



ST HELENS  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

# INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny function at St Helens Borough Council during the 2021/22 municipal year. Despite the continued disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent pressures on the council and other services, a great deal of productive work has been carried out in Scrutiny committees this year, delivering positive outcomes for residents.

Lockdowns and social distancing over the past two years have meant that the scrutiny function has had to adapt to new ways of working. Following the expiry of the temporary powers to hold remote meetings, public meetings of the Scrutiny Committees returned to meeting in person in June 2021/22. However, the Scrutiny Function continued to use agile working and remote meeting arrangements to carry out its role and work efficiently and effectively with partners and the public for non-decision-making meetings.

The Scrutiny Committees appreciate and thank the Council Officers, Cabinet Members and partners who have committed to working with Scrutiny during what has continued to be a challenging year.

Details of the activity of each of the Committees during 2021/22 and the impact of their work are provided in this report.



# WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

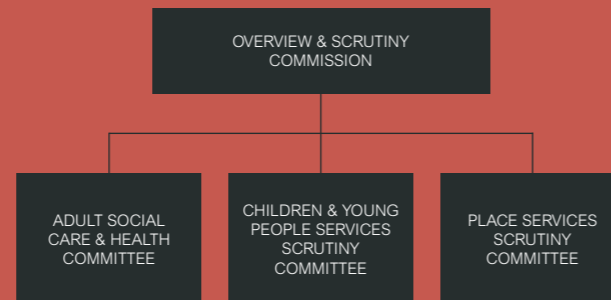
The purpose of Overview and Scrutiny (Scrutiny) is to hold decision makers such as Cabinet, Senior Officers, and the managers of external organisations, such as Health Services Commissioners and Providers and Community Safety Partners, to account for decisions they have made or are planning to make, and to examine the performance of services and the outcomes delivered for the residents of the borough.

Scrutiny is led by Councillors who are not involved in Cabinet. As elected representatives of the residents of the Borough, Councillors involved in Scrutiny can highlight the needs and concerns of the public with decision makers to ensure services are designed and operated effectively to meet those needs.

Members of the public can contribute to Scrutiny by submitting ideas for items to consider and raising concerns about the quality of service or if there is a lack of provision. The public can engage with the Scrutiny Function by contacting the Scrutiny Team directly using the details provided at the end of this report, speaking to their local ward councillor, attending one of our public meetings or visiting the Council's website.

In 2021/22, Scrutiny at St Helens Borough Council was carried out by an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission and three thematic Scrutiny Committees with remits that ensure all aspects of the Council and relevant Partners are covered.

Scrutiny Committees can receive reports regarding services during public committee meetings or carry out more in-depth scrutiny through Task and Finish Groups or Spotlight Reviews. Chairs of the Commission and Scrutiny Committees also hold regular meetings with Cabinet Members and Senior Officers to share information and discuss work programmes. Some Committees have co-opted members representing other organisations or sectors



# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

## REMIT

The Commission is responsible for all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of the Council, including monitoring and supporting the work programmes of the three thematic scrutiny committees. The Commission is also responsible for monitoring the Finance & Governance and the Reset & Recovery Portfolios.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITY

The Commission met seven times over the course of 2021/22, which was a significant increase on the three meetings held in the previous shortened municipal year.

The Commission began the new municipal year by considering the Revenue and Capital Outturn & Council Performance Reports for 2020-2021. At subsequent meetings throughout the year the Commission considered the Council's quarterly financial monitoring and performance reports up to Quarter 3 in March 2022.

In September 2021, the Commission held a spotlight review into the Council's new Housing Strategy. The spotlight review group reviewed the thematic priorities and supporting actions that had been developed in the draft strategy and provided a steer in relation to the public consultation which was to be carried out in early 2022. The group's report was approved

by the Commission in December, with a recommendation that the Commission hold an informal meeting during the consultation period to provide feedback regarding the contents of the draft strategy. This was held in February 2022, and feedback was provided directly to officers and the portfolio holder in attendance.

In October 2021, the Commission received a comprehensive update of the council's new 'Ways of Working'. This was followed by a presentation on the council's ICT Enablement and Digital Transformation programme in March 2022. The Commission welcomed the Council's continued transformation and recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

The Commission carried out a Budget Scrutiny Task Group during January 2022. During the Task Group's meetings, portfolio holders were asked to explain the process they had undertaken with officers, and as a Cabinet, to develop the budget proposals and the opportunities, challenges and pressures facing services within their remit in 2022/23. Portfolio holders were questioned on how they worked together to consider issues which affected services in multiple portfolios and different directorates and where decisions regarding services in one portfolio might have adverse consequences for other portfolios. The Task Group also sought assurances as to whether

the implications of all possible options regarding budget proposals were fully understood, as well as the opportunities for income generation that had been explored and opportunities for the 'localities' model to be implemented.

Overall, the Commission was satisfied that the process for setting the Council Budget for 2022/23 has been robust and thorough.

IN OCTOBER 2021, THE COMMISSION RECEIVED A COMPREHENSIVE UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S NEW 'WAYS OF WORKING'. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S ICT ENABLEMENT AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME IN MARCH 2022

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## REMIT

The Children and Young People Services Scrutiny (CYPS) Committee is responsible for scrutinising items relating to the provision of services to children and young people. This includes any services within the Children and Young People Portfolio, part of the Education, Business and Skills Portfolio and relevant health services where they are provided predominantly to children and young people. Because the Committee's scope covers the Council's role as a local education authority, its membership is extended to include five co-optees, who represent the primary, secondary and special school sectors and two representatives of faith communities.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITY

The CYPS Committee's principal focus during 2021/22 continued to be scrutiny of the Council's work to improve its delivery of social care services for children, following an inadequate Ofsted inspection rating in 2019. Senior officers reported to each Committee meeting on progress against the Council's Improvement Plan and the challenges the service is encountering. In addition, the Committee Chair also provides a "critical friend" challenge as a member of the Children's Improvement Board.

At each regular Committee meeting held during the year, the Committee continued to receive performance reports relating to Borough Priority 1 - *Ensure all children and young people have a positive start in life.*

The Committee also continued to receive presentations to closely monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and children's learning and development within the borough. This is also included the support available to schools. This work has enabled the public to see how robust efforts to maintain safety and attainment in schools have been during the pandemic.

At the beginning of the municipal year, members of the CYPS Committee expressed concern regarding whether there was a sufficient supply of foster carers within the borough to meet the needs of children and young people that required foster care. In August 2021, the Committee commissioned a Task Group to explore the issue. The Task Group held numerous meetings between August to December, including with current foster carers. The Task Group's report and recommendations were approved at an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in January 2022 and subsequently submitted to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations made in March.

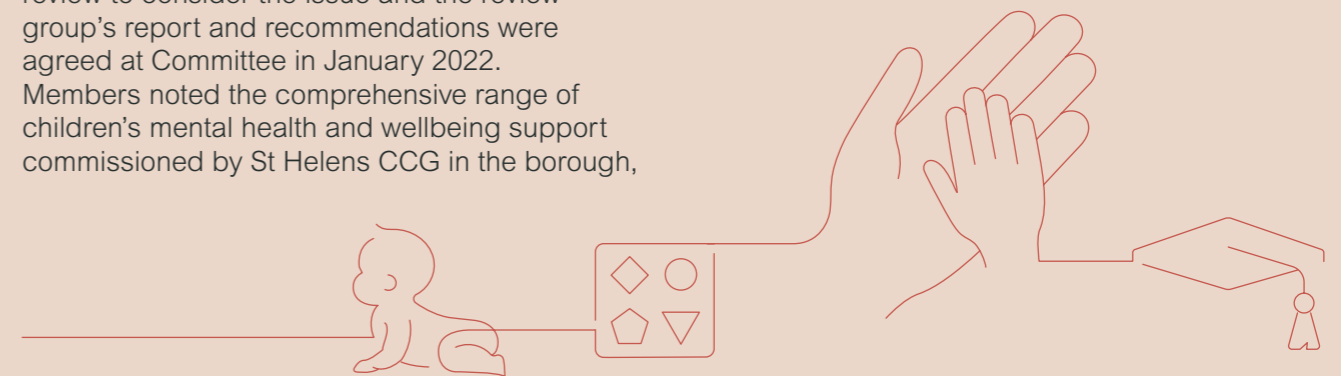
In July 2021, the Committee received the NHS St Helens CCG response to the previous Scrutiny Committee's report on 'Mental Health Services for Children and Young People with SEND' spotlight review held at the end of 2020. As a follow-on to this review, Members felt it was important to scrutinise the mental health and wellbeing services available to children without SEND.

As such, during the work programming session for 2021/22, the CYPS Committee agreed to hold a further spotlight review to provide Members with an opportunity to be informed and scrutinise the efficacy of the mental health and wellbeing services available to children and young people in the borough commissioned by NHS St Helens CCG. Committee members expressed particular concern regarding the level of the pandemic's impact and wished to understand and review what services were in place to address this.

In December 2021, Members held a spotlight review to consider the issue and the review group's report and recommendations were agreed at Committee in January 2022. Members noted the comprehensive range of children's mental health and wellbeing support commissioned by St Helens CCG in the borough,

and the progress that had been made with partner organisations rising to the challenges of the unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. A response to the recommendations from St Helens CCG was presented back to the Committee in March.

Other topics presented to the Committee during 2021/22 included the Cabinet response to the previous year's task group which made recommendations on Improving Work Opportunities for Care Experienced Young People. The Committee also received a report in January 2022 on the support for young carers in the borough, with a visit to the St Helens Carers Centre subsequently arranged for March.



# ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## REMIT

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny (ASCH) Committee is the designated health scrutiny committee as required by Regulations and is responsible for monitoring the Integrated Care and Health and Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage (Public Health only) Cabinet Portfolios. The Committee is also responsible for scrutinising the People's Board in relation to its Health and Wellbeing Board responsibilities. The Committee responds to any consultations carried out by the CCG and NHS providers in relation to substantial development of health services in St Helens. The Committee also leads on behalf of the Council in coordinating with other local authorities in relation to Joint Health Scrutiny Committees when required. The Committee is responsible for responding to items referred by Healthwatch St Helens and a representative from Healthwatch is a co-opted member of the Committee to foster good relationships between the Committee and Healthwatch.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITY

During 2021/22, the ASCH Committee continued to receive performance reports relating to Borough Priority 2 – Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.

The Committee received reports throughout the year on the new Integrated Care System (ICS) for Cheshire and Merseyside. The Cheshire and

Merseyside ICS will become a statutory body in July 2022, at which point local CCG's will be dissolved. The considerable changes to the local health landscape will continue to be monitored by the ASCH Committee in the next municipal year.

The Committee continued to receive updates on the continued impact of the Covid-19 impact, including on the care sector.

A report was also presented to the Committee regarding the progress and achievements of the Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2017-20. The report also provided an update on the surveillance of suicides for St Helens, the additional challenges requiring attention due to Covid-19 and the strategic approach being taken towards the ambition of 'No More Suicides' for the St Helens Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2024.

In September 2021, the Committee was presented with proposals to establish a Cancer Hub at St Helens Hospital for Halton, Knowsley, St Helens and Warrington patients – referred to as the Eastern Sector. A report was taken to each of the four local authority Health Scrutiny Committees with a request to consider whether the proposed change to provision of cancer services outlined in the report constituted a substantial development or variation in service for each borough's residents. All four Health Committees agreed that it was.

Health regulations place a requirement on those local authorities that agree that a proposal is substantial to establish, in each instance, a joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of considering it. The 'Protocol for Establishment of Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside' sets out the framework for the operation of joint scrutiny arrangements in St Helens. This joint committee will be formally consulted on the proposal and have the opportunity to comment. It will also be able to refer to the Secretary of State for Health if any such proposal is not considered to be in the interests of the health service. However, as of March 2022, the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee to consider the Eastern Sector Cancer Hub proposals had yet to meet and further clarity on the issue will be sought in the new municipal year.

A report from Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Trust was taken to Committee in March 2022 regarding Breast Screening Proposals. The report notified the proposal to consolidate and expand Breast Screening Services at Bath Street (Warrington) and relocate Breast Screening Services from the Kendrick Wing at Warrington Hospital. The report set out the impact on service users from St Helens, who comprise up to 10% of existing Kendrick Wing appointments and describes the planned engagement and consultation process related to this proposal. A further report on the outcome of the consultation process will be brought to Committee in 2022/23.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in January 2020, the then Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel received a report from St Helens CCG into GP Appointment Waiting Times. Members of the Panel resolved to consider the issue further, however with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in a national lockdown, this work was postponed. Since then, the operating model of GP practices and how patients accessed primary care was severely impacted. With COVID restrictions lifting in the August 2021, the ASCH Committee agreed that a spotlight review would be held to consider access to GP appointments. The spotlight review explored the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on residents' access to GP appointments within the borough; assessed whether access is satisfactory; and considered where improvements could be suggested. The spotlight review's report and recommendations were approved by the Committee in September, with a response provided by St Helens CCG in December 2021.

In August 2021, the Committee also held a site visit to the Mersey Care Life Rooms in Walton, Liverpool. Members attending the visit received a presentation which provided an overview of what the Life Rooms are and the development of the provision across Merseyside. Life Rooms are a free NHS service who provide a safe and welcoming space to meet others, access opportunities and learn about community resources. The Life Rooms offer support to those wanting to take the next steps in their life, with services available to anyone.

# PLACE SERVICES

# SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## REMIT

The Place Services Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising items concerning borough-wide economic development, environmental services (such as grounds maintenance and waste collection), regeneration, housing, culture, tourism, leisure, and libraries. The Committee is responsible for monitoring the following Cabinet Portfolios: Regeneration and Planning; Environment and Transport; Wellbeing, Culture and Heritage (excluding Public Health); Safer, Stronger Communities; and Education, Skills and Business (excluding Education).

The Committee is also designated as responsible for scrutiny of crime and disorder issues. As such it is responsible for monitoring the Safer St Helens Executive Board (a sub-committee of the People's Board responsible for community safety). The Committee can request items for consideration from partners such as the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service. Therefore, to support good relationships and communication, there are co-opted members on the Committee from Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITY

During 2021/22, the Place Services Scrutiny Committee continued to receive performance reports relating to Borough Priority 3 - *Create safe*

*and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all; Priority 4 - Support a strong, thriving, inclusive, and well-connected local economy; and Priority 5 - Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.*

At the beginning of the municipal year, Members of the Committee expressed interest in the Council's development of a new resources and waste strategy. The Committee agreed to form a Task Group which would provide Members with an opportunity to obtain assurances of the need for, and the approach being taken to, the development of a new resources and waste strategy for St Helens. The Task Group's report and recommendations were presented to and approved by Committee in February 2022, and subsequently submitted to Cabinet for response. This response will be brought back to Committee in early 2022/23.

In the summer of 2022, the Committee also expressed an interest in the issue of Wildflower Sustainability and Biodiversity within the Borough and what the Council was doing through its grass cutting strategies on green spaces such as highway verges to enhance biodiversity and support native species of flora and fauna. The Committee therefore held a spotlight review to consider the topic and a report was submitted to Committee in September 2021. The Cabinet response to the recommendations was

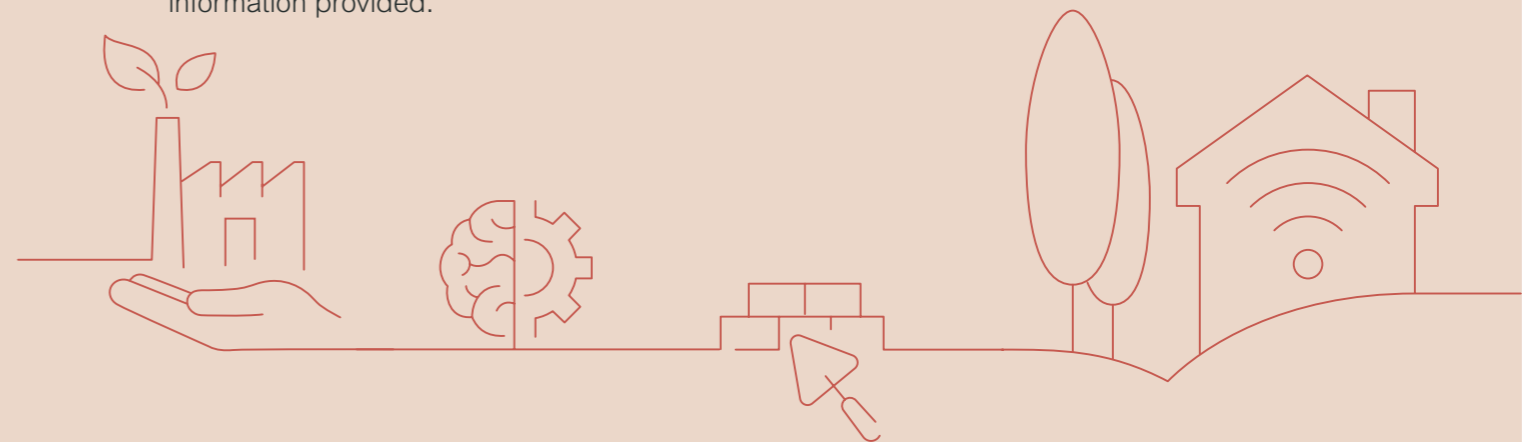
provided back to Committee in December, and the Committee welcomes a further update on progress made against the recommendations during 2022/23.

The Committee also held spotlight reviews in autumn 2021 to consider the Library Strategy Consultation Process as well as the Asset Transfer of Community Sports Facilities elements of the Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sports Facilities Strategy. Both spotlight review reports were presented to and agreed by the Committee in December.

Two sites visit were also held throughout the year. Members were invited to visit the new St Helens Community Fire Station located at Violet Way in the Town Centre. The new station combined the resources from two previous stations located in Eccleston and Parr into one centralised location. Members commented that it was clear that staff were extremely committed and passionate about their job, the new station, and its facilities. In early 2022, members of the Committee also visited Newton Health and Fitness Centre - which followed on from a previous visit to the new centre in early 2020. Members wish to thank officers for facilitating both visits and for the comprehensive information provided.

The Committee began the municipal year by receiving a presentation on the Council's adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs set out how communities, organisations and government can progress towards better lives for themselves and their children, without leaving anyone behind. The report presented to the Committee highlighted how the Council was contributing to the ambitions and delivery of the SDGs which cut across all Council directorates and portfolios.

The Committee also received reports throughout the year on the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy; operation of Prevent in the borough following the spotlight review held in the previous year; and an update on Policing in the borough.



# HOW TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SCRUTINY

The work of Overview and Scrutiny should be informed by the issues that matter to those who live or work in St Helens. A key component of how issues are prioritised within scrutiny work programmes is whether there is public interest in an issue.

Help us to ensure the work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees reflect the priorities of the public by telling us what you think we should focus on in 2021/22. Our Committees have the ability within the rules

governing overview and scrutiny to scrutinise anything affecting the borough, this means more than just council run services and includes health services, community safety (e.g. police and fire services), voluntary and community services, and regional/national services.

You can contact us by using the channels listed below or submit a suggestion for our work programme using the Scrutiny pages on the council's website.

## CONTACT US

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