

SCRUTINY

Annual Review 2019

A Year in Scrutiny 2018/2019

The main aim of the council's Scrutiny function is, quite simply, to make recommendations that improve the daily lives of people who live, work or visit Wolverhampton. This is a simple ambition but challenging to deliver. We cannot seek to improve people's lives until we identify their priorities. Our starting point is to reach out and communicate effectively with the public and local organisations. This will make Scrutiny and the democratic process more accessible and relevant. We have produced a number of short videos that can be viewed by clicking on the links in this report which are aimed at helping local people connect with our work.

Scrutiny has successfully delivered several effective reviews this year. These have included topics ranging from fire safety, violent crime, parking outside schools and mental health services. The work of all these groups has been enhanced by the inclusion of external witnesses, organisations and service users.

Reaching out for evidence outside the council breathes fresh life into the work of Scrutiny. By listening to a diverse range of views and perspectives, knowledge and understanding about an issue can be greatly enhanced. This approach certainly improves and strengthens any final recommendations to

Cabinet, making them more robust and more likely to succeed.

This year, the Scrutiny team has worked closely with Wolverhampton Youth Council to hold mini-Scrutiny reviews in subjects voted for by their members. Last year we held reviews on work experience, mental health and transport.

The new leader of the council, Cllr Ian Brookfield, has made the strengthening Scrutiny an important priority, enabling all councillors to have a role in developing policy and scrutinising performance.

I look forward to seeing it go from strength to strength in 2019 and beyond.



Cllr Stephen Simkins
Chair of Scrutiny Board, 2018-19

Stronger City Economy

(Chair: Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman)

Work undertaken by the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel this year has included an excellent item reviewing the progress that has been made since the review on apprenticeships. This was a good example of monitoring the progress of recommendations and involved a variety of different witnesses. There was a very well received item on enabling a vibrant city centre and a new opportunity to hear from and question the cabinet member, Cllr John Reynolds.

The panel also considered a report on innovation, which involved inviting external witnesses to provide evidence. The discussion highlighted the importance of having the right facilities and premises available locally at an affordable cost and the importance and value of the council engaging local businesses. The work that the business engagement team had completed was seen to have had a valuable impact on the local economy and it was thought there was much to learn from their work.

Our Council

(Chair: Cllr Paula Brookfield)

Highlights from the Our Council Scrutiny Panel include the proposed future customer service operating model and performance of the service. This includes their approach to managing the high volume of customer service contacts the council receives. The panel will continue to receive regular updates on performance of this service and continue to monitor progress in responding to issues raised by the public.

The panel also considered the improvements being carried out by Digital Print Solutions (DPS), the performance of the service as well as plans for its future. The panel made a recommendation to improve rest room facilities following a tour of the print facility. A request

was also made to receive a future report on plans to develop commercial opportunities outside the council and putting in place mechanisms to ensure all print requirements are directed to the internal DPS team before consideration is given to using an outside contractor.

Children, Young People & Families

(Chair: Cllr Rita Potter, previous Chair: Cllr Peter O'Neill)

The issue of elective home education sparked a great deal of debate at the meeting of the panel in June. The panel considered the current arrangements for monitoring children being home educated and the government consultation which proposed a number of changes. Consideration of this issue at a previous meeting resulted in a letter being sent to the local MP, raising concerns about the current policy. The panel will continue to monitor the government review, as there are still ongoing concerns about the current arrangements.

Adults and Safer City

(Chair: Cllr Val Evans, previous Chair: Cllr Linda Leach)

The panel considered and commented on the draft Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy before it was presented to the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Board meeting for approval. The panel welcomed the amount of support for shared priorities detailed in the strategy among the different agencies. There was discussion around the important role of schools.

The new strategy has close links with the soon to be published scrutiny review into youth violent crime. The strategy recognises the lines between crime types are becoming increasingly blurred and crimes that were previously dealt with separately are now to be addressed by a more joined-up strategy.

There will be joint ownership and governance of the strategy from the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership (SWP) and the Adults and Children's Safeguarding Boards. The review group is in favour of this approach. It welcomes the opportunity to work with the SWP and Safeguarding Boards in future, to help shape and promote the operational governance review and to monitor the delivery plan and performance framework. The review will seek to underpin the ethos and philosophy of the strategy and to make recommendations that will help inform and strengthen its implementation.

The panel also considered a report and presentation about the current adult education offer in the city and possible implications for the service of the adult skills budget being devolved to the West Midlands Combined Authority. A tour of the adult education service building was arranged and panel members were able to talk to staff and students and observe a class.

Vibrant & Sustainable City

(Chair: Cllr Mak Singh, previous Chair: Cllr Martin Waite)

This year the panel received an update report following the well-received scrutiny review into parking outside schools. The panel monitored the progress and implementation of the review recommendations.

Discussions on active travel provided a good example of council employees working collaboratively across departments. Active travel was defined as having the choice of travel modes requiring physical activity for all or part of a journey in preference to motor transport. Typically, these modes are walking, wheelchair use and cycling, whether as sole methods of transport or elements of a longer journey. Increasing physical activity is a key local priority as healthy life expectancy in Wolverhampton is below the national average. The panel also carried out some excellent pre-decision scrutiny in relation to the new City Housing Strategy 2019-24, following a

presentation from the Service Manager for Private Sector Housing.

Health Scrutiny Panel

(Chair: Cllr Phil Page, previous Chair: Cllr Jasbir Jaspal)

This year the panel worked exceedingly hard to organise an additional informal meeting on the Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust Draft Quality Accounts, a special panel meeting on the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust mortality rates and a further special meeting on processes to be followed after death. This involved helpful contributions from a range of external witnesses, including the Coroners Lead for the Black Country.

The panel considered the issue of suicide prevention, the Public Health Annual Report and an item, that was requested at the annual planning event, regarding the transition from child to adult services.

There was also in-depth engagement with the voluntary organisation, Action Hearing Loss, with the aim of helping to improve outcomes for local people.

Scrutiny Review into Fire Safety

(Chair: Cllr Greg Brackenridge)



The work of the Fire Safety Scrutiny review group continued in 2018/19. Recent

developments have included WV Living and Wolverhampton Homes now fitting sprinklers in all new build homes following a recommendation from the group. The chair of the group, Cllr Greg Brackenridge, has also been very busy presenting the findings of the review to Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) and other groups.

New Chair for Scrutiny Board



Cllr Paul Sweet has taken on the challenging and important task of chairing the council's Scrutiny Board. Work carried out by the Board so far has included an update and review of the plan for the Civic Hall refurbishment, consultation on the all ages transport policy and cyber security. Planned items for the Board include an update from the review into the city's flood preparation and the City Council's Brexit preparation plans.

Cllr Sweet explained:

Scrutiny plays an incredibly important role in our democratic process and I'm proud to have been asked to chair the Scrutiny Board. I look forward to helping lead and shape scrutiny in our city and to building on some incredibly

important work already done by the Board under the previous Chair, Cllr Simkins. I want to pay tribute to his work and to the work and contributions of all the scrutiny panels and the officers that support them. My ambition is that our work this year will help improve the lives of every person who lives, works or visits Wolverhampton.'

Other new scrutiny chairs for 2019/20 are Cllr Rita Potter (Children, Young People and Families), Cllr Val Evans (Adults and Safer City), and Cllr Mak Singh (Vibrant and Sustainable City).

Health Scrutiny Former Mayor takes the Chair

The Health Scrutiny Panel has a new Chair, Cllr Phil Page, as well as a refreshed membership consisting of nine elected councillors and three representatives from Wolverhampton Healthwatch.

Cllr Phil Page said,

I am looking forward immensely to chairing the council's Health Scrutiny Panel throughout this municipal year. The panel, working in collaboration with our health partner organisations, will be striving to improve health outcomes for all the residents of Wolverhampton. The Health Scrutiny Panel can make a real difference to facilitating positive change throughout the city.



Visit to the Glasgow Violence Reduction Unit



As part of the scrutiny review into youth violent crime, the Chair and Vice Chair of the group visited the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU). This was a fascinating visit and it was clear that the ethos and philosophy of the SVRU was what has driven its success. This needs to be replicated in Wolverhampton and the West Midlands.

The SVRU was given permission to experiment, to try out new ideas; failure was accepted as a possible outcome and this was not a deterrent to trying. The operating model recognised there has to be trust and a commitment to actually 'doing'. This means accepting that a violence reduction unit might, when appropriate, need to operate outside of the committee structures of local authorities, police authorities and other similar organisations.

The SVRU had no overarching strategy at the start. This was allowed to evolve over time, alongside a steady cultural change and growth in trust and communication between the SVRU and the communities it sought to help. The focus was on long term commitment. The group heard from one officer who had spent three years in a community, building relationships and trust and breaking down the

barriers that alienate and exclude young people and lead them down the pathway of violence.

The SVRU genuinely embraced and involved the people it was trying to help. Mums who had lost children to gang violence were invited to speak to young people and youngsters were asked to sign up to a 'pledge to change' scheme. This opened doors to them including job offers, places on cadet forces or volunteering schemes to meet and work with other members of the community.



The full report from the scrutiny review, *Scrutiny Review into Youth Violent Crime: Rewriting the Narrative*, will be presented to Cabinet in November 2019.



The council is currently piloting the new Scrutiny Improvement Review scheme (SIR) launched by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The SIR is an independent evaluation and improvement programme for the scrutiny function.

The SIR is based on the new [statutory guidance](#) published by the government on overview and scrutiny in local government. At the moment councils face unprecedented

challenges: financial, demographic and political. The way ahead is uncertain but we will need to make sure scrutiny arrangements keep up with these challenges. The SIR is an evolution of a range of tried and tested tools for the evaluation and review of scrutiny, which CfPS has developed since 2003.

Ed Hammond, CfPS director of research and campaigns visited the council on 19 July 2019 and spoke to a selection of councillors, senior employees, scrutiny officers, the chief executive and the leader of the council to collect information for the review.

Mayor of the West Midlands Policy Question Time, hosted at City of Wolverhampton Council

This year, Wolverhampton hosted the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee Mayoral Question time on policy. The event was very successful and the webcast can be viewed [here](#).



Upcoming Highlights

Scrutiny Board

Plans for Brexit
Update on Scrutiny Review into Flood Prevention
Report from the Black Country LEP
Update from the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Our Council

Briefing on Universal Credit
Treasury Management-Annual Report 2018-2019 and Activity Monitoring Quarter One 2019-2020
Rapid Development Platform

Adults and Safer City

Blue Badge scheme
Safer Wolverhampton Partnership
Adult Education Services

Children, Young People and Families

SEND Self Evaluation
Culture of Belonging (school exclusions)
Early Intervention and Prevention

Stronger City Economy

Branding and Marketing Strategy
Apprenticeships and Wolves at Work

Vibrant and Sustainable Communities

Housing Allocations Policy
Section 106 Money
The Condition of Roads

Health

Site visit to West Park Hospital
GP waiting times
Cancer Screening
Patient Participation Groups

Useful links and documents:

- [City of Wolverhampton Council Website](#)
- [Forward Plan](#)
- [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#)
- [Statutory Guidance for Overview and Scrutiny](#)
- [City of Wolverhampton Constitution](#)
- [Minutes and Agendas](#)
- [Petitions](#)
- [Consultations](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)