

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



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Committee Chairman Foreword

The Committee's aims are to provide real benefits to the people of Broadland and through its work, bring forward appropriate recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

This year has seen many changes and we have continued to review and change our ways of working, due to COVID-19. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was regularly meeting via Zoom at the start of the year but, when the remote meetings legislation ceased in May 2021, the Committee reverted to holding its meetings in-person. Despite these changes, we have still managed to undertake some important work this year. In recognising this, I would like to pay tribute to my fellow members who have shown commitment and devotion in serving the Committee and seeking the best outcomes for our residents and services, whilst recognising the substantial additional strain on the Council's officers and resources.

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, reviewing several important policies, including those in place for empty homes, houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), the Council Tax Assistance Scheme, and various environmental issues. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also championed the needs of Broadland residents by strongly highlighting their concerns regarding the removal of the cap on the Care and Repair service, when reviewing the Independent Living Assistance Policy, which prompted further assurance from the Portfolio Holder that no residents would be disadvantaged. When reviewing the Treasury Management Report, the Committee recommended that the Council adopt a green and ethical approach to treasury management. Cabinet agreed that consideration would be given to making the existing content of the Strategy more stringent at its next review. In addition to pre-scrutinising the Cabinet agenda, the Committee also provided feedback to assist Cabinet in wording the Council's response to the Transport for Norwich Strategy Consultation, to ensure this reflected and reinforced the needs of Broadland residents.

Whilst the pandemic has continued to cause some delays to our work programme, the Committee has future plans to review some important Council policies to ensure they are achieving their objectives and providing the best in customer service and value for money for our residents, and to ensure that residents are at the heart of what Broadland District Council does. We continue to reach out to our towns and parishes and look forward to examining some of the issues that face our communities and, where necessary, identifying and recommending solutions to improve services for residents.

The Overview and Scrutiny function of a local authority has many objectives, but its main focus is to ensure better outcomes for our communities through constructive engagement with officers, Cabinet, Council and our partners.

I enjoy 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, Martin Murrell.



Councillor Steve Riley
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman

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.

Overview and Scrutiny is central to the Council's decision-making process and has two main roles.

- (1) The development and review of policies for a wide range of subjects and services.
- (2) The critical examination of the Council's performance and effectiveness of its decisions.

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** - We have to meet corporate priorities set out in the Broadland Business Plan and report against those indicators. 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.

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.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

An Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to both scrutinise and monitor on an ongoing basis. To that end, the Committee strives to develop a balanced Work Programme which is published on the Council's website for information. Since the Committee's last annual report, which was commended to Council on 27 May 2021, there have been five meetings to consider items on the Work Programme.

The Reviews undertaken during these meetings were as follows:

Maintenance of Bridges in Broadland

On 15 June 2021, the Committee reviewed a report which it had requested due to concerns about the level of reserves that had been set aside to meet the Council's future liabilities for bridge maintenance. This important review allowed the Committee to thoroughly scrutinise the budgetary measures that the Council had put in place to fund the maintenance of the bridges. It also provided members with reassurance that a review was being conducted of all of the Council's assets and that a programme was to be drawn up to undertake identified maintenance works, within the allocated budgets.

Parish Council Involvement with Developers and the Planning Authority regarding the Allocation of Public Open Space

At the heart of good Scrutiny is engagement with residents and parish councils. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee invited all town and parish councils within the District to put forward any items they wished the Committee to scrutinise. In response, Sprowston Town Council requested that the Committee review the Council's involvement with town and parish councils and developers regarding the allocation of public open spaces.

At its meeting on 24 August 2021, the Committee reviewed a report which had been prepared by officers in response to the request from Sprowston Town Council. Members of the Town Council were invited to attend and participate in the meeting. After scrutinising the issue thoroughly and hearing the views of the Town Council, the Committee requested that Broadland District Council officers, together with a working group of members, produce a planning guidance note for town and parish councils. The Committee also agreed that a letter should be sent to developers in the District to remind them of their obligations, under the Statement of Community Involvement, to engage meaningfully with parish and town councils.

Review of the Environmental Strategy

At its meeting on 30 November 2021, the Committee was provided with an update on the delivery of the Environmental Strategy across the District. Members were reassured by the content of the update report and were pleased to note that, in addition to the projects being developed through the Action Plan, the Council was undertaking a wide range of business activities that contributed to carbon reduction, such as: recycling, the Warm Homes Project, fly tipping enforcement and the planning policy. The Committee was satisfied that no further scrutiny would be required at this time.

Member Ward Grant – Spend Review

On 30 November 2021, members undertook their six-monthly review of the member-led grant scheme. The Committee scrutinised information regarding the spending of the grant monies and requested that the level of funding should be increased from £500 to £1000 per annum, to match that at South Norfolk Council. It was suggested that this issue should be raised during the joint budget meeting with Cabinet in January 2022. This was consequently raised as a request at the budget meeting but was refused by Cabinet who deemed there was no need to align the two schemes as the Councils were separate and sovereign entities.

Staff Turnover at Broadland

During 2021, a Time and Task Limited Panel was convened to analyse staff turnover at Broadland District Council. The Panel scrutinised local and comparative data in order to identify any potential solutions deemed necessary to aid the Council in its retention of staff. On 30 November 2021, members reviewed the interesting findings of the Panel but noted that there had been a low percentage of leavers who had chosen to complete exit interviews, making it difficult to ascertain the reasons that some staff had left the Council's employment. It was agreed that the Time and Limited Task Panel be reconvened to further discuss the matter.

Review of the Public Consultation Processes

On 18 January 2022, members considered a report which had been drafted as a result of the Committee's request to review the way in which the Council engaged its residents in public consultations. Members had wished to understand the current processes for engaging the public in consultations and to explore how these processes could be improved to maximise response rates. The Committee felt that by reaching and engaging with the widest possible audience, results would be more likely to demonstrate the wide-ranging views of the community rather than be skewed by limited responses from a small section of residents.

Members scrutinised the processes for formal consultations and then considered ways in which more residents could be reached regarding less formal consultations and general matters. After discussion, the Committee requested that the report of the recently appointed Customer Insight and Experience Lead, which was scheduled to be presented to the Committee in June 2022, include details of how the Council could better publicise and raise awareness of consultations.

Norse Environmental Waste Services

On 29 March 2022, members considered a report on the performance of the materials recycling facility. The Committee scrutinised the financial details and noted the promotional and educational work being undertaken by officers to increase the rates of 'clean' recycling throughout the District. Members were pleased with the positive figures and outcomes but stressed the importance of continuing to monitor any changes to commodity prices in the future, so that any risks to the Authority could be minimised.

Overviewing

In addition to the above stand-alone reviews, the Committee continually monitors certain Council activities. In the past year these have included:

- Water – Supply, Management and Climate Change Updates
- Community Safety Updates
- Leisure and Community Wellbeing Briefings

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.

Meeting with Cabinet to discuss the budget

In October 2021, the Committee held a pre-budget workshop to discuss proposed questions for Cabinet on the budget for 2022/23. These were presented at the meeting on 18 January 2022 and Cabinet Members were in attendance to respond.

Committee Training

In March 2021, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended a virtual training session, which was delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). This focussed mainly on developing effective questioning skills and the use of funnelling methods to drill down on specific points and to turn these findings into sound recommendations. During 2021/22, members have been able to put these skills into practice when scrutinising items.

Communicating Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognises that although the scrutiny function is councillor-led, the communities of Broadland can and should influence their Work Programme and involve themselves in scrutiny reviews. During 2022/23, the Committee will continue to promote scrutiny and consider important local issues.

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr S Riley (Chairman)	Cllr M Murrell (Vice Chairman)	Cllr N J Brennan
Cllr P E Bulman	Cllr S J Catchpole	Cllr J Davis
Cllr N J Harpley	Cllr S I Holland	Cllr C Karimi-Ghovanlou
Cllr K S Kelly	Cllr D King	Cllr K Leggett MBE
Cllr G K Nurden	Cllr S M Prutton	Cllr N C Shaw

Support for Overview and Scrutiny

The Senior Governance Officer provides advice to both members and officers and supports the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the various Time and Task Limited Panels that may be set up. Democratic Services Officers produce agendas and clerk the meetings. Senior officers and managers of the Council are expected to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and present reports at the request of the Committee. In addition, Cabinet members are often present to aid the Committee's understanding of a particular item, which makes the scrutiny process more effective and constructive.

Have your Say

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 Senior Governance Officer 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.

Members of the public may also write to the Senior Governance Officer at the below address to request that a relevant subject or issue be investigated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny and the Committee Services Team,
Broadland District Council
Democratic Services
Thorpe Lodge
Yarmouth Road, Norwich
NR7 0DU

Email: cllr.steve.riley@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk and
committee.services@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee does not get involved with individual cases and cannot look at individual planning / licensing applications. These should be addressed through the appropriate service area or the local councillor. It also cannot deal with individual complaints; these should be raised through the Council's Complaints Procedure.

All suggestions will be considered by the Chairman and Vice Chairman. You will then be informed of the outcome by the Senior Governance Officer.