

Scrutiny Annual Report

2022/23



Bassetlaw
DISTRICT COUNCIL
— North Nottinghamshire —

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Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022/23. Council functions have now returned to face-to-face meetings following the Pandemic.

Overview and Scrutiny has continued to perform its functions including monitoring the Council's Forward Plan on 'pre-decision scrutiny', scrutinising key decisions taken by Cabinet to ensure they deliver for our communities and the Council, monitor performance information on a quarterly basis and consider annual reports on Complaints, the Community Safety Partnership and the BPL Leisure Management contract.

A positive outcome of the scrutiny review of Town Centres – Anti Social Behaviour in 2021/22, was a successful Safer Streets 4 Funding bid of £229,922 in relation to Worksop Town Centre, including employment of Street Wardens for a period of 18 months.

The Committee undertook one Task and Finish review in 2022/23 on Housing Services and a received a report on Management of Commercial Properties. The focus was on pre- decision scrutiny of Council Services especially Housing Services and Planning Services by the whole Committee. We have also carried out Post Scrutiny Monitoring on the Flooding and Cycling reviews and received follow up reports on Planning Enforcement, Thriving Communities, Waste and Recycling and the Green Agenda.

In July 2022, the Council revised its priorities to support the Council and partner organisations with the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis and the Committee will monitor the ongoing work in Bassetlaw at each meeting.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, officers and all participants involved for continuing to make scrutiny a success.



Councillor John Shephard
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Introduction

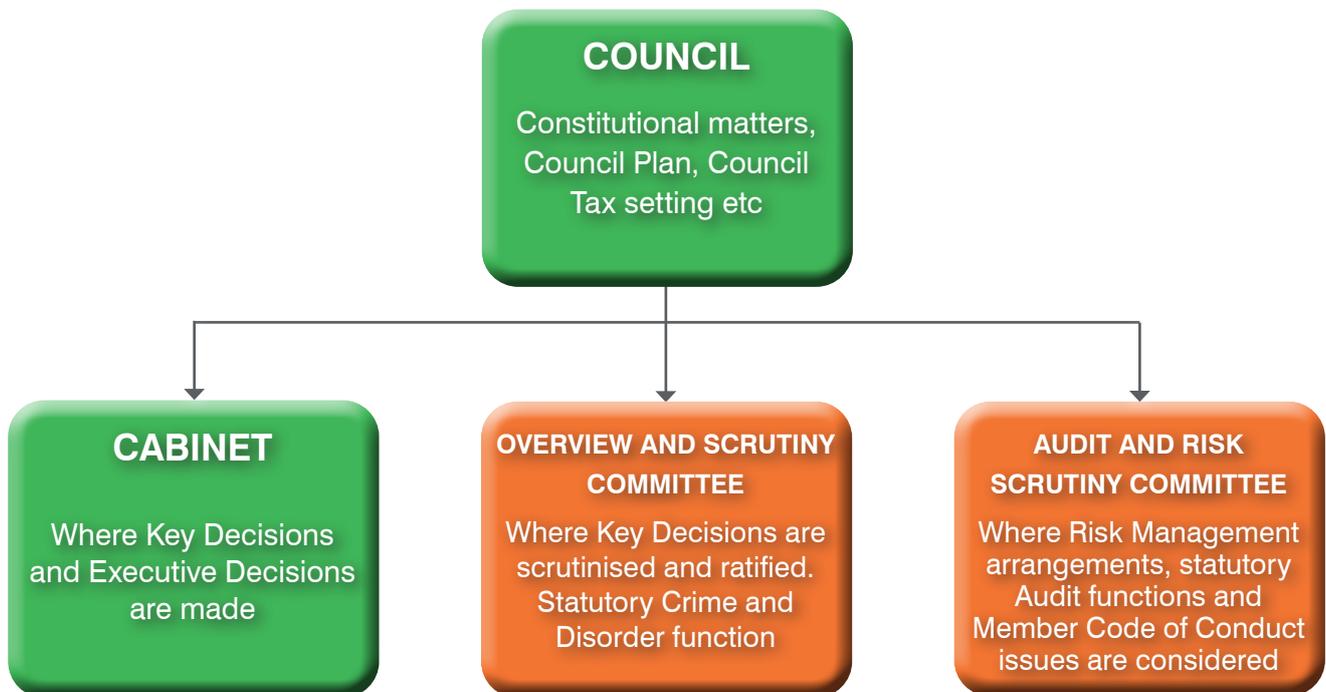
This Scrutiny Annual Report looks back over the work of Overview and Scrutiny in the municipal year of 2022/23. It explains the role of Overview and Scrutiny, looks at some of the topics covered over the year as well as looking to the future. The report takes into account the requirement to communicate Scrutiny's work to Full Council, as detailed in the 2019 [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#).

Where Scrutiny fits in

The Local Government Act 2000 changed the way in which Councils are structured. Bassetlaw District Council operates a Cabinet system with a Leader. In 2022/23 the Cabinet was made up of seven Elected Members responsible for the majority of decision-making at the Council.

As a balance to this more concentrated decision-making process, the Act introduced Overview and Scrutiny into local government. Councils operating the Leader and Cabinet model must have in place a scrutiny structure to challenge the decisions of Cabinet. It can, therefore, be a powerful tool to ensure that the Council is run effectively and efficiently.

Overview and Scrutiny does not have executive power, therefore cannot make executive decisions. The scrutiny function, however, does have a strong influencing voice within the Council. The relationship between the Cabinet and Scrutiny is shown below:-



Scrutiny's power of influence

Overview and Scrutiny has a number of statutory powers and serves a variety of functions in the Council:-

Hold the Cabinet to account

- Act as a “critical friend” to the Council’s Executive
- Review the Forward Plan and Key Decisions of Cabinet
- Monitor the Council’s performance
- Monitor agreed actions arising from Scrutiny Reviews

Review topics to improve service / local area

- Provide reports and recommendations to Cabinet for consideration
- Address Councillor Call for Actions
- Address referrals from Council and Cabinet
- Set up Task and Finish Working Groups to look into topics in detail

Undertake external Scrutiny

- Scrutinise partners and external bodies where appropriate
- Work alongside health and Community Safety partners to influence how services are delivered at a local level.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to scrutinise the following at least once a year:

- Leisure Management Contract performance (BPL)
- Community Safety Partnership (Statutory Crime and Disorder Functions)
- Complaints to the Council and to the Ombudsman

Forward Plan / Key Decisions

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to review the Council’s Forward Plan at every meeting. The Forward Plan details forthcoming Key Decisions and decisions to be considered in private at least 28 days before the decision is taken. The Forward Plan is interrogated by the Committee and at pre-agenda meetings to allow effective pre-decision scrutiny to take place.

A Key Decision is a decision that affects multiple wards in Bassetlaw or involves spending a significant amount of money. Cabinet Key Decisions do not come into force until Overview and Scrutiny have endorsed the decision.

Where necessary, the Committee will ask for briefing notes or invite the relevant Cabinet Member / Officer to provide information on specific reports or issues.

Call in

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to “call in” decisions of Cabinet before they are implemented. The call in is heard at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the decision is put on hold until the matter has been resolved. Call in continues to be a last course of action, as the Committee feel it is much more constructive to scrutinise forthcoming decisions of Cabinet before they are taken.

There were no “call in” decisions in 2022/23. All Key Decisions came before the Committee and none were called in and referred back to the decision maker.

Scrutiny Reviews

In addition to its standing items, the Overview and Scrutiny can undertake Scrutiny Reviews of certain topics affecting council services and the local community.

There was an above average response to the Topics suggested for 2022/23 and the Committee chose the following topics for either review or further information:

- Climate Change - deferred to 2023/24 Work Programme
- Empty Commercial Properties
- Enforcement of Tenancy Conditions – part of the Housing Scrutiny Panel
- Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Pest Control

This resulted in the Committee undertaking one review in 2022/23, which was time, limited to one day - the Housing Scrutiny Panel (Task and Finish Group).

The focus for the year was on the organisation and the services the Council delivers to residents with pre scrutiny of Key Decisions in the Forward Plan with requests for Officer and Cabinet Members to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide more in depth information and answer questions; provide written briefings and follow – up progress updates. This enabled the Committee to have influence on key policies and strategies.

The Housing Scrutiny Panel (Task and Finish Group)

The Task and Finish Group met on 17 March 2023, comprising four Members and was set up to scrutinise:

- How Tenancy Conditions relating to ASB and untidy gardens are enforced
- The nature of official complaints and action taken to reduce these.

Witness evidence was provided by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Housing Services and Tenant Services Manager.

The Outcomes and six Recommendations were approved at the March Overview and Scrutiny Committee and referred to the June 2023 Cabinet for consideration.

Recommendations:

- Members be given clarity on the use of the Member Portal and e-form on the website for reporting repairs; terminology be clarified
- Members consider submitting a topic proposal for O&S to look at the work with the private rented sector in relation to management of ASB and untidy properties and gardens.
- Members be kept informed on IT system implementation of customer portal and O&S review its success in Jan 2024.
- Use infographics in the In touch magazine to promote positive customer experiences
- Members be encouraged to arrange visits to housing services
- For O&S to investigate corporate stance on review of policies as part of next year's work programme.

In addition, further information was requested on:

- Tenancy Complaints Review Group TORs and implementation timelines
- New Tenants welcome pack
- Content of tenant handbook
- Tenancy agreement
- The number of policies and how many are due for review

Managing Commercial Property

In December 2023, the Head of Finance and Property Services delivered a report on the Council's role and approach to managing commercial properties within the District, examining the process from managing empty commercial properties within the Council's own estate with links to the Council's overall Asset Management Strategy.

The asset management system is in the early stages of being reviewed with options to implement a fully integrated software solution designed to assist with asset management planning strategy. The software will ensure that council can manage its property assets, including commercial assets more effectively from maintenance and surveys to estate management.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for an update in 12 month's time, to include information on unlettable properties, properties with arrears and the new management system.

Briefing Notes

The Committee received written information on Pest Control and Houses of Multiple Occupation in Bassetlaw.

Pre – Decision Scrutiny

In addition to the Topic suggestions, analysing the work of the Committee over the year, a picture emerged of a focus on two services – Housing and Planning.

Housing Services

During the course of the year, there were a number of Housing Services policy and strategy Key Decisions on the Forward Plan that were subject to pre- decision scrutiny.

[Management Arrangements of Housing Community Centres \(Key Decision No. 974\)](#)

The Head of Housing, Cabinet Member for Housing and the Strategic Housing Officer answered questions as pre-scrutiny of the report which considered options for the future ownership and management of the Community Housing Centres.

[Managing Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy \(Key Decision No. 984\)](#)

The Head of Housing, Cabinet Member for Housing and the Strategic Housing Officer answered questions as pre-scrutiny of the report which set out the approach to managing the risk of condensation, damp and mould in the Council's housing stock.

Protocol for Housing Dangerous and Potentially Dangerous Individuals (Key Decision No. 983)

The Head of Housing, Allocations Team Leader, Cabinet Member for Housing answered questions on the report, which advised that there were few protocols in place in other Councils nationally and Bassetlaw District Council was adopting best practice.

Draft Allocations and Choice Based Lettings Policy (Key Decision No. 917)

In March 2023, the Committee resolved that the Head of Housing and Cabinet Member attend June Committee for pre-scrutiny of the Draft Allocations and Choice Based Lettings Policy.

In addition, there were progress updates in the Work Programme from the previous year.

Updates on the progress of the Thriving Communities Strategy Delivery Plan and Actions

The Strategic Housing Officer delivered a 6-month update on the Thriving Communities Strategy, which was developed to tackle deprivation in Worksop South East (Cheapside), Worksop Central and Worksop Sandy Lane. Actions around four key themes aimed to improve quality of life in these areas:

- Housing and Households;
- Wellbeing and Lifestyles;
- Employment and Education;
- Physical Neighbourhood.

There was a partnership approach with a wide range of partners across the public and community and voluntary sectors who were already contributing support in the areas.

The key actions outlined in the Strategy include:

- Working with Landlords and homeowners to encourage improvements to housing stock;
- Working with planning to respond to future housing developments;
- Promoting improvements to the lived environment and encouraging investment in housing;
- Assisting residents and landlords to make dwellings more carbon neutral and providing advice on energy supply and affordable warmth;
- Providing advice and assistance to landlords to bring empty homes back into use;
- Offering tailored support to vulnerable groups;
- Targeted health initiatives;
- Engaging with the community to promote education and encourage participation in training to improve skill levels;
- Supporting landlords to carry out repairs;
- Initiatives to reduce Crime & Anti-Social behaviour;
- Initiatives to encourage self-help and community.

The Committee recommended that SMART targets with appropriate timeframes be added to the strategy and an end-point identified.

Also, in February 2023, Committee carried out further pre- decision scrutiny on the progress of the action plan in the **Thriving Communities Strategy – 12 month update (Key Decision No. 976)**.

Carlton Wimpey Estate Masterplan – Outcome of Consultation (Key Decision No. 899)

The Head of Housing Services answered questions on Masterplan and it was noted that because of the consultation responses, changes have been made to the Masterplan.

2022/23 Performance Outturn and Council Plan Progress Update

CPIH 003 Average time taken to relet Standard Voids

The Committee monitored the performance of this indicator during 2022/23 and the Head of Housing Services attended to give an update and answer questions. She explained that a new contractor, EQUANS, had been appointed in February 2023, who was working to reduce the number of voids. There was a high demand for housing properties and measures were being taken to reduce let times. There is still a national problem of access to raw materials, however, it is envisaged that the number of voids will reduce.

Committee requested that the Head of Housing Services provide an update on the performance of the new repair's contract in six months' time.

Planning Services

There were also a number of policy Key Decisions on the Forward Plan relating to Planning Services, which were subject to scrutiny.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) Policy (Key Decision No. 991)

The Head of Regeneration and Cabinet Member for Regeneration explained the background to the report outlining the Council's role as a statutory consultee in NSIP and the additional workload for Planning and other Council officers. The policy aims to maximise the benefits to local taxpayers by making it mandatory for developers to pay for the Council's contribution to the process.

First Homes Administration (Key Decision No. 992)

The Head of Regeneration and Cabinet Member for Regeneration explained the background to the report outlining the introduction of a Bassetlaw first approach to the criteria and an administration charge to check the criteria of the applicants.

Community Infrastructure Levy; Amendments to Exceptional Circumstances Relief (Key Decision No. 993)

The Head of Regeneration and Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised of the background to the revisions.

Update on Planning Enforcement (Verbal Update)

The Head of Regeneration gave a verbal update on the Planning Enforcement Strategy that was agreed by Members at the October 2021 meeting following the Spotlight Review of Planning Enforcement. The Planning Enforcement Strategy report was presented to Cabinet in June 2022, in which the service was benchmarked against other local authorities. An internal review of the Planning Enforcement Team was carried out, a new Enforcement protocol published in July 2022 and posts were advertised for a new Enforcement Team.

The Head of Regeneration gave an update stating that recruitment had not been successful to the Senior Enforcement Officer or Planning Enforcement Officer posts so the Council were utilising agency staff, as the service requires additional support. The post was to be re-advertised post-Christmas 2022.

Members were given some in-year comparative figures for Q2 2021/2022 versus Q2 2022/2023 that showed a significant improvement dealing with new cases and closing cases as a result of the correct staffing levels.

Many more non-quantifiable improvements to the service are now operational:

- Digitising historic enforcement notices ready to go live on the web site
- Scanning of old cases to remove paper files
- Digitising old paper records
- Communicating with Parish Councils on a monthly basis so that they have a record of what actions have been undertaken in the previous month on cases in their locality. The dedicated Planning Support Officer for Enforcement can offer some feedback before any Parish Council meeting.
- The amount of historic formal service complaints directly attributed to planning enforcement has been reduced.

Other Items

Cost of Living Action Plan

During the year, the Cost of Living Crisis emerged as a national and local issue. In September 2022, Cabinet considered a report concerning proposals for the Council's priorities in relation to the ongoing impacts on the cost of living. A number of intervention themes were identified:

- Coordination
- Communication / Information
- Council Support
- External Support
- Capacity Development

In addition, the Council allocated £150,000 funding for the development of a package of measures, working with partners, to support the residents of Bassetlaw.

In October 2022, Members endorsed the Cabinet decision and agreed that the Committee should receive quarterly progress updates for pre scrutiny questioning.

Bersahill Ltd

In October 2022, the Committee were given a presentation and verbal update covering:-

- The purpose of Bersahill Ltd
- Projects delivered through the company
- How the company is structured and governed
- The response to the main contractor ceasing trading
- The current position of Bersahill Ltd

A further update was scheduled for March 2023 but in February 2023, the Committee considered a Member Delegated Decision for Bersahill Ltd. and a future update was set for July 2023.

Sickness Absence Update (Verbal update)

In January 2023, the Head of People and Culture gave a verbal update on sickness absence and circulated additional briefing papers. The Committee resolved that an internal review of the current sickness absence policies and practices take place looking at the causes of high levels of sickness, the possible solutions and comparing best practice with other councils.

The Head of People and Culture will provide a progress update to Overview and Scrutiny in 6 months' time.

Devolution Update (Verbal update)

The Chief Executive delivered a brief summary of the East Midlands Devolution deal, outlining the key funding proposals and answered questions from Members.

Health Scrutiny and East Midlands Ambulance Service

In October, Members were informed of the changes to health scrutiny with the establishment of the Integrated Care System in July 2022 and the role of Nottinghamshire County Council. It was noted that East Midlands Ambulance Service reports performance to the NCC Health Scrutiny Committee and will be removed from Bassetlaw District Council's Work Programme.

Progress Updates

Update on Waste and Recycling Action Plan - Environment Act - Recycling in flats (Verbal Update)

The Committee had previously agreed that the 2018/19 Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan be closed and replaced by a new service led Recycling Action Plan which addressed current issues in the context of the Environment Act. The Environment Services Manager and the Director of Regeneration attended to give a verbal update on Waste and Recycling Action Plan, the Environment Act and Recycling in flats in Bassetlaw.

The Director of Regeneration introduced the Environment Act that had been signed off in November 2021; it is now waiting for DEFRA to confirm the targets.

Currently recycling in Bassetlaw is at 26.4%, this is the highest quarter four figure and the Council has had its best year and is improving. The Environment Services Manager gave an update on recycling and garden waste collection. In the last 2 years the garden waste subscriptions have increased by 27% with a target set to increase further in 2023, a campaign will run again for the public to re-subscribe to the scheme.

He also set out what has been done to promote recycling. The Bin Basic Campaign of closed lids has had a good response from residents and has seen a reduction in rubbish going to landfill sites. Also, leaflet drops identifying what can go in the blue bins will be repeated on the Christmas collection date stickers.

The contamination levels in the blue bins is still high, particularly within flats and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This is probably down to a high turnover of residents in HMOs. A new sticker has been introduced to try to reduce contamination by increasing residents' awareness of what not to place in the recycling bin.

Update on Green Agenda and Carbon Neutrality

The Climate Change Officer had previously delivered an update and presentation to the Committee about the work being undertaken to fulfil the Council's Green Agenda and carbon neutrality targets and it was agreed that progress should be reported in 12 months' time.

In December 2022, he advised that Projects have ranged from capital improvements for key assets to more innovative discussions, supporting the District transition to a net zero future. The Climate Team has also expanded this past year from 1 to 3 FTEs, utilising the revenue generated from grants being brought in to the Council.

Referencing the Bassetlaw District Council estate, the first successful project was a full retrofit of the Kilton Forest Golf Clubhouse. Comparing a whole year's worth of operational data on the new system with pre-covid levels the building is emitting on average 66% less carbon. Additionally, the building's operation cost this year will be just under what it was in pre-energy crisis times.

Queen's Buildings succeeded in gaining capital funding from the previous Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). The Council has been awarded just over £1,000,000 to install a variety of energy efficiency measures and a low carbon heating system at QB. It is expected to save the council over £16k per annum, which should increase as predicted utility prices increase in coming years, and protect against future minimum energy efficiency standard increases, as it will perform at an EPC A.

Initial findings from the Low Carbon Skills Fund were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee last year. Following completion in March 2022, work was identified to improve the vehicle maintenance depot that will improve the facility for the staff working on site. It is also expected to save the council upwards of £15k per annum at pre energy-crisis prices.

The Climate Change Team submitted another application to the next phase, PSDS 3b, in October 2022 for 17b in Retford. This application has passed its initial assessment and is awaiting further input regarding the next steps.

In addition, the Team is managing the domestic retrofit related funding for the private housing sector:

In the current phase of funding, called sustainable warmth competition (SWC) an approximate £1m budget was allocated to BDC and is focused in Rhodesia. There are approximately 36 External Wall Installations (EWI) in the pipeline with approximately 50 lofts and cavity walls insulations.

The team is also preparing to deliver the next phase of funding in this sector, called HUG 2 for 2023-2025 and has accepted Midlands Net Zero Hub's allocation of £3.9m for this scheme.

Looking forward there other projects ranging from EV Charging strategies for the district; building a leased asset decarbonisation register to protect BDC leased assets from rising Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) regulations; fleet decarbonisation plans to coincide with the wider decarbonisation of transport in the area; support SMEs with the Council's Shared Prosperity Fund work; and create a District wide carbon strategy that will be built upon engagement with local residents, businesses, and councillors.

Post Scrutiny Monitoring

Review of Flooding

In July 2022, Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the Cabinet's response to the review of Flooding, which was part of its 2021-2022 Annual Work Programme. Usually progress on the actions is reported back to Committee after 12 months but the members requested an update after six months.

Subsequently, in February 2023, Committee noted progress on the actions and agreed that a further update report should be received in 12 months' time.

Scrutiny Review of Town Centre Anti-Social Behaviour

The Cabinet response to the review was received in September 2022 and agreed Post Scrutiny Monitoring of the actions in 12 months' time.

The review identified that a more visible presence was required in the town centre with the ability to deal with incidents and breaches expeditiously, and to act as a deterrent for unacceptable behaviour. It was recommended that this could be achieved, in part, by the introduction of Street Wardens/Community Protection Officers employed by the Council. A successful outcome of the review was that in conjunction with the Office of the Nottinghamshire Police & Crime Commissioner, the Council received Safer Streets 4 Funding of £229,922 with regard to a series of proposals in relation to Worksop Town Centre, including employment of wardens for a period of 18 months.

Update on Action Plan arising from the Scrutiny Review: A Cycling Strategy for Bassetlaw

Overview and Scrutiny received a progress report on the delivery of the actions in February 2022, resolving to extend the monitoring period for an additional 12 months. In February 2023, the Committee agreed that the action plan has reached the end of its life, with formal monitoring to stop and the cycling agenda will continue to be supported through the role of the Cycle Champion.

Crime and Disorder Committee

Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act requires every local authority to have a Crime and Disorder Committee with the power to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions. Responsible authorities are effectively the statutory partners within a community safety partnership, i.e. Police, local authorities, (county and district), Fire and Rescue Authority, Probation Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups (replaced from July 2022).

Bassetlaw District Council is part of a merged Community Safety Partnership (CSP) with Newark & Sherwood District Council and between 2008 and 2013 held a joint meeting each year, however, since the 2014/15 municipal year, both authorities have held individual meetings.

The meeting updated on the priorities, work undertaken and performance of the Partnership and the implications of the Serious Violence Duty for the Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Bassetlaw District Council. The following were discussed:

- Funding of Community Safety Partnership Posts
- The role of the Safer Nottinghamshire Board (SNB)
- Scrutiny Review of Anti - Social Behaviour in Town Centres
- Update on the progress of actions funded by Safer Streets 3 and the additional Safer Streets 4 funding bid to enable the Council to employ four Street Wardens for 18 months to support the work of the ASB Team in Worksop Town Centre.
- The role of the Nottinghamshire Rural Crime Prevention Officer
- The process for setting of Local Policing Priorities
- Additional police resources allocated to Bassetlaw
- The implementation of the Worksop Town Centre Delivery Plan
- Performance of BDC Community Safety/ASB Team

The committee was informed about the new Serious Violence Duty, which came into force in January 2023, why it was introduced, requirements of the duty, its implications on the CSP and the Council and the structures established to implement the duty. The Community Safety & Safeguarding Manager represents Bassetlaw District Council in relation to this work.

Reports to Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny may also request reports to committee on a periodic basis. The following reports were considered in 2022/23:-

Annual Update on Leisure Management Contract and Performance

The Chief Executive, Finance Manager and Bassetlaw Contracts Manager of Barnsley Premier Leisure (BPL) and Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, BDC, attended the committee meeting on 17th January 2023. The meeting considered performance levels for the 12 month period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, efforts to recreate the participation levels post-pandemic and maximising opportunities for local people to access healthy activities.

Committee were informed that the Bassetlaw District Council / BPL Leisure Management Agreement has been extended to 2030.

BPL fully re-opened the leisure facilities at the first opportunity after lockdown, when it was safe to do so, which gave protection from many of the financial pressures created by the Covid closures. It will also enable BPL to better cope with the pressures caused by the cost of living crisis and extreme utilities inflation.

The performance data shows that BPL continues to perform at a very high level and the direction of travel for improvement is encouraging in both the short and medium term. The opportunity to increase participation by both able bodied and disabled residents has been enhanced by the Council's investment in fitness suite extensions at Worksop, Retford and Bircotes Leisure Centres. These facilities have been self-funded by the financial performance of the leisure management contract.

The improved facilities have also assisted the "bounce back" of usage following the Covid pandemic. The total number of visits for this period was in excess of 640,000, this cannot be compared to previous years due to the pandemic but the centres showed a significant recovery compared to the national average.

A number of highly innovative schemes have been launched to promote the Council's facilities and increase participation.

BPL has invested over £1 million across all sites to complete the Your Space rebrand including changing room and fitness facility improvements and the creation of new café facilities at Worksop Leisure Centre. Worksop Your Space was shortlisted for the National Fitness Award 2021 Midlands Gym of the year and Local Authority Gym of the year.

Visitors show an extremely high level of customer satisfaction and this is reflected in the performance data and the net promoter score for the facilities.

The Council has invested £20,000 improving disability access at Kilton Forest Golf Clubhouse with decarbonisation works completed May – Sept 2021.

Working in partnership, the Council and BPL have supported activities around the Tour of Britain, Retford Health and Wellbeing Day and the mobile food hubs – a Cost of Living initiative.

BPL continues to provide a long-term exercise referral scheme and cardiac rehabilitation phase in partnership with the health colleagues. Increased health funding supports extended referral pathways to reduce health inequalities and reach additional cohorts.

The Head of Finance delivered a financial update. The BPL Group have a total income of £14.8m with a surplus of £418k. Bassetlaw's facilities total income is £3.5m with a surplus of £239k of which £207k is committed to reinvestment.

Future developments for BPL include a 300sqm gym extension at Retford Post 16, Levelling Up funding in Worksop for a Family Entertainment Venue and improved operational management systems.

Members also received an update from the Bassetlaw Contracts Manager on employees and investing in communities. Currently Bassetlaw BPL employ 171 staff, 8 Leisure Apprentices, 5 Wellbeing Champions and have maintained the Investors in People (IIP) Gold Membership.

In terms of the community, there is a Roving Service, Community Outreach with weekly events and campaigns and the Dukeries Memory Group supports people with dementia.

The investment in communities has seen an increase in the following activities:

Fitness Membership by 8%

Exercise on Referral – 485 referrals to 512 year to date

Swimming Lessons by 20%

Complaints

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor complaints on an annual basis.

Members were presented with an annual summary of complaints dealt with by the Council during 2021/22. The Council has a three stage complaints process, i.e. firstly it is referred to the Head of Service and then secondly, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint is then investigated by the Chief Executive. If the matter is not resolved through the Council's process, the matter can be referred through to the Ombudsman.

A breakdown of service areas and categories for complaints was considered. The number of complaints received for the year was 220, this was an increase of 71 complaints compared to the previous year's 149; 90% of complaints were submitted digitally and 86% of the complaints were responded to within 15 working days.

There were a total of 18 Stage 2 complaints, all but 2 of these complaints were responded to within 15 working days, with 4 upheld and 7 partially upheld.

A variety of customer focussed service improvements have been identified and implemented during 2021-22 as a result of complaints made.

The key complaints received were for Housing and Neighbourhoods. In response to the increase in complaints within Housing Services, further investigation was undertaken as part of the Housing Services scrutiny review in March 2023.

It was noted that Council services had been maintained throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic with little disruption to services but some delays have inevitably occurred.

The Committee were also provided with an annual summary of complaints dealt with by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for 2021/22. As part of the Council's complaints process procedure, complainants may exercise their right to seek advice from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The Ombudsman received 6 complaints and enquiries about the Council for 2021/22 compared to 12 the previous year. Of these 2 were closed after initial enquiries, 1 was incomplete or invalid, 2 complaints where advice was given and 1 case was referred back for local resolution.

The Committee will continue to monitor complaints and Ombudsman referrals on an annual basis.

Performance monitoring

The Committee continues to monitor performance of the Council through a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are reported on a quarterly basis. An identical set of indicators is also reported to Cabinet. The Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny will discuss the performance report at pre-agenda meetings, and where necessary, ask officers to provide additional information. Committee members may also raise questions at or before the meeting.

KPI outturns are classified as follows:-

Green – Exceeding target

Amber – On target / within tolerance

Red – Below Target

In addition, a number of data only PIs are reported. Informative notes are provided for each KPI and exceptions are highlighted. Overview and Scrutiny monitored over 76 KPIs on a quarterly basis and 16 KPIs on an annual basis, across a number of service areas:

- Corporate Services;
- Finance & Property;
- Neighbourhoods;
- Regeneration;
- Housing;
- Policy, Strategy and Communication.

Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee

The Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee has three specific responsibilities:

- to fulfil statutory Audit functions in respect of the Council's financial and non-financial operations;
- to consider all aspects of the Council's Risk Management arrangements; and
- to consider aspects of the Council's arrangements for Member Code of Conduct.

The Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee may also appoint a sub-committee (Standards Sub-Committee) to conduct a Hearing into an allegation that a Member or Co-opted Member has breached the Authority's Code of Conduct.

In 2022/23, the Committee received reports on a number of items, including:-

- Internal Audit Progress Reports 2021/22
- Internal Audit Progress Reports 2022/23
- Internal Audit Plan 2022/23
- Audit Planning Update and Progress Reports
- Internal Audit Annual Report 2021/22
- Draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/22
- Financial Outturn 2021/22
- Annual Treasury Management Review 2021/22
- Mazars External Audit Completion Report 2020/21
- Assessment of Going Concern (status of 2021/22 Statement of Accounts)
- Write Offs Annual Report 2021/22
- Budget Monitoring and Capital Programme Updates
- Changes to the Financial Statements, Accounting Policies and Regulatory Changes for 2020/21
- Risk Management Strategy and Framework
- Corporate Risk Management Quarterly Reports
- Adoption of a new model of Code of Conduct for Members
- Code of Conduct - End of Year Analysis
- Local Authority Trading Companies Governance Review
- Constitution Review
- Local Code of Corporate Governance 2022/23
- Draft Annual Governance Statement and Report 2021/22
- Regulation of Use of Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Review of Use of Powers and Policy
- Partnership Governance and the Partnership Register
- Budget Reports 2023/24 to 2027/28

It should be noted that in accordance with the Constitution, the Chair of Audit and Risk is a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Annual audit letter

The 2020 Code of Audit Practice required the Council's external auditors to issue the Auditor's Annual Report, which includes commentary on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (VFM commentary) before 30th September. If this is not possible, the auditors are required to write setting out the reasons for the delay.

In June 2023, Mazars, the Council's auditors, presented a report to the Council's Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee explaining the delay in issuing the Auditor's Annual Report and subsequently their audit opinion for the year to 31st March 2022. As a result of the national issue surrounding the valuation of net defined benefit pension liabilities at 31st March 2022, they are yet to finalise our work on this area. Further, they are finalising work on a number of other areas and undertaking a final review of their audit file. They are yet to complete their work in respect of the Council's VFM arrangements for the year ended 31st March 2022 but advise that, at the time of preparing the report, they have not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements that require them to make a recommendation. Mazars have regularly updated Audit and Risk Scrutiny Committee on progress. Commentary on the Council's VFM arrangements for 2021/22 will be provided within 3 months of issuing their opinion on the financial statements.

Looking forward

Delivering the 2023/24 Work Programme

The Committee will continue to programme work in advance by keeping their Work Programme under review at each meeting. The changes to Committee membership for 2023/24 with Councillors new to scrutiny will offer a refreshed perspective to shape the Work Programme.

At the start of the municipal year, all Elected Members and Senior Officers were given the opportunity to suggest topics for Overview and Scrutiny and these suggestions will be shortlisted in the July Committee meeting.

The Committee has previously agreed to carry out a Climate Change Review in the 2023/24 Work Programme and there are a number of follow up updates carried over from the 2022/23 Work Programme.

In addition, the topics were agreed as:

- Income Generation Strategy – Task and Finish Group
- Council’s policy in supporting co-operatives and social enterprise – Committee to receive an update on the current position
- Council’s Industrial and Community Properties – the Committee is to receive a 12-month update on the Management of the Council’s Commercial Properties.

The Committee may select other topics of focus during the course of the municipal year, and will continue to scrutinise the **BPL Leisure Contract Performance and the Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood Community Safety Partnership, as well as receiving quarterly performance reports, Cost of Living Updates and the Annual Complaints and Local Government and Housing Ombudsmen Reports.**

Outstanding Items from Work Programme 2022/23 carried over to Work Programme 2023/24

Scrutiny of Finance training – with the objective of enhanced scrutiny of financial resources. Programming is awaiting the outcome of the Council’s Constitutional Review.

Empty Commercial Properties outside of the Council’s estate – following a review of the Council’s estate it was suggested that it be extended to include other commercial properties.

Pre-decision Scrutiny of the new Council Plan 2023-2027.

Cabinet Response to Housing Scrutiny Panel recommendations reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee March 2023.

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