

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan

Executive Summary

This report sets out changes to Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. The changes are a result of a development workshop with Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the committee made a number of decisions on how they wished to proceed in the future.

It involves changing the committee's workplan so that individual meetings have a more clearly defined focus, and the committee undertakes more of its overview function than it currently does along with a change in the focus in the reports to the committee to make them clearer on decision making and relevant evidence.

It recommends that the Committee approves the changes outlined so that they can be implemented.

Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approves the changes set out in this report to its future meetings.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held a development workshop on 22 May 2024 to consider how best to take Overview and Scrutiny forward and made a number of decisions on how they wanted the committee to change.
- 1.2 Those involved changing the reports that they were being asked to consider and looking at the type of meetings that were being held.

2. Types of Meetings

- 2.1 The Committee at the workshop asked to look at a workplan on the basis of different types of meetings. In a quarter:
 - one meeting would deal with performance management, operational risk and budget monitoring as “early warning radar”.
 - one meeting dealing with pre scrutiny early principle items, and
 - one meeting acts as a mini task and finish group looking at a public issueThere would also need to be a budget savings meeting which could be included in one of the early warning meetings.
- 2.2 Early warning radar meetings would see the Quarterly Cabinet reports on corporate plan reporting, budget monitoring and operational risk alongside a new performance management report for the Committee that deals with North Norfolk profile indicators only. These will be a “general state of North Norfolk” indicators covering economic development, housing, health/quality of life, climate and deprivation/poverty that are not directly linked to the performance of the council appended to the report.
- 2.3 The main report will seek to pull key information from these reports and assess what issues the Council needs to be thinking about for the next 3 to 6 months. Some of these will be covered by potential operational changes while others may need a re-evaluation of part of a Council strategy or may need some new work to be done.
- 2.4 The Committee will be encouraged to take a more forward looking and strategic approach

when looking at this report with the aim of making clear recommendations to the Cabinet.

- 2.5 The meeting considering earlier pre scrutiny could include reports going to Cabinet at a later stage or issues chosen by the Committee. For those reports such as the recent Housing Allocations and Strategy a report would go to OSC prior to public consultation rather than the current approach when the consultation is finished and to some extent the OSC hands are tied by then and it can result in a more political discussion at the committee.
- 2.6 Officers will be encouraged to write reports that deal more with in principle issues. An example of that could be the Beach Huts report which is due to come to OSC in October that could address the issue of whether the council should provide with such huts or not.
- 2.7 It is proposed that no more than three substantive items come to each committee meeting.
- 2.8 The mini task and finish group meetings would seek to look at issue of public concern and call-in public organisations, community groups and stakeholders and members of the public in a question-and-answer session to work out if the Council could do anything to address that public issue.
- 2.9 An indicative work plan is at Appendix A but will need further work as items are identified for possible consideration by the Committee.

3. Reports

- 3.1. Councillors were clear in the workshop about what they wanted in reports and how they should be structured, and a new reporting guide and training will be given to officers. This will include the need for a full executive summary to be part of all reports as well as clearer and better evidenced reports.
- 3.2. The rationale for this was that not all members will want to look in detail at all reports. Instead, the Councillors could be split into three groups depending on the subject matter in the report to-

Paddlers – will only need to read the Executive Summary to get the information they want

Swimmers - will want to read the Executive Summary and the background and details highlighted in the report

Divers - will want to everything they can on the subject so will go through the appendices

- 3.3. This issue was brought up in the recent LGA Corporate Peer review that stated that reports need to be clear about what decision they are asking members to make, provide all the options, risks and implications and be succinctly explained by an officer in the meeting.

4. Corporate Plan Objectives

These changes to Overview and Scrutiny fit within the Council's Strong, Responsible and Accountable Council priority and link directly to "ensuring that strong governance is at the heart of all we do."

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy

In part the aim of this approach is to try and highlight issues at an earlier stage for the Council to consider and deal with which may reduce surprises and expenditure that was unexpected.

6. Financial and resource implications

None at this stage.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The are clear expectations from the Government on how Overview and Scrutiny should operate at Councils with new recent statutory guidance being issued that is particularly helpful advice. The new government might change this advice and indeed seek a different approach as to how it is being implemented on the ground.

8. Communications issues

- 8.1. There may be potential for more communications work especially at those meetings where a public issue is being considered that could involve members of the public and the use of social media channels.

9. Risks

- 9.1. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced Overview and Scrutiny as a check and balance to the Leader and Cabinet model and the expectation is that they are treated with a same level of importance at a local authority.
- 9.2 There are clear reputational risks to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee not working effectively and with both the LGA and the LGIU expressing concern about how Overview and Scrutiny Committee is operating at the council along with wider organisational culture and governance issues changes are needed.
- 9.3 Without those changes the ongoing political tensions and different interpretations of what is the purpose of Overview and Scrutiny may simmer leaving the officers in a difficult position and drawing the council into more interest from external bodies.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

The recommendation is that the Committee approves the changes set out in this report to its future meetings.