



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Annual Report 2018/19

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 Lead Cabinet Members 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

At the Annual General Meeting of the Council in May 2018 the number of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Scrutiny committees was reduced from two to one, however the membership of the remaining Scrutiny and Overview Committee was increased from 9 to 14 non-executive District Councillors. The membership was drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole. In 2018/19 the chairmanship was held by the opposition and pre-decision Scrutiny was adopted whereby the committee reviews items before Cabinet makes a decision.

The committee's role is to hold Executive decision takers to account.

The following Councillors served on the committee for the 2018/19 municipal year:

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

- Chairman: Councillor Grenville Chamberlain
- Vice-Chairman: Councillor Brian Milnes
- Councillors:
- Ruth Betson
- Anna Bradnam
- Dr Martin Cahn
- Sarah Cheung Johnson
- Gavin Clayton
- Graham Cone
- Dr Claire Daunton
- Dr Douglas de Lacey
- Bill Handley
- Steve Hunt
- Peter McDonald
- Judith Rippeth

The following Councillors were available as substitutes during the year:

- Peter Topping
- Mark Howell
- Shrobona Bhattacharya
- Sue Ellington
- Bunty Waters
- Henry Batchelor
- Geoff Harvey
- Alex Malyon
- Joes Hales
- Clare Delderfield
- Deborah Roberts
- Nigel Cathcart

How does the scrutiny and overview committee decide what to scrutinise?

The scrutiny and overview committee sets its own work programmes and topic suggestions can be gained from numerous sources, including: -

- individual councillors
- local petitions
- partner organisations
- officers
- residents
- Lead Cabinet Member Scrutiny Monitors
- the Council's Forward Plan of key and non 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 used which enables the committee to assess those items that have been suggested or put forward and ascertain whether they should be included in the work programme, 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 the committee 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 Committee 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 Scrutiny and Overview Committee during 2018/19

At the start of the municipal year the Council adopted a pre-decision scrutiny model. This means that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee considers scheduled decisions, before they are made by Cabinet, providing an important means to influence decisions and improve them.

Recognising that it cannot look at everything, the committee has focussed on reviewing items where it considers it can add value by doing so. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee met on a monthly basis during the 2018/19 municipal year and reviewed the following items:

- Quarterly reports on finance, performance and risk: The committee continues to keep a close eye on the Council's financial position and performance, through the review of quarterly performance reports.
- The Council's preliminary draft consultation response on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (June 2018).
- The Council's proposed consultation response to the pre-submission draft Uttlesford Local Plan (Regulation 19) (July 2018).
- Waterbeach New Town Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which the committee reviewed and commented on before it went to public consultation. (August 2018). The committee considered this again in January 2019 following the public consultation and was informed of the outcomes of the public consultation. The committee also received two public statements at its January meeting from the Chairman of Waterbeach Parish Council's Planning Committee and the Chairman of the Waterbeach Cycling Campaign. Committee members made a significant number of comments which were incorporated in the SPD.
- Implementation of Universal Credit: The committee received an update from the Council's Benefits Manager and representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions (August 2018).
- The Local Development Scheme for Greater Cambridge: The committee reviewed and commented on this before it was adopted (September 2018).
- Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service Collection Policies and Procedures: The committee reviewed these policies, which set out what the Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service would deliver for residents (October 2018).
- Implementation/Adoption of Completed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and Land North of Cherry Hinton SPD (October 2018).
- General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategies 2019-20: In accordance with the Council's budget and policy framework, the committee reviewed and commented on the draft financial strategies in October 2018 and final strategies in January 2019, before their adoption by the Council in February 2019.

- Localised Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS): The committee considered the introduction of a banded discount LCTS scheme for 2019/2020 (November 2018).
- Cambridge Ice Arena: In November 2018 the committee considered a report seeking the provision from the Council of an additional loan facility to enable the Cambridge Ice Arena development to be completed. The committee's Vice Chairman visited the ice arena site before the meeting and presented his findings to the committee which asked detailed questions of a representative from the ice rink who attended the meeting. Following this discussion the committee recommended some additional actions and approved recommendations that were presented to Council later that month.
- Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy: The committee considered and commented on the draft strategy before it went out to public consultation (December 2018).
- Northern Fringe Area Action Plan Issues and Options: The committee considered and commented on proposals before they were consulted on (December 2018).
- The Council's Business Plan 2019-2024: The committee considered the outcomes of the public consultation on the Council's Business Plan for 2019-2024 (January 2019).
- Annual Budget: The committee reviewed the Council's annual budget before this was considered for approval by full Council in February 2019. The committee also considered and commented on a budget proposal from the Conservative Group so that it could be accepted for debate in accordance with the requirements of Council Standing Orders.
- Shared Services Business Plans: The committee reviewed and commented on the business plans for the ICT, Legal, Internal Audit, Building Control and Waste shared services (March 2019).
- Purchase of investment property: The committee undertook post decision Scrutiny in April 2019 of a decision to purchase an investment property at the Cambridge Science Park.

Task and Finish and Working Groups

Barriers to Procurement from Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Task and Finish Group

A task and finish group was set up in June 2018 to look at the Council's procurement processes and consider how the Council could facilitate small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and procure work in a cost effective, reasonable and proportional manner from them. The group also reviewed the barriers to SMEs securing contracts with the Council. Working with procurement and economic development officers, the group developed 7 recommendations which were approved by Cabinet in March 2019. It is hoped that these recommendations will significantly improve the skills and knowledge of local companies to bid for Council contracts as well as reducing the resource requirements when applying for these. Work to implement the recommendations has started and the first procurement workshop is scheduled to take place on 22 May 2019. Progress against the recommendations will be reviewed after 12 months.

ICT Working Group

Following an ICT outage experienced by South Cambridgeshire, Cambridge City and Huntingdonshire District Councils, the committee set up a working group to look into the Council's shared ICT service. The group has held discussions with senior officers from the shared ICT service to establish the reasons for the ICT outage and the contingencies that were put in place. The Chief Executives of all three partner councils attended the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's March 2019 meeting to answer questions in relation to the shared service. The group has raised concerns regarding the governance of the shared ICT service and lack of member involvement in this. The work of this group is ongoing.

Rural Crime Task and Finish Group

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee has set up a task and finish group to look at crime in rural areas. At the time of writing this report, the first meeting of this group had been scheduled.

Monitoring Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were allocated as Cabinet monitors for specific portfolios. Scrutiny Monitors for 2018/19 were allocated as follows: -

Cabinet Portfolio	Scrutiny Monitor
Leader of the Council	Cllr Grenville Chamberlain
Deputy Leader	Cllr Graham Cone
Housing	Cllr Claire Daunton
Environmental Services and Licensing	Cllr Sarah Cheung Johnson
Planning	Cllr Brian Milnes
Customer Services and Business Improvement	Cllr Peter McDonald
Finance	Cllr Bill Handley

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 has not been used during 2018/19.

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