
Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23

This report gives an overview of scrutiny activity at the County Council and the work of the five scrutiny committees, both formal and informal. It enables an assessment of the effectiveness of scrutiny and identifies areas for development. 46 of the 70 county councillors sit on one or more scrutiny committees. Their purpose is to hold the Executive to account – to comment on proposals before decisions are taken, to input into policy development and to monitor performance against corporate priorities. The report covers the main topics scrutinised during 2022/23, outcomes of this work, future plans and initiatives including a new Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

Scrutiny at West Sussex County Council

Information on [Scrutiny at the Council](#) is on the website. For details on membership, areas of responsibility, meeting dates, agendas, and minutes, use the links below:

- Children and Young People’s Services Scrutiny Committee ([CYPSSC](#))
- Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee ([ECSSC](#))
- Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee ([FRSSC](#))
- Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee ([HASC](#))
- Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee ([PFSC](#))

The scrutiny year at a glance

28 committee meetings held	All committee meetings webcast, with 3,639 views	83 topics scrutinised	3 task and finish groups for in-depth scrutiny	86.5 hours in committee / task and finish groups
16% of topics on key decision preview	10% of topics on policy development	19% of topics monitoring specific service performance	20% of topics monitoring corporate performance	11% of HASC work on health scrutiny (NHS)

Scrutiny development

Update on commitments made in last year’s Annual Report

- a) A new **Executive-Scrutiny Protocol** was endorsed by the Governance Committee in September 2022. This follows national guidance to help the practical arrangements between scrutiny committees and the Executive (the Cabinet), to define roles and relationships and provide a framework for working together. Aims of the Protocol include supporting focused, transparent and timely scrutiny of proposals, facilitating effective scrutiny work planning and objective setting and enabling scrutiny committees to influence Council business in a meaningful way.

The effectiveness of the Protocol is monitored by scrutiny chairmen, the Cabinet and by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee as part of its review of this Annual Report in June 2023. Feedback from the Committee will feed into a review by Governance Committee in September 2023. In monitoring so far,

information exchange between scrutiny and Cabinet is said to work well, including Cabinet Member input into work programme planning. There is evidence of early valuable scrutiny of policy development and of performance monitoring working well, with constructive feedback to Cabinet on areas for improvement.

- b) **Review of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee** was carried out two years after its establishment and reported to Governance Committee in September 2022. It recognised that the Committee is effective, ensuring a stronger scrutiny focus for the Fire and Rescue Service and playing an important role in supporting its improvement journey. An external inspection by HMICFRS (His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) confirmed that the arrangements ensure decision-making can be challenged in a robust and informed way. This model of a dedicated scrutiny panel is in line with the Government’s Fire Reform White Paper. The Council’s arrangements will continue.
- c) **Balanced and outcomes-focused work programmes:** all work programmes now identify the type of work undertaken, to show the balance between key decision preview, policy development and performance monitoring as well as other work. Monitoring and assessment of this will be needed as part of the end of year review and, as this is the first year of providing a breakdown it may take time to determine what is an appropriate balance and it may be different for each committee.

83 topics were scrutinised during 2022/23 and categorised by type of scrutiny, as shown in the table below. Not included are health scrutiny (by HASC - 10% of its work programme) and scrutiny of the budget (by PFSC - 9% of its work programme; 2% of the overall scrutiny work programme). HASC did not carry out any key decision preview during the year but did consider two NHS proposals for substantial variation in service in its health scrutiny role. In some cases, scrutiny of policy development may mean that subsequent proposed decisions are not identified for preview as scrutiny has happened. Each committee will review the balance of its own work programme using the data from 2022/23 as a benchmark.

	Key decision preview	Policy development	Performance monitoring of the PRR	Service specific performance	Improvement programme monitoring
CYPSSC	3	2	4	3	3
CHESC	6	2	4	4	0
FRSSC	1	2	4	1	3
HASC	0	1	4	2	0
PFSC	3	3	4	9	0
Total:	13 (16%)	10 (12%)	20 (24%)	19 (23%)	6 (6%)

- d) **Raising the profile of scrutiny:** All scrutiny committee meetings are webcast, with a total of 3,639 views during the year and there continues to be external media coverage by the Sussex local democracy reporter. An aspiration in last year’s Annual Report was that committees consider proposing scrutiny debates at full Council but no topics for debate were proposed in 2022/23. There may not have been any appropriate topics, but committees will be reminded that the Council’s Constitution allows for any scrutiny committee to identify major items of work undertaken to be reported to meetings of the County Council for debate.

Other developments during 2022/23

- a) **Different ways of working** continue to be explored and include pre-meetings, informal briefings, task and finish groups (TFGs), visits and informal evidence gathering. HASC had briefings on Adult Services and Public Health ahead of meetings on specific topics. CYPSSC had a briefing on children's residential care (and which was open to all county councillors to attend). A visit to the new Horsham Fire and Training Centre was arranged for FRSSC. CYPSSC and HASC routinely hold pre-meetings to help plan the meeting, deal with questions of detail and clarification and to share background information. Scrutiny committees can use hybrid arrangements which has helped external witnesses join meetings remotely (e.g. senior NHS representatives).
- b) **Scrutiny chairmen** meet regularly to share learning and best practice and meet quarterly with the Cabinet to highlight areas for early and timely scrutiny of policy development and proposals. Cabinet Members are invited to committee business planning discussions to help identify where scrutiny can add value.
- c) **Effective Scrutiny Training** delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in March 2023 with a focus on preparing for meetings and questioning skills. Refresher training has been provided for members newly appointed to scrutiny committees, including co-opted members of HASC and CYPSSC.
- d) **External witness** input into scrutiny was provided by NHS Trusts, the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, Unison, Carers Support West Sussex, Balfour Beatty (the Council's principal highways contractor) and the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum. Healthwatch West Sussex, the health and social care champion has a seat on HASC and provided reports on topics being scrutinised by the committee. The **West Sussex Youth Cabinet** has a standing invitation to attend and speak at CYPSSC meetings and plans are being developed to extend their opportunities to input into the work of all scrutiny committees, particularly where this links with their own campaigns and areas of interest.

Scrutiny impact and value to the Council's business

The Council's approach to scrutiny aims to reflect the nationally recognised principles for good scrutiny, set out in the [government guidance for local authority scrutiny](#):

- provides constructive "**critical friend**" challenge
- amplifies the **voice and concerns of the public**
- led by **independent** people who take responsibility for their role
- **drives improvement** in public services

Key aspects of scrutiny activity carried out during 2022/23 are set out below, based on the four overarching objectives for effective scrutiny agreed by the Governance Committee and County Council in 2019.

1. Influencing policy ideas/ proposals before they are developed

- a) CYPSSC added value to the **Education and Learning Strategy 2023–25**. In July 2022, members considered the outcomes of stakeholder engagement to help identify priorities for the Strategy and made suggestions to ensure a focus on equal opportunities for all children. A task and finish group met in October to review the draft strategy. Members identified attainment outcomes in early years and primary as areas of focus and suggested further detail on how best practice is shared between schools. The Committee welcomed that its input had been incorporated into the final Strategy.

- b) A FRSSC task and finish group scrutinised the **recruitment and retention of fire fighters**. It reviewed systems and policies and recommended measures to address challenges, including to the retained duty system, core performance measures, training systems and recruitment and retention procedures. Recommendations were incorporated into policies and the Community Risk Management Plan and are being monitored by the Committee through quarterly performance monitoring.
- c) HASC has input into the **Adult Social Care Strategy**, including ensuring the right indicators have been included, seeking assurance that the workforce is trained and available and supporting lobbying for more adult social care funding.
- d) CHESC used a task and finish group to inform plans for the **Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan**. This facilitated timely and meaningful contributions to decision-making. The TFG is continuing and will input into the bus network review and the implementation of schemes arising from the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- e) PFSC contributed to the Council's **Smarter Working Programme** which aims to support new and more flexible ways of working whilst ensuring the needs of customers and staff are met. Recognising the importance of IT capability for effective flexible work practices, the Committee received two updates on the **Smartcore programme** for a new business administration system. Members highlighted the importance of project specifications and requested that learning be carried through to other large-scale projects. PFSC also reviewed progress on a range of issues relating to the Council's **workforce**, building on previous scrutiny of the People Framework. Scrutiny of these areas highlighted the importance of changing work practices after the pandemic and the need to review how the Council makes best use of its resources, a priority in the Council Plan.
- f) PFSC also scrutinised a number of **property** related items, including the revised Asset Management Strategy and the development of property Joint Venture arrangements. In March 2023, the Committee reviewed the proposed sale of a Council-owned property in Burgess Hill following a successful call-in request. This was the only call-in made during 2022/23 and was accepted on the basis that the proposal had not already been subject to scrutiny. PFSC explored the implications of this proposal, particularly the importance of considering the wider social value context of asset sales. The Committee supported confirmation of the proposal.

2. Spending time on matters critical to outcomes for residents

- a) An informal evidence gathering session on **dentistry** was held in January 2023 for members of HASC, with input from dentists and representatives of children in care. Healthwatch West Sussex provided a report on the impact dentistry provision is having on West Sussex residents. Conclusions from the session were considered by the Committee at its meeting in March 2023, when it agreed to write to West Sussex MPs and the Secretary of State for Health, setting out the concerns raised. It also shared the findings with relevant NHS bodies and asked them to take action on a number of points, to be reported back to the Committee. One issue raised through evidence gathering was the impact of access to dentistry for care leavers, and this has been shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- b) HASC was consulted on **NHS proposed changes** to stroke services and children's cancer services and was able to robustly challenge and make suggestions to consultation plans. It held the **University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust** to account following a challenging external inspection by the Care Quality Commission, seeking assurance on its improvement plan. It also scrutinised aspects of **NHS service delivery**, with sessions on winter planning, the provision of primary healthcare and ambulance service performance, focusing on capacity to meet current and future demand.

- c) CHESC has a strategic duty to scrutinise the decisions and actions taken in respect of **crime and disorder**. In November 2022 the Committee considered the work of the County Council and its partners to tackle **Digital Crime**. Evidence was provided by Surrey and Sussex Police, Get Safe Online and Trading Standards. One recommendation was to publicise the details of schools yet to sign up for the Digital Safety Package, as a result of which a further eleven schools enrolled.
- d) In September 2022 CYPSSC assessed the delivery and performance of the **SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion Strategy** implemented in 2019. The Committee highlighted the timeliness of Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments being completed within the 20-week statutory deadline as a particular area for improvement as well as better communication lines for parents and carers. The EHCP timeliness is now a key performance indicator in the Council Plan which the Committee will continue to monitor into 2023/24 along with the work to increase SEND places in the county.
- e) **The Council Plan and Budget for 2023/24** were scrutinised before approval by the full County Council in February 2023. They were reviewed together to ensure targets and objectives were linked to financial resources and could be monitored together. Three informal member sessions were held through the year to ensure all members were engaged and had opportunity to input into the development of the Plan and Budget. The session in January included breakout groups by scrutiny portfolio areas for an in-depth look at service plans. Comments were fed into scrutiny by PFSC, with its conclusions fed back to the Cabinet. This enabled each portfolio to be reviewed ahead of the PFSC session for more effective scrutiny. Feedback from members on the process and the reports presented was positive, suggesting that it had enabled timely and valuable engagement.

3. Meaningful challenge to service performance management

- a) All scrutiny committees carry out quarterly performance monitoring in public at their formal meetings, through review of the **Performance and Resources Report (PRR)**. Each scrutiny committee receives the information for its portfolio areas, encouraging wider member responsibility for performance and finances. The PRR includes improved information on performance targets, budget, workforce and corporate risk as well as a summary of the transformation programme and the impact of Covid. The report was improved during the year to better link to the Council Plan's key performance indicators and priorities. Scrutiny feedback is provided to Cabinet ahead of its consideration if possible and information in the PRR informs scrutiny work programmes.
- b) PFSC used the PRR to identify priorities for scrutiny, for example a report was requested on **recruitment and retention**. The committee uses the quarterly report to monitor particular areas of interest such as the economy, Capital Programme and cyber security. This allows the Committee to better prioritise issues making better use of resources. Extra information was requested for inclusion in the reports to assist members in their scrutiny role, for example in relation to workforce statistics and specific capital projects.
- c) The progress of the **Children First Improvement Programme** continued to be a focus for CYPSSC. It looked at particular areas of the programme to assess how it was improving outcomes for children and families. This included assessing the work on **recruitment and retention** of social workers and outputs of **Ofsted Monitoring visits**. In November 2022, the Committee heard from the Independent Commissioner, John Coughlan with his view on the progress by the service since 2019, areas for future focus and the preparedness for the full Ofsted

Inspection. This gave the Committee a sound basis for planning its work programme for the forthcoming year.

- d) FRSSC has continued to review Fire and Rescue Service performance through the **Performance and Assurance Framework**, enabling timely and constructive input and focusing on areas of concern identified by the Committee. It monitored the impact of the Joint Fire Control Centre, to ensure the maintenance of satisfactory response times. The benefits of working with Council services were highlighted, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable adults.
- e) A specific area of focus for HASC was on the **workforce challenges** facing Adult Social Care and it sought assurance on the planned action. It also identified Public Health performance on **obesity rates** as an area for future monitoring. The Committee recommended ways to increase response rates for the reporting of performance data in sensitive areas, such as domestic violence reporting.
- f) CHESC examined performance against the **Highways Maintenance Contracts**. Evidence was heard from a representative of Balfour Beatty, the principal contractor. Scrutiny was wide-ranging, touching on issues such as the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), enhancements and innovations delivered, the upskilling and sufficiency of staff (both contractors and in house) and work to address the effects of climate change. In September 2022, the Committee was updated on delivery of the Council's **Climate Change Strategy** and reviewed progress in meeting the commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2030. It recognised the scale of the challenges and welcomed the work undertaken to date, including the fact that climate change is considered as part of every decision made within the Council.

4. Showing the difference scrutiny makes to outcomes for residents

- a) In September 2022, HASC reviewed the improvement plan for the **financial assessment** process for customers in receipt of adult social care. It was able to ensure the views of service users and their families/carers were being heard and that a fair application process has been implemented. Whilst supporting the improvements made, the Committee recommended that more information on disability related expenditure should be shared with the public and that the Service should improve response times for customer enquiries.
- b) CYPSSC considered proposals for the **review of primary age school provision** across Worthing and Durrington ahead of a Cabinet Member decision. It explored the outcomes of the public consultation and heard from local members. The Committee was pleased that the feedback from the consultation had been taken into account for the final proposals and made suggestions on areas for improvement to future consultation processes to ensure they are inclusive and accessible.
- c) CHESC carried out preview of the proposed new **Speed Limit Policy** in November 2022. This session was identified by Committee members as an example of scrutiny at its most effective – with many of its recommendations being addressed or adopted by the Cabinet Member in the final version of the Policy, including rewording the document for clarity. The Committee sought further information on the numbers of people killed and seriously injured, to explore whether any action within the Council's control could have had a positive impact.
- d) Demonstrating and evidencing the impact of scrutiny has been helped by a **new recommendations tracker**, reported to each committee meeting as a means of assessing outcomes. There has been positive feedback from members on this in keeping track of the progress of committees' recommendations and conclusions.

This was an outcome of best practice liaison with Surrey County Council (who use a similar tracker for their scrutiny) and should enable better monitoring of impact. In addition, the scrutiny **business planning checklist** used by members for work programme planning has been reviewed and refreshed to support more effective prioritisation and an outcomes-focus. Pre-agenda meetings, attended by the committee chairman, vice chairman and Democratic Services support officer to plan the management of meetings are more focused to help ensure clear aims/outcomes are identified for each agenda item, with a **focus for scrutiny** and **key lines of enquiry** in each report. It will be important for all scrutiny committee members to play a part in ensuring scrutiny maintains an outcomes-focus, and for this to be part of the ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of scrutiny.

Scrutiny Evaluation 2022/23

Each scrutiny committee held an informal review of the year in March 2023 to consider what had worked well and identify areas for improvement. It also gave an opportunity to consider member training and priorities for the work programme.

What worked well:

- The flexibility of hybrid technology to allow witnesses to attend
- Pre-meetings to prepare and focus questioning ensures members and officers are aware of issues resulting in better scrutiny and use of resources
- Different ways of working, such as briefings/information sessions to increase understanding and make better use of time and resources
- Support from Services, including the timely request for further information and thorough reports
- Use of a range of witnesses to triangulate evidence
- Early influence on policies, rather than later stage through decision preview
- Closer working and regular meetings between Cabinet and scrutiny means better Cabinet Member engagement in work programme planning. For FRSSC, with no BPG, the involvement of the whole committee was seen as beneficial
- Communication with the whole committee following BPG meetings, providing updates on work programme planning
- Quarterly scrutiny of the Council's Performance and Resources Report has enabled more robust performance, budget and risk monitoring. This has continued to improve by scrutiny input to the report content
- The new Recommendations Tracker, helping to ensure scrutiny input and influence can be monitored
- Liaison with Surrey County Council's scrutiny committees, and the opportunity to share learning and reflect on scrutiny at WSCC

Areas for improvement:

- More use of external witnesses/external subject matter experts
- More visits to be programmed on services being scrutinised and more information/briefing sessions to help build knowledge, and more use of TFGs
- More involvement by all committee members in work programme planning
- Members to have the confidence in questioning and to understand the level of background research and preparation required ahead of meetings
- The time given to consideration of performance reports, and giving members the tools to enable effective scrutiny of these

Priorities for scrutiny in 2023/24

As well as addressing the areas for improvement highlighted in the evaluation of 2022/23, areas of focus for the future scrutiny work programme include:

- The Medium-Term Financial Strategy, Capital Programme and the Council Budget for 2024/25
- Service improvement programme for Adult Social Care and monitoring onward development for Children's Social Care and Fire and Rescue Service
- Plans to support the growth of the West Sussex economy
- Lessons learned from major highways schemes
- Progress of the Council's commitments to address Climate Change
- Effectiveness of new processes for Traffic Regulation Orders, Community Highways Schemes and the management of on-street parking
- Mental health services for children and young people, initially by informal evidence gathering
- Reviewing the Early Help Service model
- Assessing the improvement plan for children with SEND and preparedness for the SEND Area Review
- Arrangements for the integration of health and social care across Sussex, and any specific proposals impacting on West Sussex residents, with training on health scrutiny of the Integrated Care System to be provided at a joint session for HASC and the health scrutiny committee members of Brighton and Hove City Council and East Sussex County Council

June 2023