

# Annual review of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

2023/24

Appendix A

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# 1. Committee Chairman Foreword

The Committee's aims are to scrutinise, encourage good governance and ultimately ensure there are real benefits to the people of Broadland being shown by the work of the Council. Moreover, where it is appropriate, the Committee aims to bring forward recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

This year has seen many changes and new challenges with a change in control of the Council, a massive move to a new building and continued joint working with South Norfolk Council, and we have continued to review and change some of the areas the Committee has looked at, to deal with these new realities.

We have undertaken some important work this year, introducing new ways that councillors can be involved in understanding the process of developing the Council budget, recognising the ways in which councillors can have a greater overview of the services the Council provides, and scrutinising decisions made by the cabinet. In recognising these changes outlined in this report, I would like to pay tribute to my fellow Council Members who have shown a real commitment to understanding the issues, making excellent contributions to meetings and asking the key questions that underlines what good and proper scrutiny is. By doing this, they are serving the Committee and seeking the best outcomes for our residents and services.

The topics discussed over the last year have covered various areas of the Council's work such as pre-scrutinising the Council's budgets and performance and reviewing several important policies. These include supporting new ways of measuring the standard of housing provided by local social housing providers, a review of the Council's partnerships, early intervention and how the anti-social behaviour officer pilot service has benefitted our residents.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also championed the needs of Broadland residents by strongly highlighting their support for the Business Regulatory Support Hub Pilot Service, which Council Members learnt has provided clear benefits to Broadland.

We should also recognise the substantial work done by Councils' officers this year and thank them for the resources they have put in, the support given and the time they spend with us explaining the Council's work.

The Overview and Scrutiny function of a local authority has many objectives, but its main focus is to ensure better outcomes for all of our communities through constructive engagement with officers, Cabinet, Council and all our partners. I have enjoyed chairing this Committee and would like to offer my thanks and appreciation to the officers and members who support the Committee and to the Vice-Chairman, Cllr Peter Bulman.

**Cllr Nich Starling**

**Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## 2. Introduction

Broadland District Council adopts the Cabinet system to operate its decision-making. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is politically balanced and is made up of councillors from the political groups that make up the Council. As only non-cabinet members can be on the Committee, this enables those members to have an active role in the Council's decision-making process.

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.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks into areas of local concern and recommends improvements the Council can make to ensure quality of life is improved for all. The main tasks of the Committee are:

- **Performance Monitoring** - Scrutiny can examine any aspect of our performance, including services that we deliver through partnerships with other organisations.
- **Holding the Cabinet to Account** - Decisions made by the Cabinet but not yet put into practice can be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and challenged.
- **Policy review and development** - Overview and Scrutiny can propose new policies or review existing policies and recommend changes to the Cabinet.
- **External Scrutiny** - Any issue directly affecting Broadland residents can be scrutinised by the Committee, including services provided by another organisation.
- **Call ins** – Any 3 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can request for a decision to be 'called in' into the committee. A summary of decisions made by Cabinet is published immediately after each meeting of Cabinet and a call in effectively means the decision is delayed until the committee can examine the decision at its next meeting. After examination, the committee can decide to recommend an alternative option or endorse the decision of the Cabinet.

It is through demonstrating the value and impact that effective scrutiny can have in supporting councils and other organisations to deliver better, more cost-effective services, that scrutiny is a valued element of local democracy.

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

The Overview & 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.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is made up of 15 Councillors and membership is as follows:

<b>Chairman:</b>	Cllr Nich Starling
<b>Vice-Chairman:</b>	Cllr Peter Bulman
	Cllr Mark Goodman
	Cllr Caroline Karimi-Ghovanlou
	Cllr Shane Ward
	Cllr Tony Yousefian
	Cllr Adrian Tipple
	Cllr Emma Tovell
	Cllr Lacey Douglass
	Cllr Jonathan Emsell
	Cllr Simon Jones
	Cllr Martin Murrell
	Cllr Paul Newstead
	Cllr Fran Whymark
	Cllr Eleanor Laming

Other non-executive members also took part as substitute members as and when required. With Cabinet members also attending to provide context, overview and responses as needed.

#### **Support for the Overview & Scrutiny function**

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

## 4. Overview & Scrutiny in 2023/24

### Scrutiny of the Cabinet

Broadland District Council conducts a practice of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee appraising Cabinet reports one week before Cabinet meetings. This provides opportunity for Committee to ask officers questions and enables the Committee to be fully briefed before making recommendations to Cabinet. This practice is considered by the Committee to keep call-ins to a minimum and build a good working relationship between Cabinet and officers.

Furthermore, Committee members are able to attend Cabinet meetings when those reports are discussed, to make any further comment through the Committee Chairman and to witness how the Cabinet arrives at its decisions. There were no call-ins this year.

Appendix B provides an overview of the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet during 2023/24.

### Overview & Scrutiny Reviews

Tuesday, 27 June 2023

- **Report of the Time and Task Panel – Housing Providers** – The Committee reviewed the outcomes and recommendations from the Time and Task Panel which was set up by the Committee in 2022. The Committee welcomed the report which reviewed housing conditions and housing supply issues within the District. After reviewing the report, the Committee recommended to Council and Cabinet where appropriate, the recommendations. The Committee also agreed to add a further item to their work programme to review the progress made following the recommendations being agreed. This was scheduled for November 2023 and March 2024 (see below for outcomes).

Tuesday, 12 September 2023

- **Council Partnerships Register Review** – The Committee received an overview of the register of Council Partnerships, alongside the criteria for inclusion on the register, as well as the definition of joint working arrangements which fell out outside of a partnership. The Committee were able to assess the current partnerships on the register, and ask questions of the officers present to clarify the current position. The Committee endorsed to receive the report and agreed that if a further update was required, this should be aligned to the next Delivery Plan phase.

Tuesday, 14 November 2023

- **Update on actions following the Time and Task Panel – Housing Providers** – The Committee were provided with an update on the actions following the Time and Task Panel investigation into housing providers and the recommendations which were made. The Committee were made aware that the housing providers had been very receptive to the recommendations of the

Panel and were enthusiastic about the way they worked with the Council. Members commended the work and the update provided and noted it was very encouraging to have a good level of engagement from housing providers.

Tuesday, 23 January 2024

- **Early intervention anti-social behaviour officer pilot service – review of progress** – Members reviewed a pilot scheme which the Council had undertaken regarding early intervention and antisocial behaviour throughout the District. Previously in 2022, the Committee had recommended the extension of the pilot to March 2024 and had agreed the pilot to come back to Committee for further review. The Committee commended the work and service provided to date via the pilot. Following questions, officers confirmed that discussions were taking place with housing providers to seek funding for the service in the future. The Committee endorsed the pilot service progress to date.
- **Business regulatory support hub pilot service – review of progress** - Members reviewed a pilot scheme which the Council had undertaken regarding the roll out of a business regulatory support hub across the District. Previously in 2022, the Committee had recommended the extension of the pilot to March 2024 and had agreed the pilot to come back to Committee for further review. Members were advised of the success of the pilot and excellent feedback received from customers. Following discussion, the Committee resolved to recommend to officers that they review potential funding opportunities to keep the service running, in consultation with South Norfolk Council as it was a joint service.

Tuesday, 26 March 2024

- **Cost of Living Review** – The Committee reviewed the audit results on the councils cost of living response. The report highlighted the areas of positive work as well as areas where the Council could improve. Members commended the work done to support residents across the district, particularly the partnership working of the help hub and also had the opportunity to ask officers questions around how we are improving the work we do as a Council.
- **Working with Housing Providers** – An update report was brought back to the Committee following the recommendations the Time and Task Panel made. Members reviewed progress being made on the recommendations and endorsed officers continuing to work on the priorities highlighted in the report. Officers agreed to bring back a report in the future to provide a further overview of progress.
- **Rural Business Builder Grant Programme** – Members reviewed the progress being made with the delivery of the one-off grant programme, funded by the Norfolk Strategic Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Members commented on the amount of support given to businesses and commended the outcomes achieved to date. Following discussion, Members suggested that it would be beneficial for officers to continue to track success of the programme beyond the

funding ending, in particular, to see the impact it has had on businesses within the area.

## **Scrutiny of the Budget & Council Plan**

Overview and Scrutiny have a key role to play in supporting the organisation to set its budget each year, along with the Council Plan which forms part of the Councils policy framework. Each year, a joint meeting takes place between the Committee and Cabinet as part of the budget consultation process.

**Budget** - In October 2023, the Committee held a pre-budget workshop to discuss proposed questions for Cabinet on the budget for 2024/25. On 23 January 2024, the Committee reviewed the responses to the budget questions from Cabinet and had the opportunity to ask a number of supplementary questions to the Cabinet during the meeting. Following this, the budget returned to the Committee on 6 February, seeking endorsement to recommending the budget to Council, which the Committee resolved to do.

**Council Plan** – On 10 January 2024, the Committee took part in a facilitated informal workshop with Portfolio Holders and Officers, reviewing the draft Council Plan and Delivery Plan. The Committee received the draft Plans in advance of the workshop and had the opportunity during the workshop to ask questions and provide feedback for Cabinet's consideration. Following this, the Council Plan and Delivery Plan returned to the Committee on 6 February, seeking endorsement to recommending the Plans to Council, which the Committee resolved to do.

## **5. Public involvement**

Members of the public are welcome to attend any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. Public speaking is allowed on any matter on the agenda, excluding the Minutes of the previous meeting. Speakers must advise the Chief of Staff of their wish to speak two clear working days before the Committee. Members of the public can also make their views known to their local District Councillor or any member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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](#).