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Annual Scrutiny Report 2023 to 2024



Introduction



Councillor Sarah Broughton
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny
Committee 2023 to 2024



Councillor Peter Armitage
Chair of the Performance and Audit
Scrutiny Committee 2023 to 2024

The West Suffolk Scrutiny Annual Report 2023 to 2024 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 2023 to 2024 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 2023 to 2024

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

Activity	Outcome
In June, the committee received a report on the Appointment to Outside Scrutiny Bodies.	The committee resolved to appoint one Member, and one Substitute Member from the Committee to sit on the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee for the term of the 2023 to 2027 administration.
Activity	Outcome
In July, the committee received scoping documents and key lines of enquiries to set up Task and Finish Groups for a Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Review and a Transport and Infrastructure review.	The committee appointed members to sit on both the Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Review Task and Finish Group and the Transport and Infrastructure Task and Finish Group.
Activity	Outcome
In September, the committee requested information on CCTV provision at West Suffolk Council. Members received an overview of the council's CCTV service, including the services provided, staffing, costs and income, incidents, arrests and equipment, including Hikvision cameras.	The committee was reassured that West Suffolk's CCTV security protocols were continually monitored, with security software updates applied and considered safe. Existing camera technology represented best value and Hikvision was currently certified by the Information Commission Office as safe to use.
Activity	Outcome
In November, the committee received a report and recommendations from the Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Review Task and Finish Group.	The committee made a number of recommendations, attached at Appendix 1 below, for the Cabinet's consideration at its meeting on 5 December 2023, which were approved.

Activity	Outcome
<p>In January 2024, the committee received a Housing Update from the Cabinet Member for Housing. The update covered the Housing Strategy 2018 to 2024, the Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 to 2024 Delivery Plan, the Council’s priorities for housing and how the council is addressing the issues being faced by refugees and asylum seekers in West Suffolk.</p>	<p>The committee considered the development of the new strategy including the consultation and engagement plan and confirmed that it would like to be involved and to receive a further update following the conclusion of the consultation process.</p>
Activity	Outcome
<p>In March 2024, the committee received an update on how the Council had been allocating funding from the UK Share Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) to projects and initiatives in West Suffolk.</p>	<p>The committee noted the progress made so far in allocating West Suffolk’s UKSPF and REPF allocations to local projects and initiatives, and also noted the challenges which officers had faced, and suggested more communication on the fund as it was a good news story for West Suffolk.</p>

Other areas of focus

The committee has a key role in scrutinising community safety. In September 2023, the committee received the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Annual Report from Councillor Derek Davis from Babergh District Council as the Chair of the Partnership at the time of the reporting period.

Councillor Andrew Martin, 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.

Councillor Mike Chester and Councillor David Smith, the council’s representatives on the Suffolk Police and Crime updates the committee on a quarterly basis on the work undertaken by the Police and Crime Panel, giving members the opportunity to discuss issues raised and where necessary, give their support on proposals.

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee

Key themes during 2023 to 2024

The committee receives 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 continued to monitor health and safety related incidents and accidents and wider health and safety compliance, as well as reviewing measures to support the well-being of staff.



Scrutiny on a page

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

Community Safety Partnership Annual Report	External Audit Annual Report and Annual Audit Letter	Complaints and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2022 to 2023
CCTV at West Suffolk Council	Sustainable Medium – Term Budget Reports	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) – Annual Report and Review of RIPA Guidance
Reports on the activity of the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel	Internal Audit Annual Report and Mid-year Report	Annual Governance Statement
Reports on the activity of Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny Committee	Year-end performance out-turn	Statement of Accounts
Monitoring the Cabinet Decisions Plan	Quarterly Performance Reports	Health and safety summary report 2022 to 2023
Recommendations and Findings from the Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group	CIPFA Guidance on Audit Committees	Health and safety incident reports
Modern slavery update	Co-opting Non-elected Independent Members	Health and safety training report
Quarterly financial resilience reports	Annual Financial Resilience Report	Health and safety policy amendments
External Audit Plan	Financial resilience strategy	

The year ahead

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

- A Task and Finish Group was established in July 2023 to establish ways to get upstream on areas relating to transport and infrastructure to help influence future local plans. However, this review has been put on hold post local plan.

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.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Recommendations Tracker (2023)

Date of Overview and Scrutiny	Issue Title	Action Taken by Overview and Scrutiny	Date of Cabinet and Decision	Responsibility for onward action and review date, if applicable
9 November 2023	Abbeycroft Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group – Findings and Recommendations Report number: OAS/WS/23/019	The Committee considered the Task and Finish Group’s findings and recommendations, and RECOMMENDED: That <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cabinet instructs officers to update the Collaboration Agreement noting no fundamental revisions are required on the principals of the current agreement. However, some technical changes may be required and the approach to health funding be clarified which is currently dealt with through side letters. 2. Cabinet requests Abbeycroft and West Suffolk Council to work collaboratively to promote the activities and programmes delivered at the Leisure Centres, ensuring residents are 	5 December 2023: Cabinet considered the report and approved the recommendations as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cabinet instructs officers to update the Collaboration Agreement noting no fundamental revisions are required on the principals of the current agreement. However, some technical changes may be required and the approach to health funding be clarified which is currently dealt with through side letters. 2. Cabinet requests Abbeycroft and West Suffolk Council to work collaboratively to promote the activities and programmes delivered at the Leisure Centres, ensuring residents are 	Cabinet and Abbeycroft to progress onward actions.

Date of Overview and Scrutiny	Issue Title	Action Taken by Overview and Scrutiny	Date of Cabinet and Decision	Responsibility for onward action and review date, if applicable
		<p>aware of what they deliver and provide (that can be reflected in further revisions to the Collaboration Agreement).</p> <p>3. Cabinet and officers work with providers and partners to secure more long-term and sustainable external funding streams (particularly on health improvement interventions).</p> <p>4. Cabinet asks officers to explore further capital investment in the leisure offer and facility mix across the leisure centres site through business cases where appropriate to provide outcomes and financial benefits through invest to save/earn initiatives with Abbeycroft.</p> <p>5. Subject to the outcome of the condition surveys of each Leisure Centre, Cabinet to consider the extension of the Council's Net Zero fund as part</p>	<p>aware of what they deliver and provide (that can be reflected in further revisions to the Collaboration Agreement).</p> <p>3. Cabinet and officers work with providers and partners to secure more long-term and sustainable external funding streams (particularly on health improvement interventions).</p> <p>4. Cabinet asks officers to explore further capital investment in the leisure offer and facility mix across the leisure centres site through business cases where appropriate to provide outcomes and financial benefits through invest to save/earn initiatives with Abbeycroft.</p> <p>5. Subject to the outcome of the condition surveys of each Leisure Centre, Cabinet to consider the extension of the Council's Net Zero fund as part</p>	

Date of Overview and Scrutiny	Issue Title	Action Taken by Overview and Scrutiny	Date of Cabinet and Decision	Responsibility for onward action and review date, if applicable
		<p>of the 2024 to 2025 budget development to include a programme of improvements (where appropriate and where they meet the outcomes of the fund) to upgrade and improve the facilities to maximise energy efficiency, support Net Zero and carbon reduction targets, and extend the life span of the facilities.</p> <p>6. As part of the 2024 to 2025 West Suffolk Council budget development, consideration should also be given to whether the extraordinary utility support grant should be continued and phased out in the short-term (linked to market expectations around utility costs).</p>	<p>of the 2024 to 2025 budget development to include a programme of improvements (where appropriate and where they meet the outcomes of the fund) to upgrade and improve the facilities to maximise energy efficiency, support Net Zero and carbon reduction targets, and extend the life span of the facilities.</p> <p>6. As part of the 2024 to 2025 West Suffolk Council budget development, consideration should also be given to whether the extraordinary utility support grant should be continued and phased out in the short-term (linked to market expectations around utility costs).</p>	