

Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report 2023/24



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Foreword

By the Scrutiny Commissioners

Once again, we are pleased to present this annual report which sets out the extensive work undertaken, and outcomes achieved by the County Council's overview and scrutiny committees for the 2023/24 municipal year. It also provides a general overview of how scrutiny operates and how you, as a member of the public, can get involved.

We continue to be impressed with the volume and quality of scrutiny undertaken by each committee and the number of recommendations made to the Cabinet and key partners, to help drive improvement in services for the benefit of residents. Each committee has scrutinised and questioned relevant Cabinet Lead Members on their areas of responsibility and reviewed a range of specific topics, including adult social care support and funding for nursing care provision, the delivery of the Councils Transforming SEND and Inclusion programme and SEND Transport, flooding, particularly following Storm Henk, and we have undertaken some focussed work to look at proposals to deliver savings through the closure of some recycling and household waste sites and SHIRE community and environment grants.

At the County Council we take great pride in our scrutiny function, and we would like to pay tribute to officers for supporting and facilitating the Overview and Scrutiny process, staff working within partner organisations that have sent representatives to share information and their experiences, and Cabinet Members that have attended meetings to answer our questions.

Finally, we would like to thank all Scrutiny Members for their commitment and contribution to the process, with special thanks to the Chairs and Spokespersons who have continued to drive each Committee's work programme to address areas of concern and interest.

The four Scrutiny Commissioners are responsible for leading the Overview and Scrutiny process, deciding on priority issues for Scrutiny and areas that merit more detailed review.



Michael Mullaney CC
Chairman of the
Scrutiny Commission



Rosita Page CC
Vice Chairman of the
Scrutiny Commission



James Poland CC
Scrutiny
Commissioner



Amanda Hack CC
Scrutiny
Commissioner

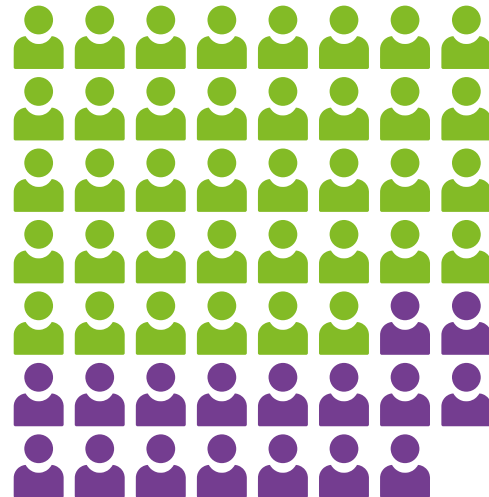


What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny (scrutiny) is an important part of local democracy and provides the legal power for Members who are not Cabinet members to look into issues of concern and make sure decisions taken are for the benefit of Leicestershire residents.

Although scrutiny cannot make decisions, it can make recommendations for improvement to those that do (i.e. the Cabinet). Scrutiny can also look at services provided by other organisations, such as health, and make recommendations for partners too.

There are currently 55 Councillors elected to Leicestershire County Council to represent the residents of Leicestershire. **Of those, 38 (non-Cabinet members) are appointed to the Scrutiny Commission and five other Overview and Scrutiny Committees** which are politically balanced committees and provide challenge to the Cabinet.



Principles of good scrutiny and how it makes a difference.

The four key principles of scrutiny as established by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny are:

1. To provide critical friend challenge to executive policy and decision makers
2. To enable the voice and concerns of the public to be heard
3. To be carried out by independent minded councillors
4. To drive improvement in public services

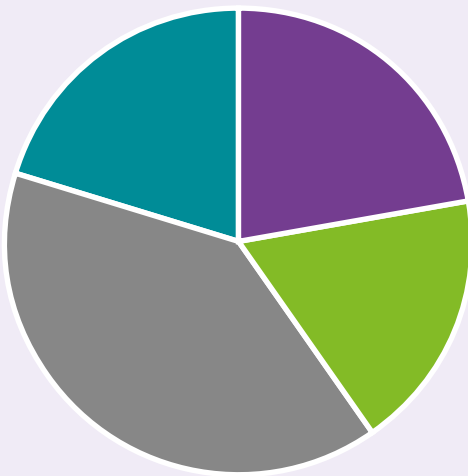
Scrutiny committees hold the Cabinet to account for the decisions it has taken or intends to take, and acts as a critical friend, helping to ensure the Council delivers its services efficiently and effectively. They do this by:

- Reviewing and commenting on the County Council's budget and strategic policies.
- Undertaking pre-decision scrutiny of key matters, making recommendations for improvement wherever possible.
- Monitoring and challenging the performance of services and the outcomes delivered for those living and working in Leicestershire.
- Providing transparency by holding meetings in public and taking questions from residents.

Types of Scrutiny Undertaken

Well over a quarter of reports considered by the Council's Scrutiny Committees resulted in their comments being presented to and considered as part of the Cabinet's decision making process.

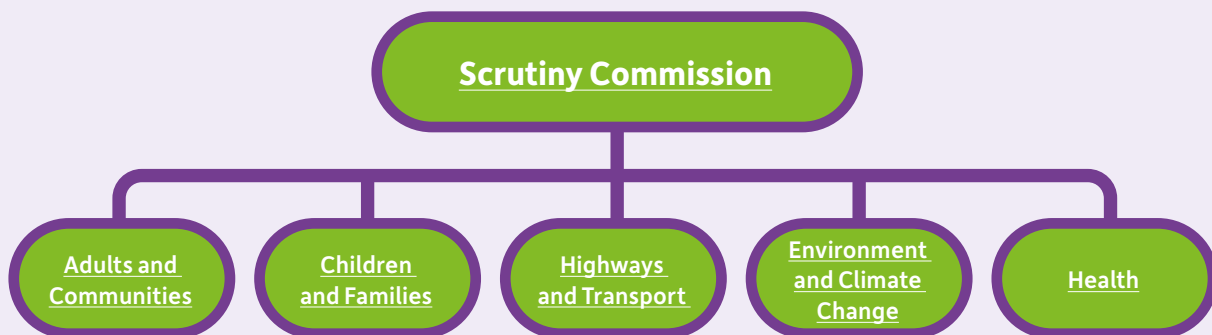
Scrutiny Committees have sought to keep abreast of issues, receiving information updates on a range of issues affecting residents, but have focused substantially on monitoring the Council's performance and seeking assurance around service and project delivery.



■ Pre-Cabinet Scrutiny
 ■ Policy Development
 ■ Performance and Assurance
 ■ Information

Leicestershire's scrutiny structure

In Leicestershire all scrutiny work is carried out by the Scrutiny Commission and five Overview and Scrutiny Committees which each look at a particular service area of the Council. These are outlined in the table below.



Scrutiny Committees can also initiate a workshop to look at a particular issue in detail. These can provide for short sharp scrutiny.

Alternatively, a formal Scrutiny Review Panel can be established. Whilst time limited, these can run for several months and their recommendations, which may suggest a change in policy or service provision, are submitted to the relevant parent scrutiny committee prior to consideration by the Cabinet.

Reports of previous Scrutiny Review Panels and Task and Finish Groups can be viewed on the Council's [website](#). Details of two carried out this year are set out below.

You can also find out more about how Overview and Scrutiny works in Leicestershire by accessing our [Overview and Scrutiny Guide](#) on the Council's website.

Stakeholder and Public Involvement

Our committees work to ensure the Council and its partners are delivering the right policies and services that will benefit Leicestershire residents and service users. They do this by:

- Inviting partners, stakeholder representatives and external experts to contribute evidence to broaden Members' understanding and inform their discussions.
- Having co-opted members on the Children and Family Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, representing parent governors and Church of England maintained schools.
- Using Scrutiny Members' local knowledge from within their communities to question decision makers (i.e. Cabinet Lead Members) and officers.
- Ensuring transparency by holding meetings in public and webcasting these live via the Council's [YouTube channel](#).

Attendance and involvement by the public is also actively encouraged, and this can be done by:

- Attending a meeting – Members of the public are welcome to attend any public meeting of a Scrutiny Committee, details of which are listed on the [online meeting calendar](#).
- Asking a question – all Scrutiny Committees allow for public questions at the beginning of each meeting. If you wish to ask a question, please see our [online guidance on how to submit a question](#).
- Submitting a petition – all Scrutiny Committees can receive petitions relating to an area that the council has authority over. It can be submitted by anyone who lives, works, or studies in Leicestershire and can be submitted in writing or as an e-petition. For further details, see our [online guidance on how to submit a petition](#).
- Identifying issues which a Scrutiny Committee might look at (particularly through a specific review).
- Providing evidence to inform Scrutiny (either in writing or in person).
- Contributing to consultations, surveys, workshops and/or focus groups.

Leicestershire County Council continues to be committed to allowing residents full insight into its decision making and so, as set out above, **all Scrutiny Committees are held in public, allowing people to attend in person to view the debate and ask questions**. Here is a summary of the level of public scrutiny undertaken over the last year.

Committee Meetings held:	31
Reports Considered:	128
Hours of public debate:	56
Questions submitted by Members and the Public:	18
Webcast views:	2920
Comments submitted to Cabinet:	28
Recommendations made and additional information and assurance sought	97



Scrutiny Activity during 2023/24

Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission reviews the overall strategic direction and corporate policies and priorities of the Cabinet and Council, including the budget and its four-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Full details of the Commission's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

The Budget and Finance Monitoring

The central role of the Scrutiny Commission is to monitor the financial health of the Council. It has been an exceptionally demanding year with rising costs and inflation and continued growth in demand for services. In addition to regularly reviewing the Council's overall financial performance, the Commission has specifically looked at those projects and services which pose the biggest risk to the Authority. The Commission has:

- Submitted its views to the Cabinet on the Council's budget proposals for the next four years.
- Raised concerns regarding the Council's worsening financial position and expressed frustration at the lack of adequate Government funding particularly in areas such as adult and children's social care. The Commission continued to press the Lead Member for Resources regarding progress being made to secure fair funding for Leicestershire and provided its support to his discussions with Government officials on this issue.
- Supported the recommendations of the SHIRE Grants Scrutiny Review Panel and submitted these to the Cabinet for consideration. The Cabinet has subsequently approved the approach put forward and these have been included in the current MTFS.
- Raised concerns about the level of slippage in delivery of the capital programme and the impact this had on overall costs incurred. The Committee has closely monitored the position through receipt of quarterly budget monitoring reports.
- Commented on the need for more to be done by the NHS locally as Leicestershire had the fewest number of nursing places funded within the community. The Committee asked that the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee look at this in more detail.
- Referred its concerns regarding risks relating to the use of costly agency staff across the authority to the Council's Corporate Governance Committee for consideration. This Committee is to receive a detailed presentation on this risk later in 2024.

Commercial Strategy Performance

The Commission has continued to monitor the performance of Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS) which has struggled to recover in some areas following the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commission:

- Noted that whilst all traded services had recovered well over the last 12 months, rising costs and inflation had eroded any improvement resulting in performance continuing to be below target.
- Submitted a number of concerns regarding the performance of the Service to the Cabinet for consideration, particularly regarding Beaumanor Hall, the school meal service and country parks and cafes.
- Agreed to hold a workshop to look at each traded services performance in detail and the income being generated against capital costs invested.

Investing in Leicestershire Programme

The Commission looked at the performance of the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (previously the Corporate Asset Investment Fund (CAIF)) and considered performance against the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan 2022 – 2025. The Commission:

- Welcomed the change in approach to prioritise investments that would support the local economy and local growth, as well as generate an income for the Council.
- Recommended that the Programme specifically incorporate targets for the delivery of wider economic benefits and asked that future reports include details of how these were being achieved.
- Considered proposals for the final phase of development at Airfield Business Park in Market Harborough.
- In light of public concern, raised questions regarding RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) and was pleased to hear none had been found in any Leicestershire maintained schools. For academies, the Commission sought and received more information regarding the maintenance obligations imposed on academies under their lease agreements and the Council's ability to take action if these provisions were not being complied with.

Customer Programme and Automation

The Commission looked at progress being made in the delivery of the Council's Customer Programme and considered the proposed approach to automation as an enabler for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Council services. The Commission:

- Highlighted that 28% of people were not digitally enabled therefore some residents would continue to require access through traditional channels. This needed to be balanced against an increase in demand for digital options, although members raised concerns that too many options risked adding complexity and causing confusion.
- Raised concerns that digital options could alienate some residents, particularly those most vulnerable and in need of support. The Commission was reassured that all non-digital channels that worked well and continued to be utilised would remain for the those that needed them.
- Suggested a change in terminology when describing the Programme, as introducing self-service options was not to reduce customer contact but to provide an alternative form of contact for those able and wanting to use this option.
- Commented on the need to improve departmental responses times when these were passed on by the Customer Service Centre.

- Suggested that all members be updated on the Programme as soon as possible given they were key points of contact for residents. The Commission also requested that updates be provided to all departmental overview and scrutiny committees as the Programme was rolled out so that progress and risks could be monitored.

Crime and Disorder

In its capacity as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee the Commission considered the Council's progress to deliver its Community Safety Strategy and Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy in partnership with other agencies. The Commission:

- Commended the valuable work of the service and the excellent partnership arrangements in place with district councils, particularly in addressing homelessness in cases of domestic violence.
- Requested more information on the costs of domestic abuse services commissioned compared to Government funding received.
- Welcomed work undertaken to educate and support young people affected by domestic violence.

Place Marketing and the LLEP (Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership)

Representatives from the Place Marketing Organisation (PMO) attended to answer the Commission's questions regarding delivery of its priorities for 2023/24. The Commission also received an update on the Government's transition of responsibilities from the LLEP to the County and City Councils. The Commission:

- Challenged what direct outcomes were achieved by the PMO, noting that this provided a centralised point of contact for businesses and agents seeking to locate or expand in the area.
- Questioned the benefit of attending MIPIIM (the international market for real estate professionals) events, suggesting that a presence at UK based events such as REiif was a more appropriate use of Council resources and more likely to attract investment.
- Sought more information regarding the governance and decision making arrangements that would be implemented by the County and City Councils following the cessation of the LLEP and challenged how this would continue to involve partners (such as district councils) and the business community.

Next Year...

The Commission will continue to monitor the Council's financial performance and the performance of its commercial traded services. It will also look again at the Council Customer Programme and consider proposals for future Investing in Leicestershire Programme investments.





Adults and Communities

This Committee exercises the Scrutiny function in relation to services provided by the Adults and Communities Department. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

CQC Assurance of Adult Social Care

The Committee considered a number of reports on the expected Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance visit. The Committee:

- Welcomed Dr. Carol Tozer's independent review during the Annual Conversation visit to the Council on 9 and 10 August 2023, which had focussed on the four CQC Assurance Framework themes - working with people, providing support, ensuring safety and leadership.
- Requested that action be taken to improve the Adult Social Care section of the Council's website to address issues raised through the review, including the ongoing curation of the website to ensure long term quality assurance of contents.
- Asked that consideration be given to the introduction of a standard process to contact more regularly those in receipt of care (by email) to provide assurance that the Council was keeping in touch in between the annual review process.
- Supported the key priorities for improvement identified through the Department's own self-assessment in preparation for its CQC inspection. The Committee has requested a further report on how these will be incorporated into the Plan and thereafter regular six-monthly updates on progress.

Collections Development Policy and Access Policy for the Records Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR)

The Committee has continued to receive reports on the Collections and Development Policy and Access Policy for the ROLLR, which are a requirement for archive accreditation and it has considered changes to plans for a new Archive, Collection and Learning Centre. The Committee:

- Raised concerns about limited storage availability at the current Records Office in Wigston, particularly for documents that needed to be stored in specific conditions and raised particular concerns about the risk to the Authority losing its accreditation.
- Was unanimous in its view that the preservation of records in an acceptable storage space with access for members of the public was essential.
- Challenged the merit of investing in maintaining the Wigston Records Office given the cost of this would be more than the capital value of the building itself.
- Requested that a scrutiny workshop be arranged to consider in more depth the Archives, Collection and Learning Centre and future delivery options. This Workshop is to be held in May, the outcomes of which will be reported to the Committee for further discussion.

Nursing Care Provision in Leicestershire

The Committee requested a report on nursing care provision in Leicestershire, work undertaken with Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board and funding levels in Leicestershire for people with complex care needs. The Committee:

- Considered the impact the lack of nursing home beds had both on the NHS and people waiting to leave hospital, as well as those waiting for treatment, and questioned how the situation could be improved. The Committee noted that funding was a critical factor and supported the Council's ongoing discussions with NHS colleagues to address this.
- Questioned how the Department was seeking to bring five nursing homes rated as 'Requires Improvement' up to 'Good' standard, noting the support provided by the Quality and Improvement Team to providers to get the rating levels uplifted.
- Supported the Director and the Cabinet in their approach to secure appropriate funding for nursing care services, in particular to redress the low level of funding for end-of-life care which severely disadvantaged residents living in Leicestershire.

Budget and Demand Pressures

The Adults and Communities Department has worked through another challenging year due to rising costs, inflation, and demand pressures. The Committee:

- Raised concerns about the forecasted increase in the cost of social care over the next few years and challenged what was being done to seek additional money from Central Government. The Committee was disappointed to hear that despite discussions with the Department for Health and Social Care, additional funding was not considered likely.
- Heard about the impact the increase in the National Living Wage (NLW) would have on the Department's budget due to the majority of social care services being delivered by in excess of 17,000 care staff who were paid the NLW.
- Requested more information about unspent direct payments claimed back by the Council, the Committee being concerned that this might mean some were going without the care they needed. A report on this is planned for later this year.

Social Care Investment Programme

The Committee considered the outcome of a review of the Council's Social Care Investment Programme. The Committee:

- Questioned the feasibility of the Council being able to deliver the Programme in the current economic climate.
- Noted with concern that Leicestershire had fewer extra care beds than other areas and that this was not seen as a real alternative to long-term care in the area.
- Recommended that the Council work in partnership with district councils as the local planning authorities, to ensure appropriate housing was being delivered in the right locations, and section 106 developer contributions secured to support delivery.

Performance

The Committee has continued to monitor the performance of services across the Adults and Communities Department as well as look at complaints received. The Committee:

- Welcomed the continued reduction in the number of people waiting for social care assessment.
- Received assurance that the treatment pathway across Health and Social Care was being looked at and improvements made, through collaborative working with the NHS.
- Requested the Department investigate whether the low percentage of people who felt they had much social contact was as a result of keeping people in their own homes rather than in the care environment.

Next Year...

The Committee will continue to monitor the impact of demand and cost pressures on the Departments budget, the preparations for the CQC inspection, and continued increase in inflation and cost of living pressures.



Children and Families



This Committee scrutinises the services provided by the Children and Family Services Department to children, young people and families as well as education, special needs and safeguarding matters. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

SEND and Inclusion

The Committee has continued to scrutinise the provision of SEND and Inclusion services and has:

- Monitored performance against delivery of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme and challenged how this was addressing the budget deficit within the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant, acknowledging the significant challenges faced in meeting growing demand for support, rising costs, and a cumulative budget deficit within the HNB of the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- Heard from and questioned representatives of Newton Europe, specialist consultants appointed by the Council to aid its delivery of the TSIL programme.
- Raised concerns about the exceptionally high number of children and young people requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Leicestershire compared with other areas.
- Sought reassurance that data on Electively Home Educated (EHE) children was being analysed in order to understand the reasons behind the growing number of parents choosing to EHE.

Admissions

The Committee requested and received an update on the Service challenges experienced during the 2022/23 admissions cycle. The Committee:

- Received a full performance breakdown of the year's outcomes, details of service and process improvements, and an overview of a consultation on the Council's Admissions Policy.
- Raised questions on the number of children who had not been allocated with a school place within appropriate time before the beginning of the academic year.
- Welcomed the proposal to increase the number of school preferences from three to five on the Leicestershire school application form.
- Raised concern that some children had been placed in schools which were a significant distance from their home, noting that this usually occurred due to lack of availability within the closest school if late or mid-term applications were received.

Children's Innovation Partnership

The Committee requested an update on the progress of the Children's Innovation Partnership (with Barnardo's) with particular focus on the residential design brief element of the programme. The Committee:

- Welcomed confirmation that the first of the residential homes had opened but raised concerns about the time it took to set up such homes. The Committee received some reassurance that the remaining homes would be created over the next five years, which it was anticipated would reduce reliance on the private sector and reduce costs.

- Questioned but were assured that the financial business case for the programme was still viable, given the rise in costs to buy, adapt and thereafter maintain properties.
- Received assurance that the programme would address demand for Children and Family Services arising from demographic growth and an increased need for social care.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

The Committee received reports on the budgetary and sufficiency challenges faced by the Department in supporting an increasing number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The Committee:

- Received data on the number of UASC entering Leicestershire through the National Transfer Scheme, within Adult Asylum System Dispersal hotels, and as spontaneous arrivals.
- Raised concerns about the financial pressure faced and the resource required to meet the needs of UASC, and supported plans to continue to raise the issue of funding with Government to reduce the gap within the wider social care budget.
- Sought reassurance that UASC were placed in appropriate settings as soon as the Council became responsible for their care.

Recruitment and Retention

The Committee requested an update on recruitment and retention pressures, including the Department's long-term strategy for addressing the challenges posed by agencies and the expected impact which national reviews into social care would have on delivering support to children and families. The Committee:

- Received assurance that exit interviews were conducted when staff were leaving the Service, in an attempt to understand their reasons for leaving so that any themes could be identified and issues addressed where possible.
- Was pleased to note that the Department would continue to ensure all newly qualified and agency staff would work alongside a qualified and experienced delivery mentor, would receive additional supervision and training days and would work with a reduced number of cases.
- Received assurance that internationally recruited social workers had or obtained relevant knowledge on UK social work practice and legislation before commencing employment.

Performance

The Committee continued to monitor the performance of all services provided by the Children and Family Services Department throughout the year. In response, the Committee:

- Raised concern at the increase in children receiving at least one fixed term suspension but were assured that affected children and families would continue to be supported.
- Requested that a decrease in the number of eligible two-year-olds took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) be monitored.
- Was pleased to note that there had been an increase in the number of primary and secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding.

Next year...

The Committee will continue to monitor the performance within SEND and Inclusion provision as a key priority and receive regular updates on the progress of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire programme. The Committee will also receive an update on work being done to tackle sexual and criminal exploitation amongst children.



Highways and Transport

This Committee scrutinises the Council's highways and transportation services. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

The Budget and the Highways and Transportation Capital and Works Programme for 2024/25

The Committee commented on the Department's budget proposals taking account of the increased cost and growth pressures being faced. The Committee:

- Expressed concern at the level of growth forecasted, despite no growth being provided in areas such as highways maintenance. Members were concerned that growth was being dominated by increased demand in SEN Transport and so requested a specific update on this service area.
- Supported the change in strategy regarding future funding bids for Capital Programme projects, acknowledging that the Council could no longer bid for funding unless it could be demonstrated that the costs and match funding would be met without the need for additional Council resources.
- Supported changes to require inflation rates within planning agreements for developer contributions to increase in line with inflation.

SEND Transport Services

The Committee has continued to monitor the performance of the Special Educational Needs Transport Service and looked at proposed actions to be taken over the next 12 months. The Committee:

- Emphasised that, as this was a national crisis, Government action was needed and endorsed the recommendations made by Council officers through the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) to Government regarding the changes and improvements needed to both the SEN and SEND Transport system.
- Received assurance that rising demand was not forecast to flow through into Adult Social Care Transport, as there were different eligibility criteria for adults and they also had less need (not requiring transport to school each day).
- Highlighted the need for a joint strategic approach with the Children and Family Services Department which undertook Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments. The Committee were pleased to hear about the new approach to consider transport needs earlier in the EHCP process.
- Supported the continued delivery of a mixed inhouse and outsourced operation transport approach.

Flooding

The Committee submitted its comments to the Cabinet on the Draft Leicestershire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LLFRMS) and also requested and received an update on the disruption caused to many parts of the County by Storm Henk. The Committee:

- Welcomed the new Strategy, which was timely, in light of recent flooding events in the County.
- Supported the proposed partnership approach with communities, commenting that helping residents to be flood aware would be an effective way of managing future events.
- Welcomed the online platform being developed by the Council which would provide a useful, single point of information and guidance for residents to access. However, in light of storm Henk, the Committee suggested that communication via leaflet dropping would also be helpful as many homes were without electricity for some time and so did not have access to digital means of communication.
- Encouraged the Department to consider flood warnings on mobile phones to help divert people living in the surrounding areas away from flooded roads which exacerbated problems.
- Was pleased to see that the Strategy addressed the issues and areas of concern raised by the Scrutiny Review Panel on flooding which had made 26 recommendations in total.
- Questioned how the impacts of new residential and commercial developments were managed to minimise future flooding, noting that the County Council was only a consultee and so could only make recommendations regarding flood risk management, such decisions resting with the district local planning authorities.
- Commended the staff involved in the aftermath of the storm for the excellent support provided to residents.

Street Lighting

The Committee considered the outcome of the Council's consultation on dimming all streetlights to 30% from 8pm across the County, noting the concerns that had been raised by some members of the public regarding the proposals. The Committee:

- In light of public concerns about the prospect of increased crime, requested that officers develop a heat map to identify those locations where people reported feeling vulnerable as a result of the reduced lighting to enable this to be compared with data held by the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Recommended that officers consider the impact of tree coverage which might further reduce lighting in some areas. The Committee asked officers to liaise with colleagues responsible for tree maintenance so that if any issues were raised as part of the planned pilot, works could be considered to make improvements.
- Raised concerns regarding the possible impact of the proposals on vulnerable groups such as women and disabled people and requested sight of the Equalities Impact Assessment that had been carried out to ensure any areas identified were being addressed.

Next year...

The Committee will continue to monitor performance, particularly regarding SEN Transport. It has requested a report on the Members Highway Fund and will consider the Leicestershire Highway Design Guide and Local Transport Plan (LTP4) before these are considered by the Cabinet.

The Committee will also look at the Leicestershire Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy and the next two Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.



Environment and Climate Change

This Committee scrutinises Waste Management Services and the Councils green agenda. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Responsible Authority Status

The Committee learnt about the new statutory duty that had been placed on local authorities in relation to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), and of the appointment of the County Council as the 'responsible authority' for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. The Committee:

- Was concerned to hear that government funding had only been provided for the first two years for the development of the LNRS and that further details regarding future funding were still awaited.
- Was pleased to hear that, whilst enhancing biodiversity was the main aim of the LNRS, there would be other environmental benefits such as tackling climate change, reduction of carbon emissions and improving air and river quality.
- Received assurance that improving the biodiversity of Country Parks would be an important part of the LNRS.
- Welcomed consultation with stakeholders to develop an Action Plan to underpin the LNRS, which would give further detail about the work to be undertaken and that farmers were being encouraged to move towards more sustainable farming practices.

Air Quality

The Committee reviewed the progress made against actions within the Air Quality and Health Partnership Action Plan 2020-24 and the initial proposals for an updated plan for 2024-28. The Committee:

- Raised concerns that as of 2020, 14 Air Quality Management Areas in Leicestershire exceeded the Government's national air quality thresholds. The committee was also concerned about the high prevalence of asthma and viral wheeze cases in the under 15s in the South Wigston area. The Committee welcomed work being undertaken by the Council's Public Health service with University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust to explore if there was any correlation between areas with poor air quality and the prevalence of breathing issues.
- Reassured by proposals to design and invest in road schemes that would improve air quality by reducing congestion and pollution, and that health considerations would be included in the Local Highway Design Guide.
- Supported the decarbonisation of the Council's own fleet of vehicles where appropriate and welcomed the award of government funding to install more Electric Vehicle charging points in Leicestershire.
- Requested an update at a future meeting on the Air Quality Action Plan 2024-28.

Tree Management

The Committee reviewed the work taking place under the Tree Management Strategy to manage the County Council's trees and woodlands. The Committee:

- Commended officers for their efforts in delivering the Tree Management Strategy, especially as targets for tree planting would be achieved two years ahead of schedule.
- Was pleased to hear that the County Council had been successful in attracting funding and planting trees by working in partnership with others, (local authorities, developers, and the National Forest), but raised concerns regarding the long term financial sustainability of the ambitious targets set considering the increased financial pressures faced.
- Raised concerns regarding the lack of clarity in the Strategy on timelines for maintenance and management of the trees but was reassured to hear that a financially sustainable risk-based approach would be adopted for scheduling tree inspections.

Net Zero

The Committee reviewed progress made in delivering the Council's commitments to net zero and progress in delivering the aims and objectives of the Council's Environmental Strategy 2018-2030. The Committee:

- Commended officers for their achievements to date in working towards the Council's net zero targets.
- Expressed concern that an extension to the target dates by five years was proposed but understood the need to do so in light of the financial challenges faced by the Council.
- Requested a future report on the reprioritisation of activity under the revised net zero targets and welcomed a simplified and more accessible action plan being developed.
- Requested that Members' questions on the significant decline in the number of rivers of good chemical status be submitted to the Environment Agency and water companies to explore the reasons for this and proposed actions for remedy.
- Visited Croft Highways Depot with Members of the Highways and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee to view the new environmental scheme to clean oils, diesel and chemicals in water, as well as solid remnant waste, collected from Leicestershire's gullies.

Performance

The Committee has continued to monitor the Council's performance in the delivery of its environmental and climate change targets. The Committee:

- Requested further detail on the process for monitoring key performance indicators, which were statutory or locally developed, who held responsibility for specific indicators and the frequency of monitoring noting that the annual compendium would detail the overall picture.
- Requested further details on the indicators that were performing in the third and fourth quartiles and how improvements would be made.
- Clarified the process for the collection of food waste and requested a report on Collection and Packing Reforms be presented to a future meeting.

Next Year...

The Committee intends to receive further updates on the revised Environmental Net Zero priorities, collection and packaging reforms, disposal of domestic seating that contain persistent organic pollutants, Local Nature Recovery Strategy and continue its regular performance monitoring.



Health

This Committee reviews and scrutinises matters relating to the planning, provision, and operation of health services in the County of Leicestershire. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Elective Care

The Committee has looked at the waiting lists for elective care procedures for Leicestershire patients and the actions being taken to reduce waiting lists. The Committee:

- Noted how much the waiting lists had grown during the Covid-19 pandemic but also that significant progress had been made in reducing the waiting lists since then.
- Sought further information regarding which specialties made up the majority of the waiting lists and the number of patients that had been waiting between 18 and 24 weeks.
- Gained reassurances that resources would continue to be invested in elective care waiting times and that recruitment was taking place for the East Midlands Planned Care Centre.

Homeless Support Service

The Committee has scrutinised the County Council's proposals to cease funding a dedicated homeless support service and instead to provide support via the Council's existing public health services. The Committee:

- Welcomed the proposed use of Local Area Co-ordinators in the new model for homeless support.
- Heard from the Chief Executive of Falcon Support Services (who provided the dedicated homeless support service) regarding the impact of the decision to cease funding.
- Noted that the new model would support many more people than were currently supported through the Falcon Centre.
- Raised concerns that the £300,000 saving could be negated by an increase in demand for the service, and gained reassurances that capacity in the First Contact Plus team and Local Area Co-ordinators had been increased and therefore there was confidence that the demand could be managed.
- Gained assurances regarding how the County Council audited the provision of the services it commissioned.

Winter pressures 2023/24

The Committee reviewed the plans of the health system to manage winter pressures across Leicestershire in 2023/ 2024. The Committee:

- Requested more data and evidence to help provide reassurance that targets would be reached.
- Welcomed the improvement in Ambulance handover times at Leicester Royal Infirmary Emergency Department.
- Learnt about the use of virtual wards which allowed people to be safely monitored from the comfort of their own home.
- Considered the discharge from hospital processes and the partnership working which was taking place to improve discharges and welcomed that County Council Social care staff were working on wards assessing people for discharge.

Vaping

The Committee considered the work that was being carried out relating to vaping and young people in Leicestershire. The Committee:

- Raised serious concerns about the numbers of young people vaping in Leicestershire, particularly those that had started vaping without any previous smoking history, that selling vapes to children was illegal but giving them out for free was not.
- Emphasised that there needed to be a more strategic approach to tackle the problem of vaping supported by legislation and so wrote to all Leicestershire MPs asking for support in ensuring that the smokefree generation plans and legislation targeted equally, not just the smoking of tobacco, but vaping as well.
- Welcomed the Government's Smokefree Generation Programme and the funding that came with it, but noted that more needed to be done to reduce the appeal of vaping to young people and prevent children accessing vapes.

Joint Heath Scrutiny

Health Overview and Scrutiny members have also taken part in meetings of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Joint Heath Scrutiny Committee and considered agenda items relating to Primary Care access, mental health services run by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, maternity services, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust's 'Our future hospitals programme' and the approach being taken to address workforce challenges across the health and care system.

Next year

The Committee plans to look at the use of apprenticeships in the health system, the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service, and return to the issue of Elective Care.

In Depth Scrutiny Reviews

During the year, in light of proposed savings within the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24 – 2026/27 (MTFS) the Scrutiny Commissioners established two five member scrutiny review panels. One to look at the possible closure of some Recycling and Household Waste Sites and the other to look at the cessation of the SHIRE Community and Environment Grants. A summary of these reviews is set out below.

Scrutiny Review Panel on Recycling and Household Waste Sites

The County Council's MTFS proposed a saving of £580,000 from the Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS). The Scrutiny Commissioners appointed the Panel to test the assessment criteria applied to identify the sites for closure and to consider how the closures would impact residents for the future.

As well as the assessment criteria, the Panel reviewed the legislative background and national guidance relating to RHWS, the County Council's current service offer and budget for RHWS, and the savings that could be delivered through site closures.

The Panel made several recommendations but overall supported the criteria to be applied to prioritise sites for closure and the proposal to consult on the possible closure of sites at Shepshed, Somerby, and Market Harborough. The Panel recommended that the proposed closures of the Lutterworth and Bottesford RHWS be reconsidered.

Scrutiny Review Panel on SHIRE Community and SHIRE Environment Grant Programmes

The MTFS proposed a saving by ceasing delivery of the SHIRE Community and Environment Grant programmes. The Scrutiny Commission established the Panel to consider the impacts and value for money achieved through the grants programmes, examine the profile of past and current recipients and key metrics, and the potential impact of the discontinuation of both grant programmes.

The Panel heard from departmental officers regarding the impact and value for money of the grants programmes and investment into the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, and how the grant schemes supported the achievement of departmental strategic objectives. It welcomed feedback from VCSE organisations (including SHIRE Grant beneficiaries) regarding the impact of SHIRE Grants, how grant investment supported delivery of community-based projects, services and activities and examined Case Studies which helped to demonstrate the impacts and outcomes achieved via SHIRE Grant funding.

The Panel raised concerns regarding the costs of administering the schemes, the allocation of grant funding to certain organisations, the use of funding and the number of repeat grants awarded in some cases.

By majority the Panel recommended that the operation of the grant programmes be supported to continue during the 2023/24 financial year with reduced budgets but that the grants thereafter be ceased, the County Council, however, continuing to provide advice, guidance and signposting to VCSE organisations requiring funding. It also recommended a change in the criteria for awarding SHIRE Community Grants during the 2023/24 financial year to provide grants only to small voluntary and community groups.

Overview and Scrutiny

Members

Scrutiny Commission	<u>Michael Mullaney CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Tony Gillard CC</u>
	<u>Tom Barkley CC</u>	<u>Amanda Hack CC</u>
	<u>Mark Frisby CC</u>	<u>Jonathan Morgan CC</u>
	<u>Hilary Fryer CC</u>	<u>Rosita Page CC</u>
	<u>Simon Galton CC</u>	<u>James Poland CC</u>
		<u>Terry Richardson CC</u>
Adults and Communities	<u>Terry Richardson CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Nick Chapman CC</u>
	<u>Bill Boulter CC</u>	<u>Leon Hadji-Nikolaou CC</u>
	<u>Barry Champion CC</u>	<u>Jewel Miah CC</u>
Children and Families	<u>Hilary Fryer CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Max Hunt CC</u>
	<u>Mark Frisby CC</u>	<u>Sue Jordan CC</u>
	<u>Fula (Kamal) Ghattoraya CC</u>	Canon Carolyn Lewis (Church of England Representative)
	<u>Leon Hadji-Nikolaou CC</u>	Robert Martin (Parent Governor)
	<u>Ross Hills CC</u>	
Highway and Transport	<u>Tony Gillard CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Bryan Lovegrove CC</u>
	<u>Richard Allen CC</u>	<u>Keith Merrie MBE CC</u>
	<u>David Bill MBE, CC</u>	<u>Les Phillimore CC</u>
	<u>Amanda Hack CC</u>	
Environment and Climate Change	<u>Mark Frisby CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Dan Harrison CC</u>
	<u>Bill Boulter CC</u>	<u>Max Hunt CC</u>
	<u>Nick Chapman CC</u>	<u>Rosita Page CC</u>
	<u>Brenda Seaton CC</u>	
Health	<u>Jonathan Morgan CC (Chairman)</u>	<u>Betty Newton CC</u>
	<u>Michael Charlesworth CC</u>	<u>Trevor Pendleton CC</u>
	<u>Dan Harrison CC</u>	<u>Brenda Seaton CC</u>
	<u>Ross Hills CC</u>	

The Overview and Scrutiny Team

If you would like to feed into the scrutiny process or suggest a topic for scrutiny's attention, you can get in touch with the Scrutiny Team at democracy@leics.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can contact the officer that supports a specific Committee as detailed below.

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<p>Children and Families</p> <p>Damien Buckley Democratic Services Officer Tel: 0116 305 0183 Email: Damien.buckley@leics.gov.uk</p>	<p>Health</p> <p>Euan Walters Senior Democratic Services Officer Tel: 0116 305 6016 Email: Euan.walters@leics.gov.uk</p>

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Democratic Services

Chief Executive's Department

Leicestershire County Council

For further details on the contents of this report please email: democracy@leics.gov.uk