West
Northamptonshire
Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held in The Council Chamber at The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Monday 15 May 2023 at 6.00 pm

Agenda

1.	**Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members**
2.	**Declarations of Interest** Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.
3.	**Minutes** (Pages 5 - 10) To confirm the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 March 2023.
4.	**Chair's Announcements** To receive communications from the Chair.
5.	**Asset Strategy** The Committee to undertake scrutiny of asset disposals.
6.	**Modernising Systems Spotlight Review** The Committee to receive the report of the Modernising Systems Spotlight Review for approval.
7.	**Draft Annual Report 2022-23 - Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee** The Committee to consider and approve the Draft Annual Report on activity by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2022-23 to be presented to Full Council.

8.	**Review of Committee Work Plan** To review and note the Committee Work Programme.
9.	**Urgent Business** The Chair to advise whether they have agreed to any items of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.

Catherine Whitehead
Proper Officer
4 May 2023

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members:

Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)	Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi	Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Paul Clark	Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Rupert Frost	Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Mark Hughes	Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley	Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Ken Pritchard	Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms	Councillor Danielle Stone

Information about this Agenda

Apologies for Absence
Apologies for absence and the appointment of substitute Members should be notified to democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk prior to the start of the meeting.

Declarations of Interest
Members are asked to declare interests at item 2 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item

Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates
Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare that fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

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If you have any queries about this agenda please contact Tracy Tiff / Richard Woods, Democratic Services via the following:

Tel: 01327 322043
Email: democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk

Or by writing to:

West Northamptonshire Council
One Angel Square
Angel Street
Northampton
NN1 1ED

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West
Northamptonshire
Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Jeffrey Room at The Guildhall, St Giles Square, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Monday 6 March 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:
Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi
Councillor Paul Clark
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Rupert Frost
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Danielle Stone

Also Present:
Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Leader of the Council)

Apologies for Absence:
Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Mark Hughes
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms

Officers:
Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - People Services & Deputy Chief Executive
Rebecca Peck, Assistant Chief Executive
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
Matthew Prisk, Head of Transformation Delivery
Julie Curtis, Assistant Director - Place Development
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Richard Woods, Democratic Services Officer

46.   **Declarations of Interest**

      There were no declarations of interest.

47.   **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

48.   **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and all Officers for their attendance to present their respective items.

49.   **Transformation Projects and Wicked Issues**

The Committee considered a presentation from the Leader of the Council which provided an overview of ongoing and upcoming Transformation Projects and 'Wicked Issues' identified by Cabinet.

In introducing the presentation, the Leader of the Council advised that the key Wicked Issues identified by Cabinet were children's placements, adult social care, homelessness and single vulnerable adults, school transport, developing a new way of working, and 'front door' issues such as customer contact. The identification of these subjects had led to the development of new projects for the Council's transformation programme, along with enhancements to existing transformation projects which had been built into the 2023-24 budget savings.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding children's placements, the Leader of the Council explained that the Council had encountered difficulty with the ongoing national challenges of demand and a shortage of suitable available placements for children who require them, however the Council was seeking to develop its offer and pursue opportunities to work together with partner agencies to reshape our local market, become a 'foster friendly Council' thereby improving outcomes whilst reducing costs.

In explaining the current position on homelessness, the Leader of the Council advised that West Northamptonshire had a Higher percentage of single homeless households compared to the national average, which also had links to poor mental health and a loss of government subsidies due to a lack of qualifying support accommodation, which were issues the Council was working to fix through the acquisition of temporary accommodation and transformation within the housing service, which would be achieved through the adoption of a new single system, the development of a single 'West' way of working to enable a strong culture, and the development of a programme of both demand and supply improvements, enabled by system rationalisation and adoption of best practice.

In terms of 'front door' issues such as customer journey, the Leader of the Council explained that due to the nature of bringing together four Councils, West Northamptonshire Council had inherited a number of different systems, pathways and experiences for people accessing our services, with siloed services leading to repeat contact as we addressed one issue at a time, which in turn had led to an increase in demand. The Leader advised that, in order to tackle these issues, the Council had

begun the process of implementing telephony modernisation, a new single Customer Relationships Manager (CRM), process redesign and locality hubs. This, in turn, was intended to deliver financial efficiencies by moving customer contact from expensive back office settings to the customer contact centre.

The Leader also outlined the current position on school transport, which was that the Council had seen significant pressures arising from increased costs and demand, with a total spend on contracts for school transport in excess of £25m across Northamptonshire as a whole. In order to make any changes to existing school transport policies, a full consultation would be required to be undertaken with parents and stakeholders ahead of the beginning of the academic year. In order to simplify the school transport system, the Leader advised that the Council had procured a new system which was due to go live in November 2023 and would pursue other opportunities for simplification such as check ins, route optimisation, and the development of a new West Northamptonshire School Transport Policy.

The final wicked issue centred around operating costs and utilities, which had also seen a significant increase due to the rising cost of energy, however the Leader explained that the Council would look to move towards greater energy efficiency, which was being achieved through the use of renewable energy sources and the drive towards net zero, LED lighting, more modern heating and cooling systems, and the office optimisation project which sought to make better and more efficient use of the Council's buildings.

In introducing the Transformation Update, the Head of Transformation provided an overview of the Council's current operating model and explained that Transformation projects and activities in the previous two years have delivered £12.5m of transformation-related savings In the first two years there were also a number of projects which were paramount to building successful teams but would not necessarily deliver immediate financial savings, for example the Pay and Grading project the development of the People Strategy, which were primarily aimed at creating a level playing field for all staff who had transferred to West Northamptonshire Council under TUPE from previous sovereign council terms and conditions, and ensuring that WNC was marketed as an attractive and competitive employer in the local jobs market.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the number of ongoing disaggregation projects, the Head of Transformation advised that there were currently 23 live disaggregation activities requiring at least some level of project management.

Resolved

(1) That the update on Transformation Projects and Wicked Issues identified by Cabinet be noted.

(2) The Committee receives further details on Transformation Projects and Wicked issues at its September 2023 meeting.

50.   **Local Area Partnership Funding**

The Committee received a presentation from the Executive Director – People Services which sought to provide Members with an overview of how Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) were funded, formed, and operated.

In introducing the report, the Executive Director – People Services set out that Local Area Partnerships were largely born out of the Health and Care Act 2022, which provided a new legislative framework for greater collaboration between the NHS, local government, and other partners. Local Area Partnerships themselves are based on community areas collaborating across organisational barriers to engage and coproduce services with local people. Ways of achieving this involved the use of local area profiles to provide insight for local priorities, and the development of local area plans. However, the Health and Care Act 2022 did not create additional funding for LAPs, therefore the operation of LAPs was reliant on innovation, existing funding streams and attracting funding from elsewhere.

The Executive Director – People Services explained that the objectives of Local Area Partnerships were to promote partnership working at a community level to reduce inequalities and improve public health and wellbeing outcomes for local residents. By working collaboratively together, heath services integrated at a local level had the potential to reduce duplication and drive efficiencies. Local Area Partnerships also make full use intelligence led data and insight information for priority setting and development of Delivery Plans and have the potential to highlight specific issues and attract funding.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the implementation timescale for all Local Area Partnerships to cover West Northamptonshire as a whole, the Executive Director – People Services advised that it was intended to have all nine LAPs covering West Northamptonshire mobilised by the end of March 2023, so that each LAP could then commence its work on holding inaugural meetings and beginning to identify local priorities.

Resolved

(1) That the contents of the presentation be noted.

(2) That the Committee shall receive further details on the funding of LAPs at its September 2023 meeting.

51.   **Quarterly Revenue Monitoring Report**

The Executive Director – Finance presented a report which set out the Quarter 3 Revenue Monitoring report that was considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 13 January 2023.

In introducing the report, the Executive Director – Finance advised that as at the end of Q3 2022-23, an overspend of £3.9m was currently forecast after use of £10.1m of budget contingencies, which were set aside in the budget for risks that have

subsequently crystalised in the current financial year. This represents an adverse movement of £0.2m from the Quarter 2 position reported to Cabinet in December 2022.

However, as the Council had since set its budget for 2023-24 at the meeting of Full Council in February 2023, the position at the end of Q3 was now outdated and that as at the end of period 10, the forecast outturn position was now an overspend of £2.9m, which represented an improvement of approximately £1m in the current position.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the current financial pressures faced by the Council, the Executive Director – Finance advised that further pressures of approximately £800k had been seen in Children's Services since the end of Period 10, which had been offset in part by underspends across other services, however the final position for the end of period 11 was not yet known.

Resolved

(1) That the contents of the report be noted.

52. **Quarterly Medium Term Financial Plan Update**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Executive Director – Finance on the Medium Term Financial Plan, following the setting of the budget for 2023-24 at Full Council in February 2023.

The Executive Director – Finance explained that, although the final budget for 2023-24 showed a balanced position, there was considerable uncertainty in the medium term due to current economic uncertainty and inflationary forecasts, establishing post-pandemic levels of demand and changes in consumer behaviours over future years, confirmation of the implementation of Business Rates reform, the resetting of the business rates baseline and the fair funding review, and the future likelihood of one off Council Tax benefit surpluses which the Council benefitted from in 2023-24.

In response to questions from the Committee regarding the budget outlook for future years, the Executive Director – Finance explained that as part of the final settlement announcement ,the government had confirmed that the business rates baseline reset will not be implemented until 2025-26 at the earliest. Therefore, the Medium Term Financial Plan had since been updated to reflect this change in funding assumption, which materially improved the 2024-25 budget position.

Resolved

(1) That the verbal update on the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

53. **Review of Committee Work Programme**

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 15 May 2023 at 6pm and would be held in the Council Chamber at The Forum, Towcester.

Members of the Committee also requested that further updates on major contracts, capital contracts, and the progress of the Asset Management Strategy be included on the Committee Work Programme for the 2023-24 municipal year.

Resolved

(1) That the Committee Work Programme be updated and noted.

(2) That Major Contracts and Capital Contracts be referred to the O&S Coordinating Group as a potential cross scrutiny Committee review.

(3) That Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) be referred to the O&S Coordinating Group as a potential cross scrutiny Committee review.

54. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.04 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____

West Northamptonshire Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Modernising Systems Spotlight Review

Draft version 5 – 27 April 2023

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Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present this report which details the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group from its Spotlight Review into Modernising Systems.

The Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, comprising myself, as Chair of the Task and Finish Group, together with all Councillors of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was set up.

The purpose of this Scrutiny review was to provide scrutiny input into modernising systems. The key lines of enquiry were:

- To identify what good systems look like before any potential investments can be made.
- To consider both the capital and revenue expenditure for modernising systems
- To examine how transformation from services is joined up.
- To understand how the financial consequence for not modernising systems.
- To recognise the benefits associated with the impact of modernising systems - for example, freeing up staff time and there no longer being the need to chase up data if automated.

The Review was a focussed piece of work that linked to the Council's corporate priorities and examined a range of information over just three meetings. The Review took place between September 2022 and March 2023. It was a very interesting and informative Review; with clear evidence received that led to our conclusions and recommendations.

I thank the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services and Officers for providing information to inform this Review.

Councillor Danielle Stone

Chair, Task and Finish Group – Modernising Systems

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -

- Councillors Ian McCord, Andrew Grant, Sally Beardsworth, Paul Clark, Maggie Clubley, Rupert Frost, Keith Holland-Delamere, Mark Hughes, David James, Koullla Jolley, Colin Morgan, Ken Pritchard, Mohammed Aziz Rahman and Richard Solesbury-Timms who sat with me on this Review

- Councillor Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services, Sarah Reed, Executive Director – Corporate and Chris Wales, Chief Information Officer for providing data and materials to inform this Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1   Purpose

The purpose of the Spotlight Review was to provide scrutiny input into modernising systems.

The key lines of enquiry were:

- To identify what good systems look like before any potential investments can be made.
- To consider both the capital and revenue expenditure required for modernising systems.
- To examine how transformation from services is joined up.
- To understand the financial consequences of not modernising systems.
- To recognise the benefits realised by modernising systems - for example, freeing up staff time and there no longer being the need to chase up data if automated.

2   Context and Background

2.1   Following approval of its work programme, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned the Task and Finish Group to undertake a spotlight review – Modernising Systems. A Review commenced in September 2022 and concluded early in March 2023.

2.2   A Task and Finish Group was established comprising the whole Committee with Councillor Stone as the Chair.

Corporate Priorities

2.3   This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, in particular - Robust resource management but also it is acknowledged that systems underpin all of the council's key activities and priorities as an enabling function.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence, the Task and Finish Group established that: -

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

Transformational Change

4.1   Although good progress has been made to date on bringing together the new Council and stabilising service delivery, the Task and Finish Group now feel that that the pace of transformational change should be augmented from a systems integration perspective. It is essential to review the Councils existing core

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processes to maximise the potential of new systems and standardised core processes.

4.1   The Task and Finish Group acknowledges that there is a need to know and set out what good looks like before any potential investments can be made, along with the knowledge of what is both capital and revenue expenditure consequences. This includes consideration at a whole council level, taking into account the wider West Northants operating environment (e.g., work with health and the ICS) as well as what good looks like for all of our core services of People, Place and Corporate.

4.2   Consideration also needs to be given to how the council will enact the change as "one council" since the strategic drive for transformation is no longer fully governed centrally, and there is a need to know how transformation from services are joined up. It is acknowledged that transformation for modernising systems will be expensive and a phased approach will be needed.

4.3   There is a need for WNC to be an intelligent client when purchasing software from suppliers and their maximised implementation. There should be an industry standard software and internal business intelligence within the service area so that WNC becomes the intelligent customer. There is a need to recognise new development and there is a central architecture with the ability to add on as required.

4.4   The Task and Finish Group suggests there is a need to understand that processes should be mapped and this process map can be used to guide our engagement with any potential suppliers and optimise these processes.

4.5   The Task and Finish Group recognises that the Transformation Board oversees the key projects, and each directorate provides details of their top key projects to that board and each directorate has its own transformation programmes. It was felt that communication could, however, be improved so that there is more awareness of the progress with the key projects, in order for details to be made more accessible. There is a need for a standardised approach for staff using the systems, with Council wide design principles, in order to ensure a good user expertise.   This would eliminate duplication. There should be for collaborative working across all directorates with an organisational overview of Transformation.   A Member Steering Group could be set up with the key purpose of communicating transformation progress to Members and officers.

4.6   The Task and Finish Group is concerned that there is no central oversight Team but acknowledges that the Programme Management Office provides intelligence to the service areas. There is a need for all partners to come together, including the Children's Trust when investigating new systems, to promote a holistic view

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leading to a better shared intelligence approach to enable the Council to make smarter decisions and support wider partnership working.

4.7   The Task and Finish Group supports the work that is undertaken by the Business Intelligence Team but felt there is the need for a more insight and an intelligence-based approach across the council, with strong data management, to enable the Council to develop systems to support the needs of residents and ensure better outcomes.

4.8   An innovation manager has joined ICT and will be looking externally for ideas of best practice. The Task and Finish Group welcomes this role and the proposal to work more with anchor organisations.

4.9   The Task and Finish Group highlights the need for Local Authorities to be able to generate their own income streams, and therefore WNC should have a business plan in respect of upskilling the workforce and it suggests whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee, moving forwards. This is the point that the Task and Finish Group would like the service area to aim to achieve.

4.10   Investment is a top priority, together with a developed standards framework. The Task and Finish Group agrees that it should be aimed that spend on ICT should be best in class. Better systems will save time and increase efficiency. Any income generated or saved should be reinvested in ICT.

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) - ICT systems

4.12   It is acknowledged that information regarding revenue and capital expenditure needs to be provided, in particular around expenditure on modernising systems. There is a need for more investment into ICT and it should be a higher priority.

4.13   The Task and Finish Group recognises the need for decent infrastructure to be in place with the correct digital functionality.

4.14   It is acknowledged that many systems had not yet been aggregated and there is a roadmap of changes being developed and this is why the Council is operating so many systems, with the four former predecessor Councils having operated duplicate services.

Architecture of System and Information Security and Organisational Risks

4.15   The Task and Finish Group expresses its concerns regarding the delayed implementation of the new telephony system and the timeframe and pace of this project. For future projects, there is a need for a central architectural team to partner with the detailed knowledge within the service areas acknowledging it is a finite resource, and an intelligence client service will be built that can advise on suppliers for software. The Task and Finish Group is keen to grow internal

expertise, bringing in apprenticeships, train, graduate programmes for example which is part of efficiency and sustainability.

4.16   The need for further key technical skills are being realised, including systems architecture, user experience and technical business analysis. The Task and Finish Group acknowledges that work is underway to address the gap in these technical skills to create an appropriate structure to oversee the aggregation and modernisation of the Council's systems. It is realised that it can be a timely approach to onboard new recruits into West Northants council.

4.17   It is felt that there is a need for an in-house approach of growing internal expertise to be adopted, bringing in for example: apprenticeships, training, and graduate programmes, which is part of efficiency and sustainability. The Task and Finish Group agreed that there is a need for Local Authorities to be able to generate their own income streams, therefore West Northamptonshire Council should have a business plan in respect of upskilling the workforce and whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee.

4.18   There is a need for a more insight and an intelligence-based approach to enable the Council to develop systems to support the needs of residents and ensure better outcomes. There is a need to reduce the equalities gap and really understand the user experience

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations:

The Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group recommends that:

5.1.1   The Council needs to increase its spend on ICT and give consideration to the appropriate percentage to be put into the budget annually; the cost of which would be found from the service areas.

5.1.2   The pace of transformational change in respect of digital and core systems is increased and existing processes are reviewed to maximise the potential of new systems. Cabinet is asked to review the timeline for development with a view to increasing the pace of change.

5.1.3   A Member Steering Group is set up with the key purpose of communicating transformation progress to both Members and Officers in order for details to be made more accessible.

5.1.4   A business plan in respect of skilling the workforce is devised, and consideration is given to whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee, in the medium to longer term, as part of a monetising strategy. .

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5.1.5 The work to build resilience within the DTI service, particularly around the recent recommendations from the Audit Committee are prioritised and accelerated.

5.1.6 Cabinet is advised that more clarity is needed regarding the term architecture and timeframes.

5.1.7 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' from when Cabinet responds to the recommendations, and then as part of the Committee's agreed monitoring schedule.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1.3 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' from when Cabinet responds to the recommendations, and then as part of the Committee's agreed monitoring schedule.

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West Northamptonshire Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group

Draft version 4 28th March 2023

1   Purposes and Rationale

1.1   The purpose of this Scrutiny Spotlight Review (the Review) was to provide scrutiny input into modernising systems.

The key lines of enquiry

- To identify what good systems look like before any potential investments can be made.
- To consider both the capital and revenue expenditure required for modernising systems.
- To examine how transformation from services is joined up.
- To understand the financial consequences of not modernising systems.
- To recognise the benefits realised by modernising systems – for example, freeing up staff time and there no longer being the need to chase up data if automated.

2   Context and Background

2.1   Following approval of its work programme, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned the Task and Finish Group to undertake the Review – Modernising Systems. A review commenced in September 2022 and concluded early in March 2023 over a series of three meetings.

2.2   A Task and Finish Group was established comprising the whole Committee with Councillor Stone as the Chair.

Corporate Priorities

2.3   This Review underpins all the Council's corporate priorities, in particular, it directly links to *Robust Resource Management*.

2.4   The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

Background data and evidence gathering –   To apprise the Task and Finish Group of the elements of systems:

- ➢ System architecture
- ➢ Aggregation of systems from the four predecessor Councils: Daventry District Council, Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council and South Northants Council
- ➢ *Future Ways of Working* model
- ➢ Cyber security monitoring systems
- ➢ Resilience of the DTI services
- ➢ Transformational change

3   Methodology and Evidence Collection

3.1   For this Review, evidence was collected from the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services and senior Officers of the Council from the Corporate Services directorate, which provide and oversee the key systems that underpin the council, led by DTI (Digital, Technology and Innovation division).

3.1.1   Evidence

Senior Officers of the Council provided a wealth of information to inform the evidence base of this spotlight Review.

Salient points:

'Complexity of the Landscape' - The inherited systems that underpin West Northants Council reflect different operating models. District and Borough council systems included joint arrangements with councils outside of West Northants, different platforms for service fulfilment and different levels of integration that previously connected the council's systems. In addition, West Northants Council is the lead provider of ICT and digital services to North Northamptonshire Council, Northamptonshire Children's Trust and to Northampton Partnership Homes and Northampton Leisure Trust.

'Systems Scope' - There has been a full audit of all systems that are utilised by West Northants Council and service and directorate roadmaps are being developed. In addition to this, the Council continues to be part of shared services arrangements with other councils – specifically with North Northants Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Milton Keynes council. This is governed by the Lead Authority Board. This arrangement includes payroll systems, Finance and HR systems (including ERP Gold) and other ancillary systems such as income management.

Disaggregation of services - As part of the setting up of both West and North Northamptonshire Councils there was an agreed disaggregation timetable for

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former county council services that were hosted by either of the two new unitaries from Vesting Day. Each splitting service can have significant impact on underpinning systems, most notably a proposed disaggregation of DTI services themselves. Although this nominally allows each council to then shape their own services, it adds considerable cost, complexity, pressure and risk to the service.

West Northamptonshire Council's ICT systems - Across the Council there continue to be a wide range of systems and IT smaller system solutions in place. The priority roadmaps for systems transformation are under way and as contracts have come towards their end, priority integrations have taken place. Currently the Council is operating a total of approximately 800 systems, which includes various versions of systems inherited from the Council's predecessors.

Digital, Technological and Innovation (DTI) directorate Skills Analysis and the "Gartner" Model. After DTI services were aggregated into West Northants, work was done to review the skills and capability of the inherited functions. The 'Gartner' Model is an ICT industry measurement standard, reviewing the capability and the functions that a technology service will be able to perform in totality.

The Council's performance against this model was assessed by the Council's Head of Architecture, with each area of the Council's DTI service assessed in its capability and processes, and the quality of activities being undertaken and ranked against the model. This identified the need for further key technical skills, including systems architecture, user experience, cyber security and technical business analysis. Some of this is currently being addressed but more is required to support the changes required from aggregation of systems and driving greater productivity.

This also identified the importance of ensuring that the council has both a good overview of all systems and their opportunities for aggregation and reduction of duplication (**Architecture of Systems)**.

It also identified that there was always the need to ensure that sufficient effort and resources were available to ensure good Information Security across the organisation and its support for partners and shared systems.

Capital and revenue expenditure - There is a difference between capital expenditure and revenue expenditure in the context of Digital, Technological and Innovation (DTI); for example, engaging in transformation activity could be capitalised when the Council is investing in new processes, new systems, and new skills. In the long term the revenue expenditure element will increase, and the capital expenditure element will decrease as the Council shifts more emphasis towards "software-as-a-service" (SaaS) systems and services and less toward physical purchased infrastructure. There is also consideration for cloud-based services procurement and the issue of revenue requirements to pay for ongoing licensing.

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The Council's Digital, Technological and Innovation Strategy - The aim is to establish West Northamptonshire Council as a leader among other Local Authorities in innovation; to harness imaginative ideas and new developments to deliver transformed public services; with a refined and redesigned offer to meet individual needs; and improve the speed and efficiency of delivery. This will involve collaborating and co-designing services, harnessing both internal expertise and partnering with communities, experts, volunteers, academics, and businesses to better use technology to improve outcomes.

"The West Way of Working" – This is a programme with elements of HR, DTI and Property. As part of the council's approach to support all employees (Fieldworker, Fixed, Part Flexible and Flexible) and the resetting of our offices (Office Optimisation Strategy),   the Council has prioritised a hardware refresh to enable staff to work flexibly from any of the Council's office buildings and locations and from home. DTI has also focussed on resetting offices, including closing Lodge Road and migrating staff to the Abbey Centre and to other locality centres, focussing on the migration of staff, hardware and systems and the support to staff (commencing with Lodge Road) .One of the Council's key priorities from a DTI perspective is to merge the four existing networks from the legacy Councils into a single West Northamptonshire network. A capital bid is being prepared, alongside a shorter-term list of mitigations.

The Council has invested in architecture design and support to cover both people and processes, cyber security, supporting the move away from Citrix and investment in new laptops, a replacement IT help desk system, digital and televised meetings and support to the coroner's office, fibre between office locations at the Guildhall and the office at One Angel Square, along with the disconnecting of the data centre which supported the former shared service between Cherwell District Council and the legacy South Northamptonshire Council.

Current priorities for forthcoming DTI deliverables - A new system is being scoped for Northamptonshire Children's Trust, together with new systems for other services: registrars, revenues and benefits, legal and flexi routes.

Longer-term transformation roadmap for DTI - Future deliverables include rationalisation priorities, identifying efficiencies, for example automating back office processes and integrating existing systems, leading to a three year technology roadmap for each directorate and eventual target state planning, which envisions a 5-10 year horizon plan for an efficient, cost-optimised WNC technology estate.

The officer internal **Transformation Board** oversees the key projects, and each directorate provides details of their most significant projects and programmes to that Board. Each directorate also has its own transformation programmes and projects. There is a Digital, Technology and Innovation Strategy Board, that reports

into the overarching Transformation Board that guides the overarching transformation of DTI and enabling systems.

The Business Intelligence Team works across the Authority, produces quarterly performance reports and looks at the overarching business need together with local need. Local priorities can then be looked at from this overarching work. Strong foundations are part of the programme and helping ensure better outcomes are delivered across the Council.

Cyber Security monitoring systems - There is ongoing work around cyber security and progress was reviewed by a recent Internal Audit report. The new post of Head of Cyber Security has recently been recruited to and work continues reviewing internal and external control measures in response to the changing environment. There have been additional investments brought in to ensure the council is robust in its approach to managing current risks.

Resilience of the DTI Service - In bringing together the four legacy Councils, the inheritance of four sets of systems and ways of working had added additional complexity in light of the need to align and integrate core offices and systems. There is a lot of work being undertaken and progress was also recently reviewed by Internal Audit.

3.2 **Core Questions**

3.2.1 The Task and Finish Group devised a series of core questions that it put to the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services (Copy at Appendix A) at its meeting on 2 March 2023.

3.2.2 **Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services**

The Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services attended the meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 2 March 2023 and provided responses to the core questions. Core questions as at Appendix A.

Key points of evidence:

- There is a need to update current IT systems.
- Currently, a hardware refresh is being undertaken, which will be carried out every four years. It was noted that generally when purchasing new hardware, there are newer options available to purchase as the speed of change is very high
- It is good practice for an organisation to obtain data about its customers.
- The spend on IT has reduced to £7.6 million, due to several factors such as duplication of systems. There were several historic income generation

targets, which were seen to be unrealistic, and these targets have been removed.

- Systems that can be integrated in line with the ongoing transformation of the Council to create smarter and more collaborative ways of working that users can access anywhere including: MS365 and the telephony system. The DTI service area is responsible for ensuring software systems are regularly updated and work is not duplicated.

- All desired IT Systems are not as yet in place as there are a number of legacy systems and associated issues to be worked through, such as storage and compatibility, hardware refresh and disaster recovery.

- Cloud First is an important Strategy for the Council moving forward; it is imperative to put this model in place and then invest. It is key that it is implemented correctly. The journey to Cloud First has not as yet been fully reviewed. Expertise is difficult to find but it is key that Cloud experts are employed, along with Cyber expertise. The Head of Cyber Security is now in post.

- The Council will be moving away from the Citrix system, but it will not be a hurried process. It is important that it is a thorough and proper process. The data for Children's Services is now on Cloud First.

- No one Local Authority is known for its best practice IT. Expertise is available in establishments such as the University of Northampton.

- It is not best practice for departments to have individual IT models. At West Northants Council it is established that IT services is the central command, which will be good practice going forward. It is the responsibility of IT services to manage the architecture of IT systems.

- Our DTI services comprise of many long serving, experienced staff but there is also the need for new and different skills within the service area. The Service area will undertake a transformational review. There is a need to ensure the service area has the right skill set.

- Additional resources and capacity are now in place for cyber security and cyber security is an important issue and all need to be conscious of this. A briefing on cyber security for all Councillors is scheduled. Similar briefings will be scheduled for all staff.

- It was acknowledged that the ensuring resilience of system and their integrity was a key priority as it is with every other council and business and that it was important to be fully aware of external threats and learning from other businesses and councils.

- The Authority has statutory data retention periods and must have a Data Retention Policy in place. When legacy data is migrated, it can be cleansed. Legacy data will only be stored if it is relevant, useful and legal.

- An effective overarching architecture road map for IT systems will be established this year and look at the next five years. Work has been done to

look at the pathways for each area of business and their integration. The fully resourced plan is not yet done and the modelling of costing per stage needs to be done but it is likely that this will vary, year to year.

- Officers in IT services are looking actively at systems to ascertain how they can prevent duplication, such as online and audio platforms that are being used, but the experience of the end user is also taken into consideration.
- A Working Group to oversee and provide input into the implementation of an effective architecture roadmap for IT systems would be useful.

4	Conclusions and Key Findings

After all of the evidence was collated, the following conclusions were drawn:

Transformational Change

4.1 Although good progress has been made to date on bringing together the new Council and stabilising service delivery, the Task and Finish Group now feel that that the pace of transformational change should be augmented from a systems integration perspective. It is essential to review the Councils existing core processes to maximise the potential of new systems and standardised core processes.

4.11 The Task and Finish Group acknowledges that there is a need to know and set out what good looks like before any potential investments can be made, along with the knowledge of what is both capital and revenue expenditure consequences. This includes consideration at a whole council level, taking into account the wider West Northants operating environment (e.g., work with health and the ICS) as well as what good looks like for all of our core services of People, Place and Corporate.

4.12 Consideration also needs to be given to how the council will enact the change as "one council" since the strategic drive for transformation is no longer fully governed centrally, and there is a need to know how transformation from services are joined up. It is acknowledged that transformation for modernising systems will be expensive and a phased approach will be needed.

4.13 There is a need for WNC to be an intelligent client when purchasing software from suppliers and their maximised implementation. There should be an industry standard software and internal business intelligence within the service area so that WNC becomes the intelligent customer. There is a need to recognise new development and there is a central architecture with the ability to add on as required.

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4.14 The Task and Finish Group suggests there is a need to understand that processes should be mapped and this process map can be used to guide our engagement with any potential suppliers and optimise these processes.

4.15 The Task and Finish Group recognises that the Transformation Board oversees the key projects, and each directorate provides details of their top key projects to that board and each directorate has its own transformation programmes. It was felt that communication could, however, be improved so that there is more awareness of the progress with the key projects, in order for details to be made more accessible. There is a need for a standardised approach for staff using the systems, with Council wide design principles, in order to ensure a good user expertise.   This would eliminate duplication. There should be for collaborative working across all directorates with an organisational overview of Transformation.   A Member Steering Group could be set up with the key purpose of communicating transformation progress to Members and officers.

4.16 The Task and Finish Group is concerned that there is no central oversight Team but acknowledges that the Programme Management Office provides intelligence to the service areas. There is a need for all partners to come together, including the Children's Trust when investigating new systems, to promote a holistic view leading to a better shared intelligence approach to enable the Council to make smarter decisions and support wider partnership working.

4.17 The Task and Finish Group supports the work that is undertaken by the Business Intelligence Team but felt there is the need for a more insight and an intelligence-based approach across the council, with strong data management, to enable the Council to develop systems to support the needs of residents and ensure better outcomes.

4.18 An innovation manager has joined ICT and will be looking externally for ideas of best practice. The Task and Finish Group welcomes this role and the proposal to work more with anchor organisations.

4.19 The Task and Finish Group highlights the need for Local Authorities to be able to generate their own income streams, and therefore WNC should have a business plan in respect of upskilling the workforce and it suggests whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee, moving forwards. This is the point that the Task and Finish Group would like the service area to aim to achieve.

4.20 Investment is a top priority, together with a developed standards framework. The Task and Finish Group agrees that it should be aimed that spend on ICT should be best in class. Better systems will save time and increase efficiency. Any income generated or saved should be reinvested in ICT.

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West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) - ICT systems

4.12   It is acknowledged that information regarding revenue and capital expenditure needs to be provided, in particular around expenditure on modernising systems. There is a need for more investment into ICT and it should be a higher priority.

4.13   The Task and Finish Group recognises the need for decent infrastructure to be in place with the correct digital functionality.

4.14   It is acknowledged that many systems had not yet been aggregated and there is a roadmap of changes being developed and this is why the Council is operating so many systems, with the four former predecessor Councils having operated duplicate services.

Architecture of System and Information Security and Organisational Risks

4.15   The Task and Finish Group expresses its concerns regarding the delayed implementation of the new telephony system and the timeframe and pace of this project. For future projects, there is a need for a central architectural team to partner with the detailed knowledge within the service areas acknowledging it is a finite resource, and an intelligence client service will be built that can advise on suppliers for software. The Task and Finish Group is keen to grow internal expertise, bringing in apprenticeships, train, graduate programmes for example which is part of efficiency and sustainability.

4.16   The need for further key technical skills are being realised, including systems architecture, user experience and technical business analysis. The Task and Finish Group acknowledges that work is underway to address the gap in these technical skills to create an appropriate structure to oversee the aggregation and modernisation of the Council's systems. It is realised that it can be a timely approach to onboard new recruits into West Northants council.

4.17   It is felt that there is a need for an in-house approach of growing internal expertise to be adopted, bringing in for example: apprenticeships, training, and graduate programmes, which is part of efficiency and sustainability. The Task and Finish Group agreed that there is a need for Local Authorities to be able to generate their own income streams, therefore West Northamptonshire Council should have a business plan in respect of upskilling the workforce and whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee.

4.18   There is a need for a more insight and an intelligence-based approach to enable the Council to develop systems to support the needs of residents and ensure better outcomes. There is a need to reduce the equalities gap and really understand the user experience

5	Recommendations

5.1   The Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group recommends that:

5 .1.1 The Council needs to increase its spend on ICT and give consideration to the appropriate percentage to be put into the budget annually; the cost of which would be found from the service areas.

5.1.2 The pace of transformational change in respect of digital and core systems is increased and existing processes are reviewed to maximise the potential of new systems. Cabinet is asked to review the timeline for development with a view to increasing the pace of change.

5.1.3 A Member Steering Group is set up with the key purpose of communicating transformation progress to both Members and Officers in order for details to be made more accessible.

5.1.4   A business plan in respect of skilling the workforce is devised, and consideration is given to whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee, in the medium to longer term, as part of a monetising strategy. .

5.1.5 The work to build resilience within the DTI service, particularly around the recent recommendations from the Audit Committee are prioritised and accelerated.

5.1.6   Cabinet is advised that more clarity is needed regarding the term architecture and timeframes.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1.7 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' from when Cabinet responds to the recommendations, and then as part of the Committee's agreed monitoring schedule.

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APPENDICES

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Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group

Core Questions to the Portfolio Holder for HR and Corporate Services

The purpose of this Scrutiny Spotlight Review is to provide scrutiny input into modernising the Council's systems.

Core Questions

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Task and Finish Group:

1. When do you anticipate that we will get an effective IT system in place that is satisfactory and user-friendly for officers and residents and what are the cost implications? What are the council's priorities for the next year ahead?

2. How can systems be integrated in line with the ongoing transformation of the council to create smarter and more collaborative ways of working that users can access anywhere? Who is responsible for ensuring software systems are regularly updated and work is not duplicated?

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3. In terms of IT systems, how up to date are we with our systems with hardware capability, storage, speed, security, and compatibility? Do you believe the systems in place are good enough to become a high performing council?

4. Do we anticipate migrating to a cloud model or SAAS (Software as a Service) based provider to secure data and moving from capital to a revenue expenditure model? What would the timescale be for this and are officers trained in this area?

5. What are other authorities doing with best practice IT and how are they managing the revenue for this? Will we be able to have a single user service with joined up services? For example, if a resident were to change their address this information is updated on multiple systems rather than informing each service area?

6. Why has the budget for IT been reduced this year? Would you have any recommendations about where the council needs to direct future investment and improve productivity? Should we be considering the pay scale and grading for IT staff in order to retain expertise and specialist knowledge? What are the priorities?

7. How resilient and secure do you think the IT systems are? What does our IT architecture look like and what are we doing from a security perspective to protect from any potential cyber-attack? Do we have the intelligence and skills in-house in our IT department and what training measures will be in place to ensure we can thrive?

8. With the former legacy Councils how are data sources being used and how is legacy data being securely stored and used analytically to show trends? When are we going to have a data driven organisation using tools with data warehousing with sufficient metrics for analytics?

West Northamptonshire Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2022/2023

Draft version 1

A Message from Councillor Ian McCord, Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2022-2023

This is the second Annual Report of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it details some of the work of the Committee during 2022-2023 and lists suggestions for the Committee to investigate during 2023/2024.

Overview and Scrutiny is a vital part of local democracy and good governance. It is really important that the work of scrutiny adds value and improvement. During 2022/2023, the committee acted as a critical friend to the development and implementation of key council policies and provided robust challenge. The work that the Committee undertook on budget scrutiny really showed that. I attended the meeting of Cabinet that was held in February 2023 and highlighted the work undertaken by the Committee and the recommendations put forward.

Scrutiny has an important role in monitoring how the Council uses its finances, and the Committee undertook budget monitoring at various stages during the year.

The Committee has completed a vast amount of work through formal meetings and Task and Finish groups. Through the scrutiny work, the Committee has made recommendations to both Cabinet and individual Portfolio Holders.

This report is not a complete commentary of everything the Committee has achieved but is a summary of some key highlights of the work undertaken in 2022-2023.

The role of scrutiny cannot be under estimated and forms part of the good governance of the Council, therefore it's of vital importance to encourage members who sit, or aspire to sit, on the Committee to please attend meetings of the Committee and contribute to this vital work.

The work of the Committee has been varied, and in particular I would like to thank my colleagues who sat with me on Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2022/2023. I am also indebted to all at Democratic Services who work to make sense of our deliberations, in particular Tracy Tiff and Richard Woods who attend all of our meetings. I also wish to thank Martin Henry and all in his directorate who support our important work.

Councillor Ian McCord
Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose of Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny function at West Northamptonshire Council helps to improve the quality of services provided to local residents and supports and challenges the work of the Council's Cabinet.

Overview and Scrutiny carries out a number of roles, including:

(a) monitoring the decisions of the Cabinet
(b) advising the Council on forthcoming decisions
(c) contributing to the development and review of Council policy
(d) reviewing decisions that have been taken by the Cabinet but not yet implemented that are 'called in' for further consideration

At West Northamptonshire Council these roles are currently carried out by three Overview and Scrutiny committees: Place, People and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These Committees are made up of Councillors from different political groups, known as non-Executives, and who are not part of the Cabinet.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny is a national organisation that promotes effective governance in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny states that good scrutiny involves four fundamental principles:

(a) it provides constructive 'critical friend' challenge
(b) it amplifies the voice and concerns of the public
(c) it is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
(d) it drives improvement in public services

Remit of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising issues and services in the following areas:

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership

The membership of the Corporate O&S Committee was made up of 17 non-Executive Members during 2023/2024:

Councillor Ian McCord (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice Chair)

Councillors:

Jamal Alwahabi
Aziz Rahman (Aziz)
Sally Beardsworth
Paul Clarke
Maggie Clubley
Rupert Frost

Keith Holland Delamere
Mark Hughes
David James
Koulla Jolley
Colin Morgan
Ken Pritchard
Richard Solesbury-Timms
Danielle Stone

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 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The terms of reference of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

➢ Finance and resources
➢ Corporate services
➢ Shared services under the WNC and NNC Shared Services Joint Committee (the WNC Constitution assigns this focus area to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee or equivalent at each authority).
➢ Corporate Strategy and priorities

What has Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee achieved during 2022-2023 and how was this impact made during 2022-2023?

The Committee held seven formal meetings during 2022/23 as well as one informal workshop style meeting in respect of the draft budget for the Council 2023-2024. The Committee set up three Task and Finish Groups during 2021-2022 and these commenced their work in the Municipal year 2022-2023. Some key areas of work by the Committee and the outcomes resulting from this work are detailed below. The Committee's work programme, meeting details and papers can be located on West Northamptonshire Council's website.

What has Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee achieved during 2022 - 2023

The following are examples of the scrutiny work which has been undertaken by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2022/2023:

- Budget monitoring   - Revenue Monitoring Report
- Monitoring - Northamptonshire Children's Trust Budget
- Corporate Plan Performance Report Monitoring
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- The Council's Draft Budget 2023-2024
- West Northamptonshire People Strategy – Key actions
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review letter 2021-2022
- The Council's Pay and Grading Project
- Transformation Projects and 'Wicked Issues'
- Local Area Partnerships (LAPs)
- Three Task and Finish Groups - Treasury Management, Modernising Systems and Expenses Policy

Work commenced during 2022/23 on the Highways Contract - Joint Scrutiny Review with Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is expected to report during 2023/2024

Budget monitoring – revenue monitoring

The Committee scrutinised the quarterly budget monitoring reports providing scrutiny input in particular in relation to the overspend in the Children's Trust. The Committee understood that the Council has no financial control over the Children's Trust Budget and taking account of the potential for such an overspend to further increase and add additional pressure to the Council's Budget for 2022-23, it recommended that Cabinet writes to the Department for Education regarding the Children's Trust model and state that, whilst West Northamptonshire Council will honour its contract regarding funding its agreed proportion of the Children's Trust budget, any subsequent difference be covered by the Department for Education. Cabinet accepted the recommendation, and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services wrote to the Department of Education. It was disappointing that the DfE were unable to accept the recommendation, however it did offer to fund some invest to save projects that may help the Trust, and ultimately the Council.

As part of its monitoring role the Committee monitored the forecast outturn position for the 2022-2023 financial year, any overspend together with budget contingencies previously set aside in the budget for risks that had been realised in the current financial year. This Council along with many other local authorities had seen a significant impact on its finances as a result of external factors beyond its control, including inflationary and cost of living pressures, the ongoing financial aftershocks of the Covid pandemic and the withdrawal of Covid funding by central government, demand-led inflationary pressures on the Children's Trust and Adult Social Care, and a higher than anticipated cost of living pay award for 2022/2023.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Committee considered and monitored the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The key pressures, caused by external factors, that have emerged since the budget for the current year that had been set in February 2022 had resulted in a projected overspend. The Committee realised that such an overspend represented a very small percentage of the total net budget and was therefore within acceptable tolerances. The Committee understood the management action being undertaken to alleviate further pressures being faced.

Corporate Performance Report

The Committee received details of the Council's performance metrics for the current year and set against the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan at regular intervals during the year. Performance is monitored within services and owned by service Directors. Performance data is monitored by both the Executive Programme Board and Executive Leadership Team. At the end of the first year of West Northamptonshire Council's existence, a review had been undertaken on the performance metrics in order to ensure that the reporting to Cabinet was representative of the Council's corporate priorities. Data is fed in from all directorates and teams across the authority. It is then analysed and utilised to monitor performance and identify areas where improvement may be required. The Council also utilises a wide range of nationally published local authority databases tracking a wide range of statistics, which formed the main source of the Council's benchmarking information.

Performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service

The Committee considered and reviewed the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service. On vesting day, West Northamptonshire Council had inherited a complex range of existing service delivery models from the previous sovereign Councils, which led to a full options appraisal and business case being undertaken which ultimately led the service being brought back in-house. This allowed for the implementation of a uniformed operating model in order to deliver improvements to service provision, a streamlined process, and a reduction in costs. Against the backdrop of significant transformation, the service had also been required to deliver the rollout of a host of government grants and initiatives including but not limited to covid grants, business support and cost of living support, the delivery of which had been a significant undertaking for existing resources across the service. A number of transformation projects were planned, including the establishment of a single software system including the migration of data and merging of databases. A business case for this work had been drafted and had been considered by Cabinet in November 2022, with an ambition to commence work on this project following the conclusion of annual billing in April 2023. The Committee supported the transformation plans for the Revenues and Benefits Service and progress made to date.

Pay and Grading Project

The Committee considered and provided scrutiny input into Pay and Grading Project for West Northamptonshire Council and started with the phase of the project that would align those staff on interim terms and conditions, who joined the authority or changed posts after 1 April 2022, onto the new West Northamptonshire Council pay structure. As of January 2023, the Council's staff headcount currently stood at 2,762 and that 43% of the workforce were now on interim WNC terms and conditions, with over 500 jobs now matched to the job family architecture. The Committee will further consider the Pay and Grading Project in the municipal year 2023-2024.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter 2021-2022

The Committee considered and provided comment on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter 2021-2022 prior to its consideration by Cabinet. The Committee was aware that the period covered by the annual letter included some legacy complaints that originated with the predecessor authorities but were adjudicated within the last year, and mainly occurred during the pandemic which in some cases had impacted on the service

delivery and timescales before the complaint was raised with the Ombudsman. The central Complaints and Compliments Team had administered 131 contacts from the LGSCO during the report period, many of which did not require a detailed investigation and in some cases, were closed following initial enquiries demonstrating no evidence of fault by the local authority. There were 34 complaints that required detailed investigation, down from 38 across the sovereign Council's in the previous year 2020-21, only 11 of which were new complaints originating from services provided by West Northamptonshire Council.

Budget Scrutiny

The Committee commenced its budget scrutiny process for 2022-23 with a particular focus on the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Budget. The shared mission between West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council was to create a service capable of radically improving services for children, young people, and families across Northamptonshire. The new model had been set on a clear path towards improvement. The Trust had made a number of key achievements to date. Key cost drivers behind the Children's Trust budget were an increase in children's social care cases in the care system, and increased number of children in care, increased cost and reduced availability of placements, increasing independent fostering agency fees, and workforce pressures. There were other additional pressures aside from the key cost drivers such as the contract negotiation also included the implementation of a staff pay award above the contract sum provision based on the flat rate of increase and additional pressures related to demand growth in children's placements for example.

The Committee then scrutinised the Council's draft 2023/24 budget in detail and provided scrutiny input. Budget Scrutiny was undertaken by the whole Committee in the form of a "Spotlight" Scrutiny Review. The Committee focussed its budget Scrutiny on three key areas:

Fees and Charges
Capital Programme
Care – Robustness of Budgets

The Committee broke into three Groups, each one providing critical challenge to one of the above key areas.

The Committee's recommendations that:

Fees and Charges

Having carried out scrutiny on the Fees and Charges contained within the draft budget and having received a detailed presentation from the Executive Director – Finance which addressed all the elements set out in the terms of reference for the scrutiny work on Fees and Charges members of the Committee were generally supportive of the approach adopted on Fees and Charges.

A Communications Plan is put together for some of the main fees and charges which focusses on the increase in cash terms rather than in percentage terms which can be misleading. It should also highlight that benchmarking information was used to be able to propose an increase in Fees and Charges.

Capital Programme

Cabinet is informed that that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is concerned that adequate budget is available for the Council to be net Zero by 2030 and that there needs to be a costed plan setting out how this will be achieved. Cabinet is informed that in general, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that Cabinet has demonstrated that monitoring, and oversight is in place.

Robustness of Budgets

Care

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny could see that budgets for both Adults and Children's Social Care had increased significantly for next year to reflect current levels of demand for the service and provision for some continued increase in demand over next year. The Committee acknowledged that the budgets have been put together using the best information currently available and therefore are as robust as they could be at the time of setting the budget. However, given it is difficult to foresee the future demand in the need for Children's and Adult's services and how this will affect budgets for both, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers that the budget for both Children's and Adult's Services is an area of continued risk to the Council's budget for 2023/24.

General

The Committee acknowledged that there was approximately £48 million of base budget changes and believes that this budget should be more accurate and more deliverable than previous versions.

The Committee's report was appended to the report on the budget that was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on13 February 2023 and full Council at its meeting on 24 February 2023.

Transformation Projects and 'Wicked Issues'

The Committee provided input into the Council's Transformation Projects and "wicked issues". The key Wicked Issues identified by Cabinet included children's placements, adult social care, homelessness and single vulnerable adults, school transport, developing a new way of working, and 'front door' issues such as customer contact. The identification of these subjects had led to the development of new projects for the Council's transformation programme, along with enhancements to existing transformation projects which had been built into the 2023-24 budget savings.

Transformation projects and activities in the previous two years have delivered £12.5m of transformation-related savings In the first two years there were also a number of projects which were paramount to building successful teams but would not necessarily deliver immediate financial savings, for example the Pay and Grading project and the development of the People Strategy.

Local Area Partnerships (LAP) Funding

The Committee considered and provided input in LAP funding. LAPs were created from the Health and Care Act 2022, which provided a new legislative framework for greater collaboration between

the NHS, local government, and other partners. They are based on community areas collaborating across organisational barriers to engage and co-produce services with local people. Ways of achieving this involve the use of local area profiles to provide insight for local priorities, and the development of local area plans. The Health and Care Act 2022 did not create additional funding for LAPs; therefore, the operation of LAPs is reliant on innovation, existing funding streams and attracting funding from elsewhere. It is intended to have all nine LAPs covering West Northamptonshire mobilised by the end of March 2023, so that each LAP can commence its work on holding inaugural meetings and beginning to identify local priorities.

Task and Finish Groups

During 2021-2022 the Committee set up three Task and Finish Groups that, due to timing reasons, commenced their review work in the Municipal year 2022-2023:

Expenses Policy

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved its Work Programme for 2021/2022 and included a Spotlight Review of the Council's Expenses Policy. The Review could not commence until West Northamptonshire Council had approved and internally published its Expenses Policy. As soon as this was published, a Spotlight Review was undertaken. The objective of the Task and Finish Group was to understand how West Northamptonshire Council's Expenses Policy for employees is structured and operated and to make recommendations as to potential improvements. The review also looked at the procedures in place for Councillors claiming expenses, while acknowledging the policy matters fall under the responsibilities of the full Council. After considering the evidence provided, the Task and Finish Group was satisfied that there were the required guidance, claiming mechanisms and audit checks in place in relation to the Council's Expenses Policy that was introduced in 2022.

The Expenses Task and Finish Group recommended that the Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services is informed that after considering the evidence provided, the Expenses Task and Finish Group is satisfied that there are the required guidance, claiming mechanisms and audit checks in place in relation to the Council's Expenses Policy and the Relocation Policy for employees. The Expenses Task and Finish Group was satisfied that there is the required guidance, claiming mechanisms and audit checks in place regarding travel and subsistence claims for Councillors.

Treasury Management Strategy

The objective of the Task and Finish Group was to scrutinise the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and monitor progress on treasury management in accordance with CIPFA codes of practice.

After all of the evidence was collated the Task and Finish Group drew a number of conclusions. Key conclusions: The Task and Finish Group agreed that it was satisfied that the evidence highlights that the Council is undertaking Treasury Management in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Conduct. The importance of Members gaining a comprehensive understanding of Treasury Management Activities was recognised as was the ned for annual training for Members on Treasury Management. The right approach and Policies are in place in relation to risk management in accordance with the Treasury Management activities, ESGs (environmental, social and governance) classification and sustainable finance.

The Treasury Management Strategy Task and Finish Group recommended that the Cabinet Member for Finance is informed that after considering the evidence provided, the Task and Finish Group is satisfied that the Council is undertaking Treasury Management in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Conduct and the right approach and Policies are in place in relation to risk management in accordance with the Treasury Management activities; and it recommended to the Cabinet Member for Finance that in order to increase awareness of the detail and intricacies of Treasury Management activity, all Members are encouraged to read the Treasury Management Strategy in full and gain a full understanding of its detail in order to maintain this understanding; details of which could be promoted in a weekly edition of the Member bulletin.

Modernising Systems

The purpose of this Scrutiny review was to provide scrutiny input into modernising systems. The key lines of enquiry were:

- To identify what good systems look like before any potential investments can be made.
- To consider both the capital and revenue expenditure for modernising systems
- To examine how transformation from services is joined up.
- To understand how the financial consequence for not modernising systems.
- To recognise the benefits associated with the impact of modernising systems - for example, freeing up staff time and there no longer being the need to chase up data if automated.

The Task and Finish Group arrived at a number of conclusions which were around transformation, West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) - ICT systems and the architecture of System and Information Security and Organisational risks. The Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group recommended that the pace of transformational change in respect of digital and core systems is increased and existing processes are reviewed to maximise the potential of new systems. A Member Steering Group is set up with the key purpose of communicating transformation progress to both Members and Officers in order for details to be made more accessible. A business plan in respect of skilling the workforce is devised, and consideration is given to whether this expertise could be offered out to other organisations for a fee and the work to build resilience within the DTI service, particularly around the recent recommendations from Audit Committee are prioritised and accelerated.

Critical Friend to Cabinet

Cabinet Members and Senior Officers attended various meetings of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provided the detailed reasoning behind the various key issues. These are summarised at earlier sections 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 relationship that exists between Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. They emphasise also the robust challenge offered by scrutiny.

Call in

During the year the Committee received one call-in.   The call-in was in relation to the Cabinet decision of 11 October 2022 - Office Optimisation Stage 1 building adaptations, budget and disposal   was upheld by the Committee.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme 2022/2023

The Committee has addressed key issues as detailed at an earlier section of this Annual Report. The Committee's work programme was put together by the Committee and was regularly report to and monitored by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group, that comprises the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny committees.

Looking ahead

There are a number of key issues contained within the work programme, for example, budget monitoring and budget scrutiny, and these will continue to be key focus areas for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the future. The Work Programme of this Committee will be considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its inaugural meeting of the new Overview and Scrutiny structure that commences from June 2023. Going forwards, the Committee will play a key role in embedding the recommendations arising the recent Centre for Governance and Scrutiny review of the Council's scrutiny function, and the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure that the review has given rise to, in order to make sure that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function continues to develop and grow.

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West Northamptonshire Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/2024

■	**Topic identified and scheduled**
■	**Topic identified but not yet scheduled**
■	**Topic completed**

Title	Proposed purpose	Date of Committee meeting	Cabinet Member and Executive Director	Proposed Task and Finish Group	Comments
Pay and Grading Review	To provide scrutiny input to the Pay and Grading Review	**16 January 2023 Meeting Taken Place** **12 July 2023 (date to be confirmed) - Further scrutiny input into the Pay and Grading Review**	Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services Executive Director – Corporate Services and Assistant Director – Human Resources	No - Whole Committee	The Committee to provide scrutiny input into the Pay and Grading Review
Budget Scrutiny	The Committee to confirm its budget scrutiny process and undertake budget scrutiny of the Council's budget 2023/24	**12 October 2022** – The Committee to consider its budget scrutiny process **7 November 2022 - Children's Trust Budget** **Budget Scrutiny to continue over a number of meetings: Task and Finish Group meetings commencing in January 2023 COMPLETED** **12 July 2023 (date to be confirmed) – The Committee to agree its budget scrutiny process for 23/24**	Executive Director for Finance	No	The Committee to confirm its budget scrutiny process and undertake budget scrutiny of the Council's budget 2023/24 - Task and Finish Group meetings scheduled for January 2023 COMPLETED **12 July 2023 – The Committee to agree its budget scrutiny process for 23/24**

Modernising Systems	The Committee to receive information regarding systems at the Council and to consider their value for money	15 March 2022 - A report to the Committee providing background information, to assist the committee in deciding how it will undertake scrutiny activity Modernising Systems Inquiry day(s) have been programmed from September 2022 onwards **Reports to Committee November 2022 onwards. The Committee will conclude its scrutiny activity in April 2023 and report to the meeting of the Committee 15 May 2023**	Cabinet Member for Finance Executive Director - Corporate	To be confirmed	The meeting on 15 March 2022 comprised a comprehensive question and answer session (Scrutiny Inquiry) to inform a potential scrutiny review. The Modernising Systems Task and Finish Group is evidence gathering and will conclude its work early in 2023.
Quarterly Budget Monitoring Reports	The Committee to receive regular budget monitoring reports at its meetings	**12 October 2022** **16 January 2023 Taken place** **7 March 2023** **15 May 2023** **12 July 2023 (dates to be confirmed)** **18 September 2023** **24 January 2024**	Cabinet Member for Finance Executive Director for Finance	No	To receive a quarterly budget monitoring report which will inform the budget scrutiny role of this Committee.
Quarterly reports on the MTFP	The Committee to receive regular MTFP monitoring reports at its meetings	**12 October 2022** 16 January 2023 Taken place **7 March 2023** **15 May 2023** **12 July 2023 (dates to be confirmed)** **18 September 2023** **24 January 2024**	Cabinet Member for Finance Executive Director for Finance	No	To receive a quarterly budget MTFP report which will inform the budget scrutiny role of this Committee.

Transformation Projects	The Committee to review transformation projects: Definition of the Transformation Projects Spend on transformation Savings	7 March 2023 – Taken place **18 September 2023 (date to be confirmed)**	Leader of the Council and the Executive Director – Corporate and the Head of Transformation delivery	No	
Performance Monitoring Report	The Committee to consider the Performance Monitoring Report to inform Performance Management Scrutiny	**12 October 2022** 16 January 2023 Taken place **15 May 2023** **12 July 2023 (dates to be confirmed)** **18 September 2023** **24 January 2024**	Leader of the Council Assistant Chief Executive	No	The Committee to consider the Performance Monitoring Report to inform Performance Management Scrutiny
The Children's Trust Budget	The Committee to receive a briefing on the Children's Trust budget	15 September 2021 **actioned** **7 November 2022 - Budget Scrutiny - Actioned** **Further meeting TBC** To consider the Business Plan for the Children's Trust	Cabinet Member for Finance Executive Director for Finance	No but following the briefing the Committee may consider setting up a Task and Finish Group	The Committee received a briefing on the Children's Trust Budget at its September 2021 and November 2022 meeting and resolved to receive the business plan for scrutiny input at a future meeting **Further meeting dates TBC**

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny annual report 2022/23	The Committee to receive the annual report 2023/24 for Corporate OSC.	**15 May 2023**	Chair - Corporate OSC		
"Wicked Issues"	To undertake scrutiny activity of wicked issues	**Date : 7 March 2023 Taken Place 18 September 2023**	Leader of the Council together with the Executive Director – Corporate and Assistant Chief Executive		
LAPs (local area partnerships)	The Committee to review and provide scrutiny input into the funding of LAPs	**Date: 7 March 2023 Taken place** **NB: Potential cross Committee (Place, People and Corporate) - refer to O&S Co Ordinating for consideration) for future scrutiny input**	Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing, and Health Integration for together with the Delivery Director for Health & Care Integration		

| Asset Management | To undertake scrutiny activity of asset management | 15 March 2022 - The Committee to set up a Task and Finish Group to undertake this scrutiny activity **Actioned**

A presentation was given to the Committee at its meeting 10 May 2022 and from there the Committee will consider Scrutiny work into this issue. - **Actioned**

Date to be confirmed: The Sustainability Working Group is asked to report back to a future meeting regarding the alignment of workstreams around the development of the new Asset Management Plan to the Corporate Plan and the Council's commitment to carbon neutrality.

15 May 2023 – The Committee to undertake Scrutiny of asset disposals. | Cabinet Member for Finance

Executive Director for Finance | To be confirmed | It was resolved that the Sustainability Working Group is asked to report back to a future meeting regarding the alignment of workstreams around the development of the new Asset Management Plan to the Corporate Plan and the Council's commitment to carbon neutrality. |

Potential cross-cutting themes for the Scrutiny Committees

| Major Contracts and Capital Contracts | The Committee together with Place and People Scrutiny Committees to undertake scrutiny of major contracts of the Council including the Children's Trust | Corporate, People and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees

NB: Potential cross Committee (Place, People and Corporate) - refer to O&S Co Ordinating Group at its March meeting for consideration) for future scrutiny input | To be confirmed | To be confirmed | |
| **LAPs (local area partnerships)** | The Committee to review and provide scrutiny input into the funding of LAPs | Date: 7 March 2023 **Taken place**

NB: Potential cross Committee (Place, | Cabinet Member fir Adult Care, Wellbeing, and Health Integration for together with the Delivery Director for Health & Care Integration | | |

Housing	The Committee, together with Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake scrutiny activity of the housing costs and social value	Corporate and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees	To be confirmed	To be confirmed	

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting dates in 2022/23

- ➢ 6 March 2023
- ➢ 15 May
- ➢ Further dates to be confirmed
- ➢