

Annual Scrutiny Report 2020-2021



Introduction



Councillor Ian Shipp
Chair of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee 2020-2021



Councillor Ian Houlder
Chair of the Performance and Audit
Scrutiny Committee 2020-2021

The West Suffolk Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-2021 highlights the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee over the past year.

This report presents some of the accomplishments and highlights of the scrutiny committees which have a vital role in helping the authority to continue to improve and strength. The following report aims to give a flavour of the work undertaken during 2020-2021 and to confirm to Council it has operated to deliver its role in line with its terms of reference.

The work has been varied and we have done our utmost to make it transparent, relevant and insightful. We would like to thank councillors, officers, partners and members of the public who have taken part in this important work and hope you find this annual report both informative and interesting. We hope it may also encourage you to follow the progress of the scrutiny function at West Suffolk Council. We always welcome members of the public putting forward suggestions for us to review, and you are welcome to find out more about our work on the Council's website

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Key themes during 2020-2021

The COVID-19 pandemic had a fundamental impact on West Suffolk Council and its communities. In June 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee elected to focus its work over the coming year on the response to the pandemic.

Activity	Outcome
In June, the committee heard from the Leader and Chief Executive to understand more about the immediate response to the pandemic and how it was impacting on West Suffolk Council and its communities.	The committee identified future areas of focus and areas where they could add value through further review.
Activity	Outcome
In September, the committee received a report on how West Suffolk communities responded to the crisis.	The committee supported four recommendations including the development of a volunteering strategy and enhancing community emergency plans.
Activity	Outcome
In November 2020 and March 2021, the committee received reports on progress in implementing major capital projects during the pandemic.	The committee gained assurance as to how the projects had been re-appraised and were progressing.

Other areas of focus

The other major national event of the past year has been Brexit. In March 2021, the committee explored how Brexit had impacted on West Suffolk Council and whether there are further actions the council can take to support its communities.

The committee has a key role in scrutinising community safety. In September 2020, the committee received the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Annual Report, recognising the need to undertake further evaluation of West Suffolk Council's work to tackle modern day slavery. In January, the committee endorsed the need to review the council's public space protection orders.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

Key themes during 2020-2021

In the same way that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, the Performance and Audit Scrutiny's programme has been impacted by the pandemic given the dramatic impact the pandemic has had on West Suffolk Council's financial position.

The committee has received quarterly financial and performance reports to understand how the pandemic has impacted on the achievement of West Suffolk Council's objectives, recognising the need for the council's priorities to change during the pandemic.

The committee has evaluated quarterly and annual financial resilience reports to understand how the pandemic has impacted on West Suffolk Council's longer term financial position.

The committee assessed how the pandemic has impacted on the work of West Suffolk Council's internal and external audit services, assessing whether, in the environment, sufficient assurance can be gained to provide audit opinions for the council.

The committee has evaluated the development of West Suffolk Council's budget, including both the annual and medium-term financial budget, to understand the longer-term effects of the pandemic on the council's finances.

The Health and Safety Sub-Committee has evaluated what steps West Suffolk Council is taking to protect staff and the public during the pandemic, in terms of both physical equipment and measures and the wellbeing of staff.



Scrutiny on a page

Over the past year, the scrutiny committees have collectively considered the following:

Council response to COVID-19	Monitoring the Cabinet Decisions Plan	Annual Governance Statement
Community Safety Partnership Annual Report	External Audit Plan	Statement of Accounts
Review of the community response to COVID-19	External Audit Annual Report and Annual Audit Letter	Sustainable medium term budget reports
Reports on the activity of Suffolk County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Internal Audit Annual Report and Mid-year Report	Local Government Ombudsman Annual Report
Impact of COVID-19 on major capital projects	Internal Audit Plan	Health and safety incidence reports
Review of the public space protection orders	Year-end performance out-turn	Health and safety measures to support COVID-19
Impact of Brexit on West Suffolk	Quarterly performance reports	Health and safety policy amendments
Progress on the Mildenhall Hub	Annual financial resilience report	Health and Safety Training report
Quarterly financial resilience reports	Financial resilience strategy	Impact of COVID-19 on staff wellbeing

The year ahead

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has committed to three reviews during the next year:

- A strategic review of West Suffolk Council's Markets service, evaluating how it functions to support the local economy and market traders.
- A review of the West Suffolk Council website, assessing the ease of use of the most frequently used functions and services.
- A review of West Suffolk Council's approach to modern day slavery (this review is presently awaiting new government guidance).

Both committees will also be continuing to evaluate the ongoing impact of the pandemic. For example, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be receiving a report from Anglia Revenues Partnership on how the pandemic has impacted on their work, whilst the Performance and Audit Committee will continue to evaluate the council's financial and non-financial performance.

