

Annual Report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Chair - Councillor Daniel Cook

Vice Chair – Councillor Daniel Maycock



Members (2023/24)	Appointed for municipal year	2022/23	Retirement from Committee
Daniel Cook (Chair)	May 2023		
Daniel Maycock(Vice-Chair)	May 2023		
Marie Bailey	May 2023		
Chris Bain	May 2023		
Lee Clarke	May 2023		November 2023
Rosemary Claymore	May 2023		
Gareth Coates	May 2023		
Stephen Doyle	May 2023		
Ben Price	May 2023		
Lewis Smith	November 2023		

Committee’s remit and function (Terms of Reference)

The Constitution sets out the Committee’s remit which can be summarised as to provide effective scrutiny of the achievement of the Council’s strategic priorities by scrutinising the performance of the Executive. Particular areas of focus include reviewing and scrutinising matters relating to:-

- Forward Plan
- Quarterly performance reports
- Corporate plan
- Major Council led projects
- Investment Strategy
- HRA function
- Bi-annually review and scrutinise matters relating to the Local Authority Trading Company’s activities and performance

Chair's Overview

Welcome to the annual report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee who met eight times in the 2023/2024 municipal year, one meeting that was scheduled for the 7th December 2023 was moved to the 20th December 2023.

During the past year, the Committee's main focus has been on the Council's performance, including specifically the financial performance of the Council through the Quarterly Performance Report which has been spotlighted within the report.

Cabinet Members and Officers were invited to attend meetings of the Committee to provide information and to answer questions on these areas.

The Committee has used the Council's Forward Plan to focus its work and to help identify areas which would either require pre-decision scrutiny and/or post implementation scrutiny.

The Committee undertook a robust scrutiny of actions taken by Officers and Members over recommendations made by the Leaseholders working group.

A cross scrutiny working group was established to consider a number of items raised by all three Committees, in relation to Council Housing Repairs. The Housing repairs working group has already met and delivered a number of recommendations to Cabinet around damp and mould with more work to do around general repairs.

I would like to thank all members of the Committee, officers and other stakeholders who took part in these meetings for their valuable contributions during the year.

Councillor D Cook

Chair

Spotlight item – Quarterly Performance Report

The Committee received the relevant quarter's draft report, and the meetings were normally attended by senior Officers and/or the Leader. Consideration was given prior to Cabinet's receipt of the report and a report detailing the Committees comments was added to the report to aid Cabinet in their consideration of the reports.

In addition to the quarter's highlights the following areas received scrutiny through the regular receipt of the QPR reports:

- Strategic Corporate Projects
- Financial Position
- Corporate Risk
- Audit
- Information governance and Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Following feedback from the Committee the layout of the report has been developed throughout the year.

During Scrutiny of the reports' the Committee requested clarification and asked questions around the Councils Financial Position including -

- How benchmarking was used within the Corporate Plan to measure performance?
- The improvement in corporate risk and how sensitive this was to change?
- Whether there was a 30-year projection of the Housing Revenue Business Plan?
- Clarification around the medium-term financial strategy?

The Committee also requested explanations around tenants' arrears, council tax support, Universal Credit figures, as well as questioning the expected outcomes of the new Neighbourhood Impact Teams and how Members could learn more and signpost users to the Councils Homelessness Hub?

The Committee asked questions around the Future High Street Fund project and asked for clarification around the decision to demolish the Peel café. The Committee highlighted the importance of ensuring good governance was in place around decisions in future to ensure that people are fully engaged.

Through the report the Committee acknowledged the work carried out by the team responding to FOI requests.

Further items were identified through the report for consideration on the Committees workplan including an item to look at the Councils budget and policy around managing trees.

The Committee endorsed the reports before they were presented to Cabinet.

The Committee also considered the following items:

1. **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (July and August 2023)**

At the July meeting the Committee received an update on the Council Tax reduction Scheme for 2024/2025, as the report was released late it came back to the Committee in August when they had, had more time to consider the report.

The Committee sought clarification around whether the armed forces Covenant had been included, the discretionary fund available, how many people with benefit from the scheme and what was being done in terms of money advice or green energy support.

Following the responses from Officers the committee agreed that they were in support of the scheme going out for public consultation.

2. **Housing Repairs Performance Update (June and July 2023)**

At the June 2023 meeting the Committee received an update from the Assistant Director Assets and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning on the housing repairs performance statistics.

The Committee raised concerns around the number of repairs that were not put right on the first visit and highlighted that they felt the data in the report did not seem to represent the number of complaints that Ward Councillors were receiving. Further information was requested around the damp and mould process.

The Committee resolved to make a recommendation to Cabinet that would allow complaints to Members to be fed through the tell us process.

Following on from this meeting a further update on the Housing Repairs Services was brought to the Committee at the July Meeting where they were provided with performance data for a number of areas.

A working Group was set up to include Members from the other Scrutiny Committees to be led by Corporate Scrutiny under the title of Housing Repairs Working Group.

3. **Leaseholder Service Charges (October 2023)**

At the meeting on the 4th October 2023 the Committee undertook a review of the actions taken since recommendations had been made to Cabinet in February 2023 around Leaseholder Service Charges.

Officers attended to provide a timeline of events since the recommendations were made and to answer questions from the Committee on the progress made which included confirmation of the current situation; what urgent works had been carried out; and what communication had been made with leaseholders.

Following the report and the responses from Officers the committee highlighted:

- the importance of improving communication with residents particularly the elderly and vulnerable.
- the importance of strong governance arrangements being in place to support accountability so that the public can have confidence and trust in processes.

4. **Medium Term Financial strategy (October 2023)**

The Committee received an update on the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Considering the report, the Committee asked for clarification on a number of areas including; where assumptions within the report came from and whether the Council could keep anymore of its business rates. Concern was raised that the Council do not do enough long-term planning to secure the future of the Council.

Following Scrutiny two recommendations were made to be sent to Cabinet for consideration.

5. **Update on the Social Housing Regulatory Programme (November 2023)**

Further to the Spotlight item in 2022/2023 the Committee continued to monitor the Social Housing Regulatory Programme and received an update for endorsement in November 2023 before it was presented to Cabinet.

Clarification was sought by the Committee around what work was being done in terms of engagement other than dealing with complaints. The Committee also highlighted a concern in the increase in anti-social behaviour.

Following the responses from Officers the Committee were happy to endorse the recommendations within the report for Cabinet.

6. **Update on the Assure Implementation.**

Following on from the meeting of the Committee in March 2023, in February 2024, they received a further update on the implementation of the Assure project to migrate Environmental Health and Planning processes from M3 to Assure.

The Committee asked for clarification around the testing of the system; what would happen if they did not meet the de-support deadline for the licensing system and for the elements that would run beyond the deadline whether there was a plan in place for if support was needed.

The Committee endorsed the report but requested a briefing note with a progress update for their March meeting.

Forward Plan consideration;

Over the year 2023/2024, there has been regular review of the Forward Plan at all meetings to identify areas which would either require pre decision scrutiny and /or post implementation scrutiny.

Working groups

1. Housing Repairs working Group

The Cross-Scrutiny working group decided to address damp and mould as its first item and a meeting was attended by officers where Members given an update on the inspection process and how damp and mould could occur.

Members of the group had the opportunity to ask the Officer questions before drafting three initial recommendations.

The recommendations were moved by the Scrutiny Committee on the 20th December 2023.

A further working group meeting was held where the focus was on voids and at the March meeting, the Assistant Director- Assets attending to answer some questions with a view to a full report being produced for April. The Committee agreed to add an extra meeting to the calendar.

At the meeting in April 2024 the Committee received the housing voids update report to review where the Committee raised a number of concerns including, the time taken to turnaround voids and the associated costs, the capacity of the contractor to manage the work and the change in turnaround times seen since the change of contractor and the current recovery rate of rechargeable repairs.

Following the Committees discussion a number of recommendations were moved to be presented to Cabinet at the first meeting of the new Municipal Year.

2. Leaseholder Insurance Policies

Following a request from a non-Committee Member the Committee requested a briefing note around Leaseholder services charges, following this it was agreed that a working group would be established and meet in April when Officers could attend. Following the working group meeting, Members reported back to the Committee that they were satisfied with the response provided by Officers and that there was no further work to be done in this area.

Recommendations made to and Responses received from Cabinet

Recommendations were made to Cabinet on the following Reports and Cabinet's response is highlighted:

Scrutiny meeting item recommendations	Responses received
<p>4th October 2023</p> <p>1.a. That Cross party write a letter to Government to lobby for a better position for long term strategic planning for the Council.</p> <p>1.b. That the three Scrutiny chairs are invited on to the budget setting group.</p>	<p>26th October 2023</p> <p>No recommendations were moved however in respect of recommendation one: the Leader of the Council agreed that he supported the first recommendation for Cross party write to Government to lobby for a better position for long term strategic planning.</p>
<p>20th December 2023</p> <p>2.a. To add additional resource to TBC repairs team; when a MLDINS code is inputted for a property a manual lookback at the history of repairs for that property be conducted to identify if this Damp and/or Mold has been a previous issue at the property, or for the tenant at a previous property.</p> <p>2.b. That the Damp & Mould inspection process become part of the repairs policy.</p> <p>2.c. To ensure that vulnerable residents are prioritised when there are damp and mould issues within the home.</p>	<p>25th January 2024</p> <p>All recs agreed as long as in line with new housing regulations.</p> <p>Rec 3. Need to think about criteria of what constitutes vulnerable people</p>
<p>22nd April 2024</p> <p>3.a To instruct Officers to review the costs versus return, of employing an in-house inspection team to see if we can drive down the costs of voids.</p> <p>3.b To review how we recover damages costs from existing tenants and see if there is a more proactive way we can approach this long term.</p> <p>3.c That the Portfolio Holder calls Equans in to address Members major concerns around void turnaround times and ask them what their action plan is to improve this.</p>	<p>To be presented to Cabinet in the 2024/2025 Municipal year</p>

Members Attendance

Member	Number of meetings attended
Daniel Cook (Chair)	9 out of 9
Daniel Maycock(Vice-Chair)	7 out of 9
Marie Bailey	2 out of 9
Chris Bain	7 out of 9
Lee Clarke	4 out of 5
Rosemary Claymore	6 out of 9
Gareth Coates	8 out of 9
Stephen Doyle	8 out of 9
Ben Price	7 out of 9
Lewis Smith	4 out of 4