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# Annual Scrutiny Report 2022

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# Chairman's Foreword



I am pleased to present an overview of the work carried out by scrutiny over the last twelve months. Following my appointment as the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2022, my role is to promote the scrutiny function both inside and outside of the Council and guide the process through the undertaking of evidence led reviews of strategic and local issues.

Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's democratic structure and governance framework and continues to spotlight and review issues of concern raised by the community, Members, and service delivery performance.

I would like to thank the Chairs, Vice Chairs and Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Scrutiny Panels A and B, and the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel for their hard work during the last year. I would also like to make special mention of Councillor Jim Blagden. Throughout his tenure as both Vice Chairman and Chairman of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel, Jim dedicated his time to tackling the issues and effects of the pandemic on the community and businesses in Ashfield and played a key strategic role in guiding the recovery process throughout the District. He will be sadly missed.

Whilst the time limited remit of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel concluded in May 2022, the effects of the pandemic and recovery within the community will continue to be a focus in the development of appropriate work programme topics.

Work undertaken during the last twelve months and ongoing throughout 2022, continues to be varied and wide reaching, engaging both the community, partner agencies, and Officers. This includes reviews of the cost of living crisis, gambling harms, dog fouling and littering, social value and selective licensing. Furthermore, Scrutiny continues to monitor service delivery through performance and the Council's budget.

I look forward to continuing the key work undertaken by Members of scrutiny throughout 2022/23 in delivering a function that remains open, participatory, investigatory, and flexible to deliver positive outcomes for both the community and the delivery of services.

**Councillor Kier Barsby, Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman**

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## Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs

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### Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman – Councillor Kier Barsby  
Vice Chairman – Councillor Andrew Harding

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### Scrutiny Panel A

Chairman – Councillor Dave Shaw  
Vice Chairman – Councillor Caroline Wilkinson

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### Scrutiny Panel B

Chairman – Councillor Christian Chapman  
Vice Chairman – Councillor Trevor Locke

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# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Cost of Living

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recently began a review focused on the national cost of living crisis. The Cost of Living topic was added to the scrutiny work programme in June 2022, with Members discussing how prices continue to rise at an alarming rate, including groceries, fuel, and energy with an ever-increasing reliance on free school meals and food banks throughout the country. This was followed by Members voting to declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' at a Council meeting held in July 2022.

As part of this declaration, Ashfield District Council noted that, at the time:

- *Prices are continuing to rise at their fastest rate for 40 years with food costs, particularly for bread, cereal, and meat, climbing. UK inflation, the rate at which prices rise, edged up to 9.1% in the 12 months to May, from 9% in April according to the Office for National Statistics.*
- *On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54 percent. In light of the increased energy price cap, the average standard tariff energy bill will increase by £693 per year. The average pre-pay meter energy bill will increase by £708 per year.*
- *On 6 April 2022, the Government increased National Insurance by 1.25 percentage points, which is projected to cost the average Ashfield family an additional £108 per year.*
- *The Government has suspended the pensions 'triple lock' for 2022/23, meaning that Ashfield's 24,919 pensioners will see a rise of 3.1% this year (instead of the 8.3% under the triple lock formula). This year, this will cost an Ashfield resident on the full new state pension an average of £487, and for an Ashfield resident on the full basic state pension an average of £373.*
- *The number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in the Ashfield District is 17,987 – which is 28.2% of all pupils. This is the highest figure since records began. Thousands of Ashfield families face destitution and hunger as their earning are just over the threshold for free school meals.*
- *According to the Trussell Trust, food banks in the food charity network provided more than 2.1 million emergency food parcels between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. Of these, 832,000 were for children. This represents an 81% increase compared to the same period five years ago.*

In declaring the 'Cost of Living Emergency', Council resolved to ask Ashfield's two District MPs to urgently lobby the Government to:

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- *Reduce the standard rate of VAT from 20 percent to 17.5 percent, saving the average Ashfield household a further £600 this year.*
  - *Re-introduce the pensions triple lock to support Ashfield's pensioners.*
  - *Re-introduce the £20 Universal Credit uplift immediately.*

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are committed to understanding the scale of the cost of living crisis in Ashfield to residents, businesses, communities, and to the Council as an organisation. Members will explore what steps the Council can take to support residents, communities, and businesses in Ashfield facing rising costs across the board that may face many difficult decisions going forward.

The Committee will maintain awareness of any and all emerging initiatives and support measures announced by Central Government to understand how they will translate to Ashfield, such as the recent announcement of a Government-imposed price cap for energy prices.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be advancing with the Cost of Living review through the remainder of 2022 and into the New Year, with a view to submitting a final report to Cabinet in Spring 2023.

## **Social Value**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a meeting in March 2022 focused on Social Value. During the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the Annual Budget and Corporate Plan at the February 2022 meeting, Members expressed a desire to learn the benefits and requirements of social value and how methodology relating to it has been incorporated into the Council's procurement procedure.

The Council's Procurement and Project Officer attended the March 2022 meeting of the Committee and delivered a presentation on what Social Value means and how it is incorporated into the Council's procurement strategy.

Members were informed that the Council's Social Value Policy was approved mid-2020 and the Council was now starting to see real outcomes from its implementation. Current social and local economic value delivered from January 2021 to January 2022 stood at £184,677.89 with a committed value over the life of its procurement so far of £1,445,640.23.

The procurement, measurement, management, and reporting of social value were currently administered through a national 'Social Value Portal' which provided Council's with a dashboard for collating information.

It was explained that the recording and use of Social Value methodology enhanced and reinforced:

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- Legal compliance with Social Value
  - Increased value for money/return on investment
  - Increased local employment growth
  - Public health and wellbeing benefits
  - Community resilience
  - Improved local place
  - Join working around commissioning and procurement

Members were pleased to learn that a Supplier Directory/Portal was in development, designed to grow local opportunities and to provide a reference point to Officers for low value procurement. Following the detailed presentation, Members took the opportunity to question the Procurement and Project Officer. At the end, Committee Members felt significantly more informed on the subject and assured that the knowledge around social value will assist Members during future scrutiny work.

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# Scrutiny Panel A

## Selective Licensing Scheme

Scrutiny Panel A carried out a review of the Council's Selective Licensing Scheme that concluded in March 2022. The review was carried out concurrently with the review of the Selective Licensing Scheme as it reached the conclusion of the originally agreed 5-year pilot period.

Carrying out the review, Members looked to understand why the Selective Licensing Scheme was initially implemented, and looked back to the 2016 report that proposed the initial introduction of the Scheme, learning that the following objectives underpinned the initial its establishment:

- Improve housing standards, properties, conditions within the private rented stock
- Improvement management practices
- Improve levels of demand for housing and reduce the number of empty homes
- Contribute towards partnership working to improve wider community issues including crime, anti-social behaviour, and domestic nuisance

To inform eventual recommendations to Cabinet, Panel Members worked to determine if the Scheme had achieved the objectives set out above, and if any new objectives should be considered in renewing the Scheme.

Throughout the review, Members worked closely with the Service Manager for Strategic Housing & Lettings and the Environmental Health Team Leader to gather information and evidence regarding the implementation of the Scheme, as well as the benefits achieved, and areas for improvement needed within the Scheme.

Members held two informal working group meetings focused on the Scrutiny Review: Selective Licensing Scheme as well as two formal Panel meetings. From the onset, it was clear that selective licensing was a divisive topic with Panel Members having numerous concerns that needed to be addressed before any recommendation could be made to renew the Scheme.

Members were presented with a variety of information and evidence to assist with formulating final recommendations for the review. Most notably, Members were given the opportunity to review case study photograph examples of the Selective Licensing Scheme being utilised to improve living conditions for tenants in Ashfield. Members were informed of the benefits achieved by the Scheme in the first five-year period of implementation for tenants, landlords, the Council, and the wider District.

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Members were informed of the number of properties within the designated areas that required a license under the Scheme. Furthermore, information was shared regarding the number of licenses issued, licence refusals, and any penalties issued as a result of the Scheme. The Panel also examined the legislation behind selective licensing to understand the conditions required to be met for selective licensing designation in an area.

## **Recommendations and Explanations**

At the conclusion of the review, Members of Scrutiny Panel A formulated the following recommendations and reasons for recommendations that were presented to the March 2022 meeting of Cabinet for consideration, alongside a report recommending that Cabinet renew the Selective Licensing Scheme for a further five-year period:

- a. Support the renewal of the Selective Licensing Scheme in designated parts of Stanton Hill and Sutton Central (New Cross) for a further 5 years.*

*Upon reviewing all of the information and evidence provided, taking into consideration the primary objectives of the Selective Licensing Scheme, and the benefits and improvements that have been achieved in the first 5-year period of implementation, Scrutiny Panel A Members feel it would be most appropriate for Cabinet to support the renewal of the Selective Licensing Scheme for a further five-year period.*

*Panel Members make this recommendation with the knowledge that numerous lessons have been learned from the original implementation of the Scheme following a comprehensive evaluation report and consultation exercise, and that some proposed changes to geographical boundaries, fee structure, license conditions, scheme administration, and support for landlords will be put forward to Cabinet, as set out in the Selective Licensing of Private Rented Homes report to Cabinet in March 2022.*

- b. Explore the feasibility of expanding the Selective Licensing Scheme to other areas in the District that might meet the conditions for selective licensing designation.*

*At the onset of the review, Scrutiny Panel A Members learned the conditions that need to be met in an area to achieve a selective licensing designation. These conditions are specified in Selective Licensing in the Private Rented Sector: A Guide for Local Authorities, a guidance document published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in March 2015.*

*A selective licensing designation may be made if the area to which it relates satisfies one or more of the following conditions:*

- Low housing demand (or is likely to become such an area)*
- A significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour*
- Poor property conditions*

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- *High levels of migration*
  - *High level of deprivation*
  - *High levels of crime*

*Furthermore, in considering whether to designate an area for selective licensing on the grounds above on property conditions, migration, deprivation, and crime the local housing authority may only make a designation if the area has a high proportion of property in the private rented sector.*

*Authorities are also required to identify the objective or objectives that a designation will help it achieve, and an authority must also consider if there are any other courses of action available to it that would achieve the same objective or objectives without the need for a selective licensing designation to be made.*

*With the knowledge of the conditions needed to be met to achieve a designation, Panel Members have discussed the possibility that other areas in Ashfield may meet these conditions and benefit from the implementation of a selective licensing designation. Therefore, Scrutiny Panel A recommends to Cabinet that exploration is undertaken to identify any such areas that would meet the criteria required to implement a selective licensing designation.*

- c. Ensure that, if approved, the Selective Licensing Scheme continues to be self-funded through the license fee structure.*

*Members of the Panel raised some concerns that the refocussing of dedicated officer(s) could have longer term financial implications to the Housing Revenue Account. Members have been assured that the Scheme would not have any General Fund/HRA implications as all costs would be contained within the income generated by the license fee structure.*

- d. Ensure that the Council continues to provide available support to private sector tenants outside of designated Selective Licensing Scheme areas.*

*Members are aware that it is not possible to designate every area in Ashfield for selective licensing, and that the absence of selective licensing in areas leaves the Council with limited powers in regard to the private rented sector.*

*However, it is recognised that even in the absence of a licensing designation, the Council still has a responsibility to Ashfield residents who may be experiencing issues, and must continue, through signposting and appropriate advice, to support private sector tenants in areas outside of the proposed Selective Licensing Scheme.*

**All recommendations presented to Cabinet as part of the final report were accepted. The Selective Licensing Scheme was renewed for a further five-year period in designated areas of Ashfield.**

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## Gambling Harm

Members of Scrutiny Panel A are currently working through a review of Gambling Harm. Gambling Harm was added to the scrutiny work programme following debate from a previous Council meeting relating to the revised Statement of Gambling Policy where numerous Members raised growing concerns on the serious impact of gambling on local communities and individuals, with a desire for the Council to identify what it can do to mitigate these issues.

In addition to this, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is working on a project with the Gambling Commission to raise awareness and increase the involvement of elected members in overview and scrutiny roles in tackling gambling related harms. As part of the project, the CfGS have released a document detailing how local authorities are using scrutiny to tackle gambling harms. In the document, the CfGS have provided recent examples of local authorities tackling gambling related harms through scrutiny – using the function to understand, evaluate, and improve efforts that prevent and treat gambling harms in the community.

The CfGS set out common themes for scrutiny involvement in gambling harm that have been identified. Scrutiny Panel A Members are applying these themes throughout the review:

- Mapping areas of risk and vulnerable populations
- Bringing together local partners
- Involving stakeholders and victims
- Seeking to understand individual, social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors that influence experience of gambling harm
- Understanding gambling harm as a public health issue

The Local Government Association (LGA) have also published a councillor handbook designed to assist councillors in understanding gambling regulations and the role local authorities have in managing those regulations. A section of the handbook Members have been particularly interested in during the review is titled 'Protecting Vulnerable People'. This section sets out how protection children and vulnerable people from being harmed or exploited by gambling is one of the three key licensing objectives.

Members are awaiting the publication of a Gambling Reform White Paper from Central Government before formulating a final report with recommendations for the review. The White Paper will include proposals to reform gambling laws. Unfortunately, publication of the White Paper has been postponed for a fourth time. Members are hopeful that the Paper will be published soon so it can be understood the proposals within can contribute to mitigating gambling harm and related issues.

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# Scrutiny Panel B

## Climate Change Mitigation

Scrutiny Panel B Members undertook a wide ranging and lengthy review into Climate Change Mitigation. Climate Change Mitigation was added to the scrutiny work programme following the Council declaring a 'Climate Emergency' at a meeting held in July 2019. Panel Members held five formal meetings and three informal working group focusing on Climate Change Mitigation.

Through the course of the review, Members worked closely with the Council's Assistant Director for Assets and Investments and Strategic Asset Manager. Working so closely with both Officers was invaluable for Members and allowed scrutiny to play a clear role in the Council's emerging policy regarding climate change. The review was commenced with Members setting out clear terms of reference and gaining an initial understanding of what climate change was, the international context, and how it is impacting Ashfield.

Members used the motion passed by Council at the July 2019 meeting to form the partial basis of the review. In this motion, the Council confirmed a commitment to continue with tree planting schemes, supporting blue and green infrastructure, and working with community groups across the District towards climate change mitigation.

In passing the motion, Council resolved to:

- Reaffirm its commitment to doing everything possible to combat climate change including committing to a robust climate change strategy.
- Include an assessment of the implications for sustainability and the environment in all relevant reports to committees.

Members also give consideration to the Council's established Corporate Plan and the key priorities set out within relating to climate change mitigation. These included some key objectives such as:

- Deliver against our Environmental Charter
- Refresh the Green Business Scheme to engage businesses and promote environmentally sustainable behaviours
- Work with community volunteers and local business volunteers to encourage an increase in ownership of community open spaces
- Contribute to a reduction of CO2 emissions by increasing tree coverage in Ashfield
- Develop a Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan

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It was clear to Panel Members that the development of a robust Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan was a key priority for the Council and would be central priority for the Scrutiny Review: Climate Change Mitigation.

To inform the review, Members utilised guidance published by the CfGS on how to practice scrutiny and enquiry into climate change at a local level, with a focus on the implications for any council declaring a climate emergency.

Members worked to understand the steps the Council had already taken towards climate change mitigation. These included commissioning Nottingham City Council to produce a Carbon Management Plan specific for Ashfield, moving to green electricity across the Council's assets, expanding use of photo voltaic power generation, biomass boilers, and improved external wall and general insulation on Council properties.

The Panel were informed of the different categories of emissions:

- Scope 1 – Direct (Ashfield District Council offices and fleet to provide services)
- Scope 2 – Indirect utilities (purchasing utilities for offices and communal housing courts)
- Scope 3 – Indirect other (Ashfield District Council investment properties, housing stock, staff commuting, purchased goods/materials)

Regarding scope 1 and 2 emissions, Members were informed that the largest contributors were the Council's Fleet at 41%, gas usage at 39%, and electric usage at 20%.

As part of the evidence gathering process, Panel Members examined a series of case studies compiled by the LGA highlighting the work of local authorities across the country towards climate change mitigation. Emerging government policy and legislation was also key to the information base built upon by Members, including the Net Zero Strategy, published by the Government, setting out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet a net zero target by 2050.

As mentioned, contributing to the development of the Council's emerging Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan was a key priority for Scrutiny Panel B during the review. Members had the opportunity, at every stage of the review, to examine the documents in draft format, providing direct feedback to the Officers responsible for drafting the documents. Members held a question and answer session to go through the targets set out within the draft Climate Change Strategy and assessed each step set out within the draft Climate Change Action Plan.

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## Recommendations and Explanations

At the conclusion of the Scrutiny Review: Climate Change Mitigation, Scrutiny Panel B submitted a final report to Cabinet in June 2022 with the following recommendations and reasons for each recommendation:

- a. *Support the approval of a proposed target of net-zero by 2030 for the Council's scope 1 and 2 emissions*

*The draft Climate Change Strategy sets out a target for the Council to reach net-zero for the Council's direct and indirect (scope 1 and 2) emissions by 2030. Panel Members support this target in recognition of the Climate Change Act 2008 and the emissions reduction targets set out within. Members also acknowledge the significant steps the Council has made in reducing carbon emissions, such as installing solar PV panels on many Council owned buildings, operating smarter working practices, and launching a Climate Change Officer Working Group.*

- b. *Support the approval of proposals to minimise scope 3 emissions by 2050*

*The draft Climate Change Strategy also sets out a target to minimise scope 3 emissions (outside the Council's direct control) by 2050. Panel Members recognise the extra difficulty of this target due to the nature of scope 3 emissions. However, the Panel is confident the Council can utilise its position as a community leader to work towards achieving this target.*

- c. *Support the approval of the Climate Change Strategy, Climate Change Action Plan, and Carbon Management Plan*

*Understanding the Council's developing policies regarding climate change mitigation was a key objective of the Panel as part of the review process. Members were made aware of the developing draft Climate Change Strategy, Climate Change Action Plan, and the Carbon Management Plan at an early stage of the review. Policy development is one of the key roles of scrutiny, and Panel Members have worked closely with the Assistant Director of Assets and Investments and Strategic Asset Manager to have input into the developing documents.*

*Members fully support the steps that are being taken to ensure that the Council has robust policies in place regarding climate change mitigation and recommend that Cabinet approve and adopt the draft documents.*

- d. *Continue to ensure an increase in the number of electric charging points available to the Council and the wider public*

*Central Government have announced that from 2030, the sale of new petrol and diesel cars will no longer be permissible. This announcement, alongside the continued advancement in*

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*electric vehicle technology, will lead to increased demand for electric charging points throughout the District.*

*Panel Members are recommending that Cabinet ensure that this increase in demand is met.*

*e. Continue the commitment towards the expansion of a greener transport fleet*

*As stated in the draft Climate Change Strategy, in 2019/20, the Council's fleet accounted for 39.9% of the Council's scope 1 and 2 emissions. Because of this, one of the main priorities of the Council's aim to achieve net-zero in scope 1 and 2 emissions will be the decarbonisation of the Council's fleet.*

*The Panel have been made aware that the Council will be undertaking a full fleet management review, with strong consideration given to full electrification of the Council's fleet. Panel Members welcome the fleet management review, and also endorse other initiatives undertaken by the Council to reduce transport and fleet emissions, such as promoting agile working to reduce commuting and encouraging carsharing.*

*f. Continue to invest appropriately in renewable technology opportunities*

*Members are aware that there continues to be advancements in renewable technologies, such as with electric vehicles, and recommend that Cabinet continues to identify and invest in opportunities that will contribute to a reduction in emissions. This could include opportunities such as continued investment in solar PV technology, achieving a greener transport fleet, and exploring renewable technologies in house building and repairs.*

*Panel Members would also like to see, where possible, renewable measures implemented in the Council's leisure centres.*

*g. Promote low carbon and sustainable procurement across the Council*

*Panel Members recommend that the Council promotes and embeds sustainable procurement within the organisation. As set out by the Local Government Association in the Sustainable Procurement – Delivery Local Economic, Social, and Environmental Priorities toolkit, sustainable procurement is a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works, and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation, but also to society and the local economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment.*

*h. Continue to support tree planting schemes throughout Ashfield*

*Members agreed that continuing to establish tree planting schemes throughout Ashfield will be an important step to helping the Council achieve its emission reduction goals. Tree*

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*planting is an effective method used to offset emissions that cannot be removed. Furthermore, tree planting is an important step to support biodiversity.*

*The Forestry Commission's Plant Your Future: The Case for Trees details the wide-ranging benefits of tree planting schemes for businesses, land, local communities, and nature and the environment. These include:*

- Carbon offsetting*
- Natural flood management*
- Cutting pollution*
- Supporting health and wellbeing*
- Improving air quality*
- Boosting biodiversity*

*i. Continue to support and promote energy saving initiatives to Ashfield residents*

*Panel Members agreed that ensuring residents have the most up-to-date knowledge and information regarding climate change mitigation and energy saving initiatives is pivotal. The Council already puts out messages on the website, through social media, and inside Ashfield Matters.*

*Ensuring that residents are aware of energy saving methods and initiatives will be especially important with the rise in cost of living and the dramatic rise in energy prices in 2022.*

*j. In addition to the Green Rewards Scheme, consider other targeted recognition initiatives aimed at communities, educational institutions, and businesses to increase innovation, action, and awareness in Ashfield*

*In recognising the importance of raising knowledge and the profile of climate change mitigation initiatives, Members of the Panel agreed that developing other District-wide targeted schemes, in addition to the Green Rewards Scheme, would be valuable. These schemes could recognise where schools, local businesses, communities, and residents have made exceptional efforts to contribute towards reducing carbon emissions.*

*Such schemes could include:*

- Primary and secondary school category*
- College category*
- Community group/individual category*
- Business category*

*This would differ from the Green Reward Scheme, which offers financial incentives, instead focussing on a possible annual awards ceremony at Ashfield District Council. Such events*

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*not only raise the profile of the issue, but also continue to encourage participation and interaction.*

- k. Work with schools and community groups to improve knowledge and understanding of climate change mitigation*

*It is globally recognised that young people play a critical part in future climate change action and long-term changes. In addition to recommendation J, the Panel also acknowledges the importance of keeping schools and community groups informed and engaged on climate change issues.*

*Such interactions and engagement ensure that both local impact and short- and longer-term initiatives can drive both behavioural, consumer and business changes that help Ashfield continue to achieve collective objectives of reducing carbon emissions and improving the local environment for generations to come.*

- l. Explore the possibility of establishing wildlife friendly verges across the District as part of the Council's commitment to supporting nature and wildlife*

*Panel Members were interested in understanding what measures other Councils have taken in working towards the commitment of climate change mitigation. One such measure Members became interested in was the utilisation of road verges to establish wildlife areas.*

*Members studied various case study examples of road verges being used in this manner, including:*

- Leicestershire County Council established a 'Develop your own wildlife area' scheme in response to public interest. This scheme offers parish, town, borough, and district councils the opportunity to turn urban roadside verges into dedicated wildlife verges.*
- Cornwall Council noticed a large rise in native wildflowers and meadow plants as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic reducing grounds maintenance. They have since implemented a policy including reducing the number of times grass on verges is cut, ensuring that cutting is done after flowers have been set, and using special mowers to allow meadow plants to establish.*
- Dorset Council launched a 'Love Your Verge' campaign as a countywide collaboration to raise awareness about the Council's work to increase and maintain biodiversity in verges, in response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency. By increasing awareness about the importance of Dorset's thriving verges, the campaign also aims to deter people from littering on roadsides.*

*Since formulating this recommendation, Members are aware that the Council has set out plans to establish 'bee highways' on Titchfield Park and Kenbrook Road in Hucknall, Teversal*

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*Trail in Skegby, and Derby Road in Kirkby. Panel Members are keen to see the Council continue to expand on this innovative scheme.*

- m. Ensure that local businesses and communities are involved in implementing the key objectives set out within the Climate Change Strategy*

*The aims and objectives established within the Climate Change Strategy are wide-ranging, requiring the Council to work in partnership with local businesses and communities to achieve them. In order for this plan to be an operational living document that demonstrates ongoing progress, it is critical that the Council continues to establish and maintain relationships with key partners, businesses, and the community alike.*

**All recommendations presented to Cabinet as part of the final report were accepted.**

## **Dog Fouling and Littering**

Scrutiny Panel B has recently started a review into Dog Fouling and Littering in Ashfield. The topic was added to the scrutiny work programme in June 2022 following Members agreeing that dog fouling and littering offences remain key issues for the Council to focus on, being the source of a high number of complaints reported to Councillors. So far, the Panel has held one formal introductory meeting on the topic where Members had the opportunity to discuss terms of reference for the review and identify key information and evidence required.

Initially, Members have looked back to previous scrutiny review into similar topics, assessing whether some of the issues that were prevalent during previous reviews are still relevant today. The Panel has looked at the outcomes of two reviews carried out previously that concluded in 2004 and 2010. The Panel has further examined recent campaigns launched by the Council to tackle the issue and are further interested in exploring any opportunities regarding the Council's established volunteering programme.

Members have also identified the information available on the Council's website regarding dog fouling and littering, explaining what constitutes an offence and the potential consequences that can be faced if a dog owner does not clean up after their dog immediately in public places and dispose of it responsibly. Members are also aware of the Council's duty to clear litter and waste, as far as possible, from public land and places which the Council is responsible for. This includes areas such as:

- Public highway (verges, pavements, and to some degree the road itself)
- Council owned car parks
- Play areas
- Pedestrian areas
- Parks and open spaces

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Members have learned when fixed penalty notices may be issued, including the legal powers that allow the Council to issue fixed penalty notices.

The Scrutiny Review: Dog Fouling and Littering will continue into 2023 with the Panel requesting further information on the number of offences recorded in Ashfield, any dog fouling and littering offence hotspot areas identified in Ashfield, and how the campaigns undertaken by the Council have tackled dog fouling and littering in the District.

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# COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel

## COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel Conspectus

Due to the completion of the time limited remit and objectives of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel, Council made the decision to approve the cessation of the Panel at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2022.

In June 2022, Cabinet was presented with a conspectus report, providing a meeting-by-meeting overview of the progress and achievements attained by the Panel over the course of its establishment from June 2020 through to April 2022.

### Panel Establishment

At the 30 June 2020 meeting, Cabinet considered a report titled *COVID-19 Response Update and Initial Recovery Plans*. The report provided Cabinet with a summary of what the Council has done to respond to COVID-19, a comprehensive update of the COVID-19 decisions taken to date (30 June 2020) and began to explore arrangements for the recovery stage of the pandemic.

Within the report, the proposed establishment of a new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel was presented to Cabinet, with a view to Cabinet recommending the establishment of the Panel to the next meeting of the Council. The Panel would be made up of 7 Members who are appointed in accordance with the requirements of political balance.

At this meeting, Cabinet resolved the following:

- a. the way the Council has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to date, the fact that the Council has delivered all essential Council services in full, along with other priority services and additional COVID-19 responsibilities, be noted and welcomed.
- b. the COVID-19 related Executive decisions taken to date (attached as Appendix B to this report), be received and fully endorsed.
- c. the extension of free Town Centre parking until 7 September 2020 be approved.
- d. the initial approach to the recovery phase of the pandemic be approved.
- e. the Recovery Strategy (attached as Appendix C to this report) be approved.
- f. recommendation to Council for the establishment of a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel.

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The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel was subsequently established by Council alongside a set terms of reference as follows:

1. Responsibility for the review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and taking an active role in respect of the Council's recovery plans as requested by the Executive or as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Scrutiny Workplan, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Reviewing the Council's response to COVID-19 and identifying any short-term actions arising which improve operational and corporate resilience.
  - b. Policy development in respect of the Council's recovery from COVID-19, including preparedness for future waves of COVID-19.
  - c. Policy development in respect of respect of the Council's approach to the renewal of the local economy.
  - d. Policy development in respect of the renewal and reform of local government services, including the future structure of local government in Nottinghamshire.
2. To report any recommendations or considerations to the Executive in respect of the responsibilities outlined above.
3. The Panel will receive updates in respect of the implementation of the Council's Recovery Action Plan.

### **Panel Meeting – July 2020**

The first meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in July 2020. Members received a detailed report including guidance from the Centre for Governance on establishing a COVID-19 related scrutiny panel, a detailed summary of what the Council had done up to that point to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, which further included a summary of COVID-19 related decisions taken to that date, and arrangements for recovery.

Members were joined at this meeting by the Director of Legal and Governance and the Council's Strategic Lead for COVID-19 Response, who explained the summary of the work undertaken by the Council in response to the outbreak of the pandemic. Members were also informed of some of the key partnerships the Council operated within, including:

- The Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Local Resilience Forum
- Multi-Agency Response Group
- Ashfield District Council Incident Management Team

At the first meeting, the Panel made a request to Cabinet that a standing item be placed on the Cabinet agenda to allow the Chairman and Vice Chairman the opportunity to provide responsive comments and recommendations as required.

Members also took the time to establish a work programme for the Panel, planning out each meeting with key themes and attendees identified.

At the conclusion of the first meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a) the Council’s initial response to the pandemic including the consequential impacts to the Council, the local economy, and its communities as outlined in the report, be received, and noted;
- b) the following initial work programme for the Panel be approved to facilitate delivery of the Panel’s objectives in a timely and responsive manner: -

Date of Meeting:	Focus Theme:	Attendees:	Cabinet Update:
3 September 2020	Local Recovery Themes Update and The Peoples’ Memorial	All Service Directors	15 September 2020
6 October 2020	Small Business and High Street Recovery	Local Business Representatives	13 October 2020
5 November 2020	Multi-Agency Working	Police, NHS, Charities, Discover Ashfield, County Council	1 December 2020
10 December 2020	TBC	TBC	20 January 2020

- c) the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team be invited to attend the next Panel meeting in September 2020 to brief Members on their designated area of COVID-19 response and recovery;
- d) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 3 September 2020, to enable Members to consider in more detail the suggestions for a memorial to

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commemorate and honour the unstinting commitment and bravery shown by all key workers and volunteers during the pandemic;

- e) Police Inspector Mark Dickson and Kings Mill Hospital's Chief Executive, Richard Mitchell, be invited to a future Panel meeting to consider the successes achieved through multi-agency working during the pandemic.

### **Panel Meeting – September 2020**

The second meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in September 2020. Members were presented with a report featuring updates from the Council's Corporate Leadership Team relating to each of the Council's directorates and COVID-19 specific response and recovery themes. Key themes such as government funding, housing and communities' recovery, and local economic recovery were included in this report.

The Panel welcomed attendance from the Director of Legal and Governance, the Director of Place and Communities, the Director of Housing and Assets, the Director for Resources and Business Transformation, the Corporate Finance Manager, and the Chief Executive.

During the height of the pandemic, Panel Members were also presented with the most up-to-date guidance and legislation regarding COVID-19 restrictions.

The meeting took the format of a question-and-answer session, with Panel Members taking the opportunity to ask questions of each member of the Corporate Leadership Team based on the updates provided within the report. The Panel also received questions from the public which were answered by those in attendance.

The key areas of concern identified at this meeting were:

- What further support can be offered to small businesses?
- What support could be offered to charitable organisations and churches?
- Homelessness and rent arrears escalating
- Potential impact of a second wave

At the conclusion of the second meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a) the updates provided by the Corporate Leadership Team relating to the Council's Directorates and COVID-19 specific recovery themes, as outlined in the report, be received, and noted;
- b) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 6 October 2020 focusing on Small Business Recovery in Ashfield;

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- c) the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to extend invitations to business representatives from a variety of sectors and areas across the District to attend the next meeting of the Panel and participate in the discussion relating to Small Business Recovery;
  - d) an item be placed on the agenda for the Panel meeting scheduled for 6 October 2020 to enable Members to consider in more detail the proposals for local government reorganisation.

### **Cabinet Meeting – September 2020**

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the September 2020 meeting of Cabinet to provide an update on the work undertaken at the first two meetings of the Panel.

#### Key Worker Memorial

The Panel were very keen to see the installation of a suitable memorial to commemorate the bravery and excellent work carried out by all key workers and volunteers during the COVID-19 outbreak. It was unlikely that S106 funding would be available to purchase and install the memorial, but officers were still considering the possibility of funding through public realm contributions.

#### Letter of Thanks

The Panel requested that a formal letter of thanks on behalf of the Council be sent to all foodbanks and community groups that worked to support vulnerable people and communities during the pandemic.

### **Panel Meeting – October 2020**

The third meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in October 2020. Members were presented with a report providing further information regarding small business and high street recovery, which was selected as a focus theme for this meeting as part of the Panel's established work programme.

Members welcomed attendance from the Director of Legal and Governance, the Director of Place and Communities, the Assistant Director of Planning and Regulatory Services, the Town Centres and Markets Manager, and Senior Economic Development Officer.

The Panel also welcomed attendance from Martin Rigley, the Chairman of Discover Ashfield, who offered a business perspective to the Panel. Martin updated the Panel on the work of the Discover Ashfield Board, and also took the time to answer a series of questions and

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comments from Members ranging from advice to businesses in the event of additional lockdowns to advice to new businesses starting up during the pandemic.

At this meeting, Panel Members were asked to consider the Economic Recovery Plan that detailed the latest real-time data to help the Council understand the significant impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic disruption had on Ashfield's economy.

The Economic Recovery Plan set out seven emerging themes to guide local economic recovery:

### Emerging Themes to Guide Local Economic Recovery

1. **Town Centre Recovery:** Boost local consumer demand and confidence by promoting Ashfield District as a great place to live and visit. Attract spending back to Hucknall, Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Sutton Town Centres through promotional activity, local purchasing campaigns and community projects. This could involve the Council working with local partners to implement an 'open for business' campaign to publicise businesses, offers and events as town centre businesses gradually re-open.
2. **Regeneration Capacity Building:** This would need to include a Full Time Regeneration Team for ADC tasked with producing a new Economic Development Strategy. New dedicated capacity building and leveraging of the Council's own dedicated resources to instigate a full time Regeneration Team for Ashfield District capable of delivering and taking forward its own Economic Development Strategy for the District. This could involve progressing a wider Place Marketing campaign to encourage a broader range of developers and investors to come back to Ashfield. This would involve the new Regeneration Team marketing the District's assets effectively to developers and housebuilders more generally and promote Ashfield as a place for aspiring households to move to.
3. **Skills and Training:** By working with local education and training providers, the D2N2 LEP and others to ensure that local residents – in particular, young people - can access skills and employability support including specific opportunities for re-training, business start-up, and developing digital/e-commerce competencies.
4. **Industrial Sectoral Support:** As Ashfield's business base transitions from restart, to recover, to renew, this should include a locally responsive business resilience programme with targeted support to enable firms to adapt to new technologies (such as enhancing digital and e-commerce capabilities), diversify or access new markets (including exporting opportunities) and support business start-ups amongst residents re-entering the labour market as a result of Covid-19.
5. **Green Business Growth:** This would involve harnessing innovation 'Green Recovery' opportunities generated by the pandemic (such as medical technology and clean growth), using these to accelerate existing business clusters, development proposals

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and local business ecosystems, particularly where these align with Government economic recovery funding initiatives.

6. **Development and Infrastructure Projects:** This would aim to kick start investment and stimulate economic activity within the District, engaging with key partners such as the LEP to leverage funding opportunities from emerging funding packages such as the Getting Building Fund. This would include progressing opportunities such as the Maid Marian Line Rail Extension to the proposed HS2 Hub at Toton; the new Garden settlement(s); and the opportunities emerging from the Towns Fund and Future High Streets fund proposals.
7. **Supporting Ashfield's Residents and Workforce:** The Pandemic may create a significant mental health crisis for Ashfield's residents due to heightened levels of anxiety due to the risk of catching the infection, disrupted education, lost jobs/income, dying, or losing family members. From an economic perspective, this theme would include ADC working with the NHS Nottingham City CCG to ensure widespread availability of mental health and psychosocial support and to assist residents to overcome financial difficulties and to come out of debt and re-enter the workforce.

Furthermore, Members received a verbal update from the Director of Legal and Governance in relation to Local Government Reorganisation.

At the conclusion of the third meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a) the Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its developing recovery programme, as outlined in the report, be received, and noted;
- b) the Senior Economic Development Officer be requested to provide a briefing note to the next meeting of the Panel outlining the work of the new Business Support Hub and the signposting and support service being offered to local and enquiring businesses in relation to potential access to grant funding (including temporary Covid-19 funding);
- c) an invite be extended to Jonathan Gribbin, the County Council's Director of Public Health for Nottinghamshire, to attend the next meeting of the Panel to advise Members in relation to the development of the county-wide response to the pandemic and subsequent recovery plans;
- d) the Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Panel be required to submit the following interim recommendations to the Cabinet on 13 October 2020:
  1. the draft Economic Recovery Plan be approved with the proviso that the Plan is updated accordingly as circumstances change;
  2. work be undertaken to consider establishing a scheme to recognise local businesses that have excelled at adapting to guidelines and providing a COVID-secure environment for customers, in conjunction with key partners such as Discover Ashfield;

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3. the Council continues working toward the establishment of a Key Workers Memorial, including consultation with Ashfield residents and key partners;
  4. the Council's established Business Support Hub offers support for those looking to set up new businesses or reinvent existing businesses as a result of the pandemic;
  5. Cabinet be commended for the decision to implement 2-hour free parking in all town centre car parks to aid the longer-term recovery of Ashfield's local economy;
  6. congratulations be extended to the Planning and Economic Development Team, the Environmental Health Team, and the Discover Ashfield Board for their continued efforts to ensure that local businesses sufficiently adapt to COVID-19 measures and survive the ongoing economic difficulties brought about by the pandemic;
  7. that the Council looks at all options to use all of the ring-fenced 'Reopening High Streets' Fund innovatively.

### **Cabinet Meeting – October 2020**

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the October 2020 meeting of Cabinet to present the recommendations and comments formulated by Members at the Panel meeting held earlier in that month.

Cabinet was informed that the Panel had focused on small business recovery at the previous meeting, which was well attended by Officers and the Chairman of the Discover Ashfield Board, Martin Rigley.

Cabinet was presented with the recommendations set out above from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel. All of the recommendations were positively received and approved by Cabinet.

### **Panel Meeting – November 2020**

The fourth meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in November 2020. Members received a report setting out the most up-to-date guidance and restrictions, considering how they would impact Ashfield. Members also received a further report on business recovery and support as requested at the October 2020 meeting of the Panel. This report featured details of the Business Support Hub.

Invitations had been extended to numerous business representatives from Ashfield from a variety of sectors. The Panel hoped that discussions with business representatives would aid understanding of the challenges businesses continued to face throughout the pandemic, and to help identify the most appropriate support for the Council to offer moving forward.

Members welcomed attendance from the Director of Legal and Governance, Director of Place and Communities, Senior Economic Development Officer, and the Assistant Director of Planning and Regulatory Services.

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Members also welcomed attendance from various business representatives across Ashfield, as the majority of the meeting took on a question-and-answer format to allow Members to ask questions of the representatives and allow the representatives to ask questions of the Officers in attendance.

Discussions centred on topics such as:

- Regenerating Ashfield's Town Centres
- Support and advice for small businesses
- Car parking initiatives
- Business grants

Overall, this was a fantastic example of scrutiny being used to effectively engage communities in Ashfield, and Panel Members were pleased to be able to offer this opportunity to the representatives in attendance.

At the conclusion of the fourth meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a) Cabinet be provided with a briefing note outlining the work of the Panel to date and the issues/suggestions raised at the meeting including:
  1. concerns for the ongoing viability and survival of sole traders and small businesses should lockdowns continue;
  2. to avoid undue worry and to allow local businesses to react proactively to the current climate, a request for additional communication regarding the latest Government guidelines to be sent out to business communities in a swift and timely manner;
  3. the benefits of establishing an Ashfield business forum to enable local businesses to network, interact and support each other as required;
  4. to continue work around the establishment of a shop recognition scheme for businesses that have provided exemplary Covid-secure environments for customers;
  5. options for how the Council and local businesses can continue to support local foodbanks and health and wellbeing organisations during the pandemic;
  6. appreciation to Cabinet for the imminent provision of hand sanitiser stations at car parking ticket machine location;
  7. concerns around the extensive, ongoing, cost of providing PPE to protect employees and a hope to see a tax relief of reimbursement scheme from Government in the near future.
- b) the Economic Regeneration Unit be requested to formulate some appropriate case studies, to reflect the experiences shared by the business owners in attendance at the meeting, to highlight via the Council's media platforms as appropriate;

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- c) an invite be extended to Inspector Mark Dickson to attend the next meeting of the Panel to offer an insight into the perceived rise in incidences of crime as a result of the recent pandemic.

### **Cabinet Meeting – December 2020**

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the December 2020 meeting of Cabinet to provide an update on the work of the Panel and present the comments and recommendations formulated at the previous meeting of the Panel held in November 2020.

Cabinet was presented the following comments and recommendations set out above.

Cabinet was pleased to see the Panel working to understand the real issues facing small businesses and how the Council could continue to assist with recovery. The comments and recommendations submitted by the Panel were accepted by Cabinet.

### **Panel Meeting – December 2020**

The fifth meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in December 2020. The Panel received a report detailing the three-tier COVID-19 restrictions introduced in early December 2020, and considered how they would impact communities, businesses, and the Council.

Members welcomed attendance from the Chief Executive, Director of Legal and Governance, Director of Place and Communities, Town Centres and Markets Manager, Corporate Finance Manager, and the Senior COVID Business Support Officer.

Members further welcomed Inspector Mark Dickson from Nottinghamshire Police who attended the meeting to talk about the impact of COVID-19 from an operational perspective and to address concerns regarding possible increasing crime and anti-social behaviour due to the pandemic.

Inspector Dickson advised that all front-line policing operations had been stripped back and Police Officers went out into the community to educate and enforce national lockdown rules. Members were informed that there had been increased levels of anti-social behaviour during the first lockdown, and much time had been taken up dealing with breaches of COVID-19 restrictions.

Members took the opportunity to conduct a question-and-answer session with Inspector Mark Dickson and Officers in attendance. Some of the key themes from this session included:

- Concerns over social distancing rules not being followed
- Relationship between the Police and the Council's Community Protection Officers
- Staffing issues
- Mental health issues
- Area-specific anti-social behaviour issues

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- Homelessness

Following discussions with Inspector Dickson, the Chairman introduced the Council's Town Centre and Markets Manager and Senior Business Support Officer to advise the Panel as to the support and assistance being offered to local businesses and retailers navigating through the latest restrictions.

The Panel were informed of the work being conducted by the newly established COVID-19 Information Team. The new Team had already established good working relationships with local businesses, and the pandemic gave the Team more focus and opportunity to spend time with local businesses to assist with the setting up of COVID-secure environments.

Members were advised that the pandemic had created opportunities for many local businesses who not only were protecting customers but were offering continued support to fellow businesses and communities.

Finally, the Corporate Finance Manager presented the current position in relation to the facilitation of the COVID-19 Business Support Grant through the Council.

At the conclusion of the fifth meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a) the Council's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, its developing recovery programme, and the operational response from the Police, as outlined in the report and as considered at the meeting, be received, and noted;
- b) the following meeting date be agreed for the Scrutiny Panel in early 2021:  
2 February 2021

### **Cabinet Meeting – January 2021**

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the January 2021 meeting of Cabinet and delivered a verbal update on the work of the Panel.

The Vice Chairman gave an overview of the discussions held at the previous meeting of the Panel, held in December 2020, where Members held a detailed question and answer session with Inspector Mark Dickson from Nottinghamshire Police. The Vice Chairman noted that additional Police patrols in areas of Sutton, Hucknall, Kirkby, Jacksdale, and Underwood had been initiated following the Panel's discussions with the Inspector.

Both the Chairman and Vice Chairman informed Cabinet that they would continue to keep all Members in the picture regarding the latest COVID-19 information and statistics and had circulated regular email updates.

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## Panel Meeting – February 2021

The sixth meeting of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in February 2021. Members were presented with the usual report detailing changes to COVID-19 guidance and restrictions, including area-specific statistics. Additionally, Members were provided with a report detailing corporate performance from April to September 2020 to provide an insight into how the pandemic impacted service delivery across the Council.

Members welcomed attendance from the Chief Executive, Director of Place and Communities, Director of Legal and Governance, the Corporate Finance Manager, and the Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation.

The Panel also welcomed Richard Mitchell, the Chief Executive of Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to the meeting. The Chairman, through the Panel and on behalf of the Council, firstly extended immense gratitude to the NHS and the staff at Kings Mill Hospital in particular for the unrelenting care and support of local residents throughout the pandemic.

Richard Mitchell spoke about his role as Chief Executive at Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust which covered Kings Mill Hospital, Newark and Mansfield Community Hospitals. The Panel were informed that the overall care service provided had been immense and staff had worked tirelessly to provide care to patients. However, the pandemic had taken its toll and staff were exhausted and, in many cases, emotionally spent. He continued to say that the Council had been a great support during the pandemic and the relationships that had been cemented would endure and be invaluable going forward.

Members and Officers took the opportunity to conduct a question-and-answer session with Richard, discussing some of the following key themes:

- How has the pandemic impacted the four main pathways of care?
- Vaccination uptake
- The importance of staff feeling valued and supported

Following this discussion, Members moved on to consider the Corporate Plan Performance Update delivered by the Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation. The Panel were informed that the Council had worked extremely hard since the pandemic began and were the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has continued to deliver Tier 1 and Tier 2 critical services without interruption. The Council had also delivered a variety of humanitarian services across the District and continued to facilitate many of the waste collection campaigns.

At the conclusion of the sixth meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

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- a) the work undertaken by the Council and the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust as a partnership, to support the NHS and Ashfield residents through the pandemic, be noted, welcomed, and continued;
- b) a letter of appreciation and thanks be forwarded to Richard Mitchell and all the staff at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for their unwavering dedication and care to the people of Ashfield during the pandemic.
- c) that Cabinet be recommended to endorse:
- the continued lobbying of the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide a vaccination centre in Hucknall
  - the provision of a mass asymptomatic testing centre in Sutton in Ashfield

### **Panel Meeting – July 2021**

The seventh meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in July 2021. The name of the Panel was changed from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel to the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel at the 2021 Annual Council Meeting to align with the shift in focus of the Panel's work. Members were presented with a report detailing service updates in respect of the following:

- Collection Rates and Grant Payment Information
- Environmental Health and Commercial and Environmental Protection
- Neighbourhoods and Environment
- Cemeteries
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Town Centres and Markets
- Governance

Members welcomed attendance from the Director of Legal and Governance and the Leader of the Council.

The Chairman gave the Panel a brief synopsis of the work undertaken so far in relation to the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, reiterating that there was still a long recovery road ahead for everyone and the Panel's role was now to listen, learn, and provide ideas, suggestions, and recovery initiatives to Cabinet. The Chairman placed on record a personal thanks to all Officers who had worked so tirelessly through the pandemic. Ashfield District Council had been exemplary in its response to the pandemic and went above and beyond to protect and support residents and businesses through the lockdown periods.

Members debated the following points of consideration:

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- acknowledgement that the Council needed to stay abreast of the vaccination take-up rates and continue to focus on areas of poor uptake to encourage vaccination across all age ranges
  - a suggestion that an update on vaccination rates within Ashfield be presented to each Panel meeting
  - huge appreciation and gratitude for the work undertaken by the Covid Information Officers over the past few months
  - whilst recovery of town centres was vital, it was important that the Council did not ignore recovery of the smaller towns like Huthwaite, Stanton Hill and Selston
  - recognition of the incredible delivery of the vaccination programme at the local centres by staff and volunteers alike
  - concerns regarding fake and misleading news in relation to vaccinations for younger age groups and how the Council might mitigate against this on a local level, whilst encouraging uptake in Ashfield.

At the conclusion of the seventh meeting, the Panel resolved the following:

- a. that a preliminary recommendation be submitted to Cabinet for the creation and installation of four commemorative benches within the key areas of Ashfield, with the design for the bench being given further consideration by officers, as appropriate, prior to any final decision being made.

### **Cabinet Meeting – September 2021**

The Chairman of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the September 2021 meeting of Cabinet to provide an update on the work undertaken by the Panel at the previous meeting held in July 2021, and to present some recommendations regarding the tribute to key workers. Following discussions, Cabinet resolved at this meeting that:

- a) approval be given to identify funding for four commemorative benches to be located in suitable locations in Kirkby, Sutton, Hucknall, and the Rurals, as a tribute to the tireless efforts of key workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- b) following initial design suggestions by the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel, further design work regarding the commemorative benches be commenced in line with identified funding.

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## Panel Meeting – November 2021

The eighth meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in November 2021. The Panel received a report detailing the vaccination programme in Ashfield, as requested by the Panel at the previous meeting held in July 2021. The report presented to Members included details of latest COVID-related figures from the UK Coronavirus Dashboard, latest efforts to promote vaccination uptake in Ashfield, and details of the School Age Immunisation Service.

The Panel welcomed attendance from the Director of Legal and Governance and the Service Manager for Place and Wellbeing. Members also welcomed attendance from two representatives from the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Rosa Waddingham – Chief Nurse and David Ainsworth, Mid Notts Locality Director.

David and Rosa explained their roles within the CCG and their responsibilities for ensuring delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination within Nottinghamshire. They both took the opportunity to thank Ashfield District Council for the support received with delivery of the vaccination programme, stating that the Council had been instrumental in ensuring take up within Ashfield.

The representatives from the CCG delivered a comprehensive presentation to the Panel on the vaccination programme, with the following key information relayed:

- Phase 1 and 2 Programme Reflections
- Vaccination Take Up Rates
- Booster Programme
- Vaccination Programme Next Steps

Following the presentation, Members took the opportunity to undertake a question-and-answer session with the CCG representatives. Discussion focused on the following:

- The Vaccination Bus
- School Vaccination Programmes
- Vaccine availability
- How to tackle misinformation

At the conclusion of the eighth meeting, the Panel resolved that the following recommendations be presented to Cabinet for consideration:

- a) to continue to prioritise partnership working with the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a schedule and identify suitable locations for the vaccination bus;

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- b) to undertake a co-ordinated and targeted engagement approach using all communication methods available to the Council designed to reduce vaccine hesitancy; this should include debunking misinformation, sharing updates on the vaccination programme, and continuing to advertise the vaccination bus;
  - c) to undertake a wider communications exercise to share relevant case studies relating to COVID-19 vaccinations and booster jabs;
  - d) to explore any extra measures that could be implemented to support people with mental health and learning difficulties that may prevent them from accessing the COVID-19 vaccination;
  - e) to recognise the challenges in vaccination uptake, present in Greenwood and Summit, Abbey Hill, Leamington, and Sutton Central and New Cross wards and consider how the Council can use its position to improve take-up in these areas;
  - f) as a result of e) above, if approved, Councillors representing the above wards be consulted and engaged in any activities to target vaccination uptake.

### **Cabinet Meeting – December 2021**

The Chairman of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel attended the December 2021 meeting of Cabinet to provide an update on the work undertaken by the Panel at the previous meeting and to present a set of recommendations formulated by Panel Members regarding the vaccination programme in Ashfield.

Cabinet thanked the Panel for working on the key issues still present as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and approved the following recommendations set out above.

### **Panel Meeting – March 2022**

The ninth meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel took place in March 2022. Members welcomed attendance from Lorenzo Clark, the Ashfield Contract Manager for Everyone Active, who was in attendance to deliver a presentation to the Panel regarding Everyone Active's COVID-19 recovery process in relation to the Council's leisure facilities.

Members were given an overview of the actions taken by Everyone Active at the start of the pandemic when Government ordered leisure sites to be closed on 20 March 2020.

Following the presentation, Members took the opportunity to engage in question-and-answer session with Lorenzo, with the following topics discussed:

- Help given to customers looking to cancel membership

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- Booking no-shows reducing capacity
  - Community engagement initiatives
  - What key lessons have been learnt
  - Positive lessons from the pandemic
  - Online streaming

Members were extremely impressed with the presentation delivered and the subsequent discussion, and noted the information shared by Lorenzo Clark.

### **Panel Meeting – April 2022**

The final meeting of the COVID-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel was held in April 2022. Members welcomed the attendance of numerous representatives from the voluntary sector, invited by the Chairman, to give Members an insight into the challenges they faced and the resulting impact on the delivery of much needed services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following lengthy discussions with the representatives, including a question and answer session, Panel Members formulated the following recommendations and explanations for Cabinet to consider:

- a. Commend the tireless work of the voluntary sector, both during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

Throughout the work of the Panel, Members have been acutely aware of the pivotal role that the voluntary sector has played in supporting both individuals and community groups. This has included, amongst other things, specialist advice, transport, welfare checks, financial assistance, food bank access and tackling loneliness during lockdown.

Members also recognised the challenges that the voluntary sector faced both during the pandemic and the continuing after-effects. Whilst demand for services increased massively, the effects of the pandemic resulted in recruitment shortages, financial/funding pressures, and long-term uncertainty on the sustainability of some support organisations.

- b. Continue to build and nurture the relationships forged with partners during the pandemic, and to further develop the Council's role as a community leader providing pivotal central support to all parties.*

The impacts of the pandemic required joint working between organisations under unique circumstances. In addition to maintaining standard service delivery, the Council and its partners had to build on existing relationships to provide the required additional support for communities and businesses alike.

Every organisation had to adapt its day-to-day business to meet these challenges, key to this success was partnership working and a joined-up approach.

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Many of the different methods used as a necessity during this time have introduced many new working relationships and partnership working, much of which can continue to be built upon as the District moves forward with recovery.

- c. Ensure the Communications Team continue to prioritise the Council's relationship with Ashfield's voluntary sector, providing an effective conduit for the dissemination of information and signposting services as required.*

Members of the Panel acknowledged the critical role that effective communication played during the pandemic. Ensuring communities, partners, and individuals were provided with information in a timely and consistent manner was key to partnership working.

Guidance and advice often changed weekly, therefore communications had to be prioritised. Many organisations have highlighted that even during these difficult times, a key success was forging even stronger partnership working, consistent communication and information dissemination between the Council, voluntary sector, and other key partners. Members agreed that these stronger links and working partnerships should be maintained.

- d. Continue to support Ashfield residents and offer encouragement and guidance to enable reintegration back into local communities with a particular focus on working with organisations supporting vulnerable groups.*

The pandemic presented fresh challenges to all communities, particularly hard to reach and vulnerable groups. Members discussed how fear and isolation had impacted some people's confidence in reintegrating back into everyday life and undertaking everyday tasks such as using the high street, public places, public transport or seeking medical attention.

Members agreed that working with partners to both inform and support vulnerable groups in a variety of ways will continue to be vital in gaining an understanding of the continued fear of integration and considering how partnership working can explore longer term strategies in resolving this.

- e. Continue to ensure available grant funding is effectively administered to local businesses and organisations to assist with the reinvigoration and support of Ashfield's local economy following the pandemic.*

In recognising the challenges that many organisations have faced both throughout the pandemic and through the recovery process, the Panel commended the work that has already been undertaken in supporting organisations in the community, local businesses, and the community as a whole. Members agreed that continuing to ensure all avenues of grant funding are explored should remain a priority for the Council and its partners.

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## Audit of Scrutiny Function

Over the previous year, an audit has been carried out of the Council's scrutiny function by the external auditors. This involved the external auditors taking a detailed look at how scrutiny is carried out at Ashfield. Four main control objectives were examined as part of the review, these included:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides effective, constructive, "critical friend" challenge
- The overview and Scrutiny Committee is effective in amplifying the voices and concerns of the public
- The Council's Overview and Scrutiny function is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is effective in driving improvement in public services

The following issues were considered to be the key control weaknesses:

- Scrutiny recommendations were not tracked and did not include implementation deadlines (Moderate risk)
- The decision on whether to use co-opted members had not been formally considered within the current Administration (Low risk)
- The dedicated area on the Council's website for overview and scrutiny was not up-to-date and accurate (Low risk)
- Three out of the four Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels were inexperienced at their time of appointment (Low risk)

Following the audit review, the Council's scrutiny function received a 'Reasonable' assurance rating from the external auditors. Steps have since been taken to address the key control weaknesses identified as part of the review, including updating information available on the Council's website and facilitating a discussion on co-option at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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## Getting Involved with Scrutiny

There are a number of different ways in which members of the community can get involved with Ashfield District Council's scrutiny function. These are:

- 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 Chairman. Details of scrutiny meetings can be found through the [Calendar of Meetings](#).
- Put forward a suggestion for a topic to be reviewed by scrutiny – Any topic can be suggested for consideration to the scrutiny work programme. Any topic suggested for inclusion on the scrutiny work programme will be debated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on whether to formally approve the topic to the work programme. To suggest a topic for the scrutiny work programme, contact [scrutiny@ashfield.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@ashfield.gov.uk).
- Speak to your local councillor – If you would like to learn more about Ashfield District Council's scrutiny function, you can speak to your local councillor. You can find your local councillor through the Council's website [here](#).