

with you
for you



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

1. INTRODUCTION

THIS REPORT PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THE WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION AT ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL DURING THE 2024/25 MUNICIPAL YEAR.

Members of each Scrutiny Committee appreciate and are grateful to Council Officers, Cabinet Portfolio Holders and external partners who have committed to working with Overview and Scrutiny during another challenging year.

In June 2024, the work programmes for each of the Scrutiny Committees were set during individual workshops held for each committee where officers and cabinet members were invited to discuss potential topics for the committee members to choose from. Details of each committee's activity during 2024/25 is described below.

The Overview and Scrutiny function notes the sad passing of Councillor Linda Maloney and Councillor Brian Spencer during the 2024/25 Municipal Year both having been nominated to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission at the start of the year.



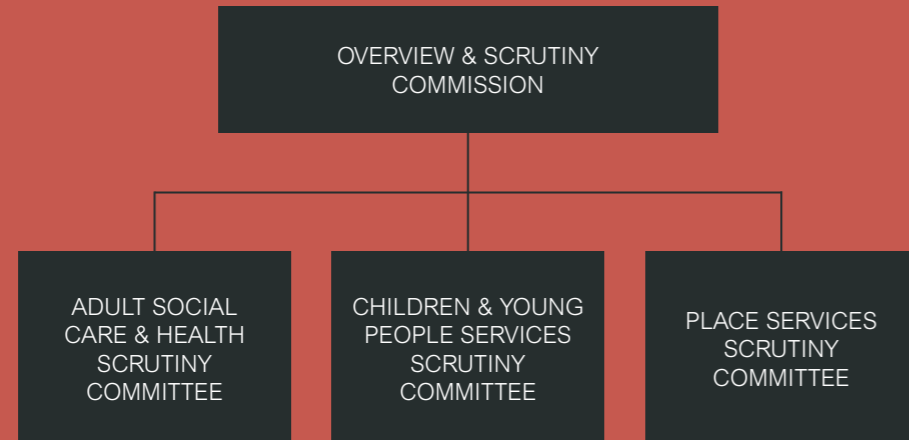
2. WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

The purpose of Overview and Scrutiny (Scrutiny) is to hold decision makers such as Cabinet, Senior Officers, and the managers of external organisations, such as Health Services Commissioners and Providers and Community Safety Partners, to account for decisions they have made or are planning to make, and to examine the performance of services and the outcomes delivered for the residents of the Borough.

In holding decision-makers to account, Scrutiny plays an important role in the successful functioning of local democracy; and effective scrutiny function helps to ensure that public services are more efficient.

Scrutiny at St Helens Borough Council is carried out by an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission and three thematic Scrutiny Committees, each with remits that ensure all aspects of the Council and relevant partners are included.

Scrutiny Committees can receive reports regarding services during public Committee meetings or carry out more in-depth scrutiny through Task and Finish Groups or Spotlight Reviews. Chairs of the Commission and Scrutiny Committees also hold meetings with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers to share information and discuss work programmes as required. All Committees have co-opted members representing other organisations or sectors.



3. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

MEMBERSHIP:

- COUNCILLOR MANCYIA UDDIN (CHAIR)
- COUNCILLOR ROBYN HATTERSLEY
- COUNCILLOR JOHN HODKINSON
- COUNCILLOR JANET JOHNSON
- COUNCILLOR PAUL MCQUADE
- COUNCILLOR LINDA MUSSELL
- COUNCILLOR DAMIEN O’CONNER
- COUNCILLOR GEOFF PEARL
- COUNCILLOR LISA PRESTON
- COUNCILLOR GLEN RICHARDS
- COUNCILLOR MICHELLE SWEENEY
- COUNCILLOR JAMES TASKER

CO-OPTED: VOTING

- MR D THORPE, CHURCH OF ENGLAND
- MR B MCMULLEN, ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

REMIT

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is responsible for all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council, including monitoring and supporting the work programmes of the three thematic Scrutiny Committees. The Commission is also responsible for monitoring the Finance & Governance, and People, Performance & IT Portfolios, the Council’s Quarterly Financial Monitoring Reports and Quarterly Performance Reports in relation to performance under Priority 6 of the Borough Strategy – ‘Be a Responsible Council’.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

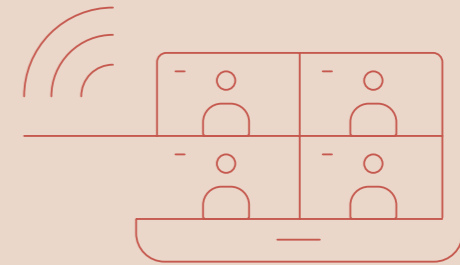
At each of the Commission’s meetings in 2024/25 members reviewed the Quarterly Financial Monitoring Reports. Members focussed questioning on areas of overspend within portfolio budgets, particularly within Children’s Services where increased levels of demand and inflationary rises had created budget pressures. The Commission noted the various interventions that officers had put in place to address those issues and seek to maintain balanced budgets. The Commission also received the Quarterly Performance Report at each meeting and considered areas where performance was below target to understand what could be done to improve outcomes.

The Commission also received regular verbal reports from each of the Chairs of the three Scrutiny Committees regarding the activities of their committees as part of the Commission’s role overseeing the whole Scrutiny Function.

The Commission ran three task and finish reviews during 2024/25 including the annual budget scrutiny task group which met in January to review the Council’s 2025/26 budget setting process. The Commission also carried out a review of the Council’s Finance Scrutiny arrangements to assess whether any improvements could be made to the processes followed during budget scrutiny and financial

monitoring scrutiny. The report was approved by the Commission in April 2025 and a response from Cabinet will be received in the new municipal year.

FINALLY, IN MARCH 2025 THE COMMISSION CARRIED OUT A SPOTLIGHT REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL’S NEW WORKFORCE STRATEGY. OFFICERS PROVIDED AN OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, AND AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, AND MEMBERS OF THE SPOTLIGHT REVIEW GROUP PROVIDED FEEDBACK TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. A REPORT WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE JUNE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION.



4. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP:

COUNCILLOR MICHELLE SWEENEY (CHAIR)
COUNCILLOR DAVID BANKS
COUNCILLOR DONNA GREAVES
COUNCILLOR TERRY MAGUIRE
COUNCILLOR ANNE MCCORMACK
COUNCILLOR PAUL MCQUADE
COUNCILLOR BISI OSUNDEKO
COUNCILLOR MARLENE QUINN
COUNCILLOR TERESA SIMS
COUNCILLOR DAVID VAN DER BERG

REMIT

The Children and Young People Services (CYPS) Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising items relating to the provision of services to children and young people. In 2023/24, this included any services within the Children and Young People Portfolio, and part of the Public

CO-OPTED:

MR D THORPE, CHURCH OF ENGLAND
MR C WILLIAMS, ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
MISS A KIRMAN, PARENT GOVERNOR (PRIMARY)
VACANT PARENT GOVERNOR (SECONDARY)
VACANT PARENT GOVERNOR (SPECIAL)

Health Portfolio. Due to the Committee's scope covering the Council's role as a local education authority, its membership is extended to include five co-opted members, who represent the primary, secondary, and special school sectors and two representatives of faith communities.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

During the previous municipal year the CYPS Scrutiny Committee received updates from the Director of Children's Services (DCS) at each meeting regarding the children's services improvement process while the Council undertook changes following an inadequate Ofsted Rating in 2019. Following the Good rating that the Council received from Ofsted, following a review in June 2023, the Committee decided not to continue with the DCS updates during 2024/25. However, the Committee has continued to scrutinise performance within children's social care, education and learning via the Council's quarterly performance monitoring reports, which have been considered at each of the committee's meetings. The DCS, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service have attended the Committee's meetings to provide performance updates and answer Committee Members' questions regarding ways in which performance could be improved. Some of the performance indicators under Priority 1 of the performance report are the responsibility of Public Health and as such, representatives of Public Health have also attended the Committee's meetings to provide updates and answer questions.

As well as considering the quarterly performance monitoring reports at each meeting, the Committee has considered a number of substantive items during its public meetings this year. In July 2024, the Committee received an in-depth report about children's mental health services from representatives of Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board as commissioners and representatives of some of the various service providers including Mersey

Care NHS Foundation Trust and YMCA. The Committee had reviewed children's mental health services a number of times over the previous five years and Members were pleased to see the progress that commissioners and providers had made in putting in place the St Helens Thrive Collaboration offer that provides services for various levels of mental health support need.

IN OCTOBER 2024, THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERED A REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION & LEARNING DEPARTMENT REGARDING THE COUNCIL'S SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) STRATEGY. THE NEW ST HELENS SEND STRATEGY 2024/27 HAS RECENTLY BEEN AGREED BY ALL PARTNERS AND WAS DUE TO BE PRESENTED TO CABINET AT THE TIME OF THE COMMITTEE'S MEETING.

A particular area of interest to committee members was Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) having identified the timely completion of ECHPs for children and young people in the borough as an area of under performance in the Performance Monitoring Report. Officers provided a detailed overview of the issues that had led to the underperformance noted by the Committee and how the service had acted to make improvements. At the time of

the Committee's meeting, timely competition of EHCPs had improved, however, there were still significant pressures due to high levels of demand for EHCPs and a shortage in qualified officers nationally. It was noted that the Triage for all Education Support and Specialist Advice (TESSA) system that the Committee had conducted a spotlight review of the previous year, was helping schools identify support needs of children and enabling a higher quality of EHCPs. The Committee's consideration of this issue supported the Council to fulfil a directive from the Local Government Ombudsman to address delays in EHCPs.

In January 2025, the Committee received a report regarding young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This report was requested following an unmet target relating to NEET in the Performance Outturn Report for 2023/24. At the meeting Officers identified the issues that had led to an increase in the number of 16-17 year olds who were NEET; the sudden closure of St Helens Chamber in the Summer of 2024 had a negative impact on some apprentices that the Chamber had been supporting, however, officers from Education and Economy Teams were supporting those young people to find alternative providers. Members welcomed changes that the Council's Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) team had made with the Department for Education (DfE) to make 150 additional placements available. Members noted that a lack of aspiration was not generally an issue for young people who were NEET, and instead a lack of opportunity or other factors in their lives had created barriers to education, employment or training.

In September 2024, Members of the Committee attended the Council's Lord Street Office of the Young People Drug and Alcohol Team (YPDAAT). This site visit was arranged following a report into Underaged Alcohol Consumption at the Committee's meeting in March 2024. Members were able to meet with staff from YPDAAT, and the Youth Justice Services also based at Lord Street, to learn more about the services that they provided there. Members found that although the building needed some renovations to provide a better environment for officers and service users, they agreed with officers that the central, yet relatively secluded location, was ideal for service users for accessibility but also privacy. Some Members of the Committee also attended a site visit to Sutton Family Hub in July 2024 alongside Members of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee to see the facilities and hear from some of the service providers based there providing vital services for families to help provide better outcomes for young people and parents.

The Committee also carried out two reviews this year. The Committee has held a significant number of meetings with a wide range of Council and partner representative regarding the growing issue of ketamine use in the Borough, specifically among young people. The Addressing Ketamine Use in Young People task and finish group has met with officers from education, community safety, youth justice, and public health as well as representatives of Merseyside Police and NHS commissioners and providers. The task and finish group has been particularly well supported by officers of YPDAAT during the review and members are grateful for their support and the way they are leading the region on understanding

more about this significant issue that has major negative impacts on young people's health. The task and finish group's final report is expected to be approved by the Scrutiny Committee at the July 2025 meeting. The Scrutiny Committee expects the report to help increase attention on this issue regional and national and support service providers in tackling the availability and use of ketamine in the area.

The Scrutiny Committee has also held a Reducing Vaping Among Young People spotlight review this year. The spotlight review was set up following concerns raised by Councillors about the growing trend of school age young people regularly vaping in and around schools and in communities. The review has been supported by public health and trading standards and well as health service providers and schools. The final report of the spotlight review is expected to be approved by the Scrutiny Committee at the July 2025 meeting and will hopefully help to raise the profile of this issue and help to implement changes linked to the Tobacco and Vapes Bill currently being considered by Parliament that will help to reduce the use of vapes by children and young people.



5. ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP:

COUNCILLOR JOHN HODKINSON (CHAIR)
COUNCILLOR JEANIE BELL
COUNCILLOR TRACY DICKINSON
COUNCILLOR JANET JOHNSON
COUNCILLOR DEREK LONG
COUNCILLOR ALLEN MAKIN
COUNCILLOR LINDA MUSSELL
COUNCILLOR BISI OSUNDEKO
COUNCILLOR GEOFFREY PEARL
COUNCILLOR KATE STEVENSON

CO-OPTED:

(HEALTHWATCH) VACANT

REMIT

5.1 The Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) Scrutiny Committee is the designated Health Scrutiny Committee as required by regulations. It was responsible for monitoring the Integrated Care and Health, and the Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage (public health only) Cabinet portfolios in 2024/25. The Committee also scrutinises the People's Board in relation to its health and wellbeing responsibilities and responds to consultations carried out by the Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and NHS providers regarding substantial developments in health services in St Helens. The Committee coordinates with other local authorities on Joint Health Scrutiny Committees when required

and reports back on the newly established ICS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Health Scrutiny Committee, which met four times in 2024/25. Additionally, the Committee responds to items referred by Healthwatch St Helens, with a representative from Healthwatch co-opted as a member to foster good relationships between the two bodies.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

During 2024/25, the ASCH Scrutiny Committee continued to receive performance reports related to Borough Priority 2 - promoting good health, independence, and care across our communities. Committee Members questioned Cabinet Members and Officers about Adult Social Care and Public Health performance at each of the Committee's meetings in 2024/25. During the year the Committee focused questioning on: the number of adults aged 18-64 admitted on a permanent basis to residential or nursing care per 100,000 population, the mortality rate due to suicide and injury of undetermined intent per 100,000 population, the successful percentage completion of drug treatment for both opiate and non-opiate users, and the take up of direct payments.

THE COMMITTEE CONSIDERED SEVERAL KEY AREAS OVER THE COURSE OF THE 2024/25 YEAR. THE WORK BEGAN WITH A REPORT ON SCRUTINISING THE MARKET POSITION STATEMENT DRAFT STRATEGY, PROVIDING MEMBERS WITH A CLEAR INSIGHT INTO THE CHALLENGES FACING ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND ENABLING MEMBERS TO UNDERSTAND THE VISION AND DIRECTION OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE. ADDITIONALLY, A REPORT WAS RECEIVED ON

THE URGENT EMERGENCY CARE RECOVERY PLAN FOLLOWING THE CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD (ICB) REVIEW, ALLOWING MEMBERS TO SCRUTINISE AND CONSIDER ANY PROPOSED CHANGES AT THE ICB LEVEL AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPACT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY SERVICES.

In January 2025, the Committee received a verbal update on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection of adult social care services that took place in December 2024. The Council underwent a CQC inspection, which provided a rating on overall performance in Adult Social Care Services. The Committee was updated on the findings and considerations for forward planning based on the outcomes of the CQC Inspection. The full CQC Inspection report was published in May 2025 and judged Adult Social Care Services at St Helens Borough Council as 'Good'.

In March 2025, the Committee reviewed the Homes First Model, including a site visit to the Brookfield Support Centre. The Committee was impressed with the progress made in delivering the Council's policy of enabling residents to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible. The Committee commended the Council's efforts in progressing various services and products to help people maintain their independence at home. The Committee

explored what more could be done with Assistive Technology and Artificial Intelligence to support residents in remaining in their homes, whether as part of a social care package or as private clients not eligible for social care.

The Committee undertook the Suicide Prevention Task and Finish Review during 2024/25. The Committee was aware that for every life lost, over 100 other people can be affected. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, St Helens had recorded the highest rates of suicide in the country but had been making significant improvements. Unfortunately, the pandemic had a negative impact on a lot of people and suicide rates rose again. Since then, significant work has been done by our communities, schools, workplaces, and services to raise awareness, provide support, and prevent and reduce suicide. The further rise in suicide rates and accidental deaths (e.g. from accidental drug overdoses), collectively known as 'deaths of despair', have been attributed to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. The task and finish group's final report is due to be approved by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in June 2025.



6. PLACE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP:

COUNCILLOR ROBYN HATTERSLEY (CHAIR)
COUNCILLOR JOHN CASE
COUNCILLOR TRACY DICKINSON
COUNCILLOR ANNE MCCORMACK
COUNCILLOR PAUL MCQUADE
COUNCILLOR DAMIEN O'CONNOR
COUNCILLOR GEOFF PEARL
COUNCILLOR MARLEEN QUINN
COUNCILLOR GLEN RICHARDS
COUNCILLOR KATE STEVENSON

REMIT

The Place Services Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising items concerning borough-wide economic development, environmental services (such as grounds maintenance and waste collection), highways and transportation, housing, culture, tourism, leisure, libraries, and regulatory services. The Committee monitors the following cabinet portfolios: inclusive Growth and Regeneration; Transport and Environment; Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage (excluding Public Health); Safer, Stronger Communities; and Business, Culture

CO-OPTED:

MERSEYSIDE POLICE -
SUPERINTENDENT DAWN MCNALLY
MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE -
VACANT

and Leisure. It is also designated for the scrutiny of crime and disorder issues, monitoring the Council's Community Safety Partnership (Safer St Helens Executive Board), which is responsible for community safety. The Committee can request items for consideration from partners such as the Police and the Fire & Rescue Service. To support good relationships and communication, there are co-opted members on the Committee from Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

Throughout 2024/25, the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report at each of its meetings. The Place Services Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring three of the Borough Strategy Priorities, which requires a significant portion of the Committee's time.

Regarding Priority 3 – “Create Safe and Strong Communities and Neighbourhoods for All”, the Committee continued to scrutinise the net increase in dwelling stock, which showed positive progress over the year. However, concerns remained regarding the number of unique individuals verified as rough sleeping, as this indicator continued to rise.

In relation to Priority 4 – “Support a Strong, Thriving, Inclusive, and Well-Connected Economy”, the Committee monitored several key indicators, including the percentage of residents economically inactive due to long-term sickness, as a proportion of all economically inactive residents aged 16–64. While this indicator showed improvement and was on target, it remained in the 4th quartile compared to the England average.

As a result, the Committee agreed to establish a Task Group on this topic, which will commence in the 2025/26 municipal year. Other closely monitored indicators included the employment rate (working age) and the number of claimants aged 18–24 as a proportion of all residents in that age group.

The main areas of focus under Priority 5 – “Create Green and Vibrant Places to Reflect Our Heritage and Culture” included recycling, particularly the rising costs to the Council and the financial pressures associated with it. Key indicators such as the percentage of household waste sent for recycling and kilograms of recycling per household remained challenging. Members of the Committee also discussed issues regarding fly-tipping at each meeting. The Committee noted that Libraries and Leisure Services both performed well in relation to their respective targets.

The Committee continued to monitor its previous work on Housing Voids. In July 2024, the Committee received the Cabinet response to the review of Housing Voids submitted to Cabinet in April 2024. In January 2025, the Committee was presented with one of the Task Group's recommendations, the Annual Housing Voids Update. Housing Officers and representatives from the Registered Providers forum provided a detailed update to understand and scrutinise thematic compliance in relation to registered providers' obligations within the nomination's agreement, providing the most up-to-date Voids Data referencing all voids, and a breakdown of data relating to voids for each provider. The Committee also monitored progress and initiatives on reducing Voids across the borough.

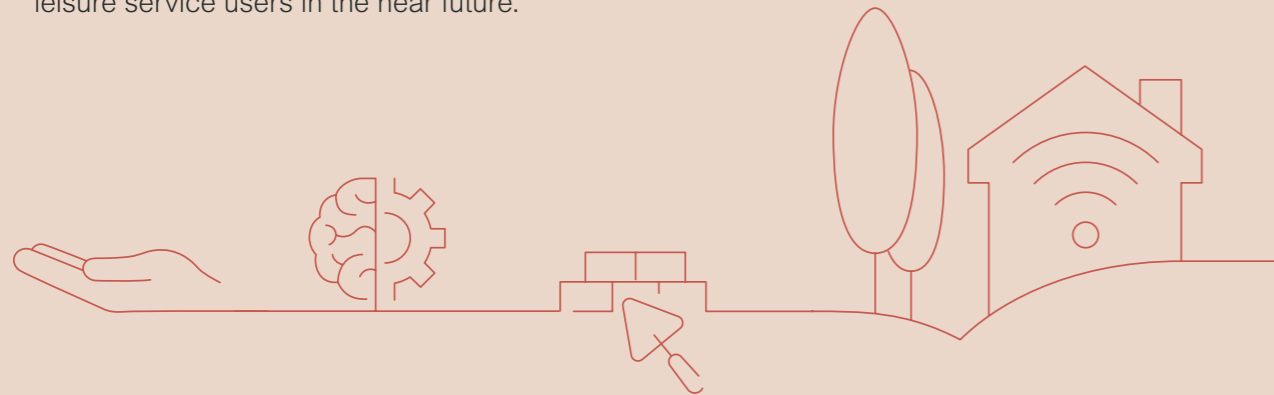
In October 2024, the Committee was presented with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Annual Report for 2023/24 and scrutinised how the CSP spent its funding from the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and reviewed the effectiveness of the CSP initiatives.

In March 2025, the Committee considered the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy in recognition of the prevalence of this issue in the borough and its impact on our communities. The Committee commended the Council's work with partner agencies to refresh the Domestic Abuse Strategy and provided some valued feedback regarding the content of the draft strategy

During 2024/25, the Committee undertook a Task and Finish review of Leisure Services. This work culminated in a report and a series of recommendations, which were approved by the Committee on 6 January 2025. The recommendations emphasised the need for stronger collaboration between Leisure Services and Public Health and called for an expansion of health and wellbeing programmes to deliver more clearly defined outcomes within Leisure Services. The Committee looks forward to seeing a positive impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for leisure service users in the near future.

Additionally, the Committee completed a Road Safety Task and Finish review, which included a site visit to a speed enforcement unit to gain insight into enforcement processes and detection rates. The report of the task group recommended supporting education and voluntary sector engagement strategies to enhance enforcement.

The Committee is also leading an ongoing review into Economic Inactivity, which is scheduled for completion during the 2025/26 municipal year.



7. LOOKING AHEAD

During 2025/26 the Scrutiny function will be continuing to review the Council's performance information each quarter. The dates of committee meetings have been changed slightly to improve alignment with when Cabinet receives the performance report ensuring that scrutiny activity is more timely.

The Scrutiny Team will also be reviewing the way scrutiny operates during task and finish reviews to explore opportunities to improve the process using IT. Microsoft Teams offers an opportunity to increase collaboration and improve information sharing during projects like task and finish reviews and implementing some of the functions that are available may make the scrutiny process more efficient and increase councillors' engagement. Some task and finish reviews during 2025/26 will be used as pilots to test whether changes to the process are beneficial before considering a full roll out across all reviews in 2026/27.

The way that the scrutiny committees develop their work programmes is also changing slightly this year. Whereas in recent years the scrutiny committees have each held their own individual workshops to discuss potential ideas for their work programmes the Scrutiny Function is this year looking to return to a previous format with a single, larger, workshop involving all of the scrutiny committees with support from external facilitators to provide some helpful training for councillors and officers on overview and scrutiny best practice.

As 2025/26 is the last municipal year of the four-year local elections cycle for the Council the Scrutiny Function is aware of the need to conclude scrutiny business before the final meetings of the scrutiny committees in March 2026. This will be kept in mind when the scrutiny committees are developing their work programmes to ensure the workload is manageable in a year where there is less flexibility to carry out work between municipal years.



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