



Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

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Foreword of the Scrutiny Chairs

Throughout 2023/24, our Scrutiny Committees have continued to carry out their functions in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Following advice from Internal Audit and revised guidance at a national level, the Finance Corporate and Overview and Scrutiny Committee was established in May 2023 to separate the Audit and Scrutiny functions. The committee has been responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Treasury Management Strategies and associated policies; for receiving and scrutinising the Executive's budget proposals; for receiving quarterly updates on performance against relevant Corporate Plan targets from Portfolio Holders; and has provided a forum for Scrutiny Members to review and scrutinise the Council's financial position and for Scrutiny Chairs to update information from their respective Committees

The Finance Corporate and Overview and Scrutiny Committee has delivered its function in accordance with its remit featured in the Council's Constitution. The three thematic committees continued to deliver their responsibilities in line with their terms of reference and monitored the delivery of recommendations from completed past reviews.

Scrutiny Members' focus over the next year needs to be on the challenges facing both the Authority and service provision by our partners. We aim to ensure that Scrutiny makes a valuable contribution through its work. We appreciate the continued support of colleagues on the Executive and senior officers and look forward to another year of collaborative working for the benefit of our communities.

Councillor Donna Hales

Chair of the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee (2023/24)

Councillors Catherine Tite and Emma Stevenson

Chair of the Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee (2023/24)

Councillor Tom Kirkham

Chair of the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee (2023/24)

Councillor Lucy King

Chair of the Finance & Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee (2023/24)

Summary of 2023/24

Constitution Updates

As noted in the Foreword, work took place during Spring 2023 to create a revised scrutiny structure and associated terms of reference as a result of the national guidance from CIPFA on the separation of Audit and Scrutiny.

This brings all sections related to scrutiny up to date with current legislation and the revised statutory guidance issued during 2019.

Member Training

A range of training took place for Scrutiny Members. This included Data and Managing Council Performance training from LGA, Questioning Skills for Scrutiny training from EMC/CfGS and Scoping and Managing Scrutiny Reviews from EMC/CfGS. Members also Finance & Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Finance Training for the newly established committee; the Chair of this committee also attended training on Effective Budget Scrutiny at Nottinghamshire County Council from EMC/CfGS). CfGS provided training on Best Practice and Scrutiny Essentials for all Scrutiny Members and Scrutiny Chairs also attended training for chairing skills by ADSO.

Customer Services Scrutiny Committee

During 2023/24, Members received a range of reports to Committee. Some were routine update reports and others were linked to service transformation and development of new policies:

Policy/Strategy/Programme Monitoring Reports:

- Housing Strategy 2021-24 – Action Plan Monitoring Update

Policy Development:

- Tenant Engagement Strategy
- Equality Plan and Objectives 2023-27
- Business Rates Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
- Consultation on Draft Allocations Policy
- Private Sector Housing Strategy
- Housing Strategy 2024-2029: Consultation

Performance Review Reports:

- Customer Service Standards and Compliments, Comments and Complaints 2022/23 – 1st January 2023 to 31st March 2023 and Annual Summary
- LG&SCO and Housing Ombudsman Annual Report 2022/23
- Customer Service Standards and Compliments, Comments and Complaints 2023/24 – 1st July 2023 to 30th September 2023
- Customer Service Standards and Compliments, Comments and Complaints Report 2022/23 – 1st October 2023 to 31st December 2023
- Policy Review

Review Work

- Review of Members ICT & Support and ICT Service Delivery: post scrutiny monitoring
- Review of Effectiveness of Council's Waste Collection and Disposal Education

Review of Effectiveness of Council's Waste Collection and Disposal Education

The Customer Services Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of effectiveness of the Council's waste collection and disposal education as part of the 2023-24 Work Programme.

The issue was initially raised due to concerns of contamination rates within recycling waste collections, creating additional costs to the Authority through contamination charges. Committee Members believed that the main cause of this issue was due to residents not knowing how to use their bins correctly and effectively.

The aim of the review was:

- To ensure that the Council's approach to waste disposal advice and education is reaching all target audiences to reduce current contamination rates and improve recycling rates by way of increased resident participation.

The objectives agreed were:

- Assess the current approach of the Council to waste disposal advice and education and the channels used.
- Examine the accessibility and reach of current communications on waste disposal/education
- Assess current levels of performance and action taken to ensure this is controlled within expected limits.

The key issues identified for investigation included:

- Impact of current contamination rates on recycling targets, additional costs to the Council.
- Usage of Household Waste Recycling Centre in Bolsover and whether there is clear messaging as to what can and can't be taken to the site.
- Reduction in size of black residual waste bins. Costs associated with recycling by way of burgundy bin, with second available on request.
- Potential use of skip collections in problem wards or Freighter Days – this does not always encourage correct recycling and results in bulky type waste collection. This further increases residual waste which may normally be taken to a household waste recycling centre and therefore increases the amount of residual waste collected by the Council. This then lowers the overall combined recycling rates due to the amount recycled being calculated as the percentage diverted from the residual waste stream and not increasing as skip collections do.

The key findings arising from the review were:

- That there is most confusion over the burgundy bin and which items are supposed to be recycled and which items cannot be recycled.
- That since the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Council has struggled to regenerate school programmes and has not yet returned to the pre-COVID standards of recycling education for young people.
- That the Council acknowledges the introduction of separate weekly food waste collections from 1st 2026 will influence the next major stepped change in Bolsover's combined recycling performance, by breaking the 50% barrier to head towards the 2035 target of 65%.
- That it is crucial that the Council considers accessibility of communication services and the statutory requirements with regards to education on Council services that affect all residents so that every service user can benefit from the waste collection services that the Council provides.
- That the Council should look towards the future of Bolsover by considering innovative modern methods of communication to consider ways to engage young people and the future residents of the District.
- That some of the Council's communication services are not being fully utilised due to a lack of educational content being received from the relevant specialist officers.
- That the Council must effectively utilise their current methods of communication to the highest standard with efficiency and coherence to frequently remind residents on the importance of recycling, the correct methods of recycling, and the best practice of how to engage with the Council's waste collection services.

The Committee put together 11 recommendations, as outlined in section 2 of the final report, which will hopefully assist the Council in improving recycling rates and reducing rates of waste contamination by improving the effectiveness of the Council's waste collection and disposal education. This review is now within its monitoring phase with reports expected in January and July 2025.

Climate Change & Communities Scrutiny Committee

During 2023/24, Members received a wide range of reports to Committee:

Policy/Strategy/Programme Monitoring Reports:

- Sustainable Community Strategy 2020-23 and current Partnership delivery – Monitoring Update
- Review of Community Safety Partnership – Deliberate Fires Group Monitoring Report
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy – Monitoring Update
- Annual Review of Community Safety Partnership (Both Public and Exempt session)

Policy Development:

- New Council Ambition 2024-2028 – Scrutiny Consultation
- Safeguarding Policy for Adults and Safeguarding Policy for Children – Consultation on Refresh
- Fire Safety Policy
- Review of the Council's Policy under the Licensing Act 2003

Performance Review Reports:

- None for 2023/24

Annual Review of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 requires every Local Authority to have a specified Committee (the “Crime and Disorder Committee”) with the power to:

- Review or scrutinise decisions made or other action taken in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.
- Make reports or recommendations to the local authority with respect to the discharge of those functions.

(Responsible authorities are effectively the statutory partners within a community safety partnership i.e. Police, Local Authorities (County and District), Fire and Rescue Authority, Probation Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups. This is determined by section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (c. 37)).

Following on from last year's review Members wished to focus on the ongoing impact of the pandemic on trends in service demand and delivery, and current engagement by partners.

Key issues presented and areas of questioning included:

- Delivery of the current Partnership Plan and Plan Priorities 2023 – 2026.
- PCC New Priorities (Police Crime Plan 2022 – 2025).
- Summary of achievements 2023/24 inc. Diversionary Activities and Crime Prevention

Officers were invited to attend from Bolsover District Council Community Safety Team and Enforcement Team, and Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service.

Review Work

- Review of Council's Approach to Carbon Reduction: Post-Scrutiny Monitoring
- Review of Council's Policy on Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons: Post-Scrutiny Monitoring
- Review of Voluntary & Community Sector Grant Allocations: Post-Scrutiny Monitoring
- Review of the Council's Energy Policy for Local Housing

Review of the Council's Energy Policy for Local Housing

The Climate Change and Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of the Council's energy policy for local housing, as part of the 2023-24 Work Programme.

The issue was initially raised due to the District's requirement of improved energy resilience within the local housing stock as well as concerns over residents being under pressure due to the rising costs of energy adding to the current cost of living crisis. This review will assist in determining the Council's response to the national changes to EPC requirements.

The aim of the review was:

- To ensure that the Council has a clear policy on energy efficiency standards across Council stock and long-term energy resilience across all housing stock within the District.

The objectives agreed were:

- Clarify the Council's energy policy and minimum energy efficiency standard for:
 - Council Housing
 - New build properties
 - Private rented sector
 - Owner-occupiers (existing private stock)
- Ensure the Council has clear data analysis of its current housing stock to establish current Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings and areas for improvement.
- Analyse existing Local Plan policies in relation to energy efficiency and requirements for new build housing and assess if they support the Council's net zero target.
- Improve public information/education on grants and energy efficiency.
- Ensure there is a clear Council approach to improving energy ratings of private rented sector stock.
- Clarify opportunities for Dragonfly Development Ltd. (DDL) to become a lead local exemplar offering energy improvements to the owner-occupier sector.
- Clarify position/policy in relation to installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points for Council Housing (inc. Motability vehicles).

The key findings arising from the review were:

- That the Council has clear data analysis of current housing stock.
- That the Council's Local Plan policies relating to energy efficiency and requirements support the Council's net zero target.
- That the Council's recent 2024 Private Sector Housing Strategy provides a clear approach to improving energy ratings of private rented sector stock.

- That it is currently not in the budget or remit to become a lead local exemplar offering energy improvements to the owner-occupier sector, however, research would still be useful to investigate potential opportunities in the future.
- That it is important that the Council continues to utilise its current methods of communication such as Intouch and Bolsover TV to improve public information/education on grants and energy efficiency.
- That the Council's website lacks easily accessible detailed information regarding several key areas of energy saving for local housing. These areas include:
 - The Council's energy policy and minimum energy efficiency standard for council housing, new build properties, and the private rented sector.
 - Public information regarding energy saving grants.
 - The Council's existing policies, strategies and plans regarding EV charging stations for Bolsover District as well as any basic information on EV's for residents in general.

The Committee have put together five recommendations which will assist the Council in improving the Council's energy policy for local housing.

This review is now within its monitoring phase with reports expected in March 2025 and September 2025.

Local Growth Scrutiny Committee

During 2023/24, Members have received a range of reports to Committee, some allowing us to monitor delivery of core projects and others to develop new policies for the Authority.

Policy/Strategy/Programme Monitoring Reports:

- Business Growth Strategy – Monitoring Update
- Update on Levelling Up Fund Bid for Bolsover
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Monitoring Update
- Dragonfly Development Limited (DDL) Delivery Update
- Pleasley Vale Regeneration Programme
- Tourism Strategy – Monitoring Update
- Business Engagement Strategy

Policy Development:

- Draft Tourism Strategy 2023-2025 – Consultation
- Business Engagement Strategy (BES) and Action Plan – Final draft Consultation

Performance Review Report:

- None for 2023/24

Review Work

- Review of Town Centre Regeneration Frameworks
- Review of Dragonfly Development Limited (DDL) Service Level Agreements

Finance & Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

The Finance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has provided oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements, responses to the recommendations of assurance providers and helping to ensure robust arrangements were maintained. This Committee has provided a forum for Scrutiny Members to review and scrutinise the Council's financial position.

The Scrutiny element of the Committee has been responsible for receiving and scrutinising the Council's Treasury Management Strategies and associated policies, reviewing budget proposals in line with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in the Council's Constitution, and reviewing performance against the Council's Corporate Ambitions and associated performance indicators.

During 2023/24, Members received a range of reports to Committee. Some were routine update reports and others were linked to service transformation.

Treasury Management Reports:

- Treasury Strategy Reports 2024/25 – 2027/28
- Treasury Management Strategy

Capital:

- Capital Strategy

Borrowing & Investment:

- Corporate Investment Strategy

Budget Monitoring:

- Annual Corporate Debt Monitoring Performance Report 2022/23
- Budget Monitoring Report – Financial Outturn 2022/23
- Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter 1 – April to June 2023/24
- Budget Monitoring Report – Quarter 2 – July to September 2023/24
- Revised Budgets 2023/24
- Setting of Council Tax 2024/25
- Proposed Budget – Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28

Performance Review Reports:

- Member Briefing on Bolsover District Council's Performance Management Framework (Verbal report)
- Corporate Ambitions Performance Update – January to March 2022 (Q4 – 2022/23)
- Corporate Ambitions Performance Update – April to June 2023 (Q1 – 2023/24)
- Corporate Ambitions Performance Update – July to September 2023 (Q2 – 2023/24)
- Corporate Ambitions Performance Update – October to December 2023 (Q3 – 2023/24)
- Corporate Ambitions Performance Update – January 2024 – March 2024 (Q4 – 2023/24)

The Committee's Main Achievements/Outcomes

The Committee aims to add value to the organisation through its activity and in particular has:

- Reviewed non-financial performance against the Council's Ambition targets on a quarterly basis and invited officers to attend the Committee meetings to help Members understand where performance was not on target.
- Scrutinised the Medium-Term Financial Plan prior to recommending to Executive the budget proposals in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.
- Reviewed quarterly budget monitoring reports.
- Scrutinised the setting of Council Tax rates.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is considered that the Committee has made a positive contribution to the Council's overall governance and control arrangements, including risk management.

Scrutiny Impact

During 2023/24, the three themed committees monitored implementation of review recommendations. Progress across the year was as follows:

Review	Recommendations						Status
	Achieved	Achieved (Behind target)	On track	Overdue	Extended	Alert	
Council's Approach to Carbon Reduction	5	0	0	0	4	0	Progress for this recommendation is now pending following the newly appointed Climate Officer beginning work.
Review of Members ICT & Support and ICT Service Delivery	7	3	0	4	4	0	Review almost complete pending decisions to be made by the Chief Exec and Assistant Director of ICT.
Council Policy on Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons	5	0	0	0	0	0	This review is now complete.
Review of Council-Owned Adapted Accommodation	4	2	3	0	1	0	Review on track to be complete.
Review of Integration of Social Value to BDC Policy and Delivery	2	0	0	0	4	0	Several recommendations extended, action to be transferred to partnerships team.
Total No. of Recommendations Monitored	23	5	3	4	13	0	

A number of the reviews are due to complete their monitoring within 2024/25 with recommendations expected to be implemented. The Customer Services Committee and the Climate Change and Communities Committee also completed reviews on the Council's approach to waste disposal education and the Council's energy policy for housing. The recommendations from these new reviews will be implemented over the next 6–12-month period and scrutiny will continue to monitor their progress.

The year ahead

Setting the Committee Work Programmes

A call for suggested topics went out to all Members and senior leadership in Spring 2024 prior to the national election. Topic suggestions were put forward from a range of councillors, service managers and directors. The three thematic committees discussed the various subject areas put forward to review and each committee has decided on what they intend to investigate and scrutinise for the 2024/25 municipal year and have drawn up draft work programmes.

The Local Growth Scrutiny Committee intend to review the Council's approach to industrial enterprise zones within Bolsover District to explore potential opportunities for growth however as this subject area has recently been evaluated by Development and Planning, the committee will instead receive an interim report on East Midland Investment Zones in Spring and Autumn 2025. The Customer Services Scrutiny Committee intend to undertake a review of the Council's security procedures and protocols at the Arc to evaluate what policies are already in place and identify areas for improvement. It has been proposed that the Local Growth Committee will work collaboratively with the Customer Services Committee on this review from a facilities perspective. Final details of this collaborative joint scrutiny review are still in discussion. Lastly, the Climate Change and Communities Committee intend to undertake a review of environmental despoilment education and enforcement across the District with the aim of to reducing littering, fly-tipping and dog fouling. The Finance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to evaluate and scrutinise the Council's financial position through critical examination of the Budget and Policy Framework.