

**HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Council**

**9 May 2024**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Annual Scrutiny Report 2024/25</b>
<b>SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS:</b>	<b>Councillors Payne, Quinn and Siddall</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Rachel Rourke – Senior Democratic Services Officer</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>Non-Specific</b>

**Appendix A – Sub-Committees/Working Groups**

**Appendix B – Select Programming Group – Terms of Reference**

**Appendix C – Work Programme Prioritisation - PAPER Analysis**

**1. Reason for the Report**

- 1.1 The Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually on their work.
- 1.2 To provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2020.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

**3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 In the past year Select Committees have continued to scrutinise performance, hold the Executive to account and contribute to policy development. The broad range of work and issues considered by Select Committees during 2023/2024 are summarised within the report and the appendices outline issues that have been given more detailed consideration by Task and Finish Groups together with other supporting information.
- 3.2 The recommendations following the review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny have continued to be implemented to ensure a greater focus on strategy and policy;

earlier access to, and involvement with, core policy and decision-making activities; and increased work programming across scrutiny which has been led by the Select Committee Programming Group.

#### **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Aim 5 - A responsive, smart, financially resilient and forward thinking Council. Objective - Strong and effective democratic processes. Effective scrutiny is essential in order that the Council can successfully achieve its objectives and priorities set out in the Borough Plan.

**Mark Trillo**  
**Executive Director and Monitoring Officer**

#### **Web Links and Background Papers**

Appendices attached

#### **Contact details**

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#### **5. Detail**

- 5.1 The Executive and Executive Councillors are responsible for making the day-to-day decision concerning the running of the Council. Select Committees ensure that the Executive are publicly held to account for their actions, promoting open and transparent decision making and democratic accountability. They also have a role in researching, scrutinising external agencies, ensuring that the Council's policy and budget framework is respected and realising the key aims of the Borough Plan. Meetings are held either in-person or virtually with the agreement of the Select Committee Chair.
- 5.2 Select Committees may appoint Sub-Committee/Working Groups to examine any issue in more depth. Recommendations from Sub-Committees have been based on cross party consensus. Details of Sub-Committees and Working Groups currently established are shown in Appendix A.
- 5.3 Effective participation has taken place with the involvement of partners, outside organisations and individuals at Select Committees and Sub-Committees. Executive Councillors attend Select Committee meetings and introduce reports, provide updates and answer questions. They have also attended and contributed to Sub-Committee and Working Group meetings.
- 5.4 The Alliance Leadership Team (ALT) are directly involved with Select Committees, and each Select Committee has a designated ALT lead officer

who works closely with the Committee Chair to plan agendas, provide briefings and ensure the Committees meet their objectives.

- 5.5 Following the elections in May 2023, a comprehensive induction programme was rolled out for all Councillors, which included an introduction to the scrutiny function across the Council's Scrutiny Committees. Three seminars have also recently been led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny around areas such as Charing and Leading Scrutiny, Questioning Skills and Scrutiny Essentials. Councillors are also encouraged to make use of online resources offered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny as well as the LGA e-Learning platform. Officers are members of the East Midlands Scrutiny Forum and attend regular meetings to share best practice and learning both locally and nationally.

## 6. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Review

- 6.1 During 2020, the Council invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to conduct a review of its arrangements for overview and scrutiny in order to provide assurance about existing practices and to consider improvements.
- 6.2 The recommendations of the review were supported as part of the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge in January 2022 and the Council gave a commitment to take forward the findings of the review, including:
- Greater focus on strategy and policy
  - Earlier access to, and involvement with, core policy and decision making activities; and
  - Increased work programming across scrutiny on a basis that is more elected member led
- 6.3 The recommendations included the establishment of the Select Committee Programming Group to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and to manage work programming across the scrutiny function. The group was first established in August 2022 and its membership reviewed following the elections in May 2023. The group now consists of:
- The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council
  - Opposition Group Leaders
  - Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each Select Committee
  - Chair of Audit & Regulatory Committee

The Group is chaired by the Chair of Corporate Select Committee and the Terms of Reference for the Group are set out in Appendix B.

- 6.4 In terms of work programming, an all-member annual scrutiny workshop has been established to capture topics for the scrutiny work programme to ensure that all councillors have input to this process (the first workshop took place on 21 March). All topics selected are to be prioritised based on the "PAPER analysis" model as detailed in Appendix C, to ensure that the items suggested are focussed on policy and strategy, in line with the priorities for the Council

contained in the Borough Plan and within the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out in the Local Government Act 2000, which are to:

- Help shape Council policy
- Hold the Executive to account
- Consider matters affecting the Council's area or its inhabitants
- Scrutinise services provided by our partners

## **7. Select Committee Work**

### **7.1 Corporate Select Committee**

7.1.1. The Council's Financial, Performance and Procurement arrangements were monitored through the scrutiny of quarterly reports, the draft Medium Term Financial Plan as well as the 2024/25 Budget & Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28. A number of proposed write offs of irrecoverable debts were also recommended to the Executive for approval. The Annual Report and Performance Framework will be scrutinised shortly.

7.1.2 The Committee considered the draft HPBC Asset Management Framework in September, which set out a cohesive approach on how the Council's land and buildings will assist in achieving the Council's vision and meeting the corporate objectives. In line with the recommendations, the Committee established a working group to oversee the implementation of key priority projects, the work of which is on-going.

7.1.3 A draft Corporate Debt Recovery Policy which will provide a framework for maximising income collection and ensuring that recovery action complies with legislation and best value was scrutinised by the Committee. In recommending the policy to The Executive, the Committee also sought a firm commitment from the Council in signing up to the Citizens Advice Bureau Council Tax protocol, which meant that HPBC, Enforcement Agents and advice agencies can help taxpayers pay their Council Tax bills while accessing debt advice when needed.

7.1.4 The Committee scrutinised a number of reports around matters relating to Council Tax, including reviewing the level of discount for council tax on short empty/unoccupied and uninhabitable properties, as well as the implementation of the premium for second homes from 1 April 2024 and the premium for second homes from 1 April 2025. The recommendations were put forward to address empty homes as a wasted resource at a time when there is increasing pressure to address housing and homelessness need. In all cases, the Executive agreed with the recommendations of the Select Committee.

7.1.5 A number of reports relating to Workforce Development were considered during the year, including the Annual Trade Union Liaison Update and a report which presented the results of the Alliance

Employee Survey, which had received a high level of engagement and provided very encouraging results across all questions and provided a good base on which to build. The Annual Corporate Health and Safety report was also reviewed, which provided updates on training information, emerging risks and supporting statistical information.

## **7.2 Community Select Committee**

- 7.2.1 The Committee received a number of updates from Derbyshire Police around patterns of local concern and interest and discussed ways of improving engagement with local members, including the setting up of informal meetings in localities. The Committee were also advised of a project called Clear, Hold, Build within Buxton which aims to tackle serious and organised crime within the area in conjunction with partner agencies including public health, education and school leaders. At its meeting in March, the Committee agreed to convene a working group to examine this matter in more detail.
- 7.2.2 A presentation providing an update around the requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act was made to the Committee in September. The presentation included an update on progress with the implementation of the requirements of the Government's White Paper, 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents', which is changing the way that social housing landlords engage with their tenants to ensure that in future, tenants have a real say in how their homes and services area managed. At a later meeting, the Committee agreed to convene a Standing Sub-Committee, to be known as the Housing Board, to monitor the Management of Council Housing Stock, which as well as Councillors would also include tenant representatives.
- 7.2.3 The Committee considered proposals for the future operations model for the Council's Leisure Centres and agreed to convene a Joint Working Group with the Borough's Strategic Alliance partner, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, to scrutinise the proposals in more detail, which is on-going.
- 7.2.4 The Committee scrutinised the performance of Alliance Norse in the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants project. This service had been transferred to Alliance Norse with effect from April 2023, and the benefits of changing the delivery of the service were set out, together with key performance and financial information.
- 7.2.5 Annual performance information was also presented by Alliance Environmental Services and Parkwood (in respect of the High Peak Leisure and Pavilion Gardens Contract) at the meeting in January which gave members an opportunity to scrutinise performance and key financial information in detail and numerous questions around different elements of the services were put to the officers who were in attendance.

- 7.2.6 The Committee considered a presentation setting out details of an enhanced Community Leadership Scheme at its meeting in November, which is a committed priority action in the Council's Borough Plan. Members were asked for their comments and feedback on what the scheme should contain to enable a revised scheme to be developed.
- 7.2.7 The process around the creation of an Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy and associated Action Plan was presented to members, together with plans to create a Cultural Strategy Advisory Group, who will assist in the creation of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- 7.2.8 The Chief Executive of High Peak CVS attended the meeting in April and presented the High Peak CVS Annual Report to members as well as outlining the current climate and challenges facing the voluntary sector as a whole.

### **7.3 Economy & Growth Select Committee**

- 7.3.1 The Committee has focussed much of its work around the monitoring of the implementation of the Revitalising Buxton project, with a number of presentations being made around the progress of key elements of the scheme which is on-going. More recently, members have been considering specific issues concerning community consultation, the stakeholder engagement strategy and the composition of the stakeholder panel and the next steps in the selection of a preferred development partner.
- 7.3.2 The Committee were presented with details around the High Peak Borough Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund at its meeting in November and also scrutinised matters relating to governance to ensure local needs are adequately represented. Details of the Rural England Prosperity Funding which seeks to address specific challenges in rural areas were also considered.
- 7.3.3 The implementation of the Tourism Strategy was considered in January, with the Committee being presented with detail around the Tourism Strategy and action for High Peak together with the UKSPF activity to support tourism and the background on the Local Visitor Economy Partnership work with Visit Peak District, Derbyshire and Derby and Enjoy Staffordshire. Members commented extensively and matters of particular note included concerns around low rates of pay within the tourism sector, increased number of air B&Bs in the area, together with the need for quality accommodation.
- 7.3.4 The Committee considered a detailed presentation around the Growth Strategy, a review of which is a priority within the Borough Plan. The national and international context for the development of the strategy was set out, which included changes to the global and national economic context, the outcome of the 2021 census in terms of changes to the population and economic activity and the business landscape, including county and national comparisons. Members were asked to

consider what themes should be included or considered as part of a Growth Strategy and information was provided on key facts and actions to support thriving businesses, people and places together with key priorities for the Growth Strategy.

7.3.5 A tour of key regeneration sites within the Borough has been arranged for 24 April, to which all members are invited to attend.

## 8. **Call-In**

- 8.1 Select Committees have the right to call-in decisions taken by the Executive or Individual Executive Councillors before they are implemented. The decision is then not implemented until the relevant Committee or Corporate Select Committee has considered the matter and/or dismissed it, referred it back to the Executive for re-consideration (or referred it to the full Council), and the matter has been considered. No decisions were called in during 2023/24.