



# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13



May 2013

# 1. Chair's Foreword

- 1.1 This has been another important year for overview and scrutiny in North Tyneside and an opportunity to consolidate changes to the structure of scrutiny implemented in 2011. During a time of considerable transformation within the Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its sub-committees have considered a range of issues that impact on the Council and the Borough as a whole, where possible with the involvement of partner organisations. This report highlights the main activities and achievements over the year.
- 1.2 In presenting this report I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the overview and scrutiny work programme during the past year, particularly councillors, parent governor representatives and church representatives who have served on the various overview and scrutiny committees, officers who have supported the committees in preparing reports, attending meetings and answering questions at meetings, representatives of partner organisations, including the police, health bodies, government agencies and voluntary organisations who have accepted invitations to assist committees in their work and the Scrutiny Advisors and Democratic Support Officers for their support and guidance in organising and administering the work programmes.

Councillor Bruce Pickard  
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements involve councillors from all political parties, as leaders of their communities, examining the delivery of services and seeking to influence decision makers to ensure they meet the needs, and improve the lives, of people in North Tyneside. Overview and scrutiny seeks to do this by following the four principles of good public scrutiny as established by the Centre for Public Scrutiny:
- a) Provide 'critical friend' challenge to the executive as well as external authorities and agencies;
  - b) Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
  - c) Taking the lead and owning the scrutiny process on behalf of the public; and
  - d) Making an impact on the delivery of public services.

Overview and scrutiny has no decision making powers.

- 2.2 The overview and scrutiny arrangements were introduced as part of the modernisation of local government. A split was created between the role of the Elected Mayor and the Cabinet, responsible for leading the Council in proposing and implementing policies, and the role of other councillors in reviewing services and scrutinising the decisions taken by the Cabinet and other public service providers in North Tyneside.
- 2.3 The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee made up of 15 councillors from all political parties, together with representatives from the education and religious sectors. Whilst the Committee has overall responsibility for the overview and scrutiny function, it has five themed sub-committees which cover in more detail a range of services. These are: Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub Committee; Children, Education and Skills Sub Committee; Economic Prosperity and Housing Sub Committee; Environment and Culture Sub Committee and the Finance Sub Committee. Time-limited sub-groups may also be appointed to undertake in-depth investigations on specific subjects.
- 2.4 This report is based on individual reports summarising the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and each of its sub-committee during the past 12 months. It aims to describe how overview and scrutiny has sought to influence decision makers by investigating issues of concern and holding decision makers to account.

### 3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has overall responsibility for the exercise of the overview and scrutiny function and for determining an overall work programme for itself and its sub-committees. Following suggestions of topics from officers and Members and consultation with Chairs and Deputies, a prioritised list of topics were agreed. It was acknowledged from the outset that the work programme would roll into the next municipal year, though some work will be done with the Chairs and Deputies to refresh the programme in light of any emerging priorities.
- 3.2 The committee has a duty to consider, and where appropriate comment or make recommendations, on the Cabinet's proposals in respect to the Council's key plans and strategies. During the year this has included the Gambling Act (2005) Draft Statement of Licensing Policy, North Tyneside Area Action Plans and the Draft Budget and Council Tax Requirement Proposals. The committee also considered, in conjunction with the Area Action Plans, the Core Strategy, looking at details of the policy context and the evidence base for the strategy. The committee concluded that further work needed to be undertaken in this area and established a task and finish group, which will report its findings into the new municipal year.
- 3.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to fulfil its role in relation to monitoring the performance of the council and its partners. This has included scrutinising the Senior Leadership Team progress reports and the North Tyneside Strategic Partnership (NTSP) Exception reports on a quarterly basis. This has involved identifying whether key projects and indicators are on track and where they have not been, finding out what remedial action was proposed to deal with slippage. The Committee also received general information in relation to the operation and objectives of the NTSP, which led to a recommendation being accepted by Cabinet to review the NTSP, as part of the refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 3.4 The committee has considered the Change, Efficiency and Improvement programme on a bi-monthly basis, which has involved scrutinising projects which have been established to deliver budget savings required across 2011-15. Throughout the year, the committee has also considered and commented on the 2012/15 Council Strategic Plan and the 2012/13 Budget Implementation Plan, monitoring progress against the proposals taken forward by Cabinet.

### 4. Finance Sub-Committee

- 4.1 The Finance Sub-committee has responsibility for scrutinising matters in relation to value for money, budget monitoring, performance management and business and resource planning.
- 4.2 In 2012-13 the sub-committee has focussed on budget monitoring, including the on-going position in relation to equal pay claims, capital expenditure and capital receipts, out of borough placements for children with complex needs, and the financial impact of flooding incidents. The sub-committee has also continued to monitor the implementation of the Change, Efficiency and Improvement

Programme. This has concentrated on items highlighted as red or amber, indicating uncertainty and risk around the achievement of the savings.

- 4.3 During the year the sub-committee has reviewed a number of specific topics in more detail.
- 4.4 The sub-committee considered information about the development of new Council homes and the sale of acquired properties. As a result, the sub-committee submitted a report to Cabinet highlighting concerns about the Council's policy to sell off acquired dwellings in light of the high number of people currently on the waiting list for council homes and the costs associated with building new homes. In response Cabinet agreed to amend the policy in relation to the sale of acquired properties. In future, consideration will be given to the sale or retention of an acquired property on an individual basis by the Head of North Tyneside Homes in consultation with the Elected Mayor and the Cabinet Member for Housing.
- 4.5 The sub-committee has also considered the Council's arrangements with partner organisations. The sub-committee considered the Director's report and financial statements for Kier North Tyneside (KNT) for the year ending 30 June 2012. The Financial Director of Kier North Tyneside was invited to the meeting to present the accounts and to answer questions from Members. The sub-committee examined the level of income the Council received from the joint venture company and how this compared with both the projected income estimated during the procurement exercise and the income received during operation of the Council's own Construction Group. The sub-committee has also considered the projected savings attributable to the business and technical packages.
- 4.6 The sub-committee reviewed the financial impact on the Council's base budget of on-going 0% council tax rises in the context of the council tax freeze grant scheme which has operated for both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 budget setting processes. The Sub-committee has also examined the Council's plans to improve the condition of school buildings and noted the Council's five year programme of investment in school buildings and that approval had been secured to rebuild 4 schools under the Priority Schools Rebuilding Programme.
- 4.7 At the beginning of the municipal year, the sub-committee considered the training needs of members of the sub-committee in the context of the roles and responsibilities set out in the sub-committee's terms of reference. The sub-committee agreed to incorporate training exercises into meetings of the sub-committee in relation to budget monitoring reports, the delivery of the Capital Plan and the Housing Revenue Account.

## 5. Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-Committee

- 5.1 The sub-committee has responsibility for scrutinising matters in relation to adult care, community services, health and wellbeing, mental health and emotional wellbeing, healthy lifestyles, welfare of vulnerable adults, older people, access to health services, benefits, independent living, personalisation, financial inclusion, public health and carers.
- 5.2 This has been a challenging year for the sub-committee in terms of gaining an understanding of the changes emerging from the Health and Social Care Act 2012. To facilitate their understanding of the new act, a senior manager from Adult Social Care (ASC) gave a presentation on the management and implementation of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 in North Tyneside. Also the first Local Account from ASC was presented and copies made available.
- 5.3 The sub-committee received a progress report on the work of the North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group which is the merger of the former Care First and Engage Health Clinical Commissioning Groups. Clarification was sought for diabetic retinopathy screening. In November 2012, this was awarded to Medical Imaging UK Limited.
- 5.4 The Care Quality Commission (CQC), Compliance Manager for North Tyneside gave the sub-committee an overview of their role and the services they monitor in November. To ensure a more effective working relationship and information sharing in relation to local health or adult social care services, regular meetings between the CQC Compliance Manager, the Chair and Lead officer will take place.
- 5.5 During the year representatives from the North of Tyne Primary Care Trust attended sub-committee meetings to discuss current topics. This included providing Members with background information relating to the national 'Any Qualified Provider' initiative and the developments across North of the Tyne. They also received an update on midwifery services and the implementation of the NHS 111 non-emergency number which is planned to be up and running in North Tyneside by March 2013.
- 5.6 Representatives from North of the Tyne Primary Care Trust and the Clinical Commissioning Group attended the sub-committee to seek their views on the proposals for the change of use of the Shiremoor Walk-in Centre and the Admission Avoidance Team. As the sub-committee had been consulted early in the process, it is planned that they will report back to the sub-committee after the consultation exercise.
- 5.7 The establishment of the new Healthwatch in North Tyneside has been of interest to the sub-committee and they have received regular updates on the development and procurement exercise relating to this. A small group of Members from the sub-committee attended a separate session with managers from ASC to discuss and feed their views into the service specification for the new Healthwatch.
- 5.8 The sub-committee received Cabinet's response in relation to the 15 recommendations they made in the Review of the Personalisation Process in

Adult Social Care Report. Of the 15 recommendations made, Cabinet accepted 11 and one in part. The sub-committee have since received a six monthly report from Adult Social Care outlining progress against the action plan.

- 5.9 Following the recent publication of the independent inquiry report into care provided at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust provided the sub-committee with an overview of the independent inquiry and how the Trust is responding to the recommendations made in the Francis Report, this was particularly in relation to nursing.
- 5.10 The sub-committee were interested in finding out what work was being carried out to safeguard adults at risk of abuse or neglect in North Tyneside, and what intervention and assistance was available to support them to remain in their own home longer. A senior manager from ASC gave Members a briefing on this topic which was followed by a question and answer session.
- 5.11 The sub-committee have been consulted on the draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy twice by the Director of Public Health, and the Autism Strategy (Refresh). Their views and comments will be considered in the final production of these strategies.
- 5.12 During the year the sub-committee have continued to monitor the Adult Social Care Change, Efficiency and Improvement Programme. In January 2013 a workshop was facilitated by senior managers from ASC to give Members of the sub-committee an opportunity to comment on all of Adult Social Care budget proposals for 2013/14.
- 5.13 The Local Involvement Network (LINK) have given the sub-committee regular updates on its Forums, planned activity, events and work plan.
- 5.14 The Chair and Deputy Chairs have continued to meet on a quarterly basis with the Chief Executive and Chair of Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust. These meetings have kept members up to date with relevant issues and emerging changes, such as; hospital discharges, re-admissions and the new emergency care unit.
- 5.15 The sub-committee was invited to take part in the Department of Health consultation over proposed changes to local authority health scrutiny regulations and submitted replies to questions.
- 5.16 The Chair has also continued to represent the sub-committee on the North East Regional Health Scrutiny Committee.

## 6. Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

- 6.1 The Children, Education and Skills sub-committee is responsible for scrutinising issues in relation to schools, youth services, higher education, child poverty, safeguarding, child protection, looked after children, vulnerable children, early years and childcare and playsites.

- 6.2 The sub-committee has been proactive in responding to events that have occurred throughout the year relating to the provision of education within North Tyneside. Since the announcement of plans for a merger between Priory Primary School and The Kings School to create Kings Priory School as a sponsored academy, the sub-committee has kept a close watch on developments, due to concerns over the potential impact on existing schools. The sub-committee referred a recommendation to Cabinet in relation to the Kings Priory consultation process, which resulted in agreement that consultation will take place with all group leaders prior to the submission of the Council's representations upon the Kings Priory Proposals to the Secretary of State for Education.
- 6.3 The sub-committee has also looked into data published in the media which suggested that there had been a drop in the number of students from North Tyneside applying for university places. Initial investigations identified that this may be due to pupils not utilising all five of their available choices when completing application forms. The sub-committee has agreed to continue to investigate this into the next municipal year, when data will be available that shows the actual number of university places secured.
- 6.4 The sub-committee has considered, on several occasions, the progress made in relation to Phase 2 of the River Tyne North Bank – Learning Village. Members have had discussions with officers in relation to the various options available in delivering educational provision on the site. Throughout the year the sub-committee has also considered several issues that fall under the topic of 16-19 learning. This has included 'Best Start in Life' – education, employment and skills; apprenticeships and the conclusion of a piece of ongoing work in relation to the withdrawal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance.
- 6.6 The sub-committee has considered the Forward Plan on a regular basis in order to keep up-to-date with forthcoming policies and plans that relate to the remit of the sub-committee. This resulted in the sub-committee considering information relating to school balances and school funding for 2013/14 and the Council's adoption action plan, which Members have agreed to monitor at future meetings.
- 6.7 The sub-committee has had regular conversations with relevant officers on progress in relation to the Change, Efficiency and Improvement programme projects that fall within its remit. Particular attention has been paid to areas where saving targets have been off track and Members have been informed of ongoing work to identify mitigating actions.

## 7. Economic Prosperity and Housing Sub-Committee

- 7.1 The Sub-Committee has responsibility for scrutinising matters in relation to economic development, housing, planning, business and enterprise, the transport network, highways and road safety, town centres, inward investment and tourism.



## **On Housing**

7.2 The Sub-Committee has taken a keen interest in the proposals for building of new Council houses in the Borough. The Sub-Committee received a number of reports on the potential for developing new council homes and has:

- Reviewed the potential funding arrangements for the building council homes
- Requested the Council's property team to review the development capacity of all council land in the ownership of the Council and their suitability for new council homes
- Considered the interaction with the Right to Buy scheme and the implications of the agreement the Council has entered into for the development of new homes from a proportion of the receipts, and
- Challenged the costs of developing new council homes

As part of this review members have met with representatives of social housing providers, including Leazes Homes and Gentoo, to review best practice elsewhere and consider the role of Registered Providers in the delivery of affordable homes.

The Sub Committee's views were considered by Cabinet in their decision to develop 21 new council homes at Station Road and Byrness Court.

7.3 The Sub-Committee has been consulted on the development of the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy, the Tenancy Strategy, and the Lettings and Tenancy Policies. The sub-committee made a number of suggestions to improve the final version of these strategies and policies. Some specific suggestions were incorporated into the Cabinet report and accepted.

7.4 In response to a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Joint Venture Task Group, the Sub-Committee has examined information on the total level of rechargeable repairs and the recovery rate during 2011/12 in comparison with previous years. The Sub Committee made recommendations for streamlining and improving collection arrangements.

7.5 The Sub Committee has also received presentations and challenged the HRA Budget for 2013/14, its has received a presentation on the appointment of the preferred bidder for the Quality Homes for Older People Project and intends to scrutinise in more details specifics aspects of the projects, the welfare reform changes and the introduction of the Bed and Breakfast Gateway at Whitley Bay.

## **On Transport**

7.6 The sub-committee received information from NEXUS on changes proposed by the Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) in relation to the planning and delivery of bus services. This includes consideration of the options of either a new Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the existing bus operators, or a Quality Contracts Scheme in which all services would be specified by the public sector and operated by private companies under operating contracts.

The sub-committee discussed concerns about the withdrawal of essential routes within the borough and were unanimous in the view that the proposed Quality Contract was essential in the future delivery of bus services.

As a result the Chair of the sub-committee wrote to the Council's representatives on the ITA to request that the views of the sub-committee are raised at a future meeting of the ITA. The sub-committee is currently awaiting a decision by the

ITA on how it intends to progress this matter before scrutinising proposals in more detail.

### **On Business, Economy and Tourism**

- 7.7 The Sub-Committee continues to monitor progress in relation to regeneration projects in the Borough, including the regeneration of the Whitley Bay Dome. The sub-committee has received reports setting out the corporate risks in relation to regeneration projects and how these are monitored and managed by the Council's Senior Leadership Team.
- 7.8 The sub-committee has continued to monitor progress in relation to items within the change, efficiency and improvement programme within the area of Enterprise and Employability.

## **8. Environment and Culture Sub-Committee**

- 8.1 The sub-committee has responsibility for scrutinising matters in relation to the environment, energy use, climate change, waste management, community safety, parks and open spaces, sports and leisure, libraries, arts development, heritage strategy, community centres and voluntary sector support.
- 8.2 To keep abreast of the changes emerging as a result of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the sub-committee were given an overview of the role of the Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Panels. Subsequently, the sub-committee have received an update on the implementation of these new roles. In relation to crime and community safety, the sub-committee gave consideration to the progress made during the first six months of the year towards achieving Safer North Tyneside's 2012/13 targets.
- 8.3 The sub-committee received an update on the Excellent Parks Programme, this included information in relation to the successful Heritage Lottery Fund for work to commence at Northumberland Park.
- 8.4 The November meeting of the sub-committee was dedicated to considering the interim report of the Flooding Task and Finish Group; this was attended by officers of the council and representatives from Northumbria Water and the Environment Agency. Members were given an opportunity to discuss and comment on the findings outlined in the report. The sub-committee have since received a report outlining the final recommendations made by the Flooding Task and Finish Group.
- 8.5 The sub-committee were very concerned about the outbreak of Ash Tree Dieback Disease during 2012 and invited the Bio-Diversity Officer to give them an update on the disease. The officer explained that although there had been no evidence of the disease spreading into North Tyneside, the Council in response to Government guidance had produced an Ash Dieback Action Plan.
- 8.6 The sub-committee have been consulted on the draft Waste Strategy. Members were given the opportunity to comment on the strategy and give their views on the future priorities.
- 8.7 Following a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the sub-committee were asked to investigate the grounds maintenance provision within the Housing Revenue Account for 2013/14. The sub-committee have received a

briefing from officers regarding the management arrangements and recharge for the provision of grass cutting and environmental work on Housing Revenue Account land. We may need to add something following the meeting on 13 March.

- 8.8 During the year the sub-committee have continued to monitor the Change, Efficiency and Improvement Programme and in particular the Customer First Project. As part of their monitoring they have discussed the relocation of Wallsend Customer Service Centre to the Forum Shopping Centre in Wallsend and the roll out of self serve payment kiosks. Members also received demonstrations and gave feedback to officers on the Customer Relationship Management System and automated telephone system.

## 9. In-depth investigations

- 9.1 During 2012-13 a number of sub-groups have been established to undertake in-depth investigations of specific topics. These sub-groups are outlined below. It is envisaged that such sub-groups will undertake longer-term studies over a period of time and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with recommendations.

### **Child Poverty**

- 9.2 The child poverty sub-group is a joint study comprising members of the Adult Social Care and Health and Well Being and Children, Education and Skills sub-committees.
- 9.3 The group met in November 2012 to discuss the scope for the study and agreed that the investigation would be based on the following points:
- Gaining an overview of the current situation in North Tyneside and an understanding of the main causes of child poverty and the barriers that exist in preventing people from breaking the poverty cycle
  - Exploring the steps that the Council and its partners are taking to achieve the target of eradicating child poverty in North Tyneside by 2020
  - Recognising priorities for action that have been identified in child poverty strategies and investigating 2 of these areas in detail.
- 9.4 These two areas identified by the group to focus on were barriers to employment and best start in life, early intervention and prevention. In investigating these issues, the group has met with various council officers to gather background information and in relation to barriers to employment, has held 3 focus groups with unemployed residents to gather first hand experience of the problems that individuals are facing.
- 9.5 In relation to best start in life, early intervention and prevention, Members have visited one of the borough children's centres to discuss the services provided and the engagement strategies used to advertise the facilities to families. Discussions have been held with some of the boroughs community entrepreneurs and other workers that support vulnerable families.
- 9.6 The group will carry on its work into the 2013/14 municipal year, continuing to gather information and evidence from local and national strategy, council staff

and partners and service users and residents. The study will conclude with a report to Cabinet setting out the groups findings and any recommendations it wishes to make in relation to tackling child poverty and supporting vulnerable families.

### **Public Health Transition Study**

9.7 A sub-group of the Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-Committee was set up to investigate the transition of Public Health into the Local Authority. The key objectives of the study are to:

- Seek assurance that the grant allocation for 2013/14 is adequate to cover the cost of public health service contracts and staffing.
- Consider the Public Health Operating Model to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- Examine the new governance arrangements for public health.
- Ensure that the public health ring-fenced grant is aligned to local needs identified in the JSNA.
- Gain an understanding of the Public Health agenda for next three years.
- Ensure that there is no duplication between public health services and those of the local authority and that smarter ways of working have been identified, i.e. through combining teams, sharing resources.
- Ensure that we maximise the health premium incentive payment – related to our performance with the Public Health Outcomes Framework.
- Ensure that there is sufficient capacity to carry out the mandatory elements of public health.
- Explore how the transition can have a greater impact on the key health outcomes, such as smoking, obesity, alcohol etc.
- Explore how the transition can have a greater impact on health inequalities.

9.8 At their first meeting the Director of Public Health and the Business Manager for Public Health set the scene in relation to the transition of public health and provided relevant background information. Since then the sub-group have had a further two meetings with relevant Public Health Officers to gain the relevant information and evidence to support the study. It is anticipated that the report will be concluded during 2013/14.

### **Core Strategy Sub-group**

9.9 As mentioned earlier, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has appointed members to a study group to review the Core Strategy and report back to the Committee. The review is expected to cover issues relating to housing and population, employment land, and infrastructure and waste.

## 10. Getting Involved

- 10.1 One of the key roles of overview and scrutiny is to involve communities in the Council's decision making process. Whatever your role, whether it be as a councillor, officer, partner, community representative or an individual who lives or works in the borough, you are encouraged to have your say, either by suggesting an issue for investigation, or by getting involved with an area of work already underway.
- 10.2 If there are any other themes relating to improving council services which you believe could benefit from a scrutiny review or if you have concerns or feel strongly about an issue or service where you think overview and scrutiny could make a difference by influencing decision-makers please let us know.
- 10.3 Any suggestions will be evaluated to assess whether an overview and scrutiny investigation is likely to have a positive impact and councillors will decide whether to proceed. Please bear in mind however that overview and scrutiny cannot investigate individual complaints. The Council has a separate complaints procedure to deal with these.
- 10.4 Please contact the Scrutiny Team at the following address for further information:

Scrutiny Team,  
Floor 3L  
North Tyneside Council  
Quadrant East  
The Silverlink North  
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