

**Report to:** Governance Committee

**Date of meeting:** 24 June 2025

**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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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Governance Committee is recommended to note the updates on Scrutiny and Audit Committee activity and the current work programmes at Appendices 1- 4.**

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## **1 Background**

1.1 These six-monthly reports aim to provide the Governance Committee with a summary of scrutiny activity and issues of note 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 in December 2024, particularly from the committee meetings held in late November 2024 and in March 2025. 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.

1.3 In February 2025 the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group discussed the approach to scrutiny oversight and engagement in local programmes of work related to devolution and local government reorganisation and agreed a proposal for a joint scrutiny Reference Group with membership drawn from both Place and People Committees, recognising the cross-cutting impacts of the reforms on Council services. On the recommendation of Governance Committee, Full Council subsequently agreed in March to extend the remit of Place Scrutiny Committee as the lead committee to facilitate this. Chairs and Vice Chairs also noted the ongoing oversight role for Audit Committee in relation to related risks, and agreed to keep these arrangements under review, ensuring appropriate Scrutiny and Audit Committee engagement in the work as it progressed. Details of the establishment of the Reference Group are in the Place Scrutiny section of this report.

1.4 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. Recent sessions have included briefings on the Life Transitions Service (open to all Members) and on preparation for the Care Quality Commission assessment of Adult Social Care.

1.5 Following a change to the membership of People Scrutiny Committee, a new committee member received an induction to support them in taking up their role. Recruitment for two Independent Member positions on the Audit Committee was unsuccessful in 2024. New recruitment for the positions will commence in 2025 and if successful, 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***

2.2 The committee met in November 2024 to consider:

- **East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Annual Report** – the committee received an annual update on the work of the ESSCP and discussed and asked questions about safeguarding persistently absent children and home educated children, and recorded sexual offences related to Looked After Children.
- **Transition in Services** – the committee received a report by Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH), in partnership with the Children's Services Department (CSD), on transition in services, including the Preparing for Adulthood Model. The committee discussed the role of parents in transition arrangements; eligibility for services; and employment and education support.
- **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)** – the committee discussed the RPPR update report considered by Cabinet earlier in the month which provided an update on the policy context, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), capital programme, and the Council's response to significant financial pressures. The committee discussed the challenging financial outlook for the Council, in particular the pressures facing ASCH and CSD, as well as the impact of recent announcements in the Government's Autumn Budget, and the Council's response to these pressures, including its approach to identifying savings.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the September meeting and agreed updates to the work programme as discussed at its annual awayday in October.
- **Loneliness Stewardship Group** – the committee received a report on the progress of the Connected People and places project focussed on tackling loneliness in East Sussex. The committee welcomed the report and discussed partner engagement and work with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector; loneliness in rural communities; community groups; and digital inclusion.
- **ASC Peer Review and Care Quality Commission (CQC) preparations** – the committee received an update on the preparation for the upcoming CQC assessment. The committee welcomed the engagement with scrutiny and commented on the thorough preparation undertaken by the ASCH Department.

2.3 In March 2025 the committee met to consider:

- **Call-ins** – the committee considered call-ins of two decisions made by Cabinet regarding the proposal to close the Linden Court Day Service for people with a learning disability and merge it with Beeching Park day service, and the proposal to reduce the funding for the Housing-Related Floating Support Service. The committee considered the information provided by the Director of ASCH in response to the points raised and discussed a range of issues including the impact of the decisions on a future unitary authority and on district and borough councils; the impact of public consultations; alternative provision; and the wider implications of the proposals. Following discussion, the committee voted to refer both matters to Full Council for further consideration.
- **School Exclusions Scrutiny Review** – the committee received a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the School Exclusions Scrutiny Review.
- **National policy developments in Children's Services** – the committee received a report on key national policy developments in Children's Services, including the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The committee discussed costs and funding to deliver the reforms; the department's use of agency workers, departmental priorities and educational

outcomes. The committee agreed to include regular updates on this item on its work programme.

- **Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report** – the committee received the annual report which outlined the work of SACRE for 2023-24. The committee welcomed the work of SACRE, including the addition of a Humanist representative and school visits arranged by SACRE.
- **RPPR update** - the committee reviewed scrutiny input into the 2024/25 RPPR process, including ensuring relevant topics were incorporated into the scrutiny work programme to support the committee's ongoing contribution to RPPR.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the November committee and agreed to establish a Reference Group focussed on Children's Services Reforms; establish a scoping board for a potential scrutiny review on transport for all age care; and to receive a report on the Climate Change Health Impact Assessment.
- **Equality and Inclusion in ASCH Scrutiny Review** – the committee received a progress report on the recommendations of the Equality and Inclusion in ASCH Scrutiny Review. The committee welcomed the positive outcomes in the report and discussed the East Sussex Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Health Inequalities Partnership Group and the ASCH complaints process.

2.4 Future committee agenda items include:

- Climate Change Health Impact Assessment;
- Progress on the recommendations of the Healthy Ageing Scrutiny Review;
- Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (ASEND) inspection report;
- Safeguarding Adults Board - Annual Report;
- Annual Review of Safer Communities; and
- Work on the 2025/26 RPPR process.

### **Reference Groups**

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

- **School Attendance** – Reference Group (membership: Councillors Field and Howell and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)). This Group was established to provide timely input into targeted programmes in relation to school attendance. The Group met in January 2025 and considered the latest attendance data, national guidance and legislation, and progress of current initiatives. The Group welcomed the number of initiatives underway to improve school attendance and discussed engagement with parents and support for families, attendance for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and mental health support. The Committee agreed at its March 2025 meeting to combine the work of this group with the Reference Group focussed on Prevention in Children's Services into one Reference Group that would consider both areas, as well as the Department's response to wider national policy reforms.
- **RPPR Board** - The committee forms an RPPR Board annually to agree detailed comments and any recommendations on the emerging portfolio plans and spending and savings proposals to be put to Cabinet on behalf of the scrutiny committee. The Board met on 5 December 2024 and considered the financial outlook for the Council, relevant department portfolio plans, and savings proposals. The Board expressed concern about the financial challenges facing the Council and recognised the need to take steps to reduce the budget deficit. The Board welcomed the work and priorities of the departments, including a focus on prevention and managing demand.

## Scrutiny Reviews

2.6 The committee has completed a scrutiny review and has recently scoped a potential future scrutiny review, as outlined below. The committee continues to monitor progress with implementation of recommendations from its earlier reviews.

Healthy Ageing	<p>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 East Sussex, including through preventative approaches which support people to age well. The committee's report and the department's response were reported to Full Council in February 2025.</p> <p>The committee will consider progress reports at approximately 6 and 12 months.</p> <p>Review Board membership was Councillors Geary, Pragnell, Ungar (Chair) and Webb.</p>
Transport for all age care	<p>At its 2024 away day the committee discussed the challenges in transport for care and home to school transport and agreed that this, in collaboration with Children's Services and Adult Social Care and Health, could be a potential topic for a future scrutiny review.</p> <p>An initial scoping board was held on 8 May 2025 where Members considered current statutory duties around transport in both adult social care and education; cost pressures; and programmes of work, planned and underway, to address these.</p> <p>The Board agreed that it was not currently the right time for a scrutiny review into this area, due to work in progress, but that an update on transport policy in ASCH would be brought to the Committee when appropriate. The Board agreed that a rapid review in the autumn into some specific issues in home to school transport could add value. A further scoping board will be arranged to look at these areas in more detail.</p> <p>Membership of the Scoping Board: Cllrs Belsey, Cross, Howell and Pragnell and John Hayling (Parent Governor representative)</p>

## 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**

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

- **Water Supply Future Demand Planning and Water Supply Issues** – Members received a presentation from South East Water on their plans for future water supply in East Sussex and their response to recent water supply issues in the county. The committee received a separate presentation from Southern Water on the process of developing its latest Water Resources Management Plan.
- **RPPR** – as with People Scrutiny, the committee considered the RPPR update report considered by Cabinet earlier in the month, which included an updated MTFP, savings proposals and capital programme update. The committee discussed the challenging financial outlook and the potential impacts on some areas of focus for the committee, including climate change and highway maintenance.
- **Fees and charges (RPPR)** – the committee considered a report on the fees and charges applied by the services within the remit of the committee in order to understand how the council maximises its income as part of the RPPR process.
- **Scrutiny Review of Local Speed Limit Policy** – the committee received the report of the Review Board, which represented the first stage of the committee's work on this issue.

The committee noted that further work was required to explore some of the issues raised by Members and retained a potential further review of this topic on its future work programme.

- **Call-In of Decision Made by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment regarding Eastbourne Town Centre Management and Access Package - Phase 2a Revised Scope** – the committee considered the call-in and the department's response to points raised in the call-in request. In its response the department confirmed that, in line with the initial call-in request, public display boards would be provided in Eastbourne to inform residents of the revised scheme, and the committee agreed to take no further action.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the September meeting including the work of the Climate Emergency Action Plan working group. The committee also agreed to establish a working group to provide input to the update of the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

3.3 The committee held an additional meeting on 13 March 2025 to consider a report on:

- **Call-in: Decision made by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment regarding the Proposed implementation of a booking system at Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRS)** – the committee considered the call-in and additional information provided by the department in response to the issues raised in the initial call-in request. The committee discussed how the booking system would operate, the public consultation response, traders' use of HWRS, potential impact on fly-tipping, queuing at sites, out of area use of HWRS and the Equality Impact Assessment. The committee resolved to take no further action on the call-in.

3.4 The committee met again on 20 March 2025 to consider reports on:

- **RPPR** – the committee reviewed scrutiny input into the 2024/25 RPPR process, including ensuring relevant topics were incorporated into the scrutiny work programme to support the committee's ongoing contribution to RPPR.
- **Review of the Flexibus Service** – the committee received a report evaluating the use and success of the Flexibus service. The committee commented on the success of the service and the high level of customer satisfaction and asked about future funding for the service beyond the current Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) allocation period.
- **Scrutiny Review of Pothole Management update** – the committee received a second update report on the implementation of the recommendations made by the scrutiny review. All but one of the recommendations had been implemented and work to deliver the remaining recommendation relating to the development of a drainage strategy was underway.
- **Work programme update** - the committee reviewed the current work programme. Following the agreement of the committee's revised terms of reference by Council, the committee agreed to establish a Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation reference group, to include members of the People Scrutiny Committee. The committee noted that devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR) would be significant areas of work for the committee to examine, and this may need to take priority over other issues on the work programme.

3.5 Future committee agenda items include:

- work on the 2025/26 RPPR process, including consideration of the 2024/25 year end Council Monitoring report and the State of the County report in July;
- the highways maintenance contract end of year 2 update report;
- an update on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP); and
- the first update report on the implementation of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Local Speed Limit Policy.

## 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:

- **Asset Management Strategy** – Working Group (membership: Councillors Hilton, Hollidge, Lunn, Murphy (Chair), Redstone and Wright). The group was established to provide scrutiny input into the update to the Council's Asset Management Strategy. The group met in March and the department sought Member views on how best to proceed with the update to the strategy in the context of changes to local government as a result of devolution and LGR. The group recommended a light refresh of the existing strategy, and agreed to meet again at an appropriate time after Government feedback on the East Sussex interim LGR proposal had been received.
- **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation** – Reference Group (membership: all Place Scrutiny Committee members, and People Scrutiny members Councillors Cross, Geary, Howell and Pragnell. Chair: Cllr Hollidge). The group has been established to provide timely scrutiny input into the development of plans for both devolution and LGR. An initial meeting was held in May, and the Reference Group will continue to meet as these processes develop.
- **RPPR Board** – The committee forms an RPPR Board annually to agree detailed comments and any recommendations on the emerging portfolio plans and spending and savings proposals to be put to Cabinet on behalf of the scrutiny committee. The Board met on 9 December 2024 and considered the financial outlook for the Council, relevant department portfolio plans, and savings proposals. The Board commented that while it would not wish for the Council to make savings, it recognised the very challenging financial position, and that savings were necessary to address the budget deficit.

## Scrutiny Reviews

3.7 The committee has recently completed a scrutiny review and continues to monitor progress with implementation of recommendations from its earlier reviews.

Scrutiny Review of Speed Limit Policy	<p>The review considered the 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. As part of the terms of reference, the review was split into two parts, with the second part subject to the committee's agreement and the completion of the Local Transport Plan 4 Request Assessment Process. The committee's report and the department's response were reported to Council in February 2025.</p> <p>The committee will consider progress reports at approximately 6 and 12 months.</p> <p>Review Board membership was 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 December 2024 to consider reports on:

- **NHS Sussex Winter Plan 2024/25** – to scrutinise local NHS organisations' preparations and plans for the winter period.
- **Changes to Paediatric Service Model at Eastbourne District General Hospital** – an update on the implementation of changes to this service made by East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust following HOSC's review and recommendations.
- **Ambulance Handovers at the Royal Sussex County Hospital** – a progress report on work to reduce hospital handover delays at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton.

- **Proposed changes to Colorectal Cancer Surgery Pathway at University Hospitals Sussex (UHSx)** – the committee received an overview of proposed changes to elective colorectal cancer surgery across UHSx hospital sites. After exploring the impact of the proposals for East Sussex patients, Members agreed that the plans did not constitute a substantial variation in services.
- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee considered and agreed its future work programme priorities.

4.3 The committee met again in March 2025 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.
- **Ophthalmology Transformation at East Sussex Healthcare Trust (ESHT)** – a report updating the HOSC on the implementation of ESHT’s ophthalmology transformation programme and progress with HOSC’s recommendations in its review of the changes conducted in 2022.
- **SECamb update** – an update report on the South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SECamb) performance and progress in improving services and organisational culture as part of the NHS England Recovery Support Programme following its 2022 CQC inspection.
- **HOSC Review of Audiology Services in East Sussex** – to agree the report and recommendations of the HOSC Review Board following its review of NHS audiology services.
- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee considered and agreed its future work programme priorities and requested additional progress reports on access to NHS dentistry.

4.4 Key future committee agenda items include:

- a feedback report on the NHS Sussex Winter Plan for 2024/25;
- a report on the implementation and mobilisation of the new Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service contract;
- a progress update on work to improve primary care access;
- a further update on the paediatric service model changes at Eastbourne District General Hospital; and
- a response from NHS Sussex to the HOSC Review of Audiology Services.

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

4.5 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 recently completed a scrutiny review and continues to monitor progress on the implementation of service changes that have been subject to its earlier reviews, as well as upcoming changes to the delivery of the health services for the residents of East Sussex that it may wish to review.

Scrutiny Review of Audiology services in East Sussex	<p>The committee conducted a review of audiology services following concerns and issues raised about the provision and access to services, including treatments for earwax removal, and a report on the services considered at the July 2024 meeting.</p> <p>The Review Board reported its findings and recommendations to the HOSC in March 2025, having concluded that audiology services are currently unsatisfactory and have substantially diminished since before the COVID-19</p>
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	<p>pandemic. The Board found there was a lack of clarity on what services people were entitled to receive on the NHS and had concerns about the level of funding being made available for the recommissioning of a new age-related hearing loss contract. NHS Sussex will provide the committee with a response to the report and recommendations at the September 2025 meeting.</p> <p>The review board was comprised of councillors Azad, Belsey, Marlow-Eastwood, Robinson (Chair), and Shuttleworth.</p>
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## 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 November 2024 and March 2025 to discuss reports on:

- Internal Audit Progress Report – Quarters 2 and 3 2024/25
- Audit Committee Oracle Working Group Update;
- Review of Annual Governance Report and 2023/24 Statement of Accounts
- Review of Annual Pension Fund Governance Report and 2023/24 Statement of Accounts
- Auditor's Annual (Value for Money) Report on East Sussex County Council 2023/24
- Treasury Management – Stewardship Report 2023/24 and Mid-Year Review 2024/25
- Annual update on the Council's Property Assets
- External Audit Plan 2024/25
- External Audit Plan for the East Sussex Pension Fund 2024/25
- East Sussex County Council and East Sussex Pension Fund: IT Systems Audit Findings Report
- Strategic Risk Monitoring – Quarters 2 and 3 2024/25; and
- Audit Committee work programme.

5.3 The committee's future agenda items include the usual quarterly consideration of Internal Audit reports and the Strategic Risk Register, together with:

- Assessment of the Corporate Governance Framework and Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25
- Internal Audit Services Annual Report and Opinion 2024/25
- Counter Fraud Annual Report
- Audit Committee Annual Report
- Internal Audit Self-Assessment against new Global Internal Audit Standards and updated Internal Audit Charter
- Financial Management Code

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

5.4 The Working Group which provides oversight of the Oracle Implementation programme met monthly in November, December, January, February and March leading up to go-live for Phase 2 of the programme, reporting progress to the Audit Committee in March. The group met again on 1 May following go-live and will provide a further report of progress to the Audit Committee in July.



5.5 Audit Committee Members attended 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.

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