

Cumberland Shadow Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2022-23

What is Scrutiny and why is it important?

Scrutiny is a process to ensure that decisions taken by the Council reflect the needs and priorities of communities in Cumberland. Scrutiny is carried out by Councillors who understand and promote the concerns of the people who elected them, connecting decision makers to local communities.

Council decisions can be made by Council Officers, by the Council's 'Executive' (the political leadership) and by full Council (all Councillors).

Scrutiny Panels are made up of Non-Executive Councillors who work together, across political parties, to understand why decisions are made and how the Council is performing to deliver the best possible outcomes for Cumberland and its people.

Scrutiny Panels do not have decision-making powers; their role is to challenge and make recommendations that influence decision makers.

Local government re-organisation

On 1 April 2023 a new Cumberland Council will be established under Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) in Cumbria, replacing the current arrangement of Cumbria County Council, Allerdale District Council, Carlisle City Council and Copeland District Council that cover the geographic area.

Over this year, 2022-23, a Shadow Cumberland Authority has existed that has included shadow scrutiny arrangements. The Shadow Scrutiny Committee has considered matters relating to the Shadow Cumberland Authority and work being undertaken to establish the new Cumberland unitary authority. County and District Council Scrutiny Panels have considered matters within the remit of the sovereign councils, such as the day to day running of services.

As the LGR process has developed, the effective handover of services and strategic priorities has been a recurring theme in scrutiny discussions at both Sovereign and Shadow councils.

Scrutiny chair's report, Councillor Mike Hawkins

After the May 2022 elections it was important to establish a scrutiny committee to help Members and the Executive begin to get an understanding of the enormity of the changes that LGR presents. Shadow Scrutiny work has given Members an opportunity to hear from senior officers and the Executive on the LGR process and challenges that we anticipate moving from seven councils to two.

The new Cumberland authority brings together Members with different levels of experience and understanding of council services. Bringing together different councils and different ways of working was expected as a challenge for Shadow Scrutiny. I have been impressed by the Members of Scrutiny and the experienced Scrutiny Officers in their willingness to learn from each other, and in embracing differing views in a friendly manner.

I have learned that underneath the headlines of LGR being a vehicle for savings across Cumbria, there is much more detail than the general public hear about. For example, given the number of services that we will have to deal with as a council, Scrutiny Committee Members will need to dedicate more time to this important council function. The reduction in the number of councillors that we have in Cumberland is going to be a challenge, with Member workloads. There is, in my view, a high risk of Member burn-out that may need to be addressed going forward. Given the concerns around councillor numbers, it has been important to establish the right number of scrutiny committees to cover all council functions but being mindful of Member and officer resources for these committees. Shadow Scrutiny undertook a task and finish group on future scrutiny arrangements for Cumberland. I feel that the scrutiny arrangements that are in place for Cumberland Council will achieve the right balance to start with in the number of committees. I would like to thank all Members and supporting officers who joined the task and finish group in undertaking this important piece of work, which helped to shape the Cumberland scrutiny arrangements.

The new Cumberland Council is a chance to reset our priorities and the way that services are delivered. To local people, arrangements such as the more localised Community Panels are an opportunity for Cumberland Council to be more engaged and to deliver priorities for our local communities. I am especially looking forward to putting people and public health at the heart of everything that we do. Despite the challenges that we will face, especially around finance, this is an exciting time to be involved in local government. I wish all Members, staff and officers well for the coming year.

Comment from Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder for Governance and Thriving Communities, Councillor Lisa Brown

I am pleased to add my comments to this Shadow Scrutiny Annual Report, and excited that we're on the verge of vesting and will be appointing Members to our five new scrutiny panels at our AGM on 13th April.

As Deputy Leader, it was really important to me to be a part of steering the governance to embed scrutiny in the structure of the Cumberland Council. Scrutiny is the balance to our work on the Executive, and as a former scrutiny chair myself, I recognise that the challenge it brings is a vital element of ensuring that everything we do keeps our overall council plan aspirations in sight.

Moving forward, I'd like to see Scrutiny as a full participant in the decision making process of this new council – with a commitment to full engagement by the Executive and Senior Management Team, and to pre-scrutiny wherever possible. We have a once in a generation opportunity here to unite and transform services from across both tiers of local government in Cumberland, and with a strong focus on locality working and community engagement – Scrutiny, along with our Community Panels, has to be one of our key approaches to challenging that we are consistently taking decisions in the best interests of our people and communities.

Thank you to Members and Officers for all their work during this shadow year, and I look forward to working with you all during the year ahead.

Shadow scrutiny activity during 2022-23

During the Shadow Authority year, Scrutiny has been engaged in the following matters:

- Local government re-organisation programme delivery – focus on risk register and appropriate risk management; staffing and employee engagement; ICT and Information Security; financial management of the LGR programme.
- Cumberland Council Plan development – focus on strengthening climate emergency commitments; links to cost of living.
- Future scrutiny arrangements – task and finish group– developed proposals that informed the development of the Cumberland constitution.
- Budget setting and council tax consultation – considered proposals for Council Tax harmonisation and 2023-24 increases prior to public consultation; considered the draft budget and Mid-Term Financial Plan and fed back comments to the Executive.

The Committee has recognised that training and briefing for all Cumberland Councillors is important and has undertaken and hosted a number of training and workshop sessions. Training and workshop sessions undertaken:

- Introduction to Scrutiny at the Shadow Authority (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny)
- Scrutiny Work Programming (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny)
- Draft Cumberland Plan – virtual workshop on development
- Scrutiny Committee post meeting “away day” – focus on scrutiny role and responsibilities
- Budget workshop – invite to all Members

Recommendations for future Cumberland scrutiny committees

Cumberland Council will have several Scrutiny Committees, each focussing on different areas of Council responsibility:

- Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- LEP Overview and Scrutiny Committee

There will also be joint scrutiny arrangements with Westmorland and Furness Council for Joint Services and Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

During the Cumberland Shadow Authority year, Shadow Scrutiny have identified that the following issues are likely to be important for inclusion in future scrutiny workplans:

- Quarterly Budget Monitoring (Resolution at Budget Special 15/02/23)
- Treasury Management Strategy (Resolution at Budget Special 15/02/23)
- Transformation of council services – budget, process, outcomes for the community, staffing implications (Scrutiny meeting 01/02/23)
- Cost of Living – review of legacy of cost of living work undertaken by Sovereign Councils and Cumberland plans to address the cost of living in year 1 (Scrutiny meeting 01/02/23)
- Climate emergency as a cross-cutting theme for policy and strategy development (Scrutiny meeting 01/02/23)

A number of Scrutiny Panels and Committees from sovereign councils have provided end of year reports; these documents provide useful insights into the issues that they had identified as strategic priorities for Scrutiny to engage with:

- Carlisle City Council Scrutiny Annual Report [Scrutiny Annual Report](#)
- Allerdale Borough Council [Climate Change Action Plan](#)
- Allerdale Borough Council [Scrutiny Sign Off Report](#)