



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Annual Report 2021-22

What is Scrutiny and Overview?

1. 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'.
2. Scrutiny and overview committees can also challenge executive decisions taken by Cabinet, individual Lead Cabinet Members and Chief Officers on a key decision. The Chair 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.
3. 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.
4. 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
5. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee's role is to hold Executive decision takers to account and to provide an open and transparent forum in which to investigate whether South Cambridgeshire District Council's policies and services are meeting the needs and aspirations of local people.
6. The following Councillors served on the Scrutiny and Overview Committee for the 2021-22 municipal year:

Ordinary members

- Anna Bradnam
- Dr Martin Cahn

- Nigel Cathcart
- Grenville Chamberlain (Chair)
- Sarah Cheung Johnson
- Graham Cone
- Dr Claire Daunton
- Peter Fane
- Sally Ann Hart
- Geoff Harvey
- Steve Hunt
- Judith Rippeth (Vice-Chair)
- Dr Richard Williams
- Dr Aidan Van de Weyer

Available as substitutes

- Henry Batchelor
- Gavin Clayton
- Sue Ellington
- Mark Howell
- Alex Malyon
- Dr Ian Sollom
- Bunty Waters
- Heather Williams
- Eileen Wilson

How does the Scrutiny and Overview Committee decide what to scrutinise?

7. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee sets its own work programme. Topic suggestions can originate from various sources, including:
 - individual Scrutiny and Overview Committee members
 - Any member of the Council when the item is relevant to the Committee's functions, relates to all or part of their Ward and is not an excluded matter (such as a planning application)
 - Local petitions
 - External organisations working in partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council
 - South Cambridgeshire District Council officers
 - South Cambridgeshire residents
 - the Council's Notice of key and non-key decisions
8. In addition, a so-called 'Triangulation meeting' is held every six months or so involving the Committee's Chair and Vice-Chair, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Council's Chief Executive, and its Chief Operating Officer. The purpose of this meeting is to scope future areas for the Scrutiny

and Overview Committee to develop, but without compromising that Committee's independence and authority.

9. The Committee's Chair and Vice-Chair review the work programme at frequent intervals in association with the Scrutiny and Governance Adviser. The work programme is then considered as a standing item at every ordinary Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting alongside the Council's Notice of Key and non-Key decisions. Additional items for consideration will often be added during the year as and when they arise. Typically, these will consist of both one-off topics and items that may require more in-depth review by way of a Task & Finish Group.
10. A work programme 'prioritisation tool' is used to enable the Committee to examine those items that have been suggested or put forward, ascertain whether they should be included in the work programme, and determine their priority.
11. Items included in the work programme usually go through an initial scoping process to consider the rationale behind the committee looking into those issues. Consideration is given to the purpose or objective of scrutiny involvement and a methodology or approach is developed for the piece of work.

Scrutiny Reviews

12. Scrutiny Reviews provide opportunities to consider specific issues in more detail, sometimes outside formal meetings involving a small group of councillors with experience, expertise or an interest in the subject being reviewed. The committee ultimately will agree whether 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

13. 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

14. 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

15. Informal working groups with relevant officers, Lead Cabinet Members 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

16. 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 2021-22

Work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee during 2021-22

17. The Council adopted a pre-decision scrutiny model in 2018. This means that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee considers selected items before a decision is made by Cabinet, an individual Lead Cabinet Member or, in the case of a Key decision, by a senior officer. Such pre-scrutiny provides an important opportunity to influence decisions and improve them.
18. Recognising that it cannot look at everything, the Committee focusses on reviewing items where it considers it can add value by doing so. In practice, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee allows the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee to scrutinise policies and other matters concerning the climate, environment, and biodiversity.
19. Despite the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, along with other Council bodies, was no longer allowed to meet entirely remotely after 7 May 2021. However, despite this, and challenges posed by the nature of South Cambridgeshire Hall, officers devised a hybrid system so that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee could continue to meet legally throughout 2021-22 with most Committee members attending meetings in the Council Chamber and most officers and some Members attending virtually via Microsoft Teams. The Committee also benefitted from the availability of newly-installed webcasting equipment in the Chamber, providing a more 'realistic' way for residents to watch meetings online than had previously been the case with Teams.

20. During 2021-22, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed the following items:

- **June 2021**
 - Private Sector Housing Policy
 - Quarter 4 Performance report
- **July 2021**
 - District-wide Street Trading Policy
 - Recovery Plan
- **September 2021**
 - Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Preferred Options (Regulation 18) – For consultation (in association with the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee)
- **October 2021**
 - Medium Term Financial Strategy
 - North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (Regulation 18) Delivery report
- **November 2021**
 - Empty Homes Strategy
 - Investment Strategy
 - Planning performance (matter referred to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee by Full Council motion)
- **December 2021**
 - Audit of accounts update
 - Housing Revenue Account asset management
 - North East Cambridge Area Action Plan: Proposed Submission (Regulation 18)
- **January 2022**
 - Capital Strategy
 - Civil parking enforcement
 - Council's Business Plan
 - General Fund Budget
 - Housing Revenue Account Budget
 - Treasury Management Strategy
- **March 2022**
 - Annual Equality Scheme Update and Progress Report
 - Commercial Asset Disposal (confidential)
 - Ermine Street Housing – review of Business Plan
 - Interim position statement – First Homes
 - Quarter 3 Performance Report
 - Webcasting issues

Task and Finish and Working Groups

21. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee did not establish any Task & Finish Groups during this period.

Call-in

22. Call-in is usually a last resort when other means of influencing decision-making have failed. Any Call-in is considered by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. This procedure was not used during 2021-22.

Useful Information

- [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#)
- [South Cambridgeshire District Council agendas, minutes, and other information](#)

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