

# Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report 2019**

January 2020

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# Foreword

It is a pleasure to be able to write the Foreword to this year's Annual Scrutiny Report. However, I was only elected to the Chair in November and only became a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board in September, so most of the work and all of the credit must go to others.

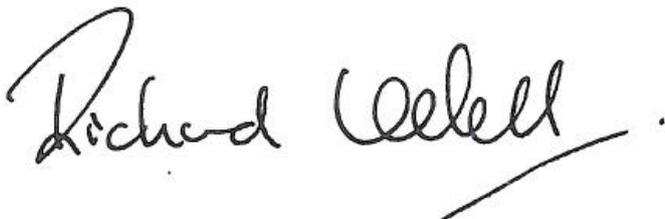
In particular, a big thanks must go to Christopher Bloore, who not only preceded me as Chair but was also my successor two years ago. He helped to refresh Scrutiny and his challenging style and forensic investigatory skills will be a big loss. I wish him all the best for his future in Canada. Also, special thanks to Elizabeth Eyre, the Vice Chair of the Board who took over the reins from him and kept Scrutiny going, her experience and commitment are key to the success of Scrutiny in Worcestershire. Equally, all members of the Scrutiny Board have played important roles in ensuring we continue to speak truth to power and hold the Executive to account, I happily thank them all for their service and commitment.

We face difficult times ahead, as scrutineers we need the tools to enable us to do our job properly; we have many demands, new priorities and a varied workload. We also need to take more seriously our role of overview, to help, assist and provide advice to the Executive when they are engaged in making difficult decisions. We need to be able to monitor performance, challenge when necessary and not be afraid to speak our minds and must resist the temptation to be controlled by any external forces. Scrutiny independence must be protected.

I would like us to review the way we conduct Budget Scrutiny and to make it more meaningful, it is one of the most important parts of our job; we must ensure we are doing it correctly. We also need to concentrate our efforts and our work into areas when it can be most useful, the use of Task and Finish Groups have long been one of our most effective forms of Scrutiny.

During the past year we have been very busy and have helped to deliver new policies. The issue of Gateway Drugs has unified the Council and Scrutiny has responded. I hope we will be able to continue to make the changes, meet the challenges and deliver the new ideas which can make local government relevant, make politics work and demonstrate how we can make a difference.

Finally, and most importantly, a huge thank you to the people who work very hard on our behalf. A small team of talented professionals. We could not function successfully without their support, thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Udall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Richard Udall  
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

## Introduction

This Report highlights some of the key pieces of work from the past year undertaken by the Scrutiny function of the Council. A diagram showing where Scrutiny fits in the governance of the Council is enclosed at the appendix. Details of the membership of scrutiny bodies and their meetings are on the Council's website here:

[http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20152/overview\\_and\\_scrutiny/540/overview\\_and\\_scrutiny](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20152/overview_and_scrutiny/540/overview_and_scrutiny)

## Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB)

The primary role of the Board is to co-ordinate the work of the Scrutiny Panels. However, it has considered a range of issues in 2019, generally focusing on strategic Council-wide matters.

## Learning

In addition to formal meetings Scrutiny members have attended informal briefings and site visits to increase their knowledge of specific areas of work, from round table discussions to observing consultation events and visiting other authorities to see how they operate services.

## Scrutiny Annual Work Programme for 2019/20

The Work Programme was drawn up following consideration by each Panel individually, so that their individual priorities could be taken into account. The work programme was endorsed by Council in November 2018:

<https://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=129&MIId=2069&Ver=4>

## Call-in

The Board has considered one Call-in this year.

A Call-in is essentially one of the tools available to non-executive Councillors to hold the Executive to account for the decisions that they take. Call-in is not a process to question the merits of a decision; it is a process to ensure that the principles of good decision making have been applied to the decisions that have been taken by Cabinet.

The Call-in related to a Cabinet Member decision to introduce parking charges at the Worcester Woods Countryside Centre. The Board agreed arrangements for hearing the call-in and this took place at an additional meeting on 14 January 2019. 5 public participants attended and written submissions from a further 3 people were taken into account. The Cabinet Member for Communities (CMR) and senior officers also gave details of the processes followed in arriving at the proposal to introduce a charge.

The Board considered that the CMR did not have sufficient information on which to make the decision and was preparing to launch a task group to investigate this further when the CMR rescinded the decision.

## Reflecting Matters of Concern to the Community

One of the roles of Scrutiny is to reflect on and consider issues of concern to the community. These may come to the Board's attention in many ways. The call-in referred to above is one example.

The Board has also maintained a watching brief on the Assessment Pathway for Children and Young People who may have Autism. This was originally raised via a motion at Council and the Board has considered updates from the relevant bodies during the development and implementation of a business case for the 'umbrella pathway'. During this process the Board has been aware of the impact on families awaiting a diagnosis, whether it be positive or negative. The topic is now being followed up by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

## **Scrutiny of Other Agencies**

In May the Board met with representatives of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) to discuss governance arrangements and its effectiveness. This is now an annual feature of the Board's work programme and Scrutiny of an organisation in which the County Council is a partner is regarded as best practice. The Board recommended that:

- The relationship between the WLEP and individual Councillors should be further developed
- Work to enhance the diversity on the WLEP Board should be supported.

## **Community Safety**

The Board's Lead Member for Community Safety, Cllr Becky Vale, led the Board in its Annual Crime and Disorder meeting to consider community safety issues. This year, in addition to an update on the activities by the County Council and partners generally in supporting community safety, the Board also focused on GET SAFE, the Worcestershire multi-agency support and protection approach to child criminal exploitation. Members were impressed by the partnership working approach being taken with this initiative.

It was agreed that the Board would be updated on the progress of the data set being developed in partnership with Police analysts to enable more meaningful monitoring of crime reduction strategies, the Lead Member for Crime and Disorder would work more closely with the Chairman of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel and the GET SAFE presentations would be shared with District Councils and that they would be encouraged to champion the initiative.

## **Budget 2019/20 and 2020/21**

The Board collated views on the draft budget for 2019/20 at its meeting in January for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting later that month. When presenting the draft budget to Cabinet, the Leader acknowledged the contribution of Scrutiny to some of the changes in the plans, including areas such as the reduction of cuts in funding for highways, the countryside service, libraries and the archives service.

The Scrutiny function has developed its approach to monitoring and challenging service and budget performance this year. Regular updates are now included in each Panel's work programme and this has led to some 'deep dive' work being undertaken to follow up queries. This has helped the Panels be proactive when Scrutinising the budget and developed a deeper understanding of the services. I would like to thank Officers and Cabinet members for their support for this development during the year.

I now move on to set out highlights from the work of the Panels during the year.

## **Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

63,685 adults and 3,490 young people in Worcestershire are carers. The Panel has considered the support available to them. In doing so it heard from representatives of carers' organisations and from carers themselves about the issues they faced on a practical level and support that they accessed and needed. Arising from this, the Panel is looking into continuing health care arrangements in more depth and has written to the Clinical Commissioning Group expressing its concerns.

The Panel welcomed the Independent Chairman of the Adult Safeguarding Board and Board Manager to its November meeting and considered the Board's Annual Report 2018/19 and the activities of the Board. The Panel was reassured by the report and has asked for further information about Trading Standards' work on modern slavery; a guidance note for members to respond to constituents' queries about safeguarding issues and an update on Worcestershire Health and Care Trust's progression of the action plan regarding compliance with best practice against NICE guidelines on the use of decision making and mental capacity.

The Panel's work has also taken place in Task and Finish Groups, details of which are given elsewhere in this report.

## **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

The main focus of the Panel this year has been the development and launch of Worcestershire Children First, a wholly-owned Council Company set up to deliver and improve children's social care, education and early help services on behalf of the Council from 1 October 2019. It has been updated regularly during the development of the governance of the company and has worked with the Cabinet Member and Director to ensure that it continues to receive appropriate and timely information about children's services.

At the same time the Panel has maintained its concentration on progress with the improvement in children's services. Examples are:

- A progress update on the Joint Local Area SEND Written Statement of Action/Improvement Plan – pre-scrutiny of a report to Cabinet in March and a further update in November;
- Commissioning of a 0-19 prevention and early intervention service – raised by the Panel during consideration of the budget in January and followed up in May with an outline of the tendering process and contract requirements;
- Pupil attainment at Key Stage 2 – an update on progress with raising the achievement of children in KS2 in reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, spelling and mathematics;
- The preparations for, and outcome of, the OFSTED inspection of children's services

In addition, the Panel considered, ahead of the meeting, the report to Cabinet in September about the future of Overnight unit-based short breaks in Worcestershire. This followed work by a Task Group last year which examined proposed changes to the service. The Panel supported the recommendations in the Cabinet report and agreed it will receive an update after the new model has been running for 6 months, to include levels of parental satisfaction.

## **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

The Panel has continued to be actively involved in consideration of the libraries remodelling proposals this year. Members of the Panel visited a library in South Gloucestershire to see how an example of an Open Library worked in practice and issues that had been faced when establishing this. Visits to other locations were also undertaken with the CMR. The members shared their learning with the Panel when it considered the draft Libraries Strategy as a pre-scrutiny in December.

The Panel supported the Strategy, seeking assurance that sufficient resources were available to deliver it. Among other things it also asked to see a detailed Implementation Plan when available and suggested, where possible, the exploration of opportunities for S106 monies that might benefit the development of the libraries service.

Arising from regular budget and performance reports, the Panel has carried out a 'deep dive' into Registration Service performance regarding death and still birth registration appointments., along with an overview of the Registration service, including performance, recent changes and future developments.

The Panel has more recently considered energy purchasing arrangements. Three members of the Panel are looking at this in more detail and will report back in March 2020.

## **Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

The Panel has examined a variety of topics, including an update on changes to street lighting, residents zonal parking schemes and countryside access.

In May, the Panel considered progress with reducing congestion, which included input and challenge from an external expert in the field. Representatives from cycling groups also contributed to the meeting. At the following meeting, responding to issues raised by parish councils, the Panel scrutinised arrangements for traffic calming. This involved officers from other organisations in addition to the County Council and discussion was wide ranging. The Panel learned about a toolkit produced by a neighbouring County Council which aimed to support communities in helping themselves and the Panel asked to see an example as a potential initiative that might be rolled out in Worcestershire.

OSPB referred consultation on the Worcestershire Public Transport Strategy to the Panel so that it could feed back during the consultation period. The Panel contributed a number of suggestions including how to maximise access to the consultation for members of the public.

Close attention is paid to the budget and performance monitoring reports and the Panel now seeks examples from the Strategic Director of 3 areas of success and 3 areas of challenge each quarter.

## **Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

Last year's report set out details of how the Committee received details of, and updates on, the implementation of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust's Improvement Plan following its rating as 'inadequate' by the Care Quality Commission. The Committee has continued to scrutinise the quality of Acute Hospital services. This culminated in a full presentation in October by the Trust's Chief Executive of the latest Care Quality Commission (CQC) report, following inspections in May and June 2019. The report contained details of a range of quality and safety improvements which had led the CQC to lift the Trust's overall rating to 'requires improvement' from its previous rating of 'inadequate'. Whilst the Chief Inspector of Hospitals had recommended

that the Trust should be removed from special measures, this would only take place when a system-wide support package involving local and regional partners had been agreed.

The background to this year has been the announcement of the NHS Long-term plan and arising impact on the work of STP's (Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships). The Committee continues to be updated on the work of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire STP and its plans for meeting the national requirements. It has also been updated on the merger of the Worcestershire and Herefordshire CCG's.

More recently the Committee has examined how the Public Health Ring Fenced Grant is used and been updated on progress with smoking cessation. It also reviewed the audiology service and arising from that has written to the Clinical Commissioning Group about the role of GP surgeries and primary care in enabling patients to be seen most promptly when referrals are made.

## **Scrutiny Task Groups**

### **The Relationship Between the Family Front Door and Schools**

The Task Group was led by Mrs Potter, Vice Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Its terms of reference were *'to investigate how the Service is currently working, taking into account the relationship between the County Council and School partners, and the progress made since the Ofsted Inspection and subsequent monitoring visits'*.

The Task Group made 8 recommendations, ranging from communication with schools to training for members. The CMR for Children and Families accepted a number of the recommendations, including the CMR and Director assess the viability and merit of arranging for designated safeguarding leads and social workers to spend some time in each other's work environment as part of their training and incorporating specific training on the Family Front Door into member training.

### **Quality Assurance of Care Homes**

This Scrutiny review was proposed by the OSPB. The Board wanted reassurance about the effectiveness of the County Council's quality assurance systems of residential care and nursing homes.

The Task Group was led by Mrs Brunner, Chairman of the Adult Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel. The terms of reference for the scrutiny exercise were *'to investigate how the Council carries out and monitors quality assurance of care homes in Worcestershire'*. Whilst the remit of this scrutiny has been on the role of the Council's Quality Assurance Team, in order to understand the broader system, the Task Group has also met with other organisations involved – including the Care Quality Commission (the independent regulator of health and social care in England) and the Clinical Commissioning Groups. The Task Group has also met with Healthwatch and visited a number of care and nursing homes across Worcestershire.

The Task Group report was agreed at the last meeting of the OSPB and is due to be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 30 January. The report makes 8 recommendations.

## **Care Work as a Career**

In February, the Council agreed a Notice of Motion asking the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care to consider ways in which the work of Worcestershire residents who worked in the care industry could be celebrated and encouraged and how the importance of the care workers' role could be emphasised. The CMR subsequently suggested that a Scrutiny Task Group could look at how to develop the career pathway for care workers and how to promote care work as a career with justifiable rewards. The Task Group led by Mrs Tucker, Vice Chairman of the Adult Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel, has been working on this and is due to report shortly.

## **Future Task Groups**

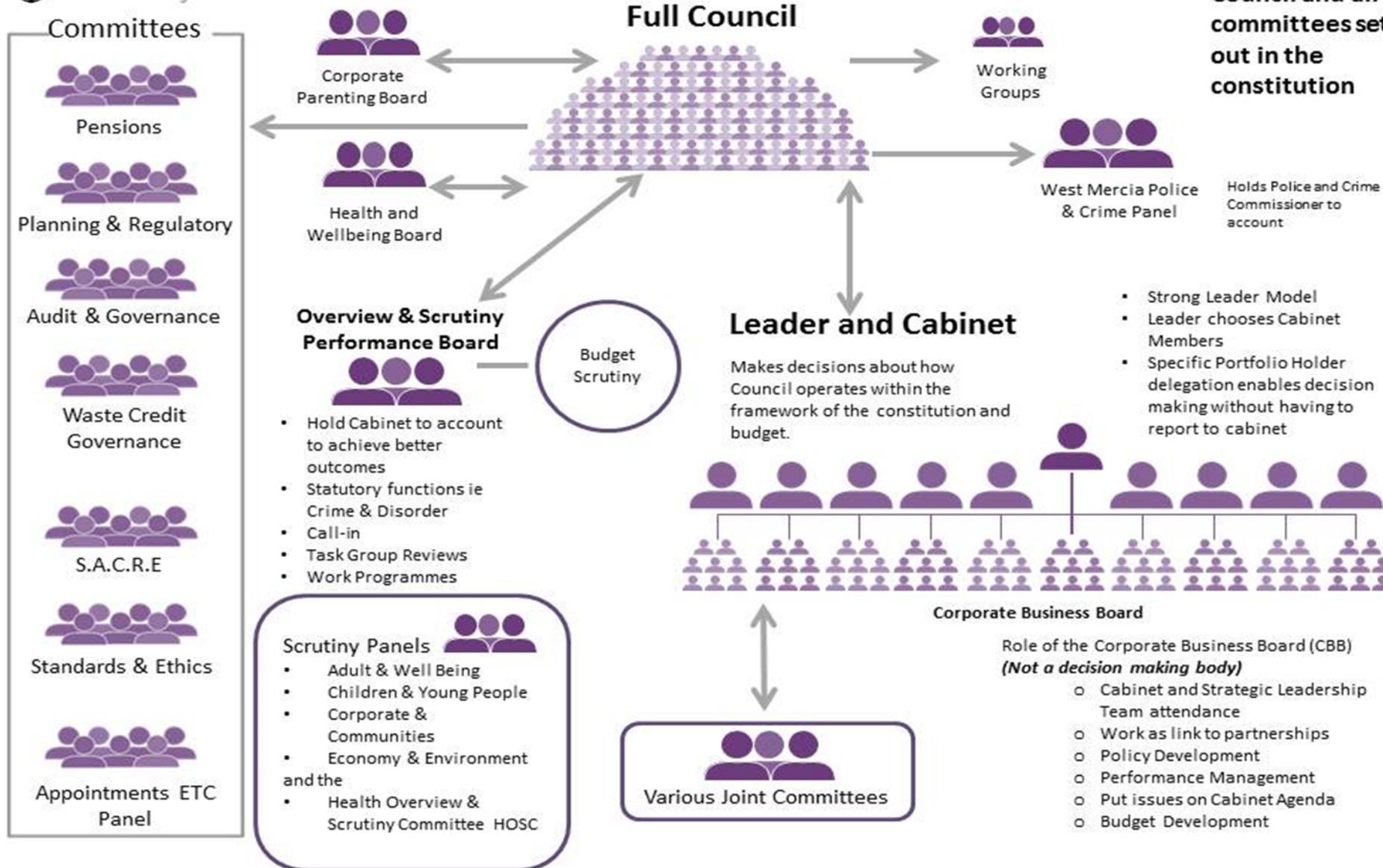
The OSPB has recently agreed proposals for three further Task Groups –the impact that the use of gateway drugs have on young people, Elective Home Education and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

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## Appendix 2

### Governance Model

### Role of Full Council and all committees set out in the constitution





## Further copies of this report are available from:

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