



# Scrutiny Annual Report

## 2024–25

**Sunderland  
City Council**

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# Foreword



In this, my first year as the Chair of Scrutiny, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Council's Scrutiny Annual Report. The report provides an overview of the work of scrutiny during 2024/25 and sets out the contribution it has made to the good governance of the Council. It also looks at how the scrutiny function will remain fit for purpose for the year ahead and the challenges we face moving forward.

The year began with the election of a new national government, and it will be important for the Council to respond positively to the new policy developments that emerge such as those around economic growth and housing.

Nevertheless, it is also likely that the Council will continue to face a difficult financial climate for the foreseeable future. Nationally and internationally severe economic challenges remain. These include long term recovery from the Covid pandemic, the war in the Ukraine, the challenges for many businesses arising from the UK's exit from the European Union and the nationwide downturn in the high street retail sector.

For the Council, the demand for services continues to increase, as does the cost of providing them. This is a problem across the board but particularly an issue in the adult and child social care sectors, where we continue to face a perfect storm of rising costs, workforce shortages and increasing demand.

At the same time as these financial pressures, the city continues to face a number of deep

seated economic and social challenges. These include regenerating the local economy, improving educational attainment and skills and tackling economic and social inequalities. There also remain the problems of improving the long-term health of our residents, tackling child poverty and the lasting consequences of the cost-of-living crisis.

The social unrest and shocking scenes of violence and disorder experienced by the city in August 2024 have brought all of these challenges into sharp focus. It is important that we continue to build relationships and encourage collaborative working between communities. With the development of an impactful community cohesion strategy, I feel sure that the city will prosper and come back all the stronger.

With the Council and our partners required to deliver ever greater efficiencies and financial savings, the need for robust, evidence-based scrutiny becomes ever more pressing. To meet these demands, we have continued to adapt and improve the scrutiny process, helping to ensure that resources are targeted on front-line and key priority services. We have stressed the importance of being customer focussed - using robust data and information to understand our resident's needs and maximising opportunities through the use of technology for both our customers and internal users, so that people self-serve wherever possible thereby eliminating duplication and making activity more efficient.

Despite the challenges faced nationally and locally considerable progress is being made in a number of areas. In March 2025, an Ofsted Inspection of children's services in Sunderland saw the service retain its outstanding rating; a considerable achievement given the resource constraints and levels of increasing demand.

The Council continues to be ambitious and investing in the city is a key element of the City Plan. Good progress is also being on a range of regeneration projects; including the development of Sunderland Riverside

and the former Vaux site, the forthcoming Culture House development on Keel Square, Sunderland Rail Station, the International Advanced Manufacturing Park and the Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor. All of these developments bode well for the future transformation of the city centre and long-term economic prosperity of the city.

Sunderland continues to be involved in a number of joint scrutiny arrangements for health provision across the area. Members are actively involved in the joint arrangements that cover the North East and North Cumbria, looking at the Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Systems. These joint arrangements provide an opportunity to consider substantial service reconfigurations and developments and how services are delivered across Sunderland and the North East.

Scrutiny in Sunderland has also made a significant contribution to regional scrutiny arrangements. Throughout the year, we have represented the Council on the North

East Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee which looks at matters of significant importance to residents across the region, focusing particularly on economic development and transport issues.

No doubt, the next twelve months will bring further challenges. However, I do believe that with the cooperation of fellow members, partners and the support of our officers we will rise to meet these challenges in the year ahead.

Finally, and most importantly, the Committee would like to place on record its thanks to all those staff within the Council and in our partner organisations who have worked tirelessly in support of our local communities. I would also like to thank the officers and portfolio holders who attended our Committee meetings in order to assist us in our work.

**Councillor Claire Rowtree**

**Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee**



# Scrutiny Coordinating Committee



**Chair: Cllr Claire Rowntree**

**Vice-Chair: Cllr Tracy Dodds**

**Committee Members:** Cllrs Malcolm Bond, Mark Burrell, Helen Glancy, Michael Hartnack, Catherine Hunter, Fiona Miller, Antony Mullen, John Price, Dorothy Trueman, John Usher, Peter Walton and Linda Williams.

It gives me great pleasure to present the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's annual report providing an overview of the work of the Committee over the last municipal year. The Committee has again looked at a variety of issues through its work programme and Members have continued to engage and contribute to the work of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee throughout the year.

Performance management is a principal element of the Committee's work programme, and the Committee continues to monitor and challenge Council performance, achievements and progress against a range of ambitions for the city around Sunderland becoming a great place to live, work, achieve and play around the three key themes of a Dynamic, Healthy and Vibrant Smart City. Members continue to value this performance reporting and see the value it provides in highlighting good performance and indicating potential items for the Committee's work programme.

Budget and financial scrutiny is a key function of the Committee with a range of comprehensive reports submitted to the Committee over the municipal year. This continues to include reporting on the Capital Programme, Proposed Council Tax, Revenue Budget and the Budget Planning Framework and Medium-Term Financial Plan. Members of the Committee continue to monitor and challenge the budget and financial reports as well as continuing to acknowledge the current financial situation for local government.

The Committee also established a task and finish working group to look at the Council's Customer Enabling Services (CES). The working group has looked at how both digital and physical aspects of the service operate, deals with customers and the processes involved as well as identifying key challenges and opportunities in terms of developing the service. The report and recommendations are aimed at supporting and highlighting CES and the important role this service provides across all areas of the Council, as well as recognising some of the key challenges that still exist. The report will be submitted to Cabinet in the new municipal year.

The Committee has continued to monitor the vision and delivery of the Smart City programme, particularly in the context of the impact on City Plan aspirations. The Committee were particularly pleased to see how the city was developing digitally and the impact this would have on people's lifestyles. Concerns were raised during discussions at the standard of the reinstatement work undertaken by fibre broadband providers following the installation of cabling. The Committee was assured that the Highways Team were aware of these concerns and this further feedback would assist in ensuring the powers available to the team were being fully utilised.

The City Plan and indicative timeline assurance process were also submitted to the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee for

consideration during the year. Members received the plan refresh and provided a number of comments and observations including ensuring the plan's terminology provided an inclusive feel that connected with all residents of Sunderland, the promotion and funding in equal measure of all the local natural assets and ensuring that the plan provided focused actions to determine if the city was delivering on its ambitions. These comments would be reported back to Cabinet and given further consideration with the continued development and updating of the plan in the future.

Following the scenes of crime and disorder in the city on Friday 2 August 2024, the Committee invited the Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism and Chief Executive to attend and discuss the response to this disorder as well as the long-term plans for improving community cohesion across the city. There were extensive discussions around themes of developing a cohesion strategy, engaging

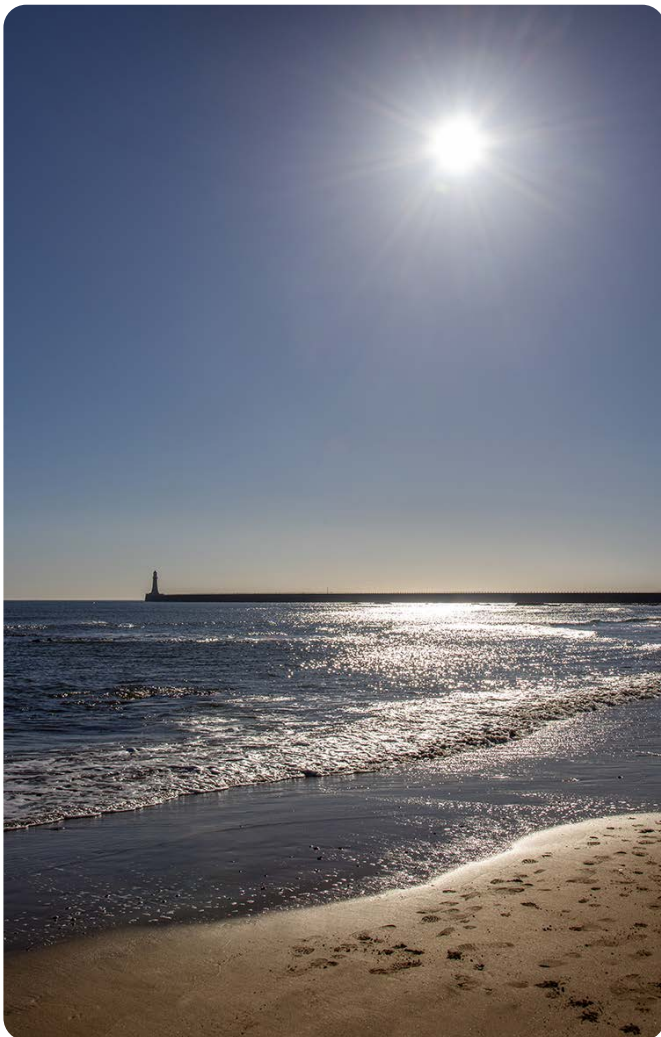
with local communities, educating and promoting cohesion with young people and the critical role of all partners across the city. The Committee requested a further update on this work later in the year and it was agreed that the Leader of the Council would be in attendance at this point.

The Committee also acts as the designated scrutiny committee for statutory purposes in relation to for crime and disorder and continues to receive the Safer Sunderland Partnership Annual Report. The report shares the progress of the partnership and the work of multi-agency activities in making Sunderland a safe and secure city. The Committee discussed a number of key themes around serious violence, domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, the riot, social cohesion, hate crime and public perceptions. Again, the Committee provided some critical challenge and robust scrutiny around local issues related to shoplifting, racism, speed cameras and community cohesion.

The Committee also looked in-depth at the work of the motorcycle disorder team and its work in tackling citywide motorcycle disorder. A detailed presentation provided information to the Committee on establishment of the motorcycle disorder team, public engagement, partnership working, citywide patrols and enforcement and prevention. The Committee again highlighted some key issues including improving communication on the seafront promenade for reporting motorcycle offences, the development of a training pack as an educational aid for use in primary schools with young people and their parents and the role of the physical infrastructure in tackling and prevention of motorcycle disorder.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank all the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Members for their continued support and involvement throughout the year. I would also like, on behalf of all Members of the Committee, to recognise our appreciation to Cabinet Members, officers and partners for providing their valuable cooperation, knowledge and expertise to the work of the committee.

**Councillor Claire Rowntree**  
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee



# Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee



**Chair: Cllr Linda Williams**

**Vice Chair: Cllr Paul Gibson**

**Committee Members:** Councillors Chris Burnicle, Joanne Chapman, Sophie Clinton, Margaret Crosby, Allen Curtis, Stephen Elms, Adele Graham-King, Alex Samuels, Paul Stewart, Melanie Thornton.

**Co-opted Members:** Ann Blakey (Roman Catholic Diocese)

At the start of the year, the Committee received details of the Annual Report of Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP). The independent Partnership comprises high level officer representation from partner agencies across the city and is a key multi agency statutory body for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children in Sunderland.

Marianne Huison (Independent Chair of the SSCP) reported that conditions continued to be challenging, with increasing demands for services and constraints on the level of resources available. However, she felt that the city had stood up well to the challenge and continued to make improvements. Achievements during the year included improvements in workforce training which should help to ensure that staff are fully equipped to support children, young people and their families. Relationships within the Partnership had been strengthened and the

increase in the co-location of services was improving communication between partners. In terms of key areas for the future, these included the strengthening of family and community resilience and promoting the greater use of shared data between partners. The Committee welcomed the report and agreed to receive a further update in the next municipal year.

The Committee heard about the progress being made by the Early Help Service and its plans for the future. It was considered that Early Help services were having a positive effect on the numbers of children requiring statutory services and that prevention work was reducing the numbers requiring targeted early help support. The last few years had seen a rapid increase in demand and funding remained a challenge. However there remained a clear commitment to early intervention and ensuring that children and families get the appropriate level of support at the right time, delivered by skilled professionals.

We heard that five Family Hubs have now been established; in Washington, Bunny Hill, Hetton, Hendon and Thorney Close. Each provided a wide range of support and activities at a local community level. The Committee referred to the excellent working being undertaken at the Family Hubs and looked forward to their continued development into the future.

In January 2023, a Joint Targeted Area inspection (JTAI) was undertaken into children and families who need help and an action plan for improvement was developed. While there was no formal grading system, the outcome of the inspection was categorised as positive. The Committee heard about the progress being made across the themes of the action plan including; communication and involvement of all partners in meetings and decisions about next steps to help children; increased staffing capacity to allow the consistent involvement of health

practitioners; analysis of children’s ethnic identity, cultural heritage and diverse needs; the timeliness of early help assessments and plans and finally the quality and effectiveness of the LSP’s multi-agency audits. The Committee considered that good progress was being made and that we would continue to monitor progress in the year ahead.

For a number of years, the Committee has received regular update reports on the delivery of the city’s children and adolescent mental health services. In October 2024, we received details from Sunderland ICB about an extensive review of the current neurodevelopmental and mental health pathways in Sunderland. The review examined referral routes, processes and the interface within schools, community child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHs), special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) specialist support service, and speech and language teams.

The Committee heard that the review represented a move towards a needs led approach. Building on a graduated response, the aim of which was to understand the child’s needs in order that the appropriate support was put in place in the right place, at the right time, regardless of diagnosis. It was noted that the approach was not to stop children getting into services, but to focus on meeting their needs through multi-agency working and stopping the ‘bounce’ between services

The Committee welcomed the service developments arising out of the review while recognising the issues and challenges still faced, in terms of a rapidly increasing demand for services. This was clearly an issue that will need to be closely monitored in the years ahead.

Following on from this report, the Committee received a more detailed update on the outcome of a review of the Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Service (SALT). We heard from the ICB that referrals to the service continue to increase, with wait times at an all time high across the country. This reflected an increase in development delay particularly around Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) skills in children in the early years. A number of measures were being put in place to develop an integrated cross sector speech, language and communication

pathway that was seamless to the parent/ carer/referring practitioner. There would also be a review and redesign of the specialist service model and an expansion of early intervention and prevention models. A greater emphasis would be placed on consultation and engagement with referrers, parent/carer and schools. The Committee particularly welcomed the involvement of specialist SALT workers into schools, Family Hubs and care and mental health support teams. It was important that support was given as early as possible in a child’s life and efforts made to engage with parents and carers, especially those hard-to-reach families who were reluctant to engage.

The Committee has continued to monitor progress on the provision of overnight short breaks for children with complex and additional needs. This has included an anticipated time frame for the steps leading to the opening of a new facility, details of the current and interim support being provided to children and parents/carers and examples of the feedback provided from families. The Committee will continue to monitor progress in the year ahead.

The Committee received a progress report on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt Coast to Coast, which currently comprises the areas of Sunderland and County Durham. We heard that the introduction of regional adoption agencies across England has increased the competitiveness of recruitment in adoption and as a result Adopt Coast to Coast had broadened the geographical area where they were actively recruiting. Priorities for the year ahead included increasing the universal adoption support offer, the delivery of consistent training for family and friends opportunities for children and young people. The Committee welcomed the information in the report, and particularly the success of the agency in matching children with prospective adopters.

The Committee received a detailed report on current school occupancy levels, which included projected rolls across the city between 2024 and 2029, together with any areas of anticipated surplus or deficit in the mainstream school sector. Projections indicated that the declining birth rate in the

city will result in lower reception intakes in the future. The Committee felt that it was important to ensure the widest possible dissemination of the latest pupil place data in order to help schools, the Council and other partners plan for the future.

Over recent years, a continuing concern for the Committee has been the implications of the increase in elective home education across the city. The Committee received a detailed report on the current position. The existing statutory process provides parents and carers with the right to educate their children at home and places tight limitations on the role of local authorities. Together for Children's (TfC) duty was currently discharged by requesting an education plan from parents. A template together with advice and guidance was provided to support parents with this process, however TfC had no role to play in judging the quality and outcomes of the education which legislation dictates remain purely a matter of parental responsibility.

The Committee consider that while parents have the right to home educate, there are real concerns at the potentially detrimental effect on some children, particularly in view of the disproportionate number of children removed from school rolls for elective home education having SEND or living in disadvantaged areas. At present, local authorities have only limited powers in this area and we feel that more powers should be made available. We welcome the appointment of three new members of staff to the Elective Home Education (EHE) team, who work as part of a wider multidisciplinary team which also focuses on the related issues of attendance and exclusion. The Committee agreed to receive a future report in the next municipal year detailing the implementation of the Attendance Charter and Strategy and the outcome of the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Partnership's deep dive process into the impact of EHE.

The Committee has received an update on the increase in numbers of exclusions and suspensions in many of our schools, together with contextual background to the increase and any mitigating action that can be taken. The Committee expressed its great concern at the current numbers of exclusions and suspensions in many of our schools and

agreed to receive regular update reports in the year ahead.

In July 2024, Ofsted published the outcome of a short inspection of Sunderland's Learning and Skills Service - Adult Education Provision. The service received an overall rating of 'Good'. It was noted that going forward the responsibility for this service would lie with the new Mayoral North East Combined Authority but staff would work to ensure that it kept a local focus and reflected the needs of the people of the city. The Committee commended and congratulated staff on the outcome of the review.

Last year, the Committee received details of the latest Healthy Related Behaviour Study report. One of the concerns highlighted in that report related to the online safety of young people. In order to consider this issue in more detail, we received a report on the issues involved and the kind of support available to young people in Sunderland. Nationally these include Childline, NSPCC and the National Crime Agency. At a local level, the KOOTH system offers an important mental health and well-being service, providing a confidential counselling service for young people. Reference was also made to a training package which TfC had developed for school governors, and which was being promoted in the city.

Early in the year, a sub-group of members from the Committee met with Victoria French to discuss the Council's leisure and sporting offer for young people. We heard that there were numerous activities on offer and while the Council did keep a data base, this information could only provide a snapshot at a particular moment. Virtually any activity that could be thought of was provided by some organisation and body. The key was to communicate the options available and allow users to seek out what they are interested in via websites. Much leisure and sporting activity took the form of self-organised activity with the range of activities limited only by the imagination of the individual.

We followed up this session with a meeting Ruth Walker, Operations Manager of Sunderland All Together Consortium, in view of the positive impact effective youth work has on our communities. Ruth felt that the relationship between providers had grown

stronger and was continuing to be developed and a lot of joint working took place with TfC in areas such as holiday activities and care experienced children. It was felt important that Area Committees were kept up to date with service developments in their area and that activities were promoted at an area level. It was also recognised that moving forward funding would remain a challenge. The Committee will look to develop those conversations further in line with the development of a National Youth Strategy and how we will work towards taking up opportunities to support our young community.

Ms Ola Tony-Obot, (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead) provided the Committee with a presentation on TfC's equality, diversity and inclusion work being undertaken within educational setting and Sunderland's wider community. The Committee felt that such work was vitally important, particularly in light of events during August 2024 and the future implications for community cohesion in the city. The Committee looked forward to a further update in the next municipal year.

The Committee has continued to receive periodic performance reports in order to demonstrate levels of improvement were being maintained and we will continue to monitor the progress into the future. The

Committee has also received regular update reports on children services customer feedback reports. I am pleased to see that these show a continuing reduction in the number of complaints.

Toward the end of the year, the Committee received the feedback on the Ofsted inspection of children services. We were delighted to hear that the service had retained its outstanding rating; a considerable achievement given the resource constraints and the backdrop of the cost of living crisis and ongoing Covid-19 recovery. The Committee would like to place on record its thanks and appreciation to all the staff involved. We look forward to the level of service delivery being maintained and will continue to monitor the progress through our overview of performance monitoring information.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their contributions and to thank all the officers and witnesses who gave up their time to attend and provide insights into the services they provide and the challenges they face.

**Councillor Linda Williams**  
**Chair of the Children Education and Skills**  
**Scrutiny Committee**



# Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee



**Chair: Cllr Mark Burrell**

**Vice Chair: Cllr John Price**

**Committee Members:** Councillors Michael Dixon, Steven Donkin, Heather Fagan, Stephen Foster, Logan Guy, David Newey, Lyall Reed, Lynda Scanlan, George Smith and Sue Watson.

During the year, the Committee's work programme has focused on a range of issues affecting the economic prosperity of the city and the opportunities and challenges we face.

One of the key drivers of economic development within the city is Siglion and the Committee received a comprehensive progress report on its work during the year. We heard that the main priorities for Siglion were to improve the concentration of new economic activity in the city centre, create a city centre that supports higher value job creation, bring back into use dormant areas such as the former Vaux site, offer a wider choice of housing to the market and position Sunderland as a place to invest.

We heard about the progress being made on the regeneration of Riverside Sunderland, with the opening of Sheepfolds Stables and preparatory work for new residential neighbourhoods. We also heard how the Council was working with partners to complete Riverside Park, the new Wear footbridge, Culture House Sunderland,

the new Eye Hospital and residential developments at Nile + Villiers, Farringdon Row and West Park. The Committee considered that the regeneration of Sunderland had reached an exciting stage and looked forward to further progress into the future.

The Committee was consulted on the Draft Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD was being reviewed in order to reflect new legislative requirements and updated national and local policy guidance. The Committee supported the contents of the draft SPD and commended the hard work of officers in preparing such a comprehensive document.

In 2021, the Committee set up a working group to consider the regeneration of the Sunnyside area and we have continued to monitor the progress being made. Kate Percival, Development Manager – TOWN, attended the Committee to update us on the latest position. It is recognised that the challenges facing Sunnyside are highly complex and deep rooted, and we are in the early stages of the redevelopment journey. Much will depend on continuing to access external funding. However, there are a number of positives and opportunities, and we feel a growing sense of positivity about the future of the area which can help provide the foundations for its long term redevelopment.

Following on from previous years, we received an update on the progress of schemes being funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, from which Sunderland received £16.57m over three years from 2022/23 - 2024/25. The funding has supported a range of projects across three investment priorities: communities and place, supporting local business and people and skills. We heard in detail about the development of the programme in Sunderland which has reflected the priorities set out in the City Plan, the processes by which funds have been allocated and an assessment of the impact to date.

Nick Maylan Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture attended the Committee to provide an update their work and the contribution made by the cultural sector to the economic prosperity of the city. For the future, we heard that the opening of the Culture House and the Museum redevelopment should substantially improve the cultural offer in the city. Attendance figures were now on the rise, though it was recognised that it could be several years before we see attendance figures back up to pre covid levels. A central feature of their work was to ensure that residents and communities can better connect with the cultural offer. It was also important to market and promote what is on offer in the city and look to hold on to visitors longer when they visited the city. The Committee was also updated on the future of exhibits from the Glass Centre and plans for the future use of the site.

Sharon Appleby of the Sunderland Improvement District (BID) updated us on the work of the BID in supporting local businesses. This included events such as the Summer Food and Drink Festival and the March Restaurant Week, together with a summer and seasonal programme of family activities. We were pleased to note that following the Covid pandemic, footfall and retail spending in the city centre has begun the process of recovery and that the development of Sunderland Riverside should provide an added impetus for the growth of the independent retail sector.

We also discussed the economic challenges facing the city and the region. These included long term recovery from the Covid pandemic, the challenges for many businesses arising from the UK's exit from the European Union and the nationwide downturn in the high street retail sector. However, on a positive note, it was felt that the Sunderland economy retained strong foundations and that many opportunities existed, particularly in the engineering, manufacturing and the software sectors.

The Committee received an update on a wide range of events organised in the city, including the Festival of Light, the Women's Rugby World Cup, the Expo Screen in Keel Square and the Music City. It was noted that moving forward a greater emphasis would be placed on facilitating smaller community

based events with a wider geographical spread which were less at risk of cancellation and often more cost effective. The Council was also looking to maximise resources by working more closely with local communities, the voluntary sector and partners such as the BID.

The Committee views were sought on the draft update of the International Advanced Manufacturing Park Area Action Plan (IAMP AAP). Since its adoption, the AAP has successfully enabled delivery of phase one of IAMP and the ongoing development of the UK's first large scale gigafactory. Notwithstanding the success of the IAMP AAP to date, there is a need to increase the flexibility of the document going forward to ensure it is appropriately aligned to the newly designated North East Investment Zone. The overarching aim of the IAMP is to deliver 7,850 headcount jobs over the lifetime of the IAMP development. The Committee referred to the significant impact of the Manufacturing Park to the economic prosperity of the city and the contribution it can make to employment opportunities for local residents.

In setting its work programme for the year, the Committee asked for an update on operation of Environmental Services within the city and its plans for the future. We heard that the Pallion Household Waste and Recycling Centre had now opened and was proving a great success. The Refuse Electric RCV had begun operations, and the fleet service had introduced 24 new refuse collection vehicles during the year. Cemetery regulations have been improved and remedial works to cemetery lawn sections were ongoing.

The Committee was also consulted on the proposals for the Council's future approach to promoting biodiversity and effective sustainable weed management. The Committee stressed the importance of resident engagement and communication with regards the treatment of weeds in order to allay any potential safety concerns or misunderstandings.

We heard about work going on in relation to environmental enforcement in the city, including littering, fly tipping, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles, street watch cameras, the use of drones and CCTV. The Committee supported the additional resource that had



been put into this service and commended the progress that had been made. It was important that residents and local councillors should be encouraged to report any issues faced in their ward in order that remedial action could be taken quickly and effectively.

The Committee's views were sought on the Council's revised Statement of Licensing Policy. The policy has two primary purposes. Firstly, to provide a decision-making framework for the Council to use when responding to licence applications, and secondly to inform and advise businesses and the public of the authority's position in respect of the Licensing Act 2003. We heard that the policy aims to balance legitimate needs of businesses, public demand for leisure and cultural activities against the need to mitigate against potential adverse effects including the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm. The Committee commended staff on their hard work in this important area of work.

The Committees was also consulted on the contents of the draft Gambling Act - Statement of Principles. These principles contribute to the prevention of gambling being a source of crime or disorder, ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way and protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited. We noted that while there had been an overall reduction in the number of betting shops in the city, this most likely reflected a worrying growth in the level of online gambling over which local authorities do not have any regulatory responsibilities.

The Committee received a report on the establishment of a new Road Safety Partnership involving other Northeast local authorities, Northumbria Police and the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner. The Partnership will work together to improve road safety and compliance with existing speed limits; collectively procure and consider the deployment of digitalised fixed speed cameras; develop information

and intelligence processes and develop joint media plans. The Committee welcomed the establishment of the Partnership and looked forward to it having a significant impact on improving road safety in the area.

The Committee also received an update on the system for processing requests for highway road safety improvement works in the city. These range from requests for road safety assessments, minor highway improvements, 20mph limit zones, walking routes to schools and educational programmes. It was noted that from January 2021 to December 2023 the team reviewed, assessed and responded to an average of 1284 requests each year, averaging at 107 per month. The Committee commended the staff involved for their positive and helpful approach to requests for work.

In March 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency. In response, a city-wide 2030 Shadow Board was established, bringing together partners from across the city, with the ambition of the city becoming carbon neutral by 2040 and the Council carbon neutral by 2030. The Committee received a report on the progress being made on the Low Carbon Framework and Action Plan that reflected the importance of fully involving partners from throughout the city if the goals are to be achieved.

An important part of the Low Carbon agenda is the promotion of electric vehicles. The Committee considered a report on the work going on to develop electric vehicle infrastructure in the city. We heard that during 2024, the number of public charging points which had increased from 240 to 515. The Council had also helped secure a number of private sector charging points through conditions in planning applications and were developing residential charging points working closely with local communities. The Council was continuing to expand its own fleet of electric vehicles and there had also an increase in the number of electric buses operating in the city.

Climate change can significantly impact flood risk in various ways including changing weather patterns, increased rainfall density and sea level rise. The Committee heard about the progress of remedial action being taken through the Council's Flood Alleviation

and Capital Maintenance Programme 2020-27. This follows the Council's allocation of around £28 million in funding from the Government to support 39 schemes over a seven-year period. Since April 2020 a total of 375 properties have been moved from a high risk of surface water flooding to a low risk. The Committee received details of the works planned for the remainder of the programme.

All in all, it has been a very busy and productive year for the Committee. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank members of the Committee and everyone else involved for their hard work and commitment, together with the relevant Cabinet portfolio holders who attended and contributed to the meetings during the year.

**Councillor Mark Burrell**

**Chair of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee**

# Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee



**Chair: Cllr John Usher**

**Vice-Chair: Cllr Fiona Miller**

**Committee Members:** Councillors Simon Ayre, Lynne Dagg, Steven Donkin, Brandon Feeley, Juliana Heron, Catherine Hunter, Dominic McDonough, Dianne Snowdon, Fiona Tobin and Peter Walton.

I am pleased to be able to introduce this chapter of the annual report and share the work of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee that has taken place during the year. Health is such an important area and covers a wide variety of issues that can impact anyone, their families and the way they live their lives. Access to quality medical advice and treatment is therefore fundamental to ensure we can live a healthy and independent life for as long as possible. The work the Committee undertakes looks at many aspects of health and wellbeing and provides the requisite challenge and support in terms of the development and delivery of services to the people of Sunderland.

The availability and access of NHS dentist services in Sunderland continues to be included in the Committee's work programme. The Committee continues to have a good working relationship with the NHS Dental Commissioning Lead for the area and have them in attendance at the September 2024 meeting. A number of issues were discussed including NHS commissioned capacity, urgent

Dental Care Services, the National Dental Recovery Plan and oral health improvement initiatives in Sunderland. Members enquired about the pilot fluoride varnish scheme, Urgent Dental Access Centres, child dentistry provision, retention of NHS contracts and approaches being taken to encourage dentists to remain in the City. The Committee also requested consultation documents for any future requests for practice relocations and handing back of NHS dental contracts be provided to the Committee to allow a formal response to be submitted.

Women's health is an important issue and knowing the diseases and conditions that are among the top health risks for women is important, as is effectively managing matters that affect daily health. The Committee looked at the progress and future of the Women's Health Hub pilot in Sunderland, including some of the key services offered via the hub. Members made some useful observations including barriers for accessing services, involving teenage fathers where possible and around widening the offer to poorer areas of the city.

Members also received a report during the year on gambling related harm and the associated work to support the reduction of harm in Sunderland. The report from the Council's Public Health Team provided information on a number of actions and initiatives in relation to gambling related harms. The Committee was also informed of the formation of the Sunderland Gambling Prevention Network which brings together, from across the city, a number of key partners to raise awareness, contribute to initiatives and support the formation and delivery of a Lived Experience Forum. Members also acknowledged and welcomed the development of Sunderland's local gambling Statement of Principles. The Committee also suggested that it would be beneficial to further promote this work by presenting at local voluntary and community sector meetings.

Suicide prevention continues to be an extremely important issue, and the Committee remains committed to this issue and received an update on the whole systems approach to prevention in Sunderland. Members discussions centred around preventative measures in high-risk locations, promotion of services by Members and learning from suicide attempts data. Members of the Committee also had the opportunity to undertake suicide prevention training conducted by Sunderland MIND as part of the further action on this issue, and this offer remains open to all Members.

The Committee continues to have a strong relationship with Sunderland Integrated Care Board (ICB) and continues to receive performance updates from the ICB covering a range of issues including indicators relating to the key areas of Urgent Care; Planned Care; Cancer; and Mental Health. Sunderland ICB have also provided information around migrant health in Sunderland and an update on access to primary care. The Committee continues to acknowledge the fundamental role that Sunderland ICB has in the delivery of health services across the area and will continue to monitor and challenge, where appropriate, around performance.

The Committee also has a very good working relationship with South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and the Chief Executive of the Trust attended a meeting of the Committee and provided a general overview of Trust service developments and performance. This involved discussions around national priorities, reducing waiting lists in elective care, eye hospital progress and the Trust's five year forward plan. Members raised several issues related to recruitment and retention, tackling long wait times, future investment and staff surveys.

The Foundation Trust also provided an overview and update to the Committee on its Targeted Lung Health Check Programme including how to access, progress, national programme activity and promotion. There was a good level of discussion and Members made suggestions around greater partnership working particularly with Gentoo and mapping their dynamic approach to hard-to-reach groups to other screening programmes.

The Committee has also visited the Council's Smart House to look at a number of assistive technologies that are available to help people live safe and independent lives in their own



homes. Along with this visit the Committee also held its February meeting in Leechmere Independent Living Centre.

Members of the Committee also visited City Hospitals and looked at the food journey that provides the preparation and delivery of meals to hospital patients. This was as a result of a report requested by Members around the nutrition and hydration element of care in hospitals. The Foundation Trust provided detailed information on the Trust's implementation of the NHS National Standards for healthcare food and drink, and it was positive to note the Trusts progress and compliance with the eight prescribed standards.

The Committee has also received a variety of reports that support the work programme of the Committee including Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report, a progress report on the review into adult social care, the State of Ageing in Sunderland, Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, North East Ambulance Service Performance and the Public Health Annual Report. As Chair, I have also been involved, on behalf of the Committee, with the recent Care Quality Commission review of the Council's Adult Services. As well as all this there was also a follow-up session with Northumbrian Water (NWL) representatives that looked at NWL's traditional role as a sewerage undertaker, engagement in the planning process, creating an evidence base and how new developments can be part of the solution.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of myself and the committee, to thank Members, officers, partners and stakeholders who have continued to contribute and work with the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The City Plan and the Director of Public Health's Annual Report continue to highlight the importance of health and the challenges that we face as a city in addressing those fundamental health issues. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee will continue in its role to act as a critical friend to monitor, challenge and support service providers in the delivery of health provision across Sunderland.

**Councillor John Usher**  
Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

# The year ahead

Overview and scrutiny is an integral part of the Council's governance and decision making structure, contributing to the Council's budgetary and policy making function as well as holding the executive to account for its actions. This report provides an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the last year and recognise the challenges we face in the year ahead.

Clearly, the next few years will continue to be challenging for the Council; operating as it does within an environment of constrained resources and increasing demand for services. This represents a major challenge for us all. In terms of scrutiny, it is important that we help the Council to make the best use of the resources available and ensure that frontline services are delivered to the highest possible standards.

Moving forward, we will need to address a broad range of issues, not least the long term economic, social and health consequences of the Covid pandemic and the increasing demands placed on our adult and child health services. We also face the challenges of increasing child poverty, the cost of living crisis and its effect on household incomes and the decline of the high street retail sector. We also need to improve educational attainment and tackle its consequences for health and economic inequalities.

As a Council we must ensure transparency, open communication and meaningful public engagement to help us to build trust between ourselves and the people we work for and represent. We also have a vital role in fostering social cohesion and a sense of shared purpose within our local communities.



The social disorder experienced by the city in August 2024 have brought all of these challenges into sharp focus. It is important that we continue to build relationships and encourage collaborative working between communities. With the development of an impactful community cohesion strategy, I feel sure that the city will prosper and come back all the stronger.

Scrutiny will also continue to play an active role in the changing delivery of health services across Sunderland and the region. It is certainly an area that will continue to be determined by financial, social and environmental factors that will continue to drive change in the sector.

We will continue to monitor and challenge health partners through our own Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, and also regionally through the North East Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Through these joint arrangements we are able to represent the concerns and needs of the Sunderland population and ensure that Sunderland residents views are represented and considered in looking at service reconfigurations.

There are also positive changes on the horizon with the new devolution deal for the North East seeing significant economic benefits of a £1.4bn investment over the next 30 years. There is an active role for scrutiny members in these arrangements and we have representation on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide enhanced accountability and transparency of decision making and to represent the view of Sunderland residents.

The North East Mayoral Combined Authority will enhance adult education provision in a way that meets the needs of business and the community while allowing them to kick start regeneration by supporting the construction of affordable homes on brownfield sites. There will also be funding available for the new combined authority to shape and improve local rail and bus services.

We continue to monitor the progress being made in implementing the Council's City Plan and Corporate Plan and the measures being taken to make Sunderland a more dynamic, healthy and vibrant city. A key to this will be our ability to work closely and collaboratively

with our partners and make the most of the resources available in the city.

Once again, I would like place on record our thanks to everyone who contributed to the work of scrutiny over the last twelve months and look forward to having another productive year ahead.

**Councillor Claire Rowntree**  
Chair of the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

# Scrutiny on a page

The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, the three thematic scrutiny committees, North East Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee (NECA) and the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) tackle a large range of issues over a municipal year. In order to fully appreciate the variety and breadth of the subjects covered. Below is an extensive, though not exhaustive, summary of the work of scrutiny in Sunderland.

- Adoption
- Annual Low Carbon Progress Report
- Budget and Finance Reports
- Business Centres
- Children Services Customer Feedback
- City Plan Update
- Community Cohesion
- Consultation with Youth Council
- Corporate Plan Update
- Dental Services Update
- Drug and Alcohol Services Update
- Early Health Provision
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
- Elective Home Education
- Environmental Enforcement Update
- Environmental Services Update
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Events Update
- Flood Management
- Healthy City Plan Refresh
- Highways Asset Management Scheme
- ICB Sunderland Performance Update
- Internal Communications
- Learning and Skills Inspection
- Lung Health Checks
- Motorcycle Disorder Update
- Neuro Services for Young People
- NHS FT General Update
- North East Ambulance Service Update
- Northumbria Road Safety Partnership
- Nutrition and Hydration in Hospitals
- Performance Management Reports
- Personal and Online Safety of Young People
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment
- Primary Care Access Update
- Reducing Gambling Harms
- Safer Sunderland Annual Report
- School Exclusions and Suspensions
- Secure Data Environment (NHS)
- Short Break Service
- Siglion/Housing Update
- Smart Cities Update
- Sport and Leisure Opportunities for YP
- SSAB Annual Report
- SSCP Annual Report
- State of Ageing in Sunderland
- Sufficiency and School Based Planning
- Suicide Prevention Update
- Sunderland BID
- Sunderland Riots
- Sunnyside Regeneration
- Task and Finish Working
- TfC Meaningful Measures
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Women’s Health
- Water Quality



**Sunderland  
City Council**