

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-25	
Executive Summary	This report aims to provide the Council with an outline of the role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, a summary of the work undertaken throughout 2023-25 period, and highlight any issues encountered by the Committee during this time.
Options considered	N/A
Consultation(s)	O&S Chair
Recommendations	It is recommended that Full Council notes the report, affirms the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and considers the following concerns raised within the key issues section of the report: • An average of more than 1.5 apologies given every meeting with limited substitutes being sought needs to be considered and addressed by Members. • Now the new Scrutiny Officer is in place training needs should be assessed so that the Scrutiny Officer can best support the Members of the Committee in fulfilling their roles. Any training Members need to help them feel more confident in their roles should be encouraged. • Monitor the work programme and avoid slippage in key areas such as the Police and Crime Plan to ensure that there is no lengthy gap.
Reasons for recommendations	To inform Council of the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 2023-25 and address concerns raised.
Background papers	Overview & Scrutiny work programme 2023-25
Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	N/A
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1. Introduction – Role of the Committee

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the Council's primary oversight Committee that holds Cabinet to account and ensures that reliable services are provided, whilst best value for money is achieved. Introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, Scrutiny Committees are able to monitor internal Council affairs and also review the work of external bodies such as the Police, health providers, and utility companies.

1.2 As outlined in the Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference are as follows:

- To scrutinise and review decisions or other actions taken with respect to Cabinet functions. This includes call-in of Cabinet decisions.
- To scrutinise and review decisions or other actions taken with respect to non-executive functions.

- To make reports or recommendations to Full Council or to the Cabinet about one or more particular issue(s), service(s) or matter(s), which affects North Norfolk and its residents. Reports or recommendations may be carried out on whatever issue, service or matter the Committee thinks fit and may be carried out on any subject if Full Council or the Cabinet requests it to do so.
- To carry out best value reviews.
- To act as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee.
- To produce an annual report to Council on the work of the Committee over the year.

1.3 The remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S Committee) also includes undertaking policy review and development, monitoring performance management, promoting community well-being and improving the quality of life in the District. Scrutiny is Member-led and independent of party-political arrangements. At North Norfolk District Council, the O&S Committee is chaired by a member of the opposition. Scrutiny should always be viewed as a function which belongs to and benefits the whole Council.

2. Who participates in Scrutiny

- The Chair and Vice-Chair of the O&S Committee take a pro-active role throughout the process, attending pre-agenda meetings to steer and scope the direction of questioning and investigation.
- O&S Committee Members – Scrutiny is different from other committees in that it calls for Members with investigative and creative minds who are prepared to “do their homework” out of the Council Chamber and think outside of the usual committee framework, tailoring the method of review to suit the topic.
- Cabinet Portfolio Holders are invited to attend meetings of the Committee to present and answer questions on reports relevant to their portfolio. The aim is that the Portfolio Member should have an opportunity to contribute to any issues relating to their portfolio.
- All non-Executive Members of the Council are routinely invited to attend Committee Meetings and offered the opportunity to ask questions on issues that matter to the residents they represent.
- Officers are involved in a number of ways – those directly involved in supporting the scrutiny process and those who are called to prepare reports for the Committee on a range of issues.
- Invitees and Witnesses can be called not just from within the Council, but from partners and public service providers.
- The public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committee, with a provision to submit questions or statements 2 days in advance of the meeting, in order to raise issues of concern that they would like the Committee to consider.

3. Committee Role and Responsibilities

- 3.1 Scrutiny of decisions made by Cabinet - The O&S Committee routinely reviews decisions made by Cabinet to ensure that they are appropriate, justified and provide best value for money.
- 3.2 Pre-Scrutiny - This enables greater co-ordination between the Cabinet and Scrutiny work programmes, whereby the Committee can provide input into policy development and decisions prior to their approval. This process

ensures that the O&S Committee and wider Members can provide meaningful input into key issues, reducing the likelihood of call-ins. Some examples include:

- Commenting and providing input on corporate projects
 - Pre-scrutinising the annual budget.
 - Providing input during the policy development process.
 - Considering key strategies prior to approval.
- 3.3 Call-ins - All key decisions made by Cabinet that have not been pre-scrutinised are subject to a five day 'call-in' period, prior to implementation. This enables the O&S Committee to consider whether any contentious decisions are appropriate and provides the opportunity to recommend to Cabinet that the decision be reconsidered, if necessary.
- 3.4 Financial Scrutiny – This allows the Committee and wider Members the opportunity to review and comment on draft budget proposals, budget monitoring reports, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, and other financial strategies. Consideration of financial reports is a statutory requirement of the Committee's work programme.
- 3.5 Performance Monitoring - This is a quarterly item for the Committee that provides an opportunity to ensure that service areas are meeting performance targets, or to highlight issues where further investigation may be required. It is also important for holding the Cabinet to account, by considering whether the administration is meeting the objectives set within their Corporate Plan and subsequent Delivery Plans.
- 3.6 External Organisations - The Committee may request briefings on matters of concern from external organisations. These are usually followed by a Q&A session to gain further insight into the chosen subject. The O&S Committee has a statutory obligation to oversee crime and disorder in the District, which is usually in the form of a briefing from the Police and Crime Commissioner, accompanied by senior Police Officers.
- 3.7 Focused/Rapid Reviews - The Committee may choose to look at a topic in depth over a specific period of time to consider whether the Council is achieving the necessary outcomes. This could be undertaken by the whole Committee as a rapid review in a single day, or as a smaller review by a Task and Finish Group, usually lasting six months.
- 3.8 Petitions - The Committee has an obligation to consider petitions received from members of the public, which can be submitted electronically or by hard copy. There is a threshold of 750 signatures required from within the District in order for the petition to be subject to full debate by the Committee.

4. Work of the Committee 2023-25

The period of 2023 to 2025 was a very busy two years for the Committee with the lead-up to the 2024 General election, the Peer Review and Local Government Reform (LGR) all coming at a time when the Scrutiny Officer position had many changes in personnel resulting in additional challenges. With several large projects reaching completion at the time, as well as the Peer Review, and subsequent feedback from the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), the Committee was seeking to be more effective and inclusive to fulfil the important role that it has in the role of governance. Those

challenges, and the recommendations from the LGiU were met positively by the Committee and they have worked hard to eradicate any issues that may have existed within Scrutiny at that time. The dedication of the Committee for self-improvement and to best highlight, and investigate, the issues of importance to the local community should be noted. Twenty-one formal Committee meetings were held throughout the two-year period, with one being an extraordinary meeting to debate a Call-In decision for the Rocket House Café in Cromer. Apologies were given on thirty-four occasions with substitutes covering nine of those absences. This highlights the continued need for those absences to be covered more robustly in the coming year in order to maintain a fair, and thorough, balance of debate and questioning.

4.1 Highlights from the 2023/25 Work Programme are listed below:

- **June 2023 & ongoing:** Waste issues - With the many changes impacting waste services across the District, such as the continuing need to amend collection routes and the impending introduction of food waste collections, the Committee closely scrutinised the services provided and debated them at three O&S Committee meetings within the period in question. This included the need to purchase two additional refuse collection vehicles, making certain the council, and communities served, received the best value for money. The recommendation was that these additional vehicles should be purchased but funded by borrowing of £335,000 and a revenue contribution of £50,000. It was also agreed that given the performance levels having improved, future updates are only made to the O&S Committee if, in the view of the Director of Communities, performance has dropped to a level that is, again, of significant concern.
In **Feb 2024** Cabinet supported the O&S Committee recommendation that *Full Council agrees to write to the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) setting out the evidence associated with the shortfall in allocation and the anticipated annual capital costs that the Council will incur in relation to food waste collection.*
- **June 2023:** Appointment of representative and substitute for the NCC Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC). The O&S Committee correctly felt that NNDC needed a representative on NHOSC with key issues needing raising, such as ambulance wait times and access to NHS dental services within North Norfolk. The Committee were asked to consider relevant councillors responsibilities, skills or experience, as well as time available to devote to the role. With that Cllr Boyle was appointed as representative to the NHPSC and Cllr Holliday was appointed substitute. It was noted that Cllr Boyle suggested these arrangements be reviewed after a period of 12 months, so this item is in line to be raised again in the 2025/26 work programme.
- **Nov 2023 and ongoing:** Anglian Water (AW)– There were a number of water and drainage related issues for the Committee to consider over the past 24 months. There was a briefing held in November 2023 by AW regarding sewage outflows and also the East of England Local Government Association Water Summit held in March 2024. The Committee noted the progress being made by AW who returned to O&S Committee in June 2025 for a further update. With regards to the Water Summit, the O&S Committee resolved that AW be invited to speak to the Committee on the strategic water issues that affect North Norfolk to include the Anglia Water Strategic Investment Plan and the Committee

would ask Cabinet to provide advice on what it would like the Council to take forward on water issues following the East of England Water Summit.

- **Oct 2023:** NHS Dental Services – The Committee resolved to write to the ICB to request more detailed information on several factors, including amongst other things, how service demand is determined if waiting list information is not collated and any data on the number of patients accessing private dental care. The NNDC representative at NHOSC raised concerns at their meeting as to what preventative work is being done to address dental issues and what was causing issues with capacity across Dental Services, was it training and the recruitment of Dentists. The O&S Committee did receive a positive response on those queries and there was a request from NHOSC to the Committee to recommend that the Leader of the Council write to the Cabinet member for Public Health in support of school dentistry as this was a significant gap in dentistry provision for children.
- **Jan 2024:** Councillor Call for Action: Homelessness. Cllr Holliday raised this call for action due to the tragic national crisis that our District along with the wider population, were facing and the many homes and families it affected in our area. The Committee resolved that a Task and Finish Group be established to investigate the causes and relief of homelessness in the District and make recommendations to the O&S Committee on its findings. The Task and Finish Group subsequently made two visits back to the Committee to report on their findings and outcomes. In **Sept 2024** it was Recommended to Council that,
 - ***To prevent homelessness, it expands its homelessness service prevention work to undertake such work at an earlier stage along with multi agency support, on an invest to save basis, to seek to reduce the number of people going into temporary accommodation and the costs of that to the council.***
 - ***Managing homelessness***
 - ***Housing allocation***
 - ***Increase housing supply***
 - ***Increase affordable house building/supply***
 - ***Increase/sustain Private rental tenancies***
 - ***Reducing Long Term Empty Homes***
 - ***Sustain social tenancies***
 - ***Prevention of/provision for victims of Domestic Abuse.***

These recommendations were all approved by Full Council. In **Feb 2025**, The Portfolio Holder for Housing & People Services wrote to central government, setting out the situation in North Norfolk regarding the private rental sector reducing housing stock levels and the key reasons for the withdrawals and asked central government for action to address the progressive stock loss and help this Council retain and even grow private sector stock levels

- **July 2024:** Ambulance Response Times – The Committee again took a keen interest in a subject that was very important to the community, this time focusing on Community First Responders (CFR). It made 3 recommendations to the Council,

- **Request the East of England Ambulance Trust to provide the mapping of CFRs in North Norfolk to establish where any gaps in the numbers of volunteers are &**
- **Communication materials for members of the council to use when talking to their respective Parish and Town Councils about the co-responding and the role of CFRs**
- **O&S also asked the Council to work with the Norfolk Ambulance Trust to help promote its Campaign on Community First Responders and co responding by signposting members of the public towards the Ambulance Trust's Community First Responders**
- **Oct 2024: Public Question – Benjamin Court.** The Committee heard from the 'Save Benjamin Court as a Reablement Unit' Group to question what more NNDC could do to ensure the facility is secured for health and care services of the community in the future. The O&S Committee recommended that:
 - **(A) the issue of Benjamin Court Cromer be referred to the November full council meeting for decision along with additional data to be provided in the report, where possible, on delayed discharges, the numbers of digitally excluded people and the availability of home-based care staff,**
 - **(B) it was noted, with the Committee's support. that the Leader of the Council intended to write to the Secretary of State as a matter of urgency on the need to retain Benjamin Court, Cromer and to request that NHS Property Services doesn't dispose of the building, and**
 - **(C) it was noted that the Chief Executive intended to make representations on the Health Watch suggestion that a team of community nurses could be stationed at the Council Offices rather than use the Benjamin Court building.**

Councillors welcomed the endorsement that the Council sought to contact the NHS Property Services team and promised to report back to O&S Committee as they learn more. Full Council agreed it was important that we kept this issue in the public domain. This is a good example of the how the Committee are actively supporting the Community on wider issues important to the local population and getting the public's voice heard at a higher level which can, potentially, affect positive change.

- **Oct 2024: Planning Service Improvement Plan (PSIP) –** In Sept 2023 O&S requested that a concluding report be added to the work programme for summer of 2024 to include a summary of performance following the implementation of the PSIP. In Oct 2024, upon receiving that report, the Committee welcomed the improvements that had been noted and that any future performance reports will be made via reports to Development Committee, quarterly, and annually.

- **Oct 2024:** Car Park Charges – The annual scrutiny of the car park fees and charges drew much discussion as many changes were proposed. The O&S Committee recommended that Cabinet consider the following changes to be implemented from 1st April 2025.
- **(1) that fees for the Council's Standard Car Parks be increased by 10p per hour, for the Coastal and Resort Car Parks be increased by 30p per hour, and**
- **(2) the question of whether there could be no increase in fees at the standard car parks and a charge of 40p at the Coastal and Resort car parks be explored**
- **That seasonal charges are not introduced at this time**
- **A flat rate evening charge across all car parks is not re-introduced at this time**
- **Season ticket prices are increased by the inflationary increase since 2016 only this year and increases to season ticket prices should be reviewed annually**
- **Coach Parking charges are increased to £12, £24 and £96**
- **That all the potential options for charging at Hornbeam Road Car Park in North Walsham be explored**
- **Car parking charges are reviewed every other year with the next review taking place so that any changes are implemented from 1 April 2027 apart from season tickets which should be reviewed annually as mentioned under recommendation D above**

Cabinet subsequently noted the positive impact on their decision making the O&S Committee recommendations had and the recognition by the Committee of the Council's financial position. Cabinet supported many of the O&S Committee's recommendations and agreed on an increase of 10p at Standard Car Parks, 20p at Resort Car Parks and 30p for Coastal Car Parks. Cabinet also agreed to no evening or seasonal charges be introduced at this time, whilst season ticket prices increased in line with inflation. The Cabinet explored options for Hornbeam Road Car Park, as a result of the O&S Committee's recommendation, agreeing leisure users at Victory Leisure Centre to be offered a 3hrs parking at a standard charge, via app only, with permit holders also having usage. It was also agreed that parking fees and charges to be reviewed again in 2025/26 rather than every other year. Reviewing charges lead to the Council considering charges at other local authorities and private providers which resulted in cheaper or highly competitive prices than many similar locations nationwide, including for coach Parking fees thus encouraging the tourist economy.

This type of collaborative work between the O&S Committee and Cabinet is a demonstration of how the Committee has taken on board the observations of the Peer review and how working together as a group, independent of political agendas, can achieve a common desired goal.

- **Nov 2024:** The Closure of Cromer Tourist Information Centre – the O&S Committee debated an issue very important to the local community and wider visiting population. The Committee recommended that Cabinet Consider:
 - **The building being made available for an alternative income generating use.**
 - **What provision can be made to continue a tourist information service – be that through an enhanced online presence, electronic information boards or physical leaflet stands at prominent locations within Cromer such as the Pier and other visitor attractions.**
 - **Relocation of the current Deep History Coast display housed within the North Norfolk Visitor Centre to a suitable alternative location, possibly Cromer Museum.**

Cabinet discussed these recommendations in **Jan 2025**, with Portfolio Holder for Leisure supportive of those recommendations and agreed to advertise the premises as available for let. It was noted that Officers were considering alternative means of providing visitor information within the town and wider district. Cabinet also agreed that the relocation of the Deep History Coast display be explored, noting the partnership nature of the development with the Norfolk Museums Service. This is a very good example of the cooperative working mechanisms of the O&S Committee and Cabinet, achieving an outcome beneficial to the Community and wider public whilst making financial savings and generating additional income from the asset.

- **Dec 2024:** Petition – Closure of Stalham Public Conveniences. The petition was brought to the Committee after it was agreed that it had gained the required number of signatures in support for it to be discussed. On hearing the local Councillors presentation, the O&S Committee requested an Officer report to be prepared by Director of Resources to provide information covering,
 - **Details as to how levels of usage have been captured.**
 - **Costs of maintaining this asset and cost comparisons.**
 - **Impact of not having these facilities from an assets and social economic perspective.**
 - **Any alternative opportunities including partnership funding.**
 - **Understanding how this aligns with the High Street Task Force.**
 - **Reasons for closure, and why appropriate, being the only town in the district that would be without public toilets.**
 - **Consultation with Cllrs Shires, Taylor and Bayes.**

- **Conversations with STC to continue in the meantime.**

Subsequent developments in LGR have impacted on proposed closures to public conveniences but the importance of the O&S Committee being able to hear and debate and respond to local petitions should be welcomed and noted.

4.2

In summary, the Committee undertook a substantial amount of business throughout the two-year period, with seventy-two reports or briefings, though this includes a number of recurring items such as performance and budget monitoring. Twelve of these topics could be defined as 'pre-scrutiny', in that they were reviewed by the Committee or looked at in greater detail by the Task and Finish Group in advance of consideration or approval by Cabinet or Council. This is in line with 2022/2023 and although shows a drop from the year 2021/2022, the Committee undertook more investigatory work as well as hearing a petition and a Call-in. In total, the Committee made over one hundred recommendations to Cabinet, Council and GRAC, with further action requests made to the Corporate Leadership team (CLT) and other officers. This equates to approximately five recommendations per meeting, with only three not accepted throughout the entire two-year period. Overall, the Committee remained highly active throughout this period with a focus on undertaking investigations and reviewing Cabinet decisions, whilst also maintaining oversight of Council services and performance.

4.3 **Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review:** The Committee noted that,

- I. It was clear to the Peer Review Team that the Committee is working much better with improved attendance, debate, and outcomes.
- II. The new strategic oversight boards that had been established in July 2024 to provide clarity of operational and strategic management. With each board being chaired by a director with a focus on monitoring progress and performance and reporting to members by exception.
- III. That in regard to of the support offers available for members around devolution and local government reorganisation the LGA will be providing support to councils to help them address specific challenges at all stages of devolution and local government reorganisation (LGR).

5. **Key Issues**

- 5.1 There were thirty-four instances where apologies were given over the period 2023-2025, with substitutes only available on nine occasions. This equates to an average of just under two absences per meeting requiring substitutes. It is hoped that the recruitment of a new Scrutiny Officer will see continued improvement on what had become a recurring theme for the past 3 years. Group Leaders must ensure that all efforts are made to arrange a substitute where possible.
- 5.2 The O&S committee has not had a permanent, or consistent, Scrutiny Officer for much of the past 12 months or more and this has affected the continuity of the Committee. The need to build strong relationships and for Members to have confidence in the Scrutiny Officer can only strengthen the Committee. In addition, training may support Members to fulfil their challenging roles.

- 5.3 The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in May 2024 proved a further challenge in allowing the PCC sufficient time and opportunity to attend an O&S meeting within the past 2 years. This has undoubtedly hindered the Committee's ability to give an informed contribution or opportunity to comment on the Police and Crime Plan. It is hoped that with the new PCC being due to attend in September 2025 we can best serve and reassure North Norfolk Communities that NNDC are looking after the Public's best interests to this regard.

6. Corporate Priorities

- 6.1 One of the Committee's key responsibilities is monitoring the performance of the Council against its corporate priorities. This is done on a quarterly basis to provide Members with an opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns, as a result the Committee helps to ensure that all corporate priorities of the Council are achieved.

7. Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There are no explicit proposals contained within the report that present financial or resource implications, however the Committee does in principle support any operational actions taken by the S151 Officer to increase the available resource within the Finance Team, which will have an associated financial implication.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications presented within the content of the report.

9. Risks

- 9.1 There are no immediate risks raised within the content of the report, however the key concerns outlined in section five may negatively impact the ability of the Committee to operate effectively, which could present a level of risk to the Council.

10. Net Zero Target

- 10.1 There are no net zero implications presented within the content of the report.

11. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 11.1 There are no equality, diversity and inclusion implications presented by the content of the report.

12. Community Safety issues

- 12.1 Whilst there are no direct community safety issues presented by the content of the report, the absence of the Police and Crime Commissioner's attendance for the crime and disorder update, these past 3 years, means that community safety issues may not have been given adequate attention in 2023-25. Efforts have been made to ensure that the PCC attends the Committee meeting in Sept 2025, or that a representative will be sent in their place. The intention also being that the new Scrutiny Officer can develop a stronger relationship with the PCC office so that these types of absences are avoided in the future.

13. Conclusions

- 13.1 2023-25 was a challenging but very productive two years for the Committee, with several investigations and reviews that required significant time and resource to complete. The result of these investigations were positive recommendations that helped Cabinet and the Council to improve its services and adapt to rising challenges, most explicitly in the areas of public interest such as access to NHS Dental Services and tackling Homelessness. The Committee also undertook important scrutiny work on external bodies, including Anglian Water and the Ambulance Service, both of which related to matters of significant concern for residents of the District. As a result, the Committee can also be seen to have worked in the public interest for the residents of North Norfolk and will continue to do so in the year ahead.
- 13.2 The Committee made one hundred and six recommendations to both Cabinet and Council, with a further 18 requests made for actions from officers. Recommendations were largely accepted, with healthy debate over the car park fees and charges resulting in the best outcomes for local, and wider visiting, communities, which suggests that the work of the Committee was widely supported by all Members of the Council. There was one decision made by the Cabinet that warranted call-in by the Committee, concerning the Rocket House, which was resolved that no further action be taken. It is a positive sign that Scrutiny can Call-in decisions to keep the public's best interest at the heart of what they do. The positive decision demonstrates that Scrutiny and the Executive are able to work effectively together.
- 13.3 There are matters of concern for the Committee that have been highlighted under the key issues section of the report. These relate to the number of apologies given and substitutes arranged, the lack, until now, of a consistent Scrutiny Officer for 12 months, and the absence of a briefing from the PCC. Members and officers are asked to reflect on these concerns and consider whether any actions for improvement can be made. Despite the challenges faced, the Committee was still able to provide valuable and effective oversight for the Council, whilst providing input into policy development, monitoring service performance, and undertake reviews or investigations. In summary, the Committee was clearly able to add value to the operation of the Council.