

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023

Blackpool Council



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## Introduction

The 2022-2023 Municipal Year is the final year in the four year election term and the progress that Scrutiny has made during this time must be recognised. A new structure has been implemented, improvements have been made to the way in which Members consider and challenge, the level of work at both Committee meetings and through scrutiny reviews has increased and relationships with the Executive and partners have continued to develop with an intended consequence being a valued and positive contribution to policy development across the Council.

All Committees concluded their work prior to the pre-election period with suggested workplans developed for the new Committees to consider for 2023/2024 following their appointment at Annual Council.

The contribution of former Councillor Mrs Maxine Callow to the progress made must be recognised and the Council would like to thank her for her dedication and efforts over the years.

## Scrutiny Leadership Board

The Scrutiny Leadership Board has continued to focus on financial performance, budget scrutiny and the overall performance of the Council against the priorities identified in the Council Plan. The Board has continued to bring together the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees in order to provide joined up working on cross-cutting issues.

Regular meetings have been held between the Scrutiny Lead Member and the Leader of the Council in order to ensure relationships are strengthened and the Leader has continued to attend meetings of the Board in order to answer key questions on performance.

### Key pieces of work:

- During 2022/2023, the Scrutiny Leadership Board identified the issue of **measuring the impact of**

**scrutiny recommendations** as a priority. It was acknowledged that scrutiny had improved but that it was difficult to demonstrate added value from recommendations approved by the Executive. A scrutiny impact assessment tool was therefore developed and tested on the Housing and Homelessness scrutiny review. Feedback from Council Officers indicated that it was a useful reflective experience and provided a natural end to a scrutiny review once all recommendations could be considered complete.

- The recommendations of the **Channel Shift Scrutiny Review** were approved by the Executive and the Board undertook to review the implementation of the recommendations with a first report received in March 2023. There was still progress to be made in a number of areas and the Board will continue to follow these up over the next year.
- The Board has also taken hold of the Council Plan performance monitoring and has referred a number of items to the Scrutiny Committees which have been identified such as the support provided to young people aged 16-18 to assist them in accessing and sustaining work.

### FOCUS POINT: FINANCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

As a cross-cutting and important strategy, the Board reviewed the draft and made a number of comments for consideration prior to its final approval:

- Reference to low paid single workers who were unlikely to qualify for any additional help or benefits and what could be done to support this cohort to be included.
- The importance of digital inclusion for all residents and ensuring a wide range of publicity was utilised.
- The extra pressure placed on private tenants required to purchase electric cards and those with coin-operated meters which could often have a mark-up making prices even higher.
- The importance of education and ensuring that Blackpool residents could upskill themselves. That the value of education should be promoted through the Strategy including financial education.
- To include risks attached to the informal economy in addition to information on lower risk generation of wealth and the opportunities available.

## Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

The move to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) has been a key focus for the Committee in 2022/2023 with representatives from the ICB requested to attend on a number of occasions to provide an update on the development of the Board, its strategy and the vision for Blackpool with the intention to ensure that Blackpool residents did not see a disruption to service provision and were not 'lost' within the larger Lancashire and South Cumbria System.

The Committee also maintained its focus on mental health service provision with a special meeting again held with Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust regarding the Harbour, the development of the Initial Response Service and the improvement plans put in place to address the outcomes of the Care Quality Commission a number of years previously. A site visit was also arranged for Members of the Committee to tour the Harbour to see first-hand the services and environment on offer.

### FOCUS POINT: DRUG RELATED DEATHS

As a result of the report that Blackpool had the highest number of drug related deaths per head of population in England the Committee resolved to investigate the issue in detail in order to find areas of improvement for services. The review produced 9 recommendations, all of which were supported by the Executive. The recommendations ranged from mapping drug overdoses with related organised crime, increasing messaging around the dangers of using drugs alone, ensuring safe prescribing was embedded at GPs and the continuation of the outreach homeless health provision. A scrutiny review impact assessment was carried out on this review, which demonstrated that all of the Committee's recommendations had been implemented. Of the review, Public Health Officers and partners commented that the scrutiny process had been useful on this topic and everyone had valued the input of the Committee.

### Key pieces of work:

- **Supported Housing Scrutiny Review** – the Committee continued to monitor the recommendations made by the scrutiny review. As a result of the review, the recommended standards had been developed and approved by the Executive and were now available on the Council website. The Council continued to work with the Government regarding the development of regulations for the sector. The key role of scrutiny in the progress made in supported housing was highlighted with the impact on real lives and people noted.
- The Committee worked alongside the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to investigate **Mental Health Provision for Young Men**. In total four recommendations were made targeting improvement in data sharing protocols, the provision of a key worked for 18-25 year olds and the importance of peer support. Both Committees will monitor the implementation of these recommendations in the new Municipal Year.
- Upon an in depth review of **Dentistry and Oral Health**, the Committee noted that service provision was in a state of change with the NHS redefining the model used to commission dentists. Access to dentists in Blackpool was a real issue and one that was reflected nationally. Therefore the Committee agreed to give the changes identified by the NHS time to have an effect and review whether access to provision had changed 12 months on. The Council was also developing an Oral Health Strategy to which the Committee has provided initial input.
- **Maternity Services** at Blackpool Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was an area of concern identified by the Committee following a Care Quality Commission report and national press on the issues faced by Trusts around the country. The Trust was called upon to provide reports on proposed improvements and actions to be taken in order to address the concerns raised.

### Future focus:

The Committee has identified a number of areas for focus which will be passed to the new Committee for consideration including the increasing numbers of dementia sufferers and plans in place to support people, population health management and smoking cessation including vaping.

## Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee

The Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee has considered a large number of topics during 2022-2023, including the development of the Oracle Building, the final report of the HeadStart programme and updates on Young Inspectors and Youth Justice. Annual reports from the Corporate Parent Panel and the Children’s Safeguarding Assurance Partnership have also been received.

### FOCUS POINT: CHILDREN’S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT

A key priority of the Committee during 2022-23 has been the ongoing improvement work to Children’s Services following Ofsted’s finding that services were “Inadequate” previously. Regular updates have been provided to meetings of the Committee and have provided opportunity for members to scrutinise the work taking place. The improvement work has impacted on a number of areas that the Committee has considered during 2022-23. Following a follow-up inspection in December 2022 Blackpool had been moved up to a rating of “Requires Improvement”. The Committee will continue to focus on improvement in this key area and support the Council on its journey to improve.

### Key pieces of work

- **Mental Health Support for Young men (aged 16-25) and Suicide Prevention** - In September 2022 Members of the Committee held a review panel meeting with Officers and representatives of Empowerment, Schools and the Integrated Care Board amongst others to ensure a broad range of views and representation. The review looked at case studies of young men and their experiences with mental health services during their transition from childhood to being an adult and the challenges they faced.
- **Catch Up/Recovery Spend Premium Review** – The Committee held a series of review panel meetings in 2022 to consider schools’ use of catch-up and recovery premium spending, provided following the Covid pandemic. These included meetings with head teachers from maintained primary schools to gain an

understanding of the issues that had been faced and how funding had been used to support them.

- **Young People Classed as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)** – A review panel to consider NEET provision met with officers on 26 September 2022. The meeting discussed what work had been taking place and the opportunities available for young people classed as NEET. As much of the work had only been undertaken recently the panel agreed to review the impact of NEET work in 2023.

### Future Focus: Looked After Children in Blackpool

An area of future work for the Committee had been identified in the model of using private accommodation for looked after children. During 2023/24 it is proposed that the Committee will look at this model and consider alternative option for delivery, to ensure the best outcomes for Blackpool’s young people.

- **Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Written Statement of Action (WSOA)** – Following the outcome of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commissions inspection into SEND within Blackpool. The Committee met to scrutinise the draft WSOA to address the recommendations for improvement made during the inspection. Members considered the planned work and agreed to maintain monitoring of progress in respect of SEND provision improvements going forward.
- **Safety Valve Programme** – Following the announcement that the Council had been selected to take part in the Department for Education’s Safety Valve Programme, the Committee met with officers to discuss what the impact on Blackpool would be and what associated work would be taking place.
- **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)** – At its February 2023 meeting the Committee considered Children Service’s MTFS following the document being updated. The Committee discussed the changes to service provision outlined in the document and provided challenge regarding the assumptions made. A further revision of the MFTS is planned for consideration by the Committee in 2023-24.

#### Topics identified for review in 2023/2024 include:

- **Community Engagement in Schools**
- **Looked After Children in Blackpool – Children’s Homes**
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools**

#### Future policy development work identified:

- **Revised Children’s Services Medium Term Financial Strategy**

## Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee

The Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee has had multiple areas of focus over the previous 12 months including public rights of way, climate emergency work, town centre regeneration and leisure services performance and has received annual reports relating to parks and green spaces and waste and street cleansing.

#### FOCUS POINT: SHORT TERM LETTINGS

A key priority of the Committee has been the growth of Short term Lettings in Blackpool and their impact on residents and the local economy. As a result of this a review panel was established to consider evidence from officers and the Leader of the Council on the scale of the issue and the problems associated with short term lettings. A number of meetings were held during 2022 and the need for greater regulation of this form of lets was recognised in order to prevent their establishment outside of designated holiday areas. The Panel therefore made recommendations to the Executive supporting the maximum use of Council powers to regulate and control the growth short term lettings and sought additional resources to assist in the work taking place.

#### Key pieces of work

- **Air Quality Strategy** – On 14 December 2022, the committee met to provide input into the consultation on the development of the Air Quality Strategy. The meeting was updated on the themes identified under the strategy’s action plan and the work planned and taking place. The Committee endorsed a review of air quality

monitoring sites and recommended that Communication actions be assigned “owners” to ensure accountability and ownership. It was also asked that future policies in relation to domestic burning and heating, along with the draft Air Quality Strategy be brought back for consideration once developed.

- **Community Flood Resilience Policy** – On 15 December 2022 the Committee held a review panel to consider the draft Community Flood Resilience Policy. The meeting considered how the policy was designed to ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities during flood events and to enable local communities to be empowered in improving flood resilience in their own areas. The Committee recommended changes to wording of the policy to make it more positive and requested more details on flood work be shared with Members going forward.
- **St John’s Square Experimental Traffic Regulation Order** – The Committee was informed of proposals to introduce an Experimental Traffic Regulation order for St John’s Square. The order was intended to regulate traffic in the area for the benefit of local businesses and the public. Members endorsed the proposals and asked for an update a year on from implementation to consider the impact.

#### Future Focus 1: Economic Regeneration

Work to regenerate Blackpool through projects such as the Talbot Gateway and the Central Leisure Quarter have gained pace in 2022-23 and the agreement of the Blackpool Town Deal and receipt of Levelling Up funding from Central Government will ensure that this area remains a substantial part of the Council’s work in 2023-34.

- **Arts and Culture** – The Committee received an update on work to develop a Cultural Plan as part of its ongoing work to scrutinise the recovery of arts and culture in Blackpool following the Covid-19 pandemic. A steering group had been established to guide the Plan’s development and discussed the involvement of non-traditional cultural partners in the work taking place. A draft plan is scheduled for consideration in 2023-24.
- **Community Safety Partnership** - The Committee held its annual meeting as the Council’s statutory Crime and Disorder Panel to discuss the work of

the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in January 2023. The meeting was attended by officers and representatives of Lancashire Constabulary and discussed issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour, Begging, Rape and Serious Assault, Child Criminal Exploitation and work to improve the CSP's data quality. The implementation of the Serious Violence Duty was also noted by Members, with a new serious Violence Strategy to be developed in response.

- **Housing and Homelessness** - The annual update on Housing and Homelessness in Blackpool as recommended by the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review Panel was considered. The pressure created by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis was discussed along with the role of housing services in supporting Children's Services in deprived areas and the planned use of the Severe Weather Protocol for winter 2022-23.

### **Future Focus 2: Climate Emergency**

Throughout 2022-2023 Climate Emergency work has grown at the Council and is impacting how services operate across the town. In addition to regular updates received by the Committee it is expected that a growing number of policies and strategies will be developed where scrutiny input will be necessary.

#### **Topics identified for review in 2023/2024 include:**

- CCTV
- Skills Gap in Blackpool's Economy
- Levelling -Up

#### **Future policy development work identified:**

- Electric Vehicle Strategy
- Domestic Burning and Heating
- Cultural Plan for Blackpool

NB Owing to the new Committee structure at the Council for 2023/2024, the work of the Tourism, Communities and Economy Scrutiny Committee will be moved as appropriate to the new Levelling Up Scrutiny Committee or the new Climate Change and the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

## **North West Employer's Review of Scrutiny 2022/23**

A follow up review was undertaken by North West Employer's with a final report received in early 2023. The review looked at the change and progress made following the full review by the same organisation carried out in 2019 from which a number of recommendations were implemented and identified further improvements to focus on moving forward.

The report highlighted the following key achievements since the first review had been carried out:

- A significant cultural shift at the Council and the mutual respect that now existed.
- The creation of the Scrutiny Leadership Board and its ability to work at the heart of the organisation.
- The introduction of more in depth scrutiny realised through a range of innovative and flexible approaches that extend beyond the standard scrutiny committees.
- The strength of scrutiny officer support through the use of pre-committee briefings.

Opportunities for continuous improvement were also identified and an action plan will be developed in order to put these in place:

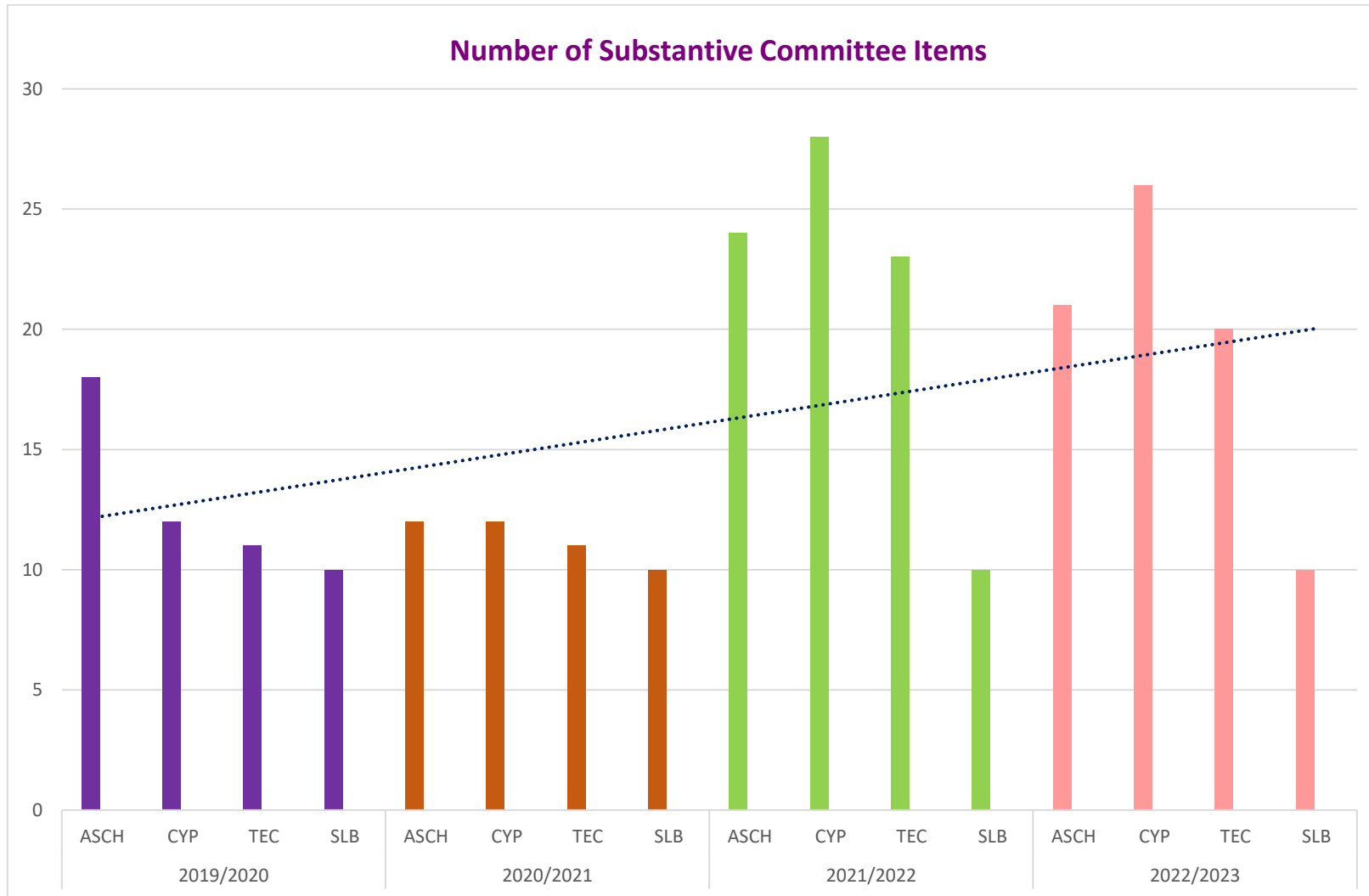
- To sharpen the role and purpose of the Scrutiny Leadership Board through the sharing of good practice and taking learning back to Committees.
- To further develop the impact assessments to contain rationale and reasoning behind the recommendations of reviews and demonstrate more widely the value added by scrutiny.
- To strengthen recommendation tracking and include in the annual report some data as to the level of work carried out.
- To continue work to develop public engagement and partner engagement in the scrutiny process.

## Scrutiny Evaluation 2019-2023:

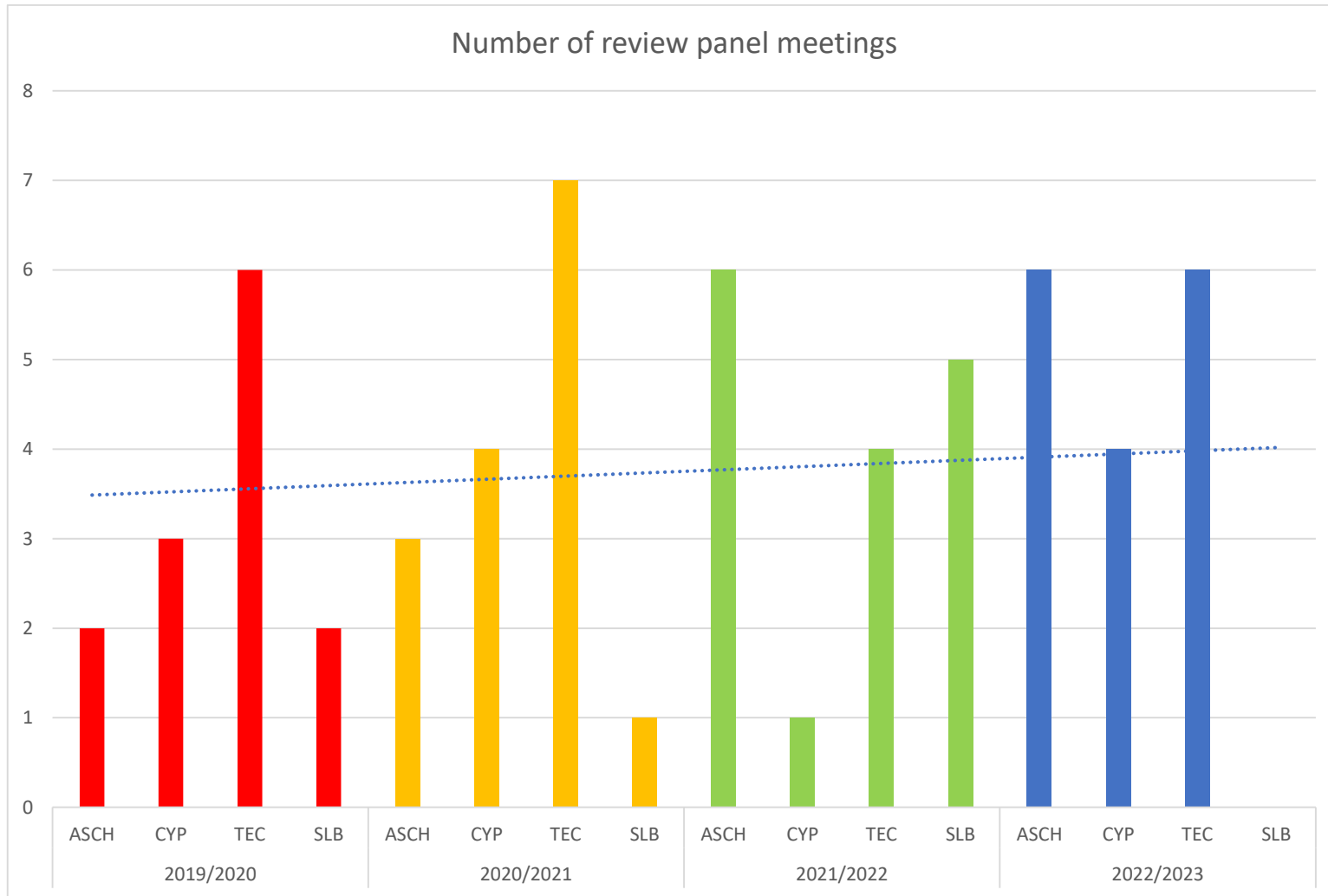
Scrutiny Members and Committees have worked hard through the four-year term in order to implement the recommendations of the North West Employer’s Review. The data below demonstrates the increase in review panels and recommendations over the four year term, an increase in the number of substantive Committee items for consideration and a substantial increase to the level of policy development which has been a key focus for the Committees.

	2019/2020				2020/2021				2021/2022				2022/2023			
	ASCH	CYP	TEC	SLB	ASCH	CYP	TEC	SLB	ASCH	CYP	TEC	SLB	ASCH	CYP	TEC	SLB
Number of substantive Committee Items	18	12	11	10	12	12	11	10	24	28	23	10	21	26	20	10
Number of Committee recommendations	13	9	3	0	11	10	7	0	13	25	3	0	11	8	9	0
Number of call-ins	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of completed Scrutiny Review Panels	1	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	3	1	2	1	0	2	1	1
Number of review panel meetings	2	3	6	2	3	4	7	1	6	1	4	5	6	4	6	0
Number of Scrutiny Review recommendations accepted by the Executive	10	5	0	0	0	0	10	0	2	0	0	0	9	0	3	10
Number of Special Committee meetings	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Number of policies/strategies contributed to	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	1	3	2
Number of briefing sessions held	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	2	1	0	3	2	1	0
Number of training sessions held for Committee Members *SLB in this category is for all Members	2	1	0	4	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Number of site visits held for Committee Members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	0





The above chart shows the number of substantive committee items considered at Scrutiny meetings for the municipal years between 2019 and 2023. The chart shows that there has been a marked increase in scrutiny items, from 51 in total in 2019/2020 to 77 in 2022/2023. On average each committee has seen its number of items increase from 13 items a year to 20 in this period.



The above graph demonstrates the consistent level of review work under taken. The number of meetings increased from 13 in 2019/2020 to 16 in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, despite the conclusion of the majority of scrutiny business prior to the pre-election period before the May 2023 local elections.

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