

Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees 2024 to 2025



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What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a key component of the Council's political structure. Many of the Council's important decisions are taken by Cabinet, a group of nine councillors to whom the County Council has given its powers to take decisions relating to policies and procedures on its behalf.

The term 'scrutiny' derives from the Latin word 'scrutinium / scrutari' which means 'to search'. In the context of local government Scrutiny's role is to research and examine policies and decisions, to assess whether they could be improved or strengthened, to deliver better services for residents and visitors to Denbighshire. Scrutiny is often referred to as the Council's 'critical friend', its purpose is to provide constructive criticism in order to continually seek improvements to services, secure better decisions and realise better outcomes. The principles that underpin Scrutiny are:

Accountability: holding decision-makers responsible for their actions and decisions

Transparency: making information about decisions and services public

Involvement: allowing stakeholders to participate in decision-making

Constructive challenge: providing a robust challenge to decision-makers in a non-aggressive way

Public participation: involving the public through meetings, consultation, and feedback

Independent scrutiny: ensuring that scrutiny is carried out by independent-minded councillors

Improvement: using scrutiny to drive improvement in the services provided by the local government

Scrutiny Committees **cannot** take decisions, but they can influence policies, review decisions taken by Cabinet and Officers, make recommendations, and examine a range of topics that affect residents, local businesses, and visitors to the county.

Scrutiny in Action

Scrutiny should at all times work in an impartial way. It should not be influenced by party politics, its focus should be on improving the lives of residents and on securing better outcomes for the county area.

Scrutiny Committees have an active role to play in developing policies and reviewing performance. They also have the responsibility of holding the Cabinet and other decision makers to account on the decisions they make.

If a Scrutiny Committee believes that an issue should be looked at in more depth before a decision is implemented, it can request a review under the “Call-In” procedure which will allow Scrutiny Committees to formulate alternative proposals.

How does scrutiny work in Denbighshire?

Scrutiny acts as a ‘critical friend’ to the Council’s leadership, driving improvements not only to services delivered by the Council itself, but to services delivered in partnership with other public services in the area by enabling the concerns of the public to be heard.

The Council’s scrutiny work is undertaken by three thematic, cross-cutting Scrutiny Committees, meeting approximately every 7 weeks, and comprising of 11 elected members from all political parties/groups on the Council.

The three committees in Denbighshire are:

- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
- Performance Scrutiny Committee

When examining education matters representatives appointed by the Church in Wales and the Catholic Church, along with representatives elected by parent governors, also serve on the committees. When dealing with education matters these representatives have full voting rights. All three parent governor representative posts on Scrutiny are currently vacant. If you are a parent governor at one of the Council's primary, secondary or special schools, or know anyone who is and may be interested in representing their sector on Scrutiny please get in touch with us (contact details can be found in the 'How residents can participate in Scrutiny' section towards the end of this report). We would really like to hear from you.

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny committees serve on the Council's Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) along with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee. This Group acts as a co-ordinating group for the scrutiny committees' work. Requests for items to be considered by a scrutiny committee, be they from county councillors, Council officers, residents, businesses, other public services/organisations, or the general public are examined by this Group to determine whether they meet the criteria for Scrutiny, or whether they would benefit from being considered by another forum or group. The explanation on the PAPER test on the following page illustrates the criteria and process for determining whether a topic is suitable for scrutiny.

The process for determining a topic's suitability for scrutiny

Step one: considering the request

Proposal form or request received, and careful consideration is given to the reasons behind the request.

Step two: does it stand up to the PAPER test?

- **P**ublic interest: is the matter of concern to residents?
- **A**bility to have an impact: can Scrutiny influence and change things?
- **P**erformance: is it an underperforming area or service?
- **E**xtent: does it affect a large number of residents or a large geographic area?
- **R**eplication: is anyone else looking at it?

If not, then no further action is required by a scrutiny committee and the request will be referred elsewhere, or information requested and shared with the individual or organisation who submitted the request.

If yes:

Step three: assessment and planning (this will be done by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group)

- Determine the desired outcome(s)
- Decide on the scope and extent of the scrutiny work required and the most appropriate method to undertake it (i.e. committee report, task and finish group inquiry etc.)
- If task and finish group route chosen, determine the timescale for any inquiry, who will be involved, research requirements, expert advice and witnesses required, reporting arrangements etc.

During 2024/25 a total of 34 requests for items to be scrutinised were considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group. Of these 34 requests:

- 17 were submitted by county councillors
- 8 by officers
- 6 requests were received from individuals or organisations external to the Council.
- 3 request was received from the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee on behalf of the Committee

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group ensures that the scrutiny committees' work programmes are balanced and that subjects are not duplicated. It also has a role to play in supporting and strengthening the Council's scrutiny function through the identification of best practice, training or development opportunities for scrutiny committee members and helping to implement any necessary changes to scrutiny practices.

In fulfilling its role of supporting the Council's scrutiny function during 2024/25 the Group discussed with the Council's Leader the Cabinet's priorities for the years that lie ahead. The purpose of this discussion was to see how Scrutiny could support the work to deliver those priorities. With a view to securing the Council's future financial resilience the Group has taken steps to strengthen Scrutiny's role in relation to the process of setting the Council's annual budget and monitoring the delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan. As a result of this work Performance Scrutiny Committee now receives regular budget monitoring reports on the Strategy's delivery. The challenges of setting a balanced budget in the face of increasing demand and diminishing financial resources continues to be a dilemma for local authorities. Now that all services have been scaled back as far as they can, to enable the Council to continue delivering key services to residents new sustainable models for delivering services need to be devised. With this in mind the Council has started work on transforming how services will be delivered. Three main workstreams have been

identified for business Transformation Programme work and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group have allocated the role of examining the proposals aligned to each theme to the following committees:

- Influencing Demand & Digital – Performance Scrutiny Committee
- Commercialisation & Enterprise – Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Collaboration & Partnership – Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Each of the Scrutiny Committees will be examining proposals for business transformation projects as and when they develop. During the remainder of this administration's term of office the committees will also be closely monitoring those projects which progress into new models for delivering services to ensure they are effective in delivering the services that residents both need and want.

In response to the difficulties encountered with the roll-out of the new waste and recycling service the Group dealt with a number of requests asking that a review be undertaken of the planning for, and the implementation of, the new service. In response to these requests the Group recommended that a Task and Finish Group be established to conduct a review into the planning and implementation of the new service. Following consultation with all county councillors on what the review should encompass the Group played a key role in setting out the parameters for the review and in compiling a terms of reference for the task and finish group. The objective of the review is to establish what lessons can be learnt from this project and used to inform the planning for other major service delivery changes which may require to be made in future years.

Following the establishment of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), a committee which has regional duties in relation to economic development, transport, and planning, the Group was consulted on how best to undertake the scrutiny of this Committee in future. Its view was that the strategic aspects of the CJC's work would be more effectively scrutinised by a joint scrutiny committee of all the public bodies that are represented on it when taking decisions, but that any decisions that it takes which affect specific localities

should be scrutinised by a scrutiny committee of the relevant local authority. It is anticipated that a joint scrutiny committee of all North Wales local authorities will be established to scrutinise the CJC in the near future.

In line with its role of supporting and strengthening the scrutiny function the Group considered the findings of the Scrutiny Evaluation exercise that was undertaken towards the end of the 2023/24 municipal year. One of the main conclusions of this evaluation exercise was the recognition that despite all efforts challenges still remain in getting residents and young people to actively engage with the work of the Council's scrutiny committees. It is important to realise that this challenge is not unique to Denbighshire, the majority of local authorities struggle to get the public engaged with their work on a regular basis. Nevertheless, when controversial proposals are considered or service delivery is adversely affected, such as was experienced during the roll-out of the new waste and recycling service, residents will actively engage with Scrutiny.

In an attempt to find ways to encourage young people's input into local democracy the Group met with the Council's Head of Education to discuss ways of raising political awareness amongst Denbighshire's students and to seek them to actively engage with local elected members and Scrutiny on topics which interest them. To try and create pupils' appetite for getting involved with scrutiny's work the Education Service was planning to promote political awareness and opportunities for pupils to engage with the democratic process during the annual 'Your Vote Counts' week. Nevertheless, given the pressures on pupils and teachers' time, educational priorities, and the value or benefits to pupils of being involved with local democracy, it was decided that the extent of any future involvement would need to be effectively managed.

Scrutiny's work during 2024/25

Scrutiny Committee meetings are all held as 'hybrid meetings'. This gives committee members, officers and external partners or organisations invited to attend a scrutiny committee meeting the option of attending in person at the designated venue, or remotely via video conferencing. This flexibility eases the pressure on people to travel from one location to the other, releases more time to undertake other work during the day and helps reduce the county's carbon emissions by cutting down on unnecessary journeys. As all Scrutiny Committee meetings are now webcast live on the Council's website, with a recording of the webcast available on the website following each meeting, residents are able to either follow committee discussions live or catch-up with items which interest them later, whichever is more convenient for them.

During 2024/25 Scrutiny begun its work of examining the initial stages of the changes to service delivery methods implemented to mitigate the impact of the severe budget cuts facing the Authority and other public service organisations. This work is currently very much in its infancy. It is anticipated that over the coming years Scrutiny will be heavily involved with the work taking place to transform the delivery of Council services going forward.

Whilst Scrutiny's work evolves from year to year it does not stop at the end of one municipal year to re-commence again at the start of the following year, hence the reason that the same or similar areas of work feature regularly in the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees. Scrutiny is an on-going process, not just a one-time look at something. It provides continual support to the Council with the objective of delivering quality services to residents whilst adapting to everchanging demands and needs .

Scrutiny and the Council's Corporate Priorities during 2024/25

The Council's Corporate Plan '[The Denbighshire We Want](#)' and its priorities for 2022 – 2027 was agreed in October 2022, the Plan sets out what it is that the Council wants to achieve for the benefit of local residents and communities over the next five years. Faced with financial constraints and dwindling staffing resources, County Council approved a revised Corporate Plan for 2022 to 2027 in February 2024. The revised Plan now contains six rather than the nine original Corporate Themes, with the themes of a

- A better-connected Denbighshire
- A fairer, safe, and more equal Denbighshire
- A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

being subsumed into the remaining corporate priorities. This will ensure that the Council will continue to strive to deliver them by the end of its term in office, but as part of its day-to-day business rather than as stand-alone objectives. The revised Corporate Priorities for the 2022 to 2027 Council term are listed below. Beneath each heading are examples of the types of actions that will help deliver each priority:

1. A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs:

- Ensuring that people can access quality housing that meet their needs.
- Helping people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Working to prevent homelessness.

2. A prosperous Denbighshire

- Supporting economic growth.
- Developing a plan to grow Denbighshire's businesses in the future.
- Providing advice and support for business growth and helping local communities to thrive.
- Maintaining a quality road network and enabling people to access education, employment, services, and activities.

- Supporting communities with improved digital networks and skills.

3. A healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire

- Delivering high standards of social care.
- Supporting people of all ages to live well and be safe.
- Helping people to live independently, providing support when needed.
- Working to support personal and community well-being.
- Ensuring that everyone can access services in Welsh naturally at all stages in their lives.
- Supporting the broader use of Welsh and the celebration of Welsh culture.
- Working to address the inequality and poverty faced by our communities.

4. A learning and growing Denbighshire

- Supporting parents, and young children in the early stages of their development.
- Making sure everyone has fair opportunities to learn.
- Providing quality buildings and facilities that support learning and thriving communities.
- Supporting people to learn new skills, volunteer and find good jobs.

5. A greener Denbighshire

- To become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive organisation by 2030.
- Looking after and improving the natural environment.
- Working with communities to cope with and reduce the impacts of climate change.
- Improve recycling rates and reduce waste.
- Supporting our green infrastructure.

6. A well-run, high performing Council

- Embedding a positive culture of ambition, transparency, and improvement.

- Developing close and trusted relationships between our staff, elected members and our communities.
- Ensuring the Council is well-run and good value for money.
- Ensuring Denbighshire County Council is a good employer and an excellent place to work.

The Council is fortunate in that its thematic scrutiny committee structure provides sufficient flexibility to enable any of the committees to examine various aspects of the Authority's progress in delivering its corporate priorities. Performance Scrutiny Committee monitors the Council's overall progress in delivering the Corporate Plan.

The Council's progress in delivering individual themes, as well as specific initiatives or services that contribute in one way or another to the overall delivery of the Corporate Plan, are continually scrutinised and monitored throughout the Plan's life. The frequency of the scrutiny work is determined by the progress made with their delivery or concerns that come to light with respect of particular aspects of their deliverability.

Call-in of Cabinet decisions

The Council's Call-In Procedure was only invoked once during 2024/25. The call-in related to a decision taken by the Council's Cabinet in relation to the 'Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme'. Partnerships Scrutiny Committee considered the decision called-in for scrutiny on the grounds given for calling it in for review, which were that insufficient consultation had taken place with local schools, residents, community, and national organisations, as well as elected members representing the area prior to taking the decision to change the use of a school/community playing field for the purpose of construction of a new building to accommodate Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn.

Evidence and arguments in support and against the justification behind the decision were heard. However, following detailed consideration the Committee determined that the Cabinet decision was a valid one and therefore did not merit being referred to Cabinet for it to look at it again.

Positive outcomes of the scrutiny process

One of the main objectives of the scrutiny process is to add value and to try and make sure that decisions taken by the Council have a positive impact on the lives of people who live, work, and visit Denbighshire. There is an expectation for Scrutiny to evidence the benefits it has added to the decision-making process and how those benefits manifest themselves in better outcomes for the residents and businesses of Denbighshire. Such benefits, in the main, are generally difficult to evidence, but the overall objective of Scrutiny is to support better decision-making which in turn delivers better services. Therefore, the earlier Scrutiny is involved with the decision-making process the better, this is usually referred to as 'pre-decision scrutiny'.

Pre-decision scrutiny of any proposals gives Scrutiny members more time to shape and influence decisions which should lead to better, evidence-based decisions being taken which in turn will deliver better outcomes for all. During times of financial austerity involving Scrutiny as early as possible in shaping how the Council will fulfil its role in delivering services is particularly important as it can act as the residents' advocate and voice in shaping future service delivery models.

Communities Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Karen Edwards (Chair)

(Vice-Chair - vacant)

Councillor Huw O Williams served as Chair of Communities Scrutiny Committee up until March 2025 when Councillor Karen Edwards, previously Vice-Chair, was appointed Chair.

The following link will take you to [information about the Communities Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

Communities Scrutiny Committee examines matters that directly affect local communities and residents' daily lives. These may be matters within the Council's direct control or aspects of day-to-day life which the Council may be able to influence.

The items scrutinised by the Committee in 2024/2025 all related to at least one of the Corporate Priorities which contribute to the commitment to deliver the 'Denbighshire We Want' under the Corporate Plan.

The priority of having quality housing that meets people's needs featured regularly on the Committee's agenda. There had been significant progress in transferring back in-house the **Single Access Route to Housing Service** (SARTH) from its former commissioned provider, Flintshire County Council. Integration of ICT systems between Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords had been resolved which allowed for live data to be reviewed at the point of contact and partners could offer customers properties based upon their needs and position within their priority banding in a timely manner.

The service was running extremely well and were now reaching the target of 28 days from application to assessment - previously it had taken 3 to 4 months. The Committee were assured that the service provision redesign of SARTH was performing well and meeting expectations.

Furthermore, **Denbighshire's Housing & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan** which set out the Council's vision and aims for housing in the County for the period 2021-2026 was reviewed. The plan comprised of 42 actions, of which over half had been delivered, the others were being actively managed and were on track for completion through the life of the Strategy.

The Committee were interested to hear how the change in regulations surrounding the eviction notice process under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act had impacted the Service. Many private landlords had left the housing market. Consequently, there had been a large increase in households presenting themselves as homeless to the Council over their loss of rented accommodation.

The Committee learned that the Homelessness Service carried a portfolio of leased properties – Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), community property and private rented sector. Occasionally private housing rentals were sourced and on rare occasions the Service would consider purchasing ex council houses when they were on the open market. Particularly if it was in the Authority's interest to purchase- i.e. if the residence was half of a semi-detached property or an apartment in a block of flats already owned by the Authority, as it made the management of the wider building more economical.

Conversely, the Committee heard at a separate meeting that whilst the Service were reluctant to dispose of property in their portfolio, if the property was in an area with low demand for housing or required significant investment to bring it up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) it made economic sense to dispose of it. The decision to sell a property was only made once all the options to keep it had been exhausted.

There was a commitment to continue refurbishment of the housing stock to bring it up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards. Whilst that investment was of benefit to tenants it did add

to budgetary pressures on the Service. To that end the **Housing Rent Setting and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2025 / 26** report reassured the Committee that: the proposed rent increase was less than the maximum possible; it was affordable to tenants and that Denbighshire rated amongst the highest in Wales in a Tenant Satisfaction Survey for Value for Money and overall service received.

The Committee welcomed the regular reports from Housing Services and were assured of their commitment to providing quality housing to its tenants.

Following its commitment to a Greener Denbighshire in June 2024 the Council commenced the roll-out of its new **Waste and Recycling Service**. The new system for collecting and dealing with domestic waste was introduced across the county simultaneously and as a result it constituted the biggest service change implemented by the Council since its establishment in 1996.

Within the first few weeks it became apparent that a large number of domestic waste collections were being missed or delayed on a regular basis. The number of complaints made by residents to the Contact Centre and local members were unprecedented.

In October 2024, the Committee were advised that the crux of the problem was that not enough rounds had been designed into the service to collect from 46,000 properties every week. Following approval from Cabinet for additional financial resources, plans had been made to deliver a more sustainable service for the long term with the provision of an additional 8 vehicles and recruitment of additional drivers and loaders, as well as the reorganisation of the collection rounds.

At a **review of the progress of the recycling service and associated waste function** in the spring of 2025 the Committee were informed that during the design of the new rounds 36 properties had been identified as having to move to '**End of Lane Collections**'.

The Committee were not assured that sufficient progress had been made in terms of implementing the planned additional steps enabled by additional financial resources or that the service change achieved the required aims.

The Committee was concerned that a lack of communication from the Service to members had been a continued issue throughout the service roll-out and sought a commitment for its improvement going forward.

Continuing the Greener Denbighshire theme, the Committee reviewed Denbighshire's **Local Area energy Plan (LAEP)**, a comprehensive report which laid out details on how Ambition North Wales managed a contract with consultants to develop the LAEP for Denbighshire, and the other north Wales counties on behalf of the Welsh Government. The plans fell under the ownership of each local authority in Wales. And were aimed at being a guidance tool in how best to work towards a fully decarbonised energy system by 2050. All LAEPs would be aggregated to inform the development of the National Energy Plan.

Also working towards the Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically positive Council by 2030 were the Tree Team who presented their **Tree Maintenance and Management Plan** to the Committee. Annual surveys of Ash trees (for signs of Ash die back) continued to take priority on both Council land and that adjacent to the highway network. Every effort was made to retain Ash trees, felling only as a last resort.

The Committee were advised that the Tree Team provided advice and guidance for various other services who have management responsibilities for trees – Countryside Service, Education, Highways, Housing, Streetscene and Planning. An action within the Climate and Nature Strategy (2021/22 to 2029/30) was an ambition to increase the Council's carbon absorption for Years 4 to 6 (2024/25 to 2026/27), to produce and implement a Tree and Woodland Strategy to help ensure coordination and a standardisation of tree care across all Council Services. The Committee requested that local members be notified when tree maintenance was to be undertaken in their wards.

As previously mentioned, the Planning Service, particularly the planning compliance function had a role to play in the management of trees and many other aspects that contribute to a Greener Denbighshire. However, a report presented to the Committee called into question the future sustainability of the function.

It was noted that the Council at that time had no dedicated planning compliance officers leading to a backlog of cases which was significantly greater than those of neighbouring authorities. The Council was not meeting expectations laid out in the existing **Planning Compliance Charter**. Therefore, amendments to the charter were being proposed that would reduce the level of service offered by the Council's planning compliance function to the minimum level set out in relevant legislation and practice guidance.

The Committee suggested that the recruitment to the two vacant planning compliance roles be treated as a matter of priority. They endorsed the amended version of the Planning Compliance Charter and requested that going forward all local members should receive a summary of all planning enforcement notices sent out within their ward. Updates should be provided to local members on the progress and outcomes of those enforcements, ensuring they remained informed of any developments or resolutions.

Vacant job roles and recruitment issues had been a common theme across the Authority (as with many other local authorities nationally). It was cited as one of the reasons for holding up progress on delivering some of the actions listed in the **Car Park Investment Plan's** first year. The Committee was advised that recycled materials were used wherever possible when undertaking resurfacing work to minimise the use of raw aggregate and it was an aspiration to add further Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points in council-owned car parks. The potential introduction of a pilot scheme for motor homes/camper vans at some locations had increased in scope from the original plans of providing overnight parking to including a fresh water supply, electricity supply and waste-water disposal facilities now being considered. It was anticipated that this would support tourism and the core priority of creating A Prosperous Denbighshire.

Continuing with that theme an update report on **The Rhyl Regeneration Programme and Waterfront Masterplan** provided an optimistic aim for Rhyl to reach the point where public sector intervention was no longer required, with Rhyl becoming a town that attracts private sector investment.

The Rhyl Regeneration Programme to date was largely focussed on capital projects that tackled physical and environmental issues to lead to economic growth and job creation. Planned projects included:

- Promenade scheme (phase 1) to help reconnect the beach to the High Street;
- Town Centre Pocket Park Project (to transform a derelict site into a high-quality public realm space);
- Town Centre Public Realm Project, focussing on improving the High Street and surrounding areas; and
- Queen's Market Public Realm, looking to enhance the external areas of the site and help create a transformational facility that the town could be proud of.

The Waterfront Masterplan was essentially a proposal to develop four distinct zones along the Waterfront between the Drift Park and Splash Point. The zones would comprise of Hospitality, Active Leisure, Family Entertainment and Aquatic.

The Committee expressed the view that public engagement needed to be undertaken across the county to promote Rhyl's regeneration and encouraged liaising with neighbouring towns, Kinmel Bay and Towyn as part of the Tourism Strategy. The Committee requested that an update report be provided once the engagement process had completed, and the Rhyl Vision Plan established.

The Authority continued its review of public conveniences having undertaken a Local Toilet Needs Assessment together with a public consultation that took place based on an Interim Needs Assessment. The Service presented a **Draft Local Toilet Strategy** to the Committee which concluded that there was no identified need for public conveniences in Dyserth, Rhuddlan or St. Asaph.

During the discussion of the item the Committee suggested that:

- Where no need for a PC requirement had been identified discussion should be held with the City, Town or Community Council to explore a contribution for seasonal opening.

- The Community Toilet Scheme payment be reviewed and
- Not enough focus was on residents' needs, particularly from a health, wellbeing, and accessibility perspective.

The Committee expressed the opinion that the level of concern raised by members and residents during the consultations over proposals to potentially close some public conveniences was so great, that it was felt that the provision of toilets, where there was an identified need, should be a statutory requirement – funded by Welsh Government. They recommended that further talks be undertaken with city, town, and community councils to support those facilities in their communities.

Partnerships Scrutiny Committee



Cllr. Joan Butterfield (**Chair**)



Cllr. Pauline Edwards (**Vice-Chair**)

This Committee is responsible for examining the effectiveness of services provided by the Council either in collaboration, or in partnership, with other public sector organisations, and for making sure that those services are meeting the needs of residents.

The following link will take you to [information about the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

The effect of budgetary pressures on all public sector providers will undoubtedly result in greater expectations for more regional and sub-regional partnership working arrangements in future. As partnership working arrangements continue to evolve, the Committee has continued its work in examining the effectiveness of various partnership and collaborative working arrangements already in place to deliver services to residents and communities.

Effective partnership working between a number of key public sector organisations, such as the Health Service, Police, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) etc. as well as with the private and voluntary sectors is crucial if the Council is to successfully deliver the corporate priorities set out in its Corporate Plan.

For it to realise its ambition of having a healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire it is vital that the Council fosters good, strong working relationship with the Health Service, as well

as with the private and voluntary sectors with respect of providing social care services and empowering community resilience. As a way of ensuring that all organisations work effectively together to care and support Denbighshire's most vulnerable residents the Committee scrutinised the collaborative work undertaken under the auspices of the **North Wales Regional Partnership Board** to facilitate the delivery of timely seamless intervention and support service to those who depend on them.

Pressures faced by both the Health Service and the social care sector have been widely reported in both the local and national media. This led to Audit Wales undertaking, on a Health Board footprint, a review of **Urgent and Emergency Care: Flow Out of Hospital** study across Wales. The review focussed on the reasons why people experienced delays in being discharged from hospital and the impact those delays were having on new hospital admissions and the availability of in-patient beds for the people who needed them. Committee members examined the progress made to date in Denbighshire and across the North Wales region by both the Health Board and Social Care services in addressing this review's recommendations and improving patients and their families' experiences of entering and leaving primary care establishments. Health and social care services are intrinsically linked on many different levels and are therefore dependent on each other in order to deliver quality services.

Ever since the **Royal Alexandra Hospital** in Rhyl was closed as an in-patient facility the Committee has taken a keen interest and role in attempting to secure the provision of key health, care, and well-being services at the site. For a number of years, it has examined the Health Board's evolving proposals for the site. Whilst there have been a number of setbacks along the way, there is now an element of renewed hope that a new hospital facility will be built on the site. This facility is expected to include 'care closer to home' in-patient bed provision, a minor injuries unit, along with other community health services, and act as a base for greater collaborative working with other services and the voluntary sector. As these plans develop over the forthcoming months and years the Committee has committed to monitoring them closely with a view to ensuring that they support and complement the Council's vision for delivering key social care and well-being services in the Rhyl area, but

which will also benefit Denbighshire as a whole. Both Health and Social Care services support the most vulnerable within our communities therefore, to ensure that those residents are kept safe and from harm's way the Committee on an annual basis examines the effectiveness of the procedures in place with respect of **Safeguarding Adults in Denbighshire**. It continued with this role during the year by scrutinising the annual safeguarding adults report for 2023/24.

Denbighshire, in line with other local authorities, has a duty to make sure that every effort is made to keep residents and communities safe during emergency situations or periods of extreme weather. To fulfil these duties the Council is part of a regional arrangement called the North Wales Regional Emergency Planning Service. During the year, the Committee considered the **North Wales Regional Emergency Planning Service's Annual Report for 2023/24** along with its proposed areas of focus for 2024/25. As a result, the Committee gained confidence that appropriate arrangements were in place to deal with and respond to emergency situations as and when they arise, be that locally, regionally, or nationally. The types of incidents which mobilise emergency response measures developed by the regional emergency service range from serious flooding, adverse weather events, wildfires, and failures in critical infrastructure. One such incident which required the mobilisation of an emergency response was Storm Babet in October 2023, which caused flooding to properties in Denbighshire. The Council has a statutory duty to investigate serious flooding incidents in the county and to publish a **Section 19 Flood Investigation Report** detailing its findings and any proposed solutions to reduce the risk of flooding re-occurring in future. These types of reports are compiled in conjunction with other risk management authorities, such as Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW). The Committee considered the Section 19 report on the effects of Storm Babet and supported the proposed improvements and revised working practices identified to help mitigate the risk of similar problems arising in future.

An earlier major storm that left a trail of destruction across the county was Storm Christoph in January 2021. The volume of rainfall that fell during that storm contributed to the velocity of the flow of the river Clwyd and increased its power to undermine the foundations of **Pont**

Llannerch which resulted in it collapsing and being swept away. This bridge was an important transport and pedestrian link between the villages of Trefnant and Tremeirchion. For the last four years the Council along with the Welsh Government (WG), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) have been exploring options for re-instating this key infrastructure link between both communities. The Committee heard that a number of engineering solutions had been explored. However, none of these could be constructed without running the risk of disturbing an aquifer used for abstracting drinking water to supply 85,000 homes and businesses in the region. Whilst acknowledging the impact the loss of the bridge had on the surrounding communities the Committee was of the view that it could not support the construction of a replacement bridge which ran the risk of permanently compromising the drinking water supply to so many homes and businesses bearing in mind that there were no known solutions for remedying any damage that may be caused to the aquifer. However, being acutely aware of the inconvenience this would cause for local residents and communities the Committee did request that the Council make every effort to secure funding to improve other transport links in the area to ease connectivity between local communities.

Quality integrated transport links as well as fast and effective means of communication are key components for securing economic development which in turn contribute towards individuals and the area's overall prosperity. All of these themes feature in the Council's Corporate Plan. With a view to ensuring that Denbighshire is best placed to benefit from major regional transport initiatives the Committee fed its views into the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee's (CJC) consultation on the **Regional Transport Plan**, which aims to complement the aims of each local authority's own local transport plans. This plan also aims to support the economic development work taken forward by Ambition North Wales, formerly known as the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) which has been tasked to create prosperity across the region through inward investment, employment opportunities, training and by growing local businesses. As in previous years the Committee has undertaken the role of examining **Ambition North Wales'** progress and performance in delivering its long-term objectives. During the coming year Ambition North Wales will become a sub-committee of the North Wales CJC. It is anticipated the CJC will have its

own scrutiny arrangements in future which will mean that the regional aspects of economic development, transport and planning will be scrutinised by a separate joint scrutiny committee comprising of scrutiny representatives from all councils who are members of the CJC. Nevertheless, this will not stop Denbighshire's scrutiny committees from examining aspects of the CJC's work which affect the county or areas within it if they wish to do so.

With tourism being a major contributor to the county's economy discussions were held between the Committee, council officers and representatives from NRW and DCWW on the challenges faced in improving bathing water quality off the county's beaches. It is hoped that in future years it will be possible for some of Denbighshire's beaches to gain or regain **Blue Flag Status**.

In recent years, the number of residents and businesses who are choosing to undertake their day-to-day business or request services from the Council electronically has increased significantly. The growing demand for digital communication and business transactions facilities requires the Council to make sure it has effective digital services in place to meet residents and other users' expectations. In a bid to ensure that the Council was meeting current needs and planning effectively for the increasing demand for evolving digital services the Committee examined the Authority's progress in delivering its current **Digital Strategy**, and if it was using the recommendations made by Audit Wales in relation to the current strategy to inform the approach for developing the new **Digital Strategy for 2026 onwards**.

Increase use of digital technology, hybrid working arrangements, and the need for the Authority to reduce its overheads resulted in the Council reviewing its office and other accommodation requirements across the county. In a bid to ensure that the Council has the right type of asset in the right location to deliver its services in future it developed the **Denbighshire County Council Asset Management Strategy for 2024-29**. Committee members had an opportunity to examine this strategy and comment on it before it was later approved by Cabinet.

School buildings are amongst the Council's portfolio of assets. The only Cabinet decision called-in for review under the Council's Call-In Procedure during 2024/25 related to a

proposal which formed part of the **Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme**. This particular decision related to plans to build a new facility for Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn in Denbigh. The outcome of the scrutiny process in relation to the decision called-in for review is reported under 'Call-in of Cabinet Decisions' section of this report.

Partnerships Scrutiny Committee is the Council's designated crime and disorder committee in accordance with the requirements of the Police and Justice Act 2006. In fulfilling that role, every year it examines the performance of the **Conwy and Denbighshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** in delivering its priorities and action plan, as well as the priorities and areas of focus earmarked for the year ahead. In undertaking this role this year, it invited a representative from North Wales Police to attend the discussion so that members could better understand the relationship between the Police, CSP, local authorities and other agencies/organisations in delivering crime prevention and intervention work.

Crime prevention and intervention is a key component for building safe, strong, resilient communities, where both young and old feel safe, supported, valued and able to live fulfilled lives. In addition to having a joint CSP for Conwy and Denbighshire both county areas also have a joint Youth Justice Service (YJS). In the wake of receiving a critical report on this joint service in May 2024 an action plan was drawn up to address the HM Inspectorate of Probation's recommendations. It was decided to hold a joint informal meeting of Conwy Council's Social Care & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Denbighshire's Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in early 2025 to jointly examine the progress made so far in securing the required improvements identified by the Regulator to this crucial intervention service. Members of both authorities agreed that considerable progress had been achieved in addressing the Regulator's recommendations. They also felt that the joint approach to monitoring the action plan's delivery had worked well and agreed to meet again in early 2026 to examine further the YJS and its partner organisations' progress in delivering the improvements identified in the action plan and consider any potential further improvements to the services provided.

Performance Scrutiny Committee



The late Cllr. Hugh Irving (**Chair**)



Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (**Vice-Chair**)

The following link will take you to [information about the Performance Scrutiny Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

Performance Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in ensuring that the Council delivers quality services to residents and in supporting it to deliver its Corporate Plan. During 2024/25 it continued its work on focussing on the Council's performance in delivering its day-to-day services, its progress to date in bringing its Corporate Plan to fruition and realising its ambition of being a well-run high performing Council.

Securing and maintaining the delivery of high-quality services when demand and costs are increasing and the financial resources available to deliver those services are reducing is extremely challenging. To ensure that the Council is able to fulfil its obligations and its ambitions, while also managing all identified risks which may impact on the delivery of services, the Committee regularly examines the **Corporate Risk Register** to make sure that appropriate measures are in place to effectively manage all known risks to service delivery. Progress in delivering the Council's **Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan**, securing the Authority's future **Financial Resilience and Sustainability**, along with the annual **Budget Setting Proposals** were all examined by the Committee during the year, as was the progress achieved so far in fulfilling the goals set out in the Council's **Corporate Plan**.

In addition, it examined the Authority's **Annual Self-Assessment** of its performance in delivering its services and ambitions.

Balancing the rising demand for services, particularly in both children and adults social care where the complexity of needs which require to be met are continually increasing, within the financial resources available is extremely difficult and requires effective and innovative planning. In its work examining the **Director of Social Services Annual Report** the Committee is briefed on the pressures faced by those services and the creative solutions devised for meeting these demands. Examining this report also provided members with an opportunity to influence future ideas for service delivery. Similarly, by examining **Cefndy Enterprises' Year End Report 2023/24** it had a chance to monitor how this unique enterprise was providing valuable employment and worthwhile career opportunities for some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

The after effects of the Covid pandemic on pupils' educational attainment, and in some instances their attendances and behaviour in schools as well as their engagement with educational activities has been widely acknowledged as an area of concern across Wales and the UK. Acutely aware of those concerns the Committee devoted some considerable time during the year to examining matters relating to education. Amongst the areas of focus have been **Promoting School Attendance and Engagement**, continued progress with the implementation of the **Curriculum for Wales** and the **Additional Learning Needs Transformation** work in schools, as well as the proposed plans for utilising the **Additional Education Funding** allocated to the Education Service as part of the 2025/26 Council Budget. In addition, the Committee continued to monitor the Education Service's progress in delivering the transformation work contained within the **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** across all the county's schools. It also continued to examine the work undertaken by all stakeholders to support improvements at **Christ the Word School** with a view to it eventually being taken out of special measures. Estyn periodically inspects local authorities' provision of services to schools. Denbighshire's Education Services was last inspected by Estyn in 2018. Following such inspections an Action Plan is drawn up to address any recommendations made by the regulator. The Committee has been actively monitoring the

delivery of this action plan during the past few years and was this year able to satisfy itself that all actions arising from the **Estyn Inspection 2018** had been delivered.

On an annual basis the Committee examines the performance of the county's Library Service in delivering against the Welsh Government's **Standards and Performance for Library Services**. It continued with this practice in 2024/25 by examining the Service's performance during the 2023/24 year. The impact of the reduction in the Service's opening hours and subsequently on its performance will be examined as part of the process of reviewing the Service's performance against the national standards for 2024/25, this information will not be available until early 2026.

Following the declaration of a **Climate Change and Ecological Emergency** in 2019 the Council adopted a Strategy in which it committed to become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive authority by 2030. In doing so it undertook to review the Strategy every three years. Following a public consultation on the revised Strategy the Committee had an opportunity to consider the consultation responses before County Council approved the final revised Strategy. As a result of this process the Committee decided that it would in future monitor progress in delivering the Strategy on an annual basis. This work will commence during the forthcoming year.

Another draft Strategy and Action Plan presented to the Committee for consideration was the **Economic Strategy and Action Plan** for the period 2025 up until 2035. Following consideration of both the Strategy and Action Plan the Committee felt that their contents supported the Council's ambitions with respect of economic development and the delivery of its corporate priority of a prosperous Denbighshire.

For businesses of all sizes, be they located in urban or rural areas, they require fast, effective means of communication to transact their business quickly and capitalise on business opportunities. In order to try and secure a fast, effective, and reliable communication infrastructure the Committee has continued to meet with BT Openreach to ensure that as many business and residential premises in both urban and rural areas of the county have access to quality **Internet and Telephony Services** and to try and secure deliverable

solutions to connectivity problems where they arise. These utilities are crucial in order to deliver economic, educational, and community prosperity.

Following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) new funding streams were established to support business and community development as well as other resilience building initiatives. The first funding streams which became available were subject to extremely tight funding application, project development and delivery deadlines. The lessons learnt from applying for funding for those projects were used to develop a methodology to use in future for **Positioning Denbighshire Council for Success in Securing High Value Post-Brexit Funding**. The Committee examined the methodology developed to make sure it was both suitable and effective to help services and other stakeholders to apply for various types of external funding going forward. This type of funding will in future become crucial to help support the delivery of essential services.

During the course of the year the Committee continued to examine and monitor the Council's **Recruitment, Retention and Workforce Planning** procedures to ensure they support the Authority's ability to sustainably deliver its broad range of services.

As a result of the problems encountered with the **Roll-Out of the New Waste and Recycling Service** the Committee agreed to the establishment of a task and finish group to examine what happened and determine the lessons learnt from the roll-out. The aim of this exercise is to use the findings of the review to inform the planning phases for any future business or service transformation projects. The task and finish group is expected to conduct its review within twelve months and report its findings to the Committee, sometime in 2026.

The Committee has an important role to fulfil in examining the impact of budget cuts on residents as well as the effectiveness of service changes on the Council's efforts to generate additional income. Elements of the budget monitoring and business transformation work commenced during 2024/25 and will continue during the remainder of this Council term. As part of this work the Committee assessed the effectiveness of the steps taken during the year to **Increase Car Parking Income** through a combination of the introduction of tariffs at

car parks which were previously free, increasing the tariffs already charged in other car parks, and extending the charging hours in council-operated car parks. The assessment undertaken concluded that the measures introduced had not realised the estimated increase in income. As a result, a new car parking tariff structure will be developed in a bid to increase the income to enable the Council to cover maintenance costs for the facilities. This new draft car park tariff structure will be presented to councillors for consultation in late 2025.

As part of the business transformation work the Committee examined in detail the proposals put forward for the establishment of an alternative company structure for the delivery of leisure services in place of **Denbighshire Leisure Limited**. The aim of the proposed new model was to secure the provision of high-quality leisure services for the future. As part of its pre-decision scrutiny work the Committee requested that clarification be provided on a number of aspects within the proposal before it was presented to County Council for approval.

As the 2024/25 municipal year drew to a close the Committee mourned the passing of its Chair, Councillor Hugh Irving. Councillor Irving had chaired the Committee since 2022 and served as Chair of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group during the same period. He had led a long and distinguished service in public life and was widely regarded as an approachable, amenable councillor as well as a fair and impartial Committee chair. Whilst his loss will be felt across the Council and further afield, the Committee will miss his wisdom, guidance, and steady hand at the helm.

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board

The Conwy and Denbighshire Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) was established by both authorities during the term of the previous councils for the purpose of fulfilling their statutory duties of scrutinising the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board (PSB). This Committee comprises of 16 members, 8 representing Conwy County Borough Council and 8 representing Denbighshire County Council. Each Council's representation on the JOSC reflects the political balance of their Council. The JOSC's terms of reference specifies that the Chair and Vice-Chair will alternate every two years between the elected membership of Denbighshire and Conwy councils. Dependent on which Council's turn it is to Chair the JOSC, the Vice-Chair will be appointed from amongst the other Council's representatives on the committee. 2024/25 was the second year of Conwy's tenure to chair the JOSC. Councillor Cheryl Carlisle continued in her role as Chair with Denbighshire's Councillor Gareth Sandilands as Vice-Chair.

The JOSC met once during 2024/25, during which it discussed with the Chief Executive of North Wales Housing, one of the invited participants on the Public Services Board, its **commitment and contribution to the work of the PSB, as well as the benefits to it as an organisation of participating in the PSB's work**. North Wales Housing felt that having the opportunity to participate in the PSB's work was beneficial to it as an organisation. Through the PSB it had been able to raise its profile across both counties and amongst PSB organisations while at the same time widening its knowledge base of services available to residents. The information gained by its participation in the PSB's work had been used to inform internal priorities, corporate plans, and improve its ability to signpost officers and tenants to relevant services and organisations for support.

The PSB has its own Local Well-being Plan. All the themes and objectives within this Plan dovetail and complement each individual Council and partner organisation's own strategic plans. As more than a year had passed since the PSB approved its Well-being Plan 2023 – 2028 the Committee, in line with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations

(Wales) Act 2015, examined the PSB's performance in implementing its Plan through consideration of the **PSB's Annual Report for 2023-24**. The JOSC was satisfied that the PSB had made progress with the initial stages of delivering its Well-being Plan 2023-28, in line with the five ways of working set out in the 2015 Act. It was also encouraged to learn that the PSB would during 2024-25 be embarking on work to raise its profile amongst residents, to make sure they were aware of its existence, its objectives, and how they could interact with it. Unfortunately, the JOSC's second scheduled meeting during 2024-25 had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, its work will continue during 2025-26.

It is important to stress that the JOSC's powers to scrutinise PSB partner organisations only extends as far as their contribution to the work of the PSB. The Joint Committee does not possess powers to scrutinise individual organisations' policies or their performance in delivering services outside of their role and responsibilities on the PSB.

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board



**Cllr. Cheryl Carlisle (Chair)
Chair)**



Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (Vice-Chair)

Membership

Conwy County Borough Council

- Cllr. Cheryl Carlisle (Chair)
- Cllr. David Gerard Carr
- Cllr. Gareth Jones
- Cllr. Bernice McLoughlin
- Cllr. Stephen Anthony Price
- Cllr. Kay Redhead
- Cllr Austin Roberts
- Cllr. John Roberts

Denbighshire County Council

- Cllr. Joan Butterfield
- Cllr. Kelly Clewett
- Cllr. Pauline Edwards
- Cllr. Alan Hughes
- Cllr. Paul Keddie
- Cllr. Terry Mendies
- Cllr. Arwel Roberts
- Cllr. Cllr. Gareth Sandilands (Vice-Chair)

The following link will take you to [information about the Joint Committee, its agendas and reports on the Council's website](#)

Scrutiny requests from residents

For a number of years Denbighshire's scrutiny committees has operated an established mechanism which enables residents to draw matters of concern to Scrutiny's attention. This is facilitated through the completion of a Scrutiny request form, available on the Council's [website](#), or from the Scrutiny Co-ordinators. Completed scrutiny request forms are presented to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, in the same way as requests received from councillors, officers or other organisations for consideration and determination on whether the subject merits examination by one of the Scrutiny Committees, or whether greater benefits could be achieved if the matter was examined by another forum.

How can residents participate in Scrutiny?

Would you like scrutiny to look at a particular matter?

You can raise a matter for consideration by one of Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committees by filling out the Scrutiny Request Form (overleaf) or by downloading the [form](#) from the Council's website and submitting it by e-mail. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny committees are members of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group. This Group meets periodically to decide how to allocate the work of the scrutiny committees and will consider if any matter raised should be examined in detail by one of the committees, or if another course of action should be pursued. This can range from a referral to the service responsible, to full scrutiny of the matter by one of the scrutiny committees, or even the establishment of a specialist 'task and finish group' to investigate and report on a particular matter.

Would you like to attend a meeting of a scrutiny committee?

Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committee meetings are generally open to the public, and residents of Denbighshire and the general public are encouraged to attend or watch the webcast on the Council's website. A list of upcoming scrutiny committee meetings and the matters to be discussed are available on the '[Scrutiny](#)' page of the Council's website.

If you wish to take part in a discussion on a particular matter, you will require the permission of the Chair of the Committee. This can be facilitated by contacting one of the Scrutiny Co-ordinators, whose contact details can be found overleaf.

Occasionally some items being discussed by a committee will contain confidential information and cannot be discussed in the usual public forum. Any such items (referred to as 'Part Two (II)') will be clearly identified when the meeting papers are published, and the Chair of the committee meeting discussing a 'Part II' item will make it clear that the meeting should continue without the press and public in attendance in order to avoid divulging confidential information.

Would you like to speak to a committee on an item being discussed?

Members of the public are very welcome to attend scrutiny committee meetings, either in person or via video link, but will require the permission of the Chair of the committee if they wish to speak or make representations at a committee meeting. If you wish to submit evidence to a committee, or address members on your experience in relation to a subject under discussion, please contact one of the Scrutiny Co-ordinators in advance of the meeting so that this can be arranged, and any paperwork can be circulated to members of the committee.

Occasionally scrutiny committees may wish to 'co-opt' an individual with particular experience or expertise to become a temporary member of the committee or ask them to contribute to an inquiry as an expert witness.

Keeping up to speed with recommendations made by Denbighshire's scrutiny committees

You can keep track of what is being discussed at each scrutiny committee meeting, as well as any other public Council meeting, by visiting the '[meetings](#)' page of the Council's website. The latest 'work programme' for each of the scrutiny committees is available with the meeting papers for each meeting and the confirmed agenda for each meeting will usually be available 5 - 7 days before the meeting is due to take place.

The minutes of previous scrutiny meetings and a record of the recommendations made are also available on the Council's website, as are the recordings of recent scrutiny committee meetings.

Further advice or information is available by contacting the Scrutiny Co-ordinators, Karen Evans on karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk (01824 712575) or Rhian Evans on rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk (01824 712554), or by sending an e-mail to the following general e-mail address: democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk .

Scrutiny request form

Is there something you would like scrutiny to have a look at?

Please give a brief description of the topic you would like to be considered by one of the Scrutiny Committees and why you think it should be considered.

Would you like to attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee?

YES / NO

It would be useful if you could give us the following details so that we may respond to your request.

Your name:

Address:

Postcode:

Email:

Telephone number:

Please return this form to:

Scrutiny Co-ordinators

Corporate Support Service: People

Democratic Services

PO Box 62

Ruthin

LL15 9AZ

or e-mail it to democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk