

# Report to Council

Meeting Date: 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Portfolio: Cross-cutting

Key Decision: No

Policy and Budget  
Framework

Public / Private Public

Title: Scrutiny Annual Report 2022 - 23

Report of: Policy and Scrutiny Officer

Report Number: OS.08/23

## Purpose / Summary:

The Scrutiny Annual Report 2022 – 23 summarises the role of Scrutiny at Carlisle City Council and reports on the work of the Scrutiny Panels during 2022-23.

## Recommendations:

That the Council formally accept this report.

## Tracking

Executive:	N/A
Scrutiny:	People Scrutiny Panel 24/02/2023 Place Scrutiny Panel 02/03/2023
Council:	28/03/2023

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The Constitution: Article 6 – Overview and Scrutiny Committees, 6.03 Specific functions [c] states that:  
***‘Annual report.** Overview and scrutiny committees must report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate’.*
- 1.2** The Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23 summarises the role of Scrutiny at Carlisle City Council and reports on the work of the Scrutiny Panels during 2022-23.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1** That Council formally accept the report.

**Contact Officer:** Rowan Jones

**Ext:** 2757

**Appendices attached to report:** Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23

**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:**

- None

### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:**

**LEGAL –**

**FINANCE –**

**EQUALITY –**

**INFORMATION GOVERNANCE –**

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23



# Introduction

Carlisle City Council has three scrutiny panels:

- Place Scrutiny Panel
- People Scrutiny Panel
- Resources Scrutiny Panel

Resources Scrutiny Panel has oversight of budget matters and financial planning. Due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cumbria being due see Carlisle City Council merged into a larger Cumberland Unitary Authority in April 2023, there has not been a requirement for budget or development of financial plans during this scrutiny year.

Place and People Scrutiny Panels have met regularly over the year working with officers to ensure that their scrutiny activity is targeted at the most important issues and decisions that are facing the City Council as Carlisle responds to the rising cost of living, goes through the Local Government Reorganisation process in Cumbria and builds upon the many opportunities that are open to us.

## What is Scrutiny and why is it important?

Scrutiny is a process to ensure that decisions taken by the Council reflect the needs and priorities of communities in Carlisle. Scrutiny is carried out by Councillors who understand and promote the concerns of the people who elected them, connecting decision makers to local communities.

Council decisions can be made by Council Officers, by the Council's 'Executive' (the political leadership) and by full Council (all Councillors).

Scrutiny Panels are made up of Non-Executive Councillors who work together, across political parties, to understand why decisions are made and how the Council is performing to deliver the best possible outcomes for Carlisle and its people. Scrutiny Panels do not have decision-making powers; their role is to challenge and make recommendations that influence decision makers.

## Local Government Re-organisation

On 1 April 2023 Carlisle City Council will become part of a new Cumberland Council under Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cumbria.

Over this year, 2022-23, a Shadow Cumberland Authority has existed that has included shadow scrutiny arrangements. The Shadow Scrutiny Committee has considered matters relating to the Shadow Cumberland Authority, while City Council Scrutiny Panels have considered matters within the remit of Carlisle City Council. As the LGR process has developed, the effective handover of services and strategic priorities has been a recurring theme in scrutiny discussions at the City Council.

The Chairs of Place and People Scrutiny Panel engaged with a Cumberland Shadow Scrutiny Task and Finish Group that was considering future scrutiny options for Cumberland Council. The Chairs shared their experiences of the Place and People scrutiny model at Carlisle, programme planning and lessons learned from the City Council's recent work in restructuring its scrutiny arrangements.

### **Comment from Leader of the Council, Councillor John Mallinson**

It's been another busy year for all the Scrutiny Panels and a lot of hard work has gone into making a very positive contribution to various policies and work programmes that this council is undertaking.

There are many projects that have kept us busy including the Garden Village with its associated new Carlisle Southern Link Road and the very important Borderlands project which will deliver the Station hub as well as the rejuvenation of the Citadels and surrounding area. We also have the Towns Deal and the Future High Streets Fund. We look forward to seeing the redevelopment of the Central Plaza site and also to seeing the Hooper's building redeveloped. Carlisle City Council has been heavily involved, in many cases leading, on these projects.

The Executive have appreciated the Scrutiny Panels work in carrying out in-depth and forensic examinations as well as exploring all options and helping formulate policy; as well as keeping an eye on our day-to-day activities.

As we come to the end of the line for the City Council I hope that the new Cumberland Authority is able to continue that work that our Scrutiny Panels have done to add value to the work of this council; both Councillors and officers working on behalf of residents and the wider community, working with our partners to achieve this.

Once again, I would like to thank Scrutiny and the Officers on behalf of myself and my Executive Members for all the hard work you do and a particular thanks to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman who come along and report to our Executive Meetings on behalf of Scrutiny.



### **Comment from Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Housing, Councillor Marilyn Bowman**

I would like to thank the Place and People Panels for their support and positive recommendations throughout this year.

St Cuthberts Garden Village, High Street Taskforce, Market Square Project, and the delivery of the Town Deal Fund, Future High Street Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund have all been given careful scrutiny and attention to detail.

The delivery of the Sustainable Warmth Grants was sensitively debated and, again, the support given was much appreciated by Officers and myself in a very difficult situation.

My sincere thanks to Officers and Members for all their help this year and I trust the high level of scrutiny set by Carlisle City Council will continue into the forthcoming Cumberland Council.



## **Comment from Portfolio Holder for Communities, Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Elizabeth Mallinson**



I would like to put on record my thanks to the People Scrutiny Panel for all the positive work that you have done over the last twelve months. As a panel you have looked at issues that cut across over many portfolio areas but have an impact of Health and Wellbeing in the City

People Scrutiny Panel over the last year has looked at a large range of issues. The scrutiny work programme also includes Performance Reports to ensure that the council is on track for continuous improvement within all service areas. It has helped me keep on track issues that have arisen in my portfolio area; so improving outcomes.

We have had some very good reports presented to People Scrutiny Panel from our Healthy City Team covering:

- World Health Organisation and work that this council has done and then been asked to present at an international conference on Health Issues that we have been able to take to the community.
- Healthy City Committee working with our NHS partners, Cumbria County Council Local Committee Team, Works and Pensions, the Third Sector and our Armed Forces.
- Children/youths and their wellbeing.
- Various other issues too many to cover now but a big thank you for looking into them.

This list is in addition to all the various cross cutting items from other portfolio areas which have an input on our health and wellbeing.

To end, I would like to say thank you to the Panel for your hard work - it's a team effort and I really believe that your work has helped to form positive policy and working practices for our communities.

## **Place Scrutiny Panel Chair's Report, Councillor James Bainbridge**

As Place Panel comes to the end of its final year, there are several themes that have come through in our consideration of the reports and the briefings we have received:

### **Let's take a moment to reflect on our success**

We concluded the year with full occupancy of the Junction 44 project, and a new swimming baths at the Sands Centre. Both are large commercial and infrastructure projects that have successfully been managed against an unexpected and unanticipated back drop of events such as a global pandemic; supplier shutdowns; a spike in inflation and even, at one point, a tanker stuck in the Suez Canal.

Firm project management has been the key to much of this by experienced officers. Going forward, if the new Cumberland Council adheres to these principles across projects such as the Morton mixed use site, it will bode well for the City's prospects as a whole.

### **The challenge of inflation**

With inflation in the construction sector seemingly having spiked in 2022, the scope for future projects may become easier to quantify in terms of future costings for the coming year. The challenges of this has been a problem for the management of grant-led investment schemes and the ambitions of the City to grow outwards in terms of infrastructure and housing. This has also impacted the flow of information to the Panel. Officers have rightly held back on submitting reports, so that additional work can be undertaken, and this can be seen in several reports such as the High Street Fund and the Garden Village Delivery Vehicle, which have slipped in timescale to such an extent that they will feed into the new Cumberland Authority for scrutiny, rather than ourselves.

### **The need to move away from reports**

Over the last 12 months we have, to some extent, tried to move away from being a Panel that receives reports as our sole source of information. We have benefited from presentations by Riverside over the regeneration of housing stock in the west of the city, and a field trip to Talkin Tarn was able to focus the Panel on the potential that investment in the site could release for the wider population.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank officers who have attended the Panel over the last 12 months, the panel members who have assiduously attended the panels and actively contributed on the issues. Lastly, if I could thank Rachel, Jacqui and Rowan for their work and support to the Panel. I am sure that we wish them all well in the new Cumberland Authority.



## People Scrutiny Panel Chair's Report, Councillor Colin Glover



Scrutiny plays an important role in helping to develop Council policy and holding the Executive to account. This year, as we work through the transition to the unitary Cumberland Council, the work programme has taken on an additional role, to recognise the good practices and achievements within Carlisle City Council which could benefit residents and businesses within the new local authority and to raise awareness of emerging challenges that will need to be addressed.

The acute pressures that people are experiencing because of the cost-of-living crisis has been a key focus for the Panel this year. A task and finish group carried out detailed examination of the challenges and considered the valuable work which Councils and partners are doing to help and a final report has been produced which we hope will be of assistance to Cumberland Council as they take this work forward. Thanks go to our own staff, Cumbria County Council, Citizen's Advice, Carlisle & Eden and Carlisle Foodbank for their help with this work and to other partners who provided valuable input to the report. The Panel has also received valuable updates by Carlisle Refugee Action Group (CRAG) and Cumbria County Council on important multi-agency work to support refugees and asylum seekers and counter common myths that exist.

Good health and wellbeing for our citizens has always been a priority for Carlisle City Council and we are rightly proud of our World Health Organisation Healthy City status.

The People Panel and its predecessor Health & Wellbeing Panel has been able to have oversight of the new Sands Centre development and we are delighted to see the Centre open and being enjoyed by local people and visitors. The facility will help to promote and deliver good health outcomes for many years to come. The Panel has also been involved in development of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans which will be an important workstream for Cumberland Council as active travel routes for the future are designed, developed and delivered.

We understand the disappointment of supporters of Carlisle's Victorian and Turkish Baths when the facility closed after the relocation of the Pools operation to the new Sands Centre. The Panel is grateful to the Friends group who shared their exciting vision with us, to restore the Turkish Baths and create a hub that will provide complementary health facilities for local people and visitors. We look forward to seeing how the Friends group can further develop their plans in partnership in the future.

Another outstanding achievement has been the success of the Thriving Communities programme, which has had a particular emphasis on people impacted by loneliness and isolation. The programme has made a positive difference to the lives of people who have participated through a network of social prescribing partnerships and activities. The evidence provided to the Panel and the successful outcomes of the Thriving Communities programme provide a sound foundation to inform and extend the work under the Cumberland Council.

We have received valuable updates on youth engagement work carried out by Carlisle City Council and Cumbria County Council. Encouraging and enabling young people to participate in civic and public life is an important part of our work and there is evidence that they are keen to be part of shaping the places where we live and work, making them fit for the future.



The panel has been involved in many other workstreams over the year including financial monitoring, emergency planning, equality monitoring and sustainable warmth programmes.

In a time of change it is understandable that local government reorganisation creates additional pressures and uncertainty for our staff. Members of the Panel have been acutely aware of these concerns and have received regular updates on staffing matters and have been keen to ensure that staff are supported through the changes as much as possible.

I wish to place on record my thanks, and also those of my colleagues on the Panel, to all our staff, present and past, for your dedication to delivering the best possible services and outcomes for the people of Carlisle. Our city is the place that it is, and the Council is the organisation that it is, because of your commitment and hard work. As we move into the new era of Cumberland Council, I wish you every success and best wishes for the future.

I would also like to thank elected Members for their work, past and present, whether scrutinising or being scrutinised. This is an important part of local government, and your work is much appreciated.

Finally, my special thanks go to Rowan, our Policy and Scrutiny Officer, who has advised and guided us, carried out extensive research for us and without whom the scrutiny panel programme would simply not have worked anywhere near as efficiently as it has.

## **Resources Scrutiny Panel Chair's Report, Councillor Christine Finlayson**



The Resources Panel has not been required to meet in 2022 due to the changes to the Council's budget planning processes because of local government reorganisation (LGR). The Panel chose to meet in January 2023 to receive an update on how issues within their area of remit, such as budget setting, are being picked up by the Shadow Cumberland Council.

As we merge into the new authority of Cumberland Council with Allerdale and Copeland District Councils and Cumbria County Council, it is vital that the city of Carlisle retains its position as a major urban and economic centre within Cumberland. I believe that it is important that Carlisle is fully recognised for its strengths, significance and identity as a forward thinking and progressive city with all its investment potential. It is important that Carlisle is enabled to continue in its present status with significant economic ambitions, having made much progress delivering major projects and developments, securing long term stability, building new homes, creating new jobs, and bringing many opportunities for economic growth.

It is very important that there is sincere engagement in decision making on council matters, between councillors, staff, and for the public and partners to be appropriately involved. This is important in order to succeed together, to bring wellbeing, security, and prosperity to all residents.

Carlisle City Council has had a strong record of involving scrutiny in the budget process and development of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. I recommend this approach of engaging with Scrutiny and also public consultation in the budget setting process to Cumberland Council.

Carlisle City Council brings with it a strong asset base, not just acquired, but developed with much hard work, diligence, forward thinking, skill and good management. Many professional contributors over the years have placed Carlisle in a very positive position. I came across one such person recently; Percy Dalton, City Engineer and Surveyor 1926 – 1949. His list of achievements includes designing five bridges in the city, erecting the Turkish Baths and taking charge of the city's housing programme. I hope that Cumberland Council is able to continue this good management and ensure that this strong asset base continues to benefit local people.

Carlisle will indeed be a great asset to the Cumberland Authority; we wish the new Authority well in all their endeavours to bring fresh hope, wellbeing and prosperity.