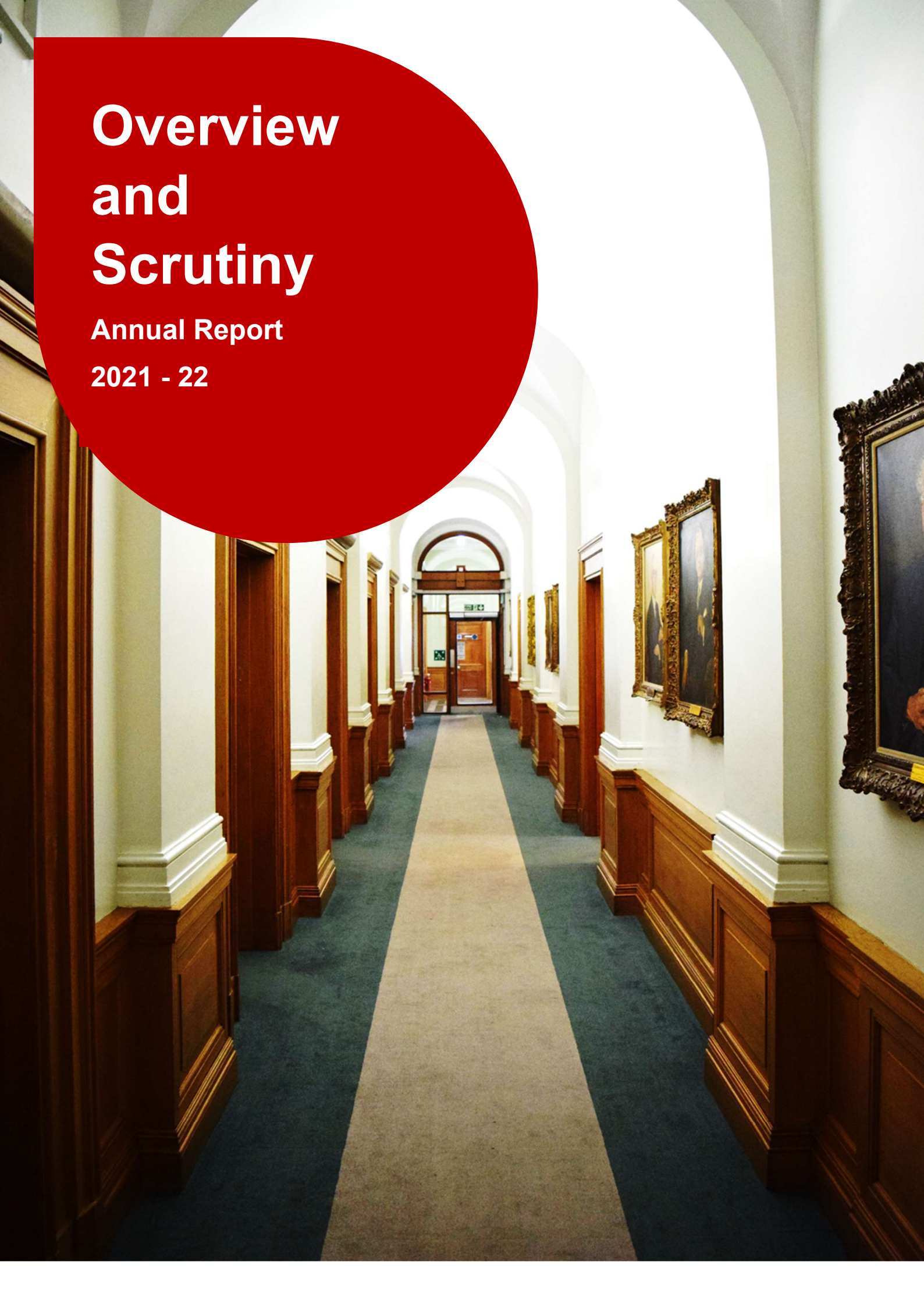


Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2021 - 22



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Introduction

By Scrutiny Board Chairman, Councillor Ray Gooding



Scrutiny is “fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy” so said the then Minister for Local Government, Rishi Sunak in 2019.

A lot has changed nationally and locally since 2019, but I am pleased that through the upheaval of the pandemic, local elections, and the current cost-of-living crisis the central role of scrutiny has remained a constant here at Essex County Council.

Scrutiny has a vital job in holding the executive to account on behalf of the residents we represent. Scrutiny should be key to the decision-making process, and it should be tackling the biggest issues. Pleasingly, this review of our work over the last 12 months suggests that all these things are happening.

Issues such as the future of libraries, climate change, local maternity services and the Everyone’s Essex strategy have been closely scrutinised. This work is summarised in this report, and I would like to thank all members and officers who have contributed.

Over the last year, we have increased joint-working opportunities to ensure that the four scrutiny committees are operating collaboratively and pooling resources. This move also reflects that issues such as mental health or climate change impact on all areas of the council’s activities; they do not follow traditional committee remits and our working practices now reflect this.

Scrutiny is not however resting on its laurels. As Chairman of the Scrutiny Board, I have instigated a review into the effectiveness of the function. This will look at best practice from other local authorities and parliamentary select committees to see what we can do better at Essex before making recommendations to Council later this year.

For now, however, it is time to reflect on the last year and I am delighted to introduce and commend this report to Council.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Gooding', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Ray Gooding, Scrutiny Board Chairman

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a core feature of the Council's decision making process.

At Essex County Council the governance model used to make decisions is that of the Leader and Cabinet, also referred to as the Executive model. Introduced by the Local Government Act (2000) this model is the most commonly used within local government and sees decision making powers afforded to a small group of the Council's 75 Councillors. These are the Leader and his nine Cabinet colleagues.

The Act requires that Councils using the Executive model also operates a scrutiny function to act as a 'check and balance' to the significant power held by the Cabinet. As such, only Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet can work within the scrutiny function. Their role is to consider the decisions taken, or that are proposed to be taken by the Cabinet and provide constructive advice and comment for Cabinet's consideration. This is characterised as taking the position of a 'critical friend' and the most effective outcomes are achieved when there is mutual trust and understanding between scrutiny and the Cabinet.

Although the existence of the function is set out in legislation, how it operates and how it is structured is left to individual Councils. This provides for a high degree of flexibility and the ability to consider different topics and issues in the most appropriate way. In Essex, the Scrutiny Board coordinates the work of the four standing Scrutiny committees by considering the best use of resources, particularly where topics to be considered may fall within the remit of more than one committee. The committees are:

- [Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [Health Overview and Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)
- [People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee](#)

Meetings of the Scrutiny committees are held in public and are livestreamed to YouTube. As well as these meetings the committees are also able to commission to smaller working groups, usually called Task and Finish groups, to consider issues that require more in depth attention. These groups produce reports, which are publicly available, and are submitted to the relevant Cabinet Member for their consideration and response.

There can sometimes be the perception that Scrutiny is somewhat powerless when compared to its Executive cousin. However, where there is a culture of trust and respect between the Scrutiny function and the Executive, the Scrutiny function can attain and deploy a great deal of influence ultimately benefiting both the Council and the residents of Essex. Whilst it is true to say that this culture does currently exist between Scrutiny and the Executive at Essex County Council it is also appropriate to reflect and consider ways in which the relationship could be further developed and enhanced. This forms a key part of the review to be undertaken by the Scrutiny Board, on which more information now follows.

Review of the Scrutiny Function

The County Council elections took place in May 2021. Some existing Members chose to step down prior to the elections, some lost their seats, and a high number of new Members were elected. This, combined with some further changes resulting from the commencement of a new Administration, led to significant changes to the membership of the four Scrutiny committees. All four Scrutiny committees had new Chairmen appointed and via the Scrutiny Board, the Chairmen identified that it would be timely and appropriate to commission a review into the operation and effectiveness of both the Board itself and the wider Scrutiny function.

The Board had carefully considered the scope of the review and have identified the key areas below for consideration. Of perhaps particular interest are ensuring good budget and resource management including how to ensure that good value is being delivered, and further developing the Council-wide culture in which Scrutiny's input and advice is valued as a key part of the decision-making process.

Structure and Outcomes – to include how can the effectiveness of scrutiny be measured / do the current arrangements support effective scrutiny / how to ensure scrutiny is focused on outcomes / the structure and remits of the current scrutiny committees / whether the current structure fully supports engagement and understanding;

Processes – to include whether existing working practices can be improved / how best practice can be shared / building a culture where pre-decision is encouraged;

The Scrutiny Board – to include the management of budget and resources / the most effective operating style for the Board;

Visibility – to include how effectively the work of the Scrutiny function is communicated within and outside the Council;

Member Development – to include whether Members have the skills and knowledge to be effective scrutineers / the pros and cons of Members being subject experts / whether there is sufficient understanding of the function amongst all Members in relation to the Council's decision making processes.

The review has commenced and intends to conclude by early summer 2022. The initial focus has been on the structure operated at ECC, how this compares with other authorities and what other options may be appropriate, for instance the select committee model. The Board expects to be able to consider the recommendations from the review in June, subsequently reporting on them to Full Council in July. Should any Members not directly involved in the review wish to contribute, Councillor Gooding invites them to make contact with him in order that their views can be fed through.

The Work of the Scrutiny Committees

Over the following pages you will find an introduction to the work undertaken by the scrutiny function over the course of the year. The four Scrutiny committee Chairmen have selected some key pieces of work completed by their individual committees also highlighting, where relevant, work that has taken place jointly across two committees where it had been identified that this would make the best use of time and resources.

The Task and Finish review undertaken by a group of Members from the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee related to Local Highways Panels is included as an example of this type of work. Task and Finish groups allow a more focused and detailed look at a particular topic than would be possible in a standard committee setting. Recommendations are produced at the conclusion of the review and passed to the appropriate Cabinet Member, once endorsed by the 'parent' scrutiny committee, for consideration and response.

1. Chairmen's Highlights from each Committee:

- Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee (CPSC)
- Health Policy and Scrutiny Committee (HOPSC)
- People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PAFSC)
- Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PSEG)

2. Example Task and Finish Review:

A summary of the work undertaken by PSEG members considering Local Highways Panels.

Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This committee reviews the overall strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Cabinet and Council including the budget strategy, financial resources, equality and diversity issues, procurement and the delivery of Everyone's Essex.

The Committee's Chairman and Vice Chairmen are Councillors Chris Pond, Michael Mackrory and Mike Steptoe. Full details of the committee's work and membership can be found on the Council's [website](#).



An important part of the CPSC's remit is to consider the overall Council revenue and capital budget strategy and financial resources. The Committee has been keen to assess the financial impact of, and response to, Covid and the subsequent challenges on the budget process, including the assumptions being made for future budgets. The CPSC will continue to challenge the progress in meeting the targets in the medium-term financial outlook.

All of this means regular updates from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs, both formally with the full Committee, and informally with my Vice Chairmen and me. This regular dialogue has proved invaluable in understanding the complexities of the challenges being faced and how the Council is responding to them. It does not mean, of course, that the committee in any way sets aside its duty of challenge when that is required.

The Committee knows that ECC continues to face many challenges to its financial sustainability with the national review of funding for local government bringing uncertainty to future finances, the permanent and the full impact of the pandemic still not yet fully known. In addition, there are other pressures including increased care complexity and demand in the Adult Social Care and Health budgets. Whilst the Committee has a legal duty to provide robust challenge to decision-makers it will also offer support and assistance wherever it can to help the organisation meet these challenges.

Historically, the Committee has considered quarterly financial outturns and the full year outturn. Whilst this is essential for an overview of finances, we intend to supplement it by deep diving on certain budget aspects as and when we feel it appropriate and helpful to get a greater understanding of what lies behind some challenges and issues. To date we have had a specific update on the commercial property portfolio held by the County Council and, in future, will consider other areas such as commercial investment portfolio and reserves and provisioning.

Our financial scrutiny can vary in approach and sometimes means seeking further information on specific entries and/or challenging how a particular commitment or project is to be financed: For example, Members have recently pushed for clarifications on the impact of reprofiling or budget slippages and are also keen to challenge the financing of

climate commission and climate change aspirations and targets. Understanding and consolidating these specific entries and commitments will help the Council understand the broader budget challenge.

The Committee has also taken the lead in establishing an approach for continued reporting and oversight of the Everyone's Essex performance framework. Everyone's Essex is the core organisational (and local partners') strategy driving everything the Council should be doing. The Committee will be scrutinising progress on a regular basis to ensure transparency in holding the Executive to account on delivery of the objectives and targets within it. Chairmen and Vice Chairmen from the other scrutiny committees will also continue to be invited to join the sessions so that they are able to identify and break-out any follow-up work that they would like their respective committees to pursue.

I was pleased that the Committee worked jointly in a session hosted by the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee to look at the draft Economic Renewal Investment Strategy which was being prepared for consideration by Cabinet. This will be an important initiative as the county emerges from the pandemic and warrants ongoing scrutiny and support and we will arrange a suitable scrutiny committee to lead on this going forward. Influencing policy development or 'pre-scrutiny' as it is sometimes also called, is an important part of the role of the committee and I will encourage good constructive engagement when further such opportunities arise.

As the organisation continues to both respond to changes arising from the pandemic and broader evolutionary changes to ways of working, the Committee will continue to scrutinise both the impact of proposed changes on the organisation and on staff. Again, there will be aspects of this of interest to my colleagues in other scrutiny committees and we will consider some elements of joint scrutiny work for this going forward as we receive regular updates. I am also looking forward to scrutinising the review of Essex Archive Services and to influence the future approach on the delivery of services, including the use of digitisation.

The Committee has also been updated on the aspirations and ambitions for levelling up and devolution in Essex, with the County Council complementing the recent Government White Paper with its own local proposals. One of the significant elements of the White Paper was that the conversation regarding devolution has been decoupled from a conversation on local government reorganisation and I look forward to continuing to scrutinise the opportunities this may offer for the whole county. We are keen to ensure no part of the County gets left behind.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of my committee for their commitment in this first year of the new committee membership, and their collaborative and non-partisan approach to scrutiny which is vitally important in building trust in the political independence of the scrutiny function here at the County Council. I am sure the Committee will seek to further challenge decision-makers going forward on how they continue to respond to financial and organisational challenges.

Councillor Chris Pond – Chairman

Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This committee reviews and scrutinises matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the County of Essex. This includes primary, secondary, tertiary care, and public health, and may involve reviewing the work of commissioners (such as local clinical commissioning groups), providers of health services (such as hospitals) and other organisations in the health sector.

The committee's Chairman and Vice Chairmen are Councillors Jeff Henry, Dave Harris and Clive Souter. Full details of the committee's work and membership can be found on the Council's [website](#).



Essex has one of the most complex health environments in the country. In recent years it has been split across three different strategic health footprints that do not align with our County Council borders. The footprints have been operating at different speeds meaning that the HOPSC has the ongoing challenge of continuing to have strategic oversight over these different paced programmes and with further changes expected in July in the form of Integrated Care Systems, more commonly known as ICS's, the challenge is likely to continue.

After focusing understandably on Covid-19 related matters for the past two years, during the past year the committee have been focusing on a range of issues and services across the health service, including scrutiny of maternity services at East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust (ESNEFT) after they received a 'requires improvement' from the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This was also the case for the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) after they also received the same rating from the CQC. Both Trusts have since implemented and met a number of recommendations that were put forward and the HOPSC will continue to engage with them over the coming year.

The HOPSC were also required, under its Terms of Reference, to endorse two variation of service changes. The first being how Children's Community Services were run at the Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust (MSEFT) and changes to community inpatient beds in Mid and South Essex at the Mid and South Essex Health and Care Partnership. After receiving a briefing on these changes, both were endorsed by the committee.

Towards the end of the municipal year, the committee have begun looking at the proposed new Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow and are looking forward to receiving further updates through the planning and business sign off process.

I would like to thank all my HOPSC members for their commitment over the last year and those who participate in additional activities such as extra briefings to broaden their knowledge and expertise.

Councillor Jeff Henry – Chairman

People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This committee exercises the scrutiny function on matters relating to children and young people, families, education, adult social care, special needs and safeguarding.

The committee's Chairman and Vice Chairmen are Councillors Ray Gooding, Carlo Guglielmi and Peter May. Full details of the committee's work and membership can be found on the Council's [website](#).



The PAF has a wide remit covering so many of the services that were at the brunt of the pandemic, such as education, services for children and families and adult social care, and so much of our focus going forward will be on the recovery of these and other key services post-pandemic.

Over the last year, as we came through a resurgence of Covid-19, the Committee heard about the challenges now facing adult social care provision in Essex going forward, and possible changes in the demand for services in future – perhaps with an increased trend towards home-based (domiciliary) care rather than residential care. Similarly, the Education and Children and Families Services faced extra-ordinary challenges during the pandemic and we have considered how they have also responded to them. The four-year Adult Social Care Business Plan has been considered by the Committee and its stress on the challenge of increasing complexity of cases and its emphasis on more place-based support with partners. We will continue to challenge how the Plan may continue to be impacted by the pandemic and how it may need to further adapt.

Part of the valid scrutiny challenge even during a pandemic is to identify learning from this crisis and the PAF has been pleased to hear about changes to working practices and service delivery being made as a result.

An ongoing challenge for scrutiny is to not only reflect back on decisions made and monitor performance but to also influence policy development or 'pre-scrutiny' as it is sometimes also called. To facilitate and encourage decision-makers and officers to be more positive in coming forward to seek input into policy development it is important to demonstrate good constructive challenge and engagement when the opportunity arises and positive productive outcomes.

During the last year the PAF has had the opportunity to influence the development of a number of new corporate strategies such as Early Years' and Childcare, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Each time, the Committee has challenged the assumptions and priorities of each strategy and, as scrutiny engagement was at a relatively early stage in the development of the strategy, was able to suggest changes and additions to the draft strategies. Interestingly, the specific changes requested varied between the different strategies but included further detail on the rationale for the strategy and objectives, implementation actions and milestones, metrics for

measuring implementation (which in the case of the SEND Strategy could also look for outcomes beyond just formal qualifications) and timetable.

I was also very pleased to see public questions being asked ahead of the discussion on the draft SEND Strategy and this direct interaction with our residents is something we all need to continue to promote.

Whilst bringing some transparency to decision-making it is also important to demonstrate outcomes from the scrutiny process and I felt that these discussion on draft corporate strategies were particularly worthwhile engagements for the committee to have had.

During the pandemic our library services were also impacted and, for a period at the height of the spread of Covid-19, the buildings were closed. Nothing highlights the importance of something more than when it suddenly is no longer available. The County Council has identified an opportunity for libraries to have a wider community and family role in the future. A new public consultation on such a new enhanced role provided an opportunity for my Committee to work jointly with the Place Services and Economic Growth Committee to scrutinise the proposals. Importantly this enhanced role for libraries also needs to include further addressing the needs of the more vulnerable members of our society and those hard-to-reach to facilitate greater equality in accessing those services. This aligns with the national government's agenda for more levelling-up and this will continue to be an overarching theme across my committee's work programme going forward.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has imposed additional duties on ECC and the Committee has considered these together with the new Domestic Abuse Commissioning Strategy 2021- 2024. Members particularly challenged the communications and messaging in place. As a result, we convened a one-off meeting of a whole-committee Task and Finish Group to look at domestic abuse and improving the knowledge and information available to local members to help them signpost services and support to constituents. This had also been identified as being particularly helpful to officers and a value-add. A number of recommendations have been made to be considered for implementation including an all-member communication to be sent advising on the availability of domestic abuse awareness training and further strengthening the opportunities for parish councils to receive awareness training. The risk of increasing incidence of Domestic Abuse has been identified as an unfortunate consequence of the pandemic lock downs and the Committee will continue to challenge how the local system responds to the likely additional demands for support in this area.

One of our highest profile pieces of work for the Committee prior to the 2021 County Council elections was a task and finish group scrutiny of the effectiveness of partnership working by local agencies in responding to the challenge of drug gangs, knife crime and County Lines. The issue of drug gangs has not gone away and the PAF will continue to challenge governance arrangements, the support for young people, safeguarding the vulnerable, actions being taken to discourage school exclusions, and the level of influence that can be had over elective home education. Educational attainment for these young people has been adversely impacted and the Committee will be seeking assurance on actions being taken to address this.

Whilst it is fair to say that the first year of scrutiny since the County Council elections in May 2021 is always likely to be partly transitional as members get up to speed on the complexity of issues and the challenges being faced, I am sure the Committee will seek to further challenge decision-makers going forward on how they support and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of my committee for their commitment in this first year of the new committee membership, and their collaborative and non-partisan approach to scrutiny which is vitally important in building trust in the political independence of the scrutiny function here at the County Council.

Councillor Ray Gooding – Chairman

Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

This committee exercises the scrutiny function on matters relating to environment, economic growth and infrastructure, sustainability, highways and transportation, libraries, planning, communities, waste and recycling and trading standards.

The committee's Chairman and Vice Chairmen are Councillors Alan Goggin, Dave Blackwell and Laureen Shaw. Full details of the committee's work and membership can be found on the Council's [website](#).



When I took over as Chairman of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PSEG) last summer, I was excited that the Committee covered so many of the areas that matter most to our residents. With a remit that includes climate change, libraries, bus services and highways it was always going to be a busy year and suffice to say the last 12 months have not disappointed!

First and foremost, I would like to thank members and officers for their commitment and hard work in tackling these topics, as well as all those who have attended and contributed to our meetings. Particular thanks goes to my two Vice-Chairman, Councillor Laureen Shaw and Councillor Dave Blackwell.

Following the 2021 county elections, many PSEG members were new to the Council and new to scrutiny so it has been a steep learning curve, but one that has already seen the Committee produce tangible outcomes that I am certain will make a real difference.

We began the year by hearing from the four Cabinet Members whose portfolios are covered by the Committee along with the Climate Tsar, Councillor Peter Schwier. These sessions

were invaluable in ensuring that we understood the challenges facing the Cabinet and the ambitions outlined in Everyone's Essex.

Whilst it is important the scrutiny is independent of the executive; it is nevertheless crucial that scrutiny is both aware of and contributing to the overall objectives of the Council. Providing robust challenge when needed, but also coming up with ideas on how to improve council services.

As a part of this, PSEG has a policy development role that was demonstrated in the Task and Finish Group on Local Highway Panels (detailed on pages 14 to 15 of this report). I am immensely proud of this work and given my competitive streak I was particularly pleased that our Committee was the first to complete a Task and Finish Review since the local elections!

As a member of the Task and Finish Group, it became clear to me just how much hard work is needed to conduct a review around such a key subject like this. Credit should go to the Chairman of the Group, Councillor Mike Steel and the invaluable behind-the-scenes dedication exemplified by Councillor Marshall Vance. Well done to all.

Alongside this Task and Finish Group, the Committee has scrutinised the ongoing efforts to tackle Climate Change. The ambition to make Essex climate neutral is the biggest challenge facing our county and our Committee has a vital role in ensuring that this ambition is turned into reality in the coming years.

Climate Change – like so many other issues – crosses so many portfolios and is therefore one of the many areas where the scrutiny committees are working together. PSEG members have attended joint meetings with PAF on libraries and with CPSC on the new Economic Renewal Investment Fund. This collaboration will continue into the new civic year and is vital in ensuring that scrutiny is working as effectively as possible.

At our other meetings, topics have included the emerging Local Minerals Plan, Country Parks, Tourism and the work of Visit Essex as well as regular updates on bus services in the county and the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Buses is one of those issues that really matter to residents. Since the pandemic, the sector has been facing a perfect storm of decreasing footfall and rising costs. It is therefore imperative that the Council is working closely with bus companies to help them to deliver a reliable, regular, and greener service. Our Committee will again play a key role in ensuring that this is happening.

With topics such as this, I am sure the next 12 months will be as busy as the last, and we are looking forward to working with officers and members to ensure that PSEG continues to deliver strong, non-partisan and collaborative scrutiny that most of all delivers outcomes for our residents.

If you would like to contribute to our work or make suggestions for our work programme, then please get in touch with me at cllr.alan.goggin@essex.gov.uk.

Councillor Alan Goggin - Chairman

Task and Finish Review – Local Highways Panels

In March 2022 the Local Highway Panels (LHP) Task and Finish Group presented its final report and recommendations.

The report, which was the culmination of months of hard work by members and officers, was supported by the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PSEG) and will now be considered by the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport.

Task and Finish Groups can be established by the Scrutiny Committees to carry out in-depth reviews on a particular service area, policy or issue and make recommendations. They are a way by which scrutiny members can help to develop policy.

The Task and Finish Group was set up following a presentation by the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport on LHPs to the PSEG Committee in September 2021. Its aims were to investigate whether the objectives of the LHPs were still relevant and whether those objectives were being met. Lines of Enquiry were established in a Scoping Document, and the Group held its first meeting in November 2021.

The Group quickly identified the main causes for concern were a lack of funding for LHPs, the length of time to complete schemes, the makeup of panels, and a general concern about the ability of LHPs to deliver the best outcomes for residents.

The Group however recognised that it needed to do more than just identify these causes of concern; it was important to ‘drill down’ to identify what could be done to help resolve some of these issues and make recommendations on the way forward.

Task and Finish Groups gather evidence in a variety of ways including written submissions, interviews with internal and external witnesses, site visits, work with partner organisations and other councils, desktop research, public meetings, and surveys.

At subsequent meetings the Group analysed LHPs, tackling important questions on budgets, membership, how schemes are delivered, whether decision-making and/or delivery could be devolved (or centralised), and the potential overlap with highways maintenance issues.

The Group considered evidence from members and officers, whilst individual group members conducted independent work and then reported back to the Group. Each issue was given focused consideration to inform the development of targeted and evidence-based recommendations. The Group also conducted an online survey of the 12 LHP Chairmen to support its work.

In March, the Group finalised its recommendations. These are publicly available and can be found [here](#). Key proposals include a reorganisation of LHPs to ensure schemes can be delivered, extra training for members, extra monitoring of highways maintenance performance, and a new LHP reporting mechanism to keep members and residents up to date.

The Cabinet Member's response to the recommendations is expected shortly and will be submitted to the PSEG Committee thereafter. Emerging policies in this area will then be scrutinised to ensure that the work of the Group is being followed-up.

Task and Finish Group recommendations are made to the 'parent' scrutiny committee and then to the relevant Cabinet Member who will give a formal response.

Training and Development

Following the elections that took place in May 2021 a focussed induction programme was delivered to members of the Scrutiny committees on the nature of the scrutiny function itself and to provide an introduction on the remit of the individual scrutiny committees. Although intended primarily as sessions for new members, or those new to scrutiny, they were open to all members that wished to attend.

Feedback from these sessions was positive, and the Scrutiny Board subsequently agreed that training and development should be kept under review and that suitable opportunities for further development should be identified and delivered as they were required. With this in mind the Scrutiny Board again considered training and development provision in February 2022.

To inform their considerations Board Members received headline information from the interviews that all members had been invited to undertake to consider their own development needs and establish a Personal Development Plan (PDP). As PDPs are completed on a confidential basis, the development requested by specific individuals was not identified. However, when considered thematically the majority of responders who identified scrutiny as a development need requested support in relation to the following topic areas:

- a greater understanding of the scrutiny function as a whole;
- the decision making process more generally;
- questioning skills.

The first two points were included, although by necessity briefly, in the induction sessions of May 2021. The sessions were recorded, and Scrutiny Board members requested that the recordings were recirculated in order for members to identify any areas on which further information would be of benefit. The Board would be pleased to support their member colleagues in accessing the most appropriate training for their individual needs, and

members are encouraged to speak with their individual committee Chairman to take this forward or through the personal development process.

The Board consider that the third point, questioning skills, is key to a successful scrutiny function. It can be viewed as two separate elements; identifying the right questions to ask to begin with, then actively listening to the response given and putting appropriate follow up questions where needed. The Board recognises that this is something that takes time and practice to develop and accordingly recommend the use of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) to support this. KLOE assist in bringing structure to committees' questioning strategies and in making best use of the time at meetings.

There are various ways of developing KLOE; it is best practice for members to be actively involved in doing so. The Board suggest that there will not be a 'one size fits all' solution, and it is up to the individual committees to find the approach that best works for them. As a starting point however, Chairmen are keen to encourage members to really engage with the reports that are submitted to meetings and clearly identify what it is that they wish to achieve when questioning Cabinet members or officers.

It is not necessarily vital that members serving on scrutiny committees must be subject matter experts in order to fulfil their role effectively. The ability to actively engage with and critically analyse the information that is presented to them in order to recognise gaps or weaknesses in service provision or policy can be effectively applied across all topic areas even when the topic is new or unfamiliar.

However, committee members having an interest in the portfolio areas falling within that particular scrutiny committee's remit, and a willingness to gain an understanding of the wider issues that may impact on a particular policy position can only be of benefit. The scrutiny review referenced earlier in this report will consider this area of development further, specifically in relation to the operating models that may be used to encourage this way of working.

Scrutiny Chairmen are keen to understand how training and information can be most effectively provided to members of their respective committees and in some cases have started to develop bespoke solutions to enable this. Committee members are encouraged to continue to actively consider what measures to be provided to them. Officers within Democratic Services can provide support and advice as requested.

How the Public can get Involved

Attending a meeting

Members of the public are welcome to attend any public meeting of a scrutiny committee, which are listed on the [online meeting calendar](#).

All scrutiny committees normally allow 15 minutes for public questions at the beginning of each meeting. If you wish to ask a question, let the Chairman or clerk know by 1pm the day before a meeting is scheduled. Public meetings are usually streamed live on YouTube, with recordings available afterwards, via this link [ECC Democracy - YouTube](#).

Scrutiny regularly asks organisations or individuals to give evidence at meetings for the purpose of their investigations. If you will be attending scrutiny to give information to a committee, you can find information and guidance about what to expect in the [Scrutiny Handbook](#).

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 democratic.services@essex.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can contact any of the Councillors who are on the relevant committee or task and finish group and ask them to consider representing you or calling you to give evidence. You can find out which local Councillors are on which committee by checking on the [website](#).

**This document has been produced by Essex County Council's Democracy and Transparency service.
Contact us by email at democratic.services@essex.gov.uk.**