



Coventry City Council

Scrutiny Annual Report to Council 2023-24

To be considered at the City Council meeting
on the 9 July, 2024

Introduction by Cllr Naeem Akhtar, Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Welcome to the Scrutiny Annual Report for the municipal year 2023-24. It contains a few highlights from the year, including cross-cutting themes, as well as work by the individual boards.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor Ruane for his work chairing the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and also Councillor Thay in his role as Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee during 2023-24

This year we welcome Councillor Jobbar as chair of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board, and Councillor Kelly as Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

Scrutiny is an important part of the Council's democratic structure which is led by non-executive Councillors. It works to the common aim of improving services for the local community and is involved in the following:

Policy review and development: Helping to shape the way public services are delivered.

Scrutinising decisions of the executive: Is the right action being taken? Are services working effectively?

External scrutiny: Examining services that impact upon the local community, such as health and policing.

Scrutiny uses evidence to make recommendations to the Cabinet to request change; it does not make decisions.

The focus for scrutiny in 2024-25 will continue to be how we work with partners to sustain and improve services, particularly within the current economic and financial situation. Learning from the LGA Peer Review and delivery of The One Coventry Plan will be central to this work, but other areas such as the Climate Change Strategy will all be considered by scrutiny this year.

Get involved:

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- Follow us on twitter @covscrutiny
- Find meeting dates and agendas here: [Coventry City Council Meeting Papers](#)

Scrutiny 2023-24



Scrutiny Co-ordination (SCRUCO)



Chair: Cllr N Akhtar
Deputy: Cllr R Thay

- Scrutiny Coordination
- Policy and Leadership
- Policing and Equalities
- Designated Crime and Disorder Board

Finance & Corporate Services (1)	Education & Children's Services (2)	Business, Economy & Enterprise (3)	Communities & Neighbourhoods (4)	Health and Social Care (5)
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Cllr E Ruane

- Strategic Finance
- Council Resources
- New Ways of Working



Cllr CE Thomas

- Early Help
- Children & Young People's Social Care
- Schools
- Adult, Higher & Further Education



Cllr R Singh

- Business, Enterprise & Employment
- Inward Investment
- Transportation
- Climate change & sustainability



Cllr M Ali

- Public Services
- Social Enterprise Strategy
- Community & Third Sector
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Arts & Heritage



Cllr C Miks

- Health
- Adult Social Care
- Health Inequalities
- Sport



Cross Cutting Scrutiny Themes 2023-24

Climate Change

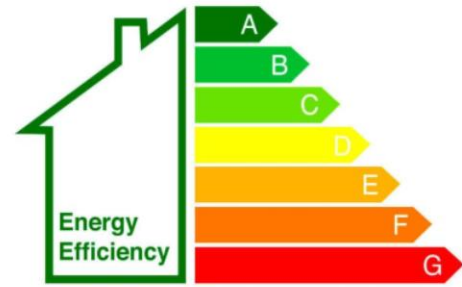
Scrutiny has continued to maintain a focus on Climate Change and work the Council is undertaking to address the impact of climate change. Scruco considered the responses to the engagement on the Climate Change Strategy at their meeting on the 20th September 2023. Members asked detailed questions about the engagement process and which groups has been involved. The Committee requested that their comments be considered as part of the consultation process, as well as identifying better ways to engage young people including through schools and social media.

As well as the overarching Climate Change Strategy, Scrutiny have considered several items which contribute to its aims and objectives. Scruco considered an item looking in detail at the Strategic Energy Partnership with EON, The Committee asked questions and received responses specifically on the procurement process and any benefits or risks associated with the venture and its ability to provide the expertise and investment to help support the delivery of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and the One Coventry Plan. The committee also requested regular updates on progress as well as the opportunity to pre-scrutinise any related Cabinet Reports.



Other Boards also considered items that will support achieving the outcomes of the Climate Change Strategy. The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received an update on the Local Air Quality Action Plan, including current monitoring of CO2 levels and progress on delivery of cycle lanes and Liveable Neighbourhood projects. The Board also considered an item on the progress on installing charging points for electric vehicles. Members asked questions regarding objections from residents to installations and requested that officers ensure that the wording in the consultation process is revised to make the process clear when an objection is received requesting removal of an EV charging point. The Board also requested further updates on progress.

At another of their meetings, the Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3) considered an item on an update to the Domestic Retrofit programme. The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member on the eligibility criteria and affordability, how information about the scheme was publicised, with Members asking for information about the scheme so they could promote it with residents, as well as use of local media outlets. Members were also interested in the training programme and ensuring that the city had the skills to call on to deliver the programme.



The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) also considered items that contribute to delivering the Climate Change Strategy, one of which was the School Streets programme. The board had already received a briefing on the project to reduce traffic and encourage active travel around schools, the previous year and had requested a progress update on the newer schemes. The board asked questions of officers and the Cabinet Member on areas such as enforcement powers and the involvement of the police, how the specific schools had been identified as well as ensuring that delivery vehicles and sat-navs would pick up the traffic restriction information. The Board recommended to the Cabinet Member that other measures should be explored such as traffic management for the schools that had not been included in the current school streets programme.

It is planned that scrutiny will consider the draft Climate Change Strategy as part of the 2024-25 work programme.

Partnership Working

Many of the Boards this year scrutinised the work of external partners and how effectively the Council work to deliver the One Coventry Plan priorities alongside those partners. Scrutiny has specific powers to scrutinise health and community safety partners but can invite any organisation that affects the residents of Coventry to attend a scrutiny meeting.

During 2023-24 a wide range of partners contributed to discussions about services in Coventry. These included voluntary organisations such as the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre and Ukrainian Society to talk about the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as well as other public sector organisations such as the Integrated Care Board to talk about the Integrated Health and Care Delivery Plan for Coventry and Warwickshire.

Other partners who have engaged this year are Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (CWPT) particularly on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services at a joint meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) and the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5). Compass, as a provider of services for children and young people also contributed to this meeting.

UHCW presented on Improving Lives, as well as A&E waiting times at the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5). More information about how the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board has worked with partners can be found in the section below.

The Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3) also invited external partners to answer questions for an item on buses. There were representatives from both National express and Stagecoach as well as Transport for West Midlands. The Board were keen to examine proposals for future delivery of bus services in the region, including bus franchising. The Board had a further item at their meeting in January and have asked to scrutinise the final report to the Mayor for the West Midlands before any decision is made on future models of bus delivery.

Overall, scrutiny considered twenty-one items that included external delivery partners, which will be a continued theme throughout the coming year as part of the One Coventry approach. Scruco also considered the Annual Reports of the Council subsidiaries, which are arms-length companies of the Council.

Scrutiny Board Highlights 2023-24

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

Community Safety

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee considered several items that focused on Community Safety and the work of the Police. There were three items that covered the Community Safety portfolio of the Board, which included the Coventry Community Safety Plan, the Serious Violence Duty, and the Local Policing update in February. There was also a representative from the police when the committee considered an item on Parking and Road Safety.

Following an item on the Coventry Community Safety Plan in July, the committee recommended that steps were taken to increase safety in the city centre, which led to the committee arranging an additional meeting to provide pre-scrutiny of the Cabinet Report on amendments to the city centre PSPO to restrict bikes and e-vehicles. The committee supported the recommendations in principle but expressed concern about enforcement. The committee requested a further report on progress on the implementation of the city centre PSPO, as well as recommending that the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities write to the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner

requesting a higher policing presence in the city centre and for the police to use their powers to seize illegal e-vehicles.

At their meeting in November the Committee also welcomed a report on the implementation of the Council's Serious Violence Duty. This was led in partnership with Public Health, Education, Community Safety, NHS partners, and the Police. The Committee heard more details about the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence. Members requested a further update in 6 months-time as well as referring an item on school exclusions to the Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) for further scrutiny.

The Committee had also requested an update on the effectiveness of the local policing model which they had received a report on the previous year. The Committee received a presentation which covered a wide aspect of the policing model including KPI's and performance measures, the outcome of the HMIC Review of the West Midlands Police, responding and calls and response times to incidents, as well as priorities and key activities.

Members requested contact details of local lead police officers for their communities, to ensure strong links between the police and residents, which were circulated.

Complaints Policy and Strategy Task and Finish Group

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman included the Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in their annual review letter for the first time in July 2023. As a result of this the Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group at their meeting on the 20th September to update and refresh the Complaints Policy and Procedure. The task and finish group met three times and identified three recommendations for the Cabinet Member which were accepted. The recommendations were a. Update the Complaints Policy and Process as suggested by the T&F Group (Appendix A)
b. Identify timescales for implementation of the electronic complaints system to deal with complaints and c. Consider future strategic planning opportunities including the budgetary implications for savings from an alternative CRM system.

Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1)

Consultation on Spending, Saving and Council Tax Proposals for 2024/25



On the 11th January 2024, the Board contributed their comments to the City Council's public consultation on revenue spending and savings proposals for 2024/25 and future financial years. In noting the content of the briefing note and following the discussion, the board identified issues to consider including standardising residents' parking permit fees,

assessing the impact of free parking at War Memorial Park, clarifying inflation narratives, and analysing the impact of an overnight streetlight switch-off. Officers agreed to address outstanding requests for residents' parking schemes and provide responses to the points raised. A briefing note containing their comments around the budget consultation was shared with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources.

Delivering Value for Money in Placement Costs

The Board considered an item outlining the corporate controls in place to secure value for money when providing support to vulnerable residents. The Board were given details of the corporate controls in place to secure the best value in securing support for vulnerable residents and the issues faced across the services in Adult Social Care, Housing, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Home to School Travel Assistance in securing placements.

Members asked questions of officers and the Cabinet Member on areas such as the number of Adult Social Care service users and the total cost, percentage markup of profit for providers, reasons for the increase in demand, location of providers, City Council engagement with highest-cost housing placements, average length of stay for an individual and checks to ensure annual reviews take place for SEND package funding.

In respect of the home-to-school travel assistance package funding, concerns were raised regarding costs and providers' contractual obligations, for instance, the costs incurred when a child is absent from school and the service not used. It was noted that a review was currently underway on this funding and the Board requested that a further report on the Home to School Travel Assistance be brought back to the Board at the earliest opportunity.

Home to School Taxi

Following on from the Board's request for a further update on the Home to School Taxi service, a background on the establishment and use of the home-to-school taxi service and an update of its review were shared with the board on the 21st of March 2024.

The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member about the use of taxi service fares, concerns about the current process not providing the best value for money, and the percentage of parents transporting their children to school.

Following discussion, the Board agreed to further explore the issues raised, and establish a Task and Finish Group to ensure that the best value was being achieved and officers agreed to provide the information requested by Members.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Cost of Placements

Following concerns raised by Members about the impact the high cost of children's placements was having on the Council budget, the Board requested an in-depth item on the issue. The Board received a copy of the recent Residential Children's Home Strategy which provided information about steps being taken to reduce reliance on external providers of children's placements, as well as position paper on the current situation. The Board were also able to take a private report on the details of the top 10 most expensive placements. This enabled Members to get a really comprehensive understanding of the complexities of meeting some children's needs and the options there are to source alternative provision. As a result of the item the Board requested a further update to track progress on implementing the strategy and whether there had been a reduction in costs. Members were also keen to visit the purpose build residential accommodation once complete.

Holiday Activities Fund



The Board have continued to receive updates on the delivery of the Holiday Activities Fund and this year they were able to watch a video providing positive feedback from children, families and staff who had benefited from the programme. The Board requested a formal thank you to the Cabinet Member for work done on the programme, as well as expressing concern about future funding for the scheme, as well as other assistance for families experiencing poverty as part of the cost-of-living crisis.

The Board also asked that the video and positive feedback was shared widely with governing bodies of those schools involved, as well as asking that activities were culturally appropriate for all communities across the city. The Board will continue to receive updates on the programme during 2024-25.

Business, Economy, and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)

Support for Businesses and the Work of Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub



On March 6th, 2024, the Board considered a report on the support Coventry City Council had been giving to businesses during the 2023/24 financial year, and how the Authority had worked alongside local business support partners including Coventry and Warwickshire (CW) Growth Hub to ensure that needs and opportunities facing Coventry businesses and the local economy were being as effectively addressed as possible.

The report outlined the support provided to businesses during the 2023/24 financial year and highlighted the Council's work on collaboration with local business support partners, including the Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub, to address the needs and opportunities of Coventry businesses and the local economy. Key areas of focus discussed between members and officers included specific support for SMEs, advice on energy bills, eligibility criteria for business support, data collection on business numbers, marketing promotion, further information to members on Business Support Services, an emphasis on innovation and university collaboration, and foreign investment figures indicating its attractiveness for investment.

Members requested the Council's Business Support Services consider all options for marketing the support on offer, to ensure promotion through various channels to maximise inclusion.

2024 Tourism Strategy and Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Model

On April 17, 2024, a presentation and briefing note were shared with the Board regarding the progress in establishing Destination Coventry as a Sustainable Destination Management Organisation (DMO) for the city. The Board discussed the increase in domestic visitor numbers, the need for collaborative working, the DMO's commitment to working as a brand and destination, the inclusion of Warwickshire, £107,000 secured from local private sector membership, and the DMO's support to businesses through the post-COVID 'Step back into hospitality' scheme. The DMO also assisted businesses in securing business or signposting them to secure business for their venues. The Board discussed the next 12 months, deciding on the best markets and how to bring in new business, targeting international events, and engaging with the city's universities. Members recommended that when the DMO Board is reviewed, consideration be taken to a mix of private and public sector representatives on the board, including the city's universities when the configuration takes place.



Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Local Plan Review

The Council's Local Plan is in the process of being reviewed and the Board had requested to be able to comment and have input in the consultation. Members initially had an informal briefing on the content of the consultation documents, before discussing the proposals at a formal meeting on 21st September. The Board robustly questioned the Cabinet Member and officers. There were six specific points that the Board wanted to be raised and included in the consultation response, which has been sent to officers. The Board also asked that all Members be made aware of other opportunities to contribute to the consultation.

Review of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Additional Licensing Scheme 2023

The Council is required to review its additional licensing scheme periodically, so the Board scrutinised the report that went to Cabinet reporting on the findings of the review. The Board were supportive of the Licensing Scheme in its current format and requested that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities considers that work to renew the scheme starts as soon as possible.

Members asked questions of the officers focussing on how landlords were engaged with the scheme and what work was being done to support landlords to improve properties, as well as share information and good practice.

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board (5)

West Midlands Ambulance Service



NHS
**West Midlands
Ambulance Service**
University NHS Foundation Trust



WMFS
**West Midlands
Fire Service**

On the 19th of July 2023, the Board reviewed a presentation by the Interim Director of Nursing and the Strategy & Engagement Director. The information covered Coventry and Warwickshire, including University Hospitals, South Warwickshire Foundation Trust, and George Elliot Hospital. The board discussed regional incidents, transport rates, hospital handover delays, performance, staff recruitment, staff wellbeing, NHS investment in emergency community response, ambulance usage, response prioritization, service gaps, in-house call answering services, staff abuse, demand reduction, ambulance waiting times, handover delays, recruitment challenges, and the use of drones in hazardous areas. The board expressed gratitude for the service's work, gave support in their request for an independent review of the service and thanked them for their efforts. The Board also gave recommendations to health partners, that work be undertaken to enable the West Midlands Ambulance Service to gain access to social prescribing.

During the same meeting, the Board heard a presentation from the Group Commander of the Coventry & Solihull Command, West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) about their response to the pandemic, addressing health inequalities, the services provided by WMFS, Key Stage 2 education, and future plans. Following the presentation, members asked questions and received information from officers on various topics, including the back home safe and well service, response to accidents involving vulnerable individuals, triage based on vulnerability, provision of free smoke alarms, fire awareness workshops in communities, periodic risk reviews, evaluations of safe and well programs, statutory school curriculum, full-time staffing of firefighters, diversity initiatives, and the Vanguard project. The Chair expressed gratitude to the West Midlands Fire Service for their work in the community.

Adult Safeguarding Annual Report

The Board considered a briefing note and presentation which provided an overview of Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2022-23. The Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) is a partnership of organisations working to prevent and end abuse of adults with care and support needs in Coventry. The report, considered by the Board, covered various forms of neglect, self-neglect, and referral activities into social care. The CSAB has provided guidance and training to informal carers, partnered with GPs, and worked closely with community navigators.

Members requested improvements to the report, including descriptions of different types of abuse, a glossary of terms, a more easy-read report style, clarity and detail improvements to tables, and circulation of details of safe and well checks by the Fire Service.

Healthwatch Coventry

The Board reviewed Healthwatch Coventry's work to improve health and care, including barriers to access and health inequality for Coventry. Healthwatch is an independent health and social care champion, involving local people in decision-making and setting priorities. The Board discussed findings with officers from care homes, maternity care for asylum seekers and newly arrived women, and increased funding for local dentistry services. Healthwatch Coventry prioritised inequalities and focused on areas of deprivation for the outreach community.



The Chair requested the Chief Officer pass on congratulations to the Healthwatch Board for their work, and the Board requested that the findings from Healthwatch Coventry care home visits be shared with care homes across the city.