

West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2020/2021

West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/2021

A Message from Councillor Jane Birch, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee - West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority

This Annual Report is a summary of just some of the work that the shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) has undertaken over the course of a period of just ten months.

The shadow O&S Committee approved its work programme for the year and details of the scrutiny activity undertaken are provided at page 4 of this Annual Report. The O&S Committees of the Sovereign Councils continued to complete their Reviews.

The work of this Committee commenced in June 2020 and we had to quickly bring in a new way of working and remote meetings became the new normal way of hosting a Committee meeting. My thanks to Councillor Jamie Lane, Deputy Chair of this Committee, who hosted training on the workings and protocols of using the online audio and web conferencing platform.

It was ensured that the public could watch a meeting of the shadow Overview and Scrutiny on : [West Northants Democratic Services - YouTube](#). The public was also able to address a meeting by registering their intention to speak.

I highlight specifically that Overview and Scrutiny is member-led and evidence-based. It is fundamental that the work of scrutiny adds value and I feel that this annual report demonstrates just that. An important element of this work has been the attendance of a Committee member at the Governance and Finance Task and Finish groups' meetings, acting as a silent observer.

Instead of a complete commentary of all that the Shadow O&S Committee has achieved over the year this Annual Report provides a short summary of the key highlights of the work that O&S has been engaged in during 2020/2021. I hope it reflects what I feel has been a very important year for the shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in and have supported Scrutiny over the past year. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues who sat with me on the shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

I do hope that you find this report informative and interesting.



Councillor Jane Birch Chair

**Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Committee
West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority**

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Membership of the shadow O&S Committee 2020/2021

The membership of the shadow O&S Committee was made up of 18 non-Executives of the four Sovereign Councils of West Northamptonshire:

Councillor Jane Birch (Chair) Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council;
Councillor Jamie Lane, (Deputy Chair) Northampton Borough Council;

Councillors Ann Addison (South Northants Council), Dermot Bambridge (South Northants Council), Julie Davenport (Northamptonshire County Council/Northampton Borough Council), Penny Flavell (Northampton Borough Council), Andre Gonzalez de Savage (Northamptonshire County Council), Enam Haque (Northampton Borough Council), James Hill (Northampton Borough Council), Dennis Meredith (Northamptonshire County Council/Northampton Borough Council), Ian Morris (Northamptonshire County Council), Ken Pritchard (South Northants Council), David Smith (Daventry District Council), Ken Ritchie (Daventry District Council), Emma Roberts (Northampton Borough Council), Allen Walker (South Northants/Northamptonshire County Council), Mark Warren (Daventry District Council) and Mark Wesley (Daventry District Council).

How does Overview and Scrutiny make a difference?

Overview and Scrutiny ensures that decision-making processes are clear and accessible to the public and that the people taking decisions are held accountable for those decisions.

Effective Scrutiny

As stated by the Centre of Governance and Scrutiny, effective scrutiny:

- provides “critical friend” challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers
- enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- is carried out by “independent minded governors” who lead and own the scrutiny process
- drives improvement in public services.

Terms of Reference for the Shadow O&S Committee

The terms of reference of the Shadow O&S Committee include:

scrutinise decisions of the Shadow Executive Committee, and offer advice or make recommendations on the matter under scrutiny once the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered the issues;

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refer to the Shadow Council, the Shadow Executive Committee or appropriate Committee/Sub-Committee any matter which, following scrutiny, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee determines should be brought to the attention of the Shadow Council, Shadow Executive Committee or the Committee or Sub-Committee;
if requested, offer any views or advice to the Shadow Executive Committee in relation to any matter referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration

Achievements

How was this impact made during 2020-2021?

Public interest

Public interest in the work of the shadow O&S Committee was monitored by the number of views of the recordings of the meetings posted on the Council's YouTube account. Views at each meeting ranged from 22 to 47.

Training

Early in the municipal year 2020/2021, the Committee received comprehensive training delivered by an expert of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The training was particularly valued as it focussed on the role of the shadow O&S Committee and its remit from June 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Scrutiny Impact

What have we achieved and influenced?

It was a very busy, interesting and productive year for the Shadow O&S Committee. The Committee held nine meetings over the course of ten months.

To give a flavour of the types of issues and the work that the Committee dealt with this year, the following provides examples of focussed and targeted assurance and scrutiny work which has been undertaken by the shadow O&S Committee:

- Council Tax Harmonisation and Council Tax Reduction Scheme (over two meetings)
- Transformation and Finance Programme
- West Northamptonshire Unitary Council Draft Blueprint
- Governance preparation arrangements for the West Northamptonshire Authority.
- Communications and Engagement –review and update on the future timetable of activity
- Vision and Culture

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ICT Preparedness

Unitary Website Development

Communications and Engagement: Day One Residents' Integrated Marketing Plan Overview

Budget Scrutiny

A new constitution for West Northamptonshire Council.

Key Outcomes

The Committee focussed on its pre-decision Scrutiny role and key outcomes for the shadow O&S Committee that demonstrate how its work this year has made a difference include:

Council Tax Harmonisation and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Committee received two very comprehensive updates and briefings on the Council Tax Harmonisation and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Committee offered challenge where necessary. The Committee was mindful of the impact that potential increases would have on vulnerable residents. Detailed case studies were considered, and the Committee sought reassurance that support was available for all residents.

West Northamptonshire Unitary Council Draft Blueprint

The Committee provided scrutiny input into the draft blueprint for West Northamptonshire Unitary Council that detailed how it would be organised at vesting day, as well as an overview of some key areas, and the plans to ensure a safe transfer and aspects of service improvement.

Transformation and Finance Programme

The Committee provided scrutiny input and challenge on the progress of the Transformation and Finance Programme. The Committee questioned the proposal to devise a 'Future Use of Capital Receipts' Policy to allow the Authority to potentially transfer the funding of these costs into capital. The Committee expressed concerns that there should have been further input into this Policy, particularly from Councillors.

Vision and Culture

The Committee provided challenge to the process for vision and culture and was supportive of the comprehensive consultation process. The need for a fresh start was noted and that recruitment and retention of staff was important.

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ICT Preparedness

The Committee was made aware of the proposals and work being undertaken in respect of the delivery of the Future Northants ICT Programme. The direction for the following two to three years was provided.

Unitary Website Development

The Committee contributed to the development of the Unitary Website, highlighting the value of specific features currently used by a number of the Sovereign Councils in the West and recommending their continuation into the website for the Unitary Council. The Committee stressed the need for easily accessible information at both a Unitary and local level.

Budget Scrutiny

The Committee scrutinised the Council's draft 2020/21 budget in detail and provided scrutiny input. Its [report](#) was appended to the report on the budget that was considered by the shadow Executive at its meeting on 12 February 2021. Comprehensive responses were received by the Committee to further queries that were raised at the meeting.

Governance Scrutiny

The Committee contributed to the draft constitution for West Northamptonshire Council, particularly in relation to O&S. It particularly highlighted that best practice processes for O&S of the various Sovereign Councils should be mirrored in the procedures for the O&S function for the new Authority. Comments put forward by the Committee have informed the latest draft of the Constitution.

Communications and Engagement Scrutiny

In undertaking the scrutiny of communications and engagement, the Committee was pleased to note that the campaign would seek to utilise the vast range of communication channels available and to ensure that residents whose first language is not English have access to all information.

Critical Friend to Cabinet

Senior Officers and Executive Members attended various meetings of the shadow O&S Committee and provided the detailed reasoning behind the various key issues. These are summarised at

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pages 4 and 5 of this Annual Report. By doing this, it provided comprehension and clarity for the Committee on the issues detailed in its work programme.

These are excellent examples of the Committee's critical friend role and the healthy relationship that exists between the shadow O&S Committee and the Executive. They emphasise also the robust challenge offered by scrutiny.

Call-In

During 2020/2021 there were no Call-In Hearings.

Looking ahead

The Committee is keen to ensure that the recommendations of this year's Policy Review work of the O&S Committees of the Sovereign Councils of the West are taken forward into West Northamptonshire Authority.

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Glossary of Terms

Call-In

The process by which the O&S Committee considers whether a decision is properly taken or is the right decision.

Executive

The Executive body responsible for the day-to-day running of the Council and the development of policy. Cabinet Members have portfolios or areas of responsibility (e.g., Housing) for which they take executive decisions.

Councillor (Member)

An elected local representative on the Council, a Councillor represents the interests of the people who live in their ward and Northampton as a whole

Pre-decision Scrutiny:

O&S may inform Executive decisions on topics on the Forward Plan by making evidence-based recommendations or advice prior to formal decision by the Executive.

Review

A study led by Scrutiny Councillors on a current issue, selected by the Committee. It aims to identify areas of good as well as poor practice, compare performance with other Councils' countrywide, and challenge existing practice where relevant.

The review will lead to recommendations for improvements to relevant Cabinet Members as well as outside agencies, such as health trusts. While these are not obliged to support the recommendations, effective consultation has been proven to lead to consensus and to Cabinet support for reviews undertaken.

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