

Scrutiny Annual Report – 2021/2022



1. Foreword from the Chair, Councillor Tony Dyer

Scrutiny has continued to face challenges brought about by the effects of the pandemic which are likely to have an ongoing impact on how we deliver scrutiny meetings in future. This has led to us exploring the potential for hybrid meetings – a format which could allow us to continue to hold face to face meetings for Members whilst also allowing officers and members of the public to choose to interact with the scrutiny process remotely. We have already held a pilot, with a Communities Scrutiny Committee session run using technology that allows for hybrid meetings, and we will continue to explore how we can make such meetings as effective as possible.

Another challenge for scrutiny, but also an opportunity, is the considerable change in the make-up of the Council following the May 2021 local elections. We now have a mix of experienced Councillors with an institutional memory of what has gone before, combined with an influx of new Members often eager and keen to learn and ask questions, whilst also bringing new insights and experience into the Council. The Member Development Programme that has been created to help new Councillors understand their role in the scrutiny process has been well received. Even some of the longer serving Councillors have found them useful too.

The report following this foreword provides details of the work that has been performed by scrutiny so far this civic year, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank some people and to briefly comment on the future.

Since taking on the role of Chair of the Overview Scrutiny and Management Board (OSMB), I have become acutely aware of the importance of the scrutiny role and how it can help and support good decision making within the Council.

However, for that to work most effectively there needs to be mutual respect between both those scrutinising and those being scrutinised. When this report was presented last year, the then Chair of OSMB, Councillor Geoff Gollop highlighted that “one of the most fundamental components of successful scrutiny lies in partnership working and, as demonstrated by the Task Groups, there’s great strength in enabling cross party members, and the public, to feed into early stage policy development.” I agree with that statement and hope that there will be increased opportunities for scrutiny to work co-operatively to aid in the development of policy at an early stage. I believe there is willingness at all levels to make this happen.

Furthermore, the operations of the Council are becoming increasingly complex, and often, it can be difficult to try to get the balance right between ensuring that as much as possible is scrutinised whilst also not overloading agendas so that we do the concept of scrutiny justice.

In such circumstances, the ability to set up sub-groups to look more deeply into specific areas can add much to our understanding – but it is important that there is a clear understanding by all involved of the standing and remit of such groups, and where they fit into the overall scrutiny process.

As a newly elected Councillor, I had not intended to take on the role of Chair of OSMB, and I have thus been very grateful for the support of several individuals. I would like to express my sincere thanks to my predecessor, Councillor Carla Denyer, for her great help and advice when I first took up the role. In a similar vein, I would also like to express my thanks to Councillor Geoff Gollop and Councillor Tim Kent for their ongoing advice and support and especially to my Vice Chair Councillor Mark Bradshaw for his considerable assistance, insight, and his words of reassurance. In fact, I have been very lucky to have access to a very broad and committed group of Councillors from all parties who have thus made my job relatively easy despite my inexperience.

I would also like to add my personal thanks to the Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, and to Mike Jackson, Chief Executive of Bristol City Council for their willingness to engage with, and support, the scrutiny function both now and as we continue to look forward to how we can improve it. In a similar vein I would also like to thank Ben Mosley, Andrea Dell, Helen Davis, Sophie Bland, and Tim O’Gara for their help and support. Above all, I have also been lucky to be able to turn to a highly effective and dedicated Scrutiny team, led by Lucy Fleming, Head of Democratic Engagement alongside Johanna Holmes, Dan Berlin and Amy Rodwell.

Looking towards the future, I do not pretend to have a crystal ball, but I nevertheless fully expect that the scrutiny function will continue to play a vitally important role regardless of how the Council is organised. Better informed decision making will almost always be the outcome of a well set up scrutiny process, and better-informed decision making will, in turn, almost inevitably lead to improved outcomes for Bristol and its residents. I therefore look forward to working with all those who wish to help ensure scrutiny in Bristol is as effective as possible.

2. Key Figures

- Number of formal scrutiny meetings – 22
- Meetings of the OSMB Lead Members - 12
- Task and Finish Groups - 5
- Reports and Statements to Cabinet – 9
- Reports and Statements to Full Council – 1 (Budget Statement)

3. Scrutiny Successes in 2021/22 – Summary

The main achievements of scrutiny during 21/22 are set out below:

- Many new Members were appointed to scrutiny for the 21/22 municipal year following the ‘all out’ elections in May 21. In order to prepare for this, we undertook a comprehensive programme of training, in conjunction with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, which involved separate sessions on the fundamentals of scrutiny; performance; health; and topic selection. This ensured Members were fully briefed on best practice approaches to scrutiny and led to the creation of an effective and engaging work programme.

- The preferred approach to scrutiny this year has been to continue with a blend of both formal Commission meetings and other ways of working, such as Task Groups. We believe this has enabled us to continue to make an effective contribution to policy development, as well as make best use of the available resources.
- In recent years, we have taken a best practice approach to scrutiny of the budget, and this has continued during 21/22 with a robust process via a series of meetings leading to carefully considered comments being presented to the Full Council budget meeting on 15th February 21. This is an example of how scrutiny, the executive and officers can work well together when there is a good degree of information sharing and transparency.
- Scrutiny should always be a Member-led process, and we have continued to operate regular meetings of the cross party OSMB 'Lead' Members (consisting of the Chairs of each Commission and OSMB Vice Chair) in order to plan the strategic approach to scrutiny, and this process is working well.

4. Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22 – Key Highlights

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB)

OSMB's main functions are to conduct oversight of the Scrutiny Work Programme and review matters that are cross cutting and/or of significant interest city wide. Main areas of focus this year have included:

- Continuing to receive regular, in-depth updates on progress around implementation of the Council's Clean Air Zone.
- Carrying out the annual review of the Council's Companies' Business Plans, which ensures good governance.
- Keeping a watching brief on all items going to Cabinet for decision, raising queries as appropriate and providing comments. OSMB routinely submit cross party comments to Cabinet on forthcoming reports which helps to ensure that a broad range of views feed into decision making.
- Taking a strategic review of the Council's performance and risk reports.
- Monitoring progress around all scrutiny activities to ensure resources are being used effectively and concentrate on the areas where Members can add the most value.
- Providing a vital interface for the public to raise issues of concern relating to work across the whole Council.

We also have plans to review Bristol City Council's Business Plans at our meeting on 29th March, and this has been preceded by a workshop to ensure Members have the maximum opportunity to consider the reports in detail. At the same meeting, we expect to receive an update on the Council's City Leap project. OSMB will continue to keep its Work Programme under review to ensure it can respond to any other emerging issues.

Communities Scrutiny Commission

The role of the Communities Scrutiny Commission is the overview and scrutiny of matters that affect Bristol's neighbourhoods. Unlike other Scrutiny Commissions, it is not assigned to a single

directorates and examines cross cutting issues. Key points of interest from the 2021/22 year include:

- In setting the 2021/22 Work Programme the Commission undertook a prioritisation exercise and survey with Members to ensure a focus on the most significant topics. The Commission has received reports relating to Waste; Parks and Open Spaces Leisure Services; and the Community Safety Partnership. The Commission will also receive reports on homelessness; temporary housing options and initiatives; community buildings usage; community asset transfers; and community facilities this year.
- Trees Working Group: the Commission convened a Working Group to consider plans to increase Bristol's tree canopy by 25% by 2035 and to double it by 2046. The Group examined the issues surrounding the tree canopy target and matters relating to tree management and protection. It received submissions from external witnesses including the West of England Nature Partnership, Bristol Tree Forum and The Woodland Trust. A report of findings and recommendations was taken to the February Commission meeting to be approved by the Commission and to be discussed with the relevant Cabinet Members.
- Ecological Emergency Action Plan Member Engagement Session: prior to it being launched in September, the Commission convened a scrutiny engagement session to review the four-year plan which will ensure nature is embedded into all Council decisions. The Commission will review progress on the actions contained within the Plan in April 2022.

People Scrutiny Commission

The Council's adult care provision, child and family support, safeguarding and education and skills fall under the remit of this Commission. The Health Sub-Committee of the People Scrutiny Commission carries out the statutory health scrutiny role. The highlights from the 21/22 Work Programme include:

- The Commission began 21/22 with a focus on education, which included a report on school places and the response to the Bristol Alternative Learning Provision review taken to the first meeting on the 19 July 21. Members submitted their comments about these items to Cabinet in September. At the first meeting, the Commission also formally co-opted and welcomed its new statutory co-optee for education matters.
- A report on recruitment and retention across the adult social care sector was brought to the second meeting on 13 December 21. Members thanked care workers for their hard work and skill, and welcomed external expertise from the Older People's Forum, Care & Support West, and Barnardo's. Members also scrutinised the Council's approach to contextual safeguarding and the sufficiency of placements for children's homes and foster carers.
- After scrutiny of Bristol's response to Sir Stephen Bubb's report (Independent Review of Bristol's Policies and Actions for People with Learning Disabilities and Autism) on the 19 July 21, Members commended the report and requested an appraisal of progress later in the year. The update was brought to the Commission on the 7 March 22, when there was also scrutiny of the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme, and the SEND Written Statement of Action.

- The Commission has convened a Working Group to investigate the Council and its partners' approach to inclusive mainstream education. Members intend to work with the administration and city-wide partners to gather evidence to help inform policy development and good practice. The scope and objectives were agreed by the Commission on the 7 March 22.

Health Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee of the People Scrutiny Commission)

The role of the Health Scrutiny Committee is to undertake scrutiny of local Health Service provision in accordance with Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013. Key areas of focus in 21/22 include:

- The Committee began the municipal year with a review of NHS Trusts' and health providers' Quality Accounts for 2020-21, submitting appropriate comments on the quality of services offered, which are published in the NHS providers final reports.
- Members received a programme of briefings delivered by NHS England, the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny, the Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, and the Council Administration on topics including the health system and the role of scrutiny; access to primary care with a focus on dentistry; addressing health inequalities in the South West COVID 19 vaccine rollout; and suicide prevention work.
- The Committee, at its meeting in-public on the 6 December, received a report on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services from Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership and also examined the developing Community Mental Health Framework and Integrated Care.
- The Council's approach to improve healthy weight in Bristol came to the second meeting in-public on the 14 March. At this meeting the Committee also examined NHS system pressures and plans for recovery; Urgent and Emergency Care (Minors Programme); and AWP Patient Reconfiguration.

Joint Health Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)

JHOSC, comprised of Members from Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils, was established to review and scrutinise the work of the BNSSG Integrated Care System (ICS) and any proposals within the ICS that constitute a substantial development of the health service or the substantial variation of such service where more than one local authority is consulted by the relevant NHS body. Seven Members of the Bristol Health Scrutiny Committee sit on JHOSC.

JHOSC considered proposals for a substantial variation of stroke services, and, following a thorough scrutiny process, which included a number of briefings, a meeting in-public on the 15 November, and a final engagement session on the 21 February, Members commended the consultation process and supported the preferred options.

Growth & Regeneration Scrutiny Commission

The role of the Commission is the overview and scrutiny of matters relating to the Growth and Regeneration Directorate including planning; strategic city planning, development management, and city design, innovation and sustainability. The Commission set a comprehensive Work Programme for the 21/22 municipal year and key highlights include:

- The Commission undertook a series of scrutiny Member briefings at the beginning of the municipal year to help inform the Work Programme setting for 21/22. Key themes for these briefings were transport, regeneration, and housing where Members were able to develop an in-depth understanding of the Council's current schemes and projects in these areas by exploring each topic in detail.
- The Commission received a scrutiny briefing on the Temple Island plans where property consultants working with the council on the project were invited to discuss the proposals.
- The Commission's formal scrutiny meetings were themed where possible to ensure a focussed and thorough approach. The Commission received reports relating to; the City Centre & High Streets Recovery & Renewal Programme; Liveable Neighbourhoods Strategy; Housing Delivery Plan; Temple Quarter/Temple Island; and Western Harbour. Members also scrutinised the River Avon Flood Strategy and received an annual update on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
- The Commission is scheduled to receive reports in March 2022 relating to transport matters including the Council's strategic transport plans; management of highways maintenance issues.

Resources Scrutiny Commission

The role of the Commission is overview and scrutiny in respect of policies, decisions and performance relating to the Resources Directorate, including legal, finance, HR, ICT, policy & strategy, and procurement and commercialisation. The Resources Scrutiny Commission has chosen to hold a combination of informal and formal public meetings this year.

- Budget scrutiny – OSMB have delegated responsibility for budget scrutiny to the Resources Scrutiny Commission and The Finance Task Group. A robust process, that included nine informal meetings, has ensured that scrutiny Members had access to comprehensive information in the run up to the budget setting process, which was delivered via the Finance Task Group. This culminated in two formal public budget specific meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Commission where detailed comments were agreed and submitted to Members in advance of the budget setting Full Council meeting on 15th February 2022. The Commission's approach to budget scrutiny is generally thought to reflect best practice.
- Another key piece of work for the Commission has been the Ethical and Equitable Investment Policy Working Group. The Working Group held three sessions, which included external organisations including, Wellspring Settlement, Great Western Credit Union and representatives of the Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani

Communities. All those involved felt this was a very constructive process that produced a set of clear proposals to further develop the policy and associated outcomes. The refreshed Ethical and Equitable Investment Policy was approved at a Cabinet meeting in January 22.

- A Member of the Commission also Chaired a short multi-sector scrutiny focus group which co-designed the 'Sustainable Procurement Policy Statement' and built on the commitments made in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategies.

5. Opportunities for Scrutiny in 2021/22 and beyond

- We believe that public engagement is an essential cornerstone of an effective scrutiny process. Residents that already engage tell us they welcome the facility to submit statements, questions and petitions to scrutiny because their views can be considered by Members who have a particular interest in the relevant subject matter. We are very positive about the opportunities that can be achieved by making better use of technology to support additional democratic engagement and we are looking forward to rolling out more extensive webcasting and hybrid meetings to assist with this. We are aware of plans in place to promote the equality of access to information about public participation with a wide demographic. It is hoped this will lead to more diverse representation at our meetings.
- The scrutiny function must continually evolve to ensure the structure provides the right framework to deliver the best value and outcomes. Members will consider whether any changes are required to the structure for 22/23 with a view to making recommendations to Full Council. Of particular note, is the need to ensure that scrutiny of matters in relation to climate change are given appropriate consideration.
- Whilst we welcome and support the introduction of different ways in which we as scrutiny are invited to work alongside the Executive, there may be some benefit in considering the arrangements of any new bodies (for example Focus Groups) that are established to ensure the decision pathway for outcomes remains clear.
- The role of Local Authorities and associated systems of governance have evolved in recent years, for example with the inclusion of Arms-Length Companies and devolution. Scrutiny must continue to review its Work Programme to ensure all key areas are incorporated as we enter ever more challenging times.