

Future direction of Policy Committees

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Portfolio: Leader

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of the Report:

This report is brought to Scrutiny to review the role and remit of the Cabinet Policy Committees, update the terms of reference accordingly and ensure that this complements the role of Scrutiny at South Norfolk Council. The (amended) report will then be considered by Cabinet before going onto Full Council for approval and adoption.

Recommendations:

1. To receive and review the proposals for the “Cabinet Policy” Committees and feedback to officers as appropriate.

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report is brought to Scrutiny to review the role and remit of the Cabinet Policy Committees, update the terms of reference accordingly and ensure that this complements the role of Scrutiny at South Norfolk Council. The (amended) report will then be considered by Cabinet before going onto Full Council for approval and adoption.

2. Background

- 2.1 South Norfolk Cabinet Policy Committees have been in place for many years and have historically focussed on policy development. As the One Team was formed this ensured a regular timetable of work to look at policies across both Councils and where appropriate align these or keep these as sovereign to each Council. As this work has now largely been completed and the policies are in the cycle of being reviewed by Scrutiny, it is important to review the remit of these committees to ensure they are still relevant and remain effective.

- 2.2 The constitution sets out the following in terms of these committees:

Part 3 Responsibilities for functions – Part 3.1 The decision-making process

The Council and Cabinet are assisted by advisory bodies:

- (a) Cabinet Policy Committees support Cabinet through the review of the effectiveness of service delivery, and developing policy, where discharged to do so by Cabinet.
- (b) Cabinet may, from time to time, appoint task and finish groups to undertake detailed policy and procedure development in areas that cut across Cabinet Policy Committees, or do not fall directly within the remit of an existing policy committee.

3. Current positions/findings

- 3.1 The Strategic Plan for 2024 – 2028 and the Delivery Plan for 2024 – 2026 have been worked on by Officers and Members over recent months and have been approved by Council in February alongside the budget.
- 3.2 The Strategic Plan sets our visions and priorities for the next four years and outlines the current challenges that we face and how we will address these through actions.
- 3.3 The Delivery Plan sets out the pieces of work that we aim to deliver in the next two years to enable us to achieve the vision and priorities set out in the Strategic Plan.
- 3.4 The work of these committees should be driven by the delivery plan and provide a programme of work that takes forwards key programmes & projects and ensures that the day-to-day business is driven forward in the right direction.

- 3.5 It is recognised that there is a need for both informal and formal meetings. Informal meetings enable early door, open & frank discussions and will provide officers with an early steer on the direction of travel for each topic and enable each committee to become “experts” in the areas under discussion. This approach will also assist with member development & training and provide “on the “job” learning opportunities.
- 3.6 Formal meetings will be convened once topics are more firmed up and are ready to go into the formal decision-making process. Formal meetings will form part of the calendar of meetings and will be diarised regularly (proposed four times) throughout the year but may be moved to complement the work and output of the informal meetings to ensure the decisions onto Cabinet are timely and relevant.
- 3.7 In considering the role of these committees moving forwards it is important to recognise the role of Scrutiny and ensure that this complements the above process and that there is not a dilution of the effectiveness of this committee. The constitution sets out how Scrutiny currently works (please note that the red font & the strike through text indicates a change to the terms of reference):

Part 3 Responsibilities for functions – Part 3.1 The decision making process

The Scrutiny Committee holds the Cabinet to account and advises the Council on the Council’s performance and the pursuit of best value. The Scrutiny Committee does not make decisions, but it can recommend and ask for Executive decisions to be reconsidered through the “call in” mechanism.

Part 4 Rules of procedure – 3 Scrutiny Committee terms of reference

The main roles of Scrutiny Committee are:

- To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Leader of the Council or Cabinet (collectively “the Executive”), and to make reports or recommendations on this basis.
- To make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive on matters which affect the authority’s area or inhabitants of its area.
- To make reports or recommendations to a relevant partner authority in so far as the responsibilities of the partner authority affect the District, or residents of the District.
- To perform the function of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for the District under section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The committee will specifically:

- (a) Assess proposed topics and scrutiny investigation for inclusion in an agreed work programme of the Scrutiny Committee, and to regularly review the work programme, taking into account the current priorities of the Council and the need for a proportionate approach.
- (b) In proposing and reviewing its work programme the Committee will determine the most appropriate means for undertaking this work, including the extent of involvement in the public and defining desired outcomes.

- (c) Review the Council's annual budget, and in light of recommendations of the Executive, report to Council.
- (d) Pre-scrutinise proposals for new policies, or significant changes to policies, where requested to do so by Cabinet.
- (e) To monitor the funding allocations and outcomes achieved from the Community Action Fund **and the Member Ward Grants**.
- ~~(f) Consider any matter referred through from the Community Reference Procedure to any committee, following such consultation the Chairman feel appropriate. Where such matters are considered by Scrutiny, these will be incorporated into the work programme as above.~~
- (g) Adopt the "TOPICS" principle in identifying if issues under consideration should be included, within the future work programme, i.e.:
 - Is this the right **time** to review the issue and is there sufficient officer time and resource to conduct the review? What is the timescale?
 - What is the reason for the review? Do officers have a clear **objective**?
 - Can **performance** in this area be improved by scrutiny?
 - Is there sufficient **interest** (particularly from the public)? The concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny.
 - Will the review assist the Council achieve its **corporate priorities**?

3.8 **Appendix E** highlights how this works in practice and how the committees can complement each other.

4. Proposed action

- 4.1 Taking account of the aforementioned sections of this report, it is proposed that the terms of reference of each committee is refreshed, as detailed in **Appendix A – D**, and that the word "policy" is removed as this can be constraining. Changes are highlighted throughout the appendices for ease of reference.
- 4.2 It is proposed that there is a lead Assistant Director for each committee, to ensure accountability and responsibility for the work programme, which will become a standing agenda item, and ensure that regular meetings are held with the Chair of the Committee and the Portfolio Holder. These are confirmed as follows:
 - Active and Healthy Places – Assistant Director Community Services
 - Cleaner, Safer Environment – Assistant Director Regulatory
 - Supporting People – Assistant Director Individuals & Families
 - Stronger, Greener Economy – Assistant Director Economic Growth
- 4.3 It is recognised that Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee (FRAG) is also a Cabinet Policy Committee, however this has a well-established work programme and lead officers (Assistant Director Finance and Head of Internal Audit) ensure that the committee fulfils its terms of reference, therefore no changes are proposed at this time.
- 4.4 As mentioned, formal meetings will be diarised four times a year as part of the Council's calendar of meetings. These will be clerked by the committee services team, have formal agendas, have minutes published and be held in person. The

meetings will be “proposed” at the start of the calendar year but may be moved during the year once the work programme is established. This is to ensure that reports are received in a timely manner ensuring that any subsequent decision is made at the right time, with the right information available and ensuring that sufficient officer time is available to input.

4.5 With regards to informal meetings, these will be convened by either the lead officer or the Chair of the Committee and can be held in person or online. These informal meetings will not be clerked and therefore, not have formal agendas or minutes, however the lead officer will ensure that Members are clear as to the items under discussion, ensure any background reading is provided in advance and ensure that appropriate notice is given. The lead officer will also take notes from the meeting as they need to enable future formal reports to be well populated and take account of discussions held. Informal meetings may also result in site visits to assist with learning and understanding of the topic being explored.

4.6 The objectives of these committees are as follows:

- To enable all Councillors of all parties to be able to introduce policy ideas that advance the Councils objectives
- To provide the ability for councillors to specialise in thematic areas of activity
- To provide for career advancement and succession for Councillors
- To routinely monitor KPIs in the thematic areas. This does not preclude Scrutiny from calling in any area. But routine and systematic analysis of KPIs on a regular and repeated basis is essential
- To enable officers and councillors to think more broadly and responsively to areas of policy
- To have the flexibility to see what work is like on the ground with field trips to see how services might be improved i.e. MRF visits

Other options

4.7 Keep the terms of reference as is, however this would not reflect how the Council has evolved and not reflect the good governance that is being proposed.

4.8 The Council could choose to disband these committees, under the Executive model Councils usually have the Cabinet (Executive) and then Scrutiny which holds the Council to account as described in the report and then they undertake some of the pre-review work as proposed for these committees.

Issues and risks

4.9 **Resource Implications** – the Committee Services team are currently resourced to service the four meetings proposed for each committee, and the lead officers are already accountable for the service areas which will be reviewed and considered. It is recommended though, that the time spend by lead officers and their staff on the informal meetings, is monitored to ensure this remains manageable.

- 4.10 **Legal Implications** – the constitution has been reviewed in preparing this report and will be updated accordingly following final decision at Full Council.
- 4.11 **Equality Implications** – not applicable to this report, however, it may be applicable as individual reports are taken forwards to formal committee meetings and this will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 4.12 **Environmental Impact** – not applicable to this report.
- 4.13 **Crime and Disorder** – not applicable to this report.
- 4.14 **Risks** – these have been outlined within the body of the report.

Conclusion

- 4.15 In conclusion it is proposed that to ensure good governance, openness & transparency, to enable Members of each committee to become “experts / specialists” in these areas & subsequently ensure there is a spread of knowledge across all Members and Groups that the proposal in this report is adopted.

Recommendations

1. To receive and review the proposals for the “Cabinet Policy” Committees and feedback to officers as appropriate.

Appendix A

Healthy & Active Lifestyles Cabinet Policy Committee

Terms of Reference

To deliver appropriate work as discharged by Cabinet, in relation to the Healthy & Active Lifestyles portfolio as outlined in Part 3.3. of the Constitution (Cabinet Members/Portfolio of Responsibility and the Responsibilities of Senior Officers).

To formulate policy highlighted by Cabinet in respect of the **relevant Portfolio area**.
~~referred to in 7.1.1 above.~~

To develop a work programme that complements the delivery of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan of the Council and enables key programmes and projects to reach fruition.

Undertake any other work as directed by Cabinet

Membership

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the committee shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.

The relevant portfolio holders will attend committee meetings ex-officio.

The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council, **as proposed by Group Leaders and approved by Full Council.** ~~appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

No more than three members of the panel can also sit on the Scrutiny Committee (to include any named substitutes).

Named substitutes may attend and vote at the Panel, **in accordance with the Council's substitute scheme set out in Part 4 Rules of procedure, 4.5 standing orders & rights of public at meetings.** ~~C7.~~

Quorum

A minimum of three members of the Council (either members of the Committee or named substitutes) must be present to transact any business of the Committee.

Procedures, protocol and public speaking

The Chairman of the Committee shall be responsible for maintaining order and the effective conduct of business at meetings of the Committee.

Public speaking will be allowed in accordance with **the public speaking section** ~~Section G~~ of Part 4.5 of the Constitution – Standing Orders and Rights of the Public at Council Meetings.

At the discretion of the Chairman, any person attending the Committee may speak or may put questions to any other participant.

Any member of the Council may attend and speak at meetings of the Committee.

The committee shall be assisted by a lead officer, in this instance it shall be the Assistant Director Community Services.

Voting

Voting shall be by a simple majority by show of hands.

Voting members may request that their votes are recorded.

In the event of an equality of votes the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.

Appendix B

Cleaner & Safer Environment ~~Cabinet Policy~~ Committee

Terms of Reference

To deliver appropriate work as discharged by Cabinet, in relation to the Cleaner and Safer portfolio as outlined in Part 3.3. of the Constitution (Cabinet Members/Portfolio of Responsibility and the Responsibilities of Senior Officers).

To formulate policy highlighted by Cabinet in respect of the **relevant Portfolio area**.
~~referred to in 7.1.1 above.~~

To develop a work programme that complements the delivery of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan of the Council and enables key programmes and projects to reach fruition.

Undertake any other work as directed by Cabinet

Membership

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the committee shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.

The relevant portfolio holders will attend committee meetings ex-officio.

The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council, **as proposed by Group Leaders and approved by Full Council.** ~~as appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

No more than three members of the panel can also sit on the Scrutiny Committee (to include any named substitutes).

Named substitutes may attend and vote at the Panel, **in accordance with the Council's substitute scheme set out in Part 4 Rules of procedure, 4.5 standing orders & rights of public at meetings.** ~~C7.~~

Quorum

A minimum of three members of the Council (either members of the Committee or named substitutes) must be present to transact any business of the Committee.

Procedures, protocol and public speaking

The Chairman of the Committee shall be responsible for maintaining order and the effective conduct of business at meetings of the Committee.

Public speaking will be allowed in accordance with **the public speaking section** ~~Section G~~ of Part 4.5 of the Constitution – Standing Orders and Rights of the Public at Council Meetings.

At the discretion of the Chairman, any person attending the Committee may speak or may put questions to any other participant.

Any member of the Council may attend and speak at meetings of the Committee.

The committee shall be assisted by a lead officer, in this instance it shall be the Assistant Director Regulatory.

Voting

Voting shall be by a simple majority by show of hands

Voting members may request that their votes are recorded

In the event of an equality of votes the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.

Appendix C

Supporting People Cabinet Policy Committee

Terms of Reference

To deliver appropriate work as discharged by Cabinet, in relation to the Supporting People portfolio, as outlined in Part 3.3. of the Constitution (Cabinet Members/Portfolio of Responsibility and the Responsibilities of Senior Officers).

To formulate policy highlighted by Cabinet in respect of the **relevant Portfolio area**.
~~referred to in 5.1.1 above.~~

To develop a work programme that complements the delivery of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan of the Council and enables key programmes and projects to reach fruition.

~~To advise on applications for affordable housing grants.~~

Undertake any other work as directed by Cabinet.

Membership

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the committee shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.

The relevant portfolio holders will attend committee meetings ex-officio.

The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council, **as proposed by Group Leaders and approved by Full Council**. ~~as appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

No more than three members of the panel can also sit on the Scrutiny Committee (to include any named substitutes).

~~The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council to be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.~~

Named substitutes may attend and vote at the Panel, **in accordance with the Council's substitute scheme set out in Part 4 Rules of procedure, 4.5 standing orders & rights of public at meetings.** ~~C7.~~

~~The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

Quorum

A minimum of three members of the Council (either members of the Panel or named substitutes) must be present to transact any business of the committee.

Procedures, protocol and public speaking

The Chairman of the Committee shall be responsible for maintaining order and the effective conduct of business at meetings of the committee.

Public speaking will be allowed in accordance with **the public speaking section** ~~Section G~~ of Part 4.5 of the Constitution – Standing Orders and Rights of the Public at Council Meetings.

At the discretion of the Chairman, any person attending the committee may speak or may put questions to any other participant.

Any member of the Council may attend and speak at meetings of the committee.

The committee shall be assisted by a lead officer, in this instance it shall be the Assistant Director Individuals and Families.

Voting

Voting shall be by a simple majority by show of hands

Voting members may request that their votes are recorded

In the event of an equality of votes the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.

Appendix D

Stronger Greener Economy Cabinet Policy Committee

Terms of Reference

To deliver appropriate work as discharged by Cabinet, in relation to the Stronger, Greener Economy portfolio as outlined in Part 3.3. of the Constitution (Cabinet Members/Portfolio of Responsibility and the Responsibilities of Senior Officers).

~~To advise on the development of local plans.~~

To formulate policy highlighted by Cabinet in respect of the **relevant Portfolio area**. ~~referred to in 6.1.1 above.~~

To develop a work programme that complements the delivery of the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan of the Council and enables key programmes and projects to reach fruition.

Undertake any other work as directed by Cabinet

Membership

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the committee shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.

The relevant portfolio holders will attend committee meetings ex-officio.

The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council, **as proposed by Group Leaders and approved by Full Council**. ~~as appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

No more than three members of the panel can also sit on the Scrutiny Committee (to include any named substitutes).

~~The Committee will consist of seven Members of the Council to be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced.~~

Named substitutes may attend and vote at the Panel, **in accordance with the Council's substitute scheme set out in Part 4 Rules of procedure, 4.5 standing orders & rights of public at meetings.** ~~C7.~~

~~The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

~~The Committee will consist of 7 Members of the Council to be appointed by the Leader of the Council and be politically balanced. The relevant portfolio holders will attend committee meetings ex-officio.~~

~~The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee shall be appointed by the Leader of the Council.~~

Quorum

A minimum of three members of the Council (either members of the committee or named substitutes) must be present to transact any business of the committee.

Procedures, protocol and public speaking

The Chairman of the Committee shall be responsible for maintaining order and the effective conduct of business at meetings of the committee.

Public speaking will be allowed in accordance with ~~the public speaking section~~ Section G of Part 4.5 of the Constitution – Standing Orders and Rights of the Public at Council Meetings.

At the discretion of the Chairman, any person attending the Committee may speak or may put questions to any other participant.

~~The committee shall be assisted by a lead officer, in this instance it shall be the Assistant Director Economic Growth.~~

Voting

Voting shall be by a simple majority by show of hands

Voting members may request that their votes are recorded

In the event of an equality of votes the Chairman shall have a second or casting vote.

APPENDIX E

