



Democracy and Standards Committee

A meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee will be held at the The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 12 January 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 - 8) To confirm the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 th October 2022.
4.	Chair's Announcements To receive communications from the Chair.
5.	Proposed amendments to the Constitution (Pages 9 - 34) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Updates to the Constitution – Council Procedure Rules ii) Proposed changes to Committees
6.	Statistics - code of Conduct Arrangements - Annual Review (Pages 35 - 42) To provide an update on the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct
7.	Carried Motions on Notice - Predecessor Councils The Committee to consider carried Motions from Predecessor Councils, with reasons proposed for for re-adoption.

8.	<p>Councillor Development (Pages 43 - 54)</p> <p>To provide an update on member training for the Committee's information and seeks support for the classification and requirements in relation to the member training programme</p>
9.	<p>Committee Work Programme 2023/2024 (Pages 55 - 56)</p> <p>To propose a work programme for the Committee for 2023/2024.</p>
10.	<p>Urgent Business</p> <p>The Chairman to advise whether they have agreed to any items of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.</p>
11.	<p>Exclusion of Press and Public</p> <p>In respect of the following items the Chairman may move the resolution set out below, on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information (information regarded as private for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972) would be disclosed to them: The Committee is requested to resolve: "That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act of the descriptions against each item would be disclosed to them"</p>

Catherine Whitehead
Proper Officer
4 January 2023

Democracy and Standards Committee Members:

Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair)

Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Mike Warren

Councillor Daniel Cribbin

Councillor Danielle Stone

Councillor Jonathan Harris

Councillor Andrew Kilbride

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift

Councillor Laura Stevenson

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.

Evacuation Procedure

If a continuous fire alarm sounds you must evacuate the building via the nearest available fire exit. Members and visitors should proceed to the assembly area as directed by Democratic Services staff and await further instructions.

Access to Meetings

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named below, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting.

Mobile Phones

Please ensure that any device is switched to silent operation or switched off.

Queries Regarding this Agenda

If you have any queries about this agenda please contact Tracy Tiff & Marina Watkins via the following:

Tel: 01604 837408 & 01327 302236

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**

Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 20 October 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present	Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair) Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair) Councillor Mike Warren Councillor Daniel Cribbin Councillor Danielle Stone Councillor Andrew Kilbride Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Substitute Members:	Councillor Sally Beardsworth (for Councillor Johnatahn Harris) Councillor Adam Brown (for Councillor Laura Stevenson)
Also Present:	Councillor Ian McCord Councillor Stephen Clarke
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Jonathan Harris Councillor Laura Stevenson
Officers	Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer) Paul Hanson, Democratic Services Manager Colin Walker - Interim Assistant Director Planning (remote attendance) Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

50. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised

51. **Minutes**

In response to a question from Councillor Beardsworth, the Director of Legal and Democratic advised that Standards for England considered that membership of a grand lodge should be declared.

With regards to Motions from predecessor Councils, political groups could re-submit Motions if accompanied by relevant information.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 28th July 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

52. **Chair's Announcements**

None advised.

53. **Updates to the Constitution**

The Democratic Services Manager outlined the report detailing proposed amendments to the Constitution, which mostly related to the Planning Protocol and particularly the 'call-in' of applications.

Previously, a Councillor was expected to attend the planning meeting if they called in an application. Provision has now been made for situations where the Councillor is unable to attend – by appointing a substitute or having representations read out at the meeting. Councillors should not need to declare whether they were speaking for or against an application. The proposed changes were welcomed.

Discussion took place on whether the time limit imposed on registered speakers was sufficient at three minutes. It was noted that Strategic Planning Committee dealt with major applications and allowing 5-10 minutes per speaker might be more appropriate to put points across. It was agreed that the time limit for speakers be increased to 5 minutes with the position to be reviewed in 6 months.

The Interim Assistant Director of Planning advised that he could be contacted with views regarding planning committees and matters could be discussed informally.

Concerns were expressed regarding meetings of the Council which had very busy Agendas. Some felt there was limited opportunity for the public and opposition and that a review was needed.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that the report also covered changes regarding severance payments and contract procedure rules. The deadline for Motions and amendments had been moved by a day to allow time for consultation.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted and approves the updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5; and
- b) Recommended the updates to Council for approval.
- c) Recommended that the time limit for speakers on Strategic Planning Committee be increased to 5 minutes, with the position to be reviewed in 6 months.

54. **Boundary Review Task and Finish Group**

The Chair thanked Officers, particularly Paul Hanson and Mark West for their work on the boundary review, and thanked Councillors for their contributions.

The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that the submission would be considered by Council on 3rd November, before being submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission on 7th November. Representations had been received from Councillors up until the meeting. The intention was to put forward a draft proposal with as much consensus as possible.

- The population figures had been provided by the Boundary Commission and had been calculated to provide for future development and growth
- Communities must be kept together
- Concerns that Daventry town had been split into two with the inclusion of some rural areas - It was noted that the Sustainable Urban Developments (SUEs) had necessitated this split. More work was needed in this area
- Currently the proposal indicated 43 Councillors in Northampton, 19 in Daventry and 15 in the South Northants area – there should be more in the rural areas
- Councillors were reminded that evidence was required to demonstrate why the wards proposed were put forward
- Information from parish councils was being collated directly by the Boundary Commission
- The Boundary Commission would not look at ward variances below 5% but would be very reluctant to allow a variance over 10%
- The final draft would be unlikely to satisfy all parties, but the final decision lay with the Boundary Commission, which is why it was beneficial to get as much consensus as possible.
- Large rural wards would be difficult to represent properly due to the distances involved
- An additional meeting of the Task Panel had been scheduled for Tuesday 25th October
- All comments and submissions would be reviewed and an amended proposal made available for the Task Panel meeting.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the work of the cross-party working group on the second phase of electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire;
- b) Approved the document set out at Appendix A for submission to Full Council, subject to further amendments to be agreed, with a recommendation that it be approved for submission to the LGBCE; and
- c) Delegated authority to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee to make any amendments to the proposed submission to the LGBCE and to finalise the submission in light of any comments from this committee prior to submission to Full Council.

55. **Member Development- Mandatory training and specific Training needs for the Democracy and Standards Committee**

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the report.

The Committee considered that training on budget setting and treasury management would be beneficial.

No specific training was identified for the Democracy and Standards Committee.

The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that there could be difficulties with making too many training sessions mandatory. It was suggested that an effective tool may be to keep a register detailing members' attendance at training and highlighting non-attendance.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the Councillor development programme to date and proposed that training sessions be provided to all Councillors on budget setting and treasury management.
- b) reviewed and noted the current list of mandatory training for Councillors and considered the use of a register to note member attendance at mandatory training sessions

56. Review of Committee Work Programme 2022/23

Consideration was given to the Committee Work Programme. It was suggested that consideration could be given at a future meeting to the formation of a training programme for new councillors.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

57. Urgent Business

None advised

The meeting closed at 7.37 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____



WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Democracy and Standards Committee

12 January 2023

Report Title Updates to the Constitution – Council Procedure Rules

Report Author Catherine Whitehead
catherine.whitehead@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	
Communications	Becky Hutson	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft revised Constitution (available on request from democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to frame a discussion by the Democracy & Standards Committee for a number of potential changes to the Council Procedure Rules, as set out in the Constitution.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Constitution for West Northamptonshire Council was formally adopted by the West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority prior to vesting day (1 April 2021). A major review of the Constitution was then undertaken by the Democracy and Standards Committee in the autumn of 2021, reporting to Council in December 2021. Since that time, the Democracy and Standards Committee has considered several suggested changes to the Constitution and has made recommendations to Council accordingly.
- 2.2 This report has been drafted following a meeting of group leaders at which the overarching aims and objectives of meetings Full Council, and how the Council Procedure Rules might be updated to support these aims, was discussed. It proposes a number of areas where the committee might consider changes to the procedure rules which are set out within section 5 below. It is suggested the Committee also consider the overall aims and objectives of Council meetings prior to formulating recommendations to the Council.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
- a) Discuss the overarching aims and objectives of meetings Full Council and how the Council Procedure Rules might be updated to support these aims;
 - b) Review the recommendation concerning the start time of meetings (5.5 to 5.7) and determine whether to recommend a change to the start time of meetings to Council;
 - c) Review the suggested updates to the Council Procedure Rules highlighted in Section 5 below and determine whether to make recommendations for changes to Council;
 - d) Should the Committee make any suggested changes to the suggested updates, delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, the authority to draft any proposed changes in such a way that they are capable of being presented to Council as recommendations.

4. Reason for Recommendations

Keeping the Constitution under regular review will help ensure that it is legally compliant, complete, reflects the character and culture of the authority and supports effective and efficient decision making.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 Following comments made by members at a recent meeting of political group leaders, suggested updates to the Council Procedure Rules are set out below for consideration by the Committee. The Committee is invited to consider and discuss the proposals before determining whether to recommend changes to the Council for adoption.
- 5.2 A number of comments have been made at recent meetings of Full Council about the Council Procedure Rules and the degree to which they enable satisfactory debate at meetings. The topic was raised at a meeting of group leaders and it was suggested that it be referred to the Democracy and Standards Committee for discussion with a view to making recommendations for changes to the Council.
- 5.3 It is accepted that members will have differing views of the purpose of council meetings. While officers can advise, it is for members to determine the appropriate balance between these areas, provided some allowance is made for both to take place. Members may wish to consider the following as potential priorities:
- Taking decision required by the constitution or the law, such as the approval of the budget and policies set out in the policy framework;
 - Holding the Executive to account;
 - Debating issues of importance to the Council or communities in West Northants;
 - Hearing from members of the public, via petitions, statements etc.;
 - Participation of 'back bench' councillors, e.g. via updates from scrutiny;
- 5.4 The objective is for members to determine priorities for meetings and to put in place a structure that enables the effective deliver of those priorities. The proposals have been broken down into a number of topics for consideration.

Start time of meetings

- 5.5 Meetings of Full Council currently start at 6:00pm. Rule 10 requires the Chairman to decide whether, by 9:45pm, it is possible to conclude the remaining items of business by 10:00pm. Where this is not possible, the remaining items are put to the vote without discussion. It has been characteristic of recent meetings that Rule 10 has been observed and a number of items of business have been withdrawn as a result.
- 5.6 Members have reported concerns relating to the timing and duration of Full Council meetings. As members travel to and from meetings from across West Northamptonshire, late finish times mean members can return home at a very late hour, with associated concerns over safety.
- 5.7 It is suggested that the start time could be moved from 6:00pm to 5.00pm. While this is not likely to resolve the issue of travelling home late at night, it is anticipated this change will allow for full consideration of items on the agenda, including reports and motions

Taking decisions required by the Constitution or the Law

- 5.8 The Committee must be mindful of the purpose of meetings. It is particularly important that decisions that are required by law to be taken by the Council are afforded appropriate time for debate. These decisions will be the subject of detailed reports that set out the reasons for the decisions, options and choices etc. Members must have time at Council meetings to properly consider these decisions as the consequences, financial, legal or for communities in West Northamptonshire, can be significant. These items also present an opportunity for 'back bench' councillors to engage in Council meetings. They may affect particular services in which members have an interest or geographical areas that members represent.
- 5.9 Sufficient time must be allocated to decision making and it is therefore not recommended that the Committee considers a change to the order of business at meetings.

Holding the Executive to Account

- 5.10 The Constitution currently provides for 60 minutes at each meeting to receive reports from portfolio holders and questions on those reports from members. Portfolio holders currently have up to two minutes to present their reports but there is no time limit for asking questions. It has been characteristic of meetings that this time limit expires before all members have asked their questions.
- 5.11 In order to make more efficient use of this time, it is suggested that the Committee consider a number of potential changes.
- It had been suggested that Portfolio Holders could present their reports without comment. However, the opportunity for Portfolio Holders to update Council on progress with service delivery is an important mechanism and it is in the Council's interests to receive updates.

- Currently there are no limitations on members asking questions of Portfolio Holders. This can lead to lengthy statements being made or many questions being asked in one speech, which impact on the ability of other members to ask questions. In the interests of fairness, a limit of two minutes per question could improve the focus and flow of this item.

Debating issues of importance to the Council or Communities in West Northants

- 5.12 In addition to holding the Executive to Account, there is a role for Council in debating key issues which are topical. The Council motion is a mechanism for any member (with a seconder) to enable a debate on an issue of public interest. A Council motion however is not a mechanism for decision making or policy setting. These require the presentation of relevant information and a set of tested recommendations and reasons in the form of a report to the appropriate decision making body. Given the other matters which are the necessary business of Council, the number of motions needs to enable time for debate.
- 5.13 To enable this to happen Procedure Rule 28 limits the number of motions that may be submitted by each group. This rule was put in place because, prior to the change being implemented in December 2021, meetings were characterised by a large number of motions that were submitted for debate. This did not provide sufficient time for debate or for an effective framework for the allocation of motions between groups, nor for the order of debate.
- 5.14 It is suggested that the limitation be revised in order to ensure there is time for the motions to be debated. A limit of one motion per group is therefore proposed, with the Principal Opposition being allocated an additional motion via a revised Opposition Priority Motion item.
- 5.15 The Committee may wish to consider whether any further structure is required to facilitate efficient debate. At the meeting of group leaders, a range of options were considered, including:
- a) A limit on the number of individual speakers per motion;
 - b) A limit on the total time available to debate each motion; or
 - c) A limit on the overall time available to debate motions at each meeting.
- 5.16 However, it was considered that a more effective method of managing debates would be to revise the time allowed for speeches. The proposal the Committee is asked to consider is a change in the time allowed for speeches. It is proposed that members moving a motion or report will still be permitted up to five minutes, but all other speeches, including seconding and exercising a right of reply, be limited to two minutes.
- 5.17 The meeting of group leaders also recommend that the Committee review the arrangements for Priority Opposition Business. Given the proposal to limit the number of motions, it is suggested that Opposition Priority Business could take the form of the Principal Opposition submitting a motion for debate as per the usual rules for motions, but that motion is dealt with at an early point on the agenda. This would recognise the status of the Principal Opposition group by allocating an additional motion but would address concerns about the current restrictions on debate for this item as the item would be subject to the ordinary rules of debate.

Hearing from members of the public

5.18 It is the practice at most councils that public engagement at meetings takes place towards the beginning of the agenda. There is much to commend this practice as it enables members of the public to participate without having to stay until the end of the meeting, which is currently around 10pm. The Council also has a number of mechanisms by which members of the public can engage, including petitions, statements and questions. It is suggested that this part of the Council Procedure Rules does not require change.

Participation of ‘back bench’ councillors

5.19 While there is no dedicated route for ‘back bench’ councillors to participate in meetings. There are routes through which such participation can take place. Debate of reports and motions enable all councillors to participate. Such councillors may also (but seldom do) ask questions of portfolio holders.

5.20 The meeting of group leaders considered adding a dedicated item to receive updates from Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This would provide councillors with another means by which they can participate. However, the group leaders considered that Cabinet is the appropriate forum for engagement with Scrutiny Chairs and so this option is not recommended for approval.

Other issues

5.21 The Committee may wish to use the information set out in this report to create a time plan for meetings. This can be used to inform time limits set out in the Council Procedure Rules. An example is set out below:

Activity	Approx. time allowance
Housekeeping (minutes, announcements etc.)	15
Public Participation	30
Opposition Priority Business	15
Cabinet reports and Questions	60
Comfort Break	15
Decision Making (reports)	60
Motions	60
Total	255 (4 hours 15 minutes)

This may go some way towards helping members identify priorities for meetings and sensible time limits for certain items.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 The issues and choices insofar as they relate to the operation of the Constitution are set out in section 5 above.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the Constitution review process.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Every local authority is under a legal duty to prepare and keep up to date its Constitution (see Appendix B). In particular, section 9P of the Local Government Act 2000 requires the Constitution to contain:

- a) a copy of the authority's standing orders;
- b) a copy of the authority's code of conduct;
- c) such information as the Secretary of State may direct; and
- d) such other information (if any) as the authority considers appropriate.

7.2.2 Regular review of the Constitution helps to ensure these legal requirements are met. The amendment set out above will assist in ensuring the Council is able to operate in a lawful manner.

7.3 Risk

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from this report. Reviewing the Constitution helps to reduce any risks that could arise as a result of the Constitution not properly supporting decision making and delivery of Council services.

7.4 Consultation

7.4.1 Consultation will be undertaken with this committee prior to recommendations being submitted to Council.

7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1 Not applicable to this report.

7.6 Climate Impact

7.6.1 There is no climate impact to consider in relation to the recommendation.

7.7 Community Impact

7.7.1 None specific.

8. Background Papers

8.1 None

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Democracy and Standards Committee 12 January 2023

Report Title	Proposed Changes to Committees
Report Author	Catherine Whitehead catherine.whitehead@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	
Communications	Becky Hutson	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Report of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to receive the recommendations from two external reviews in relation to the Council’s governance arrangements and to make recommendations to Council in relation to proposed changes to the Council’s committee arrangements.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The governance arrangements for West Northamptonshire Council were formally adopted by the West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority in March 2021 prior to vesting day. The committee structure of the Council was included within the Council’s Constitution. A review of the Constitution was undertaken by the Democracy and Standards Committee in the autumn of 2021, reporting to Council in December 2021 but it did not make any changes to the Committee structure. Since that time, the Democracy and Standards Committee has considered several other suggested changes to the Constitution but the committee structure has remained the same.

- 2.2 This report has been drafted following receipt of two separate reports by external organisations brought in by the Council to review the operation of the Council’s Planning Service (including its governance) and the Scrutiny function. Specific recommendations from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) have been considered by the Co-ordinating Scrutiny Committee.

and each of the Scrutiny Committees informally before being presented to the Democracy and Standards Committee. Consultation has taken place with the Chairs of Planning Committees in relation to some of the conclusions of the report prepared by the LGA Peer Review through the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to make changes to the Planning Committees.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Note the conclusions and recommendations within the report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the proposed guidance documents and notes which will be prepared to give effect to the recommendations.
- b) Approve the splitting of the People Scrutiny Committee to create two new Committees one for Adults and one for Children or one for Health and one for People as set out in paragraph 5.9 below.
- c) Approve the reduction in the number of members of the Scrutiny Committee to 9 per Committee.
- d) Note the conclusions and recommendations of the report from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) in relation to Planning Committees.
- e) Reduce the number of Planning Committees from 5 to 4 (including Planning Policy Committee).
- f) Agree that the standard start time for Planning Committees is 4 pm.
- g) Agree that Planning Committees should, wherever possible, be webcast.
- h) Agree that site visits will be held where there are planning reasons for doing so and that site visits will be arranged by Democratic Services and Members will be accompanied by a Planning Officer on site.
- i) Agree that the Planning Protocol be amended to reflect the above.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- a) To respond to the review of the CfGS in relation to the Council's Scrutiny function.
- b) To ensure that the council's Overview and Scrutiny function is effective and reflects national good practice in relation to the role and function of Scrutiny Committees.
- c) To respond to the recommendations of the PAS review.
- d) To support the Council's duty as Local Planning Authority.

5. Report Background

5.1 The Council commissioned the CfGS to advise and support its members and officer in the review of the Council's Scrutiny function. The aim was to ensure that Scrutiny is effective in delivering accountability, improving policy and decision making and that scrutiny makes a quality contribution in the delivery of the Council plans and overall improvement. The review was conducted by Ian Parry, Head of Consultancy, CFGS and Manisha Patel Associate Consultant CFGS.

5.2 To carry out the review CfGS met with elected members and officers, including Leader, Cabinet members, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and members of Scrutiny Committees.

Recommendations from the review

- 5.3 The review conducted by the CfGS found many positive qualities in the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. The review recognised that there is a good understanding of the importance of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council and the conditions for success are clearly present. The remaining positives are detailed in the CfGS report and are not repeated here as the focus of this report is to set out options for the Council's response. The recommendations from the report are summarised below, alongside options for the Council to choose from in developing a response, or suggestions as to where further consideration and input from members is necessary.
- 5.4 The broad themes that run through the report are:
- Renewed focus on strategic issues that are of importance to communities in West Northamptonshire;
 - Improved focus on output from Scrutiny i.e. challenge and improvement with clear recommendations, rather than updates from services;
 - Clarity about what Scrutiny should expect from Cabinet and vice-versa. Clarity about the role of Cabinet members at scrutiny meetings;
 - An emphasis on scrutiny input at a formative stage in policy development and collaborative working with Cabinet and the establishment of a clear framework for work planning;
 - Reviewing lines of communication between Scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors and developing a framework for maintaining this;
 - Review of MTFs/Budget Scrutiny, taking account of CIPFA guidance.
- 5.5 In response to the review officers met with the Co-ordinating overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive the feedback from Ian Parry, CfGS and to discuss the way forward. As a result officers including the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of Democratic and Elections met with each of the Scrutiny Committees to discuss the recommendations of the report. The attached document was used as a basis for the discussions. It is proposed that separate guidance document is developed through Scrutiny and outside the Constitution to provide a framework for good governance in relation to Scrutiny. The only specific matter requiring a decision of this committee is in relation to the changes to the committees.

Recommendation:

- 5.6 A review of the Scrutiny committee structure – with a view to assessing how the areas of ASC, Children's and Health can have sufficient scrutiny capacity.

Options:

- 5.7 It is understood that Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Health are services that are of great significance to the Council with corresponding levels of risk. The clear implication of this recommendation is that the People Scrutiny Committee should be divided into two new committees: Adults and Health and Children's. Assuming there is no corresponding move to combine the Corporate and Place Scrutiny Committees, the Council will need to take account of the available resources in amending the structure of Overview and Scrutiny.

- 5.8 Each committee already operates a number of working groups at any one time and there is a need to be mindful of the impact of an additional scrutiny committee on the committee timetable, as well as councillor and officer resource. The impact of the proposal to establish cross-party pre-meetings should also be factored in. It is therefore suggested that the Council move from a model of three committees meeting six times per year to a model of four committees meeting four times per year. The review has emphasised the need to Overview and Scrutiny to be more strategic in nature, so this change will be manageable with appropriate level of focus at meetings and emphasis on task and finish work.
- 5.9 It is also recommended that the size of each committee be amended accordingly. The current committees are large, even taking account of the current size of the Council and could be reviewed in order to ensure the workload of members serving on the four committees is reprofiled accordingly. Three committees of 17 or 15 members could be replaced by four committees of 11 or 12 members.

Current Structure	Possible Future Structure
3 x Committees meeting 6 x year (scheduled) No cross-party pre-meetings	4 x Committees meeting 4 x year 4 x cross-party pre-meetings 4 x year
Coordinating Scrutiny Group meeting 6 x year	Scrutiny Triangulation meetings 6 x year
Task & Finish held in last 12 months: Corporate Scrutiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenses Policy: 3 meetings • Treasury Management: 4 meetings • Modernising Systems: 3 meetings • Budget Scrutiny: 2 meetings Place Scrutiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree Policy: 9 meetings • Active Travel: 4 meetings People Scrutiny <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP Mental health: 10 meetings • iCAN: 5 meetings • Housing Strategy: 2 meetings Total Task & Finish meetings in last 12 months: 42	Task & Finish: In order to maintain focus, each Committee will have no more than three reviews established at any one time (12 in total). These working groups shall be staggered so they are at various stages (i.e. scoping, evidence gathering and drafting recommendations) so as to balance workload.

6. Planning Advisory Service Review

Report

- 6.1 The Planning Advisory Service also prepared a report following a review of the Planning Service. This is a broad review looking at the whole service not just the governance arrangements.

report will be presented to Cabinet together with an action plan, however the report does include conclusions and recommendations in relation to the governance arrangements. The summary findings state:

Summary:

- 6.2 Three area planning committees consider planning applications that are not delegated to officers to determine. Our analysis shows that there is not enough business to warrant three area committees. The way the committees operate varies, and are not always welcoming again sending poor signals about a single new unitary council.

Recommendations:

- 6.3 Analyse existing committee decisions and activity to inform a review of the scheme of delegation and the number of committees to provide a committee structure and process fit for a unitary council to:
- a) improve culture and practice of planning committees to reduce the risk to the council including eliminating the use of substitute members on planning committees
 - b) ensure that householder and minor applications only go to committee in exceptional circumstances
 - c) trial a significantly reduced number of committees with a proportionate geographical spread (based on workload)
- 6.4 The recommendations propose a trial of a reduction in committees and it is suggested that the number of committees could be reduced from one Strategic Planning Committee and three area committees to one Strategic Planning Committee and two other committees covering the wider Northampton area as reflected in the Northampton Related Development Area which includes an area which is different to the former Borough Council. The other committee reflecting the remainder of the area and with a different geographical area than the former district councils.
- 6.5 It is proposed also to allow only two substitutes for Planning Committees with substitutes subject to the same training as the other members of the committee. No other substitutions will be permitted for planning committees unless in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer an individual item is likely to be inquorate.
- 6.6 At the current time the existing planning committees meet at different times. To enable members to attend committees who have other commitments and to ensure that planning and senior officers can regularly attend planning committees to provide advice and support, it is proposed that planning committees should take place in the late afternoon. Ie around 4 pm. This will assist in ensuring all meetings, which can be complex and challenging, are concluded at a reasonable time whilst minimising any time needed to take off from work and allow those who collect children from school to do so and still be able to attend committee. Whilst it is unlikely that any time will satisfy everyone this is intended to be a

compromise that will support the wider improvements in planning committees recommended by the report.

- 6.7 It is proposed that all of the development control planning committees should be webcast as soon as the facility is available to enable this to happen. This facility is currently available at the forum at Towcester. It is intended to provide webcasting from the Guildhall to ensure coverage of all planning committees can be achieved as well as webcasting for other meetings which meet at that venue.
- 6.8 The current committee arrangements have different approaches to site visits. To ensure consistency and compliance with the Planning Protocol it is proposed that where there is a sound planning reason to hold a site visit and it is agreed by the Committee that a site visit should be held, these will be arranged by Democratic Services and attended by a planning officer. Members will be discouraged from attending sites other than as part of an arranged site visit to reduce the risk of lobbying.
- 6.9 The report makes a number of other recommendations and to give effect to these a further review of the Planning Protocol will take place to determine whether changes are required in the light of the report of the Planning Advisory Service. Further training may also be offered to members of the new committees which should be mandatory to ensure a consistent approach across the three new committees.

7. Issues and Choices

- 7.1 The issues and choices

8. Implications (including financial implications)

8.1 Resources and Financial

- 8.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of the Constitution review process other than minor changes to member allowances. The proposals would allow the increased cost of the Scrutiny Chairman to be offset by the reduction in the number of Planning Committee Chairman, which results in a cost neutral proposal.

8.2 Legal

- 8.3 The Council must have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Council as a Council with Health Scrutiny responsibilities there must be an Overview and Scrutiny Committee with responsibility for Scrutinising health services. The proposals better able the Council to meet these statutory obligations.

- 8.4 The Council is the Local Planning Authority for West Northamptonshire and has a quasi judicial function of determining planning applications. This is carried out through a combination of delegations to officers and decisions by Planning Committees. These committees have to carry out this responsibility with regard to the Council's wider duties under the Human Rights Act 1998 in relation to a fair hearing and more widely in relation to the Council's public law decision making.

responsibilities. The proposals enable the Council to meet its responsibilities as a local planning authority.

8.5 Risk

8.5.1 There are no significant risks arising from this report. Reviewing the governance arrangements helps to reduce any risks that could arise as a result of the arrangements not supporting lawful decision making and delivery of Council services.

8.6 Consultation

8.6.1 This report will be referred to Council for a decision before being agreed. There has been no wider public consultation in relation to this report which is a response to the recommendations of the review.

8.7 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

8.7.1 Not applicable to this report.

8.8 Climate Impact

8.8.1 There is no significant climate impact to consider in relation to the recommendation the changes to the committee will have some changes to the travel and paperwork used for each of the committees but these are largely offsetting by the different proposals. Overall the reduction in Scrutiny membership is likely to lead to a net carbon benefit but this is based on assumptions of use by an average member.

8.9 Community Impact

8.9.1 There will be a need for Planning Committees to take place further away from the area of residents in some cases however these changes are offset by the webcasting of meetings to enable more residents to attend remotely.

9. Background Papers

9.1 Northampton Related Development Area Map

<http://www.northamptonboroughcouncil.com/documents/s53668/Appendix%20B%20Northampton%20Related%20Development%20Area%20with%20District%20Boundaries.pdf>

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Rebecca Peck
Assistant Chief Executive
West Northamptonshire Council
One Angel Square Northampton

November 2022

Dear Rebecca,

Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of West Northamptonshire Council's (WNC) Scrutiny function. This letter is our feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its Scrutiny process further.

As part of this feedback stage, we would like to facilitate a workshop with members and officers to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

Background

West Northamptonshire Council commissioned CfGS to advise and support its members and officers in the review of the Council's Scrutiny function. The aim was to ensure that Scrutiny is effective in delivering accountability, improving policy and decision making, and that scrutiny makes a quality contribution in the delivery of Council plans and overall improvement.

WNC is a new council, therefore its Scrutiny function is has been in place for just over a year. It is therefore appropriate and sensible to review how it is done so far. Therefore, this review is designed to check and test that Scrutiny is meeting the Council's high expectations of democratic accountability, and that the interface of decision-making and Scrutiny is effective and relevant.

West Northamptonshire's political structure is based on a Cabinet-Cabinet model. Its current Scrutiny arrangements consists of a Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group, plus three Scrutiny committees.

CfGS undertook a review of these scrutiny arrangements, involving evidence gathering through conversations with members and officers during 10th -11th May 2022. In addition, we observed two live scrutiny committee meetings: Corporate O&S on 10th May 2022 and Place O&S on 17th May 2022, via a live remote video link. We also reviewed previous minutes of committees, work programmes and other key documents via the Council's website.

CfGS met with elected members and officers, including Leader, Cabinet members, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and members of the Scrutiny Committees.

The review was conducted by:

- Ian Parry – Head of Consultancy, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Manisha Patel – Associate-Consultant, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The findings and recommendations presented in this letter are intended to advise the Council on strengthening the quality of scrutiny activities, increasing the impact of its outputs, and through its members, developing a strong and shared understanding of the role and capability of the Scrutiny function.

Review Summary

1. Scrutiny has the conditions for success

1.1 The conditions for successful scrutiny are clearly present at West Northamptonshire; there is a shared understanding from members and officers that good governance involves scrutiny, and when used effectively, scrutiny can add value to decision-making. All of those interviewed believed that improvements can be made to make scrutiny more effective and to add greater value.

1.2 Members recognise the benefits of change and improvement, and this presents a good opportunity for the Council to further develop the way in which scrutiny operates from its current position, while it is still in a learning and exploring mode. Strengthening its role could also aim to elevate the status of Scrutiny, so that it is recognised as a strategic function and is fully utilised as a resource to support continuous council improvement.

1.3 It is also important to note that this review has the support of the Leader and Chief Executive, who both expressed a strong desire to support Scrutiny and confirm that its role is central to open, transparent decision-making and accountability in the Council. We therefore would stress that this confirmation and buy-in at the most senior political and officer level is crucial to improvement and therefore is highly valued.

1.4 Our review identified several positive indicators for Scrutiny, most notably; the positive attitude and commitment of members and officers, the mature cross-party working in the scrutiny context, the overall capacity and range of experience of members, as well as the strong belief that more can be achieved. The council has a strong cohort of committed councillors across the council and is therefore in a good position to progress. There were other positive behaviours and practices which this report will also highlight.

1.5 The commitment of members and officers to this review and the ambition to drive improvement in Scrutiny was further indicated by good attendance of those who were invited to meet with the CfGS review team. We appreciated this high level of participation and everyone's constructive contributions in interviews and discussions. The review team were impressed by this high level of commitment.

1.6 We also feel that it is important and central to this report to make it clear that this review took place just over a year after the Council was established. Therefore, we feel that it is important to record and recognise that alongside all the complex challenges and competing demands of establishing a new unitary authority (and with the added stresses of the Covid pandemic) that its democratic structures including its Scrutiny function are operational and running relatively smoothly.

1.7 This is a significant achievement and even though we feel that Scrutiny is in some respects still finding its feet, overall, it is certainly up and running.

1.8 We would therefore like to commend the council, its officers and members on this achievement.

1.9 The task now is to build for the future and ensure that the scrutiny model, through further development and refinement, is able to deliver a high-quality service to the Council and the communities it serves.

2. Officer support and organisational culture

2.1 The foundations for good Scrutiny start with the context in which it operates and the position it holds within the council.

2.2 We were reassured by the Council's senior leadership team's commitment to properly supporting Scrutiny, even if at times the understanding of the Scrutiny objective can be unclear. Our conversations with members were positive about the assistance they received from officers who support Scrutiny and were overall satisfied that support meets their current needs.

2.2 Organisational culture is also identified as foundational in improving the quality of Scrutiny. This review noted that Scrutiny mainly operated in space that was generally free from adversarial political activity and was largely collegiate. Scrutiny's ability to effectively carry out its business, rests on the strength of organisational and committee-based culture. This includes but is not limited to:

- Mutual respect between members – within the context of robust political debate and disagreement, and Members respecting officers as professionals.
- members and officers understanding their mutual roles and responsibilities – in the most basic sense, that councillors lead on strategy and overall direction, while officers lead on delivery and implementation.

2.3 These cultural aspects above are present at West Northamptonshire, but more needs to be done to position and orientate Scrutiny as a total-council, cross-party collaborative endeavour which has clear objectives which are widely understood and have broad buy-in from members.

2.4 More could be done to engage earlier with Cabinet members to help shape and improve through early constructive challenge. Furthermore, there is a real opportunity for Scrutiny to be better aligned with core corporate plans of the council. We explore this further in this report letter.

2.5 Perhaps unsurprisingly, as many scrutiny committee members have previous experience from different Districts within the former county, that the style of Scrutiny has not yet fully formed its own style and currently can feel like a mix of Scrutiny cultures.

2.6 Overall we found that Scrutiny is valued in the council as an important part of governance, democracy and accountability and receives strong support from political leaders, corporate officers and an experienced democratic services team who provide the right framework for good scrutiny.

3. Clarity on Scrutiny's role and responsibilities

3.1 Scrutiny's overall role is to hold the Cabinet to account, to assist policy development, contribute to improved decision-making, and channel the voice of the public. A good Scrutiny function is one that provides robust, effective challenge. But equally, is recognised and valued as a positive influencer of policy and key decision-making through constructive challenge, positive enquiry, and quality insight.

3.2 Through our evidence gathering, members involved in Scrutiny could articulate the role that Scrutiny should play in being an integral part of the Council's governance structure and contributing to the council's budgetary and policy making function. However, some members seemed to be unclear on how exactly Scrutiny should be holding the Cabinet to account. We observed meetings where a lot of time is spent focusing on officer presentations and less time in

enquiry and scrutiny mode. It is essential that Scrutiny meetings do not become classrooms for learning and information up-dates, but remain focused on the scrutiny task, challenge, and improvement.

3.3 We observed that Cabinet participation in Scrutiny could be limited to providing additional information or reassurance. Our suggestion is that if the meetings are properly framed around Cabinet members with robust, constructive (but respectful) challenge, Cabinet members should find the experience tough and challenging but equally useful, supportive and beneficial. We suggest that a 'select committee' style would be appropriate at West Northamptonshire, where the strategic challenge to Cabinet members could be strengthened.

3.4 The Leader and Cabinet and Scrutiny members all want to see more emphasis on shaping policy, challenging, and holding to account. Therefore, Scrutiny will need earlier access to and involvement with the core policy and decision-making activities of the Cabinet. Our assessments concluded that Cabinet members and Scrutiny all recognise and agree that greater collaboration and engagement would be strongly beneficial.

We recommend:

- **A clearer focus on democratic accountability** - Scrutiny of Cabinet members should form a key part of the work plan, and Cabinet members regularly attending Scrutiny to answer questions on items falling within their portfolio responsibilities is vital. Alongside this, we also recommend inviting the Leader to attend Scrutiny on a quarterly basis to present an integrated finance and performance report and to be held to account for Council performance and progress. Perhaps adopting a 'select committee' style.
- **More emphasis on scrutiny's shaping role** - With a clear mapping for scrutiny in early policy development and key-decisions.
- **Scrutiny avoids main focus on updates and presentations.** The task of providing Scrutiny members with the essential core knowledge to be sufficiently effective in the scrutiny task could be developed as briefings or 'master classes' where the topic is complex. Lengthy learning exercising can squeeze scrutiny capacity.

4. Collaborative approach to Scrutiny

4.1 Scrutiny is the forum for an evidence-based discussion about issues affecting local people where challenge is welcomed and encouraged. Members told us that they felt that adversarial politics was not a strong feature of Scrutiny, although there are instances of where politics can turn up.

4.2 In any democratic institution, there will be differences of opinion and disagreement about policy and decisions - this should be recognised as normal and regarded as democratic exchange and policy differentiation. However, if scrutiny becomes too politically charged or adversarial this can diminish mutual trust and respect and lead to defensive and negative outcomes, rather than resulting in creative and useful exchanges. We do not believe that WNC is in that position, but it is worth vigilance and managing.

4.3 There is also mixed level of engagement from those who sit on Scrutiny, with some members showing minimal levels of involvement within committee meetings and in some cases the conversation involving just a few members. Engagement, contributions, and challenge from all members of the Scrutiny Committee is essential if individual members wish to have an influence on

shaping decisions, and if Scrutiny is to fulfil its role in being a space for cross-party inquiry. This not only requires attendance, but background preparation for meetings. Again, it is understandable that acquiring the skills and experience to become effective scrutiny practitioners will take some time. Additional training or coaching may be beneficial.

4.4 Overall our assessment in WNC is that Scrutiny is a 'safe space' for robust, constructive challenge to be made which is welcomed by the Cabinet without any negative repercussions. But this must be cherished and protected if Scrutiny is to play a key role in democracy, accountability, and improvement.

4.5 Scrutiny's relationship with Cabinet is good and this is really important. However, we heard that proactive engagement between Scrutiny and the Cabinet could be improved both before and during Scrutiny meetings. This might involve more triangulated meetings between officers, Scrutiny and Cabinet members to explore and collaborate on the key areas of delivery by Cabinet and the essential focus of Scrutiny. This may help to achieve greater alignment between Scrutiny and Cabinet in terms of efforts being focused on the same key areas of the council plan and council or community priorities.

We recommend:

- **Developing regular communication and information sharing so that Scrutiny can be a resource that can inform Cabinet decision making.** This could be achieved through holding triangulation meetings between scrutiny chairs, Cabinet members, and relevant Directors to consider future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans. It would also present an opportunity to share and discuss opportunities to involve Scrutiny as an improvement asset.

5. Scrutiny's focus and workplan

5.1 We heard the phrase 'trying to boil the ocean' several times in our on-site conversations, which implied that Scrutiny is perhaps trying to take on too much and finding it hard to focus and prioritise. This is understandable in a large council, where many members are learning and understanding a completely new role. The size and complexity of the council can be daunting and the flow of policy development and decision-making constant. So, the task of positioning Scrutiny and deciding how to orientate through a vast array of potential issues that could be scrutinised is itself probably the most important task in front of Scrutiny. How does Scrutiny utilise its resources to best effect and with maximum efficiency and impact? What Scrutiny is scrutinising (work programmes and agendas), is really at the centre of scrutiny's current journey.

5.2 In a positive first year this challenge of clear prioritisation is widely recognised by members and officers. That it needs to focus on strategic issues, where it can have influence, and that scrutiny needs to input into these areas of key decisions and policy development at an earlier stage. Scrutiny needs to be baked-in the policy development and key-decision process.

5.3 Scrutiny work programmes are therefore not yet well developed at this stage and remain a regular discussion point at committee meetings and off-line. There is a real desire to nail this issue and get Scrutiny into a place where it can comfortably and confidently prioritise and focus on key issues.

5.4 Scrutiny could benefit from a more simple approach to prioritisation of topics. There is strong evidence that when Scrutiny focuses on fewer things of greater importance, more is achieved. The 'less is more' maxim can readily be found in quality scrutiny.

5.5 Work planning is key to ensuring Scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. From our conversations we noted that many members felt that they have little opportunity to influence work plans, and the way that issues are prioritised. West Northamptonshire's Scrutiny function may need to consider how it organises its work plans in a way that is led by all members of the committees to have ownership over committee activity.

5.6 It is important to emphasise that work planning is an ongoing process and not just a one-off event. Whilst a workshop will help identify priorities and provide structure to work for the months ahead, there will need to be flexibility in the workplan and time set aside to regularly revisit the relevance of topics in meetings as the local context changes.

5.7 Scrutiny currently tends to be more retrospective, rather than forward looking. It is important that Scrutiny carries out reviews and assesses performance, but there is an important missed opportunity for it to add value to council policy and strategy through greater emphasis on the big challenges and opportunities ahead for the council. The future is where the opportunities, challenges, risks and threats are present, and scrutiny has a vital role to play in asking about the Cabinet's plans and preparedness for what is ahead. Evidence from elsewhere clearly indicates that scrutiny's absence in this space can be a significant factor in subsequent failures.

5.8 The Council's corporate plan should direct Scrutiny's focus. However currently scrutiny business does not always seem to be aligned with either the Council's overall priorities, the 3-month rolling programme of Cabinet decisions or with pressing corporate performance or risks and challenges - when topics are reviewed the focus can lean towards operational rather than strategic or outcome focused.

5.9 There is also an opportunity to hold the Leader to account for the delivery of the Council plan and integrated performance and financial position of the council. We believe this would also be welcomed by the Leader as part of his duties to the council.

5.10 Task and finish style working was cited as some of the most successful examples of scrutiny by members, where it has selected key issues to scrutinise and to explore. These could be further improved if Scrutiny focused on making compelling, quality recommendations based on its activity.

5.11 We found that budget scrutiny was '11th hour' and light-touch to be useful or valid. It is an area that councils often ponder – when and how should Scrutiny be involved in the budget process given that the final budget draft does not normally emerge until January and that the cycle itself is often based on assumptions. Typically, as in West Northamptonshire, Scrutiny tends to be invited to scrutinise a draft budget which has in effect been put to bed.

5.12 As finance and budgets are increasingly an area of serious corporate risk. It is crucial that Scrutiny steps up and play a central role in the process of budget scrutiny from a much earlier start. This means that it may need to refocus its attention on the future challenges and operating environment of the council and to scrutinising the pressures, risks assumptions and budget gaps at a much earlier stage. It might also mean that Scrutiny will need more support, officer time, development, and information to equip it for this task. The vital task of scrutiny of the forward budget and medium-term financial plans is not yet sufficiently well developed and organised. There is a robust audit committee which looks at financial reporting as part of its remit, but the task of exploring the budget as an early and in-depth process needs more attention. This would seem to fit within the scope of the Corporate OSC.

We would recommend following the guidance in ¹ CfGS & CIPFA (2020) 'Financial Scrutiny, practice guide' - https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Financial-Scrutiny-practice-guide_proof3.pdf

We recommend:

- **Work planning to be a committee-based responsibility** – review the need for a Co-ordinating committee.
- **Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee** - Engaging members, officers, partners, and the public to prioritise the topics for review.
- **Review of the current approach to financial Scrutiny, MTFS/ budget scrutiny.** We have produced guidance on financial scrutiny with CIPFA¹, setting out scrutiny activity to complement Councils' annual financial cycle. The guide suggests ways to move budget and finance scrutiny beyond set-piece scrutiny 'events' and quarterly financial performance scorecards being reported to committee.

6. Scrutiny committee structure and scheduling

6.1 West Northamptonshire has scrutiny committee structure which includes an overarching Co-ordination Overview and Scrutiny Group (COSG). Its membership comprises chairs and vice chairs of the three other overview and Scrutiny committees. Apart from a co-ordinating role to approve the work programmes of the other OSCs it is difficult to identify any other purpose. Its apparent core role of ensuring a consistent 'golden thread' across all scrutiny committee appears to be a prolonged process.

6.2 We are therefore uncertain about the value of the COSG, since individual committees could readily identify and agree their work programmes and ensure that they are prioritising the right issues. This could be something to consider further.

6.3 The three main Scrutiny committees follow a thematic approach, focusing on Corporate, People and Place. However, it is difficult to understand in more detail, the terms of reference for these committees, other than their general title which provides a clue. Both the constitution and the council website and mod.gov would not be easy for the public to understand the role and purpose of these committees, or to navigate where specific issues would be scrutinised. Making their ToRs clear on the web pages and in the constitution would be helpful.

6.6 We would also suggest that scrutiny does not readily benefit from too much detail or lengthy reports. Detail can become counter-productive in helping Scrutiny to stay strategic and we would suggest that more consideration is given to the way committee meetings are constructed to ensure short agendas and information provided that is designed to serve the Scrutiny objective. To make this work will take some understanding and collaboration between Scrutiny and corporate officers.

6.7 We found that without some refocusing Scrutiny could continue to drift towards a performance management role, rather than being forward looking, focusing on important areas of challenge and opportunity which is largely the focus of Cabinet, and we suggest Scrutiny also.

6.8 We were told about several successful examples of task and finish group work. Scrutiny could benefit from further use of task and finish groups or 'spotlight events' where single issues of major

importance to the Council or community can be considered and explored in greater detail. This can add significant impact and quality to scrutiny activity.

6.9 But all T&F projects need to be clearly scoped, resourced, time-limited and with clear objectives to be useful and effective. The current structure does provide for up to three T&F projects per committee. We suggest that this would seem a lot in terms of support and resource capacity.

6.10 Task and finish style working is often where Scrutiny can do its best work by focussing on a single issue and drilling down to provide clear analysis to inform policy making.

6.11 We would like to raise the potential for the People OSC to become either overwhelmed or its focus unintentionally misplaced due to the size, complexity level of risk and budget challenges this committee is expected to scrutinise. The area of ASC, Children and Families, Health, PH and Education are in themselves massive areas of council responsibility. Obviously the 'Trust' model does mean that scrutiny may need to work differently, but the responsibility is still present. We would therefore raise concerns that a single committee meeting 6 times per year is potentially only able to provide high-level or limited level of scrutiny. Given that the People area of the council's responsibilities is the high spend, high risk space, our observations were that it is currently struggling with the size of the task and may tend to drift towards the 'interesting' rather than the 'critical'. We also found that health scrutiny by this committee was almost absent.

We recommend:

- **A review of the Scrutiny committee structure** – with a view to assessing how the areas of ASC, Children's and Health can have sufficient scrutiny capacity.
- **Consider extending the use of task and finish group work – or alternative scrutiny arrangements** – To ensure the most effective use of time and resources and to deliver maximum impact.

7. Scrutiny's output and impact

7.1 Overall, the general view is that Scrutiny does a reasonable job based on its short period of operation. However, when asked more specifically about Scrutiny's output and impact, most members and officers found it difficult to point to consistent work that has made a real difference, or tracking recommendations that have been accepted and implemented.

7.2 Some substantive items were considered by scrutiny committees, but the conclusion of these discussions did not always have an articulated outcome or recommendation. Otherwise, scrutiny business could be seen as solely for the purpose of obtaining information or to obtain updates. The practice of reports being presented 'to note', or inviting speakers only to share information, should be avoided.

7.3 Committee agendas can become overburdened and even cluttered with too many items which are arguably not particularly something that scrutiny can add much value or are for information. Scrutiny should not be viewed as an approval process.

7.4 Scrutiny must be clear in its purpose to add value to the issue or subject being considered. If Scrutiny cannot add value, then arguably the subject should not reach the agenda. As a matter of general principle, items for information or updates could be shared with members as briefing notes outside of committee, leaving more capacity for constructive activity.

7.5 When members of the Cabinet and senior officers are asked to attend, scrutiny committees would benefit from being clear about what the aims and objectives are of the session (including clarity over the content of any reports and presentations). Through our recommendation of establishing pre-meetings in the next section, this can also improve scrutiny's impact by allowing the space to create a shared understanding and trying to discuss beforehand what recommendations the committee might make on the day, and how the Cabinet might respond to them.

7.6 In carrying out 'external' Scrutiny work, it is important to ensure that Scrutiny has a clear focus on objectives and is able to influence outcomes concerning the topic discussed.

We recommend:

- **Changing the way that information is provided to Scrutiny members for oversight -** Reduce the number of items coming to Scrutiny solely for information, and consider how information on the following matters could be shared with councillors on a monthly basis outside of committee.
- **Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny –** so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not excessively detailed and is understandable by members.
- **Reviewing how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured –** This could include putting a 'recommendations monitoring report' at the beginning of agendas to orientate Scrutiny towards outcomes-focused meetings, alongside an emphasis on finding strong recommendations from questioning, to present to the Cabinet as improvement or challenge proposals.

8. Chairing, Member development and meeting preparation

8.1 Scrutiny's success is dependent on the right members, with the right capabilities and attributes, leading and managing the Scrutiny function. Scrutiny Chairs have a vital task in leading the committee, ensuring that it builds and maintains strong relationships with the Cabinet, officers and relevant external partners.

8.2 Chairs can also lead on setting the working culture of Scrutiny, helping it to set and uphold high standards of behaviour, engagement, and debate, ensuring good cross-party working. The lack of opposition members involved in Scrutiny chairing roles was raised as an issue in our evidence gathering. Although there is no single 'right' approach to selecting chairs - the emphasis ought to be on selecting chairs based on skill set and capability and providing ongoing training and support.

8.3 Scrutiny provides an excellent opportunity to support members in getting an in-depth understanding of issues across the Council's services. To get the most out of Scrutiny, Members need a clear sense of what is required of them as committee members and the work involved which allows good scrutiny to happen.

8.4 Many members were unsure of how to achieve impactful scrutiny, some were also open about a lack of understanding about the specific areas they are asked to scrutinise. Members felt that more briefings to provide them with core knowledge, especially on more complex or technical issues would be welcome and equip them better as scrutineers.

8.5 We heard that the quality of questioning in scrutiny varies; in some instances, it is forensic and probing, but it is often more general and exploratory and sometimes superficial.

8.6 West Northamptonshire is clearly committed to member development, and training was raised by some members who were clearly aware of the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

8.7 From our observations of committee meetings there is little evidence of co-ordinated questions or members acting as a team with clear lines of inquiry. Pre-meetings could allow members to give voice to their objectives for meetings and allow mutual motivations to be understood and questioning strategies to be agreed. It is likely that differences will remain and will, in some cases, be significant, but the airing of these differences will make it easier for members to understand where consensus is possible.

We recommend:

- **More skills development support is offered for the key roles of Chair and Vice-Chair** – To provide them with the confidence they need in leading the scrutiny function.
- **Consider further Scrutiny development and training for all committee members** - To develop a common understanding of what “good” Scrutiny practice looks like.
- **Providing additional briefing or expert involvement as required** - To assist Scrutiny members in becoming more capable to develop questioning strategies that will deliver high-impact and value-adding Scrutiny.
- **Cross-party pre-meetings for Scrutiny committees should be established** - With a specific focus on identifying priorities and members working together to develop lines of enquiry so that recommendations are more likely.

9. Public engagement

9.1 Scrutiny should explore and experiment with ways to allow greater access, openness and involvement with the public. This could include Scrutiny going on more site visits in the community, inviting the public to offer ideas for work plans, and greater use of social media channels for resident input and communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny work.

9.2 The council’s website would benefit from easier navigation to information about committees and democracy, including scrutiny. It requires a level of determination to get through to the relevant webpages. We would also recommend exploring opportunities for scrutiny to raise its public profile, perhaps through social media or other communication channels.

Thank you and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Chairs, members of the Scrutiny Committees, Leader and Cabinet members, Leaders of Political Groups and officers who took part in interviews for their time, insight and open views.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Parry,
Head of Consultancy

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny | 77 Mansell Street | London | E1 8AN

Tel: 020 7543 5627 / Mob: 07831 510381 (preferred)

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WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
12 JANUARY 2023

Report Title	STATISTICS - CODE OF CONDUCT ARRANGEMENTS - ANNUAL UPDATE
Report Author	Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager, tracy.tiff@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers		
MO	Catherine Whitehead	4/1/23
S151	Martin Henry	
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	4/1/23

List of Appendices

None.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report provides details of the annual statistics in relation to the Code of Conduct Arrangements for the Committee's information.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Constitution specifies that one of the purposes of the Democracy and Standards Committee is to *oversee and develop the Council's Code of Conduct and the overall standards of conduct for Council Members, co-opted Members and Parish and Town Councillors of West Northamptonshire.*

- 2.2 This is an opportunity for the Committee to be appraised of:

- (a) A precis of all completed complaints and any outstanding complaints of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct since the complaint's statistics were reported to the Committee at its meeting on 28 July 2022. Any complaints that were reported to the July 2022 meeting that are still live have been included within the information detailed at paragraph 4.1 below. This is in accordance with the Committee's duty to discharge functions in relation to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct within West Northamptonshire Council and Town and Parish Councils within the area of West Northamptonshire.

- (b) The procedure and process in dealing with complaints of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct was provided to the Committee at its meeting on 28 July 2022.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:
- a) Notes the statistics in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct.

3.2 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.2.1 The recommendations are intended to provide the Committee with statistical data in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with in respect of the Code of Member Conduct and so enable it to carry out its Standards responsibilities effectively.
- 3.2.2 To enable the Committee to identify whether there are any patterns or common themes in the type of complaints received and to consider whether all Members would benefit from training on any matter relating to Member Code of Conduct to enable them to fulfil their public functions effectively.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 As detailed in paragraph 2.1 above, "*The Standards responsibilities of the Committee are to oversee and develop the Council's Code of Conduct and the overall standards of conduct for Council Members, co-opted Members, and Parish and Town Councillors of West Northamptonshire.*" Therefore, statistical data in relation to complaints received and dealt with are provided to inform this role of the Committee.

Complaints – Member Code of Conduct

- 4.2 The adopted arrangements for dealing with allegations of breach of the code of conduct for councillors provides for an initial filtering process by the Monitoring Officer and in consultation with one of the Independent Persons to decide whether: -
- There is no breach of the Code and no further action should be taken; or
 - There is a potential breach of the Code and informal resolution is appropriate, to include for example mediation, training, apology, advice; or
 - There is a potential breach of the Code and the Monitoring Officer should undertake or commission an investigation into the complaint with a view to a report then being considered by the Standards Committee.
- 4.3 The analysis provides details of the nature of the complaint, the initial filtering decision of the Monitoring Officer, any informal resolutions agreed (where applicable), and the status of the complaint.
- 4.4 Some specific detailed information regarding pending complaints has not been provided as this may be prejudicial to the conduct of the ongoing complaints process. Personal details have also not been included to protect both the identity of councillors and the complainant.

4.5 Details of complaints in relation to the Code of Conduct are set out below.

Information regarding complaints in accordance with the Code of Member Conduct provided to the meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee – 28 July 2022

Where a complaint has since been closed, this is detailed within the status column below.

Date received	Council	Assessment of the Monitoring Officer	Status
06/07/21	Parish Council Complaint regarding alleged bullying.	The Monitoring Officer considered the complaint and determined it was not in the public interest to pursue.	Closed
12/01/22	West Northants Council Two complaints submitted regarding the completion of all sections of the Register of Interest form	The Monitoring Officer held discussions with the subject Member. Matter resolved informally.	Closed
12/02/22	West Northants Council Complaint submitted regarding alleged conflicts of interest at a meeting of an area Planning Committee	The Monitoring Officer consulted the Independent Person and assessed that there had been a potential breach of the Code. Referred for Investigation – no further action, inconclusive evidence.	Closed
28/02/22 and 01/03/22	Parish Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding alleged linguistic racism and aggressive behaviour during a meeting	The Monitoring Officer consulted the Independent Person and assessed that there had been a potential breach of the Code - Referred for Investigation.	Complaint in final stages – to be concluded shortly.
17/03/22	West Northants Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding not responding to a resident's email	The complainant withdrew the complaint as the issue had been resolved	Closed
25/04/22	Predecessor Council Complaint against a now former Councillor regarding issues pre 1 April 2021.	The Monitoring Officer closed the complaint as this related to pre 1 April 2021.	Closed
26/04/22	West Northants Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding alleged disrespectful behaviour towards another Councillor during a meeting	The Monitoring Officer is currently undertook an initial assessment of the complaint - no further action	Closed
01/05/22	West Northants Council A complaint submitted regarding the completion	The Monitoring Officer is in discussions with the Councillor regarding the complaint and their Register of Interest	Closed

	of all sections of the Register of Interest form	form which has now been updated – no further action.	
04/05/22	West Northants Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding social media activity	The Monitoring Officer has requested the complainant to provide further details in order that the complaint can be assessed. No further information received.	Closed
30/05/22	Parish Council Complaint against two Councillors regarding threatening behaviour towards the complainant	The Monitoring Officer undertook an initial assessment of the complaint regarding alleged threatening and intimidating behaviour. Based on the lack of evidence to support the allegations no further action proposed.	Closed
30/05/22	Parish Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding alleged disrespectful behaviour during a meeting	The Monitoring Officer undertook an initial assessment of the complaint and made contact with the subject Member for their comments – At this point the subject Member resigned from the Parish Council.	Closed
04/06/22	West Northants Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding alleged disrespectful behaviour towards Councillors and staff	The Monitoring Officer undertook an initial assessment of the complaint but was unable to contact the complainant (no name was provided on the complaint form) for further information as their email address did not appear to be valid and two voicemail messages were left on their mobile asking them to contact the Monitoring Officer – no further action.	Closed
17/06/22	Parish Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding ridiculing or demeaning towards another Councillor and picking on them or setting them up to fail	The Monitoring Officer undertook an initial assessment of the complaint and determined no further action	Closed
27/06/22	Parish Councillor Complaint against a Councillor regarding online bullying and racism	The Monitoring Officer has requested further information regarding the complaint, following which the complainant withdrew their complaint.	Closed
29/06/22	West Northants Council Complaint against a Councillor regarding correspondence sent in relation to a planning matter.	The Monitoring Officer has requested further information regarding the complaint for an initial assessment to take place. The further information was not provided by Complainant – no further action.	Closed

Complaints below received after the report to the Democracy and Standards Committee of 28 July 2022 that covered the period up to 30 June 2022

Date received	Council	Monitoring Officer Assessment	Status
21/07/22	West Northants Council The complaint submitted appeared to relate to the subject Member in relation to when they served as a Councillor for a predecessor Council, further information was required and requested to assess the complaint.	The Monitoring Officer requested further information regarding the complaint in order for it to be assessed. No additional information was received – no further action.	Closed
01/08/22	Predecessor Council Complaint against a now former Councillor regarding issues pre 1 April 2021.	The Monitoring Officer closed the complaint as this related to pre 1 April 2021.	Closed
18/08/22	West Northants Council Complaint received regarding alleged disrespectful behaviour towards the complainant	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint and concluded that the subject Member was not acting in their capacity as a Councillor. No further action.	Closed
17/08/22	Parish Council Complaint received regarding alleged bullying behaviour	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint, further information was requested from the complainant but this was not received and the complaint closed.	Closed
23/08/22	Parish Council Complaint regarding the subject Member's behaviour during a Council meeting	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint and concluded that the allegations relate to Parish Council business over which the Monitoring Officer has no jurisdiction.	Closed
03/09/22	West Northants Council Complaint regarding the language used by the subject Member in correspondence	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint and concluded that after careful consideration of the issues raised and in accordance with the West Northamptonshire Council Members' Code of Conduct, that it is deemed that there will be no further action taken in respect of this complaint.	Closed
06/09/22	West Northants Council Complaint received regarding correspondence sent by the subject Member	The Monitoring Officer requested further information from the complainant in order to be able to assess the complaint. Further information was not received – no further action.	Closed

09/09/22	West Northants Council Complaint received that the subject Member confirmed he would provide funding from the Covid Grant but this was not provided	The Monitoring Officer investigated the matter and spoke with the subject Member - the funding was provided to the complainant. No further action.	Closed
13/10/22 and 15/11/22	Parish Council Four complaints received regarding a number of Councillors and their alleged aggressive and impartial behaviour during a Parish Council meeting.	The Monitoring Officer is assessing the complaint with the Independent Person.	Live - being assessed
14/10/22	Parish Council Complaint received regarding alleged abusive comments within correspondence.	The Monitoring Officer is assessing the complaint with the Independent Person.	Live - being assessed
8/11/22	Parish Council Complaint received regarding two Councillors alleged disclosure of confidential information at a meeting.	The Monitoring Officer has assessed the complaint and the subject Member has issued an apology. No further action.	Closed
8/11/22	West Northants Council and Parish Council Complaint received regarding alleged disrespectful behaviour of the subject Member	The Monitoring Officer is assessing the complaint with the Independent Person.	Live – being assessed
15/11/22	West Northants Council Complaint received against three Members regarding alleged pre-determination regarding a Planning application. Behaviour in relation to one member.	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint with the Independent Person – Referred for investigation	Live - referred to an independent Investigator
16/11/22	Parish Council Complaint received containing a link to a YouTube video of the conversation between the complainant and the subject Member regarding alleged aggressive behaviour.	The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaint, together with the Independent Person, and concluded that the video evidence could not be used due to the poor quality and covert nature of the recording. It was also not clear whether the Member was acting in their capacity as a Councillor at the time of the recording. No further action.	Closed
05/12/22	Parish Council Complaint received regarding alleged	The Monitoring Officer is undertaking an initial assessment of	Live - initial assessment being undertaken

	aggressive behaviour by the subject Member at a meeting of the Parish Council	the complaint with the Independent Person.	
6/12/22	Parish Council Complaint relates to a Member appointment and a previously closed complaint following the resignation of the subject Member.	A response has been provided regarding the appointment process and a review is underway regarding the previously closed complaint as the subject Member is once again a Member.	Live - review being undertaken

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. Members are asked to note the information provided in respect of the Code of Conduct complaint process and complaints received.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the proposals.
- 6.1.2 There are no direct manpower implications arising from this report, however, the Committee will be aware that the handling and processing of complaints is resource intensive. A high volume of complaints could have an impact upon resources. It is therefore important that the Committee promotes and maintain high standards of conduct by all Councillors to help limit the number of complaints.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 The Council has a statutory duty under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the Council. In discharging its duty, the Council must adopt a code dealing with the conduct that is expected Members when they are acting in that capacity.
- 6.2.2 Under Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place 'arrangements' under which allegations that an elected or co-opted councillor of the Council or of a town or parish council within West Northamptonshire has failed to comply with their codes or Council's Code of Conduct, can be considered and decisions made on such allegations. It is for the Council to decide the details of those arrangements, but they must appoint at least one Independent Person whose views are to be taken into account before making a decision to investigate a complaint.
- 6.2.3 Complaints are received in accordance with the arrangements for dealing with allegations of breaches of the West Northamptonshire Members' Code of Conduct and of codes adopted by Parish Councils within West Northamptonshire. The Council has a legal duty to respond to complaints made against councillors of allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 There are none specifically.

6.4 **Communication and Consultation**

6.4.1 This is an update report which monitors complaints handling and is therefore not appropriate for wider consultation.

6.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

6.5.1 This is an update report which monitors complaints handling and it is therefore not appropriate to be referred to Overview and Scrutiny. An annual report of the Committee for 2021/2022 contained details of complaints handling through the Committee.

6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 There are no immediate climate implications arising from this report.

6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 There are no immediate community implications arising from this report.

7 Background Papers

Complaints received in respect of the arrangements for dealing with allegations of breaches of the West Northamptonshire Members' Code of Conduct and of Codes of Conduct adopted by Parish Councils within West Northamptonshire. These records contain exempt information (Categories 1 (Information relating to any individual) and 2 (Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual))

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

12 JANUARY 2023

Report Title	Councillor Development
Report Author	Sarah Hall, Deputy Director Law and Governance and Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager, tracy.tiff@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers		
MO	Catherine Whitehead	4/1/23
S151	Martin Henry	22/12/22

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Councillor development session statistics

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Councillor training for the Democracy and Standards Committee's (the Committee) information and seeks support for the requirements in relation to the Councillor development programme 2023 – 2025.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Details of training and briefings that Councillors have received since May 2022 were reported to the meeting of the Committee in July 2022. Appendix A provides the statistics for Councillor development sessions that have been held since May 2021.
- 2.2 Councillors are asked to consider the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor Development programme, starting with a programme for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4). During the Municipal year 2-24/25 a full four-year Councillor Development Programme for 2025-2029 could then also be produced for the Committee's consideration.
- 2.3 Councillor briefing sessions have been held regularly since May 2021 and it is felt there is a need to programme these into the Councillor development programme by scheduling monthly sessions in the calendar. The topic for each session will then be added closer to the date of the briefing session. This will allow for a more structured approach for the delivery of Councillor briefing sessions.

- 2.4 Personal development is important for Councillors and the Committee is asked to consider the mechanisms for identifying training needs for Councillors.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Approve the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor development programme, with a programme being approved and scheduled for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4); following which a full four year Councillor development programme for 2025-2029 will be produced for the Committee's consideration.
- b) Notes that monthly all Councillor briefing sessions will be added to the Councillor meeting calendar in regular time slots and topics for each session included when agreed.
- c) Agrees the mechanism for identifying training needs for Councillors (see paragraph 4.11).
- d) Considers other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.

3.2 *Reasons for Recommendations*

3.2.1 The recommendations are intended to:

- a) Enable the Committee to receive details regarding the Councillor development programme and provide Councillors with an opportunity to suggest further training requirements that they feel are required.
- b) Enable the Committee to consider the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor Development Programme for West Northamptonshire Councillors.
- c) Advise the Committee that monthly Councillor briefing sessions will be included with the Councillor meeting calendar.
- d) Enable the Committee to suggest various methods of identifying training needs for Councillors regarding their personal development.
- e) Enable the Committee to consider the various opportunities available to promote learning and development for Councillors.

4. Report Background

Councillor Development

- 4.1 The Standards responsibilities of the Committee includes advising, training, or arranging training for Councillors and co-opted Members of the Council, Parish and Town Councils on matters relating to the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Planning Code of Conduct. Councillor training is a wider issue and particularly for a new Council it is important that there is oversight of the Councillor training programme to ensure that Councillors have the skills they need to support effective decision making.

4.2 Councillor development is training and development opportunities, activities and programmes that offered to elected Councillors by West Northamptonshire Council which support Councillors to carry out their roles effectively.

4.3 The induction programme for Councillors that was held from May 2021 was very comprehensive and informative for Councillors. Since its completion, development sessions such as the following have been delivered as required (as detailed in Appendix A):

- Code of Conduct training
- Code of Conduct training in relation to Planning
- Planning Committee training
- Licensing Committee training for Councillors newly appointed to the Licensing Committee
- Planning Committee training for Councillors newly appointed to a Planning Committee
- Overview and Scrutiny training

4.4 At its meeting in January 2022, the Committee resolved that any refresher training for Councillors of Planning Committees and the Licensing Committees would be mandatory and this has been communicated to Councillors. Such refresher training will continue to be programmed into the Councillor Development programme as required.

4.5 It is proposed to prepare a four year rolling Councillor development programme, starting with a programme for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4 of Member's current terms of office). A full four-year Councillor development programme for 2025-2029 would then be produced for the Committee's consideration in 2024.

4.6 The following topics have been identified as priority areas for Councillor development in 2023/2024 and it is proposed that a series of sessions that focus specifically on these areas to build and develop Councillors skills and knowledge be incorporated into the Councillor development programme:

- Overview and Scrutiny
- Planning

4.7 The proposed sessions could include:

Overview and Scrutiny

- Understand scrutiny including its role, principles, and value
- Chairing skills
- Questioning skills
- Budget Scrutiny and finance scrutiny
- Performance, finance and risk
- Work programming

Planning

- Chairing skills
- Sound decision making
- Planning process and Code of Practice
- Dealing with a planning application
- Enforcement
- Consultation and Scheme of Delegation

- 4.8 Following comments from Councillors upon consideration of this report and after meetings with the Councillors of Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committees, a draft Member development programme for 2023 – 2025 will be prepared and presented to a meeting of this Committee for consideration and approval.
- 4.9 It is also proposed that Officers will review reports provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as well as meeting with both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committee Members to ascertain the training requirements and how the training should be delivered, for example, externally, internally, virtually, face to face or a mixture.
- 4.10 Councillor briefings are held regularly but are not currently programmed within the calendar of meetings. The briefings are added ad-hoc, often at short notice. The briefings are well received and provide an opportunity for Officers to brief Members on recent developments, to provide training and to facilitate the joint working between Councillors and Officers. It is considered that regular monthly Councillor briefings that are scheduled and added to Councillor’s calendars will not only encourage attendance but also provide Member’s with an opportunity to request topics to be added to the sessions. These briefings will be added to and form part of the proposed Member development programme.
- 4.11 In addition to Member briefings, consideration could also be given to other Member development opportunities. This includes:
- a Member Development Conference with a variety of topics and both internal and external speakers. Such an event could be held annually or bi-annually with Members being encouraged to propose topics for inclusion in the agenda;
 - how the Member’s bulletin could be utilised to promote development opportunities, to showcase effective Member development or as a development tool itself; and
 - a protocol for promoting and determining applications for attendance at paid for events.
- 4.11 Personal development is important for Councillors and the Committee is asked to consider the mechanisms for identifying training needs. A programme of member development should be directed towards identified need and the proposal is that officers should undertake some form of Personal Development Review with Councillors to ascertain training need. As it is not possible to conduct individual meetings with all 93 Councillors some form of collective Personal Development Review is required. Some potential examples to explore include:
- a survey with all Councillors;
 - engagement with Group Business Managers;
 - 121 meetings with nominated Councillors to discuss their individual training needs; or
 - meetings with individual committees to collectively discuss training requirements.
- 4.12 As reported to the meeting of the Committee held on 28 July 2022, there are a number of resources available for Councillors within the e-learning system “iLearn”:
- Councillor Induction and Councillor development section containing slides and recordings of the sessions from the Councillor Induction events held in May 2021
 - An e-learning section which contains the following:
 - Cyber Security
 - Community Leadership
 - Access to the Learning and Development MS365 e-learning page which contains
 - Hints and tips on using MicroSoft365
 - Application-focussed quick-start guides and videos
 - My Development Toolkit

- Search any topic and find videos and articles to enhance your own development journey.

4.13 Resources available within ILearn have been promoted to Councillors via the Councillor Bulletin and a further promotion to Councillors of these resources could take place early in 2023.

5 Issues and Choices

5.1 The Committee is asked to consider the proposal for a structured four-year Councillor Development programme starting with 2023 - 2025 (year 3 - 4) and provide comment on the proposed consultative method of preparing this programme.

6 Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the initial proposals in developing a structured Councillor development programme. However, when the development sessions are scheduled, it is expected that external training providers may be sourced to deliver some of the training. There would be a cost implication to this externally delivered training but there is budgetary provision available in the Councillor development budget.

6.1.2 There are no direct manpower implications arising from this report, however, should the training be delivered by internal officers there would be a resource implication upon those Officers.

7.1 Legal

7.1.1 The Democracy and Standards Committee and the wider Council have a duty to ensure that Councillors are supported in carrying out their roles effectively. This includes providing training. One of key roles undertaken by Councillors is decision making and particularly quasi-judicial decision making where there is a requirement to adhere to specific rules in the way in which decisions are made. Failure to adhere to these rules can jeopardise the decision making of the Council and result in legal challenges. In addition, the Council is under a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct which all councillors must uphold in performing their duties.

7.1.2 A structured training and development programme for newly elected Councillors and continuing training for all Councillors throughout their term of office will equip them with essential knowledge and skills to perform their roles effectively.

7.2 Risk

7.2.1 There are risks if Councillors do not have the training they need to carry out their roles effectively.

7.3 Consultation

7.3.1 As detailed in paragraph 4.8 it is proposed to consult Councillors of both Overview and Scrutiny and Planning Committees on the content of the training for these Committees. Wider consultation of all Members may occur following consideration of this report by Committee.

7.4 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.4.1 As detailed in paragraphs 4.8 and 7.3.1, it is proposed that Councillors of Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be consulted upon the content on the development sessions specific to Overview and Scrutiny.

7.5 Climate Impact

7.5.1 There are no immediate climate implications arising from this report.

7.6 Community Impact

7.6.1 There are no immediate community implications arising from this report.

7.7 Background Papers

Members' induction programme 2021/2022

Democracy and Standards Committee - agenda and minutes - 27 January 2022 and 28 July 2022

Report following the review of Overview and Scrutiny by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Report following the review of Planning by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

Member Training Type	Date of Training	Number attended
General Induction - 'Hitting the Ground Running' Session A – For newly elected Councillors Session B – Open to all Councillors	17 May 2021	39 (Session A) 19 (Session B)
Safeguarding	18 May 2021	30
Governance/Ethics/Code of Conduct and Member/Officer Relationships/the Role of a Councillor	19 May 2021	41
Licensing Training	21 May 2021	17
Planning Training	24 May 2021	20 (Session 1) 14 (Session 2)
Corporate Parenting and the Children's Trust	25 May 2021	36
Communications and Media Relations and Equalities Session A	27 May 2021	18
Working Together Effectively as the Cabinet/Executive	1 June 2021	Postponed
Data Protection and GDPR	2 June 2021	6
Equality in Local Government: The Councillors' Role	3 June 2021	17 (Session 1) 20 (Session 2)
Communications and Media Relations and Equalities Session B	4 June 2021	14
Local Government Finance: The Essentials	10 June 2021	33
Members' Welcome Day	12 June 2021	47 (am session) 45 (pm session)



**West
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Overview and Scrutiny	15 June 2021	29
Good and Efficient Chairing of Meetings	28 June 2021	17 (Session A) 21 (Session B)
Licensing Webinar	3 November 2021	12
Strategic Planning Refresher Training	13 January 2022	11
Various Mental Health Awareness and Self Care sessions	Various dates	15
Planning Committees Member Training	28 March 2022	31
Strategic Planning Committee Training: Minerals and Waste	4 April 2022	36
Data Protection and GDPR	28 April 2022	13
Taxi & Private Hire Best Practice Guidance Button Training Webinar	24 May 2022	6



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Member Training Type	Date of Training	Number attended
Code of Conduct Training NB: This training session was not for all Councillors	6 October 2022	12
Code of Conduct, Northampton Planning Members Training	5 July 2022	10
Code of Conduct, Daventry Planning Members Training	8 June 2022	10
Code of Conduct, South Northamptonshire Planning Members Training	12 September 2022	9
Code of Conduct, Strategic Planning Members Training	12 September 2022	9



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Member Training Type (Briefings) *Attendance statistics for Member Briefings are not recorded	Date of Training
Education Services: Responsibilities of Top Tier Councils Briefing	19 July 2021
Environmental Issues	22 July 2021
Spatial Options Member Briefing	11 October 2021
WNC Strategic Plan Spatial Options Consultation Briefing	11 October 2021
Member Briefing Northampton City Status	22 October 2021
Transformation Issues Briefing	4 November 2021
Planning Issues Briefing	10 November 2021
WNC Electoral Review Member Briefing	23 November 2021
Electoral Review Briefing	25 November 2021
Treasury Management Briefing	1 February 2022
Planning Issues Briefing	18 February 2022
Decarbonisation of Pensions Fund Member Briefing	10 March 2022
Economic Prospectus Briefing	10 March 2022
Integrated Care System Briefing	7 May 2022
Planning Issues Briefing	27 May 2022
Code of Conduct, Daventry Planning Members Briefing	8 June 2022
Highways Contract Briefing	13 June 2022
Code of Conduct, Northampton Planning Members Briefing	5 July 2022



Planning Matters Member Briefing	13 July 2022
South Northants Employment Sites SPD Briefing	14 July 2022
Code of Conduct, South Northamptonshire Planning Members Briefing	12 September 2022
Code of Conduct, Strategic Planning Members Briefing	12 September 2022
Net Zero v Carbon Neutral Briefing	21 September 2022
Councillor Engagement Session – Customer Service Point Strategy	19 October 2022
Net Zero v Carbon Neutral Briefing	10 November 2022
Councillor Engagement Session – Planning enforcement – Session 1 (drop in session)	19 December 2022
Councillor Engagement Session – Planning enforcement Session 2 (drop in session)	22 December 2022



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WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEMOCRACY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DRAFT VERSION 1

WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024

Date of the Democracy and Standards Committee	Topics and Rationale
12 January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Development – To provide an update on Member training and to seek approval for the development of a rolling Member Development Programme, commencing with an initial 2023/2025 programme. • Statistics – code of Conduct Arrangements – Annual update – To provide an update on the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct • Proposed amendments to the Constitution - To consider proposed amendments to the Constitution • Carried Motions on Notice - Predecessor Councils - The Committee to consider carried Motions from Predecessor Councils, with reasons provided proposed for re-adoption. • Work Programme 2023/2024 - To approve the Work programme for 2023/2024
30 March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundary Review Task and Finish Group - To provide an update on progress of the work of this Task and Finish Group • Proposed amendments to the Constitution - To consider proposed amendments to the Constitution • National Changes – Ethics and Standards – To provide an update on national changes in respect of Ethics and Standards that may impact on the Council’s arrangements for ethical standards • Member Development Programme 2023/2025 – to approve the Member Development Programme 2023/2025 • Work Programme 2023/2024 - To review the Work Programme 2023/2024 for the Democracy and Standards Committee
June 2023 (Date TBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register of Members' Interests - To provide an update regarding the operation of the Register of Members’ Interests 2022/2023 • Proposed amendments to the Constitution - To consider proposed amendments to the Constitution

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Changes – Ethics and Standards – To provide an update on national changes in respect of Ethics and Standards that may impact on the Council’s arrangements for ethical standards • Annual Report of the Democracy and Standards Committee 2022/2023 – To consider the draft Annual Report of the Democracy and Standards Committee 2022/2023 • Work Programme 2023/2024 - To review the Work Programme 2023/2024 for the Democracy and Standards Committee
September 2023 (Date TBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed amendments to the Constitution - To consider proposed amendments to the Constitution • Statistics – code of Conduct Arrangements – Six monthly update – To provide an update on the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct • National Changes – Ethics and Standards – To provide an update on national changes in respect of Ethics and Standards that may impact on the Council’s arrangements for ethical standards • Training for Democracy and Standards Committee - to consider any training specific to the Democracy and Standards Committee Members • Member Development Programme 2023/2025 – to review the Member Development Programme 2023/2025 • Work Programme 2023/2024 - To review the Work Programme 2023/2024 for the Democracy and Standards Committee
November 2023 (Date TBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Changes – Ethics and Standards – To provide an update on national changes in respect of Ethics and Standards that may impact on the Council’s arrangements for ethical standards • Proposed amendments to the Constitution - To consider proposed amendments to the Constitution • Work Programme 2023/2024 - To review the Work Programme 2023/2024 for the Democracy and Standards Committee
January 2024 (Date TBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics – code of Conduct Arrangements – Annual Review – To provide an update on the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct • Member Development – To provide an update on member training for the Committee’s information and seeks support for the classification and requirements in relation to the member training programme • National Changes – Ethics and Standards – To provide an update on national changes in respect of Ethics and Standards that may impact on the Council’s arrangements for ethical standards (if required) • Work Programme 2024/2025 - To propose a work programme for the Committee for 2024/2025