



West Northamptonshire Council

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2021/22

Introduction from the Chair

I am pleased to present this Annual Report, which aims to give an overview of the work done by the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the past year, including some areas that will continue to be a focus into the future.

West Northamptonshire Council started 2021/22 as a brand new authority and the Overview and Scrutiny function needed to develop from this point. This has involved getting used to new ways of working and building new working relationships. Councillors involved in Overview and Scrutiny have continued to learn as we have gone along. At the same time, Overview and Scrutiny has already started to make a contribution to the effectiveness of local services, as I hope this Annual Report helps to demonstrate.

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a broad remit covering some vital public services at a time when they are subject to significant changes and demands, including those resulting from the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee has to make some difficult decisions about the topics it selects for scrutiny. The Committee's work programme for 2021/22 was informed by suggestions from public consultation as well as engagement with relevant Cabinet Members about key priorities in their portfolio areas. The work programme ultimately represented the Committee's view about how its efforts could be focussed to best effect.

I would like to thank the members of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the commitment and knowledge that they have shown during the year. I would also like to thank all those who have been involved in supporting the Committee's work. This particularly includes the expert advisors who have offered their valuable input on issues under investigation.

Overview and Scrutiny is intended to be a collaborative and constructive process that makes a difference to the residents of West Northamptonshire. I think that during 2021/22 the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has largely found a willingness to engage with Overview and Scrutiny. In turn, I think that the Committee has shown the ability to provide constructive challenge as well as to recognise effective performance. This should provide a good basis for building further into the year ahead.



Councillor Rosie Herring
Chair, People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose of Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny function at West Northamptonshire Council helps to improve the quality of services provided to local residents and supports and challenges the work of the Council's Cabinet. Overview and Scrutiny carries out a number of roles, including:

- (a) monitoring the decisions of the Cabinet
- (b) advising the Council on forthcoming decisions
- (c) contributing to the development and review of Council policy
- (d) reviewing decisions that have been taken by the Cabinet but not yet implemented that are 'called in' for further consideration

At West Northamptonshire Council these roles are carried out by three Overview and Scrutiny committees: the People, Place and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny committees. These committees are made up of councillors from different political groups and who are not part of the Cabinet.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny is a national organisation that promotes effective governance in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny states that good scrutiny involves four fundamental principles:

- (a) it provides constructive 'critical friend' challenge
- (b) it amplifies the voice and concerns of the public
- (c) it is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- (d) it drives improvement in public services

Remit of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues and services in the following areas:

- Adult social care, public health and wellbeing
- Housing and communities
- Children, families and education
- Health services

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been made up of the following councillors during 2021/22:

- Councillor Rosie Herring (Chair)
- Councillor Karen Cooper (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Azizur Rahman
- Councillor Harry Barrett
- Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
- Councillor Fiona Cole (to August 2021)
- Councillor Raymond Connolly (from September 2021)
- Councillor Nigel Hinch
- Councillor Greg Lunn
- Councillor Bob Purser

- Councillor Wendy Randall
- Councillor Emma Roberts
- Councillor Sue Sharps
- Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex
- Councillor Mike Warren

What has the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee achieved and influenced

The Committee held six formal meetings during 2021/22 as well as one informal workshop-style meeting open to all Committee members. Two task-and-finish scrutiny panels have operated during the year. Some key areas of work by the Committee and the outcomes resulting from them are highlighted below. The Committee's full work programme and agenda papers are available on the West Northamptonshire Council website at [Committee details - People Overview and Scrutiny Committee - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.westnorthamptonshire.gov.uk/committees/committee-details-peoples-overview-and-scrutiny-committee)

Children and Young People's Mental Health

The Committee established a scrutiny panel to examine the services and support available in West Northamptonshire to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people experiencing problems that might otherwise escalate to the point where they could lead to self-harm. The Committee prioritised this topic as an area for in-depth scrutiny. The scrutiny panel has gathered information on the topic from different perspectives, including from young people themselves, NHS service providers, voluntary organisations and schools. The scrutiny panel is pursuing lines of enquiry concerning the waiting time for statutory services, how well services provided by different organisations link together, and the amount of support available in different parts of West Northamptonshire. The scrutiny panel is due to present its final report later in 2022.

Integrated care across Northamptonshire (iCAN)

The Committee scrutinised the aims and impact of the iCAN programme, which is a joint health and social care transformation programme intended to improve community-based care for older people in the county in order to provide better outcomes for them and to reduce reliance on acute hospital care. The full Committee considered this topic initially before establishing a scrutiny panel to review the outcomes being delivered at key stages in the programme contract. The scrutiny panel has provided constructive challenge about progress, informed by performance data and input from service users about how lived experience was informing the programme. The scrutiny panel has recognised examples of new ways of working making a difference. The scrutiny panel has also highlighted potential areas for further attention around support for residents living on the borders of the county who go to neighbouring areas for acute care and around the provision of 24/7 services for vulnerable people.

Children's services performance

The Committee considered the delivery and continuing development of children's services in West Northamptonshire twice during the year, meeting with the Chief Executive of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust. This scrutiny has covered areas including the outcomes of recent Ofsted visits, recruitment and retention of social workers and improvements to practice standards. The Committee has provided constructive challenge on the progress being made. The Committee has also ensured that Overview and Scrutiny councillors have access to regular information about children's services performance against key targets that is provided to the Council as the commissioning authority for the Children's Trust. This will help to inform and focus future scrutiny of this area.

Anti-Poverty Strategy

The Committee provided Overview and Scrutiny input into the development of the Council's new Anti-Poverty Strategy before it was agreed by the Cabinet. The Committee considered the vision and key priorities to be included in the proposed Strategy, how local community groups would be engaged in the development process, and how the impact of the Strategy would be measured in future. The Committee encouraged that the Strategy should take into account issues including the need to support both urban and rural areas, the impact of wider attitudes to poverty and the issue of in-work poverty. Overall, the Committee welcomed the positive approach being taken by the Council on this matter. The Committee also recommended that consideration should be given to carrying out an anti-poverty impact assessment on all new policies to be adopted by the Council in future.

Integrated Care System (ICS)

The Committee was advised about the aims of the ICS model and emerging organisational structures in Northamptonshire. The Committee provided Overview and Scrutiny input to Council senior leaders involved in the development process about how local partners should go about identifying operating future arrangements at the local authority ('place') and neighbourhood ('sub place') levels of the ICS. The Committee also highlighted the need for effective oversight of the ICS, including local involvement in its governance, and for barriers between separate organisations to be addressed to achieve the collaboration and integration proposed. The establishment of the Northamptonshire ICS in July 2022 will provide a significant part of the context in which the Committee scrutinises health and social care issues in the year ahead.

Adult Social Care service delivery

The Committee reviewed the outcomes being achieved by Adult Social Care services following the adoption of a new Target Operating Model late in 2020. The Committee sought reassurance about the sustainability of the TOM if service outcomes declined or financial pressures increased; about how it linked into services provided by the voluntary sector; and about how individual service users' needs and wellbeing were monitored within a more flexible approach to service provision. The Committee ultimately took the view that the TOM did seem to put West Northamptonshire ahead of the national direction and to be

delivering better outcomes for service users whilst also using resources more effectively. Separately during the year the Committee also sought confirmation that the Council was making full use of funding provided to support Adult Social Care workforce recruitment and retention as part of the government's COVID-19 winter plan for 2021. The Committee was satisfied with the position reported to it.

Housing Strategy

The Committee was informed about plans for developing the Council's future Housing Strategy to provide a single approach following local government reorganisation. The Committee considered the Council's picture of housing needs and housing provision in the authority. The Committee went on to identify a range of points that could be incorporated into the headline themes for the proposed Strategy, including the need for housing development to be supported by related infrastructure and access to services. The Committee aims to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the full draft Strategy in 2022/23.

Northampton Partnership Homes

The Committee considered an overview of the services provided by Northampton Partnership Homes in the former Northampton borough area, its current strategic priorities and challenges. The Committee sought to understand how NPH was responding to issues such as demand for different types of homes and the impact of financial pressures on tenants. The Committee generally welcomed the range of services that NPH provided beyond just acting as a landlord and noted examples of good practice such as partnership working with Adult Social Care to provide supported housing for people with specific needs. The Committee made representations to the relevant Council portfolio holders encouraging the Council and NPH to work together on issues relating to the operation of the planning process and traveller site provision, as well as on opportunities to bring empty homes back into use and to develop commercial sites for residential use.

Residential and nursing care for older people

The Committee scrutinised the current provision of residential and nursing care for older people in West Northamptonshire and planning towards meeting future needs. The Committee considered performance and occupancy of current care homes and sought reassurance about how the Council maintained oversight of service quality, worked with the providers concerned to support improvement, and acted to safeguard the wellbeing of residents where necessary. The Committee also provided Overview and Scrutiny input on issues relating to future service needs and the Council's role in shaping the local care market. The Committee supported the Cabinet in making representations to the government concerning the need for adult social care to be funded at a level that reflects actual pressures on services. The Committee also recommended that in cases when a care home in West Northamptonshire was due to be closed the Council should advise the relevant ward councillors in advance as standard.

School Effectiveness

The Committee considered local authority powers and duties relating to school effectiveness, the arrangements made to carry out this function in West Northamptonshire and the latest Ofsted outcomes for maintained and academy schools in the authority. The Committee heard that Ofsted outcomes for maintained schools in the authority compared well to national and regional averages. The position for academy schools was less good, although this reflected that a significant number of these schools had become academies in response to concerns about previous performance. The Committee noted how the Council sought to engage with academy schools regarding performance. It also emphasised that an academy trust should be challenged appropriately about the performance of a sponsored academy that it had been running for a reasonable time. The Committee has since made various efforts to secure a meeting with the Regional Schools Commissioner for West Northamptonshire to discuss performance in relation to academy schools.

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme

The Committee has dealt with the topics listed above and other matters considered in 2021/22 within an overall work programme for the year. This work programme was drawn up by the Committee and subject to final approval by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group, made up of the chairs and vice-chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny committees. The development of the Committee's work programme was informed by a public consultation exercise carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny function in autumn 2021. This enabled members of the public and representatives from community groups to suggest issues that they would like to see scrutinised during 2021/22. The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered all suggestions within its remit alongside other potential priorities to produce its final work programme.

Training for Overview and Scrutiny councillors

West Northamptonshire Council provided training for councillors on effective Overview and Scrutiny as part of the councillor induction programme that followed the Council elections in May 2021. This training was led by an expert from the national Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The Overview and Scrutiny function has taken further opportunities to build knowledge of good practice through the year, for example, through attendance at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's national conference in December 2021.

Looking Ahead

The creation of an Integrated Care System in Northamptonshire will involve significant changes to the planning and delivery of health and social care services with the aim of improving health outcomes and making better use of overall resources. It is important that Overview and Scrutiny establishes its place in the new model so as to be able to provide an appropriate level of scrutiny and this will be a key focus area for the Committee. The Committee will also seek to increase the number of recommendations resulting from its work in future as part of continuing effort to develop its overall effectiveness as a critical friend that carries out meaningful, productive scrutiny work.