportunity to have a continuing dialogue with the Panel around this important issue. The Panel acknowledges the real commitment of the Trust to a reduction in these waiting times and will continue to monitor the situation keeping the Scrutiny Committee informed of the Panel's progress and outcomes through my own Lead Member briefings to the Committee.

I have had the great pleasure of being the Children's Services Scrutiny Lead Member during this first year and would like to thank all the Panel members and officers who contributed to our busy work programme. I am sure that 2013/14 will be another challenging, but rewarding, year for the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel.

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Cllr Bob Francis



## Skills, Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel

### Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Tom Martin

**Panel Members:** Councillors Bob Price, Chris Marshall, David Snowdon, Denny Wilson, Len Lauchlan, Tom Wright

At the start of the year, the Scrutiny Committee asked the Panel to undertake two policy reviews into key Government initiatives impacting on the economic well being of the people of Sunderland; namely the Operation of the Work Programme and the development of the Apprenticeship Scheme.

With regard to the Work Programme, the Panel took the opportunity to visit the offices of the two Work Programme providers operating in the city – Avanta UK and Igneus UK. This allowed us to ask questions of senior staff from both firms and also speak to a number of their clients to get their views on the training and support on offer. We also met with representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus.

Underpinning our recommendations is the importance of the Work Programme providers working with and cooperating with the Council and its partners at a strategic level. We have also stressed the importance of them providing detailed and transparent performance data on a regular basis and also of the Council keeping them as informed as possible of potential investment and employment opportunities in the city.

In terms of our review into the operation of the Apprenticeship Scheme in Sunderland, the Panel again met with key organisations involved in delivery; namely representatives from the National Apprenticeship Service, the business sector, training providers and local schools and colleges. The Panel also took the opportunity to meet with young people taking part in the Apprenticeship Scheme in order to discuss their first hand experiences.

Our recommendations have focused on the need and difficulty of providing sufficient high quality apprenticeships for young people at a time of economic recession and also the importance of raising awareness and promoting the benefits of apprenticeships among business, schools and the general public.

All in all, it has been a busy and productive year for the Panel. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my colleagues for all their hard work and enthusiasm and I feel sure that the progress we have made can be built upon in the year ahead.

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Cllr Tom Martin





## City Services Scrutiny Panel

### Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Stephen Bonallie

**Panel Members:** Councillors Neville Padgett, Michael Essl, Stuart Porthouse, Lynda Scanlan  
Cllr Steven Foster, Peter Wood

It has proved to be a busy year for the Panel.

For our policy reviews, the Panel was asked to look into the operation of the Tell Us Once for Bereavement Service in Sunderland and secondly, issues associated with the Council's successful bid for funding to retain weekly refuse collection services in the city.

For our review into the Tell Us Once for Bereavement Service, we spoke with the officers involved in introducing and operating the service and also gathered information on the views of those people using the service. This also involved speaking to staff at the Moorside Call Centre who are responsible for taking client calls. I myself sat in with staff answering calls and I was most impressed with their professional approach. In fact, all the members on the Panel were most impressed by the way the new service is operating and the enthusiasm and commitment shown by our staff.

Our final recommendations have focused on ways of developing the profile and marketing of the service and also the potential for the lessons learned to be adopted by other services we provide.

In terms of our review into waste and recycling, the Panel has focused on the design and delivery of a Resident Engagement and Education Programme intended to raise awareness of refuse and recycling issues and increase recycling performance. The Panel has examined the challenges faced by the Council in communicating with residents its aim to continually reinforce and improve positive attitudes to waste and recycling collection. As part of its review, the Panel has undertaken a visit to a neighbouring authority in order to compare the approaches adopted to communicating and encouraging positive behaviour by residents.

In terms of recommendations, the Panel has stressed the importance of developing a clear and focused communications plan to ensure that the considerable progress made on recycling is maintained against the backdrop of the city retaining a weekly refuse collection service.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues on the Panel for all their support and assistance during the year and also to thank those officers and partners who have assisted us in our work. I feel that a great deal has been achieved during the year and that this will place us in a strong position to face the challenges of the year ahead.



Insert SB signature

Cllr Stephen Bonallie

## Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel

**Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor David Errington**

**Panel Members:** Councillors Bob Heron, Betty Gibson, Barry Curran, Anne Lawson, John Scott, George Thompson, John Wiper

The Scrutiny Panel was commissioned to undertake two spotlight policy reviews this year into Reducing Re-offending and Domestic Violence respectively. Both reviews have proved to be significant pieces of work and the Panel has therefore met on a regular basis and at a variety of locations.

There is little doubt that the drive to reduce reoffending in our city is critical; crime blights our communities and has significant social and economic costs. To assist us in undertaking this review we took evidence from officers of the Council, housing providers, HMP Northumberland, the Integrated Offender Management Unit, Northumbria Probation and Sunderland Armed Forces Network. We made recommendations to improve and embed links with the Health and Wellbeing Board, Police and Crime Commissioner and North East prisons; work differently to improve the accommodation offer for offenders; and gain a better understanding of the complex needs of veteran offenders.

Our second review into domestic violence was also very pertinent. Despite tremendous progress in tackling domestic violence, it remains largely hidden from view and is thought to affect one in four women and one in six men. We took evidence from a number of key stakeholders including the Chair of the Safer Sunderland Partnership, Northumbria Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, Gentoo, Impact Family Services and Victim Support. We were also very fortunate to gain the views of the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner and visited one of the city's refuges, run by Wearside Women in Need. Our recommendations for this review are mainly focused on ensuring the progress already made on this issue does not halt or take a backwards step, given the very difficult time of austerity we are in.

As a Scrutiny Panel we have worked together to embrace the new scrutiny arrangements, and I would like to take this opportunity to give my thanks to my colleagues, as well as officers and partners for the ongoing enthusiasm and commitment they have shown whilst looking at issues that are important to the future of our city.



**Cllr David Errington**



## **The Year Ahead**

This year has seen significant change to the way in which scrutiny operates and during the year ahead we will build on the foundations of a new way of working to ensure that scrutiny continues to add value to the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners by looking at the right issues at the right time.

There is a developing opportunity for scrutiny to provide checks and balances to ensure that valuable resources are deployed in the most effective way, allowing scrutiny to build on its previous successes whilst taking account of the current climate the public sector operates within.

The scrutiny 'commissioning model' has been demonstrated as a successful route for issues to be reviewed and has allowed for a value-added approach to be taken. Building on the strong start made this year, Panel arrangements will be developed to take even more advantage of their flexibility with different ways of working and new methods adopted as necessary. Smaller working groups looking at specific issues have proved to be a real success story for scrutiny in recent years and we will explore opportunities to adopt new approaches when undertaking reviews with different approaches applied to evidence-gathering to make recommendations based on robust findings.

The year ahead will also see scrutiny finding its place within new models of governance for both crime and policing and health. The newly established Police and Crime Panel is a statutory body and will take on the scrutiny of the Police and Crime Plan and holding the Police and Crime Commissioner to account. Scrutiny will retain a role in holding to account the Safer Sunderland Partnership and will be looking with interest at the developing relationships between the Safer Sunderland Partnership and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Within the health arena scrutiny will play a vital role in shaping new relationships between the Health and Well-Being Board, Clinical Commissioning Group and local HealthWatch. Scrutiny is leading on developing an effective partnership protocol which will help scrutiny to understand its role in the new arrangements, as well as assisting officers and partners in working with scrutiny.

The year ahead will also see public health responsibilities come into the local authority and we look forward to working with new health colleagues delivering public health services in the year ahead.

Also on the horizon during the next year will be a continuation of raising the profile of scrutiny within Sunderland and beyond, by networking with other local authorities, the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the local and regional media. Sunderland's Scrutiny Chair will take on the chair of the Regional Scrutiny Network in September, ensuring we are at the forefront of regional developments as they happen.

The scrutiny function will continue to introduce further innovative ideas, revised working practices and procedures to ensure Scrutiny in Sunderland continues to be a positive and constructive experience and ultimately plays a vital role in improving the lives of the residents within the city.

## **The Scrutiny Team**

The Scrutiny Team provides independent and professional support and advice to the City Council's Scrutiny service and consists of:

If you would like to get in touch with the Scrutiny Team, our contact details are:

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Notes

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