

Report number: **COU/WS/23/010**

# **Annual Scrutiny Report 2022 to 2023**



## Introduction



Councillor Ian Shipp

Chair of the Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee 2022 to 2023



Councillor Ian Houlder

Chair of the Performance and Audit  
Scrutiny Committee 2022 to 2023

The West Suffolk Scrutiny Annual Report 2022 to 2023 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 strengthen. The following report aims to give a flavour of the work undertaken during 2022 to 2023 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 and you are welcome to find out more about our work on the Council's website.

## **Role and approach to scrutiny at West Suffolk**

West Suffolk has two such committees.

The primary purpose of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to improve the delivery of services provided to West Suffolk communities. It does this by reviewing and scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of Council functions. It also undertakes specific reviews to look at new and evolving policies or an issue affecting the area and makes recommendations for improvements to the Council or Cabinet.

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee has the specific role of monitoring the budget and overseeing the performance of services by considering a range of information such as performance indicators, inspection reports and action plan monitoring. It approves the Council's Statement of Accounts and is also the Council's audit committee. The Committee also carries out the Treasury Management function.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### Key themes during 2022 to 2023

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee focus over the year is set out below:

| Activity  | Outcome  |
|---|--|
| In June, the committee received the Markets Review Working Groups Recommendations report.   | The committee made a number of recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration.  |
| Activity  | Outcome  |
| In July, the committee heard from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on the Draft West Suffolk Annual Report 2021 to 2022.   | The committee made a number of suggestions for incorporation into the final document, for the Cabinet's consideration.   |
| Activity  | Outcome  |
| In November, the committee received a report on air quality and vehicle idling which included recommendations.  | The committee made recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration and endorsement.  |
| Activity  | Outcome  |
| In January 2023, the committee received an update from Havebury Housing Partnership on the development of their Older Persons; Homelessness; and Community Investment Strategies and how the Partnership's performance is measured and who holds them to account. | <p>The committee asked questions to which Havebury Housing Partnership provided written responses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Energy Performance Certificate breakdown of its 7,000 properties and the age of the properties.</li><li>- A breakdown of the various types of benefits Havebury helped 1,800 of its residents to access.</li><li>- The percentage of homes which were social rent.</li><li>- Of the 210 houses built per year how many were in West Suffolk to help reduce the housing waiting list.</li></ul> |

| Activity   | Outcome   |
|--|---|
| <p>In March 2023, the committee held its first public meeting in the conference room at the Mildenhall Hub, where it carried out a post-implementation review on the Mildenhall Hub.</p> | <p>The committee's concluded the Mildenhall Hub has met the strategic and environmental objectives set for it by Forest Heath District Council in 2018 and is making good progress towards the break-even financial test by year five of its operation.</p> <p>The committee made recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration and endorsement.</p> <p>The committee also agreed to review progress against the year five financial test by way of a final report on the Mildenhall Hub Post Implementation Review be included in the committee's work programme for 2026, subject to the completion of a scoping/key lines of enquiry exercise being carried out with the Strategic Director.</p> |

## Other areas of focus

The committee has a key role in scrutinising community safety. In June 2022, the committee received the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Annual Report from the Vice-Chair of the Partnership, Councillor Sarah Mansell.

Councillor Margaret Marks, the council's representative on the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee updates the committee on a quarterly basis on the work undertaken by the Health Scrutiny Committee, giving members the opportunity to discuss issues raised and where necessary, give their support on proposals.

# Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

## Key themes during 2022 to 2023

The Performance and Audit Scrutiny's programme continues to be impacted by Covid-19 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 continues to impact on the achievement of West Suffolk Council's objectives, recognising the need for the council's priorities to change during the recovery phase.

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

The committee continues to assess how the Covid-19 pandemic 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 to 2026.

The Health and Safety Sub-Committee has evaluated the steps West Suffolk Council took to protect staff and the public during the recovery phase of 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:

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| West Suffolk Council Annual Report 2021 to 2022                             | Internal Audit Annual Report and Mid-year Report | Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2021 to 2022                          |
| Community Safety Partnership Annual Report                                  | Internal Audit Plan                              | Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) – Annual Report and Review of RIPA Guidance |
| West Suffolk Markets Review Working Groups -Recommendations Report          | Year-end performance out-turn                    | Health and safety summary report 2021 to 2022  |
| Reports on the activity of Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee | Quarterly performance reports                    | Health and safety incidence reports  |
| Monitoring the Cabinet Decisions Plan                                       | Annual financial resilience report               | Health and safety measures to support COVID-19   |
| Air quality and vehicle idling recommendations report                       | Financial resilience strategy                    | Health and safety training report  |
| Quarterly financial resilience reports                                      | Annual Governance Statement                      | Health and safety policy amendments  |
| External Audit Plan   | Statement of Accounts                            | Impact of COVID-19 on staff wellbeing  |
| External Audit Annual Report and Annual Audit Letter                        | Sustainable medium term budget reports           |  |

## The year ahead

### The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has committed to the following review(s) during the next year:

- A review of West Suffolk Council's approach to modern day slavery (this review is presently awaiting new government guidance).

Both committees will continue to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on the council's services and on the council's financial and non-financial performance.

