

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Summary: The report aims to provide Council with a better understanding of the role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, provide insight into the work of the Committee in the year 2018/19, and to highlight some of the key issues it has considered.

Options considered: N/a.

Conclusions: The Committee fulfilled its remit and had a very active year. There were some changes in membership during the year, including a change of Chairman. With a new Administration in place it is likely that 2019/20 will bring fresh challenges for the Committee, including input into the development of a new corporate plan. The Committee also welcomes ten newly elected Members following the May 2019 election.

Recommendations: **1. It is recommended that Council notes the report and affirms the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.**

Reasons for Recommendations: To inform Council of the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 2018/19.

Cabinet Member(s): N/a
Ward(s) affected: All

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1. Introduction – Purpose of the Committee

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the Council's watchdog, ensuring that the Cabinet is held to account and is carrying out the Council's aims, as well as getting the best value for money as a result of its decisions. Originating from the Local Government Act of 2000, Scrutiny Committees not only keep an eye on the Council, but can also review the work of other bodies such as the Police, our utility providers and the voluntary sector.

1.2 As outlined within the Council's Constitution, the Committee's terms of reference are as follows:

- To scrutinise and review decisions or other actions taken with respect to non-executive functions.
- To make reports or recommendations to the 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 Scrutiny Committee thinks fit and may be carried out on any subject if the 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.
- To ensure effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies.

1.3 The remit of the Overview and Scrutiny 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 political party arrangements. At North Norfolk District Council, the Overview and Scrutiny 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. Committee Background

2.1 Subsequent to minor changes following a change in the political control of the Council, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee comprised the following Members:

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Chairman – Cllr S Hester | Cllr N Pearce |
| Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds | Cllr N Smith |
| Cllr B Smith | Cllr P Bütikofer |
| Cllr B Hannah | Cllr P Grove-Jones |
| Cllr J English | Cllr R Reynolds |
| Cllr M Knowles | Cllr V Gay |

2.2 Who participates in Scrutiny:

- The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee take a pro-active role throughout the process, attending pre-agenda meetings and steering and scoping the direction of questioning and investigation.
- Overview and Scrutiny 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 Members 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 also invited to attend, in order to ask questions or suggest potential topics for scrutiny.
- Officers are involved in a number of ways – those directly involved in supporting the scrutiny process and those who are called to compile Reports for the Committee.
- Invitees and Witnesses can be called not just from within the Council, but from partners and utilities providers.
- The public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committee with a provision that allows members of the public the ability to submit questions

up to 24 hours in advance of meetings, in order to highlight areas of concern that they would like to see addressed by the Committee.

3. Committee Role and Responsibilities

- 3.1 Scrutiny of Decisions made by Cabinet “Call-ins” - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee can “call in” a decision which has been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. This enables the Committee to consider if the decision is appropriate, and it may recommend that the Cabinet reconsiders the decision.
- 3.2 Comment on Budget Proposals/Budget Monitoring - Draft Budget reports, budget monitoring and the Medium Term Financial Strategy are all cyclical items on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee’s Work Programme.
- 3.3 Pre–Scrutiny - This enables greater co-ordination between the Cabinet and Scrutiny work programmes, ensuring Overview and Scrutiny Committee input into key agenda items, thus reducing the likelihood of Call–ins.
 - Commenting on and providing input into Corporate Priorities.
 - Contributing to the development of Draft Policies.
 - Looking at key agenda items before they go to Cabinet.
- 3.4 Performance Monitoring - This is a quarterly item for the Committee that acts as a useful tool for highlighting service areas and issues that may require further investigation. They are equally important for showing areas of the Council’s work which are going particularly well.
- 3.5 Presentations - The Committee may request presentations from external bodies on items of interest. These are usually followed by a Q&A session to gain further insight into the chosen subject.
- 3.6 Reviews - The Committee may choose to look at a topic in depth and over a period of time. This could be undertaken by the whole Committee as a rapid review or by a Task and Finish Group over a set period of time, usually lasting six months.
- 3.7 Petitions - The Committee considers petitions received from members of the public which can be submitted electronically or by hard copy.

4. Work of the Committee 2018/19

- 4.1 2018/19 was a busy year for the Committee with two Task & Finish Group reviews, two Working Groups, a rapid review of the local plan, multiple presentations ranging from organisations such as the Norfolk Constabulary to the NHS Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust, and a call in of a Cabinet decision on Egmore Enterprise Zone. Please see below for further details of the work of the Committee in 2018/19:
 - Beach Huts and Chalets Task & Finish Group: Early in the municipal year, the Committee resolved to establish a Task & Finish Group in order to undertake a six month review into the Council’s Beach Huts and Chalets. The Review culminated in a range of recommendations that were subsequently approved by Cabinet, including a new pricing

structure, an online bookings system, improvement of maintenance procedures and service improvements for key collection/drop-off.

- **Market Town Initiative Working Group:** The MTI Working Group was established through Overview & Scrutiny as it was determined that a Scrutiny sub-committee would provide the most suitable apparatus to judge and monitor applications to the fund. The £400k fund aimed to reinvigorate North Norfolk's four inland Market Towns of Fakenham, Holt, North Walsham, and Stalham with £100k available to each town. The Working Group made funding recommendations of £274,162.97 in the 2018/19 municipal year.
- **Asset Management Working Group:** The Committee resolved to establish an Asset Management Working Group as a scrutiny sub-committee, in order to undertake reviews of the Council's potential and existing asset commercialisation projects. During 2018/19 the AMWG reviewed the business case for the Egmore Enterprise Zone and made a range of recommendations to Cabinet on the project.
- **Call-in:** The committee expressed concerns about some aspects of Cabinet's decision regarding the Egmore Enterprise Zone. Members resolved to issue a call-in of the decision at the September meeting of Cabinet. The Call-in recommendations were subsequently rejected by Cabinet.
- **Sheringham Primary School Parking Task & Finish Group:** As a result of a Councillor Call for Action from the local Member, the Committee resolved to establish a Task & Finish Group to review traffic and parking concerns raised by residents in the vicinity of Sheringham Primary School. The Group was limited to an initial three month time-limit leading up to the Local Elections held in May 2019. Prior to the election the Group met on five occasions in which time it resolved to co-opt two members of the public as representatives of the School and residents. A range of potential options were considered, and an Interim Report was produced to hand over its findings the new Overview & Scrutiny Committee post-election.
- **Rapid Review of the Local Plan:** When setting the Work Programme, the Committee resolved to undertake a pre-scrutiny Rapid review of the Draft Local Plan prior to its initial publication for consultation. The review took place over a full day and resulted in several recommendations on housing, the environment and resourcing of the Planning Policy Team, which were all in-turn accepted by Cabinet.
- **Crime and Disorder:** The Committee requested a presentation on online scams by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk in conjunction with the Superintendent for the district. The presentation led to a thorough Q&A with several service improvement suggestions put forward by Members, thus fulfilling the role of the Council's crime and disorder Committee.
- **Budget Scrutiny/Monitoring & Financial Strategy:** Throughout the year, the Committee reviewed Budget Monitoring, Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy, and Medium Term

Financial Strategy Reports in line with its responsibility to provide financial oversight for the Council. In addition to an ongoing programme of finance training, Budget Scrutiny Training was arranged to align with the publishing of the draft budget in December 2018, which allowed Committee Members a chance to review the budget simultaneously.

- Performance Management: The Committee received quarterly Reports on the performance of the Council, which it used to identifying specific areas of success or concern. Tourism figures were routinely discussed as a key economic concern for the district that resulted in the Committee receiving a briefing on Tourism in the district.
- Review of Public Convenience Strategy/Opening Times: The Public Convenience Strategy and Opening Hours were taken to the Committee as separate items with Scrutiny approving recommendations to Cabinet to fund service improvements such a renovations and extended opening hours.
- Briefings: During 2018/19 the Committee requested several briefings in order to provide insight and updates on topics including the NHS Norfolk & Suffolk Adult Mental Health Strategy, staff recruitment at NNDC, leisure & locality services offered by NNDC, NNDC corporate branding, and the Better Broadband for Norfolk service run by Norfolk County Council.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 2018/19 was a very active year for the Committee with unexpected issues arising in addition to the Committee's agreed Work Programme, including a call-in of a major commercial investment proposal from Cabinet and a Councillor Call for Action. Significant challenges also arose from unexpected changes in the political administration of the Council, and subsequent changes in the leadership of the Committee. Importantly, despite these challenges the Committee continued to exceed its obligations and provide valuable input and oversight to the Council.
- 5.2 The Scrutiny Officer that entered the role at the start of the 2018/19 municipal year has settled comfortably into the role, and now seeks to enhance both the effectiveness and profile of the Committee amongst Councillors, Officers, and across the district.
- 5.3 Challenges remain for the year ahead, with major changes to the political makeup of the Council following the May 2019 Local Elections, which has resulted in a significant change to the membership of the Committee. This has resulted in only one former Member of Scrutiny being appointed to the Committee. Whilst this may limit continuity, it could provide an opportunity for the Committee to take a fresh approach, focusing on high level strategic projects as commercialisation comes to the forefront. Furthermore, the corporate priorities of the Council may undergo significant changes, which will require considerable input from the Committee, both in the context of pre and post scrutiny reviews.
- 5.4 With predicted future budget deficits of approximately £2m, the Committee will be required to play an important role in identifying the Council's appetite for

commercialisation, monitoring the Council's budget, and continuing to review the viability of the Council's existing and future assets.

- 5.5 In Summary, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee played an important role for the Council in the 2018/19 municipal year, and its importance will continue to develop in the coming year.