



South Cambridgeshire District Council

Scrutiny and Overview Annual Report 2022-23

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. South Cambridgeshire District 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.
4. District Council elections took place in May 2022. Grenville Chamberlain, Committee Chair for the previous four years did not seek re-election to the Council and was replaced as Chair by Councillor Stephen Drew, newly elected to the Council in 2022. Councillor Graham Cone, who had previously served as a Committee member, was appointed Vice-Chair.
5. 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. Other committees also perform scrutiny-type functions, but it is important to emphasise that South Cambridgeshire District Council has only one Scrutiny and Overview Committee as defined by the Local Government Act 2000 and whose members enjoy the additional access to information as set out in paragraph 22 of the Rules of Procedure: Access to Information.
6. 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.

7. When working well, scrutiny and overview can help to:
 - get to the heart of issues
 - develop innovative ideas
 - engage and provide a voice for service users
 - improve decision-making
 - strengthen accountability
 - contribute to policy development
 - monitor and improve servicesScrutiny and Overview at South Cambridgeshire District Council
8. 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.
9. The following Councillors served as ordinary members on this Council's Scrutiny and Overview Committee for all of the 2022-23 municipal year:
 - Anna Bradnam
 - Graham Cone (Vice-Chair)
 - Stephen Drew (Chair)
 - Libby Earle
 - Sue Ellington
 - Peter Fane
 - Sally Ann Hart
 - James Hobro
 - Helene Leeming
 - Richard Stobart
 - Dr Aidan Van de Weyer
10. Committee membership changed more than usual during 2022-23. One cause of this was the sad and unexpected death of John Loveluck in late December 2022. The following Councillors served as ordinary members on the Scrutiny and Overview Committee for part of the 2022-23 municipal year:
 - Tom Bygott (from December 2022)
 - Dr. Martin Cahn (until September 2022)
 - Sunita Hansraj (until October 2022)
 - John Loveluck (until December 2022)
 - Judith Rippeth (from November 2022)
 - Heather Williams (October to November 2022)
11. The following Councillors were available as substitute members on the Scrutiny and Overview Committee during the 2022-23 municipal year:
 - Carla Hoffman
 - Mark Howell

- Will Jackson-Wood
- Lina Nieto
- Annika Osborne
- Dr. Lisa Redrup
- Peter Sandford
- Shrobona Bhattacharya
- Bunty Waters
- Heather Williams (May to September 2022 and from December 2022)
- Dr, Richard Williams

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

12. 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 other 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 Forward Plan of key and non-key decisions

13. In addition, a so-called 'Triangulation meeting' is held every few months 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.

14. The Committee's Chair and Vice-Chair review the work programme at frequent intervals (usually within a couple of days after a Committee meeting) in association with the Scrutiny and Governance Adviser and other officers. The work programme is then considered as a standing item at the next ordinary Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting alongside the Council's Forward Plan of Key and non-Key decisions. Items for consideration will often be added or removed during the year as circumstances demand. 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.

15. A work programme 'prioritisation tool' is available for 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. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee is not simply an information-

gathering forum: effective scrutiny requires there to be a degree of holding decision-makers to account, providing challenge and support, and making recommendations that inform the Cabinet's decisions.

16. 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.

How does the Scrutiny and Overview Committee carry out its work?

17. There are several ways in which the Committee can consider specific issues. These are:

Scrutiny Review by the Full Committee

18. Reviews by the full committee are the most common form of scrutiny at South Cambridgeshire District Council. These meetings are usually held in public with reviews culminating in comments, suggestions and even recommendations being made to a decision-maker. Where that decision-maker is Cabinet, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee present a formal report to the Cabinet meeting at which the decision is to be made.

19. During the year, such reviews included topics chosen by Committee members alongside the pre-scrutiny of reports being presented to Cabinet for decision. In brief, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee as a whole reviewed the following:

6 June 2022

- Quarter 4 Performance

23 June 2022

- Greater Cambridge Local Development Scheme and Greater Cambridge Local Plan First Proposals representations

26 July 2023

- Quarter 1 Performance
- Scrutiny at South Cambridgeshire District Council – a new approach (introducing the concept of adding to the Committee's work programme topics selected by Committee members)

6 September 2022

- Scoping the following topics put forward by the Chair

- i. Relationships between the planning service and parish / town councils
- ii. [Plans for the efficient use of the space available at South Cambridgeshire District Council Hall up to 2026](#)
- iii. [Engagement of the Council with stakeholders across the district](#)
- iv. Young people in South Cambridgeshire

20 October 2022

- Fees and Charges

15 November 2022

- Quarter 2 Performance
- Bids and Savings
- Future use of South Cambs Hall
- Agreeing Terms of Reference for, and formally constituting the Young People Task & Finish Group (see paragraph 22)

15 December 2022

- Medium Term Financial Strategy

12 January 2023

- Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Development Strategy Update (Regulation 18 Preferred Options)

19 January 2023

- Business Plan
- Draft Budget
- Conservative Group budget proposals

28 February 2023

- Quarter 3 Performance
- Further support for residents – cost-of-living crisis

28 March 2023

- Homes for Ukraine project status and future challenges (this item was specifically requested by the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair)

25 April 2023

- Collection changes – the future of waste collections

20. The agendas, minutes, and recordings of all of the above Scrutiny and Overview Committee meetings are available by following this link:

[Browse meetings - Scrutiny and Overview Committee \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/scrutiny-and-overview-committee)

Scrutiny Review by a Task and Finish Group

21. 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.

22. Following a motion to Full Council in July 2022, and as indicated above, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee appointed a Young People Task and Finish Group consisting of Councillors Cone, Drew, Ellington, Leeming, and Stobart. The Terms of Reference were adopted in November 2022 and, since then, a great deal of evidence has been gathered. The Task and Finish Group anticipates publishing its report and recommendations in early Autumn 2023.

Scrutiny Review by an Informal Working Group or Workshop

23. 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.

24. It is anticipated that a workshop will take place in June or early July 2023 to inform the early review of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Scrutiny Review by a Focus Group

25. 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. This procedure was not used during 2022-23.

Call-in

26. 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 2022-23.

Useful Information

- [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#)

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