

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL  
REPORT 2017/18



# Ashfield

DISTRICT COUNCIL



# Chairman's Foreword



2017/18 has been yet another another Challenging year for Scrutiny. During this period we have continued to work with Officers, Elected Members, partners and the Community to consider, discuss and review topics and issues that affect Ashfield residents.

The Council continues to face financial pressures that require us to rethink and reshape our services to ensure that they are fit for purpose, efficient and economically viable.

In developing the Workplan last year, we tried to ensure that we covered a broad range of topics including both strategic and community concerns. In addition Members of Scrutiny also utilised its Call-in Powers to ensure that we were satisfied with the decisions taken.

In the coming 12 Months the Government will be publishing a new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local government. The role of scrutiny has changed significantly since the last Guidance, issued in 2006 and I look forward to embracing the new guidance in order to ensure that Scrutiny continues to deliver a forum for the community and Elected Members review, challenge and recommend ideas for improvement.

This report provides an overview of the topics, issues and considerations of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels A & B during 2017-18. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone who have participated in the Scrutiny process this year including officers, Members, the community and partners.

**COUNCILLOR LEE ANDERSON – CHAIRMAN OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

# Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

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The Overview and Scrutiny Crime and Disorder Meeting was the first meeting of the Council to utilize both Facebook Live Streaming and Twitter for real time interactive questions to be asked during the meeting.

Posts went out on Facebook and Twitter in the week leading up to the meeting promoting the fact the meeting would be FB live and inviting residents to submit questions. Interaction on these posts was minimal and no questions were submitted before the event.

Public interaction through social media on the night was very successful with around 10 relevant questions asked during the meeting, along with questions from the floor. Engagement as a whole was also very encouraging with the live video feed attracting around 5000 views.

Under the Police and Justice Act 2006, Overview & Scrutiny has the right to consider crime and disorder issues and in particular, to review the performance of the Ashfield Community Partnership. The Partnership is responsible for drawing-up and implementing the District's Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy. It is made up of public sector bodies, such as the Council and Nottinghamshire Police, as well as representatives from the business community and voluntary groups.

In attendance at the meeting were representatives from Nottinghamshire Police and the Council's Community Protection Team. The Committee explored how the Council and the Police worked together following the development of a single 'Hub', located at the Council's Urban Road offices. Members considered how the ways in which this allowed greater collaborative working in tackling crime.

As part of the meeting, Members also considered amongst others;

- Whether the Selective Licensing Scheme had made it easier for the partners to combat crime and anti-social behaviour
- New Cross partnership initiative
- recorded crime during 2016-17 compared to the previous year

- Hate Incidents
- Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Police '101' phone system

In concluding the meeting It was recognised that significant progress had been made and that this should continue to be monitored.

## Community Engagement – Scrutiny Panel A

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Community Engagement item was added to the Scrutiny Workplan in 2016 with an aim of considering how the Council and Councillors currently engaged with local communities.

It was acknowledged that local communities currently engaged with the Council and Councillors in a variety of ways. The democratic process allowed opportunities for the public to proactively engage in the decision making process and the Council were continually committed towards ensuring that engagement and consultation with the public was undertaken as widely and as often as possible.

The primary methods for active engagement and involvement with the community included:-

- community attendance and involvement at Area Committees, Planning Committee and Council meetings;
- community participation and involvement in the Scrutiny process;
- formal consultation exercises;
- specific projects (i.e. the New Cross Project);
- Locality Team support for community groups and organisations;
- submission of petitions (paper and e-petitions);
- Councillor surgeries;
- social media presence;
- introduction of new website – more accessible and user friendly;
- live twitter feeds from Council events.

Members were advised of the benefits of good community engagement:-

- it can create social connections between individuals and groups;
- it can enhance the motivation and capacity to participate in decision-making, instead of being passive recipients;

For the purposes of the consideration, Members were requested to express their views in relation to the Council's current engagement methods, how effective they were, what worked well for them and what, if anything, could be done better. The Service Director, Corporate Services and Transformation informed the Panel about methods for managing the expectations of the public in relation to engagement and ensuring that any methods utilised remained good value for money. It was also acknowledged that the Council needed to maximise its use of social media outlets in the future, recognising its effectiveness at reaching communities swiftly and in large numbers, at minimum cost.

The following actions were put forward for consideration

- meeting dates should be more widely advertised;
- better/increased use of social media to reach wider audiences within quicker timescales;
- to consider the possibility of more interaction between the public and Members during consideration of planning applications;
- increase promotion of 'good news' stories thereby encouraging interest and public pride;
- introduce use of 'instant chat messaging' to enable prompt responses to public enquiries;
- increase awareness of Council plans and policies (i.e. Area Locality Plans) with information guides in plain English about their objectives and aspirations;
- offer more ongoing support to resident-led groups to encourage sustainable, effective local decision making;
- utilising Twitter to give real-time updates during Council meetings;

## Council Tax Exemptions for Care Leavers – Scrutiny Panel A

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Scrutiny Panel Members were introduced to the topic of Council Tax Exemptions for Care Leavers to explore the financial difficulties that care leavers often faced and initiatives proposed to assist with this.

Members considered the definition of a care leaver (a person leaving Nottinghamshire County Council care provision at the age of 18), the proposed exemptions and why they had been recommended

During the review Panel Members took the opportunity to ask questions to the Service Manager and Portfolio Holder and in doing so discussed a number of issues including:-

- the financial implications for Ashfield District Council and other Preceptors to implement such a scheme;
- acknowledgement that the exemption, if applied until 25, would not be means tested due to the resource implications and capacity to administer this process;
- how the exemption would apply to Care Leavers moving into hostels, as opposed to fully independent living accommodation;
- the Council being mindful of an individual's change in circumstances and the means by which this information is communicated;
- the importance of providing care and support to Care Leavers up the age of 25 as they are vulnerable individuals who are more likely to experience financial and life management difficulties;
- a strong commitment from the Council is required to ensure that effective signposting measures are put in place to assist and support individuals;

The Panel were informed during the review that the Council has the discretion to reduce the council tax liability for individuals or prescribed groups as it thinks fit. This discretion is exercised in accordance with section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The proposed scheme (considered by the Panel) was in addition to the Council's current Local Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS scheme) and would provide assistance to people living within the District that have previously been in care and meet the appropriate qualifying criteria.

The proposed Care Leave Reduction Scheme would only be applied after all other relevant discounts and exemptions have been applied. It was anticipated that some care leavers will already be receiving assistance through the Ashfield's CTS Scheme, which grants a reduction to council tax payers based on an assessment of their means to pay.

Where the qualifying criteria was met and all discounts and exemptions, including CTS, did not cover the full Council Tax charge, then under this scheme the qualifying care leaver would receive further assistance to cover 100% of their council tax charge.

In considering the Scheme, the Panel were informed that to implement such a scheme would require a change to the Council Tax system. The Council did not currently have the software to administer such a reduction in council tax therefore an upgrade to the system would be required. The cost of purchasing this software would be approximately £5,700 plus an ongoing annual maintenance fee of £1,100. The cost of



the additional software can be met from 2018/19 Revenues service budget. The on-going maintenance costs would be met from the Revenues & Benefits Application Software maintenance and licensing budget.

Although the Council was aware that there were currently 104 care leavers living within the District, it is not fully aware of the demographic of these individuals and how many of these are currently receiving Council Tax Support.

Based on a situation where all 104 required additional support through the additional care leavers' reduction scheme, then there would be a reduction of approximately £120,000 per annum in collection of Council Tax.

Based upon the 2018/19 precepts, Ashfield District Council's share of this was approximately £12,000 (or 9.9%) with the other precepting authorities (Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner and Nottinghamshire Fire Authority) meeting approximately £108,000 (or 90.1%).

The following recommendations were submitted to Cabinet for consideration:-

- Cabinet be requested to support the implementation and details of the proposed scheme, due to the social benefits far outweighing the financial cost;
- Cabinet be requested to review the position in approximately 12 months' time to consider any changes in the number of claimants, the impact on Council tax collection and, the costs of managing such a scheme;
- Council consider circulating an annual change of circumstances form to recipients of the exemption, to ensure that the Councils position is effectively monitored;
- Council be encouraged to make a strong commitment to providing a holistic support system to ensure that effective signposting measures are put in place to assist and support individuals;
- delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources and Business Transformation, to award the reductions as deemed appropriate, to enable the Council Tax Team to deliver a fast and efficient process for implementing the reductions.

## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme – Scrutiny Panel B

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Panel Members were asked to consider and review the Council's role in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPR). The Council is currently required to

fulfil its obligation to resettle an agreed number of Syrian refugee families each year and it was felt to be a good time to consider the process and make any changes as appropriate.

In March 2017, the Council accepted its first two refugee families with a further two families being resettled in November 2017. The families were identified as needing resettlement by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and were nominated for rehousing in the UK.

Under the scheme the Government has committed to the resettlement of up to 20,000 Syrian refugees between 2016 and 2020. Ashfield District Council has currently committed to accommodating 46 individuals which equates to 8/10 families.

Under the terms of the SVPR agreement, the Council receives a grant to support each individual refugee which also meets the cost of preparing the property and any additional support the family may need. The families are accommodated for 5 years in the first instance with a decision as to whether the family will stay in the country or return to Syria being made at the end of their stay.

The Council is currently working in partnership with Mansfield District Council to support the scheme with resettlement and community support being provided by Tuntum Housing's Supported Housing Service. Faith groups have also been instrumental in supporting the families in a number of ways. To date, the families have been housed by housing association partners and one family in a property acquired by a local church as an investment.

Panel Members welcomed the news that all the families had settled quickly into their communities and many of the children had excelled at school and formed friendships with other children. The Council were committed to resettling two further families in November 2018 with the final two families arriving mid-2019.

Lessons had been learnt following the resettlement of the first families in 2017 and these were acknowledged by the Panel as follows:-

- the importance of supporting families to become independent and endeavouring not to create dependencies with support being reduced each year;
- Community and faith groups were a great source of support though care needed to be taken to ensure that they continued to enable independence and offered appropriate support;
- Reasonable assumptions had been wrong and concerns regarding how the families might be received by neighbours and the local community were unfounded. Neighbours had been very supportive and in some cases protective of the families. Likewise, an expectation that the families would develop close relations with one another had not proved to be the case;
- The key to becoming part of the local community and to unlocking opportunities, such as employment, had been language skills and the commencement of



English language lessons as soon as possible had been important in achieving this.

As part of the review, Members further debated the following:

- suitable locations;
- types of housing including size;
- the importance of keeping Ward Members involved as they may have contacts and be able to assist in support and employment;
- the need to continue communications with private sector landlords and housing associations;
- the growing relevance of technology including language apps;
- recognition that different cultures require different types of support.

The Following Comments were forwarded to Cabinet

- the update in relation to the Council's role in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, be received and noted;
- Ward Members where the resettlement scheme is taking place in 2018 are kept fully informed and consulted with;
- research be undertaken to consider whether any mobile apps would be appropriate to assist with learning languages for job applications and social integration;
- further discussions to take place with housing associations and landlords in the search for suitable properties and locations.

## CCTV – Scrutiny Panel B

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This topic was added to the Scrutiny Workplan to gain an understanding of CCTV, to consider the impact it has within the Community, and how it contributes to the Council's Corporate Priorities.

Members explored the topic and discussed how CCTV is a popular and effective tool for increasing community safety and reducing the fear of crime.

The use of CCTV as a tool to detect and assist operations against crime has grown substantially. As the number of CCTV installations increase across Britain, so does a growing recognition and acceptance of the benefits of CCTV and the role it has in reducing crime. As well as its uses for crime detection and prosecution, CCTV is also considered to have a substantial deterrent and reassurance effect. The presence of CCTV can make communities feel safer and greatly reduce the fear of crime.

CCTV is effective on its own, but must be used in conjunction with other crime reduction measures. It is important for any CCTV to be adapted and evaluated for local settings and needs.

Other benefits CCTV can provide are:

- Better targeting and use of Police resources
- Detection of incidents
- Identification of criminals
- Strong evidence as a fearless and accurate witness
- Incident prevention
- Increased chance of locating missing persons
- Ashfield District Council utilises CCTV for the following purposes:
- Protecting areas and premises
- Deterring and detecting crime and anti-social behaviour
- Assisting in the identification of offenders leading to their arrest and successful prosecution
- Reducing fear of crime, disorder, and aggression

### **Shared Service Arrangement**

Ashfield District Council forms part of a CCTV Shared Service including two other local authorities in Nottinghamshire; Newark and Sherwood District Council and Broxtowe Borough Council. The monitoring of the CCTV for the three authorities in the Shared Service is undertaken by Profile, an outsourced contract managed by Broxtowe Borough Council. Ashfield District Council has 29 wireless CCTV cameras that are monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at a control room situated at Nottinghamshire Police Headquarters (Sherwood Lodge). The control room also provides a 24-hour contact centre for all out-of-hours calls made to this Council.

The key topics that the CCTV Shared Service Arrangement sets out are:

- Key Objectives of the partnership;
- The Principles of Collaboration;
- Performance Indicators; and
- The Respective Roles and Responsibilities each party has within the Partnership.

## **Control Room Site Visits**

Over the course of the review, Members of the Panel have undertaken two site visits to the CCTV Control Room, located at Sherwood Lodge, Nottinghamshire Police Headquarters. These visits were undertaken to assist Members in gaining a greater understanding of the following:

- How CCTV is utilised throughout Ashfield
- Monitoring of Ashfield District Council's CCTV cameras
- Staffing at the CCTV Control Room
- Image quality
- Communication between Control Room Staff and Nottinghamshire Police

### **First Visit**

The initial visit took place on the 21 March 2018, and allowed Members the opportunity to observe the Control Room during daytime operations. Control Room Staff, alongside the Emergency Planning and CCTV Officer from Newark and Sherwood District Council, were available to answer operational questions and give insight into how the system is used to detect and deter crime. During the visit Members were informed that:

- Control Room Operatives demonstrated to Members how the cameras are used and the quality of imaging available
- This included a demonstration of the zooming functionality of the cameras
- Two Security Industry Authority licensed operators continually staff the Control Room
- the Control Room monitors approximately 160 cameras between Ashfield District Council, Broxtowe Borough Council, and Newark and Sherwood District Council
- All cameras have been strategically placed in accordance with a carefully planned network designed to deter and detect acts of crime and disorder
- The Control Room has direct links with Nottinghamshire Police through dedicated radio and telephone links
- The Control Room Operatives also have the capability to directly transmit images to the Police to facilitate live incident monitoring

### **Second Visit**

The second visit was arranged to give Members of the Panel an additional opportunity to observe the Control Room with the added benefit of seeing evening operations. During the visit the following was discussed:

- Camera Quality
- Concerns were raised over camera image quality in night-time conditions

- Camera locations such as Kingsway Park and Sutton Lawn had particularly low visibility
- Further concerns were raised that Ashfield District Council has not kept up with modern technology developments
- Control Room Operatives demonstrated HD/infra-red cameras in use by other local authorities and Members noted the increased quality and clarity Camera Location
- Members expressed concerns that camera locations were not regularly evaluated
- Lack of Ashfield District Council CCTV coverage in Huthwaite, Annesley, and the Rurals
- Members were advised that with any camera relocation, serious consideration must be given to the dispersion of crime throughout the District Communication
- Members were informed that Control Room Operatives maintain constant radio communication with the Police and Community Protection Officers to ensure incidents are dealt with proactively and reactively.

**The Panel is due to report final recommendations to Cabinet in March 2019**

## Play Strategy for Rural Areas / Green Space Projects – Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Play Strategy for the rural areas and green space projects following a call-in of the Cabinet decision. It was noted that the Ashfield District Council Play Strategy was a plan of action, rather than an adopted document, which aimed to provide continued improvements to play facilities over a four-year period using additional funding streams.

The Committee were advised that the Public Open Space Strategy had been adopted by the Council in 2016 and set out the catchment for play areas across the district. The Deputy Leader also noted that the Rural area had seen significantly less investment in play areas due to lack of funding in the past, namely from lower amounts received from Section 106 agreement.

During consideration of this topic, the Committee was advised that the emerging play strategy would address this lower level of investment by providing £120,000 of funding in the current financial year for Rural area projects, and that Kirkby, Hucknall and Sutton-in-Ashfield would receive the same amount of funding in subsequent years. It was noted that projects would be prioritised using information gathered from a recent stock condition survey.

Members were advised that play area improvements funded through Section 106 contributions and grant funding were continuing this year and through into 2019 and that these included improvements at West Park and Morven Park, Kirkby, Sutton Lawn and Roundhills Recreation Ground, Sutton and Broomhill Park in Hucknall. It was also noted two new play areas had been opened in the current year which had been provided as part of developments at Papplewick in Hucknall, and at Larwood Park in Kirkby.

With regards to the Car Parking Strategy Members were informed that the Car Parking Strategy was due for an annual review. This review would be completed by end March 2019, but noted that Brand Lane would not be covered by the strategy which focused on parking need and demand in town centres and the Rural area rather than very localised parking issues across the district.

Members of the committee expressed concern regarding the parking situation at Brand Lane and on how any Section 106 monies would be spent to relieve parking and traffic issues in the Brand Lane area created as a consequence of housing development in the area. Members agreed that it would be beneficial for Cabinet to look at the terms of the Section 106 agreement with regard to Brand Lane to ensure the agreement adequately met the needs of the area.

The following recommendations were provided to Cabinet:

- the proposed schedule of work for investing in play areas, as detailed in the emerging Play Strategy be informed by specific needs for investment, and that these needs be recorded, rather than investment being determined solely on a schedule and list of areas.
- Cabinet's response to a) above be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Cabinet looks again at the Section 106 agreement for Brand Lane in order to ensure that the agreement meets the requirements of the area in mitigating the impact of further housing development.

# Ashfield Spring Clean

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The Big Ashfield Spring Clean had been added to the Scrutiny Workplan in September 2018 to enable the committee to review the project and to make recommendations to Cabinet for any proposed future schemes. It was noted that the district wide clean-up campaign had been delivered over a three-week period between 19 May and 9 June 2018 and the officer's report set out details regarding the cost of delivery, the impact the scheme made, as well as details on lessons learned.

It was noted that the campaign was rolled out geographically across the District over a three-week period, with Sutton week one, Kirkby and the Rurals week two and Hucknall week three. The campaign was comprised of three distinct offers for residents with static skips being placed at various locations across the District, complemented by "flying skip" bin lorries which collected waste at pre-determined routes over the weekends (excluding the Bank Holiday weekend) as well as free bulky waste collections for residents who needed door to door collection or additional support.

The report presented to the Committee contained a full evaluation of the scheme including information on the amount of waste collected, the type of waste collected and the costs associated with the disposal of the waste collected.

Members were informed during consideration of this item that any future scheme would utilise the "flying skips" more widely and engage with local community groups more as initial assumptions made around the community self-policing of the skips and skip sites had not been fully realised. Members of the committee noted with approval the positive outcome of the scheme in that it had resulted in the collection of large amounts of waste from the district, but did express concerns that some commercial and hazardous waste, including a small amount of asbestos that had been placed into the static skips.

The following recommendations were provided to Cabinet

- both flying skips and static skips used in the Ashfield Spring Clean 2019 be staffed at all times
- a policy and procedure be developed for dealing with any hazardous waste deposited in skips during the Big Ashfield Spring Clean 2019.

- the Council's contractor used for the processing of waste collected from skips during the Ashfield Spring Clean 2018 be contacted for further information on how asbestos deposited in skips was processed as part of an investigation of how the incident of asbestos being deposited in a skip was dealt with.
- a detailed written response on the written questions submitted by Councillor Mason in advance of the meeting regarding specific details of Big Ashfield Spring Clean 2018 be provided to Councillor Mason by the Interim Director of Place and Communities.
- full costings for all aspects of the Ashfield Spring Clean 2019 be made available in advance of the decision being made by Cabinet regarding the details and implementation of the Big Ashfield Spring Clean 2019.

## Performance

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Performance management is one of the key roles of Overview and Scrutiny and provides Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to proactively review and challenge performance, add value to the Council's services and monitor functions delivered with and by the Council's partners that add quality of life to the citizens of Ashfield.

During 2017-18, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitored the performance of an agreed list of priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan to assess where problems were arising and which aims and objectives were being achieved.

Scrutiny Members held a number of meetings to discuss performance issues with relevant service lead officers and Portfolio holders to actively challenge where outcomes have not been achieved.

The Committee have been pleased to note that the level of achievement against priorities identified within the Corporate Plan has improved significantly. Scrutiny of Performance is additionally supported by the Corporate Performance Manager. Issues raised during the year were also used to inform the 2018-19 Scrutiny Workplan.



# Getting Involved

There are a number of different ways in which members of the community can get involved in Scrutiny. These are:

**1. Attend A Meeting** - All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public to come and listen to the debate. There may also be a chance to speak at the meetings at the discretion of the Chair. The meetings are publicised and can be found at: <https://democracy.ashfield-dc.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

**2. Put Forward A Suggestion For A Topic To Be Considered By Scrutiny** - Any topic can be suggested for consideration for the Scrutiny workplan. To put forward a topic does not mean that you will have to become directly involved in the review if you do not wish to be. <https://www.ashfield.gov.uk/your-council/about-the-council/councillors-and-meetings/overview-and-scrutiny-function/>

**2. Speak To Your Local Councillor** - Your local Councillor details are located on the Council's website at; <https://democracy.ashfielddc.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>