

**Report to:** Governance Committee

**Date of meeting:** 10 December 2024

**By:** Deputy Chief Executive

**Title:** Scrutiny Activity Update

**Purpose:** To provide an overview of scrutiny activity being undertaken by the People, Place and Health Overview Scrutiny Committees and an update on the work of the Audit Committee.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The committee is recommended to note the updates on scrutiny and Audit Committee activity and the current work programmes at appendices 1-4 of the report.

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## **1 Background**

1.1 These six-monthly reports aim to provide the Governance Committee with a summary of activity across the People, Place and Health Overview Scrutiny Committees and the work of the Audit Committee to support the visibility and effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny activity.

1.2 This report outlines developments since the last update, particularly from the committee meetings held in June/July and September/October 2024. The current work programmes for the committees are attached at appendices 1-4. An overview of planned scrutiny review and reference group activity over the coming months across the three scrutiny committees is attached at appendix 5. This reflects that the current scrutiny committees are concluding their final scrutiny reviews ahead of the ESCC election in May 2025, in order to ensure reports can be considered by committees, Cabinet and Council before the election. Although there is now insufficient time to undertake and report further reviews before next May, committees have full programmes of committee and reference group activity up to spring 2025. It is not proposed that new reviews are started which risk straddling electoral terms, which would present potential challenges around continuity and duplication, and it is not clear whether these would be the areas that future committees will want to focus on.

1.3 All committees continue to be supported to develop their scrutiny practice and to deepen their understanding of the context for services and issues within their remit. Members of People and Place Scrutiny have requested that training is delivered primarily through 'bite-sized' sessions and these briefing or training sessions continue to be arranged as topics are identified by the committees.

1.4 Following some changes to the memberships of People Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee, new committee members have been offered an induction to support them in taking up their roles. Recruitment is currently underway for two Independent Member positions on the Audit Committee, as previously agreed by the County Council. The independent co-opted members will be appointed by the Governance Committee in due course under delegated authority.

## **2 People Scrutiny Committee**

2.1 The latest version of the committee's work programme (attached at appendix 1) captures the full range of activity underway or planned. Key elements are outlined below.

### ***Committee meetings and awayday***

2.2 The committee met in July 2024 to consider:

- **Children’s Services Work with IMPOWER** – the committee received an update on the department’s work on placement sufficiency, including the introduction of the Valuing Care approach; development of the fostering service; and enhanced market management and commissioning. The committee welcomed initial successes from this work and discussed the recruitment and support offer for foster carers.
- **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)** – the committee considered relevant parts of the quarter 4 (end of year) 2023/24 monitoring report and the 2024 State of the County report which together provided an overview of performance achievements and challenges, and forthcoming developments, for the services within the committee’s remit. The committee was able to ensure that key areas of interest were reflected in its work programme and identify areas for further consideration. Members also established a RPPR Board to consider draft Portfolio Plans and the developing financial outlook later in the year.
- **Adult Social Care and Health Equality and Inclusion Scrutiny Review Progress Report** – the committee received a 6 month progress report on the implementation of recommendations made by this review. The committee welcomed the progress made, including increased engagement with homeless people and the continued focus to work with gypsy and traveller communities.
- **Use of Digital and Technology in Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Review Progress Report** – the committee received a 12 month progress report on the implementation of recommendations made by this review. The committee sought assurance on safety procedures for storing records digitally and the department’s ongoing focus on digital inclusion.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the March committee, including an update on the School Attendance Review, and agreed updates to the work programme.

2.3 In September 2024 the committee met to consider:

- **School Exclusions Scrutiny Review Progress Report** - the committee received a 6 month progress report on the implementation of recommendations made by this review. The committee discussed support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- **RPPR update** – the committee discussed a report to be considered by Cabinet on 26 September detailing the latest financial outlook and the Council’s response to financial pressures, including a recommendation to begin public consultation on a range of specific potential savings. The committee discussed the potential impacts of these savings and sought assurances on the consultation and RPPR process, including the development of equality impact assessments.
- **East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2023-2024** – the committee received an annual update on the work of the East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board and asked questions about safeguarding referrals from partners, as well as support for unpaid carers in safeguarding enquiries.
- **Annual Review of Safer Communities** – the committee received an annual update on the work and performance of the East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership and asked questions on issues including work to raise awareness of domestic abuse, perceptions of crime in local communities, and work to educate children and young people on violent extremism.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the July committee and agreed to review the work programme in more detail at its forthcoming awayday.
- **Healthy Ageing Scrutiny Review Report** - the committee agreed the final report of the Review Board. The committee welcomed the report and discussed the benefits of physical activity, including how this could support mental health and bereavement.

2.4 In October the committee held its annual work planning **awayday** which provided an opportunity to consider current and forthcoming challenges for the services within the committee's remit, including departments' approaches to identifying savings and efficiencies, and areas Members wished to prioritise for further scrutiny. This followed on from consideration of the State of the County report in July and the RPPR update in September. Committee members discussed and asked Directors questions on pressures with children's care placements; SEND provision and home to school transport; Children's Services' work on prevention and early intervention; recruitment of foster carers; increased demand for social care and pressures on the community care budget; Adult Social Care and Health's approach to identifying savings, including consultations underway; and preparations for the upcoming Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment. The committee reviewed its work programme and agreed items that an incoming committee, following the County Council election, may wish to consider. This included potential scrutiny reviews of transport for all age care; support for carers; and recruitment of foster carers. The committee also agreed to recommend that a report on the initial impacts of agreed RPPR decisions is presented at the November 2025 meeting.

2.5 Further committee agenda items, including those considered at the committee's recent November meeting include:

- East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Annual Report;
- Loneliness Stewardship Group;
- Adult Social Care Peer Review and CQC assessment preparations;
- Transition in services;
- Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report;
- Progress updates on prevention and Valuing Care work in Children's Services; and
- Further work on the 2024/25 RPPR process.

### **Reference Groups**

2.6 People Scrutiny Reference Groups continued their work to provide Member input to areas of work being led by departments:

- **Health and Social Care Integration Programme (HASCIP) Reference Group** (membership: Councillors Clark, Geary (Chair), Ungar and Webb). This group meets as required to review the latest developments in local health and social care integration. The Group last met in June 2024 to consider the Integrated Care System (ICS) Shared Delivery Plan year 2 refresh.
- **Prevention in Children's Services Reference Group** (membership: Councillors Howell (Chair), Cross and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)). This group provides the committee with an opportunity to consider work to develop preventative approaches including Family Hubs and the Family Safeguarding model. The group last met in in June 2024 and agreed it was assured the Department was developing a range of work focused on prevention and to pause the Reference Group on the understanding that the Group would reconvene if there were significant work or policy developments that would benefit from more detailed scrutiny input.
- **CQC Assessment Reference Group** (membership: Councillors Cross, Geary (Chair), Howell, Ungar and Webb). The group provides support and scrutiny of preparations for the upcoming CQC assessment of Adult Social Care. The group last met in June 2024 to consider the findings from the Local Government Association Peer Challenge and the department's response to these findings.

### **Scrutiny Reviews**

2.7 The committee has recently completed a scrutiny review as outlined below, and continues to monitor progress with implementation of recommendations from its earlier reviews:

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| Healthy Ageing | This review considered how Adult Social Care and Health, and the Council more broadly, could respond to the needs of an increasing older population in |
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|  | <p>East Sussex, including through preventative approaches which support people to age well. The final report was agreed by the committee in September, including recommendations on supporting people to be physically active, tackling ageism, developing a more positive narrative of ageing in East Sussex and strengthening partnership work to further develop healthy ageing workstreams. The review was reported to Cabinet on 13 November 2024 and will go to Council in February 2025.</p> <p>The committee will consider progress reports in approximately 6 and 12 months time.</p> <p>Review Board membership was Councillors Geary, Pragnell, Ungar (Chair) and Webb.</p> |
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### 3 Place Scrutiny Committee

3.1 The committee's latest work programme (attached at appendix 2) outlines the full range of activity underway or planned. Key elements are outlined below.

#### ***Committee meetings and awayday***

3.2 The committee met in July 2024 to consider reports on:

- **RPPR** – as with People Scrutiny, the committee considered relevant parts of the quarter 4 (end of year) 2023/24 Council Monitoring report and the 2024 State of the County report which together provided an overview of performance achievements and challenges, and forthcoming developments, for the services within the committee's remit. The Committee was able to ensure that key areas of interest were reflected in its work programme and identify areas for further consideration at the awayday in October and future committee meetings in September and November. Members also established an RPPR Board to consider draft Portfolio Plans and the developing financial outlook in early December.
- **East Sussex Highways Year 1 Performance Report and Pothole Review Update** - the committee considered a report on the service performance for the first year of the highways maintenance contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) and an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Pothole Management. A further update report on the performance of the highways maintenance contract has been added to the work programme for July 2025.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the March meeting including the work of the Local Transport Plan (LTP4) Reference Group and Economic Growth Strategy Reference Group. The committee also agreed to proceed with a Scrutiny Review of Speed Limit Policy, following a recommendation from the scoping board.

3.3 The committee met again in September 2024 to consider reports on:

- **Scrutiny Review of Procurement: Social Value and Buying Local update** – The committee received a second update report on the implementation of the recommendations made by this scrutiny review. All the recommendations had been implemented and the committee agreed with a recommendation to extend the trial of a more qualitative approach to social value. The committee also received an update on the implications of the Procurement Act (2023) and National Procurement Policy Statement (2024) as part of this report.
- **County Hall Site Options - Asset Review** – Members received a report providing an overview of work that is being undertaken on the future use of the County Hall campus site (including the former St. Anne's school site), prior to a report being considered by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change. There were a range of views expressed on the options set out in the report, including that in the short to medium term it was important to reduce the running costs of County Hall and explore opportunities to let surplus office space to generate income, given the current occupancy levels and the Council's financial position.

- **Flood Risk Management and Climate Adaptation Measures** – the committee considered a combined update report on the Council's flood risk management activity under our role as the Lead Local Flood Authority and the Council's climate adaptation work, following the publication of the Government's third National Adaptation Programme.
- **RPPR update** – the committee discussed the report to be considered by Cabinet on 26 September detailing the latest financial outlook and the Council's response to financial pressures, including a recommendation to begin public consultation on a range of specific potential savings. The committee discussed the potential impacts of these savings and further information required to support the committee's ongoing contribution to the RPPR process.
- **Work programme update** - the committee reviewed the current work programme and received feedback from the LTP4 Reference Group which had completed its work on the LTP4 prior to it being considered by Cabinet and agreed by Full Council. The committee also agreed to add an update report on the performance of the highways maintenance contract for year 2 of the contract to the July 2025 meeting.

3.4 The committee held its annual work planning **awayday** in October which provided an opportunity to consider current and forthcoming challenges for the services within the committee's remit, including departments' approaches to identifying savings and efficiencies, and areas Members wished to prioritise for further scrutiny. Committee members discussed and asked Directors questions about: property asset disposals, revenue generating opportunities from property assets and the future use of County Hall including the former St. Anne's school site; the use of Artificial Intelligence technology; and financial and services information which would be helpful to the committee in understanding the background to savings proposals. The committee reviewed its work programme and discussed topics for potential scrutiny by an incoming committee after the May 2025 council elections.

3.5 Further committee agenda items, including those considered at the recent November meeting, include:

- A continuation of the committee's work on the 2024/25 RPPR process, including consideration of the November Cabinet RPPR report which included further information on savings proposals, an updated MTFP and capital programme. The committee also considered further information on fees and charges at the November scrutiny meeting.
- Water Supply Issues and Future Demand Planning - a presentation from South East Water and Southern Water about their longer terms plans for supplying water to East Sussex residents and businesses, and actions planned to tackle recent water supply interruptions in the county.
- The Scrutiny Review of Local Speed Limit Policy – the report of the Review Board.
- A call-in regarding the Lead Member for Transport and Environment decision in relation to the Eastbourne Town Centre Movement and access Package – phase 2a revised scope.
- Update reports on the Flexibus Service, which is part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).
- A 12 month update report on the implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Pothole Management.

### ***Reference and Working Groups***

3.6 Place Scrutiny Reference Groups continued their work to provide Member input to areas of work being led by departments:

- The **Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP)** Working Group (membership: Councillors Hilton, Lunn, Redstone (Chair) and Tutt) has met to provide scrutiny input into the future development of the corporate Climate Emergency Action Plan. This work has taken place over a series of three meetings held in July, October and November.
- The **Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4** Reference Group (membership: Councillors Beaver, Collier, Hilton, Hollidge, Lunn, Redstone (chair) Stephen Shing and Tutt) continued engagement work with officers and the Council's transport consultants Steer on the key

stages of the development of the revised LTP4. The group has now completed its work but will reconvene as required to provide input to related developments. The LTP4 was considered by Cabinet in September and agreed by Full Council in October 2024.

### **Scrutiny Reviews**

3.7 The committee's current programme of scrutiny reviews is as below:

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| <p>Scrutiny Review of Speed Limit Policy</p> | <p>The committee has conducted a review of local speed limit policy and the arrangements for setting and reviewing local speed limits, where the Council is able to set speed limits on local roads not part of the strategic road network. The lines of enquiry included: the purpose of a Speed Limit Policy and the key assessment criteria for an effective policy; how local speed limits are assessed, set and reviewed at ESCC and other local authorities; whether the ESCC Local Speed Limit Policy is in line with national guidance and other local authorities; whether the Council could make improvements to how it communicates the local Speed Limit Policy and wider policy context to residents; other measures for low speed environments; and the use of officer time spent undertaking assessments of road safety concerns and preparing petition reports .</p> <p>The Review Board met on six occasions during September, October and November. Its final report was agreed at the November Place Scrutiny Committee meeting and will be reported to Cabinet in January.</p> <p>Review Board membership consists of: Councillors Beaver, Hilton, Hollidge (Chair), Kirby-Green, Lunn, Murphy, Redstone and Wright.</p> |
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## **4 Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

4.1 Key work priorities for HOSC are set out in the attached work programme (appendix 3) with highlights below:

### **Committee meetings**

4.2 The HOSC met in July 2024 to consider reports on:

- **Changes to Paediatric Service Model at Eastbourne District General Hospital** – an update on the implementation of changes to this service and East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust's response to the recommendations of the HOSC review of the service changes.
- **NHS Sussex Audiology Services Overview** – consideration of a report on the provision of Audiology services in East Sussex following concerns raised with the committee. The committee agreed to conduct a scrutiny review of this service.
- **SECamb CQC report** – an update report on the progress of South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECamb) with improving services and organisational culture as part of the Recovery Support Programme following the CQC inspection.
- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee considered and agreed its future work programme priorities.

4.3 The committee met again in October 2024 to consider:

- **Access to NHS Dentistry Services** – a report from NHS Sussex on progress with enhancing access to routine and urgent NHS dental care in the county.
- **Access to General Practice** – the committee received an update on how NHS Sussex is working to improve GP access and on Primary Care Network (PCN) development.
- **NHS missed appointments** – to provide an overview of the work being undertaken to minimise missed appointments in secondary care.

- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee considered and agreed its future work programme priorities and requested additional progress reports on access to NHS dentistry and access to GPs for future meetings.

4.4 Key future committee agenda items include:

- a report on the NHS Sussex Winter Plan for 2024/25;
- an update report on University Hospitals Sussex (UHSx) NHS Foundation Trust’s hospital handovers at the Royal Sussex County Hospital;
- a report on proposed changes to colorectal cancer surgery pathways at UHSx.
- an update on the changes made to paediatric services at the Eastbourne District General Hospital in early 2024;
- a report on the implementation of the East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust Ophthalmology Transformation Programme;
- an update report on the progress of the SECamb improvement journey and exiting the Recovery Support Programme; and
- an update on the progress being made to improve access to NHS Dentistry services in East Sussex.

### ***Reference Groups and briefings***

4.5 The committee will be involved in further engagement work with NHS England on the implementation of proposals to change the provision of the children's specialist cancer services Principal Treatment Centre which is located in South London. HOSC representatives are also involved in regular informal meetings with Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust (SPFT) and other Sussex HOSC Chairs and Vice Chairs to consider the Trust’s work and other mental health service issues.

### ***Scrutiny Reviews***

4.6 The committee has agreed to undertake a review of the provision of Audiology services in East Sussex following concerns and issues raised with HOSC about the provision and access to services, including treatments for earwax removal, and a report on the services considered at the July meeting. The review board is comprised of councillors Azad, Belsey, Marlow-Eastwood, Robinson and Shuttleworth. Review Board meetings began in November with the aim of reporting to the March 2025 HOSC meeting.

## **5 Audit Committee**

5.1 The committee’s future areas of focus are set out in the work programme attached at appendix 4.

### ***Committee meetings***

5.2 The Audit Committee met in July 2024 and September 2024 to discuss reports on:

- Assessment of the Corporate Governance Framework and Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24;
- Internal Audit Services Annual Report and Opinion 2023/24;
- Counter Fraud Annual Report 2023/24;
- Audit Committee: Annual Report 2023/24;
- Audit Committee Oracle Subgroup Update;
- Strategic Risk Monitoring – Quarter 4 2023/24;
- Internal Audit Progress Report – Quarter 1 2024/25;
- Findings Update on the East Sussex County Council External Audit 2023/24;
- Findings Update on the East Sussex Pension Fund External Audit 2023/24;
- CIPFA Financial Management Code;

- Strategic Risk Monitoring – Quarter 1 2024/25; and
- Audit Committee work programme.

5.3 The Audit Committee agreed its first Annual Report to Governance Committee following a recommendation within the CIPFA Position Statement for Audit Committees to produce such a report, which will provide an overview of the work of the committee over the previous year.

5.4 Further agenda items, including those considered at the committee's recent November meeting, comprise the usual quarterly consideration of Internal Audit reports and the Strategic Risk Register, together with:

- Review of Annual Governance Report and 2023/24 Statement of Accounts;
- Review of Annual Pension Fund Governance Report and 2023/24 Statement of Accounts;
- External Auditor's Value for Money Report;
- Treasury Management Annual Report and Mid-Year Report 2024;
- Annual Update on Property Investment Strategy and Key Sites 6 Monthly Update;
- An update report on the Oracle Implementation Subgroup;
- External Audit Plan for East Sussex County Council 2024/25;
- External Audit Plan for East Sussex Pension Fund 2024/25; and
- Internal Audit Strategy and Plan 2025/26.

#### ***Briefings and working groups***

5.5 The Working Group which provides oversight of the Oracle Implementation (previously MBOS) programme met in May and June, reporting progress to the Audit Committee in July. The group met again in November and provided a further report of progress to the Audit Committee meeting on 22 November. It will continue meeting regularly over the coming months.

5.6 Audit Committee Members will be invited to a planning session with Internal Audit in January 2025 to plan for the next financial year of internal audit work.

## **6 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

6.1 This report provides an overview of recent scrutiny and Audit Committee work and a look forward at planned activity for the Governance Committee to note. It is unlikely that there will be a further update in this electoral term.

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