



Ashfield

DISTRICT COUNCIL

ANNUAL SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
2023/24



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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD



Over the past year, the overview and scrutiny function has undergone changes in an effort to refocus the work of the function and increase its effectiveness.

The newly appointed Principal Select Committee has been established to ensure that the principles of scrutiny continue to provide a forum for challenge, review, and improvement. It also provides guidance and direction to the Inward and Outward Focus Select Committees.

Post Covid, several social issues have come to the forefront of the function's considerations, including the cost of living, homelessness, small business support and climate change. The work of the Select

Committees continues to ask those probing questions, discuss options, and put forward innovative suggestions and recommendations for continuous improvement.

The opportunities to make tangible improvements not only lie in the ability to challenge and review, but also providing a forum for the public to engage in, whether that be through the hearing of petitions, public meetings, or engaging in the review process of a topic of interest. In 2024, I will continue to promote public engagement in the process and provide an accessible and transparent function that focusses on the issues that matter to the community.

Lastly, I would like to personally acknowledge and thank all who have engaged with the Select Committees over the past year. This includes past Committee Members, Officers, Executive Lead Members, partner organisations, and residents.

Councillor Kier Barsby, Chairman of the Principal Select Committee



SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS

Principal Select Committee



Chairman
Councillor Kier Barsby



Vice Chairman
Councillor Julie Gregory

Inward Focus Select Committee



Chairman
Councillor Oliver Hay



Vice Chairman
Councillor David Walters

Outward Focus Select Committee



Chairman
Councillor David Shaw



Vice Chairman
Councillor Sarah Lewsey

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

Ashfield District Council has a statutory requirement to have an overview and scrutiny function in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. The function acts as a counterweight to the political governance system the Council has in place. The purpose of the overview and scrutiny function is to allow the rest of the Council to scrutinise the decisions and policies of the Executive, issuing reports and recommendations informed by evidence and understanding the needs of local communities.

Ashfield District Council appoints three committees to facilitate the overview and scrutiny function.

Principal Select Committee

The Principal Select Committee is appointed by Council to maintain an overview of the work undertaken by the Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees. This incorporates management of the select committee work programme, including selecting topics for inclusion on the work programme and delegating topics to each Committee as appropriate.

The Principal Select Committee has an important role in monitoring the Council's performance through regular reports, which can often highlight potential areas for scrutiny involvement across the Council.

The Principal Select Committee also undertakes regular scrutiny of the Council's finances, with particular attention to the annual budget and tax setting process.

Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees

The Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees are appointed by Council to carry out reviews of topics added to the select committee work programme by the Principal Select Committee. On rarer occasions, the Committees also undertake work as requested by Council or the Executive.



PRINCIPAL SELECT COMMITTEE

50 Year Anniversary

Ashfield District Council was formed on 1 April 1974, under the Local Government Act 1972, by the merger of Urban Districts of Hucknall, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield and parts of Basford Rural District, namely the parishes of Annesley & Felley and Selston.

The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) suggested that the milestone should be marked in some way and recommended to the Principal Select Committee that the topic be included in the select committee work programme. The Principal Select Committee held a meeting to share ideas and suggestions for marking the milestone.

At this meeting, the Chairman decided to take the idea around the table and asked all Members and Officers present at the meeting for their ideas and suggestions for marking the event as follows:

Ideas/Suggestions:

- to organise an event for Officers, Members, past Members and past Chief Executives with slideshow and refreshments
- a celebratory item to be included on the Council meeting agenda scheduled for 15 April 2024
- celebratory signs to be erected at all the Council's market site including showcase stalls with special offers available on the anniversary day
- memory videos/photos to be posted on the Council's website
- publicity comprising all the Council's achievements over the past 50 years (i.e. new leisure centres and Robin Hood line)
- 'Do you remember?' interviews with older, local residents including a special feature on couples married for 50 years or more



- a one day promotional offer of 1974 prices at all the Council's leisure centres
- a promotional 'then and now' publicity campaign with a 1974 fancy dress day at Council facilities across the District on the anniversary date
- magnetic vehicles signs for the Council's fleet stating 'Proudly serving Ashfield for the last 50 years'.
- celebratory afternoon event amalgamated with the Council's 2024 staff recognition awards for all employees.

Since this meeting, the ideas and suggestions formulated by the Principal Select Committee have been shared with the Strategic Leadership Team. Subsequently, an ADC 50 Years Working Group has been formed, bringing together Officers from across the Council to work with Members and ensure the milestone is appropriately celebrated.

Social Value

Through other related work, Members were interested in learning more about the Council's increasing use of social value, particularly through procurement, as well as other activities.

Members welcomed the Procurement and Projects Officer to a meeting who provided a detailed overview of how the Council utilises social value and how it was planned to be further embedded in the organisation.

Members learned that the Cabinet had recently approved the adoption of a Social Value Policy, setting out the Council's commitment to social value and the added societal benefits to be gained from projects and public procurement.

Members were glad to note the information provided and looked to incorporate social value considerations into future work within the wider overview and scrutiny function.



No Mow May

No Mow May was added as a review topic to the select committee work programme as Members wished to review the Council's previous involvement with the campaign and identify any areas for improvement.

Members learned the origins of the No Mow May campaign, founded in 2019 by conservation charity Plantlife, calling all garden owners and green space managers not to mow during May. The goal of the campaign is to create a more wildlife-friendly environment by liberating the lawn to host wildflowers and other plants to provide a feast for pollinators, tackle pollution, and lock away carbon in the ground for good.

Members worked with the Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods throughout the review to understand the areas the Council has previously designated to take part in No Mow May and the challenges the Neighbourhoods Team faced.

At the conclusion of the review, the following recommendations were made to Cabinet:

- a. Reaffirm the Council's commitment to partaking in future No Mow May campaigns.
- b. Expand the use of maze cutting and wildflower planting to appropriate green spaces designated as part of future No Mow May campaigns.
- c. Ensure that a communication campaign is rolled out ahead and alongside future No Mow May campaigns to raise public awareness of No Mow May, including the areas taking part as well as the origins and benefits of the campaign.
- d. Commit to ensuring the ongoing maintenance of play parks, sports pitches, and road junctions that could otherwise become dangerous if not maintained, during any future No Mow May campaigns.

All recommendations were accepted by Cabinet. Furthermore, it has been agreed that the results of the 2024 No Mow May campaign will be reported back to the Principal Select Committee in July 2024.



Executive Lead Member Updates

As a component of the refocusing of the Council's overview and scrutiny function, agreed at the 2023 Annual Council Meeting, the Principal Select Committee look to engage more closely with the Cabinet through a programme of Executive Lead Member Updates. Executive Lead Members will be invited to meetings of the Principal Select Committee to provide the Committee with an update on activity within their portfolio, and to answer any questions Members may have themselves or on behalf of residents.

The programme of updates began with the Principal Select Committee welcoming the attendance of the Executive Lead Member for Social Housing and Assets, who was asked to provide an update on the impact of universal credit following an earlier review by the Committee.

The Executive Lead Member for Social Housing and Assets, supported by the Assistant Director, Housing Management, shared with Members the most recent data regarding universal credit, as well as the deadlines the Council and other agencies are working to. Members were further given full details of all measures the Council has in place to support tenants, including the Tenancy Sustainment Team and Money Management Advice Team.

As a result of the presentation and subsequent debate, Members identified further key lines of enquiry to explore the ongoing impact of universal credit.

For 2024/25, the Principal Select Committee will develop a set schedule for Executive Lead Member Updates, to be managed alongside the select committee work programme.

Petitions

Ashfield District Council has an established Petition Scheme approved by Council. As part of the scheme, the response to a petition is decided by the number of signatures the submitted petition has received.

As per the Petition Scheme:

- If a petition submitted to the Council contains between 750 and 1,499



signatures, it will be referred to the Principal Select Committee for consideration.

The Petition Scheme continues:

- A petition containing between 750 and 1,499 signatures will be considered by the Council's Principal Select Committee.
- The most appropriate Senior Council Officer(s) will be invited to give evidence at a public meeting of the Principal Select Committee relating to the issues set out in a petition.
- The petition organiser will be permitted a total of 15 minutes to ask up to a maximum of three questions to the Officer(s) in attendance regarding the petition.
- The petition organiser must provide the Service Assistant Director, Democracy with written notice of these questions at least 10 clear working days before the Principal Select Committee meeting.
- Questions submitted as part of this process considered by the Chief Executive to be vexatious, discriminatory, abusive, unreasonable, or otherwise inappropriate will not be considered.
- Following the questions asked by the petition organiser, a further 15 minutes will be allocated to allow discussion between Principal Select Committee Members and the invited Officer. During this allocated time, Committee Members may seek further clarification from the petition organiser.
- Following discussion, Members of the Principal Select Committee may decide to approve recommendations to be submitted to a future meeting of the Council's Cabinet.

In accordance with the above process, the Principal Select Committee has considered one petition over the period covered by this annual report.



Other Principal Select Committee Activity

Performance

The Principal Select Committee receives a report on Corporate Performance on a quarterly basis. The report provides Members with insight into how well each service area is performing and highlights any areas of the Council experiencing issues as they arise.

In consideration of performance information, Members utilise various methods to assess how well the Council is performing, including delivery against the Corporate Plan, outcomes from service reviews, feedback from peer challenges, place surveys, and performance scorecards.

Members have the opportunity to discuss any issues with Officers and Executive Lead Members and put forward any recommendations for improvement. Consideration of performance information is also used to inform topics to be added to the select committee work programme.

Budget

The Principal Select Committee holds an extraordinary meeting each year in line with the Annual Budget and Tax Setting process. At this meeting, Members receive an update on the key considerations within the framework of the process, prior to being presented to Council for determination.

Select Committee Work Programme

Management of the select committee work programme is one of the core functions of the Principal Select Committee. This includes formally approving items to be added to the programme for review and receiving updates on progress made. All Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs are invited to take part in this process throughout the year.



INWARD FOCUS SELECT COMMITTEE

Climate Change Mitigation

Climate Change Mitigation was added to the scrutiny work programme as it was recognised as a key corporate priority for the Council. Members of the former Scrutiny Panel B held five formal meetings and three informal working groups reviewing the topic. The review was underpinned by guidance published by the Local Government Association and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

During the review, Members were supported fully by the Council's Assistant Director, Assets and Investments and Strategic Asset Manager. Officers provided Members with comprehensive details of the Council's efforts towards mitigating the many impacts of climate change, past, present, and future. This included sharing details of a Carbon Management Plan developed for Ashfield, setting out the District's carbon baseline used to measure the Council's progress on carbon reduction thereafter.

Further work was undertaken to understand the three key emission areas, and what actions the Council needed to take to address each one. These included:

- Scope 1 emissions – Direct (e.g., ADC offices/Fleet)
- Scope 2 emissions – Indirect utilities (e.g., Purchasing utilities for offices/housing courts)
- Scope 3 emissions – Indirect other (e.g., investment properties, housing stock, staff commuting, purchased goods/materials)

Members learned of the internal Climate Change Working Group, made up of Officers from across the Council, who had been working towards the following:

- Staff Commuting Survey
- Waste Management Plan
- Energy Review
- Public Sector Decarbonising Bid
- Flood Protection Measures



Members focused on providing feedback on the Council's developing Climate Change Strategy and accompanying Climate Change Action Plan. This included reviewing the extensive list of proposed strategic actions.

The review conducted by Scrutiny Panel B concluded with Members agreeing a total of thirteen recommendations to submit to Cabinet for consideration.

Recommendations

- a. Support the approval of a proposed target of net-zero by 2030 for the Council's Scope 1 and 2 emissions, as recommended in the Climate Change Strategy report.
- b. Support the approval of proposals to minimise Scope 3 emissions by 2050, as recommended in the Climate Change Strategy report.
- c. Support the approval of the Climate Change Strategy, Climate Change Action Plan, and Carbon Management Plan, as recommended in the Climate Change Strategy report.
- d. Continue to ensure an increase in the number of electric charging points available to the Council and the wider public.
- e. Continue the commitment towards the expansion of a greener transport fleet.
- f. Continue to invest appropriately in renewable technology opportunities.
- g. Promote low carbon and sustainable procurement across the Council.
- h. Continue to support tree planting schemes throughout Ashfield.
- i. Continue to support and promote energy saving initiatives to Ashfield residents.
- 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.



- k. Work with schools and community groups to improve knowledge and understanding of climate change mitigation.
- l. Explore the possibility of establishing wildlife friendly verges across the District as part of the Council's commitment to supporting nature and wildlife.
- m. Ensure that local businesses and communities are involved in implementing the key objectives set out within the Climate Change Strategy.

Following presentation to Cabinet, all recommendations were accepted. It was further agreed that an update on the implementation and progress of the Climate Change Strategy and associated initiatives will be reported to the Principal Select Committee on a bi-annual basis.

Dog Fouling and Littering

Dog Fouling and Littering was added to the scrutiny work programme by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the June 2022 meeting. Members agreed 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.

Throughout the review, Members worked closely with the Director of Place and Communities, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods and Environment, Community Safety Manager, Executive Lead Member for Community Safety and Crime Reduction, Executive Lead Member for Parks, Town Centres, and Environmental Services, and the Leader of the Council.

The review concluded with Members agreeing a total of five recommendations to submit to Cabinet for consideration.

Recommendations

- a. Review the status of the Council's Neighbourhood/Environmental Charter and proactively engage Scrutiny Members in the process.



- b. Continue to target future resources towards reducing dog fouling and littering across the District, including facilitating preventive education measures regarding responsible dog ownership and disposal of litter/waste management within primary and secondary schools as appropriate.
- c. Continue to explore all available options relating to environmental enforcement duties following the discontinuation of the previous Environmental Enforcement Contractor pilot scheme and proactively engage Scrutiny Members in the process.
- d. Explore the possibility of undertaking a light touch review of local businesses and organisations within the Ashfield District, to ascertain and ensure they continue to meet their obligations in respect of keeping sites/curtilages within the District clean and free of litter.
- e. Continue gathering and utilising accurate locational data to identify hotspot areas in the District to enable effective targeted action to reduce dog fouling and littering offences in these areas.

Scrutiny Panel B Members resolved that:

- f. Cabinet, and the wider Teams engaged in this work, be commended for the array of mitigation measures already being undertaken, to address the issue of dog fouling and littering within the District.

Following presentation to Cabinet, all recommendations were accepted.

Damp and Mould

Damp and Mould was added to the select committee work programme in June 2023 by the Principal Select Committee. Members were increasingly aware that damp and mould in both private rented and social housing has been under the spotlight for some time, with mainstream media running campaigns highlighting and naming landlords in regular news bulletins on prime-time news slots.

As a result of this publicity, the Council had witnessed a significant increase in contact from customers requesting inspections and reporting damp and mould,



as well as an increase in disrepair claims against the Council that relate to damp and mould.

Nationally, this came to a head with the sad passing of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. The coroner's report identified that mould present in his home was a contributing factor in his death and that he died from prolonged exposure to mould.

As a direct consequence of this case the Government tabled amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill to introduce 'Awaab's Law', requiring landlords to fix reported health hazards in homes within specified time limits.

Members learned of the 10 questions sent by the Regulator of Social Housing to all social landlords. The Regulator required assurance that social landlords have a 'clear understanding and strong grip on damp and mould issues in their homes' and were addressing risks to tenants.

Throughout the review, Members worked with the Assistant Director, Housing Operations and Team Manager, Environmental Health. The Assistant Director, Housing Operations explained to Members all of the steps the Council has been taking to tackle damp and mould issues. Including the procedure used to respond to reports of damp and mould, how property data is utilised to eliminate systemic damp and mould issues, and how regular cross-department meetings are held to discuss damp and mould cases, complaints, and sector wide information and judgements to identify any emerging trends, identify best practice, and inform the Council's capital programme.

Members also discussed the gaps and challenges the Council had to consider, including resourcing, recent peer reviews, new legal requirements, and communication with residents.

To conclude the review, Members commended the Council's emerging Damp and Mould Policy and associated tenant guidance document. Through the review, Members also identified further training needs



OUTWARD FOCUS SELECT COMMITTEE

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy

Members of the Outward Focus Select Committee were invited to take part in the consultation process for the Council's developing Homeless and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2024 – 2029.

The Housing Strategy Lead Officer attended a meeting of the Committee to provide a comprehensive presentation on the subject. Members were advised that the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy was one of four sub-strategies that made up the Council's overall Housing Strategy which had recently been reviewed and refreshed. Both the updated Housing and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategies were due to be submitted to Cabinet in January 2024 for consideration.

All local authorities were required to review homelessness within their areas at least every 5 years and the most recent review by the Council had been commenced the previous autumn, working in collaboration and on average one day a week with Mansfield District Council and Newark & Sherwood District Council. Working in collaboration had ensured that common aims and objectives were aligned across the neighbouring authorities.

During the presentation, the Housing Strategy Lead Officer continued to explain the aims, objectives, achievements, and challenges of the previous Strategy, and how this information would be used to inform the development of the revised Strategy.

Finally, Members were asked to provide feedback on the proposed priorities and aspirations regarding the homelessness service over the next 5 years.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Members noted the progress regarding the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy and welcomed the priorities and aspirations outlined within the Strategy. Furthermore, Members agreed that progress towards the associated action plan be reported back to the Outward Focus Select Committee when appropriate.



Selective Licensing

The former Scrutiny Panel A undertook a review of the established Council's Selective Licensing Scheme. The review was carried out concurrently with wider the review of the Scheme towards the conclusion of the agreed 5-year pilot period.

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 if the Scheme was to be renewed.

Members firstly looked to understand why the Selective Licensing Scheme was originally implemented, and were informed that the following objectives underpinned the establishment of the Scheme:

- Improve housing standards, properties, conditions within the private rented stock
- Improve 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

Officers explained to Members the many aspects of selective licensing schemes, including benefits to landlords, benefits to tenants, benefits for the District, and benefits for the Council. Members were shown numerous case study examples of property conditions that selective licensing schemes look to address and learned of the enforcement measures available to the Council under the proposed scheme.

At the conclusion of the review, Members agreed that the Selective Licensing Scheme should be renewed and made the following four recommendations to Cabinet.



Recommendations

- 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.
- b. Explore the feasibility of expanding the Selective Licensing Scheme to other areas in Ashfield that meet the conditions for selective licensing designation.
- c. Ensure that, if approved, the Selective Licensing Scheme continues to be self-funded through 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.

Following presentation to Cabinet, all recommendations were accepted, and the Scheme was subsequently renewed in the following decision. The Outward Focus Select Committee will be looking to revisit the topic following renewal of the selective licensing scheme.

Christmas Lights

The Outward Focus Select Committee is currently working to review the Council's Christmas light provision across Ashfield. The item was added to the select committee work programme following a recommendation from the Leader of the Council as Members were made aware that the Council's contract for the provision of Christmas lights in the District was due to end, and options would be explored for a renewed provision. Moreover, Members noted that the Council, as outlined in the Corporate Plan, is committed to providing a visually attractive destination for residents and visitors during the festive period.

Members have been working closely with the Assistant Director, Regeneration to understand the successes and challenges of the previous contract and provide feedback on what the Council should be looking to achieve going forward. Members were given an overview of the previous Christmas lights contract, which included displays in the three town centres of Hucknall, Sutton-in-Ashfield, and Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Members were given further details of the budget available and the key considerations as the Council moves towards securing a



new contract for a renewed provision.

Within the ambit of the review, Members provided feedback on behalf of residents regarding the previously used 3D designs and associated Christmas events held in past years, which were said to have been received positively. Members also discussed some of the challenges experienced with the previous provision, including some display lights failing and decorations being vandalised.

The Outward Focus Select Committee will continue the review of Christmas Lights, looking to provide a steer on the areas included and the types of design sought in any newly agreed provision.

Tenancy Support

Tenancy Support was added to the former scrutiny work programme as Members looked to further understand the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and the Council as a social landlord.

Members learned the different types of tenancies and the rights that accompanied each, including but not limited to the right to be consulted with, to have repairs carried out, and to make alterations and improvements. Members also discussed the responsibilities tenants agree to, including but not limited to paying rent and other charges on time, keeping the home in a satisfactory condition, and to adhere to tenancy conditions to prevent court action.

Members continued to debate the rights of the Council as a social landlord, including access to properties to carry out inspection or repairs and the right to ask the courts to end a tenancy if conditions of a tenancy agreement are broken. Members understood the responsibilities of the Council as a social landlord to include dealing with any complaints, maintaining service standards, and to act on any repairs that are the Council's responsibility.

Throughout the review, Members were supported by the Service Manager, Housing Management & Tenancy Services and Service Manager, Strategic Housing & Lettings. Officers explained to Members the detailed process that needed to be followed regarding evictions.

The review of Tenancy Support was used as an opportunity for Members to build on knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and the



Council as a social landlord. The review was later refocused selective licensing, leading to the Selective Licensing Scheme review also detailed in this annual select committee report.

