

COUNTY COUNCIL

Meeting date: 23 March 2023

From: Chair of Scrutiny Management Board

SCRUTINY UPDATE REPORT

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is the final update to Council on the work of the Council's Scrutiny Members in advance of the transition to two new unitary authorities in Cumbria. The report includes a summary of activity since the last update to Council in November 2022, and also the final Scrutiny Annual Report which is attached as Appendix 1. This Scrutiny Annual Report includes Scrutiny Chairs' reflections on the Council's Scrutiny work over the last few years and the impact it has had.

2.0 ISSUES FOR COUNCIL

2.1 Members are asked to:

2.2 Note the Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23, attached as Appendix 1; and,

2.3 Note the recent activity undertaken by Scrutiny set out in this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

3.1 The final Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Annual Report is presented to Council as Appendix 1 to this report. As the final report it contains reflections on the Council's Scrutiny over a number of years, summarising the areas of activity, the impact the work of Scrutiny Members has had, and the learning captured over the years.

3.2 In the report, the Chair of Scrutiny Management Board recognises the positive impacts that the Council's Scrutiny function has achieved is due to the commitment and enthusiasm of Members, using their experience and knowledge to improve policy and delivery, and hold decision-makers to account. He also pays tribute to the great leadership provided by current and previous Scrutiny Advisory Board and Committee Chairs.

- 3.3 The Chair of Scrutiny Management Board reflects, in the report, on the Board's focus on the Council's workforce, on the Board's role supporting the transformation of the Council's customer and digital services, and the development of new ways of working for both staff and Members.
- 3.4 At the Board's last meeting earlier this month, Members received an update on the outcome of the recent inspection of the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service and the plans put in place to address the issues raised. The Board also received an update on the preparation for the transfer of governance of the Fire and Rescue Service. Following this, Board Members highlighted the importance for those governing and scrutinising the Service after April 2023 to work to secure the medium to long-term financial sustainability of the Service.
- 3.5 The report also recognises the work of the Scrutiny Performance Working Group which has regularly reviewed corporate performance and referred areas where performance required further exploration to the relevant Scrutiny Board or Committee.
- 3.6 The Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Advisory Board reflects in the report on the Board's focus on the key services that protect those that are most vulnerable, including investigations into Child Sexual Exploitation, the availability of services for children and young people with autism, and the availability of emotional health and wellbeing support.
- 3.7 The Chair also highlights the work of the Board overseeing and scrutinising the delivery of improvements suggested by Ofsted, and the importance of maintaining this activity in the future in relation to the recent inspections of Children's Services and SEND services. These issues were both the focus of the last meeting of the Board held last month.
- 3.8 The Chair of the Communities and Place Scrutiny Advisory Board reflects in the report on the Board's focus on the delivery of services that are important to the residents of Cumbria, including waste, highways, Fire and Rescue services, and infrastructure. This work included an investigation into the impact of utility companies' streetworks on highways infrastructure. The report produced by the Board was considered by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee, leading to improved procedures.
- 3.9 At the last meeting of the Board held earlier this month Members considered the ongoing work to improve bus services across the county.
- 3.10 The Chair of the Adults Scrutiny Advisory Board reflects in the report on the focus on the provision of Adult Social Care services during a particularly challenging period with services experiencing unprecedented pressures. Board Members' have also maintained a continuous focus on adult safeguarding activity.
- 3.11 The Board's work with services on the implementation of new models of delivery within Adult Services has had significant positive impacts. At its most recent meeting held in January, the Board considered both the current position of Adult Social Care services and adult safeguarding, as well as the

new Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment framework. The Board will meet for a final time on 24 March 2023.

- 3.12 The Chair of the Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee reflects in the report on the Committee's work to scrutinise the Health and Care system in Cumbria through ongoing reform of the system and continued pressures across the system. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the provision of health and care services.
- 3.13 At its last meeting held in February the Committee considered progress in establishing Integrated Care Boards, the recruitment and retention of NHS staff, and mental health services in Cumbria.
- 3.14 The Chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Scrutiny Board reflects in the report on the Board's scrutiny of LEP plans and investment programmes, including the LEP's skills and business development projects and its work in relation to Net Zero.
- 3.15 The Chair of the Cumbria Police and Crime Panel reflects in the report on the Panel's work supporting the Police and Crime Commissioner on issues including crime reduction, community safety, and supporting victims of crime. This is in addition to the Panel's statutory functions in relation to the Commissioner's budget-setting, strategic planning, and appointment of key roles.
- 3.16 The development of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23 was informed by some reflective and assessment work carried out with Scrutiny Members during the summer and autumn of last year. This work enabled Members to reflect on what has worked well within the Council's Scrutiny function, and what could be improved in the future.
- 3.17 This work identified a range of insights into what helps and what gets in the way of good scrutiny emerged around the themes of:
 - **Strong relationships**, with Portfolio Holders, officers, communities, and interest groups
 - **High commitment** of Members and officers
 - **Knowledge** to be informed by a range of sources, be timely, accurate, and contextualised
 - **Independence** from Cabinet and political pressures, however, to be informed by local and organisational knowledge
 - **Clear and effective processes** for all scrutiny functions to support change and improvements
 - **Critical friend** of Cabinet and other organisations, with any recommendations being tracked for progress
 - **Understanding** of Scrutiny by all Councillors, officers, and the public
 - **Effective programme management** and early access to Key Decisions
- 3.18 These insights and supporting information have been shared with Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council to inform their future scrutiny arrangements and planning.

Call-Ins

3.19 No call-ins have been received since the last update to Council.

Task and Finish Activity

3.20 The final Task and Finish Group established by Scrutiny Management Board reported to Cabinet in December 2022. The No Child Goes Hungry Task and Finish Group made five recommendations to Cabinet. In response, Cabinet agreed:

- to provide funding to cover the 25% of none DfE funded costs that eligible schools must contribute in order to be part of the National Breakfast Club Programme until March 2023;
- to provide a Food Provision Grant to every school based on a formula that included a combination of total pupil numbers and total numbers of FSM pupils. This funding to be used at the school's discretion to ensure that their pupils are able to access hot food as appropriate. Schools will be issued with guidance and advice on use of the grant;
- to allocate £0.4m from the unspent Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) and £1.1m from COVID ringfenced reserves to fund the breakfast clubs and food provision schemes;
- for the Leader to write to Government to lobby for a fair review of the funding of Free School Meals;
- to enter into an agreement for the provision of free school meal vouchers during the Easter Holidays and provide funding for the vouchers in the form of a ringfenced reserve to be used by Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council; and,
- to allocate £0.5m from COVID ringfenced reserves to fund the provision of free school meal vouchers during the Easter Holidays.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 This final report to Council reflects the wide-ranging contribution made to the work of the Council, and to that of other public service providers, by all Scrutiny Members over a number of years.

4.2 Scrutiny Members, supported by officers, have secured improvement to vital services valued by the residents of the county, have helped retain a focus on performance and high-quality policy and services which meet the needs of communities, and provided new ideas to support transformation and new ways of working.

Councillor Bill Wearing
Chair of Scrutiny Management Board
Councillor Mark Wilson
Vice-Chair of Scrutiny Management Board

March 2023

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23.

REPORT AUTHOR

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