

# Annual review of the Scrutiny Committee

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2023/24

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## 1. Committee Chairman Foreword - Cllr Jeremy Rowe

Many thanks to everyone for their support for the work of the Scrutiny Committee this year. I'd like to begin by expressing, on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee, my profound sorrow about the very sad news following our friend and committee member Councillor Stephen Ridley. To me, Stephen was the epitome of the fact that at South Norfolk we never forget that there is more that unites us than divides us.

I am very proud to be the first Labour Councillor to Chair a South Norfolk Committee; I believe that Scrutiny is the most important one. We have worked hard this year, building on the work of our predecessors, to enhance the depth and level of the scrutiny that takes place across our Council.

Working alongside the Executive, in providing good, effective scrutiny is an essential component of a well-run authority. I have been grateful to Councillor Fuller and to members of the Cabinet for the open and transparent way in which they have worked with us.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny looks for the following aspects of Council Scrutiny:

1. A cross-party approach.
2. Good councillor engagement.
3. A constructive relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny.
4. Senior officers being supportive of the work of Scrutiny.

I continue to feel strongly that we have made good progress across all four of these, with TOPIC forms continuing to be sent in, from Members across the political spectrum, alongside the work of our first Scrutiny Task and Finish group, which expands the work that we are able to do.

I'd like to give particular thanks to Councillor Terry Laidlaw, who has been excellent to work with in his role as Vice Chair, and to Sinead Carey and Jessica Hammond for their fantastic support.

As part of our commitment to strengthening the range and profile of our work, we guarantee that:

- At least with the Chair or Vice Chair will attend every Cabinet meeting
- We will send out a monthly update to all Members
- We will expect portfolio holders to attend meetings and answer questions
- We will ensure that aspects of our work, and those of outside bodies, are looked at without fear or favour
- We will refrain from entering into party-political territory within our work, and be courteous and professional at all times

Finally, I would like to thank colleagues who serve on the Scrutiny Committee – they are a very effective & experienced team – as well as the officers who provide invaluable help and support to us, including allocating time and resources to our meetings when joining us to explain their work and to answer questions.

**Councillor Jeremy Rowe**  
**Chair of South Norfolk Council Scrutiny Committee**

## 2. How Scrutiny operates at South Norfolk

### What is scrutiny and how does it select topics for scrutiny?

Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that the Council, its partners and other public bodies remain effective and accountable. Scrutiny can examine and monitor all or part of the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy.

Predominantly, Scrutiny Committee carries out most of its work in relation to the work of the Council. It undertakes this through scheduled reviews of decisions and policies that have been agreed by the Cabinet in order to hold it to account. In addition, Scrutiny considers call-ins. A summary of decisions made by Cabinet is published immediately after each meeting of Cabinet and any three members of the Council may call-in a decision for Scrutiny to consider, which effectively means the decision is delayed until Scrutiny can examine the decision at its next meeting. After examination, Scrutiny can decide to recommend an alternative option or endorse the decision of the Cabinet. There were no call-ins for the period this report covers.

### Support for the Scrutiny function

The Strategic Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer provides advice to both members and officers and supports the Scrutiny Committee. Democratic Services Officers produce agendas and minute the meetings. Cabinet Members, senior officers and managers of the Council are expected to attend Scrutiny Committee and present reports at the request of the Committee.

### Policy Committees

Policy development is undertaken by the Council's Policy Committees. This enables a clear segregation between scrutiny and policy development. In the past, the Scrutiny Committee supported the development of policy, whilst also evaluating and assessing policies at an early stage. This structure affords the Scrutiny Committee a more independent role when challenging service delivery. In addition, the Scrutiny Committee may still appoint Task and Finish Groups to look at matters in more depth when required.

The Policy Committees feed directly into Cabinet and make recommendations based on their research and findings. Working on a formal and informal basis, these Committees are flexible to programme their work around upcoming policy and can focus on specific areas of the Council.

## 3. The membership of the Scrutiny Committee 2023/24

South Norfolk Council adopts a Leader/Cabinet model of governance. As required by the Local Government Act (2000), all Councils that operate under this model need to have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

At South Norfolk Council, the scrutiny function is carried out by the Council's Scrutiny Committee, the Joint Scrutiny Committee and any Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups that it may appoint to investigate specific issues in greater depth.

The Scrutiny Committee is made up of councillors from the political groups that make up the Council. Only non-cabinet members can be on the Committee and this allows those members to have an active role in the Council's decision-making process.

During 2023/24, the Committee was chaired by Cllr Jeremy Rowe, who is a member of the Labour party and the Committee's Vice-Chairman was Cllr Terry Laidlaw, who is a member of the Liberal Democrat Party.

The Scrutiny Committee is made up of nine Councillors and membership is as follows:

**Chairman:** Jeremy Rowe

**Vice-Chairman:** Terry Laidlaw

Kathryn Cross  
Trevor Graham  
John Overton  
Stephen Ridley  
Delme Thompson  
Justin Cork  
Brendon Bernard

Other non-executive members also took part as substitute members as and when required.

#### **4. Working style of the Scrutiny Committee**

The working style of the committee is important as it guides how the committee members will drive effective scrutiny for the district:

##### **Independence**

Members of the Scrutiny Committee will not be subject to whipping arrangements by party groups.

##### **Member leadership**

Members of the Committee will take the lead in selecting topics for and in questioning witnesses. The Committee will expect members of Cabinet, rather than officers, to take the main responsibility for answering the Committee's questions about topics, which relate mainly to the Council's activities.

##### **A constructive atmosphere**

Meetings of the Committee will be constructive, and not judgmental, accepting that effective overview and scrutiny is best achieved through challenging and constructive enquiry. People giving evidence at the Committee should not feel under attack.

##### **Respect and trust**

Meetings will be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

### **Openness and transparency**

The Committee's business will be open and transparent, except where there are sound reasons for protecting confidentiality. In particular, the minutes of the Committee's meetings will explain the discussion and debate, so that it could be understood by those who were not present.

### **Consensus**

Members of the Committee will work together and, while recognising political allegiances, will attempt to achieve consensus and agreed recommendations.

### **Impartial and independent officer advice**

Officers who advise and support the Committee will give impartial and independent advice, recognising the importance of the Scrutiny Committee in the Council's arrangements for governance, as set out in the Constitution.

### **Regular review**

There will be regular reviews of how the overview and scrutiny process is working, and a willingness to change if it is not working well.

### **Programming and planning**

The Scrutiny Committee will have a programme of work. Members will agree the topics to be included in the work programme, the extent of the investigation to be undertaken in relation to resources, and the witnesses to be invited to give evidence.

### **Managing time**

The Committee will attempt to conclude the business of each meeting in reasonable time. The order of business will be arranged as far as possible to minimise the demands on the time of witnesses.

## **5. The work programme for Scrutiny Committee**

The Scrutiny Committee has a structured work programme that sets out the investigations and reviews that will be carried out and reported to Committee, which is led by members. There are also opportunities for parish councils to suggest topics for the Committee to look into.

Members of the Council are able to raise topics by way of a simple form and potential reports are assessed by way of the Council TOPIC analysis which evaluates the merits of scrutinising the issue in terms of Timeliness, Objectives, Performance, Interest and Corporate priorities, as outlined below.

- T** Is this the right **time** to review this issue and is there sufficient **Officer time** and resource to conduct the review? What is the **timescale**?
- O** What is the reason for review; do officers have a clear **objective**?
- P** Can **performance** in this area be improved by input from Scrutiny?
- I** Is there sufficient **interest** (particularly from the public)? The concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny.
- C** Will the review assist the Council to achieve its **Corporate Priorities**?

In 2023/24, the following items were added to the work programme following member TOPIC forms being received and approved by the Chairman.

- Water Management and Flooding
- Review of Procurement

## 6. Task and Finish Groups in 2023/24

Task and Finish Groups are time-limited focus groups that report their review findings to the main committee or Cabinet and are supported by relevant officers of the Council and or outside contributors.

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held 12 December 2023, the Committee agreed that a Task and Finish Group would be convened to further consider the Councils Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and report its findings and suggestions for improvement to the Scrutiny Committee. At the time of writing this report, the Task and Finish Group are due to report its findings to the Committee on 9 May 2024.

## 7. Joint scrutiny bodies

**Norfolk County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC):** South Norfolk Council has a member representative who sits on the Norfolk County HOSC plus one substitute member. For the period 2023/24, the member representative has been Cllr Justin Cork.

The role of the Norfolk County HOSC is to look at the work of the clinical commissioning groups and National Health Service (NHS) trusts and the local area team of NHS England. It acts as a 'critical friend' by suggesting ways that health related services might be improved. The Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers all matters relating to the needs, health and health related-services of the population of Norfolk. It scrutinises services that have an impact on the health of Norfolk's citizens and challenges the outcomes of interventions designed to support the health of Norfolk people.

Please view the Norfolk County Council website for papers and minutes concerning the above [here](#).

**Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Panel:** South Norfolk Council has a member representative who sits on the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel plus one substitute member. For the period 2023/24, the member representative has been Cllr Gary Blundell.

The role of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel is to:

- Scrutinise the actions, decisions and priorities of the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Crime and Disorder Partnership in respect of crime and disorder on behalf of the (County) Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- Scrutinise the priorities as set out in the annual Countywide Community Safety Partnership Plan
- Make any reports or recommendations to the Countywide Community Safety Partnership and/or where considered appropriate to the communities Committee.

## **8. The work of the Scrutiny Committee and outcomes**

The scrutiny recommendation tracker provides an overview of the work carried out by the Scrutiny Committee over the last 12-month period. This demonstrates that scrutiny investigation can not only produce outcomes in terms of feeding into the decisions that are made but that it can also play a valuable role in informing and developing knowledge for members.



**9. Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Tracker 2023/24 (this will be updated following the Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 4 April)**

Date	Topic	Responsible Officer	Resolution and Recommendations	Response / Progress	Outcome
3 Aug 2023	Leisure Recovery Plan – year 2	Assistant Director – Community Services & Leisure Operations Manager	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> to</p> <p>1. Receive the end of year two performance against the leisure service’s Covid recovery plan and the potential future risks.</p> <p>2. Continue to support and monitor the approved leisure service’s Covid recovery plan.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>No further action required.</p>	<p>The Committee was able to consider progress made with the Leisure Recovery Plan, and provide comment regarding the future direction of the service.</p> <p>Members were able to assess the offering at the centres and trends in membership numbers and associated income. This was also accompanied by pressures on the service and how these were to be addressed</p>
3 Aug 2023	Member-Led Grants	Assistant Director – Individuals & Families, and Communities Manager	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> to</p> <p>1. Note the current spend against the ground rules; and</p> <p>2. With a vote of 7–2, to <i>RECOMMEND TO CABINET</i>, that subject to the amendment of the wording from “expected” to “encouraged” at 2.2 of both the Member Ward Grant and the Community Action Fund ground rules, it:</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>Cabinet agreed the new Ground Rules, in which the wording at 2.2 was changed from “expected” to “requested”.</p>	<p>Firstly, members assessed the member grant spend and adherence to the ground rules. This ensures that adequate controls regarding governance of the scheme</p> <p>In terms of the amendments to the Ground Rules, members were able to consider the practicalities of some aspects of the changes and the impact on councillors</p>

			<p>a. Approve all amendments to the Member Ward Grant, as outlined in section 4 of the report.</p> <p>b. Approve all amendments to the Community Action Fund, as outlined in section 4 of the report.</p>		<p>themselves. The review of the Ground Rules and subsequent amendments will ensure these are fit for purpose and work for all parties.</p>
23 Nov 2023	Cost of Living	Assistant Director – Individuals & Families	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1. To note the contents of the report.</p> <p>2. To schedule a further report in March 2024 to review the internal audit recommendations regarding this area of work</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>Further report added to the work programme.</p>	<p>The Committee was able to consider progress made on how the Council has been supporting people in relation to cost of living challenges.</p> <p>Members assessed the outcomes from the previous and existing/planned cost of living projects and activities and the current state of play both locally and nationally.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to schedule a further report following the internal audit conducted in this area, enabling Scrutiny to further review progress.</p>
12 Dec 2023	Draft Strategic Plan 2024-2028 and Delivery Plan 2024-2026	Assistant Director of Transformation, ICT & Digital	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1.To receive the draft proposals for the Strategic Plan 2024 – 2028.</p> <p>2.To receive the draft proposals for the Delivery Plan 2024 – 2026.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>No further action required.</p>	<p>The Committee was able to consider the first drafts of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan for the Council from 2024.</p> <p>Members provided feedback to Officers for their</p>

			<p>3.To schedule a further report on 15 February 2024 for the Committee to review the final draft Plans alongside the budget, ahead of the Full Council decision.</p> <p>4. To convene a Task and Finish Group to investigate, evaluate and review the Council’s Key Performance Indicators.</p>	<p>Further report added to the work programme.</p> <p>Task and finish group to be set up.</p>	<p>consideration in the finalisation of the Plans going forward.</p> <p>The Committee agreed that further work needed to be done by Members to assess the effectiveness of the Key Performance Indicators and resolved to establish and Task and Finish Group, to report back to Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to receive both draft proposed plans and to schedule a further report in February following Cabinets recommendation on the final Plans.</p>
12 Dec 2023	Draft Budget – Scrutiny Review	Assistant Director of Finance	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> to</p> <p>1. To receive the draft 2024/25 budgets</p>	No further action required.	<p>The Committee received and reviewed the draft budget.</p> <p>Members were able to ask questions and receive clarifications on the draft budget. The Committee will be receiving the final budget for 2024/25 in February 2024 for further review.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to receive the draft 2024/25 budget.</p>

1 Feb 2024	Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan Update	Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1.To receive the report on the effectiveness of the Council’s Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan</p> <p>2.Recommend that officers explore including information on Big Sky within the Council Carbon Footprint report in the future.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>Update to be sought in the future for the Committee.</p>	<p>The Committee reviewed and considered the update provided by Officers on the Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan, including the appended Carbon Emission Report.</p> <p>The Committee provided feedback to officers and resolved to recommend to officers to explore including Big Sky information within the Carbon Footprint report of the Council in the future.</p>
1 Feb 2024	Review of Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer pilot service– review of progress	Environmental Protection Manager	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1.To receive the report of Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer Pilot Service progress to date.</p>	<p>No further action required.</p>	<p>The Committee was able to consider progress made on the Pilot to date.</p> <p>Members were able to ask questions and provide feedback on the Pilot and next steps.</p>
1 Feb 2024	Review of Business Regulatory Support Hub pilot service – review of progress	Food, Safety and Licensing Manager	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1.To receive the report on the business regulatory support hub pilot service progress review.</p> <p>2.To recommend that officers review the funding opportunities for the Business Regulatory Support Hub post in consultation with Broadland District Council and to then take a report through to Cabinet should</p>	<p>No further action required.</p> <p>Update to be sought in the future for the Committee.</p>	<p>The Committee was able to consider progress made on the Pilot to date.</p> <p>Following discussion on the outcomes and benefits arising from the Pilot, the Committee added an additional recommendation and resolved to recommend to officers to review the funding opportunities for the</p>

			funding be secured.		post, in consultation with Broadland District Council, as it was a shared Pilot project.
15 Feb 2024	2024/25 Budget & Longer-Term Financial Strategy	S151 Officer	<p>This item was broken down into three separate reports with the following resolutions:</p> <p><b>Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2024/25</b></p> <p>1. To endorse the Cabinet's recommendations.</p> <p><b>Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29</b></p> <p>1. To endorse the Cabinet's recommendations.</p> <p><b>Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25</b></p> <p>1. To endorse the Cabinet's recommendations.</p>	No further action required.	<p>The Committee were presented with the Budget reports for 2024/25 and the Cabinets recommendation to Council.</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the reports and were able to ask clarifying questions and were provided with further insight into the budget proposals.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to endorse Cabinets recommendation to Council on all reports.</p>
15 Feb 2024	Strategic Plan 2024-2028 and Delivery Plan 2024-2026	All Directors & ADs	<p><b>RESOLVED</b> to</p> <p>1. To endorse the Cabinet's recommendations.</p>	No further action required.	The Committee were presented with the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan for the second time, alongside the Cabinets recommendation to Council.

					<p>The Committee reviewed the report and were able to ask clarifying questions.</p> <p>The Committee resolved to endorse Cabinets recommendation to Council.</p>
29 Feb 2024	Cost of Living Review	<p>AD Individuals and Families</p> <p>Health &amp; Wellbeing Senior Manager</p>	<p><b>RESOLVED to</b></p> <p>1. To receive the contents of the report.</p> <p>2. Recommend that officers explore and develop better use of IT systems within the help hub to address the findings in the Internal Audit report.</p>	<p>No further action.</p> <p>Update to be sought in the future for the Committee.</p>	<p>The Committee were presented with the outcomes of a recent Internal Audit report which reviewed the Councils approach to the issue of Cost of Living.</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the information provided and asked questions to clarify some of the feedback received from the Auditors. As a result, the Committee identified that IT systems within the Help Hub presented challenges for officers. The Committee resolved to recommend that officers explored and developed better use of IT systems to help address some of the findings of the report.</p>

## **Appendix 1 - A Quick Guide to Scrutiny**

### **Recommendations and Reporting**

Once Scrutiny has reviewed work that has taken place, recommendations are sometimes made and reported to the Cabinet for consideration, or made directly to officers. This is usually done as part of the relevant report or paying regard to the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee in informing the final decision. Recommendations should strive to be, as much as possible; specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timed - SMART.

### **What happens next?**

Once agreement to a scrutiny recommendation has taken place, whether it be something that officers have agreed to, or the Cabinet, this should not always be where the scrutiny process ends. It is good practice for the Scrutiny Committee to set a review date to receive an update from the relevant portfolio holder on the cabinet or officers, on the progress that has been made towards implementation of the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations. This is also monitored through the Committee's Tracker.

### **Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups**

Task and Finish Groups are time-limited focus groups that report their review findings to the main committee or Cabinet and are supported by relevant officers of the Council and or outside contributors.

If a Task and Finish Group is to be set up in place of a full committee review taking place, interested members should volunteer to be involved. It is usual that Task & Finish Groups are not politically balanced unless a strong need exists. This is because the main Scrutiny Committee, which is balanced has to agree the findings, or delegates the Task & Finish Group on behalf of the whole committee to report directly to the Cabinet. It is much more important to appoint those members with an interest or expertise in the issue, irrespective of political groups.

### **Public involvement**

Meetings of the Scrutiny Committee are usually as informal as possible and as well as scrutiny members, are attended by portfolio holders, officers, partners and anyone else who can assist with the work and provide evidence for reviews. Members of the public are also welcome to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and can participate at the discretion of the Committee's Chairman.

### **Getting in touch with Scrutiny**

If you are a member of the public and wish to find out more about the scrutiny process and the committee, or if you have any queries regarding this Annual Report, please feel free to contact Sinead Carey, Strategic Advisor & Deputy Monitoring Officer by sending an email to: [sinead.carey@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk](mailto:sinead.carey@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk). If you have any topic suggestions for scrutiny please raise this first with your local Councillor, who details can be found [here](#).