



Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report 2025/26



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Foreword

Welcome to Leicestershire County Council's annual report summarising some of the work undertaken by overview and scrutiny during 2025/26. This report highlights the broad range of work carried over the course of the year and reflects the important role scrutiny continues to play in supporting transparent, accountable and effective decision-making.

This has been a particularly significant year for scrutiny. With many new Members becoming involved in Scrutiny following the May 2025 elections, this has brought a new perspective and sense of challenge to all our scrutiny meetings. Members have considered issues of major strategic importance, including local government reorganisation, the Council's medium-term financial position and the outcomes of the far-reaching organisational efficiency review, necessary due to the continued pressure on key services and the Council's low funded position. Throughout this work, scrutiny has provided challenge, tested assumptions, sought assurance on delivery and highlighted the need to protect services for residents whilst responding to an increasingly difficult financial and policy environment.

We have been impressed by the volume and quality of scrutiny undertaken across all committees. During the year, members examined a wide range of issues including SEND and children's social care pressures, adult social care improvement and safeguarding, highways maintenance and drainage, local nature recovery and climate resilience, and access to health services. In addition to formal committee meetings, the Scrutiny Commission has called three additional special meetings to examine time-critical and complex matters in greater depth such as the Council's local government reorganisation proposals and the outcome of the Council's efficiency Review.

As Scrutiny Commissioners, we would like to thank all members involved in the overview and scrutiny process for their contribution throughout the year. We also extend our thanks to officers, Cabinet members, partner organisations and external witnesses who have supported and contributed to our work.



Deborah Taylor CC
Chairman of the
Scrutiny Commission



Michael Mullaney CC
Vice Chairman of the
Scrutiny Commission



Dr John Bloxham CC
Scrutiny Commissioner



Andrew Innes CC
Scrutiny Commissioner

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.

Overview and Scrutiny at a glance

Overview and Scrutiny is a central part of local democratic accountability, enabling non-Cabinet councillors to examine matters of public importance, test proposals and support robust decision-making in the interests of Leicestershire residents.

What scrutiny can do

Scrutiny does not make decisions, but it can make recommendations to decision makers, including the Cabinet. It can also examine services delivered by partner organisations, such as health bodies, and recommend improvements where appropriate.

How scrutiny is organised

Leicestershire County Council has 55 elected councillors. Of these, 34 non-Cabinet members sit on the Scrutiny Commission and five politically balanced Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Each Scrutiny Committee looks at a particular service area of the Council and these are outlined in the chart 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.

What does good scrutiny look like?

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny identifies four principles of effective scrutiny. Together, these principles provide the foundation for constructive challenge, public accountability and continuous improvement.

Principles of Effective Scrutiny



Scrutiny committees hold the Cabinet to account for the decisions it has taken, sometimes by way of call-in, or by advanced scrutiny of decisions it intends to take. It provides challenge and acts as a critical friend, testing developing proposals and examining how services are being delivered, identifying areas for improvement to ensure the Council provides high quality services that meet the needs of Leicestershire residents. In practice, 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, taking questions from residents and receiving petitions.

The different types of Scrutiny

Scrutiny balances policy development with ongoing performance and assurance activity across the Council and its partnerships through a continuous process that combines review, challenge, assurance and accountability as outlined below.

Evidence, plans and proposals

Budget proposals, strategic policies, service plans, performance information and emerging issues are brought forward for review.



Scrutiny challenge and review

Committees test proposals before decisions are taken, reviews performance and seeks assurance where necessary. It examines whether services are being delivered effectively, efficiently and transparently.



Outputs and influence

Scrutiny helps shape policy development, supports budget and policy review, submits comments and recommendations to the Cabinet, and seeks further information and assurance where needed.



Public accountability

Meetings are held in public and questions can be received from residents, supporting openness, transparency and public accountability.

Over half of the reports considered by the Council's Scrutiny Committees have resulted in comments and recommendations being presented to the Cabinet for consideration as part of its decision making process.

Scrutiny Committees have sought to keep abreast of issues, receiving information and updates on a range of topics. They also monitor the Council's performance and seek assurance around service and project delivery.

Public involvement

Scrutiny committees draw on a wide range of evidence to assess whether Council services and partner activity are meeting the needs of residents and service users.

Scrutiny draws on several complementary sources to provide insight and to strengthen challenge and support informed decision-making.

External evidence

Partners, stakeholder representatives and external experts contribute evidence to broaden members' understanding.

Co-opted expertise

The ability to co-opt members on the Children and Family Services Committee adds expertise, allowing for representation from parent governors and Church of England maintained schools.

Local insight

Members also draw on their knowledge of local communities when questioning Cabinet Lead Members and officers.

Public participation is an important part of the scrutiny process, with a number of routes available for residents and stakeholders to contribute as outlined below:

- 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. 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.

Public involvement in 2025/26

Below is a summary of the scale of scrutiny activity and public engagement during 2025/26, including meeting volume, reports considered, public questions, webcast views and comments submitted to the Cabinet. These figures provide a concise snapshot of the reach and visibility of the scrutiny process during the year.

Compared with 2024/25, scrutiny activity and public visibility increased significantly in 2025/26. The number of committee meetings rose from 34 to 40, reports considered from 124 to 176, and hours of public debate from 55 to 72. Webcast views saw the most substantial growth, increasing from 2,261 to 8,538, while comments submitted to the Cabinet also rose from 25 to 36.

Overview and Scrutiny: Public Involvement 2025-26

40

Committee meetings held



72hrs

of public debate

8,538

Webcast views



27

Questions submitted by members of the public

36

Comments submitted to cabinet



176

Reports considered



47

Recommendations made and additional information and assurance sought

Scrutiny Activity during 2025/26

Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission has continued to provide strategic overview and challenge across the Council's corporate priorities, with a particular focus on financial sustainability, major policy development, and cross-cutting issues affecting residents and services. Full details of the Commission's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Call-in of a Cabinet Decision regarding the Protocol for Flying Flags at County Hall

A special meeting of the Commission was called to consider a Call-in of a Cabinet decision taken regarding the Protocol for Flying Flags at County Hall. The Commission, as part of this item, heard from representatives of the Council's staff networks. The Commission:

- Criticised the absence of prior scrutiny/consultation and emphasised the importance of following democratic processes and transparency. The Commission sought assurances that scrutiny would not be bypassed for future decisions, highlighting the value of scrutiny in improving policy decisions.
- Supported the Call-in reasons, particularly concerns about lack of staff consultation and the need to take proper account of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Recommended clearer drafting in the policy, criticising parts of the Cabinet's decision as being too vague, suggesting that the policy should specify which flags would be flown to ensure clarity and consistency. The Commission also recommended that the Union Flag be flown in the quadrant whilst no other flags were flown, a recommendation subsequently taken up by the Cabinet.
- Requested the Cabinet reconsider its decision taking account of the comments and recommendations of the Commission and requesting the Cabinet speak with staff working groups and consider any additional comments.



Local Government Reorganisation

The Commission held special meetings and received three separate reports regarding the Council's proposals for local government reorganisation. It commented on the draft business case, prior to submission to the Cabinet, and provided feedback as part of the Council's response to the Government consultation. Independent councillors and a representative of those political groups that do not have a member on the Commission were invited for this discussion to ensure the views of the whole council could be heard and captured as part of the scrutiny response.

The Commission initially expressed disappointment that only limited details regarding the Council's proposals had been provided when first looking at LGR and so requested further opportunities to scrutinise this given the significance of the issue. The Council held two further special meetings to look at LGR one of which was held in private. To help shape the Council's proposals the Commission:

- Commented that the business case contained too many options, making the appraisal less focused and potentially weakening the preferred case. Some scoring and narrative in the options appraisal were also considered unbalanced, particularly around democratic governance and neighbourhood empowerment which it was suggested should be corrected. The draft was also seen as lacking enough evidence on long-term sustainability, particularly in relation to population growth.
- Requested that the Case for Change be made stronger, especially in showing how proposals would improve services without requiring boundary changes.
- Expressed concern that the draft wording could imply a "takeover" of Rutland and district functions, rather than the creation of a new independent authority. The Commission highlighted the need to maintain local identity, representation, and access to services. There were concerns about the impact of a single unitary council on the local variation of district services, and on maintaining local responsiveness.
- Commented that there was insufficient clarity on how community grants, area committees, planning committees, and community involvement would work in practice.
- Raised concerns about the capacity of parish and town councils to take on devolved services, particularly where councils are small, under-resourced, or non-existent.

Efficiency Review Outcomes and Proposals

A special meeting was scheduled on 11 May 2026. A published report states it was intended to invite scrutiny feedback ahead of Cabinet consideration and sets out the review's purpose, phases and scope. Again, Independent councillors and a representative of those political groups that do not have a member on the Commission were invited to contribute to this discussion. The Commission:

- Questioned whether the scale, timing and phasing of the proposed savings were realistic, particularly as some proposals remained at an early stage, relied on assumptions about future delivery and were still subject to detailed business case approval.
- Raised concerns about how far the programme depended on future reorganisation arrangements and whether proposals, particularly longer-term investments, would remain viable under any new authority structure.
- Highlighted that implementation costs would be incurred early, while a significant proportion of savings would not be realised until later in the MTFS period, increasing financial risk if delivery slipped.

- In both children's and adults' services, Members sought reassurance that proposals would not lower thresholds, reduce care inappropriately, or place financial considerations above the safety, wellbeing and individual needs of vulnerable people.
- Raised concerns about staff morale during organisational change, the challenge of reducing agency reliance while recruiting and retaining permanent staff, and the capacity needed to deliver transformation successfully.
- Emphasised the importance of ongoing scrutiny, clearer answers on assumptions and risks as proposals progressed, and careful communication with residents and families so proposals were understood as service improvements rather than service reductions.

The Budget and financial monitoring

The Commission looked at corporate and central elements of the Council's proposed four year Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Commission also considered a number of reports monitoring delivery of the Council's budget and scrutinising the Council's short and medium term financial position, including proposed changes to the capital programme. The Commission:

- Reiterated concerns about the sharp rise in the High Needs Block deficit and the associated risk to the Council. The Commission sort assurances around the approach to resourcing within the MTFs and the need for clarity on Government arrangements, noting this area would be heavily monitored by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Queried capital programme slippage and requested assurance and lessons would be learnt from projects, noting plans to undertake an internal review.
- Raised concern about costs of secure accommodation placements for children, requesting clarity on numbers affected and costs being incurred.

Property management, estates, and investments

The Commission received several reports regarding the Council's operation and investment property portfolio and monitored how this was performing during the current year. The Commission:

- Considered the performance of the Corporate Asset Management Plan and the Investing in Leicestershire Programme (IILP). The Commission challenged how comparisons were being presented for investment properties and expressed some disappointment in the level of income generated. The Commission supported the need to explore other diversifiers and sought more information on pooled property fund liquidity risks. The Commission shared mixed views (including concerns) around the risk profile of equities as a potential form of investment in the future.
- Commented on the draft revised IILP Portfolio Management Strategy 2026–2030 and questioned the projected level of income return. The Commission also sought more information on the legal restrictions on investment types.
- Commented on the Council's new Rural Estate Strategy (IILP) 2026–2036 supporting its vision and the aim to support new entrants. The Commission, however, emphasised the need for longterm viability without subsidy and the need to balance retention and development/disposal opportunities. Members also raised concerns about rent increases linked to historic review cycles and welcomed assurance that rent reviews were now up to date and would be maintained on a defined cycle to avoid future spikes.

Performance, assurance, and customer experience

The Commission received several reports detailing the Council's overall performance across all service areas, including the level of complaints and compliments received from residents and service users. The Commission:

- Welcomed the Annual Performance Report which showed the Council continued to be high performing despite its low funding position. The Commission questioned specific indicators including park and ride performance and adult social care satisfaction survey results and sought additional information on these service areas.
- Considered the Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024/25 noting the use of root cause analysis to identify themes and drive improvements across departments and the corporate complaints function. The Commission challenged the variability in response times and the importance of routing enquiries correctly to avoid unnecessary delay. The Commission emphasised that good communication could prevent escalation
- Received the East Midlands Shared Services annual performance update 2024/25. Members welcomed the positive performance shown and discussed process controls including supplier payment approaches, purchase order compliance, and automation/AI benefits.
- Commented on the performance of Leicestershire Traded Services and submitted proposals to the Cabinet on the future of Beaumanor Hall and Park recognising the sustainability, subsidy and heritage balance that needed to be struck in respect of such a specialist building.

Governance and standards

The Commission looked at the Council's ethical governance arrangements relating to Member Conduct and reviewed the framework, processes and governance measures currently in place. The Commission:

- Supported the need for greater transparency in complaint outcomes and recommended that a summary of complaints accompany the publication of any public apology made by a member so that the action was meaningful and transparent.
- Submitted recommendations to the Corporate Governance Committee to make training on the Members' Code of Conduct mandatory, with compliance to be monitored and reported annually, recognising the need for target support to address repeat issues and reduce future complaints
- Expressed concern about the effectiveness of current sanctions, noting that these were current limited and not fit for purpose. The Commission supported the need for stronger national reform.

Next Year...

Over the next 12 months the Commission will continue to monitor regularly delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and will be particularly focused on the outcome of the Efficiency Review and the proposals brought forward to deliver savings that will address the current financial gap faced by the Council alongside demand pressures and rising costs.



Adults and Communities

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

Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)

The Committee considered updates on the Council's ongoing work to improve the pathway to adulthood, including progress arising from previous peer review activity. The Committee:

- Received assurance that actions identified through the review were being progressed across both Adults and Children's Services.
- Welcomed joint working between departments to improve outcomes for young people transitioning into adult services.
- Emphasised the importance of a coordinated approach to ensure continuity of care and support.
- Commended the quality of parent carer engagement and emphasised the importance of incorporating feedback.

Adult Social Care Complaints and Customer Experience

The Committee reviewed the Adult Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report. The Committee:

- Raised concerns regarding accessibility of services, including difficulties contacting adult social care and reliance on digital channels.
- Emphasised the need for clear communication and timely responses to reduce repeat contact and dissatisfaction.
- Sought assurance that complaints were analysed effectively to identify root causes and drive service improvements.

The Committee also received updates on the Adult Social Care Customer Service Centre and ongoing efforts to improve responsiveness and user experience.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assessment and Improvement Planning

The Committee considered reports relating to the CQC's assessment of the Council's delivery of its Care Act 2014 duties and subsequent improvement planning. The Committee:

- Received an overview of the findings of the CQC assessment and the Department's response.
- Sought assurance that improvement actions were being implemented effectively and monitored.
- Emphasised the importance of demonstrating positive outcomes for service users alongside regulatory compliance.

Carers and Safeguarding

The Committee considered strategic reports relating to carers and safeguarding arrangements. The Committee:

- Reviewed the draft Leicestershire Carers Strategy 2026–2030, highlighting the importance of recognising and supporting unpaid carers.
- Considered the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report, including priorities around equality, diversity, and improving partnership engagement.
- Raised concerns regarding attendance and engagement across safeguarding partners and the long-term financial sustainability of arrangements.

Cultural Services, Heritage and Community Provision

The Committee considered reports relating to wider community services delivered by the Department. The Committee:

- Reviewed proposals relating to museum policy, accreditation, and collections management.
- Considered the role of community-based services, including day services, in supporting wellbeing and independence.
- Highlighted the importance of maintaining accessible and inclusive community provision.

Next Year...

In the coming year, the Committee (renamed the Adults and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee) will continue to monitor delivery of the CQC improvement plan and ongoing regulatory assurance activity. It will also review the impact of financial pressures and service transformation on adult social care provision and oversee developments in commissioning, including dementia services and community-based support. The Committee will also consider progress against the Carers Strategy and safeguarding priorities and continue to monitor performance, demand, and customer experience across all service areas.



Children and Families

This Committee scrutinised 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 services which support the education health and care needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) through the provision of Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Committee:

- Raised concern about the impact of forthcoming national reforms on the rising demand for EHCPs and SEND services.
- Received assurances that mainstream inclusion was being strengthened and welcomed improved EHCP timeliness through process changes and backlog reduction.
- Welcomed the reduction in SENA complaints and ongoing expansion of specialist provision, while noting continued pressure from rising demand.
- Highlighted concerns about proposed SEND nursery changes, which were not taken forward, and questioned the aims of the Building Education Services Together programme.

Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Committee received reports on progress achieved against the Department's duties and responsibilities to children in care and care leavers. The Committee:

- Raised concern about rising numbers of children entering care, increased use of residential placements and escalating costs. The Committee received assurance that work was underway to expand fostering, strengthen kinship care and progress Family First reforms to help more children remain safely within their families.
- Welcomed development of in-house residential provision through the Children's Innovation Programme with Barnardo's, aimed at improving care quality, providing more local homes and achieving better value than private provision.
- Raised concern about the number of children in care receiving dental checks and annual health assessments. The Committee received assurance that performance was being addressed and requested a further report on progress.
- Questioned the level of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months. The Committee was advised that these were monitored closely and could reflect an appropriate response to changing or ongoing safeguarding risks.

Education

The Committee received reports relating to the Departments work regarding education sufficiency, school place planning, and admissions. The Committee:

- Raised concern about increased phase transfer allocations, linked to rising demand for secondary places, changes in the independent sector and inward migration from neighbouring authorities.
- Received assurance that the sustainability of rural schools, including risks of closure and community impact, would be reviewed through a three-year School Reorganisation Project.
- Raised concern about a projected shortfall of around 2,000 secondary places within two years. The Committee was advised that this would be addressed through capital investment, school expansions and, where necessary, new school provision.
- Welcomed development of a new planning obligations policy to better reflect school building costs, including inflation, and provide greater flexibility to support SEND provision, including in mainstream settings.
- Raised concern about growing demand for support for children facing barriers to attendance, including those with medical needs, children missing education, exclusions and elective home education. The Committee noted the rising cost pressures and anticipated national policy changes in this area.
- Received assurance that, although the Council had limited powers to monitor elective home education, its internal policy had been reviewed to strengthen support for families as numbers continued to rise.

Families First Reforms

The Committee received a report regarding national reforms for children's services, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive, and details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire. The Committee:

- Received assurance that the Department was taking proactive steps to prepare for the reforms, including work on workforce data and partnership arrangements, with a continued focus on early support and better long-term outcomes for children and families.
- Questioned how the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant would support additional preventative activity. The Committee welcomed the new funding, while noting uncertainty over whether it would be sufficient to deliver the reforms in full.

Next year...

The Committee will continue to monitor performance against the Department's safeguarding duties and its responsibilities relating to Education, SEND and inclusion, Children in Care and Care Leavers. It will also receive reports on rural schools, child exploitation, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), children and young people Not in Education or Training (NEET), and the Oakfield Short Stay School.



Highways, Transport and Waste

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

Highways safety, maintenance and asset investment

The Committee considered several reports, reviewing data and interventions aimed at improving road safety outcomes. The Committee:

- Reviewed Road Casualty Reduction activity taking place in Leicestershire report and examined trends in collisions and how resources were targeted to support casualty reduction.
- Commented on the Highways and Transportation Capital Programme and Works Programme 2026/27, which set out planned investment and delivery priorities for the coming year. The Committee considered how the programme aligned with strategic priorities and local need, including highway condition and maintenance requirements.
- Scrutinised the Council's processes for pedestrian crossing assessments and supported improvements to ensure decisions were transparent, evidencebased and aligned with national guidance.
- Considered the outcome of the street lighting dimming trial, providing comments to Cabinet on the future approach to street lighting.

Drainage and environmental resilience

Drainage and its impact on flooding remained a significant area of scrutiny for the Committee which looked at the Council's Highways Drainage Programme and Works. The Committee:

- Noted the scale and complexity of the Council's drainage responsibilities, including asset management such as gully cleansing.
- Looked at programme updates to scrutinise how drainage works were prioritised and delivered across the County.
- Sought further information on maintenance regimes to provide assurance to residents affected by flooding thought to be linked to drainage issues.

Strategic transport planning and network development

The Committee has continued to play a key role in shaping the Council's long-term transport strategy. A significant report considered during the period was Delivering the Local Transport Plan (LTP4) 2025–2040 – Next Steps, including development of the Enabling Travel Choice Strategy (ETCS) and MultiModal Area Investment Plans (MMAIPs). The Committee:

- Commented on the long-term delivery and phasing of LTP4, noting the importance of flexibility and alignment with available funding.
- Highlighted the importance of understanding differing transport needs across urban and rural communities and the need to improve engagement with residents on local areas of concern.
- Considered the Council's new Healthy Streets approach, focusing on how transport planning can support healthier and more connected communities.
- Looked at the Council's Home to School Transport annual performance and raising concerns about operational pressures and supporting future priorities.

Major infrastructure and service delivery projects

The Committee received updates on major infrastructure delivery, including the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (MMDR), to which members undertook a site visit. This was a significant long-term project which is now completed. The Committee:

- Noted progress, recognising the scheme's long development period and importance to the local area but raising concerns about rising costs that are typically faced in respect of such long-term schemes.
- Requested a future evaluation report to capture lessons learned from the scheme, recognising that some factors, such as the weather and global inflation and cost rises were outside the Council's control.

Waste and resource management reforms

Following the expansion of the Committee's remit, Members considered national policy changes affecting waste services. The Committee received a report on Collection and Packaging Reforms, outlining forthcoming Government changes, including deposit return and producer responsibility schemes. The Committee:

- Considered the implications of reforms for local service delivery and residents.
- Emphasised the importance of effective communication and public awareness as new arrangements are introduced.
- Requested further reporting on the introduction of food waste collections and associated service changes.

Next year...

The Committee (which will be renamed the Growth, Highways, Transport and Waste Overview and Scrutiny Committee) will continue to monitoring highways performance, safety and asset condition, including delivery of the capital programme and casualty reduction activity. It will be scrutinising the delivery of LTP4 and associated strategies to improve connectivity and access across the County and will take a close look at the financial sustainability of services through the MTFS and its impact on delivery. The Committee will also monitor the implementation of waste reforms and new service models, including food waste collection.



Environment, Flooding and Climate Change

This Committee scrutinised the Council's green agenda focussing on local nature recovery and biodiversity, flood risk and climate resilience. The Committee acts and serves as the Council's Flood Risk Management Committee, monitoring relevant activity and partnerships in this area. Full details of the Committee's work can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Local Nature Recovery, Biodiversity and the Natural Environment

The Committee considered strategic reports relating to local nature recovery, biodiversity and the natural environment. The Committee:

- Welcomed the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), noting that it set out meaningful priorities capable of delivering tangible benefits for the local environment, highlighting the importance of meaningful engagement and deliverable funded projects through a future delivery plan.
- Considered a refreshed draft 'Action for Nature' strategic approach and supporting action plan, noting the challenges of biodiversity measurement, the role of community participation, and practical delivery questions such as land management approached and chemical weed control regimes.
- Received a dedicated Biodiversity report, supporting continued oversight of biodiversity delivery and evidence gathering through corporate reporting.
- Reviewed the refreshed draft Tree Management Strategy, discussing the Council's developing nursery capacity (including tree stock to support ash dieback replacement and highway schemes), how value and condition are assessed, and wider practical matters such as inspection regimes on specific assets.

Climate Change, Flooding and Resilience

The Committee considered reports relating to climate resilience and local flood risk management. The Committee:

- Scrutinised the Climate Resilience Delivery Plan, including practical proposals linked to flood risk and adaptation.
- Supported stronger clarity and record-keeping around Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), recognising the operational benefits of improved asset information, whilst noting the challenges around SuDS ownership/management (including private management companies) and the importance of using the planning process to strengthen future information and accountability.
- Took public questions, specifically on the reallocation of £2m to flood mitigation initiatives, noting that proposals (including intended outcomes) were to be shaped and reported to the Cabinet later in the year.
- Considered a substantive Local Flood Risk Management Strategy Update, including an accompanying strategy action plan, and used the update to scrutinise progress and ensure strategic actions remained aligned to emerging flood risk pressures and delivery capacity.

Waste and Emissions / Regulatory Change

The Committee received an update on the Government's plans to incorporate Energy from Waste and waste incineration facilities into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme from 2028 and the possible implications for the Council as waste disposal authority. The Committee:

- Noted the need for ongoing work with district councils (waste collection authorities) to support planning for emerging legislative change.
- Discussed the risk of additional future costs if waste is not correctly managed and directed into more expensive disposal routes.
- Recognised the reforms could represent some of the biggest sector changes in decades, with greater clarity expected as national policy develops.

Environmental Performance

The Committee received regular Environment and Climate Change Performance Reports. The Committee:

- Explored issues including the assumptions and limitations of environmental measurement and sought assurance around evidence quality and monitoring approaches.
- Considered operational implications of decarbonisation activity (including fleet transition considerations and fuel choices), and requested follow-up where risks were identified.

Next year...

The Committee will continue to monitor performance and maintain a focus on flood risk management and climate resilience delivery, develop further scrutiny around biodiversity and delivery measurement, and keep under review the medium-term financial sustainability of environment, flooding and climate change services within the MTFS framework.



Health

This Committee reviewed and scrutinised 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](#).

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

The Committee has spent a significant amount of time scrutinising the work of Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) who provide mental health, learning disability and community health services. The Committee:

- Reviewed LPT's new strategy 'Together we Thrive' and raised concerns some patients might have about the move towards greater use of online and digital forms of communication.
- Questioned LPT about the provision of mental health and early intervention services available locally, welcomed that the number of people waiting for Talking Therapy was falling and that the therapy appeared to be having a positive effect, but expressed concerns about the wait times for the more specialist therapy.
- Reviewed the results of Care Quality Commission inspections into LPT and gained assurances from LPT as to how they intended to address shortcomings identified in the inspection reports particularly around waiting times.

Access to Primary Care

The Committee has reviewed the provision of primary care services in Leicestershire and in particular the ability of patients to gain an appointment with a local GP or other primary care professional in a timely manner. The Committee:

- Examined the ratio of GPs to patients and raised concerns that there was no national guidance on this.
- Raised concerns that the lack of access to primary care was displacing demand elsewhere and putting pressure on other services such as the Emergency Department, but gained assurances that capacity for same day primary care appointments was being increased;
- Examined data for the number of patients that did not attend (DNA) primary care appointments that they had booked and sought assurances about the processes in place for managing DNAs.
- Brought representatives of the Integrated Care Board and local members from the Melton area together to discuss why there is only one GP Practice for the whole of the Melton area and what can be done to alleviate this problem.

Public Health

The Committee has learnt about the work of the Public Health Department within Leicestershire County Council and how it complements the other Council departments and prevents service demand arising elsewhere. The Committee:

- Examined the proposed Public Health Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2026/27 to 2029/30 and welcomed that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) had given provisional Public Health Grant allocations for the next three years rather than the usual one-year settlement.
- Noted that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) took into account census data and population figures when allocating funding to Public Health departments but raised concerns that funding would not keep up with population and housing growth.
- Requested a more detailed report on the metric 'HIV late diagnosis in people first diagnosed with HIV in the UK' which was rag rated red for the period 2021-23 and received assurances regarding the actions underway to improve HIV diagnosis across Leicestershire.

Elective Care, Diagnostics and Cancer treatment

The Committee receives regular performance reports in relation to NHS metrics, and members noted that the targets for elective care, diagnostics and cancer operations at University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust were not being met. Therefore, the Committee requested a more detailed report on the reasons behind the failure to meet the targets. The Committee:

- Noted the context around the performance including the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Leicestershire, the industrial action being taken by NHS Staff and the fact that other NHS Trusts were also performing poorly against these metrics.
- Raised strong concerns about the length of the waiting lists and a lack of overall progress and asked for the improvement plan to be shared with the committee.
- Received assurances that whilst on a waiting list cancer patients were assessed and prioritised based on a mixture of need and risk but also the length of time they had been waiting.

Next year

The Committee (renamed the Health and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee) intends to look into the patient experience of discharge from hospital, vaccines and immunisations, and how the recent restructure of NHS bodies such as the Integrated Care Board is bedding in.

Joint Health Scrutiny

Health Overview and Scrutiny members have also taken part in meetings of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Joint Health Scrutiny Committee and considered agenda items relating to the proposed closure of St Mary's Birth Centre in Melton, access to dental services, and how the NHS is bringing patient data together into one Shared Care Record.

Contacts

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.

<p>Scrutiny Commission</p> <p>Joanne Twomey Democratic Services Manager Tel: 0116 305 6462 Email: Joanne.twomey@leics.gov.uk</p>	<p>Highway, Transport and Waste</p> <p>Aqil Sarang Democratic Services Officer Tel: 0116 305 6844 Email: aqil.sarang@leics.gov.uk</p>
<p>Adults and Communities</p> <p>Angie Smith Democratic Services Officer Tel: 0116 305 0589 Email: angie.smith@leics.gov.uk</p>	<p>Environment, Flooding and Climate Change</p> <p>Aqil Sarang As above</p>
<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
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