

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

South Lakeland District Council

2021-2022





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Chairman's Foreword

The past year has remained somewhat challenging for Members, Officers and residents of South Lakeland, but despite these challenges, I am once again delighted to present this report documenting the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the municipal years 2021 to 2022.

Following the need for virtual meetings in the previous year, Members of the Committee have smoothly transitioned back to physical in-person meetings and have ensured that their role in holding decision makers and the Executive to account has continued. Despite the challenges, the Committee has continued to express its 'voice' in reviewing and developing policies.

I would like to thank all Officers for their continued resilience and hard work over the past year, with particular thanks to the Committee Services team for ensuring the transition back to physical in-person meetings was both safe and smooth.

I would also like to thank my Vice Chairman, Councillor Doug Rathbone, for his support over the past year and for stepping in in my absence. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the Committee for their continued commitment, and flexibility in ensuring effective Scrutiny.

I look forward to another year of scrutiny and using the time we have left to focus on the areas where we can make the most difference. Particular focus will be on Local Government Reorganisation and how we as a Committee can ensure that the best aspects of the Council and South Lakeland are captured and fed into the new Westmorland and Furness Council.

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 2021 and March 2022.

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.

This year has seen reduced numbers of meetings due to COVID-19, meetings held in person were reintroduced as the legislation allowing Virtual Meetings was removed. The Chairman has continued to be involved in emergency decision making.

This Report highlights some of the key pieces of work from the past 12 months undertaken by the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Membership

Clr Pat Bell

Clr Brian Cooper

Clr Eamonn Hennessy

Clr Hazel Hodgson

Clr John Holmes

Clr Vicky Hughes (Chairman)

Clr Ali Jama

Clr Janette Jenkinson

Clr Malcolm Lamb

Clr Susanne Long

Clr Ian Mitchell

Clr Doug Rathbone (Vice-Chairman)

Clr Mark Wilson

Year in Review: Overview and Scrutiny 2021-2022

The Committee considered a wide variety of subjects over the course of the above meetings spanning over a period of 12 months. The Committee's focus in 2021-22 was contributing to the review of Council policies and budgets, whilst maintaining a keen interest in Local Government Reorganisation and the district's continued recovery from COVID-19.

Key Statistics:

- 4 Formal Committee Meetings
- 4 Policies & Strategies considered
- 5 Urgency Provisions

Examples of Involving Partners in the Committee's work.

- South Cumbria Community Partnership
- Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee
- Northern Rail

Workshops and Task & Finish Groups

Throughout the municipal year preparation for Local Government Reorganisation and the continued response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic put large constraints on Officer time and for this reason no workshops were held and no task and finish groups were established.

However, updates on key topics were provided via members of the Corporate Management Team, as well as via the various Portfolio Holder reports considered throughout the year.

Policy and Strategy Reviews

Throughout the year, various policies and strategies were brought before the Committee for comment. In July 2021, the Committee considered a change in policy regarding encroachments at Lake Windermere, particularly relating to new encroachments and the checks to be carried out before allowing new encroachments on the lake. The Committee supported the policy change and suggested some clarifications around the definitions within.

At this meeting, the Committee also considered the Procurement Strategy where they were pleased to see a focus on Social Value. The Committee also put forward questions to Cabinet around the topic of Social Value.

In August, the Committee considered a change to the Management and Safety of Memorials policy. The change aimed to ensure that cemeteries were a safe space for all, and to clarify the Council's approach to maintenance and management of these sites. The Committee asked various questions relating to costs and publicity and ultimately recommended the policy to Cabinet following responses from the Bereavement Specialist.

Finance

Overall, the Committee maintained an effective oversight over the Council's financial position, considering the following reports throughout the year:

- Revenue and Capital Outturn
- Annual Treasury Management
- Quarterly Financial Updates
- Finance and Assets Portfolio Holder Report
- Draft Budget
- Treasury Management and Capital Strategies

Northern Rail

Chris Jackson, Regional Director at Northern Rail attended the August 2021 meeting to provide an update and answer questions from the Committee. The Committee welcomed the update, and used the opportunity to ask many questions relating to rail travel in the area and the ongoing and planned projects by Northern Rail.

South Cumbria Community Safety Partnership

Alec Proffitt of Barrow Borough Council also attended the August 2021 meeting to provide a bi-annual update on the work of the South Cumbria Community Safety Partnership. Again the Committee very much welcomed the update, particularly the discussion around the impact of COVID-19 on crime levels and the future of the Partnership following Local Government Reorganisation.

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.

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 2021-22.

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 April 2021 to March 2022, the urgency provision was used five times.

Looking Ahead to 2022/23

2021-22 has continued to be very different from previous years for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at South Lakeland. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a whole new way of working and this has continued to shape the Committee's work programme.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme for 2022/23 at its meeting on Friday, 04 March 2022. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was identified as a key topic, and following discussion between Officers and the Chairman/Vice-Chairman a task and finish group was established to explore opportunities to influence the LGR process and to look at ensuring the retention of the Council's corporate knowledge during the transition.

Following an invitation for proposals and a consultation, the Government announced in July 2021 that it intended to proceed with Local Government Reorganisation, moving to two unitary authority model for Cumbria. This year will see the transition of South Lakeland District Council to the new unitary Westmorland and Furness Council.

As a result, the 2022/23 Council year will be an unusual year with regards to the usual pattern of business for South Lakeland District Council. For example, other than updates to the Council's policy framework which are statutorily required, it is not expected that the Council will progress replacement strategies. Strategy development will be a consideration for the new Westmorland and Furness Council.

At their meeting of the 22nd February, Full Council considered a report identifying the priorities on which the Council could focus during its last year of operation. The report also reviewed the Council's current Council Plan priorities, identifying those which the Council could request the new Westmorland and Furness Council to consider in the development of its Policy Framework and Council Plan. South Lakeland District Council has a wealth of knowledge regarding the area and examples of good practice in how Council services can best meet the needs of local residents, businesses and environment. It will be appropriate for Overview and Scrutiny to consider how best the achievements of the Council can be used to influence local government services moving forward into the new Council.

Scrutiny Contact Details

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