Cheshire West & Chester Council

Overview and Scrutiny

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026



Overview & Scrutiny

Cheshire West and Chester

SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF SCRUTINY FOR 2024-2025

26
Committee Meetings held in public

88
Reports considered

288
Recommendations Made

138
Recommendations completed and closed

39
Scrutiny Councillors

19
In-depth reviews undertaken

48
Public speakers, guests, and witnesses

Plus regular attendance from Health colleagues from; Integrated Care Board, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership, NHS, Countess of Chester Hospital Trust, Mid-Cheshire Hospital Trust, North West Ambulance Service.

FOREWORD

As Statutory Scrutiny Officer, I am pleased to present this year's Combined Annual Scrutiny Report, bringing together the work of scrutiny has undertaken across the Council and its partnerships.

My role is to support and safeguard the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny, ensuring that Members are equipped to hold decision-makers to account, that scrutiny operates independently, and that it is grounded in clear evidence. I work closely with the Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Officer and Democratic Services colleagues to ensure committees are well supported, have access to robust information and data, and are able to challenge effectively.

Scrutiny in Cheshire West and Chester continues to benefit from a strong but independent relationship with Cabinet. Cabinet Members and senior officers engage positively with scrutiny and respond constructively to challenge, while Scrutiny Members retain the space to question, test decisions and highlight risks. This balance is important –scrutiny is most effective when it is both valued and able to provide independent challenge.

This year has once again demonstrated that scrutiny is at its strongest when it is focused, evidence-based and rooted in real experience, as shown by the work undertaken on SEND, mental health and contaminated land.

Across the Council scrutiny has continued to provide direct challenge on performance and spend. The Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out its regular reviews of corporate and financial performance and undertook detailed scrutiny of the Council's 2026/27 budget, testing whether savings are deliverable and whether resources are being used effectively.

Scrutiny has made a measurable difference. Across all four scrutiny committees, more than 280 recommendations were accepted, demonstrating that scrutiny continues to influence policy, improve reporting, strengthen governance arrangements and provide assurance on behalf of residents.

Examples this year include recommendations that shaped the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy, informed the development of the Local Transport Plan, strengthened scrutiny of social landlords, improved safeguarding reporting and supported improvements to neighbourhood services.

People Scrutiny has maintained a strong focus on children's services, adult social care and safeguarding. This has included challenge around the rising number of children in care, the financial pressures linked to complex placements, and the need to strengthen foster care recruitment and stability. Scrutiny has also tracked the Council's Children's Services improvement journey, ensuring progress is monitored over time.

Adult social care has remained a significant area of focus. Members have scrutinised the outcomes of the Care Quality Commission inspection, the Council's improvement plans and the sustainability of services. A particular priority has been hospital discharge, where Members have begun a detailed deep dive to understand delays, system pressures and the impact on residents.

Health Scrutiny has continued to grow in importance and complexity. Members have worked closely with NHS partners, scrutinising proposals for changes to mental health rehabilitation services, including the shift toward community-based care, increasing demand and the risks associated with these changes. The committee has also considered substantial service changes, including those relating to mental health provision and IVF treatment. A significant focus this year has been the Care Quality Commission findings at the Countess of Chester Hospital. Scrutiny has been clear that, while responsibility for delivery sits with the NHS, the Council has a statutory role in providing independent oversight on behalf of residents. Members will continue to monitor progress and provide constructive challenge as improvement plans are implemented. Scrutiny has also welcomed the positive engagement from the Trust's senior leadership team in responding openly to Members' questions. In carrying out this work, the Committee has been mindful of the lessons from the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Inquiry (Francis Report), where scrutiny was criticised for not providing sufficient challenge. This remains highly relevant.

Scrutiny has a clear responsibility to ask difficult questions, seek assurance, and ensure that patient safety, quality of care and lived experience are at the heart of its work. The Domestic Abuse Strategy Task Group made 10 recommendations to strengthen the draft strategy before Cabinet approval, including ensuring that survivor voices and the needs of minority groups are reflected in delivery. This demonstrates the role scrutiny can play in shaping policy.

Places Scrutiny has focused on issues that residents experience day to day. Work on neighbourhood nuisances such as litter, graffiti and fly-tipping led to 10 recommendations to improve services and strengthen community involvement.

A detailed review of the Community Safety Partnership, including its approach to serious violence and knife crime, strengthened engagement with partners such as Cheshire Police. Environmental issues have also featured more strongly, with scrutiny examining flooding and river pollution, responding to concerns raised by Members and communities, and identifying where greater accountability and partnership working is required. Members have also shaped major policy areas, including the Local Transport Plan, and undertaken a review of registered social landlords to respond to concerns about housing conditions.

The Committee also scrutinised the draft Cheshire and Warrington Local Nature Recovery Strategy before its consideration by Cabinet. Members examined how the strategy would help address biodiversity loss, improve access to green spaces and support wider climate change objectives. Scrutiny recommendations focused on reducing inequalities in access to green space, exploring innovative approaches to urban greening and ensuring progress is monitored through regular reporting arrangements.

Members also reviewed the Council's approach to Section 106 and infrastructure funding. This included scrutinising how developer contributions are identified, allocated and monitored. The Committee sought assurances around transparency, the involvement of local ward members and arrangements for overseeing infrastructure investment, resulting in recommendations for continued reporting and strengthened governance through the proposed Infrastructure Board.

Task groups and deep dives have been a key strength this year, enabling Members to explore complex issues in detail, including council-owned companies, mental health, hospital discharge and online safety. These have allowed Members to test governance, financial sustainability and service delivery, and to learn from best practice.
Scrutiny has also increasingly moved beyond the committee room. Members have undertaken a wide range of site visits and frontline engagement, including:

·Mid Cheshire Hospital and Countess of Chester Hospital
·North West Ambulance Service call handling centre
·Mental health wards and community hubs
·Children’s social care teams and Bridge Schools
·Community safety walkabouts and operational services

These visits have improved understanding of how services operate in practice and strengthened the quality of challenge from scrutiny.

There has also been a focus on raising the profile of scrutiny and sharing good practice. The work of the People Scrutiny Committee has been recognised externally, with Members speaking at Local Government Association training and a North West Employers session on their SEND review, sharing their approach and the impact of their work. The quarterly Scrutiny Newsletter has also helped to communicate activity and outcomes more widely.

As part of my statutory responsibilities, I ensure that scrutiny remains transparent and accessible. Meetings are held in public, webcasts are available, and residents are encouraged to contribute. We will continue to build on this to engage more widely, particularly with younger people.

As we move into an election year, there will be a clear focus on completing current work. All task groups will aim to conclude and follow up recommendations by February/March 2027, ensuring that progress is evidenced and outcomes are clear.
The Scrutiny Manager will also begin planning a programme of training and development for new and returning Members from May 2027, drawing on lessons learned from this term to ensure Members are well prepared for their role from the outset.

This report demonstrates that scrutiny is making a real difference through informed challenge, detailed work, and recommendations that are being accepted and acted upon.
I will continue to work with the Scrutiny Manager and team to ensure that scrutiny is properly supported, remains independent, and plays its full role in strengthening governance and accountability across the Council.

I would like to thank all Members, officers and partners who have contributed to scrutiny this year.

Penny Housley
Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Cheshire West and Chester Council

SCRUTINY CHAIRS



Councillor Martin Barker

Chair of Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsible for holding to account those who deliver services on a borough wide basis and cross-cutting issues impacting the Council and the Borough as a whole.



Councillor Katie Kendrick OBE

Chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsible for reviewing any matter that has an impact on Statutory Scrutiny Responsibilities relating to Health Services.



Councillor Sam Naylor

Chair of Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsible for holding to account those who deliver all place-based services including environment, localities, regeneration, and growth.



Councillor Patricia Parkes

Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Responsible for holding to account those who deliver services based on individual need to children and adults, including health and wellbeing and education services.

CONTEXT

The scrutiny function is crucial in scrutinising the services and performance framework of Cheshire West and Chester Council. The Council operates four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each focusing on specific areas aligned with the council's directorates and priorities outlined in the Borough Plan:

- Cheshire West and Chester (Corporate)
- Health
- People
- Places

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee also appoints Statutory Parent Governor Representatives, who contribute to education-related scrutiny matters. Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held regularly, they are open to the public, and broadcast live on the council's website. Officers, partners, local organisations, health professionals, and witnesses are often invited to share information and respond to members' inquiries. Members of the scrutiny committees play an important role in holding Cabinet Members accountable for their decisions.

Scrutiny activities range from formal committee meetings, briefing notes and task groups/deep dives focusing on specific topics. Local Authorities are required to publish an Annual Scrutiny Report to demonstrate their work. Each of the four Scrutiny Committees produces individual reports, culminating in this summary report. The scrutiny function at Cheshire West and Chester Council is supported by the Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Officer, and Democratic Services Officers who are part of the Governance Directorate's Democratic Services Team. The scrutiny function also receives a lot of support from Senior Managers and Service Managers of the Council, along with partner organisations.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

During the year, the Scrutiny function has continued to strengthen its approach to evidence-based challenge by increasing direct engagement with services, partners, and seeing frontline activity firsthand. Scrutiny Councillors and Officers have made a deliberate effort to move beyond the committee room and virtual meeting environment, undertaking a programme of site visits and engagement activity designed to enhance Members' understanding of service delivery and partnership working across the borough.

Site visits and direct engagement increasingly form an important part of the Council's scrutiny work. During the year, Members visited operational depots, hospitals, mental health facilities, children's services teams and community safety operations. These visits enabled Members to speak directly with frontline staff and partners, helping to ensure that scrutiny is informed by practical experience as well as written reports and performance data

Members of the Places and Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee visited the Canalside Depot, where they were introduced to the Council's new street maintenance fleet and received detailed information on how operational data is used to inform service





As part of the Annual Review of the Community Safety Partnership, Members of the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee participated in an operational exercise alongside Cheshire Police and Council enforcement officers in Chester City Centre. This engagement enabled Members to observe frontline community safety activity and to better understand the use of detection dogs in identifying potential banned substances. The visit enhanced Members' understanding of joint enforcement arrangements and the collaborative approach taken to address community safety issues within the city.

Members of the Health and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees also undertook a series of site visits during the year, reflecting the importance of close engagement with health and care partners. These included visits to the newly opened Seren Lodge and the Women and Children's Building at the Countess of Chester Hospital, the Victoria Infirmary Hospital in Northwich, and the North West Ambulance Service Headquarters in Speke.

These visits provided the opportunity for Members to engage directly with NHS colleagues, gain assurance on the development of modern facilities, and understand how services are evolving to meet the needs of residents. Further information on these and other visits is outlined in the Committees section of this report.



Alongside this programme of visits, outreach and engagement have remained a core priority for the Scrutiny function. The Scrutiny Bulletin continues to be distributed to an increasingly wide audience and is now shared with all Town and Parish Councils across Cheshire West and Chester. Five quarterly bulletins have been published to date and remain accessible to residents and other interested stakeholders via the Scrutiny pages of the Council's website:

https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/your-council/councillors-and-committees/scrutiny

Scrutiny activity during the year has also been informed by engagement with a record number of external witnesses, partners, and contributors. These have included representatives from Cheshire Police, the NHS, the voluntary and community sector, residents and members of the public, community groups, and other local authorities. In addition, both the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee formally considered petitions submitted to the Council, providing Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the Council's responses on behalf of those residents who had signed them.

Scrutiny Councillors and Officers would like to formally record their appreciation to all individuals and organisations who contributed to the scrutiny process throughout the year. Constructive engagement and the sharing of insight and experience play a vital role in supporting effective scrutiny and enable Members to develop informed, meaningful, and impactful recommendations that support continuous improvement and accountability.

THE COMMITTEES

Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny

This Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those who deliver services on a borough-wide basis and cross-cutting issues impacting on the Council and borough as a whole. This includes effectiveness and delivery of borough-wide services and strategies, Council owned companies, overall performance and the annual budget development and consultation process.

A Summary of work undertaken by the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25:

As in other years, the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook its twice-yearly scrutiny of performance and financial performance. Amidst continuing national and local challenges faced by Local Government it has remained of crucial importance that the Councils performance and financial strategies are meticulously reviewed and challenged where appropriate to ensure that the Council continues to be well managed and is spending its money in the most effective manner to deliver for the boroughs residents.

Every year, the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinise the Council's proposed annual budget before it is received and approved by Cabinet and Council. Throughout the financial year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinise the Council's finances via the items it receives. However, the annual scrutiny exercise held in February is a crucial tool allowing scrutiny to fulfil its role in providing its residents with assurance about how the Council reaches its financial decisions.

A Task Group was established to scrutinise the Council Owned Companies draft annual business plans each year. The exercise is split into two task group meetings to allow the Task Group members ample time to hear from each companies' Chair and Managing Director.



The Task Group were presented with information highlighting the performance, achievements and challenges for 2025-26 and their plans and visions for 2026-27. Another Task Group report, on Registered Social Landlords, was considered by the Committee at the beginning of the municipal year.

This review was initiated in response to growing concerns from both Councillors and residents regarding the performance of some social housing providers in our borough. These concerns were brought into sharper focus by the tragic death of Awaab Ishak and the subsequent introduction of Awaab's Law, which has rightly placed a renewed emphasis on the safety and quality of social housing. Ultimately, the goal was to ensure that every resident in Cheshire West and Chester has access to a safe, well-maintained, and dignified home. This report was a step towards that goal with several recommendations being accepted by the Cabinet Member at the Committee the Task Group report was presented at.

Health Overview and Scrutiny

This Scrutiny Committee is responsible for undertaking the Council's statutory scrutiny responsibilities relating to planning, provision and operation of health services across Cheshire West and Chester. This involves reviewing the work Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, health providers other health sector organisations.

A Summary of work undertaken by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25:

As part of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees statutory requirement, the Committee received Quality Accounts from the four health care providers in the borough: The Countess of Chester Hospital Trust, Mid Cheshire Hospital Trust, Northwest Ambulance Service and Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust. The Committee welcomed colleagues from each of the four organisations and received presentations summarising highlights from their accounts. The presentations focused on their performance, quality standards, successes and areas for improvement.

A significant area of scrutiny this year was the Countess of Chester Hospital's improvement journey following a number of Care Quality Commission inspections, including a warning notice issued in April 2025. Members scrutinised the Trust's plans to strengthen safeguarding arrangements, improve patient safety and support staff. The Committee made five recommendations and sought assurances that issues relating to fundamental safety procedures would be addressed and sustained. The Trust's improvement programme will remain a priority for scrutiny during 2026-27.



In November 2025 NHS England issued an Enforcement Notice on NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB due to concerns about failures or risks in discharging statutory duties under the NHS Act 2006, relating mainly to financial planning, quality governance and leadership capacity. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard that the ICB were responding by creating a set of actions to address highlighted issues including formalising steps in their governance to ensure sufficient scrutiny and coherence across the organisation as well as having tighter control on financial decision making.

The Committee recognised that the ICB were at the early stages of the enforcement process and will scrutinise the ICBs progress in 2026-2027.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee also scrutinised NHS England's Enforcement Notice issued to Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board. Members reviewed concerns relating to leadership, governance and financial planning and made clear that improvement must be demonstrated at pace. The Committee will continue to monitor progress during 2026-27 to ensure residents can have confidence in the governance of local NHS services.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised an update on the national direction of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT). In line with the NHS ten-year plan, INTs were part of a major shift in England's health and care model, moving away from a predominantly hospital centric system to integrated, community-based neighbourhood care. Working within national guidance, The NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) had set out a framework for the types of services which could be provided locally. The Committee heard about the core components of the neighbourhood approach including standardising community health services and integrated intermediate care with a 'home first' approach. The Committee has recommended that they receive Primary Care Network (PCN) and data maps so that they can feed into the co-production of INTs locally.

Cheshire West and Chester has a higher proportion of older adults than national averages and in 2024, around 3,500 of the boroughs residents aged 65 and over received a dementia diagnosis. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. With this in mind the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the current provision and pathways for dementia care. The Committee heard how diagnosis was undertaken in the boroughs Memory Clinics, about the services provided by dementia specialist nurses, as well as services provided by the Alzheimer's Society and Cheshire and Wirral Partnership (CWP). Ageing Well and Urgent Care Cheshire and Merseyside were working alongside CWP to produce standard operating procedures for Memory Clinics and to produce a Cheshire West Dementia Strategy; the Committee plans scrutinise the strategy at its meeting in June 2026.

Joint work between the Health and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees focused on Children's and Young People's Mental Health Services. Members examined access to support, waiting times, provision for neurodiverse young people and arrangements for transition into adult services. Further joint scrutiny has been scheduled to ensure improvements continue and that young people receive the support they need at the right time.

Finally, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in conjunction with the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, scrutinised Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Services (CYPMHS). Members received updates on the Mental Health Hub which is designed to streamline access to services for young people, and the boroughs four Mental Health Support Teams and how they support around 8,000 of the boroughs young people in school settings. The Committee heard about the priorities for CYPMHS including the expansion of early interventions, improved transitions, greater community and voluntary integration and further digital innovation. The Committee sought reassurance that referrers weren't facing barriers when accessing services and neurodiverse young people were being supported while they waited for treatment. Through the development of the planned NHS Integrated neighbourhood model, there would be multiagency coordination of Mental Health Services and a pilot of the Integrated Neighbourhood model for Children and Young People was being developed within the Blacon and Lache areas of Chester.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has invited Cheshire West Integrated Care Board (ICB) to present an update on the delivery and outcomes of the pilot in 2026-2027. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue their joint working, having agreed to undertake a further review focusing on the support for young people transitioning from Children's to Adults Mental Health Services.

People Overview and Scrutiny

This Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those who deliver services based on individual needs to children and adults. The committee reviews and makes recommendations for improvement to any matter that have an impact on the educational needs, safety or health and wellbeing of people in Cheshire West and Chester. This includes responsibilities in relation to education, social care and safeguarding, welfare rights, healthy life and lifestyle choices and integration of services with partner organisations. The committee is also responsible for reviewing performance relating to Children's and Adults Services such as OFSTED reports. The committee appoints statutory Parent Governor Representatives relating to education matters.

A Summary of work undertaken by the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25:

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee have continued to scrutinise the decisions, policies and procedures that are in place to protect the most vulnerable in our borough and ensure all residents are living happy, healthy lives. As in previous years, the committee received the Adult Social Care Safeguarding and Performance Report and the Children and Families Safeguarding and Performance Report and discussed changes in statutory notifications, domestic abuse trends, social worker caseloads, staffing improvements, and support for care leavers, with officers providing reassurance about information-sharing, service capacity, and multiagency working. Recommendations for further information on caseload ranges, Intervention Hubs, and accommodation for care leavers ensured the continued scrutiny of these crucial services. The committee were also able to provide the Service Areas with valuable advice on the layout and content of the safeguarding reports, including suggestions for executive summaries, simplified formats, and increased use of data, to ensure that stakeholders were able to get the most out of these annual reports.



This years' work programme coincided with the recent Care Quality Commission inspection of Adult Social Care Services in the Council and so the committee were able to discuss the outcomes and judgement of the inspection and pass on their praise to all Council officers who were involved with the process.

Linked to the Council inspection was an item on Adult Social Care Providers who the same Care Quality Commission had rated as inadequate; the committee reviewed how the Council's robust internal quality assurance processes–supported by regular multiagency oversight meetings, annual assessments, unannounced visits, and early intervention systems–ensure that inadequate care services are identified without relying solely on delayed CQC inspections. Members received assurances on provider improvement work, whistleblowing procedures, recruitment challenges, and the importance of strong relationships with care homes, and agreed actions including improved member training and writing to the CQC and Government about lengthy inspection delays.

The Committee also considered how the Council monitors care providers that have received an inadequate Care Quality Commission rating. Members scrutinised the Council's quality assurance arrangements, provider improvement processes and safeguarding responses. Following scrutiny, Members requested additional training opportunities and agreed to raise concerns with national bodies regarding delays in inspection activity where this impacts public assurance.

As part of its work this year, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the rising number of Children in Care and its budget impact, noting that although local rates remained above national levels, they were falling and lower than regional averages, with complex needs placements creating significant cost pressures. Members explored challenges in foster carer recruitment–particularly for children with complex needs–highlighting the need for a refreshed strategy, scrutiny of fostering processes, and national action to address societal and economic barriers. They also discussed kinship care efforts, the impact of "staying put" arrangements on placement availability and agreed to form a Task Group to examine the fostering process. The Committee was also able to scrutinise progress on the supported internship pilot for young people without EHCPs, praising its success, supporting its expansion, and requesting a future update whilst encouraging wider promotion to Children in Care and greater involvement from Council companies. The committee were able to make several impactful recommendations as part of their scrutiny of Children's Services, including suggesting Officers work on improving stability within assignment of Social Works as well as giving children and families more notice when their social worker might change to reduce uncertainty and so that there is an opportunity for children to say goodbye to the social workers who have contributed to their care. The committee also pushed for the strengthening of support networks and ensuring children's views were shared and acted upon throughout a young person's journey through the care system.

During the year, the Committee also reviewed educational outcomes and challenges across the borough. Annual scrutiny focused on attendance, exclusions and suspensions, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Education Health and Care Plans and support available to vulnerable learners. Members requested additional monitoring of exclusion trends and agreed further work to understand and reduce the gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers.
The Committee reviewed exclusions and suspensions data, noting a national post covid rise in permanent exclusions and discussing contributing factors such as unidentified SEND, higher exclusion rates among children eligible for free school meals, substance misuse, and mental health needs. The committee was able to explore challenges around early intervention, the need to relocate and expand The Bridge Short Stay School, the absence of local alternative provision, and opportunities to use future spare classroom capacity for support programmes. Recommendations included requesting more detailed future reporting, including demographic and seasonal trends, and it was agreed to form a Task Group to examine how to close the exclusion gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils.

A new topic that the committee explored this year that had was an update on rising levels of self-neglect and hoarding, noting that the behaviours often overlap, stem from complex individual causes, and present increasing demands on Council resources. The committee were able to hear how cases in the borough had doubled within the past 12-months, that identification relied heavily on public reporting, and that further benchmarking and awareness raising were needed, particularly given links to mental health and the sensitivity required in responding. The committee requested improved communication strategies and agreed to receive a further update as work to combat this challenging issue continued.

The Committee also undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the draft Domestic Abuse Strategy 2026-2030. A dedicated Task Group heard evidence from officers and partners and made ten recommendations to strengthen the strategy before Cabinet approval. These included ensuring survivor voices remained central to delivery, improving engagement with minority communities and reviewing implementation progress after the strategy had been adopted.

Places Overview and Scrutiny

This Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those who deliver all place-based services including environment, localities, regeneration, and growth. The committee reviews and makes recommendations for improvement in relation to any matter that has an impact on the physical, geographical, and economic needs of the borough. This includes flood management, crime and disorder, highways, street scene, locality working and regeneration and growth.

A Summary of work undertaken by the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25:

This year, The Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the Councils approach to regeneration across the borough, looking at significant programmes of and reviewing the outcomes of regeneration activities for communities. Major regeneration programmes were scrutinised including Chester Northgate, Winsford (phase 1), Ellesmere port Town Centre and Northwich Weaver Square. The Committee heard about the approach to partnership working with communities, businesses, voluntary and community sector and how the Council communicated its regeneration work to local residents. Following scrutiny, the Committee made five recommendations to the Cabinet Member including that rural communities are engaged with and that any investment and economic development schemes undertaken in rural communities are better and more consistently communicated so that the concerns of rural communities are heard.



During work programming for the 2025-2026 municipal year, Members of the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for greater scrutiny of the issues impacting the Council mission of Neighbourhood Pride, namely fly-tipping, graffiti and littering. The Committee began a Task Group review in late 2025, visiting the Canalside Operations Depot in Ellesmere Port where they talked directly to StreetCare staff and saw the new fleet of street cleaning vehicles.

The Committee heard how data and technology integration was used to allocate jobs and how volunteers and the community were supporting Council efforts. The Task Group also received an overview of the work of Public Protection Services including environmental health, licensing, trading standards, CCTV and environmental crime. Ten recommendations were presented to the Cabinet Member focusing on improving engagement with third parties, better supporting Parish and Town Councils who want to act themselves and making improvements to the 'Report it' app to provide greater clarity for residents using it.

In March 2023, Cabinet committed to develop a new vision-led Local Transport Plan. The first part of this was subject to public consultation and the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee commenced a Task Group to feed into the draft Core Strategy at this early stage. The Task Group suggested six recommendations, all of which directly impacted the updated Core Strategy. These included that the service considers additional engagement with Councillors to ensure that they all have the opportunity to feed in on behalf of their residents and that future amendments to the plan consider the implications of future technologies like driverless vehicles or transport on water courses. The final draft of the Core Strategy was presented to the Committee in October 2025 for further scrutiny, prior to it being received by Cabinet and Council and the Committee made an additional five recommendations, including that Cabinet approve the updated plan.

The Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook its annual review of the CSP, with its focus this year being on serious violence in the borough. This year, as well as scrutinising the CSP performance, the review was also tasked with assessing a motion brought to Council in December 2024 on Knife Crime. The Task Group were invited by Cheshire Police to observe a live operation in Chester, touring Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) hotspots and the CCTV control room. As part of the review, the Task Group received a strategic overview of the serious violence duty, reviewed findings from the serious violence Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) and scrutinised commissioned interventions and community engagement, as well as the localised crime composition and risk factors. Following additional scrutiny of knife crime, the review ultimately resulted in ten recommendations accepted by the Cabinet Member. These included exploring the introduction of knife surrender bins at Household Waste Recycling Centres and strengthening preventative work with partners and communities.

At its meeting on 20 February 2025, Council agreed that the existing policy on 20mph speed limits outside educational establishments be reviewed. At its meetings in March and June 2025 the Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed and collated data on speed limits, collisions and survey results and made recommendations for approval at Cabinet.

As part of the review, the Committee heard from representatives of the 'Make Wrexham Road Safe' campaign and the '20s Plenty' Chester group, as well as representatives from Cheshire Police who answered questions around the enforcement of 20mph speed limits. The Committee made four recommendations to Cabinet which included that Cabinet consider undertaking a wider review of the Councils Core Speed Limit Policy and that the Cabinet Member write to the relevant Minister in the Department for Transport to request a review of the guidance provided to Councils on speed limit policies.

In January 2025, Cabinet noted the work being done on the development of a boroughwide contaminated land strategy and requested that Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee add scrutiny to the development of the strategy and its work programme. A Cabinet Task and Finish Group had been established, and the Committee considered the work that they had undertaken and reviewed their timetable of future works. The Committee shared with Officers the concerns of residents within the Lache Ward regarding a historic landfill site and recommended that these be investigated by the Task and Finish Group. The Committee also recommended that Officers consider the introduction of a contingency fund for the implementation of investigations in the absence of Central Government Funding. Two members of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee have now joined the Cabinet Task and Finish Group, and the Committee look forward to receiving updates on this important work during the 2026-2027 municipal year.

Members also scrutinised major regeneration programmes across the borough including Chester Northgate, Ellesmere Port Town Centre, Winsford and Northwich. The review focused on community engagement, economic impact and communication with local residents. Recommendations included strengthening engagement with rural communities and improving communication around economic development projects.

Following a referral from Full Council, the Committee reviewed the Council's approach to 20mph speed limits outside educational establishments. Members considered collision data, public feedback and evidence from campaign groups and Cheshire Police before making recommendations which were subsequently accepted by the Cabinet Member.

THE IMPACT OF SCRUTINY

- Over 280 recommendations accepted across four scrutiny committees.
- Domestic Abuse Strategy strengthened before Cabinet approval.
- Local Transport Plan influenced before adoption.
- Additional scrutiny added to Countess of Chester Hospital improvement plans.
- Recommendations made following scrutiny of NHS Quality Accounts.
- Improvements proposed to neighbourhood nuisance services.
- Greater oversight of social landlords following a dedicated review.
- Continued monitoring established for major strategies and programmes.

Key Achievements

During 2025-26, Overview and Scrutiny continued to play an important role in helping to improve services, strengthen accountability and influence decision-making across Cheshire West and Chester.

Influencing Policy and Decision-Making
Scrutiny provided constructive challenge on a number of major strategies and policy developments before decisions were taken. This included detailed reviews of the Council's Budget, the Local Transport Plan, the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and a range of place-based, health and safeguarding initiatives. Through recommendations and pre-decision scrutiny, Members were able to influence proposals and ensure that the interests of residents were properly considered throughout the decision-making process.

Holding Services and Partners to Account
Scrutiny continued to provide independent challenge and assurance across Council services and partner organisations. Members held Cabinet Members, senior officers, NHS organisations, Cheshire Police, council-owned companies and other partners to account for performance, governance and service delivery. Particular attention was given to financial sustainability, safeguarding, health service performance, neighbourhood issues and major regeneration programmes.

Delivering Recommendations That Make a Difference
Across the four scrutiny committees, more than 280 recommendations were made during the year, with a significant number accepted and progressed.

These recommendations helped strengthen local policies, improve reporting and governance arrangements, increase transparency and ensure that services remain focused on the needs of residents. Scrutiny also established ongoing monitoring arrangements for a number of key programmes to ensure improvements continue beyond a single committee meeting.

Listening to Residents and Communities
Many of the issues scrutinised during the year originated from concerns raised by residents, councillors, campaign groups and local communities. Scrutiny considered petitions, received evidence from external witnesses and invited contributions from residents and partner organisations. This helped ensure that local experiences and concerns directly informed committee discussions, reviews and recommendations.

Strengthening Evidence Through Direct Engagement
Members increasingly complemented committee reports with site visits and direct engagement with frontline staff and service users. Visits to hospitals, operational depots, mental health services, community safety operations and children's services teams provided valuable insight into how services operate in practice. This helped ensure that scrutiny was based not only on performance data and written reports, but also on first-hand experience and evidence.

Supporting Better Outcomes for Residents
Whether reviewing social landlords, scrutinising NHS improvement plans, examining knife crime and community safety, strengthening safeguarding arrangements or influencing major strategic plans, scrutiny remained focused on achieving better outcomes for residents. Through constructive challenge, evidence-based recommendations and ongoing monitoring, Scrutiny has continued to be a valued part of the Council's governance framework and a strong voice for the communities it serves.

Delivering Tangible Improvements Through Recommendations
Scrutiny continued to demonstrate its value through practical recommendations that were accepted and implemented during the year. These included recommendations to strengthen the Domestic Abuse Strategy, improve neighbourhood cleanliness and environmental enforcement, enhance transparency around infrastructure funding, improve safeguarding reporting, strengthen oversight of social landlords and support the ongoing development of the Local Transport Plan. Members also secured additional monitoring arrangements in several service areas to ensure that recommendations continue to be tracked and reviewed after decisions have been made

SCRUTINY MEMBERS



Councillor Steve Collings
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Sherin Akhtar
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Matt Carter
Places & Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Hugo Deynem
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Keith Millar
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee & Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Mark Stocks
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Lucy Sumner
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Adrian Waddelove
Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Paul Chamberlain
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Tom Cooper
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Gillian Edwards
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Gina Lewis
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Elizabeth MacGlashan
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Gaynor Sinar
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Chris Copeman
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Mike Jones
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Martin Beveridge
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Felicity Davies
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Mandy Clare
People & Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Michael Garvey
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Margaret Parker
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Alan Smith
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor John Stockton
People & Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Alex Tate
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Dan Marr
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Simon Eardley
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Caroline Ellis
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Katrina Kerr
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor John Roach
People & Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Rachel Waterman
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Mark Williams
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Kris Fisher
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Martin Loftus
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee

LOOKING FORWARD

During 2026-27 Scrutiny will continue to focus on major issues affecting residents, including health service improvement, Children's Services, hospital discharge, fostering, knife crime, contaminated land, infrastructure funding, regeneration and delivery of the Council's Borough Plan priorities.
Building on the work undertaken during the past year, Scrutiny will continue to evolve its approach to ensure it delivers meaningful impact, adds value to decision-making, and improves outcomes for residents. National guidance and sector best practice emphasise that effective scrutiny is forward-looking, focused on priority issues, and rooted in a clear sense of purpose and impact.

A continued focus on impact and value
In the coming year, the Scrutiny function will place a renewed emphasis on ensuring that its work is targeted, proportionate, and demonstrably impactful. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) highlights the importance of prioritising the “right things in the right way” and ensuring that scrutiny activities lead to tangible improvements for local people.

This will include:

- Strengthening the use of evidence-based inquiry and clear recommendations.
- Enhancing arrangements for tracking and evaluating the impact of scrutiny recommendations.
- Focusing member time on strategic, high-value issues rather than operational detail.

Strengthening work programming and prioritisation
Effective work planning remains the foundation of successful scrutiny. In line with best practice, the next year will see further development of the annual work programme to ensure it aligns with:

- The Council’s corporate priorities and emerging risks.
- The forward plan of the Executive, enabling more timely pre-decision scrutiny.
- The views and concerns of residents and stakeholders.

The use of clear priority themes–such as resident impact or financial sustainability will support members in selecting and shaping scrutiny topics, ensuring a consistent focus on areas where scrutiny can add greatest value.

Enhancing the voice of residents and partners
With a year that has included record numbers of external witnesses and site visits to location across the borough, it has been clear that effective scrutiny should amplify the voices and concerns of the public. In the year ahead, scrutiny will:

- Strengthen engagement with residents, service users, and community organisations.
- Continue to make use of expert witnesses and partner organisations in reviews.
- Ensure that lived experience informs scrutiny inquiries and recommendations.

Developing relationships and organisational culture
A positive organisational culture–where challenge is welcomed and valued–is central to effective scrutiny. Over the next year, the Scrutiny function will continue to:

- Strengthen constructive working relationships between scrutiny, the Executive, and senior officers.
- Promote a shared understanding of the role and value of scrutiny across the organisation.
- Encourage early engagement between scrutiny and decision-makers to influence policy and strategy development.

By reinforcing scrutiny's role as a "critical friend", the function can contribute more effectively to robust, transparent decision-making.

The coming year presents both challenges and opportunities for Overview and Scrutiny. With a condensed timetable for committees and Task Group meetings due to the upcoming Local Elections in May 2027, it is important that Scrutiny Councillors maintain a strong focus on prioritisation, impact, engagement, and constructive challenge, the Council's scrutiny function will continue to play a vital role in supporting transparent governance, improving services, and delivering better outcomes for residents.

The work outlined in this report demonstrates that effective scrutiny is about more than holding decision-makers to account. It helps improve services, informs policy development, strengthens governance and ensures that the voices of residents are heard. Through constructive challenge and evidence-based recommendations, scrutiny has continued to play an important role in supporting better outcomes for the people of Cheshire West and Chester

GETTING INVOLVED

If you have any suggestions for topics that scrutiny or would like to contribute to a review could consider please do let us know.

All reports considered at Scrutiny Committees, along with the minutes and recordings of the meetings, are available at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk.

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