



Norwich City Council

Scrutiny committee annual report

Chairs Foreword:

I would like to begin by thanking all those who have been involved with the scrutiny process during the last civic year, particularly those officers and members who engaged so enthusiastically with the scrutiny process. Their collective effort has been hugely valuable to our work.

The broadcast of meetings via YouTube also continues and gives members of the public an opportunity to watch our proceedings at a time / place that suits them.

The scrutiny year begin by considering the outcome of the select committee that had looked at **fly-tipping and communal bins**. Committee members serve on select committees outside of the main scrutiny meeting, and one was convened to look at **fly-tipping and communal bins**, an issue that was introduced to is by members of the public from the West Pottergate area during the 2021-22 civic year. Following some delays, the committee made a number of recommendations to deal with this issue that blights communities, all of which were accepted by cabinet at their July meeting.

In October 2018 the committee conducted a significant piece of scrutiny on **County Lines**, and the October meeting presented an opportunity to engage with further discussion as to progress in dealing with this issue in the ensuing four years.

With the cost-of-living crisis impacting heavily on many city residents, the committee used the November meeting to consider **debt advice and support services**, particularly how those services provided by the council and partners can stop being falling into debt. A number of recommendations were made to cabinet that were accepted in full, with others also being ratified at budget council in February.

The January meeting considered **financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency**, looking at options to support the council to achieve its target of carbon neutrality by 2030. The recommendations that the committee made to cabinet were in turn referred to the **Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Committee**; a cabinet advisory panel with the specific brief of addressing climate issues.

Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration was considered at the March meeting, but prior to that a survey of partner agencies had been undertaken, and

members visited the Zainab café to look at their work supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Additional scrutiny on this important topic is being undertaken in the civic year 2023-24.

Throughout the year, the committee has also looked at various standing items that feed into the transformation and budget setting process, and business plans of the council's wholly owned companies, with members making recommendations to cabinet that help shape and strengthen the work of the council.

Following each meeting, recommendations from the committee were considered by the cabinet, and broadly accepted.

I commend this annual review and hope that members feel able to adopt it.

Councillor James Wright (Chair)

Background

1. This report covers the work of the scrutiny committee for the civic year 2022-23. The production of an annual report is to fulfil the statutory obligation to publish such a report.
2. Members of scrutiny committee were as follows:
 - Councillor Wright (chair)
 - Councillor Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)
 - Councillor Carlo
 - Councillor Driver
 - Councillor Fulton-McAlister (M)
 - Councillor Galvin
 - Councillor Huntley
 - Councillor Osborn
 - Councillor Padda
 - Councillor Stutely
 - Councillor Thomas (Va)
 - Councillor Thomas (Vi)
 - Councillor Young
3. Membership of the scrutiny committee is politically balanced and made up of councillors of each political party of the council. In line with the constitution any substitutions to the committee were non-executive members of the council. Members of the cabinet were invited to attend committee meetings when the topic of the meeting was within their portfolio.
4. The committee met monthly on Thursdays from 4.30pm (excluding April and August). The majority of the meetings during the civic year 2022-23 took place in person, the session on green financing was held remotely and committee undertook a visit to a community café for the refugee and asylum seeker item.

What is scrutiny?

5. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a structure within Local Government for decision-making and accountability and created a separation between the cabinet role and the non-executive member role.
6. Moving forward, subsequent acts of parliament have come in to extend the remit of scrutiny along with its statutory responsibilities. For example, local government scrutiny committees can now look at the work of partner organisations as well. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities to scrutinise other partners and agencies. This, along with other legislation relating to scrutiny powers has now been consolidated in the Localism Act 2011.
7. The cabinet proposes and implements policies, and the non-executive members review policies and scrutinise decisions or pre scrutinise proposed decisions of the cabinet.

8. The committee sets its own work programme via suggestions from councillors, the cabinet and council, or from other issues of public interest. Any scrutiny topic that is undertaken needs to add value, and in considering suggestions for scrutiny the committee will ascertain the reasons why the matter would benefit from scrutiny, and what outcomes might be generated from inclusion to the work programme or other scrutiny activity.
9. The scrutiny committee assists non-executive and cabinet members in accordance with the Act by:
 - a) Acting as a critical friend by challenging performance and helping improve services
 - b) Ensuring policies are working as intended and, where there are gaps help develop policy
 - c) Bringing a wide perspective, from the city's residents and stakeholders and examining broader issues affecting local communities
 - d) Acting as a consultative body
10. In carrying out its role, the scrutiny committee can request written information and ask questions of those who make decisions. The committee is also enabled to comment and make recommendations to decision makers. These decision makers include cabinet, partners and other statutory organisations. Successful scrutiny is collaboration between the scrutiny committee, the cabinet, residents, partners and the officers of the council.

Key themes for the civic year 2022-23

11. The committee looked at a broad range of issues during the civic year 2022-23. These were a mixture of recurring items along with items the committee had set as its work programme for the year.
12. The overarching themes of the topics discussed during the year were:
 - a) Terms of reference for select committees
 - b) Communal bins and Fly-tipping
 - c) County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls
 - d) Debt advice and support and debt recovery
 - e) NRL Business Plan 2023-2033
 - f) Financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency
 - g) Welcoming refugees into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

h) Recurring items

13. This report will discuss each of these areas in turn.

Terms of reference for select committees

14. At the 9 June 2022 meeting the committee looked at and agreed a terms of reference for scrutiny select committees.
15. This detailed how to structure, convene and operate these working groups. The reports and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).

Communal bins and Fly-tipping

16. The scrutiny committee meeting in July 2022 looked at the outcome of the select committee task and finish group on communal bins and fly-tipping. The agenda and the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
17. The task and finish group was formed to investigate the Council's approach to managing fly-tipping particularly within its own estates.
18. It considered a number of recommendations to make to cabinet and a public survey was conducted on the council's website to gather resident's opinions on these.
19. At the July meeting committee agreed a number of recommendations to make to cabinet as follows:
- a) That the council decision in February 2007 to discontinue Waste Amnesty collections in areas of highest fly-tipping incidence is reviewed
 - b) The number, locations, and types of bins in communal areas are reviewed in the fly-tipping hotspots identified, as well as developing designs for storage areas that prevent and deter fly-tipping
 - c) Pre Covid enforcement arrangements for fly-tipping are re-established, and expanded to include the use of CCTV
 - d) Arrangements for engaging with residents with regards to fly-tipping are reviewed and improved, including consultation on proposed actions arising from this report. This should include improved partnership working between Citywide Services and Housing Estate Management in the design of services and facilities to reduce fly-tipping in our Housing Estates
 - e) Local facilities for upcycling and reuse of unwanted items are considered in partnership with the County Council as Waste Disposal Authority
 - f) The workflow and processes for managing fly-tipping between NCSL, Biffa and the council are reviewed and streamlined to improve efficiency and effectiveness

- g) The charging structure for the Bulky Uplift service is reviewed to make accessing the service easier for residents on low incomes and Universal Credit
- h) The service considers the use of an app for reporting fly-tipping
- i) The manner in which the council records and analyses Environmental Anti-Social Behaviour is reviewed
- j) The service continues to review best practice elsewhere
- k) That the Council reviews current enforcement arrangements to ensure that the full range of sanctions available to the council are used more effectively
- l) To ask officers to work with partners and local businesses on dealing with waste that arises from their products or services being used and promoting any existing services
- m) To ensure that any actions and reviews arising from the task and finish group have a clear timeline for implementation so that they can be monitored and followed up on
- n) Ask the leader of the council to write to the leader of Norfolk County Council to ask the county council to:
 - o) Reverse charges on DIY waste at recycling centres.
 - p) Provide funding for lower income residents of Norwich city centre to deal with their bulky waste

20. Cabinet considered these recommendations at its November 2022 meeting and all were adopted with an additional recommendation to agree a timeline to be set to an action plan with Key Performance Indicators being considered at the annual refresh of the corporate plan agreed.

County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls

- 21. The scrutiny committee meeting in October 2022 looked at “County Lines drug dealing, drug addiction and vulnerable women and girls”. The agenda and the minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
- 22. The committee considered County Line gangs activity within the city and asked questions of the police authority to gain insight of its impact upon the city and its residents. The council’s acting community safety manager attended to answer member questions too.
- 23. A robust debate was held and committee asked for an update on recommendations made to cabinet from its meeting held in September 2018 in relation to County Lines.

Debt advice and support services

24. At its November 2022 meeting the committee considered “debt advice and support services”. The agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
25. The committee examined the extent to which debt advice and support services provided by the council and its partners were helping to prevent people from falling into debt and becoming subject to debt recovery.
26. Members received a report from the senior financial inclusion officer and a presentation from the head of strategy, engagement and culture. Service updates and case study examples were received from the head of revenues and benefits, the interim tenancy services and income manager and the income and rents manager and members had an opportunity to ask questions of officers.
27. Committee considered recommendations to make to cabinet at its following meeting in December 2022 and resolved to agree the following;
 - a) That the council maintains a 100% Council Tax reduction scheme;
 - b) That the council maintain its financial support of the Financial Inclusion Consortium;
 - c) That cabinet lobbies against the punitive elements of the benefit system such as the recovery of overpayments and the Spare Room Subsidy;
 - d) That the council campaigns to encourage everyone to claim what benefits they are entitled to;
 - e) That officers circulate a list to councillors of any additional subsidiary advice agencies that could assist residents;
 - f) That council tax and housing benefit letters when revised are brought to scrutiny committee to be reviewed and that partners such as the tenant improvement panel, leaseholder group, Citizens Advice Bureau and Norfolk Community Law Service are consulted on changes;
 - g) If collected, that information as to why households fall into debt is provided; and
 - h) Illustrate how many people access debt information and by what means; in person, online or by telephone.
28. Cabinet considered these recommendations at its January 2023 meeting and resolved to agree them all, with the first two subject to the budget being resolved by full council in February 2023.

Financing for renewable energy/energy efficiency

29. At its January 2023 meeting the committee looked at the topic of “Financing for renewable energy/ energy efficiency”. The reports and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
30. The committee considered options for green financing to support the council to achieve its target of carbon neutrality by 2030.
31. Members considered information from UK100 and received a presentation from the [Green Finance Institute](#) (GFI).
32. The environmental strategy manager advised that a report was to be considered at the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel (CEEEP) on 14 February 2023 in relation to the item, agenda and minutes [here](#). Members agreed to consider any relevant recommendations to cabinet after this meeting.
33. The committee at its March 2023 meeting made the following recommendations:

Local Climate Bonds

- a) To begin piloting blended finance models and identify a project to invest in, potentially the retrofitting of community centers.

Green Mortgage Campaign

- b) To seek further analysis of green mortgage providers and to understand how Norwich City Council can be a part of this and seek opportunities to work with partner providers, such as Lendology.

Integrated retrofit finance:

- c) To obtain statistics regarding take up rate from the pilot in Manchester, with a view to promoting such a campaign in Norwich and gather information on how the projects were delivered,
- d) See if the additional benefits data was available; and
- e) Explore working with partners, such as the Greater Norwich Growth Board to expand this work within the Greater Norwich area.

Green rental agreements:

- f) To seek clarity on how green rental models work in practice, how these protect tenants and how tenants can be involved in the process, with LetNCC being considered as a pilot model.

Property link finance:

- g) To support the concept of property link finance and seek to be considered for a UK pilot or early adoption, whichever comes first.

General recommendations:

- h) To increase capacity for the delivery of green finance projects and seek assurance from cabinet that the council has the resources for these.
 - i) To investigate how Norwich City Council can benefit as a landlord from these projects
 - j) Investigate how the council's wholly owned companies, NCSL and NRL can be part of the retrofit programme
 - k) To ask cabinet to provide the scrutiny committee with details of the work already underway on whole house retrofit pilots, including details of funding.
34. Cabinet discussed the recommendations at its meeting on 14 June 2023. Committee resolved as proposed by Councillor Hampton, cabinet member for climate change that the recommendations be referred to the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Committee to be considered as part of their work programme.

Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

35. Members considered the scope of the above item at their meeting on 13 October 2022 and discussed how best to include the views of refugees and asylum seekers. It was agreed that a survey would be conducted with partner agencies and a visit undertaken to a community café accessed by refugees and asylum seekers.
36. Members undertook a visit to the Zainab café, an organisation which supports refugees and asylum to access work experience. Councillors spoke with individuals and the feedback from this visit and the survey conducted with partner agencies was presented at the scrutiny committee meeting held on 16 March 2023, reports and minutes can be found [here](#).
37. Members considered a number of recommendations on this item and agreed the following recommendations for officers to address which were reported to cabinet at its meeting on 14 June 2023.
- a) Investigate with partner organisations, and decide upon, a method of approach that is acceptable to asylum seekers and refugees, that allows the committee to gain data directly from service users so that the committee can understand the level of need within the city.
 - b) Ask the Head of legal and procurement to ask relevant managers to ensure that all customer contact assistants were aware of the Intran translation service and that the availability of the service was advertised.
 - c) Ask officers if any data sets around refugees and asylum seekers were already available

- d) Ask officers to investigate if there were any council owned properties that the Zainab Project could use as a base; and
- e) Review the list of issues raised by service users at the Zainab Café and ask for an update to be brought to a meeting of the scrutiny committee early in the civic year.

Call-in

- 38. Scrutiny committee monitors the decisions of the Cabinet. It can 'call-in' certain decisions that have been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. This enables it to consider whether the decision is appropriate. The Scrutiny Committee may recommend that Cabinet reconsiders the decision. The Scrutiny Committee may also be consulted by Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.
- 39. There were no call-ins this civic year.

Recurring items

- 40. There are number of items that are recurring and standing items for the committee. Each year the committee look at the annual budget, the corporate plan, the equality report and the business plans of the wholly owned companies of the council, Norwich Regeneration Limited (NRL) and Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL). At each meeting the committee considers its work programme and hears updates from the representatives appointed to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) and the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP).

Tracker

- 41. Members requested that officers design a tracker to plot the outcome of recommendations to the committee. This has been developed and will be considered as part of the work programme item at every meeting.

Budget

- 42. The scrutiny committee pre-scrutinise the budget every year in early February before the budget papers are presented to cabinet. The meeting for the 2022-23 civic year was held on 2 February 2023. The report and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
- 43. During the meeting members asked questions on each section of the report: local government finance, the general fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and budget, the capital and commercial investment strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy. Members praised officers for their work and recognised the robust financial management which had achieved a balanced budget.
- 44. Members made some suggestions which were noted for consideration by the interim Section 151 Officer. A member raised a concern regarding

the use of electronic advertising hoardings on council land. Members wanted to see the cost implications of the council's net zero carbon aspirations represented in the budget, how would this be funded and what external sources of funding could be leveraged. Members discussed the increase of 7% in the council's housing rents, with some members concerned that this would affect the most vulnerable. Members discussed updates to council housing stock in terms of bathrooms and kitchens and adopting a whole house approach to works including retrofitting. Members discussed the council's proposed capital investments which relate to the corporate plan objectives and asked if a strand on carbon reduction and biodiversity could be added. Members discussed Treasury Management and a member raised a concern regarding the council's bank and its lack of ethical credentials.

45. Members made the following recommendation to cabinet which was considered at the cabinet meeting held on 8 February 2023 and agreed:
 - a) pilot a whole house approach to decarbonisation of our council homes. Use data, information and practice gathered from the pilot, alongside stock condition data and thermography surveys to support the development of the Housing Revenue Account Decarbonisation Plan.

Corporate Plan

46. The scrutiny committee looks at the council's Corporate Plan and any refreshes made throughout the corporate plan's life cycle. The current Corporate Plan 2022-26 was not reviewed this civic year.

Equality report

47. At its meeting on 19 January 2023 the scrutiny committee considered the Equality Information Report 2023. This document is a statutory document that the council must publish by 31 January each year. The report and minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
48. Members thanked officers for their work and discussion centred on the following key points. Trend based reporting, could the next Equality Information Report include in order that year on year comparisons be made. Could the social economic background of employees be plotted. Members discussed contextual recruitment where lived experience was given weight rather than qualifications. The head of HR and organisational development advised that in terms of practices which excluded people without formal qualifications, work was ongoing and when service reviews were conducted job descriptions were reviewed to see if all aspects were required. Reducing Inequality Target Areas (RITAs), members asked how success was measured and asked for a report providing data detailing the objectives of the RITAs and the progress made to meeting them. Customer flags indicating vulnerability, members were reassured that information was shared with the council's contractors and asked if a strand could be included in the next Equality Information report on flags and what they denoted in terms of equalities data.

49. Cabinet discussed scrutiny committee's considerations at its meeting held 8 February 2023. There were no specific recommendations to consider.

Business plans

50. Each year the scrutiny committee considers the business plans of the council's wholly owned companies; NCSL and NRL. The business plan for NCSL was not available this year to consider.
51. The NRL business plan was considered in private by members as it was exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 at its meeting held on 8 December 2022. The above the line minutes of the meeting can be found [here](#).
52. The following recommendation was considered and agreed by cabinet at its meeting held on 14 January 2023.
- a) To both grow, deliver and to mitigate overexposure to commercial risk from one sector, cabinet will support more detailed work on the part of NRL to spread risk and build resilience further into the business, by committing to its scoping in detail the business case for projects like energy saving pilots and skills building for young people.

Work programme setting

53. The scrutiny committee work programme is key for the committee as it outlines the topics that the committee will discuss throughout the civic year. Usually, the committee will consider the work programme for the year at the first meeting of the civic year and any amendments are made as part of the standing work programme item on each agenda.
54. For the civic year 2022-23 the committee held an informal meeting to consider its work programme in May 2022.
55. Members are asked to circulate TOPIC forms in advance of the meeting. The TOPIC forms ask members to identify the scope of the item by looking at the following:
- a) **Time:** Is this the right time to review the issue?
 - b) **Objective:** What would be the objective of scrutiny? How do you feel scrutiny could make a difference
 - c) **Performance:** Can performance be improved by scrutiny input?
 - d) **Public Interest:** What would be the public interest in placing this topic onto the work programme?
 - e) **Contribution:** How would a scrutiny review contribute to achieving our corporate aims?

56. Throughout the civic year members updated the work programme, either by changing the substantive item discussed or by refining the scope of the item.

Updates from joint scrutiny committees

57. Norwich City Council has a representative, and named substitute, on two scrutiny committees that are held by Norfolk County Council. These are Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) and the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel (NCCSPSSP).
58. The role of NHOSC is to look at the work of the clinical commissioning groups and National Health Service (NHS) trusts and the local area team of NHS England. It acts as a 'critical friend' by suggesting ways that health related services might be improved. It also looks at the way the health service interacts with social care services, the voluntary sector, independent providers and other county council services to jointly provide better health services to meet the diverse needs of Norfolk residents and improve their well-being. NHOSC meets every other month and the reports and minutes of each meeting are available [here](#).
59. Reports from NHOSC were presented at the next possible meeting of the scrutiny committee, these were either oral reports or a written report was circulated to members and then questions were asked of the representative.
60. The representative for the 2022-23 civic year was Councillor Brociek-Coulton.
61. The role of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel is to:
- a) Scrutinise the actions, decisions and priorities of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Crime and Disorder Partnership in respect of crime and disorder on behalf of the (County) community services overview and scrutiny panel
 - b) Scrutinise the priorities as set out in the annual countywide community safety partnership plan
 - c) Make any reports or recommendations to the countywide community safety partnership.
62. While the scrutiny sub panel has the duty of scrutinising the work of the Norfolk countywide community safety partnership the police and crime panel scrutinises the work of the police and crime commissioner. There is a protocol regarding the relationship of these two panels to encourage and exchange information and to co-operate towards the delivery of their respective responsibilities. The community safety partnership meets on a half yearly basis. The reports and minutes of NCCSPSSP can be found [here](#).
63. The representative for the council was Councillor Thomas (Vi).

Training

64. The committee took part in a training session held remotely on 30 June 2022 by Dave McKenna. The aim of the session was to build on existing good practice and help councillors think about how meetings might be more effective.

Peer review

65. The council took part in a Local Government Association Peer Challenge, in January 2023. These are an established tool to support councils to drive improvements and efficiency in specific service areas as well as at a corporate level.
66. The findings of the review were very positive and were presented to cabinet in [March 2023](#).
67. The peer team made a number of suggestions in relation to scrutiny committee after speaking with officers and members. Feedback from officers highlighted by the review is that they would like a greater focus on operational matters.
68. The peers suggested that how the forward plan for committee was developed be reviewed to influence a more joined up approach. The work programme for the civic year 2023/24 has been developed in consultation with senior officers.
69. Peers also strongly suggested that more formal officer support should be invested in to support and raise the profile of the committee.

Public involvement and getting in touch with scrutiny

70. Meetings of the scrutiny committee are usually as informal as possible and as well as scrutiny members, are attended by cabinet portfolio members, officers, partners and anyone else who can assist with the work and provide evidence for reviews.
71. Members of the public are also welcomed to attend the scrutiny committee meetings and can participate at the discretion of the committee's chair. If you do wish to participate regarding an agenda item at a scrutiny meeting, you are requested to contact democratic services who will liaise with the chair of the committee. To contact democratic services please use democraticservices@norwich.gov.uk.
72. Members of the public can suggest a topic for scrutiny by submitting an on-line form available on the council's website. Please encourage your constituents to suggest topics in this way.