

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

South Lakeland District Council

2019-2021





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Chairman's Foreword

The past year has been extremely challenging for everyone around the globe and within the District of South Lakeland, but despite all the difficulties, I am delighted to present this report documenting the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the municipal years 2019 to 2021. The report includes a wide variety of information about the work undertaken over the past 24 months; and most notably, the impact this work has had.

Collectively, Members of the Committee have adapted quickly to the new ways of remote working and attended virtual meetings to ensure that they continue their role by holding decision makers and the Executive to account. Despite the pandemic, the Committee has expressed its 'Member Voice' in reviewing and developing policies. The Committee has also intensely considered the Council's response and recovery to COVID-19, informing the annual review of the Council Plan.

Members have welcomed the opportunity to work closely with both the Executive and Lead Officers as they face conflicting pressures related to the pandemic. I would like to thank all Officers for their resilience and hard work over the past year as they continue to play a pivotal role in times of uncertainty. However, specific thanks must go to Linda Fisher, Monitoring Officer, and her team, for their delivery of virtual meetings.

I would also like to thank my Vice Chairman, Councillor Helen Chaffey, for her invaluable support over the past two years, I would like to thank also the Committee for their commitment, and flexibility in ensuring effective Scrutiny continues.

I look forward to another year of scrutiny and focusing our resources on the areas where we can make the most difference as we move forward with newly developed ways of working and as the Locality, and all of those around the world, recover from COVID-19.

Councillor Vicky Hughes
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Introduction

Welcome to the Scrutiny Annual Report for South Lakeland District Council (SLDC). The report sets out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee between April 2019 and March 2021.

Scrutiny is a key tool for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the area and seeks to ensure that local people receive high quality services that meet their needs. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee does this by acting as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet, holding it to account and providing challenge where necessary. Scrutiny also plays a key role in the areas of policy review and development; by considering topics such as the Budget and the updated Council Plan at an early stage in their development, scrutiny can add real value before a final decision is made by Cabinet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant unprecedented changes to lives across the globe and within the District of South Lakeland. In the UK, on 23 March 2020 the Prime Minister asked the public to stay at home, to protect the NHS and to save lives.

Following Government guidance, on 16 March 2020 the Council moved away from business as usual activity and established an emergency planning approach to developing and enabling its response to the pandemic, whilst continuing to meet statutory duties. Consequently, Scrutiny was paused from this time until May when it started to plan for a phased return. The Chairman was however involved in emergency decision making.

A significant change arising from the pandemic has been the operation of the Council's public meetings. The Government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person and issued time limited regulations by virtue of the Coronavirus Act 2020 to allow public meetings to be held online, visible to the public. The Regulations were made in Parliament on 02 April 2020 and apply to meetings taking place before 07 May 2021.

The Council quickly adapted and held public meetings virtually via the platform of Microsoft Teams, therefore continuing to make critical decisions on the delivery of its services for residents in a way that was both transparent and accessible to the public.

Much of the scrutiny focus during 2020 has been on the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's services and the recovery of the Council's response going forward. This Report highlights some of the key pieces of work from the past 2 years undertaken by the Committee.

An effective and balanced 2021/22 Work Programme will continue to further the Committee's work in light of the COVID-19 pandemic to assist the Council in realising its ultimate aim of *"working together to make South Lakeland the best place to live, work and explore."*



**Overview and Scrutiny
Committee Membership**

Pat Bell
Helen Chaffey (Vice-Chairman)
Brian Cooper
Eamon Hennesey
Hazel Hodgson
John Holmes
Vicky Hughes (Chairman)
Janette Jenkinson
Susanne Long
Ian Mitchell
Doug Rathbone
Mark Wilson

Year in Review: Overview and Scrutiny 2019-2021

The Committee considered a wide variety of subjects over the course of the above meetings spanning over a period of 24 months. The Committee's focus in 2019-20 was contributing effectively toward the Development of Locality Working following the Council's Customer Connect Programme, the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Policy and a review of the Council's Private Water Supplies function.

On 17 July 2020, the Committee held its first 'virtual meeting'. Prior to the meeting, all Committee Members received Microsoft Teams training and participated in a Mock Committee meeting. Virtual meetings have been rolled out across the Scrutiny function, and at the time of writing, are planned to cease after 07 May 2021 where the Council will return to 'physical' meetings once more.

Key Statistics:

- 8 Formal Committee Meetings
- 6 Task and Finish Groups
- 4 Workshops
- 19 Urgency Provisions

Examples of Involving Partners in the Committee's work.

- Cumbria County Council
- Cumbria Police
- Lake District National Park
- Representatives from Town and Parish Councils
- South Cumbria Community Partnership
- Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee
- Northern Rail

Brexit Update

At the 25 October 2019 Overview and Scrutiny meeting it was agreed to hold a Brexit Update Workshop 3 months after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. The Overview and Scrutiny will meet later in the year to hold this workshop.

Customer Connect Locality Working Task & Finish Group (07 March 2019 - March 2021)

The first meeting in respect of the Customer Connect Locality Working Task & Finish Group took place on 07 March 2019. At this meeting, Members agreed the terms of reference for the Task & Finish Group and identified those organisations and/or individuals that the group wished to hear from in order to inform its work. The purposes of the Task & Finish Groups were threefold; to identify new ways for the Council's current functions to work together more

efficiently and effectively through locality working, to identify possible ways of working within communities which can be developed as part of the Customer Connect project and to identify the role and development of Members in locality working.

The work by the group involved five sessions and a wrap up session covering the general principles of Locality Working, Members' role within Locality, benchmarking and performance measuring and external partnerships. The Task and Finish Group has been incredibly dynamic and made a number of recommendations that have and will continue to guide the development of Locality Working.

During these sessions, there was great engagement from external organisations such as the Police and Cumbria County Council. These sessions had been successful in developing new ways of working and strengthening our relationships with partners and with those who have a direct role within the community in sharing ideas and creating suggestions for improved ways of working. Working together, we had shaped performance measures, established clarity on locality hub multiagency meetings, engaged members, the public and partners in our Customer Connect transformation and change programme. This was assisting with the change programme for our customers and wider community.



Photos taken at the Locality Working Partnership Task and Finish Group on 31 January 2020.

Implementation of SLDC Climate Change Policy Workshop (08 January 2020)

The purpose of the Workshop was to monitor the Council's implementation of its Climate Change Policy and ensure that addressing Climate Change was a priority for the District. Martin Sleath, a Planning Officer from the Lake District National Park Authority, also attended and contributed to the Workshop. Members were presented with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, which highlighted three key areas; the Council's own operations, the Council's strong influence areas and the areas of weaker influence.

Strategic Review of Council's Health and Wellbeing Priority Workshop (15 January 2020)

The purpose of the Workshop was to review the Health and Wellbeing priority to ensure that it was appropriate for the needs of South Lakeland Residents. The Workshop considered the

role of the Council within the health arena and identified ways of working collaboratively with other stakeholders who have responsibility for health to achieve the best outcomes for residents.

North West Scrutiny Networking Event (11 February 2020)

South Lakeland District Council hosted and welcomed the North West Scrutiny Group in the Council Chambers at Kendal Town Hall. The Chairman, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee and Councillor Rathbone attended the meeting. Both Councillors and Officers discussed the recent Centre for Public Scrutiny conference (now Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)). The group discussed engaging in effective public scrutiny and upcoming matters.



Photos taken at the North West Scrutiny Networking Event hosted by South Lakeland District Council at Kendal Town Hall on 11 February 2020.

Private Water Supplies (13 February 2020)

The purpose of this Workshop was to undertake a review of the Council's legal obligations in respect of private water supplies and to review its policies and activity in relation to these supplies to ensure that it is in accordance with the legislative requirements. The Workshop also considered any work that could be undertaken to publicise the Council's legal obligations and to improve engagement with those members of the public affected. As well as contributing to the development of the overall policy, the review provided assurances to Members that the Council's approach accords with legislative requirements.

COVID-19 Recovery Workshop (23 October 2020)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report at the Committee's 17 July 2020 meeting on the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee agreed as part of their 2020/21 Work Programme to host a Members' Workshop to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic within the district of South Lakeland. The Workshop focused on three central themes:-

- Health and Wellbeing;
- Resilience; and
- Economy.

Members' voiced that it was a great workshop and very thought provoking, the work tied in with the Local Plan, and Members were eager for this piece of work to be the main focus of the Committee's future Work Programme for 2021-22.

Effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be an effective committee that can contribute to the development of Council policies and also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions. Overview and scrutiny should be carried out in a constructive way which contributes to the efficient and effective service delivery which meets the needs and aspirations of the people of South Lakeland. As such, an annual review is undertaken to ensure that the work of scrutiny continues to be effective. Since 2016/17, the annual Review of Effectiveness has mirrored the checklist methodology of the Audit Committee's own effectiveness review.

The review concluded that the Committee continues to operate effectively in its overview and scrutiny role, but that more precise timetabling of reviews would be beneficial in ensuring that the work programme can be adequately addressed. Effective scrutiny should continue, even if impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Call-in and Urgency Provisions

The call-in process may be used to challenge Executive decisions. Call-ins are only to be used on an exceptional basis in line with paragraph 16 (a) to (i) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules. No call-in requests were received during the period of 2019-21.

The urgency provisions can be used to waive the requirements of the Council's Constitution with regards to decision-making when an urgent decision is needed and it is not possible for the normal procedure to be followed to allow a decision to be made within a given timeframe. During 30 March 2020 to 30 April 2021, the urgency provision was used **19 times**.

Looking Ahead to 2021/22

2020-21 has been a very different year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at South Lakeland. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a whole new way of working and has, in turn, shaped the Committee's work programme.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme for 2021/22 at its meeting on Friday, 23 April 2021. The topics selected for review are to be:-

- the continued focus of the Council's recovery to COVID-19;
- a Brexit Workshop following the UK leaving the EU on January 01 2021; and
- a Housing Workshop to consider the evidential and national policy basis for identifying housing need of the District outside the National Parks and to feed any recommendations for consideration in the Council's ongoing Local Plan review.

With the Customer Connect programme transition completion, the UK leaving the EU, and the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the 2021/22 Council year will no doubt prove to be a year of important activity for scrutiny at South Lakeland. Scrutiny will do this whilst continuing

to promote partnership working, building networks and relationships and maximising evidence gathering in a way few other committees could. It is hoped that, following the impact of COVID-19, Overview and Scrutiny can continue to make a constructive contribution to South Lakeland in the year to come.

Scrutiny Contact Details

Linda Fisher

Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer)

01539 733333 scrutiny@southlakeland.gov.uk

Ross Ette

Case Management Officer (Support Services)

01539 733333 scrutiny@southlakeland.gov.uk

More information on the scrutiny function, including agendas, minutes ongoing review work and Councillors' details can be found on the [Council's website](#).