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# Scrutiny Annual Report

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All together, **working, playing, learning,**  
**growing, laughing, innovating, caring,**  
**sharing, living...**  
Sunderland!



# Contents

Foreword

Scrutiny Arrangements in Sunderland

The Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Panels – reports from Lead Scrutiny Members

The year ahead

# Foreword



As the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee I am pleased to be able to introduce this year's Annual Report. The Scrutiny Annual Report is a record of the work of the Scrutiny Committee and its Lead Scrutiny Members throughout 2014/15 and is testament to the activities that we, as scrutineers, carry out.

As many of you will know this was my first year as the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and it has been an extremely busy one. I was also elected Chair of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) Scrutiny Committee for 2014/15. As the appetite for greater devolution of power gathers a growing voice across the country the Combined Authority provides an important step along this path.

It is also important, within regional arrangements, to have an effective scrutiny function that enables local councillors, on behalf of their communities, to scrutinise and challenge the North East Leadership Board (NELB), the Transport Sub-committee (TNEC) and Nexus. The Scrutiny function needs to investigate matters of strategic importance to residents within the Combined Area covered

by the Constituent Authorities with a view to influencing the decisions of the NELB, TNEC and Nexus.

The panels have once again been very active and this is evidenced by the completion of a number of reviews by the Lead Scrutiny Members and their respective panels. Further details of these reviews are included in this report, and I know that the Members who took part in them found the work to be interesting and valuable.

A range of recommendations have been identified which are intended to have a positive outcome for the council and its residents, and the Scrutiny Committee will be interested to hear about the progress made over the coming year.

It remains essential that Scrutiny continues to contribute positively to supporting the delivery of the city's priorities through its critical friend role, its contribution to decision making and its unique role of bringing the public, partners and elected Members together to explore issues in greater detail and provide solutions.

It has also become increasingly important as we continue to navigate our way through this period of financial austerity, that we focus our Scrutiny resource on areas that matter most to the public and on issues where we feel we can help the council to work smarter and more efficiently.

I would at this point like to pay tribute to Cllr Christine Shattock, Lead Scrutiny Member for Health, Housing and Adult Services, who sadly passed away this year. Cllr Shattock was a keen advocate for

scrutiny and certainly championed the voice of local people, providing an invaluable contribution not only to scrutiny but the council as a whole; she will be greatly missed.

I hope you find this Annual Report both informative and interesting, and that you will continue to follow the progress of the Scrutiny function at Sunderland City Council in the future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Norma Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Councillor Norma Wright**  
Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

# Scrutiny Arrangements in Sunderland

The democratic governance arrangements in Sunderland consist of the Leader of the Council, a Deputy, a Cabinet Secretary, five Portfolio Holders and five Project Lead Members. The decisions of the Cabinet are held to account by the Scrutiny Committee supported by the 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 ensure 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 purposes for health, flooding (when relevant) and crime and disorder scrutiny.

If the Scrutiny Committee requires more in-depth investigation of particular issues it will commission work to the six Scrutiny Panels chaired by a Lead Scrutiny Member. The Panels will contribute to and inform the scrutiny process significantly through focused policy review work and one-off policy reviews.

A Scrutiny Panel is a small group of councillors who carry out specific, time-limited work. Panels are informal and are commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee to investigate specific service areas and make suggestions on how they can be improved. This 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 key issues and outcomes. Panels will carry out a scoping exercise to identify a detailed remit and terms of reference, resource implications, the need for additional expertise, existing research and supporting documentation.

Shorter "spotlight" reviews may be 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 findings to the Scrutiny Committee. If the Scrutiny Committee formally supports the document, it will be sent to the Cabinet for consideration.

## How does scrutiny make a difference?

On a regular basis the Scrutiny Committee will add value by investigative questioning of witnesses on the issues within the council's policy framework. The impact of the work of scrutiny will also be evidenced over time by the implementation of its recommendations.

The monitoring of delivery of scrutiny's recommendations over a period time builds up a portfolio of evidence of scrutiny's role in service improvement.

# The Scrutiny Committee



The Scrutiny Committee has once again undertaken a full and active work programme. A healthy relationship continues to develop between scrutiny and the Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group. This is evidenced by the discussions that have taken place around the Clinical Commissioning Group's two-year operational plan, its programme of reform work related to the pathways for urgent care in Sunderland and the implementation of the Better Care Fund.

The Scrutiny Committee continues to take a keen interest in Sunderland Care and Support Ltd, and during the year met with a number of staff who had transferred from the council to the trading company. The Committee also held one of its monthly meetings at Sunderland Care and Support premises on the Leechmere Industrial Estate.

The Scrutiny Committee also received reports around the on-going improvement activity with regard to safeguarding services in Sunderland and an overview of the Council's Corporate Parent Role as well as an updated position on the Corporate Parenting Board Performance Data. The Committee has recognised the importance of this particular area and has established a working group to monitor and support the work that is taking place around safeguarding in Sunderland.

I am pleased to report that Portfolio Holders continue to attend scrutiny meetings, where appropriate, to provide evidence or feedback to scrutiny members on a number of issues. The Scrutiny committee also continued its dialogue with senior Cabinet members as part of the Council's budget consultation process for 2015/16. This is an important part of the scrutiny

function particularly in light of the continued spending reductions and emphasis that is placed on austerity. The Scrutiny and Cabinet relationship continues to be one that benefits both parties.

Sunderland City Council like many local authorities across England continues to look at and explore new ways of delivering services against a backdrop of diminishing financial resources. Scrutiny can play its part in this by providing an opportunity to explore new ways of working, helping to develop services and providing evidence to assist the council in the future delivery of services.

Through attendance at various panel meetings and the monthly Lead Scrutiny Member updates, presented to the committee, myself, the Vice-Chair and other committee members are able to witness the quality of evidence gathering that takes place for the various reviews. The Panels, once again, have shown their creativity in the approaches taken to investigate the issues we have asked them to look at.

Finally I would like to extend my gratitude to all Members for their contribution to the scrutiny process, whether through membership of the committee or by undertaking detailed reviews through the scrutiny panels. My thanks are also extended to officers, partners and external organisations who have attended meetings and contributed to the work of scrutiny. Their input has been much appreciated and provides a valuable contribution to scrutiny in Sunderland.



# Children's Services Scrutiny Panel



## Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Debra Waller

**Panel Members:** Cllrs Florence Anderson, Linda Williams, Doris MacKnight, Anthony Farr, Philip Tye, Jacqui Gallagher, Bob Francis

This year the Panel investigated local responses to child poverty. The starting point for this review was an acceptance that the issue of child poverty is everybody's business.

This is because a high level of child poverty in an area has both social and economic costs for local authorities, who often have to deal with its consequences. The Child Poverty Action Group carried out a study in 2012, which estimated the cost of poverty for each individual local authority, and reports that Sunderland spends an extra £187 million per annum on the effects of child poverty.

The size of the challenge facing Sunderland in trying to both reduce the numbers of families at risk of poverty and providing the support needed by families already experiencing its effect should not be underestimated.

The level of child poverty and the effectiveness of the work being done to improve the situation therefore matters. A sustained reduction in the number of children growing up in poverty is a key part of efforts, nationally and locally, aimed at breaking the 'poverty cycle' – where children of poor parents, become poor adults themselves.

The review has focused on prevention and early intervention, especially in the early years. There is compelling evidence that early intervention to prevent problems further down the line is the most effective form of action both in terms of improving outcomes for children and young people and cost effectiveness.

A review of child poverty is timely when those agencies working with families are finding that resources are being reduced significantly

The review recognises the activities being undertaken by the Council and other agencies to respond to the challenge. However, the report also identifies areas of current practice and policy in early intervention that should be prioritised if a sustained reduction in the number of children living in poverty is to be achieved.

I would like to thank the members of the review for their contributions and also to thank all of the witnesses who gave up their time to attend and provide interesting insights into the work they and their colleagues do and the challenges they face.



# City Services Scrutiny Panel



## Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor David Snowdon

**Panel Members:** Cllrs James Blackburn, Michael Essl, Stuart Porthouse, Steven Foster, Lynda Scanlan, John Wiper.

It has again been a busy year for the Panel.

In terms of our policy reviews, the Panel has looked at two issues of concern to the council's Bereavement Services function. Firstly, the condition and appearance of the council's cemeteries and in particular the effect of illegal kerb set which have proliferated in recent years and secondly the implications of government proposals to establish the position of Medical Examiner in the city .

As a result of our review, the Panel has suggested that the council undertake a review of the existing cemetery regulations in order to ensure that our cemeteries are well maintained and offer a dignified setting. The Panel has highlighted the need to balance the sensitive and potentially emotive nature of

the service with the wishes of many cemetery visitors who expect a well maintained and respectful area in which they can pay their respects. The Panel also stressed the importance of undertaking a comprehensive consultation process before amending our cemetery regulations.

The Panel has found that the proposed position of Medical Examiner could have significant cost and staffing implications for the city. The role of the Medical Examiner is to ensure that families receive an expert explanation of the cause of a death of a relative or loved one and provide an independent authority which will listen to and act on any concerns over the death certification process.

As part of its review, the Panel met with Mr Derek Winter, Senior Coroner, to discuss the respective roles and responsibilities of the council and its partners in working with the Medical Examiner. As a result of these discussions, the Panel is satisfied that the plans and preparations are in place in the event of the Medical Examiner Service being established and that the council and its partners are

clear on their respective roles and relationships.

During the year the Panel has also monitored the incidence of fly tipping in the city and trends in the collection of bulky waste. Recent figures show a continued downward trend with respect to fly tipping and a signs of a gradual increase in the take up in the service for bulky waste. The Panel has asked for a more detailed breakdown of information at an area level and will continue to monitor trends.

Toward the end of the year, the Panel revisited its review into alcohol licensing in the city in order to consider the progress being made in relation to licensing hours and the data being collected on drink related admissions to hospitals. The Panel also received an update on the work of trading standards in relation to the operation of rogue traders.

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 and made such an important contribution to our work.





# Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel



**Lead Scrutiny Member:**  
**The late Councillor**  
**Christine Shattock**

**Panel Members:** Councillors Rosalind Copeland, Darryl Dixon, Michael Dixon, Alan Emerson, Jill Fletcher, Shirley Leadbitter, Barbara McClennan, Dorothy Trueman and Gemma Taylor

The Panel have investigated the issue of loneliness and social isolation and what role there is for person-centred coordinated care. The panel continue as part of their review process to visit groups and organisations that contribute to the issue under investigation. Members have met with, and visited organisations including the Salvation Army, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group, Age UK, Hetton New Dawn, the Campaign to End Loneliness and Headlight to name but a few. One of the key themes to arise from this review is just how easy it is for anyone to become lonely or isolated through a

number of different factors such as personal circumstances (e.g. widowhood), life events (e.g. moving away from home, bereavement, moving into residential care), poor physical and mental health, or perceptions such as the expectation of declining health and dependency.

The review acknowledged, through its evidence gathering, that loneliness was estimated to have the same impact as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and that simple interventions can make the biggest of differences. The review also recognised the efforts of providing more co-ordinated care through integrated services as well as a focus on supporting individuals to manage their own health had shown positive impacts on health and wellbeing outcomes. It is hoped the review will not only highlight the serious health implications of loneliness and social isolation but also provide recommendations that further enhance and compliment the admirable work being undertaken by so many organisations across the city.

The Panel were also commissioned, by the Scrutiny Committee, to look at proposals to procure a new integrated Musculoskeletal (MSK) Service. Through the commissioning role the panel were able to explore and satisfy themselves of the new proposals. The commissioning role

of the Scrutiny Committee is of considerable importance and allows the individual Panels and its Members to contribute to the work of the Committee through each Panel's specific remit and expertise. In reporting back to the Scrutiny Committee the HHAS Lead Scrutiny Member was able to report that the new MSK service would be more responsive, ensuring greater choice and control for the patient along with a more equitable service through efficient triage, greater education of GP's and robust monitoring arrangements.

The Panel would like to thank all the officers, outside organisations and people who have contributed to the work of the scrutiny panel during the year. Finally the Panel would like to pay tribute to Cllr Christine Shattock, Lead Scrutiny Member for Health, Housing and Adult Services, who recently passed away. Cllr Shattock led the panel in exemplary fashion and will be a greatly missed scrutineer, colleague and friend.



# Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel



## Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor George Howe

**Panel Members:** Cllrs Louise Farthing, Fiona Miller, Julia Jackson, Rebecca Atkinson, David Errington, Richard Bell, John Cummings Shirley Leadbitter

I am very pleased to be able to report on the work of the Scrutiny Panel in this its 3rd year of operation. The Scrutiny Panel has had a very active year completing two reviews that have dealt with themes and issues important to both the council and the people of Sunderland.

Our first review was around how we support those at risk of suicide. Every suicide is both an individual tragedy and a loss to society. Every suicide can have a devastating effect. The numbers are very small compared to smoking or obesity but any death by suicide shows up the ultimate loss of hope, the ultimate loss of meaning of purpose. While the numbers may be small, they have a very big

impact. There are many ways in which services, communities, individuals and society as a whole can help to prevent suicides. Suicides are not inevitable.

The aim of our review was to refresh our view of what is known about the factors leading up to a suicide, including factors that impact on the number of suicides, identification of those who may be at higher risk and the evidence for effective prevention.

Our second review was on the use of so-called 'legal highs'. In the last few years there has been nothing short of a revolution in the public health risks presented by these new and unpredictable drugs.

These drugs are designed to evade drugs laws, are widely available, have the potential to pose serious risks to public health and can even be fatal.

The Scrutiny Panel's evidence gathering aimed to gain a perspective on the impact on

people's health and the challenges of trying to restrict the supply of legal highs in Sunderland. The Panel recognised that our current approach has real strengths but there is no doubt that more action is needed on a number of fronts. There is no single agency with definitive responsibility to tackle the issue and we need to continue to join forces to tackle what has been described as an epidemic. We must prevent the normalisation of drug use in our communities. If we work together, I believe we can make Sunderland a safer place.

The Panel hopes that its recommendations will make a useful contribution to the ongoing response to legal highs.

The Scrutiny Panel has delivered reports on important public health issues and this has only been possible through the contribution and dedication of panel members, officers and key stakeholders from across the city.



# Skills, Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel



## Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Dianne Snowden

**Panel Members:** Cllrs Bob Price, Michael Dixon, Christine Marshall, Mary Turton, Billy Turton, Len Lauchlan, Tom Wright, Peter Wood.

During the year, the Panel has undertaken a major review into the opportunities and obstacles faced by the city in meeting its future skills demands. The review stemmed from a frequently voiced concern that the local economy is being held back by a shortage of skills.

To this end the Panel met with a broad range of interested parties, including representatives from schools, colleges, local businesses and training providers. Panel members also attended two Work Discovery Days – one at Nissan on the topic of advanced manufacturing and the other at the Software Centre, Tavistock in relation to the IT and software sectors.

Our discussions have highlighted the growing skill shortages being experienced across a number of key sectors of the local economy including, engineering, advanced manufacturing, IT and software, building and construction and health and care.

All reported a growing challenge in replacing an aging workforce and up-skilling the existing workforce to adapt to new work processes and technological innovation. Our review has highlighted a range of measures that need to be taken to help tackle the skills deficit facing the city.

These include encouraging our young people to consider a career in engineering and advanced manufacturing, ensuring that they receive high quality career advice, developing links between local businesses and schools and continuing to expand the number and range of apprenticeships.

Reference was also made to focusing training and skills development on growth areas of the local economy and at sectors where the city has a comparative advantage. The city will also need to continue to develop its skills base in other sectors of the economy including creative and arts, professional and financial and software and IT.

At the start of the year, the Panel also conducted a short review into proposals to draw up a Digital

Strategy for the city and key themes and issues that should be included. This includes how far the council and the city are currently making use of its digital assets and how best we can make use of new technology into the future.

The Panel has stressed the importance of partnership working in drawing up such a strategy and the need for partners to pool skills and resources. The Panel feel that the strategy should be clear and understandable to the lay man while being flexible to accommodate the development of technology into the future.

While the increasing use of digital services has enormous benefits in helping to reduce costs and promote choice and accessibility, the Strategy should also address the important issue of ensuring that our residents are not excluded from the benefits of the increasing use of digital services.

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.



# Responsive Services & Customer Care Scrutiny Panel



## **Lead Scrutiny Member: Councillor Ronny Davison**

**Panel Members:** Cllrs Betty Gibson, Barry Curran, Anne Lawson, Iain Kay, George Thompson, Gillian Galbraith, Lee Martin, Margaret Forbes.

The Panel has focused on two major issues during the year; the implications of the Government's welfare reform legislation and the operation of food banks in the city.

The Government's welfare reforms programme has already had a considerable effect on the people of the city. The Panel heard about the work being done by the council and its partners to support people affected by changes to a range of benefits including personal independence payments, work capability assessments and benefits caps. The Panel was consulted at an early stage on the contents of the council's Crisis Support Scheme and Council Tax Support Scheme and has also

monitored the progress in the introduction of Universal Credit and the steps being taken to support those most affected.

As the next stage in its review, the Panel went on to look at the operation of food banks within the city. This has involved meeting with representatives from the food bank Network and visiting a number of food banks to discuss their operation at first hand.

As part of its work, the Panel also considered the recent report of the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the UK entitled "Feeding Britain" and attended an event held at Sunderland Minster to consider the reports implications.

The need and growth for food banks is a sad state of affairs for a developed and relatively wealthy nation. All those we spoke to looked forward to the day when food banks would become unnecessary. While food banks have always operated on a small scale, in recent years there has been a rapid expansion and there was concern that the introduction of Universal Credit could see a period of continued growth.

Those operating food banks see them as very much a "hand up - not a hand out" being a symptom of other underlying problems rather than a solution. Much is being done to work with people to learn more about the reasons why they are using food banks and to provide

advice and support. The Panel has been impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm of those operating food banks and the way in which statutory and voluntary groups are working together to try to find a long term solution for those in need.

As part of its work programme, the Panel also briefly considered the implications of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act. The Act is intended to introduce simpler, more effective powers to tackle anti-social behaviour and establish a community trigger and community remedy to victims and communities, giving them a greater say in how agencies respond to complaints of anti-social behaviour. It was felt that this could be an issue which could be looked at in greater detail once the new legislations has had an opportunity to bed in.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Panel members for their support, contributions, and most of all for their active participation in our evidence gathering sessions. I would also like to thank officers and partners for their contribution to our work.

# The year ahead

The Scrutiny Annual Report is largely retrospective in its approach, creating a record of the work the Scrutiny Committee, its Members and panels have undertaken during the previous year. However the annual report is also a chance to look ahead to what factors will influence the local government landscape generally, and scrutiny more specifically, over the coming year.

The hosting of the Annual Scrutiny Debate in June always plays a pivotal role in determining the Scrutiny work programme for the year ahead. Delegates include all Elected Members, Co-opted Members, key officers and representatives from our partner organisations to ensure that Scrutiny is able to focus its efforts on the key issues facing the city over the next 12 months. Although with a rapidly changing political and social landscape it is important that scrutiny has the ability to react to emerging local concerns and issues, the commissioning aspect of the scrutiny function will continue to allow for such a proactive approach.

With the abolishment of the Audit Commission there have been initiatives around community empowerment, transparency and sector-led self-improvement, and new forms of partnership-based governance from Combined Authorities to Health and Wellbeing Boards. Public governance needs to respond to an increasingly complex and challenging situation.

The principles and values that have informed scrutiny from initiation have not changed, and the challenges facing public services over the next few years, particularly at local level, mean that the work of scrutiny will remain just as relevant as ever. It will remain a challenge to ensure the effective contribution that scrutiny can contribute is understood in terms of delivering better outcomes for local people and communities.

It is clear that scrutiny provides an important function but as we move forward it will be increasingly important to ensure it is equipped and able to examine issues when things go wrong. The ability to commission one-off items of

interest or concern will remain an important tool for the Scrutiny Committee to be able to react as and when appropriate.

The social and economic landscape is continually changing and it is important that the local authority continues to serve the people of Sunderland by ensuring services meet their needs fully. Scrutiny's role will also remain important by continuing to act as the voice of local people in an effective mechanism for challenge and accountability.









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