



Overview & Scrutiny

Scrutiny Bulletin

Cheshire West and Chester Councils Quarterly Scrutiny Newsletter
Spring 2025

Welcome to the second edition of the quarterly scrutiny newsletter for Cheshire West and Chester Council. Its purpose is to help keep residents, Councillors, officers, and key stakeholders in Cheshire West borough updated on the work of the Councils' scrutiny function. Each edition will highlight the work of the scrutiny committees, feature comments from the scrutiny Chairs, and include a preview of upcoming Task Groups and Spotlight Reviews. We also hope to bring you special features, interviews with scrutiny members, and details on how to get involved in the scrutiny process, keeping you connected with the decisions that the Council makes.

Scrutiny of the Councils Budget

Every year, the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises 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 scrutinises 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.

The budget that the Council sets has an impact on all the boroughs residents, whether it's how bins are collected, the availability of leisure and library facilities, how highways are maintained, how social care is provided, or changes to Council Tax rates. Scrutiny provides reassurance for residents that the Council achieves value for money, Council resources are allocated effectively, and that the Council is focusing on the right priorities. Scrutiny challenges the Cabinet over its management of the Council's finances, providing transparency for residents in how the budget is allocated and why.

This year's budget exercise saw Councillors scrutinise the budget report and Council Tax setting policies for 2025-26 as well as the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2026-2029. Each year, the Council's Cabinet and Executive Directors are invited to attend the Budget Scrutiny meeting, meaning the questions asked by committee members can be answered by each relevant responsible portfolio holder in turn.

For the 2025-2026 budget scrutiny exercise, Members of the scrutiny committee were particularly interested to hear about proposed changes to Council Tax rates, the Cabinet's plans to keep up increased demands on services and subsequent growth pressures, and how sustainable the Councils reserve funds were predicted to be.

A total of eight recommendations were made. Councillors requested further scrutiny of parts of the budget such as the Invest to Save programme, debt management strategies, and the spread of Capital Projects across the borough, all of which will be appearing on scrutiny agendas at some point this year.

You can find out more by viewing past meeting minutes from Budget Scrutiny meetings on the Council's website.

[Click here](#)

A summary of scrutiny's ongoing and pending reviews

A summary of the scrutiny activities Cheshire West and Chester Council's four scrutiny committees (Cheshire West and Chester; Places; People and Health) are currently focusing on:

- Access to mental health services for children and young people
- A review of patient discharge from acute hospitals
- Home to School Transport
- The Annual Scrutiny Review of the Community Safety Partnership - with a focus this year on knife crime
- The Invest to Save programme
- Capital and Economic Growth Projects

If you would like to submit any evidence or take part in any of the reviews as a witness, please get in touch with us using the contact details at the bottom of the bulletin.

Scrutiny committee agendas look-ahead

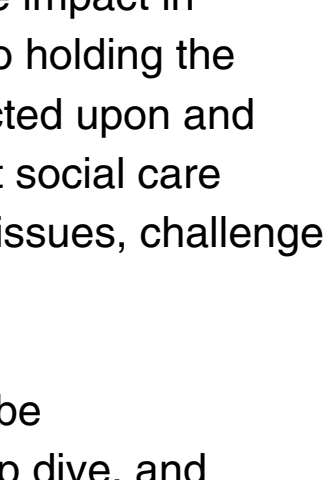
In their upcoming meetings, the Council's four scrutiny committees will be considering the following topics:

Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee	2 June 2025	Scrutiny of the Councils Performance Measures Climate Emergency Council Owned Companies
	21 July 2025	Debt Management Flood Risk Management
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	4 June 2025	Children in Care Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Ofsted - Inspecting local authority children's services
	14 July 2025	Domestic Abuse Strategy Safeguarding of Adults and Children NEET Numbers (Number of people not in education, employment, or training)
Places Overview and Scrutiny Committee	9 June 2025	Speed Limits Outside Schools Tenant / Leaseholder Engagement
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	17 June 2025	Quality Accounts - Countess of Chester Hospital Quality Accounts - Mid Cheshire Hospital Trust
	19 June 2025	Quality Accounts - Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Quality Accounts - Ambulance Service

the above details are correct at time of publishing - work programmes are subject to change

Updates from the Scrutiny Chairs

"As Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I am proud of the work that the committee undertakes in scrutinising and making recommendations to help improve Council services that so many of the boroughs' residents rely on. The Committee's work programme is split between scrutinising children and adult services.



It also has oversight of public health issues that along with key services that ensure that our residents are kept safe, resilient and well.

The Care Quality Commission's (CQC) new local authority assessments allow them to provide independent assurance on the quality of care in their local area. As part of the Care Act (2014) Part 1, the CQC now assesses how local authorities meet their statutory duties in relation to adult social care. As part of Cheshire West and Chester Council's CQC Inspection on 4 February 2025, I was interviewed by Inspectors about the work of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The main takeaways from the interview for me were the importance of ensuring scrutiny was having an impact. Therefore, as Chair I will be ensuring that the Committee's work demonstrates a positive impact in supporting Cabinet, service providers and residents, whilst also holding the Cabinet to account to ensure that our recommendations are acted upon and visible to the public. I want to ensure that adults receiving adult social care services have a voice and that scrutiny is informed on the key issues, challenges and decisions facing adult social care.

Scrutiny has a duty to respond when services may be seen to be underperforming and as such, the Committee undertook a deep dive, and scrutinised services and support provided to Special Education Needs and Disabled Children and Young People (SEND). SEND is a big issue affecting the education sector and the number of pupils with SEND appears to be increasing. As part of the review the Scrutiny Task Group engaged with local parents and carers, third sector organisations, key partners, and Council services to examine the current SEND provision and explored the different approaches used to address current challenges. As a result of the review, forty-five recommendations were made which the Committee is monitoring the implementation of.

The Scrutiny Committee will also be having oversight of the implementation of the Action Plan which was developed in response to the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services (ILAC's).

The Committee's priorities for the new municipal year will be Domestic Violence, Homelessness and County Lines, and working jointly with Health Scrutiny Committee on their scrutiny review of mental health services.

The Committee will shortly be setting its annual work programme which I am keen to ensure is inclusive and reflects the priorities of the Council.

Councillor Patricia Parkes - Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Parent Governor Representation

To allow parents of children at maintained schools within their local areas to have an apolitical voice on local education matters and to hold Councils to account regarding education policy and decision-making, the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 enables Parent Governors to be co-opted onto local Council educational scrutiny committees.

In January 2025, People Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed three new statutory Parent Governor Representatives for a two-year term of office. The recently appointed representatives are:

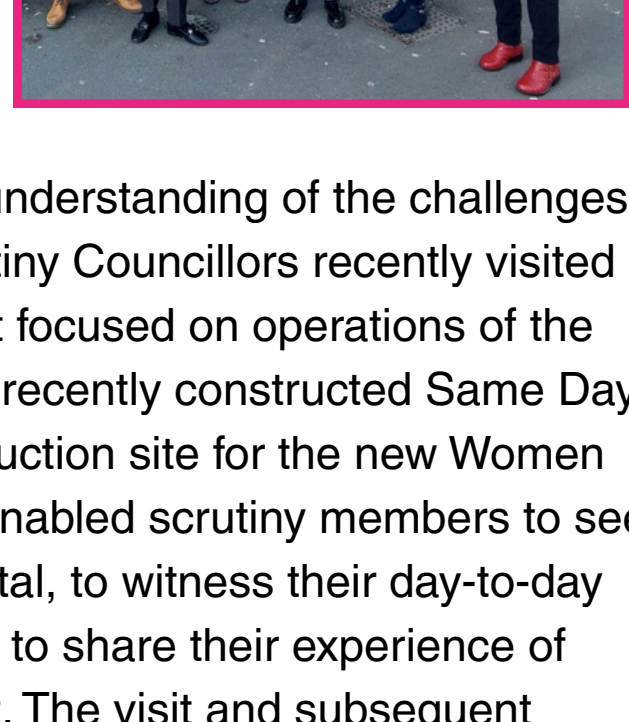
- Kim Bilcliffe – Parent Governor, Rosebank School
- Alexandra Hutchinson – Parent Governor, Hinderton School
- Nicola Lasikiewicz – Parent Governor, Mickle Trafford Village School

Parent Governor representatives are full members of the committee and are encouraged to participate in debates on any of the items on the scrutiny committee's agenda, though they can only vote on issues relating to the Council's education functions such as school transport, school admissions, and attainment. Parent Governors cannot get involved with an individual or specific case, nor any issues about a specific child.

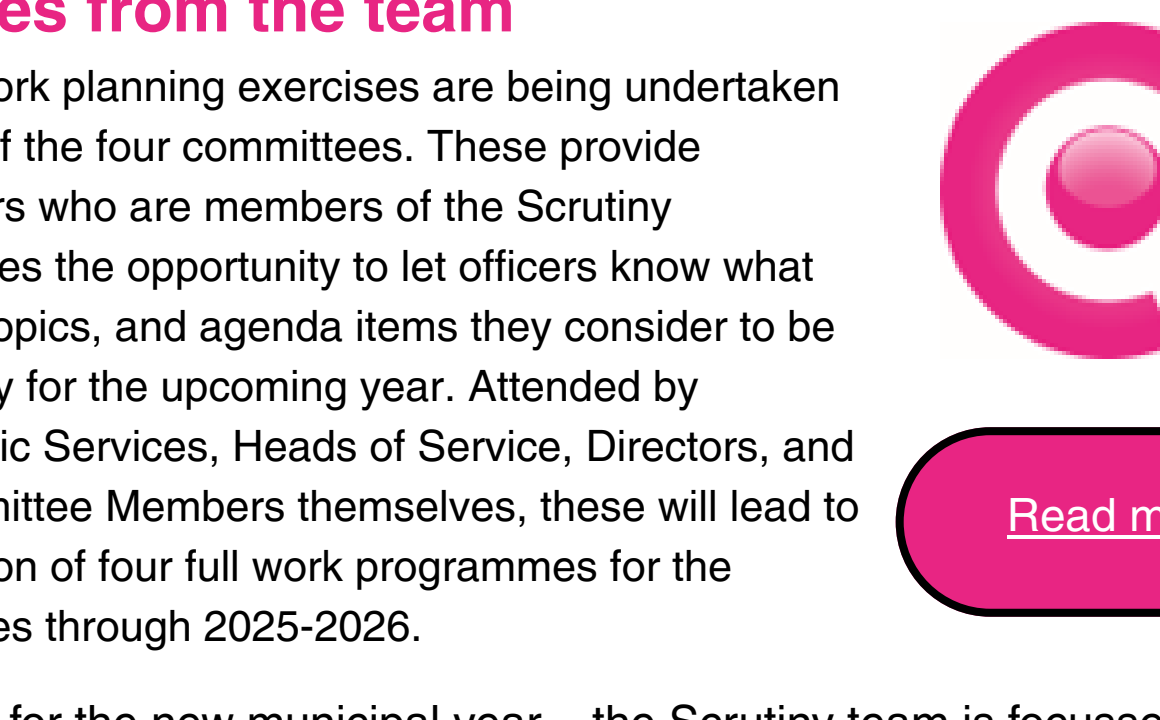
As a critical friend, Parent Governor representatives can hold Cheshire West and Chester Council to account by consulting with and feeding back to parents on discussions and decisions relating to education. If you are a parent in the borough and would like to contact a Parent Governor in relation to an education matter, you can do so via the contact details at the bottom of this bulletin.

Quarterly Case Study - Patient Flow and Discharge at Acute Hospitals

The topic of discharge and patient flow for in-patients at acute hospitals has been raised several times at both Health and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Patient flow impacts the availability of beds and ambulance hand-over times. Both scrutiny committees have been receiving regular updates and for 2025/26 it will be a focus for their work programmes.

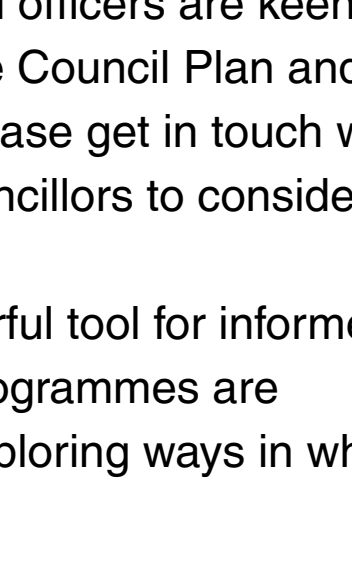


To help scrutiny members to have a better understanding of the challenges, issues and successes in our borough, Scrutiny Councillors recently visited the Countess of Chester Hospital. Their visit focused on operations of the Accident and Emergency Unit, a tour of the recently constructed Same Day Emergency Centre, and a visit to the construction site for the new Women and Children's hospital. The scrutiny visits enabled scrutiny members to see first-hand the challenges faced by the hospital, to witness their day-to-day operations, and allowed doctors and nurses to share their experience of working in an Accident and Emergency Unit. The visit and subsequent reflections from the Councillors who took part have helped foster stronger relationships and understandings with the hospital.



Updates from the team

Annual work planning exercises are being undertaken by each of the four committees. These provide Councillors who are members of the Scrutiny Committees the opportunity to let officers know what themes, topics, and agenda items they consider to be the priority for the upcoming year. Attended by Democratic Services, Heads of Service, Directors, and the Committee Members themselves, these will lead to the creation of four full work programmes for the committees through 2025-2026.



[Read more](#)

Priorities for the new municipal year – the Scrutiny team is focussed on continuing to drive increasing engagement and participation with the Scrutiny function as well as bringing new and relevant topics and items to committees and Task Groups. Scrutiny Councillors and officers are keen to ensure Scrutiny continues to reflect the priorities of the Council Plan and the areas of most concern to residents of the borough. Please get in touch with the team if you have any suggestions for Scrutiny Councillors to consider.

Data is a critical component in planning and is a powerful tool for informed decision-making. So, to ensure that Scrutiny's work programmes are focusing on the right priorities, the Scrutiny Team is exploring ways in which data can be used to inform topic selection.

The four Annual Reports for each committee will soon be published, alongside the Combined Annual Report that is received by Council. Don't forget to check the Scrutiny webpage for more information about the Annual Report using the links at the bottom of the bulletin.



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