

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Scrutiny and Overview Committee

20 July 2006

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Democratic Services Officer

SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE WEBPAGE

Purpose

1. To inform members of the options available for a Scrutiny and Overview Committee webpage.

Background

2. The Scrutiny Sub-Group agreed on 13 June 2006 that there should be a separate scrutiny page on the Council's website, with links to important information on scrutiny.

Considerations

3. The modern.gov meeting and forward plan enquiry system on the Council's website already contains details of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee (see **Appendix A**), such as:
 - (a) Links to agendas and minutes (from the committee's first meeting in May 2002 to the present)
 - (b) Contact details for committee members and links to members' webpages
 - (c) Attendance statistics
 - (d) Meeting statistics
 - (e) Declarations of interest made at meetings
 - (f) Purpose of the committee
 - (g) Links to the Constitution for further details about the committee's responsibilities
 - (h) Democratic services officer and contact information
4. The purpose of the committee is also available on the Council's main website on the "Committees & Meetings" page, but this is neither a prominent location, nor, perhaps, an intuitive one: it is not situated where most members of the public would look.
5. The scamb.gov.uk website is being linked to the modern.gov website to enable searching of the latter from the Council's main page, reducing the amount of time it can take for information to be located.

Options

6. The majority of the information about the committee already is held within the modern.gov site, and all officers in the Democratic Services Section have access to amend, update or otherwise alter the pages as required. A link to this "Scrutiny and Overview Committee" webpage could be added to the Council's main website under the Council and Democracy menu. Other features on this Committee page could include photographs and links to external websites.
7. The modern.gov site also offers a searchable Library feature in which are stored documents relating to the democratic process but not part of agendas or minutes,

such as the Constitution, the Members' Allowance Scheme, and guides for members of the public wishing to ask questions at meetings. A separate header could be created here for "Scrutiny and Overview Committee" and any relevant documents uploaded. Links could be created to these documents from the main committee information webpage.

8. A further feature is the new public on-line consultation module which allows residents to have their say on forthcoming issues. This module will be launched publicly via *South Cambs Magazine* autumn edition and will be linked initially to issues on the Forward Plan. Consultation pages can be created for any topic of relevance to the District Council, whether or not they are related to Forward Plan or agenda items, and if the Scrutiny and Overview Committee wished to conduct any such exercises, links to existing consultations can be added to the webpage.
9. Alternatively, a site could be created on the Council's main scambs.gov.uk page under the Council and Democracy \ Committees and Meetings menu. This could require the duplication of information such as Committee membership and links to minutes and agendas, all of which are updated automatically by the modern.gov software but which would have to be entered manually on the scambs.gov.uk site. Three members of Democratic Services have been trained to use the software for creation, updating and amendments to pages.

Implications

10. Financial	None. The Council already owns all the necessary software and storage space.
Legal	All information on the website must comply with the Constitution (Access to Information Procedure Rules) and various legislation (Freedom of Information, Data Protection). The website may not be used for party political or electioneering purposes.
Staffing	All Democratic Services Officers have access to amend the modern.gov committee pages as required, and three have had additional training as editors of the Council's website.
Risk Management	Neither the modern.gov nor the scambs.gov.uk server is situated locally. Regular back-ups of each server are created to allow rapid restoration of information in the event of a system failure.
Equal Opportunities	The Council's website contains tips to increase the default text size of all its pages to assist residents with visual impairments. During the 2006/07 year, the Web Services Officer will be investigating accessibility issues such as having the Council's website tested for compliancy with the Disability Discrimination Act, and providing assistive technologies such as a screen reader to convert text into audio so webpages can be "read" to the viewer. Webpages and all documents linked to them can be printed and posted to residents without internet access.

Consultations

11. Web Services Officer and other Cambridgeshire authority websites (of which Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council have separate Scrutiny pages; see **Appendices B and C**).

Conclusions/Summary

12. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee has a choice between two different locations for its website. Much of the basic information about the Committee is available already via modern.gov, and through this system is updated automatically with links to new minutes and agendas, changes in membership following Annual Council. This system has the ability to add relevant documents, links to external websites, photographs and on-line public consultation. The scamb.gov.uk website could be configured to include all this information, but would require more officer time as it must be updated manually. There could be delays in updating and editing information on the scamb.gov.uk site, depending upon the availability of officers who have had the software training.

Recommendations

13. It is recommended that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee:
- (a) have their webpage created via the modern.gov system and a link added to the main scamb.gov.uk page;
 - (b) decide (or delegate to the Scrutiny Sub-Group to decide) what information should be included and a mechanism for keeping this under review to ensure that all relevant information is added promptly and any outdated information is archived electronically;
 - (c) nominate a member or members to liaise with Democratic Services for creation and on-going maintenance of the webpage; and
 - (d) promote the new website via the autumn 2006 edition of *South Cambs Magazine* as part of the proposed article about the Committee.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

14. Affordable Homes	None specific – depends on issues on the Forward Plan or the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agenda programme.
Customer Service	A website would promote the work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, giving the public opportunities to understand its role and their own opportunities to attend and speak at meetings.
Northstowe and other growth areas	None specific – depends on issues on the Forward Plan or the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agenda programme.
Quality, Accessible Services	A website is available to anyone with internet access, whether at home, at work or at a public library or internet café, and can be viewed at any time of the day or night at the user's convenience. The website and any documents stored there can be printed and posted to anyone without internet access. See also Equal Opportunities Implications above.
Village Life	The Scrutiny and Overview Committee can use its website to draw attention to issues of district-wide or local interest.
Sustainability	The information will be held electronically and updated automatically, reducing reliance upon paper copies, which must be reprinted and replaced after each change.
Partnership	The website could be linked to other authorities and partner organisations to help the public direct their queries to the appropriate body, if issues are raised which do not relate to the District Council's responsibilities.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: None

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Existing information on the modern.gov website:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

- [Browse meetings and agendas for this committee](#)
- [View contact details for the members of this committee](#)
- [View attendance statistics](#)
- [View meeting statistics](#)
- [View declarations of interest](#)

Purpose of Committee

The Committee is appointed on the same proportionality basis as Cabinet. The Scrutiny & Overview Committee has no decision-making powers but monitors the performance of the Leader and Cabinet and scrutinises services and policies throughout the Council. The Committee manages the Best Value Reviews. It also appoints the Audit Panel which considers the reports of the Council's auditors. The Chairman or any five Councillors can call in (*challenge*) for review by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee any decision made by the Cabinet or by individual Portfolio Holders. Decisions are published each Wednesday in the [Councillors' Bulletin](#) (published on the website every Thursday morning). Councillors who are members of the Executive cannot be members of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee meetings are open to the public. They are held monthly on a Thursday afternoon at 2 pm in the Council Chamber. Further details about Scrutiny and Overview Committee responsibilities are available in Part 2: [Article 6](#) and [Part 4](#) of the Constitution.¹

Committee Members

- [Cllr Mark Howell](#) (Chairman)
- [Cllr Roger Hall](#) (Vice-Chairman)
- [Cllr Richard Barrett](#)
- [Cllr Bob Bryant](#)
- [Cllr Mrs Sue Ellington](#)
- [Cllr Mrs Liz Heazell](#)
- [Cllr Peter Johnson](#)
- [Cllr Sebastian Kindersley](#)
- [Cllr Mike Mason](#)
- [Cllr David McCraith](#)
- [Cllr David Morgan](#)
- [Cllr Mrs Cicely Murfitt](#)
- [Cllr Charles Nightingale](#)
- [Cllr Mrs Hazel Smith](#)
- [Cllr Richard Summerfield](#)
- [Cllr Dr Susan van de Ven](#)

Contact Information

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¹ The information in the "Purpose of Committee" section is duplicated on the scambs.gov.uk website.

APPENDIX B

Information on Cambridgeshire County Council's "Democracy in Cambridgeshire – Scrutiny" website:

- Summary of Scrutiny Arrangements
- Scrutiny Committees - Agenda and Minutes, Membership and Meeting Dates
- Scrutiny Committee Work Programme
- Constitutional Documents
- Scrutiny Meetings - Purpose of the Different Sessions
- Role of Scrutiny Chairmen and Officers
- Scrutiny Support and Guidance
- Scrutiny of Health and Social Care
- Review of Scrutiny Arrangements - October 2003
- Papworth Joint Health Scrutiny Committee

Each bullet point links to a separate document or website with links to further documents or websites.

This site can be accessed from:

- www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk
- Council and Democracy
- Democracy and Decision Making
- Scrutiny

Information on Huntingdonshire District Council's "Overview and Scrutiny" website:

Overview And Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Panels aim to improve the Council's performance by monitoring, questioning and making recommendations on the way that services are provided and decisions taken.

Purpose of Overview and Scrutiny

In 2000, as part of the local government modernisation programme, the Council established a Cabinet system to manage its business and take decisions.

Overview and Scrutiny Panels were set up to question decisions made by the Cabinet and examine particular issues, policies or Council services.

The Panel's work falls into FOUR broad areas:

Holding the Cabinet to Account

The Panels are charged with holding the Cabinet to account, a key role in the new executive style of decision making. This involves ensuring that decisions taken by the Council's Cabinet are appropriate and within the Council's policy and financial framework. If any three members of a Panel feel that a decision is inappropriate or contrary to policy or the budget they can "call the decision in" within 5 days of it being made to prevent it from being implemented. They can then summon the relevant Cabinet Member and Officer to be interviewed and make recommendations to the decision maker to reconsider or amend their decision.

Studies

The Panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or wider issues which affect the lives of local people. At the end of each study, a Panel will report with recommendations as to how things could be improved. During the course of reviews, Councillors will speak to Cabinet Members and to officers and also to external witnesses to assist them in their information gathering.

Scrutiny of Council Policies

Much of the Scrutiny Panel's work involves the detailed examination of key Council plans and policies, both before and after they have been approved. The Budget, the Corporate Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan have all come under scrutiny in the last year.

Performance Monitoring

The Panels review the performance of the Council and the achievement of performance indicators and targets. Panel Members also participate in the Council's Best Value Review process and in monitoring the outcome of individual Reviews.

A copy of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' Annual Report for 2005/06 is available on the right hand side.

Links

- Participating in the Overview and Scrutiny Process (includes a link to the Hunts DC modern.gov system and contact details for Democratic Services)
- The Panels (includes a link to the Hunts DC modern.gov system)
- Useful Links (e.g. Centre for Public Scrutiny, Improvement and Development Agency [IDeA], Institute of Local Government Studies, Direct.Gov, www.info4local.gov.uk)