

Wirral Council

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report 2015/16**

1.0 STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR OF COORDINATING COMMITTEE

- 1.1 It has been another busy year for scrutiny balancing a range of different work priorities including a number of in-depth reviews and some shorter pieces of pre-decision scrutiny. The value of pre-decision scrutiny work is that it enables non-executive Members to influence decisions before they are taken. This leads to better decision-making and supports good governance which are key outcomes of good scrutiny.
- 1.2 The use of workshops to review the Wirral Plan and 2016/17 budget options has proved effective and these sessions were well-supported by Members. It is very positive to see an increase in the number of Members engaging in more detailed scrutiny sessions outside formal committee meetings.
- 1.3 In depth reviews have also continued to provide a means to deliver improved outcomes for residents and service users. The Safeguarding Children review involved a detailed examination of the safeguarding process and the Council teams and partners responsible. More importantly, however, the review panel heard evidence from service users and this insight was used to inform the final recommendations.
- 1.4 The volume and scope of work continues to be a challenge and the use of sub-committees, standing panels and task and finish groups continues to be key to managing the workload effectively. These mechanisms will continue to be essential as the Scrutiny Committees are re-focussed around the Wirral Plan in 2016/17.

Cllr Moira McLaughlin

2.0 OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS 2015/16

- 2.1 During 2015/16 the scrutiny function continued to develop in supporting improved corporate governance. The significant achievements of 2015/16 include:
- A series of workshops providing overview and scrutiny of the Wirral Plan. The feedback from these sessions has been considered in the development of the Plan's supporting strategies;
 - Detailed and comprehensive pre-decision scrutiny of the 2016/17 budget proposals which have influenced the budget setting process for the coming year.
- 2.2 The number of Elected Members engaged in task and finish work outside regular committee meetings has continued to grow increasing from 31 in 2014/15 to 36 in 2015/16. This is due to the increased use of scrutiny workshops to review major items such as the Wirral Plan and budget proposals. This wider participation demonstrates the increased interest and willingness of Members to engage in focussed one-off sessions. Workshops of this type provide the opportunity to go into more depth than would be possible through regular committee meetings whilst not requiring a long term commitment of time from Members.
- 2.3 Overall the number of scrutiny reviews initiated in-year remained consistent with the previous year. However, the number of reviews completed has reduced. This is

because task and finish work has been subject to delay, mainly due to limitations on Elected Member availability in convening scrutiny panel meetings.

- 2.4 Contrary to the previous municipal year, there were no call-in meetings required during 2015/16. However, a number of items were referred by Council as Notices of Motion for detailed examination. These are set out in the table below:

Notice of Motion	Committee	Date Reviewed
Mental Health Challenge	Families and Wellbeing	8 Sept 2015
Proposal for a Fire Station on Green Belt land in Saughall Massie	Regeneration & Environment	15 Sept 2015
Wirral's Economic Success	Regeneration & Environment	15 Sept 2015
44 Councillors	Coordinating Committee	30 Sept 2015
Supporting Wirral's Part in our Nuclear Industries	Regeneration & Environment	2 Dec 2015
Open Government	Transformation & Resources	3 Dec 2015
Hamilton Square – Effective Scrutiny of Controversial Scheme	Regeneration & Environment	18 Jan 2016
Seeking Fairness in Purchasing	Transformation & Resources	22 March 2016

- 2.5 Committee Chairs continued with their practice of holding agenda setting meetings with party spokespersons prior to formal committee meetings. This provided the opportunity for all groups to influence the shape of agendas and the scrutiny work programme throughout the year.
- 2.6 Agendas continued to include a mix of standing items (policy, performance and financial monitoring updates) alongside items from the agreed work programmes of the committees. Regular update reports were provided to monitor progress with the delivery of the work programme.

3.0 KEY WORK COMPLETED IN 2015/16

3.1 Wirral Plan Scrutiny

During November 2015, a series of three workshops were held for non-executive members, one for each of the Wirral Plan themes of People, Business and Environment. This pre-decision scrutiny provided Members with an opportunity to be briefed on delivery arrangements around the 20 pledges as well as being able to challenge and influence the emerging delivery plans. The feedback from these sessions was compiled into a report that went to Cabinet in March 2016. This feedback was also cascaded to all pledge sponsors and leads in order that it could be considered for inclusion, where appropriate, in the Plan's supporting strategies and action plans.

3.2 2016/17 Budget Scrutiny

Building on the model introduced in previous years, pre-decision scrutiny of the 2016/17 budget proposals was undertaken in January 2016 concurrent with the public consultation. This was facilitated through a series of workshops for each of the Policy and Performance Committees as a means to review all budget options that Members selected for detailed examination. This approach served to highlight those options seen to be less favourable or requiring further work. A report setting out the findings from these workshops was referred to Cabinet to inform its considerations and recommendations to the budget Council meeting in March.

3.3 Safeguarding Children

A detailed review of arrangements for Safeguarding Children has been undertaken by the Families and Wellbeing Committee. This gave members the opportunity to assure themselves that the Council and partners have adequate safeguarding mechanisms in place that work effectively. A Panel of 5 members met with a range of Council staff and partner organisations as well as families who have experience of the system. During the review, Members were advised that procedures are in place to enable practitioners to undertake their safeguarding duties effectively. Staff from a number of agencies expressed confidence that processes were sufficiently robust. However, meetings with a small number of families with experience of the social care system highlighted a number of issues and risks which required further investigation.

The final report was referred by the Committee in January and approved by Cabinet in March 2016. A further report will be provided in summer 2016 to demonstrate the progress made to implement the recommendations of this review.

3.4 Avoidable Admissions

This detailed review commenced in October 2015 to provide assurances that adequate plans are in place to enhance community-based services in order to reduce unplanned admissions to hospital. Members were also able to assess the effectiveness of the integration of health and social care and the development of partnership working. Sessions were held with representatives from many different health and care provider organisations including care homes, carer and patient representative groups and third sector organisations. The task and finish group was strengthened by the inclusion of a representative from Healthwatch Wirral. Evidence-gathering for the review is complete and it is anticipated that the report will be available for the September committee meeting.

3.5 Children are Ready for School

The Families and Wellbeing Committee was keen to prioritise this topic which aligns strongly with the Wirral Plan pledge. A scoping meeting was held in March 2016 with the evidence-gathering due to commence in the new municipal year.

3.6 Health & Care Performance Panel

The Families and Wellbeing Committee undertakes the Council's statutory duty to undertake health scrutiny which involves reviewing any matter relating to the

planning, provision and operation of health services in the Borough. The Health and Care Performance Panel was set up in 2014/15 and continued to review the performance of health and social care providers and commissioners in 2015/16. The Panel has seven members and met on six occasions between August 2015 and May 2016.

Members have fully engaged in reviewing the draft Quality Accounts, which are produced by the local health providers as an annual statement of the quality of services provided. A wide range of other topics were also reviewed including the following:

- Performance of Wirral Ways to recovery, the local provider of drug and alcohol recovery services;
- Performance of Wirral University Teaching Hospital, including financial pressures, infection prevention and the four hour A&E target;
- Macular degeneration and the sensory impairment service;
- Outcomes of the CQC inspection of Cheshire & Wirral Partnership Trust;
- Quality framework and performance measures for the health sector;
- Preparations of the health and care sector for winter pressures;
- Social care complaints process.

3.7 Children Sub-Committee

The Families and Wellbeing Committee also established the Children Sub-Committee to scrutinise the Council and partners in achieving outcomes for young people, focussing in particular on foundation years, school readiness, educational attainment and children's social care.

The Sub-Committee has 7 members and has met three times during the municipal year. A number of reports were considered during the year including the following:

- Early Years and Children's Centres;
- The redesign of Specialist Services (children's social care);
- Narrowing the attainment gap;
- Annual complaints report for Children and Young People's Department;
- School standards – attainment at GCSE and A Level in 2015;
- Post 16 qualifications and the impact on NEETs;
- An overview of feedback from recent Ofsted inspections;
- The performance indicators for Children's Centres;
- Special Guardianship Orders.

3.8 Cumulative Impact on Public Health

In September 2015, the Coordinating Committee set up a task and finish group to review the link between the density of licensed premises and fast food outlets on levels of alcohol consumption and poor diet in Wirral. The Panel sought to establish what powers, policies and initiatives are at the Council's disposal to mitigate the harmful impact of excessive alcohol consumption and poor diet.

The Panel heard evidence from a number of sources including Licensing, Public Health, Environmental Health, Trading Standards Planning and Merseyside Police.

Members are keen to establish if the Council is fully realising the powers available to improve public health outcomes. The review is at the stage of drawing its conclusions and will report to committee in September.

3.9 Tourism

The Regeneration and Environment Committee established a review of Tourism in December 2015 following an earlier report to the committee in July 2015. The review aligns with the Wirral Plan Pledge - Vibrant Tourism Economy. The review has focused on how the Council promotes and markets tourism in Wirral in order to identify and exploit any gaps in the tourism offer. The Panel has had a particular focus on the marketing of Wirral's key heritage assets as well as exploring the potential to promote non-commercial heritage sites. The review has also looked how the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) operates in promoting tourism to see if any funding opportunities could be identified and pursued. The review is scheduled to conclude and report to the September committee meeting.

3.10 Coastal Strategy

The Regeneration and Environment Committee has also carried out a review of Wirral's Coastal Strategy, specifically looking at progress in delivering the improved management of flood and coastal erosion risk in the borough. The Coastal Strategy, approved by Cabinet on 10 October 2013, identifies a timescale for intervention to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk and the preferred management arrangements and funding options for each distinct length of coast.

Members were interested to review the value for money the Council secures to deliver schemes from the levy it contributes to the Environment Agency (EA) as well as the opportunities identified to secure alternative funding to meet any shortfalls. As part of the review, a representative from the EA attended an evidence session to answer the Review Panel's questions on funding. It is anticipated the final report will be presented to first committee meeting of the new municipal year.

3.11 Disaster Recovery

Following a report in September 2015 highlighting uncertainty over the Council's ICT disaster recovery arrangements, the Transformation and Resources Committee set up a review in December 2015. An evidence session with senior ICT officers was held in February 2016 at which the Panel was assured that significant measures are being taken to increase the resilience of the Council's ICT infrastructure and reduce the risk and impact of a sustained ICT failure. It is anticipated the final report from this review will be available for the first committee meeting of the new municipal year.

3.12 Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Scrutiny

The LCRCA is responsible for strategic economic development, transport, housing, employment and skills in the City Region. An LCRCA Scrutiny Panel was established in 2014 to scrutinise the strategic activities and policy decisions of the Combined Authority. The Scrutiny Panel comprises of 14 Members, 2 from each constituent authority and 2 Members nominated from opposition parties. Officer support is drawn from each constituent Authority to assist the Scrutiny Panel.

At the start of 2015/16, the Scrutiny Panel agreed a work programme which included the following:

- European Funding – The review examined the commissioning framework underpinning the delivery of the 2014-2020 European Programme to ensure it secures the right outcomes for the City Region.
- Affordable Transport – The review examined the high and variable pricing of short-hop bus journeys across the City Region to determine how this could be addressed through the Combined Authority.
- Housing – This review seeks to monitor the development of the Liverpool City Region Housing Strategy at key stages of its development.

3.13 Spotlight Sessions

During 2015/16 members continued to request Spotlight Sessions as a means to explore single issues in an informal setting and to a greater level of detail than time would allow at a formal Committee meeting. In all cases, the invitation for these sessions was widened out to all Members and as such became 'scrutiny-led' briefing sessions as follows:

- The Vanguard Programme – led by Jon Develing (Chief Officer, Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group), Jo Goodfellow (Associate Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Wirral University Teaching Hospital) and Clare Fish (Strategic Director: Families & Wellbeing, Wirral Council);
- Services delivered by Wirral Community Trust – led by Karen Howell (Chief Executive, Wirral Community Trust) and Sandra Christie (Director of Nursing and Performance, Wirral Community Trust);
- Birkenhead Regeneration – led by David Ball, Head of Regeneration and Planning, Wirral Council).

4.0 NEW SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS 2016/17

4.1 On 27 June, Council agreed to introduce new arrangements for 2016/17 that will align Scrutiny with the delivery arrangements for the Wirral Plan. This will ensure the scrutiny function continues to provide effective challenge whilst also adding value to the Plan in delivering better outcomes for Wirral residents.

4.2 The new arrangements involve the establishment of three Overview and Scrutiny committees around the Wirral Plan themes of People, Business and Environment. These committees replace the four Policy and Performance Committees that were established in 2013.

4.3 To support the new arrangements and further develop the function to ensure it contributes to good governance and delivers value for money, the following will also be introduced:

- Greater coordination between committees in developing the Scrutiny Work Programme. This will be facilitated by regular informal meetings between the Chairs and spokespersons to review prioritisation, cross-cutting themes and capacity;

- Closer engagement with the Executive to ensure scrutiny achieves the greatest possible impact in supporting the delivery of the Wirral Plan;
- Increased use of scrutiny as a vehicle to enable the voice of service users and residents to be heard. This will be achieved by ensuring that customer/resident feedback is incorporated into the scrutiny review process;
- Setting clear objectives for scrutiny work with a clear focus on impact and improved outcomes for residents and service users;
- Maximising opportunities for the use of pre-decision scrutiny to influence and shape better decision-making;
- Reducing the focus on formal committee meetings and increasing the focus on scrutiny work that produces member-led reports with clear recommendations;
- Time-limiting task and finish work to free up capacity to undertake more scrutiny inquiries.