

# SCRUTINY

Annual Report May 2022 - May 2023

## A Year in Scrutiny



### **Cllr Phil Bateman MBE**

Chair of Scrutiny Board from 17 May 2023

Following the City council elections in May 2023, I was elected by the new administration into the role as Chair of Scrutiny Board. I am very much looking forward to the Municipal year ahead. I am a long serving member of the City of Wolverhampton Council. I see great value in looking back, and this is why the Annual Report is such an important document

for our Council. As Chair of Scrutiny Board there will be issues which I will be putting forward for consideration, which have been scrutinised in the past. History gives us a very clear picture of how various aspects of society- such as technology, governmental systems, society as a whole changes. I want to make it clear that some of these topics may again need to be evaluated. Like in the past where services the Council had made progress on in areas such as flooding prevention, and the recommendations from the Select Committee on the Wolverhampton Pound. My aim is to get Scrutiny involved in a couple of specialist review groups this year.

I would like to thank Cllr Paul Sweet, the Chair of the Scrutiny Board for his dedication and for his contribution as the Chair. Last year was a particular busy year for Scrutiny Board with it meeting a total of ten times, with often full agendas. This report reflects on the year May 2022 – May 2023 and it shows the clear breadth and quantity of topics covered by Scrutiny.

I am keen to enhance Scrutiny Board's coordination role of the Work Programme across the Scrutiny Panels. I want to promote the work of Scrutiny across the organisation and work effectively with opposition Members in a collaborative approach to improve the lives of our residents and people working and visiting the City. I also want to see the work of the 2023 Scrutiny Committee to be of good quality and standard which improves the performance of government here in our great City of Wolverhampton.



**David Pattison**  
Chief Operating Officer

The Council are committed to the continuous improvement of the Scrutiny. This is in line with our duty as a Best Value Council, to secure continuous improvement in the way in which the Council functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Statutory Scrutiny Guidance was issued in 2019 and is still in force. This acts as an exceptionally good framework to help ensure that Local Authorities are implementing good governance in relation to the Scrutiny function.

Culture plays an important part within any Local Authority, to ensure that scrutiny plays an effective role. Our Strategic Executive Board value the role of Scrutiny in providing that critical friend challenge to drive service improvement, and it's a culture that is continuing to cascade to all officers throughout the authority. One of the key areas for improvement I have strived to achieve is to bring a performance management culture and framework to the authority. This is why Scrutiny Board, with the support of

Councillors, now regularly considers Performance and Budget reports, which has proved most effective.

There have been many great examples of excellent Scrutiny at the authority during the last Municipal year. It is my endeavour and desire to build on the successes of last year, working with Councillors and Officers of the Council to further enhance the effectiveness of Scrutiny within the overall Governance framework of the Council. It is a fundamental truth that effective Scrutiny leads to better decision making and this is clear on a local, national and regional level. It is sometimes those difficult questions and debates which help reveal the best path ahead and often at a strategic policy level.

Recommendations are part of effective scrutiny and I am pleased that the recommendations from the Wolverhampton Pound Select Committee were evaluated on their progress in the Municipal year. The Health Scrutiny Panel has made some excellent recommendations on Primary Care, which have made a real difference to the lives of Wolverhampton residents. As a Council with an overall principle of "Driven by Digital" within Our City, Our Plan, I am proud of the fact that every Scrutiny Panel and Board meeting was livestreamed and recorded. This is excellent for Democracy and has enhanced Scrutiny's profile within the City and the authority.

There were some special extra meetings added within the Municipal year when needed to look at important matters. This was most prominent in the case for Scrutiny Board and shows the flexibility and adaptability of the Scrutiny function to react to matters of great local interest. Some of these meetings were requested by Councillors, demonstrating how in Wolverhampton, scrutiny is "Member led", supported by the expertise of Officers within the Council.

I know that in the Municipal year 2023/24 Scrutiny will continue to strive to improve performance and to hold the Executive of the Council and our key partners to account.



**Laura Gittos**  
Head of Governance

Scrutiny is a necessary part of a democratic process, where checks and balances are required to ensure all forms of government, from elected officials through to the administrative bureaucracy and those partners who deliver vital services on behalf of the Council, continue to operate efficiently and transparently.

The scrutiny function has continued to transform over the municipal year, we have had a renewed focus on the Scrutiny Work Programme, ensuring that all items have a clear purpose, and the programme is led by Councillors.

This municipal year we introduced an internal tracking and monitoring system for Officer use. The system ensures all actions from meetings are documented and this has helped reassure Panel Members of the ongoing work to follow up on decisions made in Scrutiny meetings.

The Council ensure that all meetings are transparent, and that all members of the public could attend in person or watch the live webcast at home.



**Laura Noonan**  
Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager

I joined the Scrutiny Team part way through the Municipal year May 2022 – May 2023 and I have enjoyed learning about the Scrutiny function in Wolverhampton. It's been a busy year for Scrutiny with 43 official Public Scrutiny meetings held. Scrutiny Board accounted for nearly a quarter of these meetings, with a total of 10 held. All Board and Panel meetings were live streamed and recorded, and these are available to view on the Council's website up to 12 months after the meeting. I am particularly pleased that we can now livestream meetings in high definition from Committee Room 3 as well as within the Council Chamber.

I would like to place on record my thanks to Martin, Earl and Lee for their dedication and support to Scrutiny. I look forward to contributing to the development of the Scrutiny function over the next municipal year.



**Martin Stevens DL**  
Scrutiny Team Leader

What makes good Scrutiny? A simple question which Councillors and Officers should continue to ask themselves throughout any Municipal year. Choosing a topic area which can make a real difference to people's lives, I would argue is crucial. Receiving the right information at the right time, in a format which is accessible would also feature on my list. Challenging and meaningful questions is additionally of high importance. Making recommendations for improvement and monitoring how these are being implemented is also a vital part of the function.

In the background, research by Officers and Councillors all help to contribute to the tapestry of exceptional scrutiny. Everyone has their part to play in contributing to the Scrutiny function and you should never underestimate how you or anyone else's input can help build the foundations of its success. How other Local Authorities and Partners conduct scrutiny should also be of interest and indeed what the Council has completed in the past. It was after all Sir Isaac Newton that said, he had only seen further by "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants". Collectively Councillors and Officers can achieve great things by

embracing the Scrutiny function. Imagination and innovation are just as important in Scrutiny as in the Arts.

I see one of the key functions of Scrutiny as being able to inspire innovation in policy and strategy, to be able to look at issues with a new lens, bringing clarity and ideas to long standing problems the City faces.



**Earl Piggott-Smith**  
Scrutiny Officer

The work of scrutiny continues to have a positive impact on supporting the work being done across the Council during the year to achieve the priorities set out in Our City, Our Plan. The topics for scrutiny that have been selected during the year have been chosen to recognise and celebrate the successful work of areas of Council business and where appropriate, shine a scrutiny light on areas of poor performance to better understand the plans to respond to the challenges.

The topics selected have provided the opportunity to look more deeply into topics and to obtain more knowledge about the achievements. Councillors have been able to make positive contributions during meetings with the aims of getting better outcomes for the residents of Wolverhampton.

The work of scrutiny continues to provide the right balance between challenge and support, with Councillors focused on cross cutting topics which contribute to improving the impact of Council policies.

The importance of Panel Member site visits was again highlighted in helping Councillors to better understand issues which sometimes is not always captured in reports and presentations. The feedback from Panel Members has been very positive to the idea of visits and hopefully these will continue into next year.

There have been many examples of good scrutiny during the year which has helped increase Councillor engagement and the opportunity to further raise the profile of the important work that it does across the Council.



**Lee Booker**  
Scrutiny Officer

Since joining the Scrutiny team in January 2023, I have taken part in several Scrutiny Panel meetings. Specific to the 2022 – 2023 Municipal year, I attended Economy & Growth, Health, and the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel meetings. These Scrutiny meetings provided valuable critical oversight to key areas in the Council and partners' operations and contributed important

scrutiny to areas which impact ordinary people's lives across Wolverhampton; it is those people, who we serve.

I look forward to Clerking in the coming Municipal year and working with our Councillors and Officers to ensure good governance is in place in the City of Wolverhampton Council. I will be working on the following Panels, Health, Economy and Growth, Resources and Equality. Scrutiny is set to look at a wide variety of items across these Panels and I am pleased to add some thoughts on some of these below.

Following on from a site visit with Councillors who were part of the Economy & Growth Panel earlier in 2023 to the National Brownfield Institute, I look forward to representatives from the National Brownfield Institute attending the Panel with the City Regeneration Team to present their report on their business case. The Green Economy is another pressing issue, where Scrutiny will be able to look at the progress the Council is making towards its climate commitments, as well as looking at the establishment of a Green Partner Board, an important step in this on-going work.

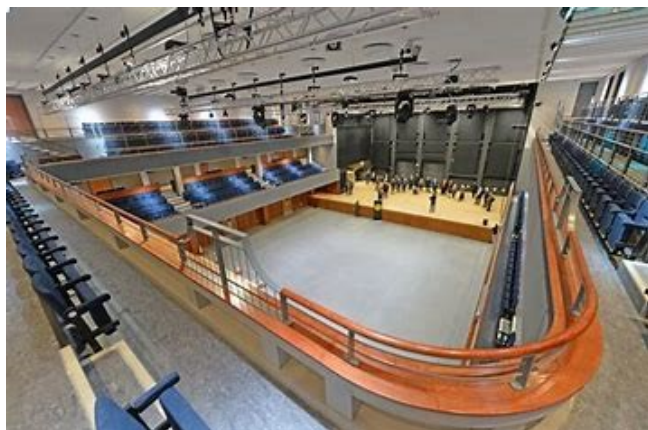
In Health, the Panel has many important items to scrutinise in the next Municipal year. The Health Scrutiny Panel will be working with Public Health and Adult Social Care, The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust (RWT), West Midlands Ambulance Service, NHS England, The Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, The Black Country Integrated Care Board and Partnership, and Healthwatch to ensure that the Healthcare services are providing the quality healthcare citizens need.

For Resources and Equality, the Panel will be able to scrutinise employment equality statistics and policy performance with updates on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy as well as Council Resource Management which includes Council Assets. The LGA Resident Satisfaction Polling will be considered by the Panel, which will be an important window into the views of the residents.

# Scrutiny Board

**Chair:** Cllr Paul Sweet

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Ellis Turrell



The first meeting of the Municipal year was held in June 2022. The Panel received a report on Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints and Compliments. They also reviewed a report on the recommendations from the Select Committee which had been held on the Wolverhampton Pound.

At the meeting in July, Scrutiny Board considered a report on the Blue Badge Service. At this meeting they also received a report on the Performance and Budget Outturn 2021-2022. Scrutiny Board has continued to monitor the performance of the Council. The report brought together the performance and financial position for the Council until the end of March 2022. The Council had strengthened links last year between performance and budget to ensure they were robustly monitoring delivery of Council priorities under pinned by the budget. The report revealed that 18 out of 29 indicators showed an improvement, a further 10 indicators were showing similar performance and one indicator saw a decrease in performance during the last 12 months.

In October, the Board considered the Performance and Budget monitoring position, as had been reported to Cabinet in September. The report set out the performance against the Our City: Our Plan indicators for Quarter 1, 2022-2023. Some of the indicators were the specific responsibility of the Council whereas others linked more

broadly into wider systemic issues which the City were facing. There were 61 performance indicators within the Our City: Our Plan framework. Three Quarters of the 57 of the indicators which could be updated in quarter 1, showed improvement or sustained strong performance. There were also some areas where performance could be improved such as youth employment and Wolves at Work 18-24. A key part of the approach was to link performance with key financial and budget information. Councillors gave robust questions to Officers.

At the October meeting there was a special item on City Regeneration and the Civic Halls. The Panel resolved that a further report be brought on the Civic Halls at an appropriate time.

In November, Board considered the item which had been Called-in on the Wolverhampton Local Development Scheme. The item had been called in by the Vice-Chair of Scrutiny Board, Cllr Turrell. A number of options were available to Scrutiny Board constitutionally for a Call-in item. Ultimately after a lengthy discussion, the Board resolved that “the decision of Cabinet be noted and implemented immediately.” Additional items considered at the meeting were on City Centre Regeneration, Visitor Experience Strategy/Plan and Budget and a report reviewing progress on the Wolverhampton Pound Select Committee recommendations. The Chair complimented Officers on the speed of work in implementing the recommendations from the Wolverhampton Pound Select Committee. A link to the report reviewing the recommendations and the minutes can be found here, [Wolverhampton Pound Review of Recommendations - Scrutiny Board](#)

The December meeting was a comprehensive agenda with items on, WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) Annual Scrutiny Report, Performance and Budget Monitoring, Levelling up including investment zones, Graffiti, and Grass verges. It was reported that in total there were 56 KPI's in the Our City: Our Plan performance framework. 33 had shown improvement or had seen similar performance. Six had seen a decrease in performance.

In January, the Board received a detailed report on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023/24 including rent and service charges. At this meeting they also had a report on the City Realm Public Improvements Programme.

The February meeting was dedicated to two items, one on the Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the second was on the Our City: Our Plan Refresh. Scrutiny Board resolved to endorse the Our City: Our Plan Refresh.

There were two meetings of Scrutiny Board held in March this Municipal year. The meeting on the 7 March considered items on the improvement work taking place in the Blue Badge Service and Levelling Up funding. The meeting on the 14 March included items on the Wolverhampton Investment Prospectus – First Phase Delivery Plan, Public Realm – Support for Businesses, and the Home Office Asylum Policy.

An extraordinary meeting of the Board was held on 2 May 2023 in the week of the all-out election. This meeting focused on the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme Payments.



Cllr Paul Sweet (Chair for Municipal year May 2022- May 2023) said, “It has definitely been my busiest year as Chair. For the item on the WMCA Annual Scrutiny Report we invited the Chair of the Panel, Cllr

Cathryn Bayton, into the meeting via MS Teams. Technology is truly transforming the way we work.

There have been significant improvements in the Blue Badge Service following Scrutiny Board’s consideration. This has been a great example of Scrutiny making a real difference to services of the Council. I was also very pleased with the meeting in February which brought together all the Scrutiny Panel’s comments on the Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for Board to consider. This really highlighted Scrutiny Board’s role as

a coordinator and on a very important subject area.

Scrutiny Board considered a diverse range of topics this year and was effective in holding the Executive to account.”



Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair) stated, “Scrutiny is a vitally important function of any local authority, and when used effectively it can lead to improved performance and delivery of services to local residents. In my first year as Vice-Chair,

I have been pleased to help lead the way in expanding the remit of scrutiny and the topics that Scrutiny Board and the Scrutiny Panels have looked into.

The Scrutiny Work Programme was constantly being updated to add new agenda items, and there were a significant number of additional meetings held throughout the Municipal year scrutinising hugely important topics including the Civic Halls project, tree maintenance services, customer service response times and the installation of new cycle lanes across the city.

It is right that the work of Scrutiny Board and all Scrutiny Panels at the Council are Member-led, and that Cabinet Members and Senior Officers are held to account and challenged over their decision-making. There is always room for improving the scrutiny process, and it is the responsibility of all Councillors to consider where changes may be needed to enhance the independent mindset that effective scrutiny needs. I look forward to continuing our work in scrutinising key issues as Vice-Chair in the 2023-24 Municipal year”.

# Economy and Growth

**Chair:** Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Sohail Khan



The first meeting of the Municipal year for the Panel was a question and answer session with the Portfolio Holder for Inclusive City Economy.

The meeting in September saw a comprehensive agenda with items on Inward Investment, Visitor Experience, Culture and Leisure Offer, and City Public Realm Works. When Inward Investment was discussed one of the recurring points was in relation to the importance of the City attracting hotel development. Praise was also given to the Inward Investment Prospectus. When the item on Visitor experience was discussed, it was outlined that research by IPW Consultants had identified 3 objectives,

- Change perceptions of the City – by enhancing profile and reputation nationally and internationally.
- Increase the social benefit and value from events – by creating opportunities for employment and skills development.
- Increase the economic benefit and return from events – by generating significant new direct and indirect spend.

The November meeting received items on Performance, Budget Monitoring and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Business Support at Place Level, Heath Town Baths and i54 new businesses. A report on the progress on the Heath Town Baths development is expected later in 2023.

The final meeting of the year, the Panel considered items on the Green Economy. Business support activity within the City Council Wards, and Public Realm – Support Package to Businesses.



Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair) said, “I am very pleased that the Panel has had good engagement with the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy, throughout the year and I am sure this will continue into the next Municipal

year. A good working relationship with the Cabinet Member can help to ensure effective scrutiny in the Local Authority and is recommended as good practice in the Statutory Scrutiny guidance issued by the Government.

Inward Investment is a critical component to the success of the City and this is why I called for this to come to the September meeting of the Panel. We also need to increase visitors to the City to help stimulate economic growth, which in turn will encourage investment into the City. It was for this reason that the Panel asked for an item on Visitor Experience, Culture and Leisure Offer. I am keen for the Council to explore how other Cities in the UK and internationally, have transformed their economies into ones that can be described with confidence, as secure, thriving and expanding. It is only by looking to the future that the City will be able to adapt to modernity and fulfil our Council priorities of residents living fulfilled lives in a thriving economy and with local people having good jobs and training.

In the new Municipal year I would like the Panel to build on the item they considered on the Green Economy this year. It is important there is exploration of the challenges and opportunities in the emerging Green Economy I would like to thank everyone who has had a positive impact on the work of the Panel this year.”





Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair) reflecting on the year commented, “During my year as Vice-Chair, I was pleased to be able to scrutinise many pertinent issues that are key to the long-term development of our City and its residents.

Along with the Chair and Members we looked at, Business support for City Traders, Public Realm works, City centre economy and visitor experience, Heath town baths and the Eye Infirmary to name but a few.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to Chair a meeting for the first time in my tenure which gave me beneficial experience that I very much appreciated and relished.

On a personal level, I’m excited to see the report on the City Centre hotels finally coming to the Panel this year. It was something I had requested to be kept on the Work Plan since it had been pushed back several times from the Scrutiny Panel over the last couple of years”.

## Resources and Equality

**Chair:** Cllr Zee Russell

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Udey Singh



The first meeting of the year was in June and the Panel received reports on the following items, Linked Bodies and Ethnicity Pay Gap. The Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of organisation and performance of the human,

financial, technical, and material resources that support the delivery of Council services. The Panel had a detailed presentation from the Chief Operating Officer on the Council’s arrangements for monitoring linked commercial trading bodies, for example Wolverhampton Homes and Yoo Recruit, that it either owns or controls and their performance.

The presentation explained the different types of legal bodies, the rules for setting them up and the process for reviewing them. In response to a number of recent high-profile national cases about how other Councils have managed their commercial enterprises it was considered both timely and important for the Panel to scrutinise the strength of the current governance and oversight arrangements of the different linked bodies. The Panel discussed the lessons learnt nationally from the finding from external auditors who reviewed the governance arrangements in the highlighted examples.

The Panel queried the rationale for setting up linked bodies, the financial benefits to the Council and the level of financial risk. The Panel discussed in detail the current and future plans to ensure continuing compliance with good practice and the recommendations from external auditors about how the Council manages its relationship with linked bodies.

The Panel were supportive of the approach taken by the Council and agreed to look in detail at the governance arrangements for Yoo Recruit and the strength of the business case, and the extent to which the actions of the Board can be properly scrutinised to ensure best value at a future meeting. A private company manages Yoo Recruit on behalf of the Council. The contract ends in 2024. The Panel will be involved in reviewing any proposed changes being considered to the linked bodies in the future.

The meeting in October considered the following topics, EDI strategy, Treasury Management and the Reserves Working Group, Customer Services performance and future strategy and Contract Management and Procurement Update.

For the item on the Customer Services performance and future strategy, the Panel had a presentation from the Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars about key achievements of the service, and the improvements made during the year to better meet the needs of internal and external customers. The Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars gave an overview of the performance of the service against key indicators based on an analysis of public enquiries received by telephone, email, and face-to face, services delivered. The service handled 592,922 customer contacts in 2021-2022.

The Panel discussed how the service was meeting the needs of different customers and what further action was being planned to reduce the call abandonment rate figures and to provide a better overall experience to residents.

The Panel discussed the demands on the service and welcomed the plans for introducing a new customer service system which will address the concerns highlighted during the meeting. The Panel have a much better understanding of the challenges in providing an effective and efficient customer service. The Panel agreed to review and scrutinise the performance of the service at a future meeting.

At the December meeting the Panel considered the following topics, Land and Property Disposal Policy, Reserves Working Group report, External Grant Funding, Performance, Budget Monitoring and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. For the External Grant Funding item, The Head of External Funding gave a detailed presentation of the national and local context for submitting a bid. For example, highlighting that the average cost of the Council submitting a competitive grant funding bid has been estimated at around £30,000.

The Panel discussed the recommendations of Wolverhampton Pound that a minimum of two of the bids submitted should be from local suppliers. The Head of External Funding highlighted the success of funding bid

applications to date, and the work done to work with local suppliers.

The Head of External Funding advised the Panel that it is a competitive process, and it is estimated that only 1 in 3 bids for external funding are successful.

The meeting in February considered the following topics, Customer Experience Strategy Consultation Update, Digital Wolves Strategy Update and the Treasury Management Strategy.

In March the Panel considered the following topics, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Update – Objective 3 (Develop an inclusive workplace culture, where targeted professional training, development and support is provided and to get comments from members), Race equality code and Ethnicity Pay Gap Update, Yoo Recruit Review, and Review of Council and Staff Subscription to other bodies – Governance Directorate.

An important part of good scrutiny is to follow up an issue from a previous meeting in more detail to either respond to concerns raised at the time or to get reassurance about progress made in achieving the stated policy objectives. The Panel asked for report on the findings of 'deep dive' review of the governance arrangements of YOO Recruit to be presented for discussion to a future meeting. The Chief Operating Officer had agreed at the time to present a report to update the Panel on any proposed changes to the future management of YOO Recruit.

The Chief Operating Officer outlined the main findings from the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and reassured the Panel about the level of confidence in arrangements for overseeing the performance of Council owned bodies.

The Panel had a wide-ranging discussion about the governance, membership structure, and financial performance of YOO Recruit and welcomed the opportunity to consider possible alternatives options to address the challenges in recruiting temporary employees, particularly in procurement and planning services.

The Panel supported the ideas from the Chief Operating Officer to invite a member of YOO Recruit board to talk about their work to help Councillors to scrutinise and challenge the decisions and to reassure themselves about the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance of the organisation.

The discussion resulted in a much better understanding of the how the Council is responding to major changes in the way people now search for jobs and the competition to fill vacancies where employees now have much wider choice of job opportunities with the ability to work remotely.



Cllr Zee Russell (Chair) said, "the Panel agreed to add the topic of EDI strategy to the Panel programme and that it should be a standing item given the importance of the issue to the Council. The valuable support and contributions of David

Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, and Jin Takhar Head of Equalities and representatives of staff equality forum members was helpful in understanding the issue.

I think it was a good decision to make this issue a standing item and the excellent example of good scrutiny in action. The Panel were able to look across a range of related topics such as, progress against the Race at Work Charter Standards, and the Gender Equality and Rainbow City Plans and work being done to increase diversity representation at senior management level.

I think that there is clear evidence that the Council is moving in the right direction and the Panel welcomes the efforts to build on good progress made in all areas on equalities to have its work externally assessed. I was also pleased with the scrutiny of the governance arrangements of Yoo Recruit and the success of efforts to secure external grant funding to support the wider strategic goals of the Council and better meet the needs of Wolverhampton. The discussions were a useful reminder of the importance of putting principals of good governance into practice

and being open to challenge about how Council resources are used to support the wider strategic goals and provide reassurance to Councillors that effective systems are in place."



Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair) said, "I've thoroughly enjoyed my tenure as Vice-Chair for the Panel. It's truly heartening to observe the Council's commitment to promoting equality. With the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy

firmly in place, this commitment will progressively permeate the organisation and resonate with its essential stakeholders and partners.

Undoubtedly, a crucial aspect of our role has been the diligent examination of the Gender Pay Gap. Through this, our Panel has gained valuable insights into how this disparity impacts the organisation. Personally, a standout experience for me has been the comprehensive evaluation of the efficacy of Yoo Recruit, gauging its ongoing benefits for the organization. Additionally, it remains imperative to consistently assess various facets of the Council to ensure optimal value for the City's residents. This ongoing scrutiny ensures the delivery of the utmost cost-effective services."

## Strong Families, Children and Young People

**Chair:** Cllr Rita Potter

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Adam Collinge



The first meeting of the year was in June and the Panel received reports on the following items, Children's Residential Provision Phase 2 – Business Case and the SEND Cross-Party Scrutiny Review Group - Written Statement of Action. The meeting in July, Councillors focused on children's social care - Draft Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Action Plan, Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2021 – 2022 and the Children and Young People Social Work Self Evaluation.

The Panel had a presentation from the Deputy Director of Children's Social Care about the ILACS action plan and process for monitoring progress following the recent Ofsted inspection of the City of Wolverhampton Local Authority Children's Service. The inspection covered the following areas - services for children and families needing help and protection and children and young people in care and care leavers.

The Panel welcomed the achievements and the progress made by the service since the previous Ofsted inspection and supported the action plan drafted in response to the inspection. The Panel discussed the issue of the school transport costs for parents who do not get a preferred school place. This conversation led to a wider discussion of the challenges facing schools wanting to expand capacity to meet demand at a time when the level of Government funding for building has reduced. The Panel had a helpful discussion about the support help available in situations where children are homeless or where a family has no recourse to public funds.

The meeting in October considered the following topics, Youth and Holiday Offer in the City, SEND Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group - Written Statement of Action and the Children's Services Transformation Programme Annual Report. On the item on the Youth and Holiday offer, the Panel had a joint presentation from the Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Children Services and from Jackie Redding, Chief Executive, The Way Youth Zone to talk about the current universal and holiday offer in Wolverhampton. The Panel discussed the numbers of young people attending Summer

Programme activities this year when compared to the same period in the previous year and asked for more details to better understand take up levels.

The Panel talked about the impact of poverty on parents and wanted reassurance that information sent to explain that young people are welcome to attend even if they don't have the money to pay the entrance fee to, The Way. The Panel wanted more opportunities for community and voluntary organisations to get involved in delivering activities and supported to make funding bids. There was a good discussion around both the quality of the current offer from, The Way, but also the challenges it faces in trying to reassure parents and young people with concerns about local gangs. The Panel welcomed the plans to promote message about what is acceptable behaviour at the centre and to improve the information on the website for parents and young people.

The meeting in November considered the following topics, Update from SEND Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group: Written Statement of Action, Performance, Budget Monitoring and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Education Excellence: Update and monitoring and the Virtual School Head Annual Report. On the Virtual School Head item, the Panel had a detailed briefing on the draft Virtual School Annual report before it was presented to Cabinet for approval. The Virtual School Head highlighted the educational outcomes and achievements of children and young people in care and care leavers from September 2021 to July 2022 in Wolverhampton. The Panel were very encouraged by the progress made, highlighting the work being done to reduce the number of children recorded as being persistently absent.

The Panel have a much better understanding of the factors behind the issue and welcomed plans to develop smart educational targets for young people when drafting their Personal Education Plans to improve the situation. The Panel will continue to monitor progress of work to track the educational progress of looked after children to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities.

The final meeting of the year the following topics were discussed, Social Work and Workforce Health Check, Family Hubs, School Appeals and School Exclusion and Suspension (Equalities).



Cllr Rita Potter (Chair) said, "I was very happy with the range of topics covered during the year and the contributions by Panel Members. The Panel's Work Programme considered many important and cross cutting topics that impact directly on the

lives and welfare of children and families in Wolverhampton. The work has been supplemented by site visits to The Way and MASH 24 office in Priory Green.

The findings from an external review of SEND provision led to the setting up of a small scrutiny review group to review the progress of the action plan to address areas of concern. The work of the group provided Councillors with assurance about the progress made.

The Work Programme topics have ranged from School Exclusion Policy and Practice, the provision of youth activities, School Appeals, the quality of SEND provision and educational achievements of Looked after Children. The Panel has considered the impact of the Covid pandemic on young people, and the work done to support those with needing help with mental health issues to re-engage positively with education after an extended break. The increase in numbers of children being home educated or lacking digital connectivity to learn remotely have also been reviewed as well as the contribution of the cost-of-living financial pressures on families.

The review of annual reports such as the Principal Social Worker Annual report and Virtual Head Teacher all have helped the Members of the Panel to get a much better understanding of the impact of different policies and the opportunity celebrate the success of efforts being made to improve outcomes for children and families.

I would like to add my personal congratulations and those of the Panel to the report detailing the work led by Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head, and his team. This rightly received a round of applause on the excellent work done to support looked after children, to achieve such excellent education results. The contributions from Members of Wolverhampton Youth Council have been another highlight of the year. The contributions and questions have been well considered and helped give Panel members a much better understanding of the impact of the policies being presented.

The Panel's Work Programme has included several pre-decision scrutiny items, for example, plans to develop two children's residential care homes in Wolverhampton. The impact of the financial challenges facing families and the range of support offered was a regular theme raised during the year.

The Panel welcomed plans for opening a network of Family Hubs which is a good example of a successful bid to a nationally funded programme to provide early support and advice to families. The Panel will review their impact on the lives of local families of this programme and other projects later in 2023.

I would like to add my personal thanks to the Scrutiny Officer and Wolverhampton Youth Council for their contributions and support to SFCYP Scrutiny Panel."



Adam Collinge (Vice Chair) said, "As Vice-Chair, I believed it important to encourage the Panel to query and challenge what is presented, striving for the very best for children, young people and families across Wolverhampton. In particular, the Panel has

sought to work collaboratively to address weaknesses in SEND provision through the Written Statement of Action. The Panel has also scrutinised educational attainment, access and standards, transitions to adulthood, youth activities and HAF provision,

youth justice, implementation of Family Hubs and many other items.

The Panel is not the Executive, but rather a critical friend, a voice for what children, young people and families are telling us and a forum to drive improvements. Challenging areas for improvement is as equally as important as building on successes”.

## Fulfilled Adult Lives

**Chair:** Cllr Val Evans

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Stephanie Haynes



The first meeting of the year was in July and the Panel received reports on the following items, Update on Health and Social Care Act - Fair Funding, Adult Services Transformation Programme, and the Principal Social Worker Annual Report.

For the item on the Health and Social Care Act, Members of the Panel had been advised earlier of plans to accept an invitation from the Department of Health and Social Care to participate in the Adult Social Care Reform Trailblazer. The aim of the plan was to test out how the introduction of fair cost of care reforms would work in practice. The local authorities involved would be required to share best practice and learning ahead a planned of a national roll out of the scheme.

The Panel questioned the benefits, financial risks to the Council and the challenges in getting the information from care providers needed to meet the timetable set by Government. A key discussion was the risk of possible legal challenge from existing care home residents who could be financially worse

off as a result of the scheme and the reluctance of care homes to share details about their costings.

The Panel wanted to continue monitoring progress to provide reassurance about how risks were being managed and asked that a meeting be arranged if a key project task or milestone in the plan was likely to be missed.

The meeting in October considered the following topics, Our Commitment to All Age Carers 2022, Adult Social Care Winter Planning 2022-23, and the Transforming Adult Services Programme 2021-22 Annual report.

The meeting in January considered the following topics Performance, Budget Monitoring and Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the City of Wolverhampton Council's Local Account.

On the Adult Social Care Annual Report: The Local Account 2021 -2022 item, the Panel discussed the findings and recommendations. The Panel discussion focused on the changes made to the service to better respond to a range of challenges and the performance against four areas of adult social care practice. The Panel welcomed the progress made and changes made to the layout and content of report in response to previous comments, for example, less use of jargon.

The Panel made a specific request for reference to progress against priorities for 2020 – 2021 separately in the next report. There was support for the proposed priorities for 2022-2023 and to continue to review progress against key priorities and to make the report as accessible to the public as possible.

The meeting in February considered the following topics, Care and Support Provider Fee Review 2023-2024 and Market Sustainability.

The final meeting of the year in March 2023 considered the following topics, Implementation of Carer Commitment and ambition for carers going forward and the Adults Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2022.



Cllr Val Evans said, “The Panel has considered a range of big topics during the year, such as Adult Social Care Winter Planning 2022-23 preparation, DHSC Health and Care Reform – Trailblazer programme, Social

Work and Workforce Health Checks. The Panel have contributed well to all the discussions and the recommendations have had a positive effect on policies aimed at better meeting the current and future needs of local people.

The Panel welcomed the progress made to deliver better care and support to the people of Wolverhampton and to challenge the negative headlines of the adult social care sector. The Panel support efforts of the Director of Adult Services to raise the profile of sector and to attract people to join the sector despite the challenges it faces.

The Panel have seen the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on these and other areas of policy and practice. We will continue to review policies and plans of the Council and how well they are responding to the challenges and opportunities this will present in the future. A highlight of the year for me was the Principal Social Worker Annual Report. This report celebrates the success of social workers and other staff who have continued to maintain such high standards service, despite the challenges. They deserve our thanks and appreciation.

I would like to finally thank Panel members for all their valuable contributions to the meetings and look forward to building on the achievements of this year.”



Cllr Stephanie Haynes (Vice-Chair) said, “It has been a challenging year in the Adult Social Care Sector, as the sector evolves following years of Covid. The Panel has learnt a great deal about the changing nature of the sector and the difficulties it faces. This

will need to continue into the next Municipal year. I have worked well with the Chair, the Director of Adult Services and the Officers supporting Scrutiny throughout the year.

## Residents, Housing & Communities

**Chair:** Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Christopher Haynes



At the first meeting of the Municipal year, Councillors considered an item on WV Living Governance and Linked companies. Council owned companies is an area which the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny has highlighted nationally where Scrutiny should be taking more of an interest and so this item was most timely. In addition to this item, they considered the Heath Town Regeneration Project.

The September meeting saw the Panel consider an item on Community Safety. Superintendent Simon Inglis attended this meeting and answered questions from Councillors. Due to positive feedback

regarding the item, in the forthcoming Municipal year there will be two sessions focussing on Community Safety to which the Police will be expected to attend to answer questions. A pertinent item the Panel considered, given the increasing costs of energy, was on the energy efficiency of the housing stock and fuel poverty.

In November the Panel considered items on Performance Monitoring, Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the new Housing Allocations Policy Impact, Active Travel, and the Public Realm. Housing enquiries is one of the most common areas which Councillors receive and so Councillors found great value in considering the Housing Allocations Policy. This meeting also received the most views from the webcast in the Municipal year.

At the last meeting of the Municipal year, the Panel received a report on the expanded Arboriculture Project, Gambling related harm in Wolverhampton, and Alcohol harm in Wolverhampton. Gambling was an area which the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny have been encouraging Councils to scrutinise, given its increasing impact on individuals, families and wider society. They have even produced a publication on the issue, which is available on their website. Officers from Public Health gave a presentation on gambling and alcohol at the meeting. There was an extensive and valuable debate on both of these issues. Arboriculture is another area which Councillors receive extensive enquiries from residents. The item certainly increased Panel Members knowledge about how the service is operating and how it has to operate within the law and guidance.



Cllr Barbara McGarrity (Chair) said, “We have covered a lot of issues in the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel. I felt that the item on trees brought about a very

helpful discussion as most of the Councillors do have casework about this issue. We now know what the Arboriculture Team will look at

in terms of actioning work on the trees. I feel that this came from the Panel. Lots of useful discussion about how to help residents with their energy took place and all very topical with the cost of living crisis and the implications for residents. Throughout, my perception is that there has been a good contribution from Councillors, and it has added to the improvement of the residents of Wolverhampton lives”.



Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair) said, “Many topics covered during Municipal year 22-23. From the Heath Town regeneration Project to Gambling and Alcohol related harm, the Panel has

scrutinised an array of topics. Some good news, some not so.

Gambling & Alcohol related harm in Wolverhampton is the highest rated in the UK. We had a report outlining what we have, as a Council, in place to confront these problems and how we will combat the root causes. Heath Town Regeneration Project brings great improvement to the local area and its residents. However, the true measure of success will be how these improvements and how they were done, can be run out around the rest of the City to improve the wellbeing of all residents.”

## Health Scrutiny Panel

**Chair:** Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

**Vice-Chair:** Cllr Paul Singh





Health Scrutiny is a statutory function for the Council and this function is undertaken by the Health Scrutiny Panel. The Municipal year started with a very important item on Primary Care. The Black Country and West Birmingham CCG reported on the changes to Primary Care since their last report to the Panel on Access to Primary Care, which was in December 2021. As part of the same item, Healthwatch Wolverhampton presented their report on GP Appointments in Wolverhampton. This item was an excellent example of Scrutiny working in collaboration with Healthwatch and making clear recommendations.

The six recommendations were as follows:-

1. That Face-to-Face appointments with medical personnel at GP Practices should increase within the next six months across all Practices.
2. That the new Integrated Care System continues to try and increase uptake of the NHS App, with the aim to achieve uptake above the national average.
3. GP surgeries which currently do not offer the option of a video appointment with a local clinician, to be encouraged to implement this option in the future for patients who wish to use this appointment type.
4. Surgeries which do not have a clear answer phone messaging and call waiting system to be encouraged to improve their system.
5. That Healthwatch Wolverhampton be requested to complete another Primary Care Survey in approximately six months' time.
6. That Primary Care come back to the Panel as an item at the meeting scheduled to take place in January 2023.

The meeting in September 2022 saw collaborative working with Staffordshire County Council. Members of their Health and Care Overview Scrutiny Committee participated in the meeting via MS Teams on the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Quality Accounts. This was an excellent example of

Scrutiny working with a neighbouring Council in a partnership approach driven by digital.

The Public Health Annual Report featured at the meeting in September along with an item on Health Checks and Cancer Screening. The item shone a light on the fact that Bowel screening, Breast screening and Cervical screening had seen a decline in uptake in Wolverhampton over the last five years and were lower than the national and regional averages. Health checks were in a much better position. In quarter 1 of 2022/2023 health checks were above both West Midlands and England respectively. Wolverhampton was above the England average over the last five years. The report highlighted where improvements could be made and the actions that would be taken to try and improve cancer screening rates in Wolverhampton and further increase health checks.

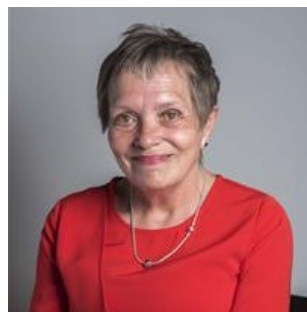
The December meeting of the Panel saw the first scrutiny session on the Integrated Care System, since it had been established on 1 July 2022. NHS England have established 42 Statutory Care Boards in line with its duty in the Health and Social Care Act 2022. A question and answer session was held on the system which included the new board, *One Wolverhampton*. Articles from the King's Fund were included as part of the agenda papers, which helped give Members of the Panel a full understanding of the national debate on Integrated Care Systems. The Health Scrutiny Panel will continue to work in partnership with the Health and Wellbeing Board, and Healthwatch within the changing health system.

In January, the Panel considered *One Wolverhampton's* priorities. They received a report on monitoring Urology Services following the merger of the service with Walsall. Importantly they received a further report on access in Primary Care, to check on the status of the Panel's recommendations from their meeting earlier in the Municipal year.

The final meeting of the year was dedicated to the Better Health Rewards Scheme, in order to help its promotion. The Better Health

Rewards pilot scheme was launched on the 17 February 2023 and was designed to last 6 months, in partnership with the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and Headup Systems Limited.

It was designed to test whether individuals would change their behaviours to eat healthier and exercise more in response to incentivisation. The Council applied to take part in the scheme because of its commitment and interest in Behavioural Sciences and were accepted due to their willingness to try something different in response to issues like obesity and a reduced willingness across the national population to participate in physical exercise.



Cllr Susan Roberts MBE (Chair) said, "I am pleased that in the Municipal Year May 2022 – May 2023, there was a particular focus on access to Primary Care. Primary Care is such a vital part of the

Health System which regardless of age or health status plays a critical part in the lives of all our residents. I am also pleased to report that the Panel made significant recommendations on Primary Care Access, which have been monitored effectively during meetings of the Panel throughout the Municipal year.

July 2022 saw the establishment of the Integrated Care System, this will be an area which the Health Scrutiny Panel will continue to scrutinise in order to ensure Wolverhampton gains the maximum it can from the new system of the Integrated Care Board and Integrated Care Partnership, with some devolved responsibility to the Local Board of *One Wolverhampton*.

I would like to give thanks to all the health and adult social care partners who have engaged with Scrutiny in this Municipal year. A very special thanks goes to all the Officers who have helped to facilitate the Scrutiny meetings and in particular Officers from the Scrutiny Team."



Cllr Paul Singh (Vice-Chair) said "I am passionate about the work we have carried out in Health Scrutiny across 2022 – 2023. In working as a critical friend with our partners, we aim to

make sure that the Local Authority provides the best services possible for its residents.

A highlight for me has been scrutinising and shining a light on our Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) post-covid lockdown. Working with our partners we have been ensuring that PPG's have started to be brought back into a functioning state and we are continuing our work in this area to ensure all PPGs are operational, so patients have a voice in their services. I look forward to scrutinising Gynaecology Services in the new Municipal year."

## Task and Finish Group: SEND Written Statement of Action

The Cross-Party Members of the Scrutiny Working Group started work in September 2022 in response to the findings from a SEND Local Area Ofsted inspection report in July 2022. The report highlighted areas in need of urgent improvement.

The working group wanted to review and contribute to the development of the action plan. The group also wanted to show their support for the work being done across the Council and local partner agencies to improve the quality of services to children and young people with SEND and their families. The Panel met again in December 2022 to further review progress and had an informal briefing before the Local Government elections.

The group met in July 2023 to discuss progress and were very pleased with work being done to get the rights processes in place and have already seen evidence of this

improved performance. The service is achieving a target 85% of EHC (Education, Health and Care) plans being reviewed within the target date compared to only 19% when the service was inspected.

The group has had its final meeting and the feedback from the Deputy Director of Education has been very positive about the value of getting Councillors involved in such an important area of policy. A report on the work of the group is expected in October 2023 to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel. Scrutiny of the very important area of SEND will continue through the Scrutiny Panel. The working group recommended to the Scrutiny Panel continued monitoring of progress of actions detailed in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) arising from the SEND review to be a priority in 2024

year for the Art Gallery because they have recently hosted the British Art Show 9.

## Useful Links

Wolverhampton Webcast Library

<https://wolverhampton.public-tv/core/portal/home>

Modern.Gov (Reports and Agendas)

<https://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/>

Local Government Association

<https://www.local.gov.uk/>

## Site Visits



On 11 October 2022 Scrutiny Board Members undertook a site visit to the Civic Halls. On 30 November 2022,

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel Members went on their own site visit to see the progress on the Civic Halls refurbishment.

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel Members visited the National Brownfield Institute on 8 March 2023 to hear all about their work.

On 13 March 2023, MASH 24 Priory Green Offices were visited by some of the Members from the Strong Families, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel visited Parkfield Medical Centre in December 2023.



Many Councillors in their own time have visited the new restaurant space in the Art Gallery. It was a particularly special