

Scrutiny Review Action Plan

Recommendation	Action to date or current situation	Next steps
CLARITY ON SCRUTINY'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES		
<p>1. Further reinforcement of the role, purpose and value of scrutiny and there would be value in developing a protocol of working between the Cabinet and Scrutiny to provide clarity of scrutiny's purpose at SKDC. This could be achieved through training or direct engagement with committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive review of the Council's Constitution undertaken and new version adopted in May 2022 • Terms of Reference set out in the Council's newly adopted Constitution for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee • New Rules of Procedure in place as part of the newly adopted Constitution to specify the Council's executive arrangements and the overview and scrutiny function and how the two functions relate and interact with each other • In-house training and externally facilitated training via the Association of Democratic Services Officers held for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of all Committees in July 2022 • Informal meetings held with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees to consider and share good or best practice • Sessions held with the Council's Conservative Group and Independent Group, facilitated by the Local Government Association, on the role and responsibilities of elected members and the specific role of members on Overview and Scrutiny Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide training on the overview and scrutiny function for all Councillors on Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to be facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny • To consider holding workshops to contribute to the development of a protocol for Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet with Cabinet Members and Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees • To review examples of protocols in use by other Councils and examples of good practice by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

<p>2. The planned changes to the way the organisation works provides an opportunity for scrutiny to be involved earlier in policy development and decision-making, as well as holding to account. Scrutiny could add significant value if it focused more on early scrutiny of policy development or on pre-scrutiny of key decisions. To be effective in doing this it needs to operate early in the cycle and to create a positive (but constructively challenging) working relationship with political decision-makers. It also means that scrutiny spends more time looking forward towards the future, rather than in reviewing and monitoring past performance (although some of this is also necessary). This pre-scrutiny work also needs to be reflected in the work programme and agenda planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular consideration of Committee work programmes by the Council's Corporate Management Team • Informal meetings held with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees to consider and share good or best practice regarding work programming and the effective use of agenda setting meetings and pre-meetings to manage work programmes more effectively • Encouraged use of the Cabinet Forward Plan to help plan items for effective pre-decision scrutiny • A focused approach to scrutiny of cross-cutting matters and the holding of joint meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees for topics such as the Deepings Leisure Centre, the Arts Review and the grounds maintenance contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider ways in which opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny and in-depth reviews through Task and Finish Groups can be built into the work programmes of Overview and Scrutiny Committees • To consider ways in which Overview and Scrutiny Committees can develop policy as part of considering their future work programmes, also through the use of Task and Finish Groups
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COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SCRUTINY

<p>3. SKDC develop a Cabinet-Scrutiny protocol to outline and reaffirm roles and responsibilities, dealing with the practical workings of scrutiny as well as the cultural dynamics included expected behaviours, access to information, etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As set out in recommendation 1 above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As set out in recommendation 1 above
<p>4. That a positive opportunity for scrutiny to hold the Leader and Deputy Leader to account forms a regular part of the work programme. The Leader already attends scrutiny as required or invited and has indicated a preference to engage more and be visibly accountable to scrutiny for overall council progress. Therefore, a quarterly Leader/Deputy accountability session could provide an opportunity to hold the Leader/Deputy to account for progress on the delivery of an Integrated Corporate Plan and Budget Report and any other issues scrutiny feels is important</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of the recommendation and ensuring that Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes facilitate updates from the Leader/Deputy Leader on delivery of the Corporate Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider reviews by each Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress made in respect of delivering the objectives of the Corporate Plan, with the Leader and/or Deputy Leader in attendance to present a report and answer any questions. A six-monthly cycle seems more appropriate than quarterly given the strategy nature of the Corporate Plan and the fact that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets approximately every six weeks

- Addition of announcements by the Leader, Cabinet Member or Head of Paid Service at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to ensure that there is a facility to appraise Overview and Scrutiny Committees of any relevant information or updates as and when they become available

SCRUTINY'S FOCUS AND WORK PROGRAMME

5. An annual process for developing the work programme across all of the scrutiny committees, engaging Members, Officers, partners and the public to prioritise the topics for review. This could involve a member workshop, where a shortlist of priority topics for the next 12 months are identified according to a selection criteria, discussed on their merit for scrutiny, and voted on

- Regular consideration of Committee work programmes by the Council's Corporate Management Team
- Informal meetings held with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees to consider and share good or best practice regarding work programming and the effective use of agenda setting meetings and pre-meetings to manage work programmes more effectively
- Encouraged use of the Cabinet Forward Plan to help plan items for effective pre-decision scrutiny
- Development of a Partnerships Register to provide a better understand of the Council's partnership arrangements

- To consider the establishment an annual forum for Parish and Town Councils to facilitate engagement in respect of community issues
- To consider how the Council engages with partners and ensures priority topics are scrutinised effectively
- To consider holding workshops with each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and understand their priorities at least once a year
- To ensure that outcomes from the above are reflected in respective Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes for the year ahead

6. A review of the current approach to financial scrutiny (across all the committees) and MTFS/ budget scrutiny and the scrutiny of commercial arrangements and to ensure lessons from other council's recent experiences have been applied

- Financial scrutiny led by the Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - Budget setting and the Medium Term Financial Strategy scrutinised by all Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of the Budget Joint Scrutiny meeting

- To consider undertaking a review of the current approach to be carried out and implemented for the 2023/24 budget cycle, to ensure that it is fit for purpose
- To consider a change in the Constitution to ensure that amendments to the budget or alternative budgets are considered by the Chief Finance Officer prior to the day of the meeting to ensure that the proposals are financial sound and represent a balanced budget

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

<p>7. SKDC to consider a new model which either consists of an overarching committee with standing committees reporting to it or two committees, one with an internal and the other an external focus. There is also scope within a revised model to create task and finish groups or other flexible scrutiny capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing committee structure consists of four Overview and Scrutiny Committees forming its overview and scrutiny function, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture and Visitor Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee • The Council's committee structure includes the following other Committees which are not part of the Council's overview and scrutiny function: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Companies Committee - Constitution Committee - Governance and Audit Committee - Licensing Committee - Planning Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider undertaking a review of the Committee structure in terms of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function and respective terms of reference of Committees, potentially based upon the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An Economic and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee - A Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee - A Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee - The removal of the Constitution Committee, with its remit falling under the terms of reference of the Governance and Audit Committee - The removal of the Companies Committee, with responsibility for overview of respective companies being allocated to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee or potentially the Governance and Audit Committee • To consider whether South Kesteven District Council's size and committee structure is sufficient enough to justify an overarching Committee • To consider greater use of Task and Finish Groups
<p>8. That the governance and scrutiny arrangement for the council's commercial activities, including its teckal companies are reviewed. It is not suggested that Members become involved in operational matters or duplicate the role of the Companies Committee, but that a consistent and effective Member overview and scrutiny arrangement is clarified</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Companies Committee is not part of the Council's overview and scrutiny function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider undertaking a review of the role of the Companies Committee in the context of the Council's committee structure to ensure that proportionate governance is provided to the Council's companies

CHAIRING AND MEETING PREPARATION

<p>9. SKDC consider changing the process for the appointment of scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs and enabling committees to select themselves. This could be achieved by candidates presenting their credentials at the first meeting of the committee and a secret ballot held to elect the chair based on a 'best person for the job' principle. This may also provide the chair with extra independence and authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen are currently made at the Annual Meeting of the Council, according to their suitability and merit in the opinion of the Leader of the Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give due consideration to this recommendation ahead of the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2023, with a view to allowing open nominations at the Annual Meeting and votes being held as necessary as opposed to each individual Committee electing Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen at their first meetings following the Annual Meeting of the Council
<p>10. A review of the process for signing off papers to ensure that it is proportionate, supports their timely distribution and transparency. We would also recommend that papers and reports for scrutiny are considered by the Chair and Vice Chair and are not subject to review or sign-off by Cabinet Members. This will maintain the authority and independence of scrutiny to decide on the information it requires to hold the executive to account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new report template has been introduced and more training on appropriate sign-offs will be provided to Members and Officers • Informal meetings held with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees to consider and share good or best practice regarding work programming and the effective use of agenda setting meetings and pre-meetings to manage work programmes more effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review implementation of the new report template • To consider the relationship between Cabinet Members and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, particularly in relation to work programming, agenda setting and the level of engagement that Cabinet Members may have with Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen of Committees
<p>11. (Re)introducing pre-meetings before formal committee between all scrutiny Members to provide the space to identify priorities and agree questioning strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This practice is not currently in place • Informal meetings held with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees to consider and share good or best practice regarding the running of meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider the principle of holding pre-meetings prior to Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

<p>12. More targeted support is offered for people in key roles such as Chairs which can meet their needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-house training and externally facilitated training via the Association of Democratic Services Officers held for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of all Committees in July 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider the training and development requirements of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees
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EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

13. We would recommend scrutiny exploring ways to allow greater access, openness, and involvement. This could include inviting the public to offer ideas for work programmes and greater use of social media channels for resident input and communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny work.

As set out in recommendation 5 above

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