

Report of the Chair of Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee

It has been a busy few months for Scrutiny with over 30 public meetings having been delivered since my last report. It has also been a turbulent time with numerous factors disrupting the Scrutiny programme, including a number of last minutes changes to the calendar. I would like to pay tribute to the Democratic Services team who, despite significant pressure and an ongoing lack of dedicated time for supporting Scrutiny, have been tremendous in what they have been able to achieve on our behalf.

When I took over the Chair of CSMC in May 2019, one of the Council's Scrutiny Officers had recently left the authority and his post was vacant. The second - and last remaining dedicated Scrutiny Officer - left the authority in June 2020. Both full time equivalent posts were reallocated to aid delivery of the core programme of meetings. The then Monitoring Officer, Chief Operating Officer and Council Leader gave assurances about the opportunities presented by employing hybrid Scrutiny/Democracy Officers but in the intervening 28 months since Scrutiny last had dedicated Scrutiny Officer support, the reality has been little more than the administrative delivery of meetings and a feeling of diminishing ability for Committees to do their jobs.

For Scrutiny to function effectively it is crucial that Officers with appropriate skillsets are given adequate time, resource and support from colleagues to enable Chairs and Committee Members to deliver meaningful and constructive work programmes. Expecting Members or non-Scrutiny Officers from within equally stretched directorates to pick up the slack, collate information or act as independent researchers has proven unworkable: There have been next to no in-depth tasks and finishes or Scrutiny Reviews completed since 2019; too many reports have been thin or have relied upon on-the-day presentations to deliver key content; worse still, a number of meetings have had to be cancelled at late notice due to lack of reports being delivered or key individuals becoming unavailable.

The appointment of a new Monitoring Officer and the upcoming restructuring of Democratic Services present opportunities to address some of these issues – as do the opportunities for Member & Officer training currently being explored. I look forward to working with Bryn,

alongside the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, in putting Scrutiny back onto a stronger footing.

I have asked each Committee Chair to provide a brief overview of their work, as follows;

Cllr Doughty reports that **Health & Adult Social Care Scrutiny** is keeping focus on the difficulties residents are experiencing in making GP surgery appointments and accessing NHS dentistry services. The Committee will be hearing from partners in Health and Care about how the new Integrated Care Service (and Integrated Care Board) will affect City of York Council as the transition of responsibilities, commissioning and service provision transfers from outgoing CCG's. They are also keeping watch over how Health Services continue to recover from the extra challenges brought by Covid, including updates on elective surgery.

The Committee has received reports and fed into the City's new dementia strategy and in conjunction with the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee will be looking at Council services that have cross-committee interest including the new autism strategy and healthy child services.

Cllr Fenton reports that the **Housing and Community Safety Policy & Scrutiny Committee** has held three formal meetings and one (informal) Forum meeting in recent months. In April the committee discussed the Safer York Partnership's bi-annual report, covering topics including counter-terror measures and the impact on communities of anti-social behaviour. Updates were also received on the Resettlement Pathway review and the implementation of the system to replace North Yorkshire HomeChoice. In July the committee discussed the council's housing retrofit plans and agreed the aims and objectives of a scrutiny review focused on developing resilient communities. Cllr Fenton reports that this review will, through necessity, be very much member-led and it is hoped that progress can be made on this in the coming months.

The committee met jointly with the Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee to review and discuss the council's draft response to the Government call for evidence on short-term holiday lets, leading to a number of amendments to the council's response being proposed by members.

Looking ahead, the Committee's next meetings will focus on the current homelessness situation including winter night provision for rough sleepers, the council's Housing Allocations policy and the approach to

providing support for tenants in the context of the cost of living emergency.

Cllr Vassie reports that the **Climate Emergency Committee**, like several others, has experienced frustration in accessing a level of detail and scope within reports that matches their ambition. They have, however, been able to consider items ranging from Sustainable Transport, Carbon Emissions and the Council's Climate Strategy. The need for clearly understood and articulated target outcomes - against which progress can be monitored and maintained - being a common theme.

Looking ahead, the Committee will be considering the draft Local Area Energy plan, CYC corporate emissions/performance data, updates on the pollinator strategy – covering the alternative weed treatment trial, pesticides and mow/no mow plan and outcomes - Tree canopy targets, Climate Risk Resilience priorities for York and an update on progress in delivering of the Community Woodland.

The Chair reports a desire to widen input from stakeholders and, in particular, think about ways in which public participation could be better utilised within the format of meetings.

Cllr Daubeney reports that the Children, Education and Communities Scrutiny Committee have considered the Public Health school survey, reports on staff sickness absence rates within the directorate and have received annual/update reports from York Learning, the Skills and Employment Board, York Explore and GLL (Greenwich Leisure Ltd).

The Committee undertook a standalone review of actions following the 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted report into Children's Services and monitoring progress on this will be a key focus over the coming municipal year.

As well as keeping a close focus on finance and performance across the directorate, the Committee will also be looking at Safeguarding, meeting the new Chief Executive of York Museums Trust, considering behaviour and attendance at the city's schools, looking at the attainment gap and receiving updates on Community Hubs and Holiday Food provision.

At May's annual Council, Cllr Norman stood down from the Chair of Economy & Place and was replaced by Cllr K Taylor. I would like to record my thanks for Cllr Norman's input over the preceding year.

Cllr Taylor reports that since taking over, the **Economy & Place Policy & Scrutiny Committee** have considered update reports on carbon

reduction, Make It York and York Business Improvement District (YorkBID)'s Five Year Plan.

Looking ahead, they will be considering updates on the Bus Service Improvement Plan, Highway maintenance programme, Community Levy, Public Realm and the city's Purple Flag status. In addition, they will focus on the city's economic strategy and aims, as well as an upcoming standalone review of the Digital ResPark rollout.

The Customer & Corporate Services & Scrutiny Management

Committee has had a focus on Organisation Development within the Council, Finance & Performance Monitoring, Digital Inclusion and the Capital Programme. We have paid close attention to Customer Services – in particular, call answering - and staff well-being given the changes of the past two years. The Committee recently undertook a review of the 'minded to' Devolution Deal before it came to Full Council.

We have dealt with four Call-Ins so far this year, on subjects including the handling of an Osbaldwick Car Parking Petition, a decision to implement Double Yellow Lines on Tranby Avenue, the Council's HMO Strategy (following the unanimous vote at Full Council) and the decision to continue with Glyphosate Based products as the principal method of weed control. None of the decisions were overturned, though concessions were made regarding the Parking petition leading to an upcoming Scrutiny in which it is hoped progress can be made. It was erroneously reported in the press – and in some political literature – that the decision on continued pesticide use had been overturned. Whilst the Executive Member did make some clarifications on her position, the Committee upheld the original decision by majority vote.

Since the beginning of the year, CSMC has reduced the number of its own regular timetabled meetings in order to free up more space for Commissioned Slots. It is hoped that in doing so, there will be increased opportunity for a diversity of public scrutiny and a more equitable sharing of the workload amongst Scrutiny Members. Care has been given to ensure the non-Commissioned Scrutiny slots are evenly shared between the standing Committees in advance of the pre-election period as we approach May's elections but it is acknowledged that there is a mismatch between the number of identified topic areas and available agenda space for most committees.

I continue to hold regular meetings with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Monitoring Officer, Democracy Officer and Vice Chair of CSMC to make

best use of resources and assist Chairs in delivering an effective and constructive programme for Scrutiny.

Healthy democracies require robust checks and balances and this should not be feared. The ongoing challenges faced by Scrutiny will require careful thought and consideration over the coming months.