

Report to: Governance Committee

Date of meeting: 16 December 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.

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.

1 Background

1.1 These six-monthly reports aim to provide the Governance Committee with a summary of scrutiny 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 in June, particularly from the committee meetings held later in June/July and in September 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 June 2025 the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group met to reflect on the call-in process, following four call-in requests since November 2024 after a number of years of the process not being used. Chairs and Vice Chairs requested that officers prepare further guidance for Members to help navigate the process and clarify aspects of the Constitution. At the following meeting in September, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group agreed a proposed checklist to facilitate the call-in process which was approved by the Governance Committee in October to be adopted as the basis for future call-in requests. The Committee also agreed a recommendation to extend the call-in period from 4 days to 5, which was approved by Full Council on 2 December 2025.

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. For example, a session has been held for Place Scrutiny on artificial intelligence and one is planned for People Scrutiny on the carers' partnership strategy. Scrutiny Members have also attended recent briefings on highways, food waste, education and prevention in adult social care (open to all Members). A joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) training event has been held with West Sussex and Brighton and Hove HOSCs, covering approaches to the health scrutiny role in the current context. People and Place Scrutiny Committees have

also been supported at recent awaydays to review their approach to using pre-meetings to develop priority lines of questioning ahead of committee meetings.

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 July 2025 to consider:

- **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)** – the committee considered relevant parts of the quarter 4 (end of year) 2024/25 monitoring report and the 2025 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 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) later in the year.
- **Work programme update** – the committee considered feedback from scrutiny activity undertaken since the March committee, including an update on scoping of a potential Transport for All Age Care Review, and agreed updates to its work programme.
- **SEND inspection report** – the committee discussed findings of the recent special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection of East Sussex Local Area Partnership and the partnership's response to the report. The committee discussed pressures within the service, including SEND support and high demand for education health and care plans (EHCPs), waiting times for mental health support and provision for post 16 year olds.
- **East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy** – the committee considered the East Sussex Housing Partnership Strategy and expressed concerns about housing planning processes, funding to support the work of the Partnership and work to support people with multiple compound needs.
- **Healthy Ageing 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 positive outcomes outlined in the report and discussed plans to further support older people in the workplace and the development of partnerships across the county to deliver healthy ageing initiatives.

2.3 In September 2025 the committee met to consider:

- **Work programme update** – the committee considered its work programme and agreed changes to reflect current priorities including adding reports on recent inspections of adult social care services and children's services.
- **Safeguarding adults board – annual report** – the committee received an annual report on the work of the East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board and asked questions about identifying and supporting adults who self-neglect, adults at risk of domestic abuse, safeguarding risks for family carers and homelessness.
- **Annual review of safer communities** – the committee received an annual report on the work and performance of the East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership and asked questions on issues including drug related offences and drug and

alcohol related deaths, multi-agency risk assessment conference referrals, shoplifting and community cohesion.

2.4 Further agenda items, including those considered at the committee's recent November meeting and planned for future meetings, include:

- Work on the 2025/26 RPPR process
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment report on Adult Social Care (ASC)
- East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Annual Report
- Ofsted focussed visit on children's social care
- Review of Adult Social Care and Health savings proposals implementation
- East Sussex Education Attainment and Performance
- SEND developments
- Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report

2.5 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 and identify areas Members wished to prioritise for further scrutiny. This followed on from consideration of the State of the County report in July. Committee members discussed and asked Directors questions on SEND demand and support; children's mental health; and areas of improvement identified by the CQC in its recent assessment of ASC, including data sharing with partners, support for carers, and provision of care for adults with complex needs. The Committee reviewed its work programme and agreed areas for further scrutiny. This included potential future scrutiny reviews of support for carers; the provision of care for adults with complex needs; and children's mental health. The committee also agreed to monitor progress of actions following the CQC assessment through its CQC Reference Group and to increase its focus on SEND through its Children's Services Reforms Reference Group.

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 Belsey, Clark, Geary (Chair), Howell and Webb). This group meets as required to review the latest developments in local health and social care integration. The group last met in October 2025 to consider quarterly progress on the Shared Delivery Plan, focusing on Integrated Community Teams, hospital discharge, and the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Group will hold further meetings aligned to key milestones in the integration programme.
- **Children's Services Reforms** Reference Group (membership: Councillors Belsey, Geary and Howell and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)). This group was established to consider the department's response to national reforms in children's services, including the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The group last met in June 2025 and discussed key reforms in children's social care and the department's work in response to these, including the establishment of a Transformation Board. It will meet again in 2026 to scrutinise work to address SEND pressures and consider potential impacts of SEND reforms in the anticipated Schools White Paper.
- **CQC Reference Group** - Reference Group (membership: Councillors Cross, Geary (Chair), Howell and Webb). This group was established to support the

department's preparations for the 2025 CQC assessment, including considering the Local Government Association Peer Review and the Department's response to these findings. Going forward the group will meet in January to begin monitoring the development and implementation of departmental actions in response to the CQC findings which have initially been considered by the full committee in November.

Scrutiny Reviews

2.7 The committee is beginning a new scrutiny review, as outlined below, and continues to monitor progress with implementation of recommendations from its earlier reviews.

Home to School Transport – Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel	<p>A further scoping board took place on 29 October 2025 which considered the current pressures, costs and statutory responsibilities related to Home to School Transport; cost avoidance measures in place to mitigate these; and national developments, including anticipated significant reforms in the awaited Schools White Paper. The board agreed that, in light of pending national reforms, a broad review of Home to School Transport would be unfeasible, however there was value in conducting a focused scrutiny review on Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training, aiming to identify barriers to uptake and explore supporting increased engagement.</p> <p>Board Membership: Councillors, Howell, Belsey and Webb and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative).</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

3.2 The committee met in July 2025 to consider reports on:

- **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)** – as with People Scrutiny, the committee considered relevant parts of the quarter 4 (end of year) 2024/25 Council Monitoring report and the 2025 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 future committee meetings in September and November. Members also established a RPPR Board to consider draft Portfolio Plans and the developing Medium Term Financial Plan in December.
- **Work programme update** – the committee reflected on its RPPR discussion and reviewed the work programme to ensure it reflected its priorities. The committee also agreed to establish a scoping board to explore a potential scrutiny review on street works, and to re-establish the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) Reference Group.
- **East Sussex Highways Year 2 Contract Performance** – the committee considered a report on the service performance for the second year of the highways maintenance contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP), focused on areas of performance where improvement plans were in place. A further update

report on the performance of the highways maintenance contract has been added to the work programme for 2026.

3.3 The committee met in September 2025 to consider reports on:

- **Work programme update** – the committee discussed its work programme, including a discussion on the Queensway Gateway Road in Hastings and an approach to scrutiny of the project once it had been completed, as well as how scrutiny can monitor major infrastructure projects as they are ongoing.
- **East Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)** – the committee received a report on recent project development and delivery associated with the LCWIP, as well as ESCC's response to Active Travel England's Local Authority Capability assessment. The committee welcomed active travel developments in the county given the limited funding available for schemes and discussed the importance of accessibility and wider active travel network integration and connectivity.
- **Scrutiny Review of Local Speed Limit Policy** – the committee received a six-month progress report on the implementation of the recommendations made by the scrutiny review. All the Department's responses to the recommendations were either completed or ongoing.

3.4 The committee also held its annual work planning **awayday** in September, which provided an opportunity to discuss how it wished to review the challenges with the construction of the Queensway Gateway Road in Hastings. The committee agreed to scope two potential reviews, one focused on the issues with the construction of the road since the point at which the Council took on responsibility for completion of the scheme, and a second to understand the role scrutiny can play in the oversight of major projects. The committee also reviewed its work programme to schedule reports for future meetings and raised areas of interest for training and briefings, including trading standards, verge cutting and the upcoming Government Road Safety Strategy.

3.5 Further committee agenda items, including those considered at the committee's recent November meeting, and planned for future meetings include:

- A continuation of the committee's work on the 2025/26 RPPR process, including consideration of the November Cabinet RPPR report.
- Scrutiny Review of Procurement update and the introduction of the ESCC Social Value Model;
- Electric Vehicle (EV) charging procurement and roll-out;
- Call-in: Decision made by the Lead Member for Transport and Environment regarding the proposed relocation of Hastings Register Office;
- Notice of Motion: 20mph speed limits in new developments
- SPACES programme and property asset disposal; and
- Scrutiny review of local speed limit policy – 12-month update.

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:

- **Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** – Reference Group (membership: all Place Scrutiny Committee members, and People Scrutiny members Councillors Cross, Geary and Howell. Chair: Cllr Hollidge). The group was established to provide timely scrutiny input into the development of plans for

both devolution and LGR, including by providing comments to inform Cabinet decisions. The Reference Group met in September to consider and comment on the One East Sussex LGR proposal and the content of the proposed Statutory Instrument to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Sussex. The Reference Group met again on 26 November 2025 to discuss the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA) governance arrangements, including the draft Local Assurance Framework, and will hold a further meeting on 17 February 2026. The Reference Group will continue to meet as these processes develop.

- **Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4)** – Reference Group (membership: Councillors Beaver, Collier, Hilton, Hollidge, Lunn, Redstone (chair), Stephen Shing and Tutt). The reference group was re-established to be briefed on and provide input to the supporting documents of the LTP4. The Reference Group met on 3 September to receive a briefing on the request assessment process ahead of it going to Lead Member for Transport and Environment for approval. It met again on 12 November to provide input into the upcoming review of East Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- **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, and will resume its work once the plans for LGR in East Sussex are clearer.
- **Exceat Bridge** – Reference Group (membership: Councillors Murphy, Redstone, Stephen Shing, and Wright). The committee has established a Reference Group to scrutinise and provide input to the planning and oversight of the bridge replacement project before and during construction. An initial meeting is planned for December or January to consider project background and initiation, followed by further meetings during 2026 and 2027 to scrutinise the progress of the project as it develops.

Scrutiny Reviews

3.7 The committee has recently begun a new scrutiny review, as outlined below and continues to monitor progress with implementation of recommendations from its earlier reviews.

Street Works	<p>The committee held a scoping board on 20 October to consider a potential review on street works. The scoping board agreed to progress with a review to focus on network management and how the Council works with utility companies to minimise the impact of street works. The board agreed to undertake further scoping to refine the terms of reference of the review to ensure it is focused on the main areas where there are concerns about the approach to street works taken by utility companies.</p> <p>The review board met again on 27 November to discuss the approach to managing the network and challenges that highways officers encounter, and plans to hold a number of meetings over the coming months, including with officers and representatives from utility companies, with a view to bringing a draft report to the March committee meeting.</p> <p>Board membership: Councillors Hilton, Hollidge, Lunn, Murphy (Chair) and Redstone.</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 June 2025 to consider reports on:

- **NHS Sussex Winter Plan 2024/25** – the committee scrutinised an evaluation report on the outcomes of the NHS Sussex Winter Plan for 2024/25. The review highlighted key areas of improvement to be incorporated into planning for Winter 2025/26, including East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) having one of the highest proportions of NCTR (no criteria to reside) patients awaiting discharge in the country, and plans to integrate care in multi-disciplinary teams for the following winter.
- **Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service** – the committee scrutinised a report on the implementation and mobilisation of the new Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service contract. The committee highlighted concerns from residents about the booking system in the new contract, and the frequency of cancelled journeys and requested further follow-up and assurance from NHS Sussex on improvements in these areas.
- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee received a verbal update from NHS Sussex about changes to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and considered and agreed its future work programme priorities.

4.3 The committee met again in September 2025 to consider:

- **Access to General Practice in East Sussex** – the committee considered a progress report on work to improve primary care access in East Sussex. The committee highlighted concerns about digital inclusion if the 10-year Health Plan aims to move routes to accessing to primary care online.
- **NHS Sussex Update** – the committee received a verbal report from NHS Sussex regarding changes to the ICB and services in East Sussex.
- **Children and Young People Mental Health Update** – the committee considered a progress report on mental health services for children and young people, including CAMHS, mental health in schools, and access to neurodevelopmental services.
- **HOSC future work programme** – the committee considered and agreed its future work programme priorities and requested additional progress reports on the implementation of the new audiology contract and Neighbourhood Health Teams.

4.4 Key future committee agenda items, including those that will be considered at the committee's December meeting include:

- a report on NHS organisations' preparations and plans for the winter period 2025/26;
- a report on the ESHT planned capital works programme detailing the infrastructure works at the Conquest, Eastbourne District General and Bexhill Hospitals;
- a progress report on the ESHT cardiology transformation programme;
- a report on proposed changes to Uckfield day surgery;
- a progress report from SECamb on their improvement journey and exiting the Recovery Support Programme;

- a further report on the mobilisation of 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 completed a scrutiny review earlier this year and continues to monitor the implementation of service changes that have been subject to its earlier reviews, including paediatric and cardiology services at ESHT as noted above, 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 pandemic. NHS Sussex will provide the committee with a full response to the report and recommendations, as well as a progress report on the mobilisation of the over-55s hearing aid contract for Sussex, at the March 2026 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 July 2025 and September 2025 to discuss reports on:

- Assessment of the Corporate Governance Framework and Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25
- Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2024/25
- Counter Fraud Annual Report 2024/25
- Audit Committee Oracle Subgroup Update
- Strategic Risk Monitoring - Quarter 4 2024/25
- Audit Committee: Annual Report 2024/25
- External Auditor's Report to those charged with governance and Annual Report 2024/25
- Internal Audit Progress report - Quarter 1 (01/04/25 - 30/06/25)

- Global Internal Audit Standards Self-Assessment and Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan
- CIPFA Financial Management Code
- Strategic Risk Monitoring - Quarter 1 2025/26
- 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. Further committee agenda items, (including those considered at the committee's recent November meeting) include:

- Auditor's Annual (Value for Money) Report on East Sussex County Council 2024/25;
- Oracle Subgroup Update;
- Management Update following Home to School Transport Internal Audit;
- Management Update following Home Care Contract Management Internal Audit;
- CIPFA Code of Practice on the Governance of Internal Audit in the UK Public Sector – Self Assessment and Action Plan; and
- Treasury Management Annual Report & Mid-Year Report 2025.
- Review of Annual Governance Report & 2024/25 Statement of Accounts
- Review of Annual Pension Fund Governance Report & Statement of Accounts
- External Audit Plan 2025/26
- External Audit Plan for East Sussex Pension Fund 2025/26
- Counter Fraud Strategy
- Property Services and Assets Update

Briefings and working groups

5.4 The Working Group which provides oversight of the Oracle Implementation programme met in September and reported progress to the Audit Committee in November. The subgroup will meet again in January 2026 as the programme moves towards phase 3 implementation.

5.5 Audit Committee Members will be invited to a planning session with Internal Audit in February 2026 to plan for the next financial year of internal audit work. This session also provides refresher training to the Audit Committee.

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 Governance Committee to note. The next update will be due in June 2026.

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