

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16



North Tyneside Council

Our role

The role of overview and scrutiny is to provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the Cabinet (and other decision makers) whilst also assisting in the development of key policies and plans. Over recent years the main emphasis of the work of overview and scrutiny has been on the policy development aspect of its role.

Throughout 2015/16 this approach has continued and a great deal of policy development work has been undertaken which has been linked to the priorities within the Our North Tyneside Plan and the principles that drive the Creating a Brighter Future Programme.

It has been a busy year for overview and scrutiny, with the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and its sub-committees considering a vast range of topics and issues. This report highlights some of the work undertaken, the impact that scrutiny has had and briefly outlines the process for the development of the 2016/17 work programme.

We have been a 'critical friend'

Whilst the main focus of scrutiny work during 2015/16 has been the development of policy, Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and its sub-committees have still fulfilled the important role of being a critical friend to Cabinet, providing challenge particularly on budget and performance issues.

Finance Sub-committee has continued to examine the Council's budget monitoring position on a bi-monthly basis, including the forecast outturn positions for 2015/16 for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account and the Investment Plan. Members have also been kept informed of the risks associated with the Business and Technical Partnerships and changes made to these. The focus of the sub-committee also turned to unspent Section 106 monies and anticipated future Section 106 grant receipts. Budget proposals for key service delivery areas have also been examined, with Culture and Leisure Sub-committee considering the implication of the budget on culture and leisure services and how this would impact on residents.

Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee has received bi-annual performance reports on the delivery of the Our North Tyneside Plan, allowing progress on delivery of the aims and objectives to be monitored and where necessary challenged. Some of the sub-committees have also monitored performance by receiving updates on the delivery of the various projects included in the Creating a Brighter Future programme.

But we have mainly focused on policy development

Some examples of the policy development work undertaken during 2015/16:

Parking Permits - Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

The Permit Parking Sub-group was established by the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to review the Council's permit parking system. The aim of the review was to consider whether the system could be made simpler, financially self-sustainable and less open to abuse. The group considered options for increasing efficiency in the administration of the system through the introduction of a virtual permit system. Local residents and business representatives have been consulted as part of the review to seek their views on the current system. The sub-group is aiming to conclude and report its findings to Cabinet in Summer 2016.

Carers Respite Provision - Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee

A sub-group was established to undertake an in-depth review of respite provision in North Tyneside for adult carers and parent carers of disabled children. This work linked to the 'Our people will be cared for and kept safe if they become vulnerable' objective of the Our North Tyneside Plan. The main aim was to ensure that the appropriate services and structures were in place to support carers, and that they have access to good quality respite care. During the review members of the sub-group held a series of evidence gathering meetings with expert witnesses, service users and service providers and covered a wide range of issues including, information, advice and training, building based respite provision, direct payments and identification of carers. It is anticipated that the final report and recommendations will be presented to Cabinet in Summer 2016.

Child Sexual Exploitation - Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

The objective of the child sexual exploitation sub-group was to satisfy Members that there was a pro-active approach to tackling the issue in North Tyneside and increase the awareness of Members, officers and the public of the issues and the warning signs in relation to child sexual exploitation. Members held a series of evidence gathering meetings with representatives from the local authority, the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Board and organisations working with young people in the borough and made ten recommendations to the authority's Cabinet relating to, among other things, an awareness raising campaign; facilities for vulnerable young people; training for members and officers; and adjustments to policies to include training for taxi drivers and licensees. These recommendations were accepted by Cabinet. This linked to the 'Our people will be cared for and kept safe if they become vulnerable' objective of the Our North Tyneside Plan.

Library Strategy - Culture and Leisure Sub-committee

The Culture and Leisure Sub-committee has examined the strategy for the delivery of library services, which had been developed as part of a previous scrutiny review of library provision. Members offered comments and suggestions in relation to the proposed approach, highlighting the importance of the promotion of literacy, open and accessible space for people to learn and help available in a range of formats. The sub-committee has also played a key role in reviewing a series of projects and initiatives relating to coastal development. Members have been keen to ensure that improvements and new opportunities along the coast are taken in order to maximise the potential of the borough's coastal assets.

Apprenticeships - Economic Prosperity Sub-committee

During the Autumn members examined the impact of apprenticeships in North Tyneside, the Council's response to supporting apprenticeships and what more the Council could do to promote good practice. The sub-committee visited Chirton Engineering Ltd to learn about its apprenticeships and to speak directly with apprentices about their experiences. Members then discussed their findings with representatives from TyneMet College and the North Tyneside Learning Trust, the Young Cabinet Member for Ready for Work and Life and Council Officers. The scrutiny exercise identified a number of areas where the Council and its partners could develop and refine its approach and the sub-committee asked that officers take these into account in delivering future activity. This linked to the 'Our economy will have the right conditions to support investment and create new jobs, especially apprenticeships' objective of the Our North Tyneside Plan.

Waste and recycling collections - Environment Sub-committee

A sub-group comprising members of the Environment Sub-committee was set up to continue some work already underway in relation to the future strategy for the collection of waste and recycling, following the end of the current weekly collection subsidy scheme in 2017. The sub-group have looked at various options for waste collection and plan to carry out some engagement with the public to seek views on these options. They have also looked at waste collection arrangements in place at other local authorities and the impact these have had on recycling levels. It is envisaged that the sub-group will complete its work over the next few months and report its finding and recommendations in June 2016.

Lettings Policy - Housing Sub-committee

Housing sub-committee has spent time this year contributing to the review of the Lettings Policy. The sub-committee was presented with 5 key proposed changes to the policy, which were discussed in full, including hypothetical test case scenarios, in order to inform the Cabinet Member of its stance on the proposal prior to a decision being made by Cabinet. The Housing sub-committee has kept up-to-date with the

many changes that new legislation has brought to housing, contributing to several discussions on the service provided to tenants and the changes needed to provide the correct level and type of support to tenants going forward. The effectiveness of these changes will be considered into the next municipal year, identifying whether more tenancies have been sustained through providing timely and targeted advice and support.

Monitoring reports

Whilst helping to develop new policies and assisting in the review of others, scrutiny has also invested time in monitoring the development and delivery of existing plans and policies to ensure that the best quality services are delivered to residents and visitors of North Tyneside.

Some examples of the plans and policies that have been monitored throughout the year:

Affordable homes - Housing Sub-committee have been monitoring the delivery of the Affordable Homes Programme to examine progress on identified developments that would deliver affordable housing and the contribution this makes to the overall target.

Flooding - Environment Sub-committee have considered reports from the Surface Water and Drainage Partnership on a quarterly basis, along with the Killingworth and Longbenton Surface Water Management Plan. Members examined the Plan to look at various solutions to alleviate flooding in the area.

Better Care Fund - Members have monitored the Better Care Fund (BCF) regularly throughout the year. At each meeting of the Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Sub-committee an outcomes report was presented which showed progress against the nationally specified metrics and targets.

Children, Young People and Learning Plan 2014-18 - following the outcome of a previous scrutiny study into child poverty, the Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee has received updates on the delivery of the Children, Young People and Learning Plan, to monitor the delivery of key services aimed at improving the lives of children and young people.

We have achieved

Recommendations

Throughout 2015/16 Cabinet responded to 40 recommendations put forward from overview and scrutiny (nb. this figure does not include all of the studies above as some are yet to be reported to Cabinet). Of these 40 recommendations, Cabinet accepted and set out action to implement 38 of them. This figure demonstrates the positive and influential impact that scrutiny is having on the development of policy.

Members will continue to monitor the implementation of the recommendations that have been agreed and the subsequent outcomes on the delivery of services.

Engagement

A key role of overview and scrutiny is to promote issues of concern to the public and, where appropriate, consult with residents and service users to gather their insight into an issue under scrutiny investigation.

Various pieces of work this year have involved engagement with service users, including Economic and Prosperity Sub-committee seeking the views of young people undertaking apprenticeships and the Carers Respite Provision sub-group consulting individuals accessing respite services. The parking permit sub-group has also sought the views of service users, with various meetings taking place with residents and business representatives, along with invitations to individuals and organisations to make written representations.

Scrutiny has also continued to work closely with its partners, maintaining positive relationships and sharing key information, particularly in relation to health issues and policing issues. Representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Group, Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust, Healthwatch, the Care Quality Commission, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and representatives of Northumbria Police have all been in attendance at various meetings to share information and maintain key links with Members.

In the future

Preparation for the development of the 2016/17 overview and scrutiny work programme began in February 2016, with an invitation to all Elected Members and senior officers to suggest topics that scrutiny could usefully investigate. An article was also placed in the residents magazine inviting suggested topics from members of the public.

All suggestions received will be allocated to the relevant sub-committee, with the topics being discussed and prioritised at the first meetings of the 2016/17 municipal year. When prioritising topics, consideration will be given to whether the issue is timely and if it will contribute to the development of policy.