

Council

Agenda
Item:

14

Meeting Date: 27th April 2021
Portfolio: Cross-cutting
Key Decision: No
Policy and Budget Framework
Public / Private Public

Title: Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21
Report of: Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Report Number: O&S 13/21

Purpose / Summary:

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21 summarises the role of Scrutiny at Carlisle City Council and reports on the work of the Scrutiny Panels during 2020-21.

Recommendations:

That the Council formally accept this report.

Tracking

Executive:	N/A
Scrutiny:	Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel 01/04/2021 Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel 08/04/2021 Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel 12/04/2021
Council:	27/04/2021

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 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21 summarises the role of Scrutiny at Carlisle City Council and reports on the work of the Scrutiny Panels during 2020-21.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council formally accept the report.

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Appendices attached to report: Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21

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:

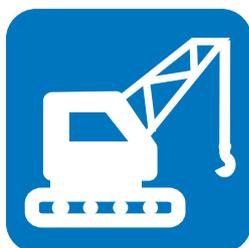
LEGAL – None

FINANCE – There are no explicit financial comments relating to this Annual Scrutiny report.

EQUALITY – None

INFORMATION GOVERNANCE – None

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21



Scrutiny in Summary

3 Panels



Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel (HWSP)



Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel (BTSP)



Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel (EGSP)



panel meetings



3 special meetings



2 task and finish groups



workshops



86 agenda items scrutinised



information reports

Partners engaged with:

Tullie House, Kingmoor Park, GLL, Carlisle Partnership, LEP, Carlisle Ambassadors, Police, Riverside



Introduction

The Annual Report for the Civic Year 2020-21 will reflect on a year of significant change for Scrutiny Panels at Carlisle City Council. The changes for Scrutiny reflect how the City Council as a whole has adapted to remote working and virtual meetings in response to the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Carlisle City Council has three scrutiny panels:

- Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel.
- Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel.
- Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel.

Over the course of the year each Panel has run a full and varied workplan, reflecting aspects of the City Council's function that fall within that Panel's remit. Members have looked carefully at their work programmes, working with council officers to ensure that their scrutiny activity is targeted at the most important issues and decisions that are facing the City Council as Carlisle looks to recover and move forward from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Scrutiny Response to Covid-19

During 2020/21 all Panel meetings have taken place in a virtual setting, following guidelines set out in the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Carlisle City Council was quick to respond to the need to deliver virtual committee meetings and we would like to note our substantial achievement in having delivered all planned scrutiny meetings during 2020/21. Panel Members and Officers have worked together to develop a new way of working, adapting and persevering with new IT skills, supporting each other and showing tolerance and humour at the bumps in the road that have sometimes accompanied the shift to virtual meetings.

Maintaining scrutiny activity during the pandemic has been important because:

- Significant decisions with impacts on Carlisle have been made during this time.
- Councillors represent their local communities; their knowledge and perspective are vital to ensuring a robust, democratic response to the crisis and recovery plans that are suitable for local needs.

Scrutiny Chairs have worked closely together to co-ordinate their Panel's activities to ensure a good level of oversight across the City Council's role in Covid-19 response and recovery.

Scrutiny Panel Members would like this Annual Report to highlight how well the Council as a whole has responded to the challenge of remote working. The Council has continued to perform extremely well and key decisions have been made, despite both Members and Officers working from home. Members would like to acknowledge the volume of work and learning new skills that has taken place behind the scenes to make meetings happen this year. Thank you to all who have contributed to this work, both Members and Officers.

Comment from Leader of the Council, Councillor John Mallinson

This Civic Year has been like no other experienced by Carlisle City Council with the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic impacting hugely on our lives and services.

Continuing to function and provide the services that we do to our residents; Members and Officers have risen to the challenge and embraced virtual meetings with staff continuing to support whilst working from home. Although particular mention should be made of our frontline staff who have had to continue their public facing roles whilst remaining safe throughout. Thank you to everyone for your ongoing commitment.

The work of the Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Members and Officers on all three Scrutiny Panels has never been more important. They have focused on ensuring and challenging the work of the Executive to take forward plans, while at the same time making sure the health and wellbeing of our residents is also considered.

Many of the major projects mentioned last year are now coming to fruition. In particular the signing of the Borderlands Deal will see huge investment in our City, as will the imminent start on the Station Gateway and Citadels projects together with major investment through the Towns Deal and Future High Street Fund. This will allow us the platform to ensure the economic growth of Carlisle going forward and a very exciting future lies ahead. Our Economic Development Team have worked tirelessly to ensure maximum funding is received, which in turn will allow the future of our City to be secured. Through grants from central Government we have also assisted countless businesses, which is a positive going forward once we begin the path out of lockdown. Demolition of the former Central Plaza Hotel has also opened up opportunities for investment with a prime site now available for potential developers.

All Members of the Executive and I have ensured we “Listen, Look & Action” all recommendations from Scrutiny Panels and on their behalf I would like to thank you all for your input and support throughout this very challenging year.

Thank you all once again.



Corporate Peer Challenges, January and November 2020 - implications for Scrutiny

The Carlisle Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in January 2020 was positive and highlighted a number of strengths for the Council. This Peer Challenge focussed on leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience. This Peer Challenge included some comments around the role of scrutiny. Scrutiny Panels, led by their Chairs, have made some steps in beginning to respond to these comments. For example, in recognising that developing robust workplans can help Scrutiny to focus on key strategic issues for Carlisle and making recommendations that will add value to the decision making process.

A further Corporate Peer Challenge, undertaken remotely in November 2020, reviewed the Council's use of existing governance arrangements. There are likely to be further implications of this Peer Challenge for scrutiny panels that can be considered over the coming scrutiny year.

Public engagement in Scrutiny

Scrutiny Panels are open to the public to attend at the Civic Centre, when Panels are meeting at a physical location. Panel meetings can be viewed online via the Council's website, whilst virtual meetings are taking place as part of Covid-19 social distancing measures.

Agendas, report and minutes from Scrutiny Panel meetings are available on the City Council website. Members of the public can also submit questions for meetings; these need to be submitted 11 full days before the Panel Meeting.

For more information on these meetings or on how to engage with the Scrutiny process, please contact: scrutiny@carlisle.gov.uk.

Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel (BTSP)

Chair's Report, Councillor James Bainbridge

At the time I wrote my last annual report, if you had said that over the coming year the Council would see an extensive level of direct and sustained financial support from Government, which would enable both the Council and the wider local economy to exist as solvent entities through a global pandemic, I would have thought it far-fetched. However, in terms of the remit of this panel, 2020 has been one of the most varied and unpredictable years in local government finance.



The financial performance of the Council at this time, has been very much on the radar of BTSP. In addition to the regular quarterly reports, the panel has reviewed the impact of Covid on our financial position. This we will continue to monitor in the coming months through further reports and study of budget outturns.

The present work of the Council on the major capital projects at the Sands Centre and on the ground floor of the Civic Centre both came before the panel for review. There has been a reassuring degree of oversight by Officers in the projects, which at this point are both on schedule and within agreed budgets.

With the conclusion of the Junction 44 drawing near, we have taken the opportunity to review this project and consider it within the context of wider commercialisation work that Carlisle City Council has undertaken and wishes to undertake in the future. Some Councillors, myself included, had expressed some concern when the project was commenced. It is fair to say that the work of BTSP has assisted in offering members a reassurance that such projects can enhance the City as a whole, as well as providing a secure level of income to the Council to fund service provision.

On the horizon there is the final report due from the Corporate Peer Review. The previous initial reported firmly highlighted the need for enhancements in the present scrutiny arrangements. In the likely two years that we have ahead of us as an authority, this will be an issue that will require our further attention.

We held an extremely positive and productive Task and Finish Group on the revision on the management of the long-term absence and attendance. As a Panel, we are extremely proud of the collaborative work undertaken in this area and the potential improvements this could bring the Council on many levels. The work gave an interesting insight into the need to keep our employment policies up to date. Thank you to the members and staff of the Council who gave additional time to take this project forward. Our next area of Task and Finish work will relate to the commercialisation strategies and policies of the of the Council.

I wanted to take a brief moment in this report to thank Rowan, Jacqui and Rachel for their work in establishing and managing the online meetings. I am sure that Members will be aware that several Councils in the UK took the position that Covid restrictions on meetings would result in their own Scrutiny Panels being put on hold, in a few cases they still are in abeyance a year later. In Carlisle, we missed the last cycle of meetings in the previous civic year, but virtual meetings commenced in May 2020 at the start of this Civic Year. We were amongst the first Councils (if not the first) to establish online Scrutiny meetings. The meetings have been professionally delivered by the Council, and I am sure that we are appreciative for the efforts made to keep Member involvement in the scrutiny of policies and projects active at this time.

Comment from Councillor Gareth Ellis, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Resources

2020 has been a difficult year for the city and the organisation. Scrutiny has managed to adapt to the virtual meetings with ease and have continued to assist the Executive in improving services for the city.

I make it my aim to attend all the scrutiny panels to ensure I get as wide a perspective as possible on the feelings of those councillors who aren't members of the Executive, they are informative and play a part in the Executive's decision making process.

Carlisle is bursting at the seams with ambition, funded projects and potential for growth and further investment. Hundreds of millions of pounds of investment is coming via the city council, and the scrutiny process will help to make sure we continue to use the resources we have wisely.

Carlisle is coming out of a difficult period in our history, but we will be coming out with the tools to make Carlisle a more prosperous place for its citizens.



Key items for Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel in 2021-22

The following items are topics that Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel have identified will be key their workplan for 2021/22:

- Commercialisation Strategy task and finish group.
- Covid-19 impacts and challenges to business recovery.
- Local Government re-organisation in Cumbria.

Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel (EGSP)

Chairs Report, Councillor Lisa Brown

It has been a both a challenge and privilege to Chair the EGSP this past year, one year on since the country went into a National Lockdown. My thanks go to Cllr Mellor as Vice Chair and all the Members and substitutes for their support and attendance, it is very clear that each member wants to see the very best for the City of Carlisle and its residents.

The majority of items coming to the panel this year have been the many key projects for the City across, all promising a bright future for Carlisle if successful, particularly the ambitions for growth in St Cuthbert's Garden Village and Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. It has never been more important that the word "Inclusive" used here is number one priority for the Council. We must ensure that all its residents benefit from these deals and projects especially since the Coronavirus pandemic has drastically changed lives over this last year. We must use all the tools available to us to reduce poverty and improve quality of life for each person living in the urban or rural parts of the district.

It is clear to see that the Council benefits from some dedicated and experienced members of staff and their ambition for Carlisle is obvious when reading the reports presented to the panel. We have also had some excellent contributions from outside organisations such as the CLEP, Riverside and Carlisle Ambassadors. The panel is keen to see the Ambassadors continue their work promoting the City and was interested to find out what Scrutiny could do to aid that.

Every meeting has been held virtually this year, not something any of us thought we would be doing. It hasn't reduced the quality of the meetings, and every meeting has run effortlessly which is entirely down to the hard work and patience of the staff behind the scenes. On behalf of the panel, I would like to thank them for all their time and effort especially doing it all from home.

Looking towards the new Civic Year, I hope that we start beginning to see work start on the key projects for Carlisle, and that we can start to build a clearer picture of Carlisle as it enters the recovery phase of the pandemic.



Comment from Councillor Paul Nedved, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Housing



Overview and Scrutiny has a significant role in policy development, scrutinising Executive decisions and holding the Executive to account positively and constructively. This has been undertaken this year wholly by virtual meetings.

The Economic Growth Panel has scrutinised a wide range of reports with clearly a key focus on one hand on the COVID 19 challenges on economic growth and recovery whilst considering the wide range of positive outcomes on Borderlands key projects, Future High Street Fund, Towns Deal and Fund and ongoing reporting on progress with St Cuthberts Garden Village and Carlisle Southern Link Road.

I welcomed the valued input from Scrutiny on the Economic Strategy which included a virtual workshop and is now reaching completion.

Equally EGSP has been able to engage with partners over the year including Cumbria LEP, Kingmoor Park, Carlisle Ambassadors and Riverside.

Housing needs and strategy have been major considerations and I thank Health and Wellbeing Panel for their detailed consideration of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Climate Change Strategy has also been central to Scrutiny determination.

I would like to thank the Chair, Vice-Chair and Panel Members for their robust questioning and discussions which has been valuable in shaping the decision-making process. Equally considerable thanks to Officers and Support Staff for their support and professionalism in these difficult times.

Potential items for Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel in 2021-22

The following items are topics that Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel are likely to find particularly helpful to include in their workplan for 2021/22:

- Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal.
- St Cuthbert's Garden Village.
- Economic recovery from Covid-19.

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel (HWSP)

Chairs Report, Councillor Christine Finlayson (Vice Chair)

I consider it a deep privilege to be a Member and part of what our City Council achieves for the City of Carlisle and its surrounding district and communities.

I would like to pay tribute to Cllr Jack Paton, Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, who unfortunately has been unwell. Jack was looking forward to having more time due to his retirement to spend in service to the City Council and his constituents. I'm sure it won't be long until he is back in full health and look forward to his return. As Vice Chair, I have led HWSP in Jack's absence, which has been a very positive experience.

The standard and professionalism of Managers and Officers during this very challenging last year has, in my eyes, been exceptional. The Council and its staff have been dedicated in working smoothly for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of Carlisle communities. I can say this from my experience as Vice Chair of HWSP.

Over the past year Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel have received detailed reports on many issues that support health and wellbeing, such as the Sands Leisure Centre Project, Tullie House Museum, housing, homelessness, emergency response and community resilience. All this has been achieved working across political parties with much agreement for the benefit of Carlisle residents.

Scrutiny by the Health and Wellbeing Panel has achieved a number of positive outcomes this year. Some examples of our achievements include:

- The Executive accepted recommendations from Scrutiny on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026 (considered at HWSP on 28 January 2021) that the Action Plan should include timescales for delivery, and that an Executive Summary should be produced to go alongside the more detailed Strategy. These are important as timescales will allow delivery of the strategy to be monitored more effectively and an Executive Summary will be a useful tool for communicating priorities around homelessness to partners and local communities.
- The Executive accepted HWSP recommendations following their scrutiny of the Local Environment (Climate Change) Strategy on 14 January 2021. The resolutions were incorporated into the Action Plan for this Strategy and covered important issues such as the importance of behaviour change being done in partnership, training for officers and Members and partnerships with schools in tackling climate change.



- At their meeting on 27 August 2020, HWSP made a recommendation that the content of performance reports which come to scrutiny should be reviewed. A cross Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish group is currently in progress to reconsider the aspects of Carlisle City Council Performance that are scrutinised. It is intended that this work will ensure that scrutiny focusses on the performance on issues that are most important to local people. Performance reports should communicate achievements, or areas of poor performance, in a way that is clear and accessible to all.

I look forward to the new Civic Year 2021 and seeing a lot of the plans and projects unfold. I have great confidence these plans will put our great City and Cumbria firmly on the map as an outstanding place to live, work and thrive.

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

In this year of Covid-19 pandemic, Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has continued to work and so well via virtual meetings and I have to thank them for all the hard work that has gone into the area covered by my Portfolio.

Scrutiny work is to make sure that the forward plan, work and reports coming to the Executive within my portfolio have been considered, reflecting aspects of the Council's functions. Scrutiny is targeted to the most important issues that are facing the City Council coming out of the pandemic to ensure that it is fit for purpose for all our residents.

Over the last year Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel has looked into the following items within my Portfolio:

- Introduction to Health and Wellbeing Team including Sport Development.
- Emergency Planning and Resilience for Covid-19.
- Annual Equality Report and Action Plan.
- Corporate Peer Challenge.
- Homelessness Strategy (including Domestic Violence, Children Leaving Care and Armed Force Veterans).
- Public Space Protection Order and Enforcement Strategy.
- Response to Covid-19 – one year review.

The County Wide Public Health Policy Document that we have signed up to is now fully embedded in all the Council Portfolio areas making sure that Council policies reflect these aims and objectives for the health and wellbeing of all our communities as we go forward.

I would like to wish the Chairman who has had Covid all the best and to thank the Panel and the Vice Chair for all the positive work that they have done over the last twelve months.



Potential items for Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel in 2021-22

The following items are topics that Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel are likely to find particularly helpful to include in their workplan for 2021/22:

- Covid-19 recovery for Carlisle communities.
- Local Environment (Climate Change) Strategy.
- GLL – post Covid service delivery and sports development.
- Active transport – developing walking and cycling opportunities.
- Choice based lettings system – accessibility of IT platform and process.