



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview
Annual Report 2017/18

What is Scrutiny and Overview?

The aim of the Council's scrutiny and overview function is to provide an open and transparent forum in which to investigate whether South Cambridgeshire District Council's policies and services are meeting the needs of local people.

Scrutiny and overview committees do not have any decision-making powers, but they do have the power to influence and make evidence-based recommendations to decision-takers. Such recommendations could be informed via performance monitoring, best practice, expert advice, or liaison with stakeholders, partners, service users or members of the public. Scrutiny and overview committees are often described as a Council's 'critical friend'.

Scrutiny and overview committees can also challenge executive decisions, taken by Cabinet, individual Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers on a key decision. The Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee or any five councillors can, in certain circumstances, 'call-in' a decision that has been made but not yet implemented in accordance with the Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee Procedure Rules. The Committee is then able to interview the relevant member of Cabinet or officers, examine the evidence and suggest improvements to the decision, or refer it to Full Council for further consideration.

Effective scrutiny provides an additional, independent resource for reviewing decisions and policies without being divisive or confrontational. Councillors on scrutiny and overview committees are in a unique position to influence policy and contribute to the decision-making process.

When working well, scrutiny and overview can help to:

- get to the heart of issues
- develop new ideas
- engage and provide a voice for service users
- improve decision-making
- strengthen accountability
- contribute to policy development
- monitor and improve services

Scrutiny and Overview at South Cambridgeshire District Council

During 2017/19, South Cambridgeshire District Council had two scrutiny and overview committees; the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Partnerships Review Committee, both of which consisted of nine non-executive District Councillors drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they were represented on the Council as a whole.

The Partnerships Review Committee was introduced to the Council's committee structure on 23 May 2013 at the Annual Meeting of the Council, where the size of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee was reduced from thirteen to nine. The specific remit of the Partnerships Review Committee was to scrutinise, challenge and hold decision takers to account on issues relating to the work of those organisations in the area of South Cambridgeshire, which may or may not involve formal partnerships. Whilst the Partnerships Review Committee's work was mainly externally focussed, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee retained its role of holding executive decision takers to account and centred on those issues considered as 'internal'.

The following Councillors served on the respective committees for the 2017/18 municipal year:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

- Chairman: Councillor Tony Orgee
- Vice-Chairman: Councillor Kevin Cuffley
- Councillors:
- David Bard
- Ruth Betson
- Grenville Chamberlain
- Graham Cone
- Jose Hales
- Philippa Hart
- Tumi Hawkins

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

- Val Barrett
- John Batchelor
- Anna Bradnam
- Doug Cattermole
- Christopher Cross
- Neil Davies
- Andrew Fraser
- Roger Hall
- Andrew Johnson
- Douglas de Lacey
- Ed Stonham
- Deborah Roberts
- David Whiteman-Downes

Partnerships Review Committee

- Chairman: Councillor Ben Shelton
- Vice-Chairman: Councillor Bunty Waters
- Councillors:
- David Bard
- Henry Batchelor
- Andrew Fraser
- Janet Lockwood
- Ray Manning
- Tony Orgee
- Ingrid Tregoing

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

- Val Barrett
- Grenville Chamberlain
- Neil Davies
- Roger Hall
- Tumi Hawkins
- Andrew Johnson
- Douglas de Lacey
- David McCraith
- Deborah Roberts
- Ed Stonham
- Aidan Van de Weyer

How do the scrutiny and overview committees decide what to scrutinise?

The scrutiny and overview committees set their own work programmes and topic suggestions can be gained from numerous sources, including: -

- individual councillors
- local petitions
- partner organisations
- officers
- residents
- Portfolio Holder Scrutiny Monitors
- the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions

Programme planning takes place at the start of the municipal year and the work programmes are considered as standing items at every meeting. Additional items for consideration will usually be added during the year as and when they arise, which can be a mixture of one-off topics and items that may require more in-depth review.

A work programme prioritisation tool is which enable the committees to assess those items that have been suggested or put forward and ascertain whether they should be included in their work programmes, as well as determine their level of priority.

Items included in the work programme usually go through an initial scoping process. This provides an opportunity to consider the rationale behind committees looking into the particular issue, the purpose or objective of scrutiny involvement and a methodology or approach that will be followed for the piece of work.

Scrutiny Reviews

Scrutiny Reviews provide opportunities to consider specific issues in more detail, sometimes outside of formal meetings involving a small group of councillors with experience, expertise or an interest in the subject being reviewed. The Committees will ultimately agree whether or not a scrutiny review on a particular issue will be undertaken. Any initial requests for scrutiny reviews will go through a scoping process to outline terms of reference for the review and identify how the piece of work should be conducted. Reviews could be undertaken through one of the following options:

Scrutiny Review by the Full Committee

A scrutiny review by the full committee could take place when all councillors on the committee express an interest in scrutinising a specific issue. These meetings would normally be held in public with the review culminating in formal recommendations to a decision taker.

Scrutiny Review by a Task and Finish Group

Task and finish groups are typically established when significant research and evidence gathering is necessary to assist in the production of a comprehensive report substantiating a set of recommendations to decision takers. An appropriate timetable would be agreed at the commencement of the scrutiny review, with most task and finish groups aiming to have completed their reviews by six months. These meetings are usually not held in public.

Scrutiny Review by an Informal Working Group

Informal working groups with relevant officers, Portfolio Holders or external parties are an effective means of undertaking scrutiny reviews that do not require significant research or evidence and can be completed in a much shorter timescale. Formal recommendations can still come out of a review carried out by informal working groups, but a comprehensive report is usually unnecessary. The informal format of these meetings would mean that they are not held in public.

Scrutiny Review by a Focus Group

A focus group could carry out a scrutiny review on any issue that requires an urgent response. It would take the shape of a significant fact-finding exercise, taking up one or two full days in an intensive session with very little research required and report its outcomes to relevant officers or decision takers.

Work of the Partnerships Review Committee during 2017/18

The Partnerships Review Committee met formally once in the 2017/18 municipal year. This was as follows:

28 July 2017

'Mind the Gap' in support and provision between schools and mental health services

The committee considered a report which outlined its findings of the review it had conducted over the previous 12 months regarding children and adolescent mental health services. This work had begun in September 2016 when the committee decided it would like to look at mental health service provision in the district. The report presented a number of recommendations which were endorsed by Cabinet in November 2017. This was the culmination of the work the committee had undertaken of the previous 12 months during which time committee members had carried out investigations in their own localities, primarily talking to GPs and schools to understand the perceived issues.

Informal meetings and other work outside of formal committee meetings

In November 2017 the committee's Vice Chairman met with representatives of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group to hear about the newly commissioned three year contract for tier one and two young people's mental health service, to be provided by a social enterprise 'CHUMS' from January 2018.

Following the roll out of CHUMS in January 2018, committee members sought feedback from their local primary and secondary schools on whether they had received any help from CHUMS.

Outside Bodies

The Council's Civic Affairs Committee agreed on 5 December 2013 that Members appointed to outside bodies should provide written update reports to the Partnerships Review Committee. Updates on Emmaus Cambridge and Health and Wellbeing were received by the committee in the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

Work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee during 2017/18

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee met as a full committee on five occasions in the 2017/18 municipal year on the following dates:

- 6 July 2017
- 7 September 2017
- 9 November 2017
- 6 February 2018
- 6 March 2018

The committee looked at the performance of the Council's Planning Service, 3C Shared Services, Shared Waste Service and the Customer Contact Centre on an ongoing basis at its meetings throughout the year, as well as receiving the Council's quarterly position reports on finance, performance and risk and reviewing the Council's Corporate Plan for 2018:

Quarterly Position Statement on Finance Performance and Risk

The committee considered the Council's position statements on finance, performance and risk for each quarter of the year. These reports were presented to the committee by the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder and Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, and provided a statement on the Council's position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks. The committee considered these at its July 2017, September 2017, November 2017 and February 2018 meetings.

Planning performance

In response to the potential risk of designation relating to certain areas of the Planning service and concerns raised by the committee, updates on the performance of the Development Management and Planning Enforcement services were received at the committee's November 2017 meeting and a further update on the performance of the Development Management service in March 2018. The Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development and Head of New Communities presented these reports which set out the services' performance and ongoing improvements. The committee agreed that it would continue to look at Development Management performance in the next municipal year.

Customer Contact Centre performance

The performance of the Council's Customer Contact Centre continued to be of interest to the committee during the municipal year. The committee reviewed the Contact Centre's mid year performance in September 2017 and its annual performance in March 2018, with reports being presented by the Benefits Manager, Head of People and Organisational Development. The committee was informed that the service's performance had steadily improved in 2017 due to the service being fully staffed and being proactive in filling vacancies. The committee was encouraged by the service's performance.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Council's draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which presented the Council's financial strategies and budgets, was reviewed by the committee in November 2017. Before its consideration by Cabinet and Full Council, the final MTFS was then presented to the committee by the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder and Housing Portfolio Holder, for its consideration on 6 February 2018.

Corporate Plan 2018

The Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the Corporate Plan 2018 to the committee for review at its meeting in February 2018, before it was considered and approved by the Cabinet at its meeting later in February 2018.

Shared Waste Service

The committee received updates on the performance of the Council's Shared Waste Service in July and September 2017, raising local issues regarding waste collections. Members were pleased to see an improvement in waste collection rates during the year. At the committee's February 2018 meeting, the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder presented a report which reviewed the implementation of the Shared Waste Service Alternative Bin Collection Day project, which was noted by the committee.

3C Shared Services

The performance of the 3C Legal, ICT and Building Control Shared Services continued to be of interest and continued to be a concern of the committee during the municipal year. The committee considered the Shared Services 2016/17 Annual Report at its meeting in July 2017, which was presented by the Leader of the Council. This report summarised the performance of the shared services during the 2016/17 financial year and in response to this the committee raised a number of issues and concerns it had regarding the performance of the shared ICT and Legal services in particular. At its March 2018 meeting, the committee received an update on 3C Shared Services performance and progress from the Business and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Director of Health and Environmental Services.

Update on building cladding and fire related issues

Following the fire at Grenfell Tower the Chairman requested an update from the Housing Portfolio Holder on building cladding and fire related issues at the committee's meeting which took place in July 2017.

Call-in of decision taken by Cabinet

At its meeting in September 2017 the committee considered the call-in of a decision taken by Cabinet in August 2017, relating to the sale of land off Station Road in Foxton. The committee debated the issue and heard from the local member for Foxton who was the lead member of the call-in, the Chairman of Foxton Parish Council and questioned them alongside the relevant Portfolio Holder and officers. Taking account of all the points raised, the committee upheld the original decision taken by Cabinet and allowed the decision to be implemented without further delay.

Ermine Street Housing Task and Finish Group

At its meeting in February 2017, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to set up a task and finish group to look at Ermine Street Housing. The group met on three occasions during the year. At its first meeting the group established terms of reference and in the subsequent meetings met with the Director and Finance Director of Ermine Street Housing in February 2018. The purpose of this meeting was to gather more information about Ermine Street Housing and for the task and finish group to understand the financial relationship between it and the Council as well as to better understand the operation of Ermine Street Housing from the Council's perspective. In March 2018 the task and finish group then met with two of Ermine Street Housing's Board members to discuss the company further and gain their views on the operation of the company. This meeting concluded the task and finish group's investigation into Ermine Street Housing. The group concluded that the company was well run and managed and was confident about the future of the company from the Council's perspective.

Monitoring Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were allocated as Scrutiny Monitors for specific Portfolios and attended these meetings to develop greater knowledge in an area of the Council's work, as well as offering well informed challenge and influence. Scrutiny Monitors for 2017/18 were allocated as follows: -

Cabinet Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Leader of the Council	Cllr Tony Orgee
Finance and Staffing	Cllr Philippa Hart
Business and Customer Services	Cllr Tumi Hawkins
Environmental Services	Cllr David Bard
Greater Cambridge Partnership	Cllr David Bard
Housing	Cllr Kevin Cuffley Cllr Jose Hales
Planning	Cllr Graham Cone Cllr Philippa Hart
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure	Cllr Philippa Hart

Call-in

Call-in is usually a last resort, when other means of influencing decision-making have failed. Any Call-in would be considered by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. This procedure was used once during the 2017/18 municipal year to call-in a decision taken by the Cabinet in August 2017 relating to the sale of land of Station Road in Foxton.

Contact us

If you would like to know more about the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at South Cambridgeshire District Council please contact the Democratic Services Team democratic.services@scambs.gov.uk.