



COU/WS/20/010

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT



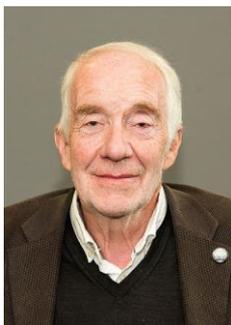
2019-2020

West Suffolk Council Annual Scrutiny Report 2019-2020

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Introduction



Councillor David Nettleton

**Chairman of the
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2019-2020**



Councillor Ian Houlder

**Chairman of the Performance and
Audit Scrutiny Committee
2019-2020**

Welcome to the first Annual Report of the overview and scrutiny functions at West Suffolk Council.

Scrutiny is central to effective decision-making within of the Council. It provides opportunities to examine the work of the Council or its partners in detail and suggest improvements. This Annual Report sets out the work of the two scrutiny committees during 2019-2020.

The report is not intended to cover all the work of the committees in great detail, but to present some examples of where and how scrutiny has contributed to change, challenge and service improvements, and to give you a flavour of the work undertaken.

We hope you find this Annual Report both informative and interesting, and that you will follow the progress of the scrutiny function at West Suffolk Council.

May 2020

What does Scrutiny do?

The scrutiny function of this and other councils was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, which required councils to set up new structures to replace the previous committee system. As part of this, councils were required to establish at least one "overview and scrutiny committee" to monitor decisions made and, where appropriate, to advise the Council on matters of policy or service delivery.

In May 2019, the Government issued Statutory Scrutiny Guidance which authorities are required to have regard to. As the Guidance sets out, overview and scrutiny "is fundamentally important to the effective functioning of local democracy. Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services drives improvement within the authority itself"

West Suffolk has two such committees. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks back at how and why decisions were made, how services are functioning and where improvements can be made, but in its role as community leader also looks at wider issues. It also examines new and evolving policies.

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for monitoring the performance of services, as well as internal audit, risk management and procurement, and has responsibility for scrutinising the Council's budget, including any proposals for cost reductions and approving the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsibilities:

- Community leadership
- Reviews
- Pre-decision scrutiny
- Post implementation review
- Policy development and review
- External and joint scrutiny
- Call-ins and Councillor Calls for Action
- Holding the Cabinet to account
- Holding Portfolio Members to account
- Scrutiny improvement

As the Council's critical friend, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee holds the Cabinet to account for its actions by monitoring the decision-making process and testing existing practices to check they are working properly. It can also call in Cabinet decisions to scrutinise them before they are put into practice. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is able to stand back from the decision-making process, look at the outcomes for the people of West Suffolk and contribute to ensuring improved performance.

The Committee also looks at the impact on the community of key plans and strategies within the Council's policy framework, investigating why things are as they are, researching options, challenging assumptions and suggesting improvements. When looking at a new policy, the Committee ensures it would contribute to the Council's strategic priorities, and that any links to other Council policies demonstrate continuity. When reviewing existing policies, the Committee investigates how successful it has been, whether it achieved its objectives within budget and to timescale, and what needs to change. In all its policy development, the Committee aims to enhance services and make life better for people living and working in West Suffolk, as well as those visiting us.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

- Performance management
- Internal and external audit responsibilities
- Strategic risk management
- Revenue and Capital Budget monitoring and budget development
- Scrutiny of annual accounts
- Procurement

Scrutiny also has an important role to play in monitoring the performance of services. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee looks at how well the Council's services are performing by considering a range of information such as performance indicators and reports from external inspectors, and by monitoring action plans. It does not carry out reviews but may recommend that a review is carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or another appropriate committee or working group where a need has been identified.

This Committee also leads on improvement planning and risk management, as well as monitoring the Council's budget, and approving the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts in accordance with the powers delegated to it under the Council's Constitution. It also leads on the development of a sustainable forward budget.

How does Scrutiny work?

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a rolling work programme which prioritises the investigations it will carry out over the coming months. The West Suffolk Constitution gives the Scrutiny Committees the power to establish how items may be identified on their own future work programmes. Any member of the Council may request items to feature on the Committee's work programme that the Committee can consider. The work programme is considered at each meeting and may be amended accordingly. In addition, at each meeting, the Committee considers the future decisions plan of those items due be considered by Cabinet in order that potential items of interest for the work programme can be identified.

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee sets its work around the quarterly budget and corporate planning cycle. The committee gathers evidence from a variety of sources including the Council's own information, other local authorities, partner organisations, service users, expert witnesses or research carried out by the committees themselves.

Once they have considered each item, and obtained evidence, the committees submit reports, complete with recommendations, usually to the Cabinet. The committees' work programmes include time to check progress on the actions that have been taken following acceptance of scrutiny reports by way of programming update reports on progress made.

For further information or answers to any queries relating to the Council's scrutiny functions or activities, please contact Christine Brain, Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) on (01638) 719729 or email christine.brain@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Review of Past Year Overview and Scrutiny Committee

 <p>Councillor David Nettleton Committee Chair</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Michael Anderson Cllr Simon Brown Cllr Tony Brown Cllr Mike Chester Cllr Patrick Chung Cllr Terry Clements Cllr Stephen Frost Cllr Diane Hind Cllr Paul Hopfensperger Cllr Lisa Ingwall King Cllr Joe Mason Cllr Richard Rout Cllr Marion Rushbrook Cllr Ian Shipp</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr John Augustine Cllr Trevor Beckwith Cllr Dawn Dicker Cllr Mary Evans Cllr Jim Meikle Cllr Clive Springett Cllr Jim Thorndyke Cliff Waterman</p>	 <p>Councillor Simon Cole Committee Vice-Chair</p>
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Scrutiny Reviews completed during 2019-2020

This section describes some of the key scrutiny topics covered during the year (June 2019 to March 2020), and their associated outcomes.

Annual Reviews

Community Safety Monitoring Report

On 13 June 2019, the Committee received its annual report on the work of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership (WSCSP) for 2018-2019. This was in line with the statutory duty of the Committee as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee designated under the Police and Justice Act 2006, to scrutinise the work of the Partnership.

The Chair of the WSCSP, Councillor Joanna Spicer and the Council's Cabinet Member for Families and Communities, Councillor Robert Everitt presented the report, which set out the background to the partnership and the statutory bodies involved, as well as updating members on the community safety partnership activity in West Suffolk, including the WSCSP for 2018-2019.

During debate, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised a range of matters, including:

- Whether sufficient training and support is offered to Town and Parish Councils, and voluntary sector organisations on County Lines.
- Whether there are sufficient links between the Police and Town and Parish Council meetings.
- Information to support the success of the target hardening programme

Members also recognised the success of the Teen Chill project and heard how data access and information sharing was helping to improve outcomes.

In conclusion, the Committee were satisfied to note the report and the work undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership.

West Suffolk Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023: Year 1 Review

On 12 March 2020 the Committee received the West Suffolk Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023. The West Suffolk Housing Strategy was adopted in 2018 and the implementation plan had been regularly monitored since it was adopted to ensure that progress was being made and tasks remained relevant.

The Committee considered the implementation plan, which contained detailed information on progress made since its adoption, along with some challenges which were being addressed.

Discussions were held on Homes for Life and what was being built for older people; the development of an affordable housing guide for parish/town councils; the transference of the Home-Link housing register system to another provider; houses in multiple occupation; emergency/temporary accommodation; 30% affordable housing; S106 agreements; and homelessness prevention and reduction to which comprehensive responses were provided.

The Committee commended officers in the number of empty homes which have been brought back into use in 2019-2020 and this be publicised as a positive news story.

At its conclusion the Committee noted the progress made against the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan and resolved that a future report be presented to the Committee in 2020-2021 on Homes for Life, setting out properties being built to support older people.

Task and Finish Group(s) / Review Group(s)

West Suffolk Parking Review

In July 2019, the Portfolio Holder for Operations, on behalf of Cabinet, requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a review of car parking in West Suffolk in line with drafted terms of reference.

The Overview and Scrutiny committee supported the request and agreed the Terms of Reference at its meeting on 11 July 2019. Recognising the level of work involved to

consider parking across the whole of West Suffolk, which had last been reviewed in 2015, the Committee established a Task and Finish Group in order to make recommendations back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2019.

The Task and Finish Group was comprised of the Chair and Vice-Chair, Councillors David Nettleton and Simon Cole; a representative of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Karen Richardson, a representative of Suffolk County Council, Councillor Karen Soons, and representative members from the Towns of Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket – Councillors Ann Williamson, John Burns and Rachel Hood respectively.

The Group met on 9 separate occasions.

Evidence was gathered from a number of external parties and stakeholder workshops were held in each of the towns across West Suffolk. In addition to this, market research was carried out in the Council's car parks to obtain the public's views on car parks across West Suffolk, and in particular to get a view on usage, the current tariffs as well as an online questionnaire.

Following analysis of the consultation results, and other evidence gathered internally such as car park usage figures, the Review Group developed detailed parking plans and presented a series of recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 January 2020. The group elected not to make recommendations in Newmarket due to the timing of a local by-election on 30 January 2020.

The Committee received a range of representations from members of the public and taking into account their feedback, made a number of recommendations to Cabinet on the parking plans. This included the retention of free parking in Brandon and investment in electric vehicle charging points across West Suffolk car parks. However, in a number of other areas, the Committee felt that further assessment was required by Cabinet, including parking charges in Newmarket; retention of the "free from 3" scheme and charging for electric vehicle bays.

Cabinet thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Task and Finish Group for the detailed assessments; the elements where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made formal recommendations were adopted by Cabinet who also considered and resolved those matters where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had suggested further assessment was required.

Cross Authority Task and Finish Group – Citizens Advice

On 14 November 2019, the Committee considered a request from Mid-Suffolk and Babergh District Council asking whether the Committee would be interested in carrying out a "Cross Authority Task and Finish Group on Citizens Advice in Suffolk".

In August 2019, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk's Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the Sudbury and Mid-Suffolk Citizens Advice (CA) services. The Councils currently revenue fund both organisations (with some funding also going to the CA services in Ipswich and Diss). Councillors wished to have a greater understanding of the work undertaken by CA and the current funding position.

A joint Overview and Scrutiny review provided opportunity to consider share learning about the operation of CAB's and their funding structures to understand how the sector can work together to support each other effectively.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to support the review and appointed Councillors Patrick Chung and David Nettleton as representatives from West Suffolk on the Task and Finish Group.

On 12 March, the Committee received the final report of the Group. In conclusion, the review found that the CAB's provide good value for money within Suffolk and have a strong positive impact on the area. A significant concern raised during the review was the funding model for CAB's, and in this regard the review made recommendations to Suffolk County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups, as well as encouraging sharing of information between District Council funders on the allocation of funding to the CAB's.

Other Reviews

West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy

On 2 September 2019, the Committee was informed that in June 2018, the West Suffolk Councils adopted the Homeless Reduction Strategy. This report presented by the Cabinet for Housing, set out a review of the strategy and changes that had been made in response to new duties and requirements which had been placed on local authorities. The strategy would now be called the "Homelessness Reduction Strategy and Rough Sleeping Strategy".

Discussions were held on Suffolk County Council's floating support contract; feedback from the Drop In Centre; Street Link (a service whereby members of the public/councillors could report cases of rough sleepers); social media in relation to verbal aggression and public shaming; landlord forums; empty homes; housing support for under eighteens; and sharing lessons learnt with other local authorities.

Following discussions held on Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing, sometimes referred to as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), the Committee requested that RP's be invited to give a presentation at a future meetings to enable the Committee to look at their aims / objectives and their future housing provision/types of affordable social housing in West Suffolk.

The Committee made no amendments to the proposed West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which was approved, as recommended by the Committee, by Cabinet in October 2019.

Management of Events in West Suffolk

On 9 January 2020, the Committee received a report it had requested on the Management of Events in West Suffolk's Parks and Open Spaces covering:

- Number/type of events held per year;
- Terms and conditions placed on event organisations;
- Legal frameworks and conditions (national);
- How does the Council ensure event organisers comply with the conditions placed on them, and how was this then enforced?

The report set out the above information, and included the following appendices:

- Appendix A – A list of events which had taken place in 2019.
- Appendix B – The current terms and conditions of hire
- Appendix C – A list of complaints received over the last three years

Following the presentation of the report, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised a range of matters, including:

- How much income was generated from events held;
- Whether adverse weather conditions had caused events to be cancelled;
- Whether clean-up costs have had to be enforced;
- Whether complaints received were predominantly from the same people;

Detailed discussions also took place on events held in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds, in particular the Nearly Festival and concerns raised last year by a small number of nearby residents who felt the music broke noise regulations.

The Committee was unanimous that there should be more events held across the whole of West Suffolk and in communities and congratulated the service for all its hard work in overseeing the events held across West Suffolk.

At its conclusion the Committee noted the scale of events held in West Suffolk and the terms of conditions and the relevant legal frameworks placed on event organisers and the Council's arrangements for enforcement.

It also recommended that the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs be asked to consider comments raised, and to progress as appropriate to ensure the continuation of these events and that the terms and conditions remain fit for purpose.

Havebury Partnership

As a significant stockholder in West Suffolk, the Chief Executive, the Director of Development and the Director of Operations from Havebury Housing Partnership were invited to its meeting on 12 March 2020 to provide a presentation / overview on the following topics:

- Development pipelines for the West Suffolk area including rural sites;
- Single/shared accommodation for under 25s;
- Housing tenure, particularly the provision of social rent;
- Affordability checks and supporting people to maintain tenancies;
- Joint working with West Suffolk Council; and
- Provision of housing for older people and policy to support people who would like to move.

The presentation covered the above topics as well as setting out the background to Havebury Housing and its journey; its Corporate Plan 2018-2022 which was currently

being refreshed; its objectives; current and future developments; strategic opportunities (new older person strategy; new homelessness strategy and new community investment strategy).

Following the presentation, discussions and responses were provided on the following queries:

- How are properties identified as requiring refurbishment?
- What measures are being taken for the provision of electric vehicle charging points on future housing development sites.
- How are homes being made more dementia friendly.
- What are the issues being faced around homes for life, and new builds for older people?
- How are you ensuring housing is affordable for young people?
- How are service charges calculated?
- What measures are taken to reduce fly tipping on housing estates.
- What do you see as being the social challenges over the next 20 years?

At its conclusion the Committee thanked Mr Andrew Smith and his colleagues for attending the meeting and resolved that Havebury Housing Partnership be invited back to a future meeting of the Committee once the Older Persons Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and the Community Investment Strategy had developed. It further resolved to also invite Flagship Housing to a future meeting of the Committee.

External Joint Scrutiny

Each year, the Council is invited to appoint a representative on the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee. In June 2019, Council appointed Councillor Margaret Marks as the representative, with Councillor Paul Hopfensperger as substitute.

Councillor Margaret Marks updated the Committee in July 2019, November 2019 and March 2020 on the work undertaken by the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee, giving the Committee the opportunity to discuss the issues raised and where necessary, give their endorsement to proposals or issues raised by Councillor Marks.

Cabinet Liaison and Strategic Oversight

West Suffolk Annual Report

On 13 June 2019, the Committee discussed the **West Suffolk Annual Report (2018-2019)** with the Leader of the Council. The report highlighted the key activities and developments which had been achieved over the financial year 2018-2019, with regard to the priorities set out in the West Suffolk Strategic Plan.

The draft report contained a number of case studies and examples from West Suffolk to illustrate the achievements described.

As a result of the Committee's review, the report was updated to reflect bio-diversity in the Council's parks, and the section regarding the work of Anglia Revenues Partnership was re-worded.

Development of a new West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024

On 14 November 2019, the Committee received a report which sought its input into the development of a new **West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-2024**. The document was intended to succeed the West Suffolk Strategic Plan 2018-2020.

The report summarised the work which had been carried out so far on the development of a draft West Suffolk Strategic framework for 2020-2024. It was proposed that the council's strategic priorities remain the same. The document also included a new emphasis on the Environment and Rural issues.

The Committee focused on whether the proposed Framework specifically addressed future housing demand; the challenge of responding to issues presented by an ageing population, and whether there was sufficient emphasis on climate change.

In consequence, the Cabinet agreed to defer consideration of the Strategic Framework to take account of the Committee's feedback. The revised Framework was approved by Cabinet and Council in February 2020.

Review of Past Year Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

 <p>Councillor Ian Houlder Committee Chair</p>	<p>Committee Members Cllr Richard Alecock Cllr John Augustine Cllr Trevor Beckwith Cllr Mary Evans Cllr Victor Lukaniuk Cllr Elaine McManus Cllr Robert Nobbs Cllr John Smith Cllr Peter Thompson Cllr Cliff Waterman</p> <p>Substitute Members Cllr Pat Hanlon Cllr David Palmer</p>	 <p>Councillor Karen Richardson Committee Vice-Chair</p>
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This section describes some of the key scrutiny topics covered during the year (1 May 2019 to 31 January 2020) by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, and their associated outcomes.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

During 2019-2020 the Committee held six meetings. In July, the Committee met to scrutinise and approve the former Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's 2018-2019 Annual Statement of Accounts.

Scrutiny of Budget Savings

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee plays an integral role in delivering a sustainable budget for the Council. There were significant levels of savings to be achieved, and the Committee scrutinised all proposals for growth and savings in the 2020-2021 budget before making recommendations to Cabinet.

This work commenced on 26 September 2019, with a report setting out the approach towards delivering a balanced budget for 2020-2021 and a sustainable budget in the medium term.

A second report was received on 28 November 2019 and recommended to Cabinet the inclusion of a number of proposals to progress securing a balanced budget for 2020-2021, and sustainable budget in the medium term to 2024.

A final report was scrutinised by the Committee on 30 January 2020, and a number of proposals/changes over and above those already considered by Members in November 2019, all of which were incorporated into the Budget and Council Tax Setting report considered by Cabinet on 11 February 2020.

Performance Management

The Committee received on a quarterly basis the **2019-2020 Performance Report** and **Budget Monitoring** figures being used to measure the Council's performance over the year. The quarterly performance report also included the **West Suffolk Strategic Risk Register**.

Audit Responsibilities

Internal Audit

At its meeting on 30 May 2019, the Committee approved an **Internal Audit Plan for 2019-2020**. The Committee scrutinised the work of the **Internal Audit Team** towards achieving the Internal Audit Plan for 2019-2020 and received updates during the year at which the results of completed audits were discussed.

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 require a **review of the effectiveness of internal audit** once a year. The review forms part of the review of the overall system of internal control required for the **Annual Governance Statement**. The Committee noted the report's conclusion, that internal audit was operating effectively and could be relied upon as a key source of evidence in the Annual Governance Statement.

The Council is required to produce and publish an **Annual Governance Statement (AGS)**, which covers six core governance principles, and is approved by the Committee, and signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer. The Annual Governance Statement had been prepared by the Officer Governance Group and was approved for signing by the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.

External Audit

Various reports from **Ernst and Young (EY)**, the Councils external auditors were considered over the year. On 30 May 2019, the **West Suffolk Council's 2019-2020 Indicative Fees** were received from EY which provided the committee with a basis to review the indicative fees for 2019-2020, as set out in the Annual Audit Letter.

In July 2019, EY presented the **2018-2019 ISA 260 Annual Governance Report** to the Committee, which set out the key messages arising from the audit of the former Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's financial statements and included an assessment of the Council's arrangements for securing value for money in its use of resources.

At its meeting on 26 September 2019, EY presented the **2018-2019 Annual Audit Letter**, which confirmed the completion of the audit of the 2018-2019 financial statements for the former Council's.

Budget Monitoring

The Committee received the former Council's **2018-2019 Performance Report (Year End Outturn)** at its meeting on 30 May 2019, following the 30 June deadline for production of the draft account for audit. The report included a financial commentary on the year, details of revenue and expenditure including budgeted and

actual expenditure and an explanation of the main variances, and details of how services were paid for. Capital income and expenditure was also discussed, as well as reserves and treasury management.

The Committee scrutinised and approved the former Council's **2018-2019 Annual Statement of Accounts** at its meeting on 25 July 2019. At the same meeting it scrutinised the External Auditors **2018-2019 ISA 260 Annual Governance Report** to those charged with governance and resolved the sign-off of this report, including the approval of the letter of representation on behalf of the Council.

Financial Resilience Sub-Committee

The **Financial Resilience Sub-Committee** of three Members, who fulfil the enhanced monitoring and scrutiny requirements of treasury management, meets three times during the financial year, at which scrutiny of the **Treasury Management Investment Activity and Performance and Monitoring Reports (2019/2020)** took place.

Officers find this specialised scrutiny of the Council's treasury management and investment activity extremely useful, and values being able to obtain Members' views on this important area of work.

On 30 January 2020 scrutiny of the **Treasury Management Policy Statement and Investment Strategy Statements 2020-2021** and **Treasury Management Code of Practice** was undertaken by the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

Health and Safety Sub-Committee

The **Health and Safety Sub-Committee** is made up of six councillors drawn from the membership of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee, and six members of staff, drawn from the Officer Health and Safety Group.

The Sub-Committee meets three times a year to consider the Council's health and safety arrangements and to provide guidance to support the development of executive action by Officers of the Council, including policy guidance. It keeps under review all matters relating to the health, safety and welfare of Council employee's and the protection of other persons against risks arising out of the work activities of the employee's and of persons working under contract.

The Sub-Committee reports annually to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee on the progress of its work and matters it has considered.



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