



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

DRAFT Overview and Scrutiny Review Framework

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview and scrutiny has been a fundamental component of local authority governance since executive arrangements were introduced via the Local Government Act 2000. Overview and scrutiny helps ensure members of an authority who are not part of the Cabinet may hold the cabinet to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities.

1.2 Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions the cabinet plans to take, those it plans to implement and those that have already been implemented. Recommendations by overview and scrutiny committees enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented. Overview and scrutiny committees can also play a valuable role in developing policy. Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
- Drive improvement in services.

1.3 Our mission statement is:

Effective scrutiny supports the work of the Council in achieving its objectives and priorities through constructive challenge and the promotion of best practice. It makes a positive contribution to the lives of citizens in West Northamptonshire.

1.4 Work carried out through scrutiny reviews should therefore be constructive and focussed on the priorities of the council and local people.

2. How Overview and Scrutiny is Organised at West Northamptonshire Council

2.1 West Northamptonshire Council has established a number of overview and scrutiny committees. Each committee has responsibility for a particular aspect of the Council’s services and/or governance. There are three components to how scrutiny is organised:

2.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings

2.3 Each of the Council’s overview and scrutiny committees maintains a strategic oversight of the services within its remit. They do this by setting an annual work programme and establishing task and finish groups to undertake scrutiny reviews.

2.4 Overview and scrutiny committee meetings should have a clearly laid out agenda, ideally featuring no more than two substantive items. The focus of committee meetings should be on challenge and improvement with a view to agreeing clear and implementable recommendations. Information gathering or updates from services should be avoided.

2.5 Formal committee meetings are an ideal opportunity to hear from members of the cabinet and senior officers and to ask questions that are relevant to each committee’s objectives.

2.6 Scrutiny Committee Pre-meetings

- 2.7 Pre-meetings are used to ensure each overview and scrutiny committee can get the most out of the subsequent committee meeting. They are intended to improve the impact of each committee by allowing the space to create a shared understanding and discussing beforehand what recommendations the committee might make on the day, and how the Cabinet might respond. All members of the committee should be invited.
- 2.8 Pre-meetings allow members to articulate their objectives for committee meetings and allow motivations to be understood and questioning strategies to be agreed. While differences may remain, the airing of these differences will make it easier for members to understand where consensus is possible.
- 2.9 Ultimately, the purpose of pre-meetings is to ensure that time spent at the subsequent committee meeting is used productively. They are to be used for identifying priorities and developing lines of enquiry so that productive recommendations are more likely.

2.10 Scrutiny Triangulation Meetings

- 2.11 Scrutiny Triangulation Meetings are regular meetings that are designed to facilitate regular communication and information sharing so that Scrutiny can be a resource that can inform Cabinet decision making. The meetings include scrutiny chairs, Cabinet Members and relevant Directors and are intended to allow consideration of future issues and the role that Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these long-term plans.
- 2.12 The meetings should provide a forum for scrutiny leaders and Cabinet Members to discuss upcoming matters that will benefit from scrutiny input. Such matters can include policy development and major procurements to name but two. The timescales are not limited to those covered by the Council's Forward Plan; these meetings should look further ahead in order to take a strategic view. The meetings are also intended to present an opportunity to share and discuss ways in which scrutiny can be used as an improvement asset. The meetings are not intended to set work programmes for committees, which remain the responsibility of each committee.

3. Work programme

- 3.1 It is vital that each committee sets a work programme in order that it can prioritise its work and ensure there is a clear emphasis on key issues. Work programmes must be focussed as there is strong evidence that when scrutiny focuses on fewer things of greater importance, more is achieved.
- 3.2 Work planning ensures scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. Work planning is not a one-off activity. Although a workshop at the beginning of the year may be helpful in identifying priorities and providing structure, each work programme will need to retain flexibility,

which means each committee should set aside time to review its work programme to ensure it remains relevant.

- 3.3 The triangulation meetings play an important part in the development of work programmes, but individual committee members are also be empowered to suggest topics. A pro forma is included at Appendix A. This is intended to provide a helpful framework for suggesting topics, as well as a means by which committees may ensure suggestions are aligned with the strategic aims of the committee and will add value/are of relevance to communities in West Northamptonshire.
- 3.4 In agreeing items for their work programmes, Overview and Scrutiny Committees should take account of suggestions from members, as well as partners and the public but must also be directed by the Council's corporate plan, plans for policy development and risks and challenges identified through corporate performance reporting. Work planning should be a committee-based activity but must also be forward-looking and strategic in nature.

4. Scrutiny Reviews

- 4.1 This document is designed to guide those involved in overview and scrutiny through the procedure for conducting a scrutiny review from beginning to end. It is intended as a framework which will help to ensure that scrutiny reviews are effective and deliver their stated objectives.
- 4.2 The criteria set out below can be used as a guide for selecting and prioritising topics that are suitable for scrutiny reviews.
- 4.3 Good scrutiny reviews:
- Are about topics that are important to local people;
 - Have an impact and add value;
 - Are about issues that a scrutiny review can influence;
 - Have a clear focus and clearly defined aims and objectives;
 - Do not duplicate work being carried out elsewhere;
 - Have a clear picture of the resources required to undertake a review; and
 - Use resources proportionally to the topic
- 4.4 Topics may not be suitable for a scrutiny review when:
- The issue is already being addressed, or would be better addressed elsewhere;
 - A review would have limited impact, or the topic is too broad to make a review realistic; or
 - The topic is not a priority for local people.
 - The resource required is disproportionate to the likely benefit to local people
- 4.5 Overview and scrutiny committees are ultimately responsible for selecting topics for inclusion in their work programmes.

5. Proposal

- 5.1 Every proposal to undertake a scrutiny review should use the Scrutiny Review Proposal form set out at **Appendix A**. The Scrutiny Review Proposal should be completed by the member (or officer) proposing a review and shall be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee. Where a committee proposes a review, a lead member should be identified to complete the proposal form. Members may wish to seek input from a Director or Assistant Director prior to submitting the proposal form for consideration.
- 5.2 Each Scrutiny Review Proposal shall also be reviewed by the Monitoring Officer to ensure the review is a matter for which the scrutiny committee has a remit and does not cut across the work of any other committee. A Proposal may be rejected if it:
- Does not relate to a matter for which the Council has responsibility;
 - Is not within the remit of overview and scrutiny committee concerned;
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, vexatious, or otherwise improper or irrelevant;
 - Is otherwise contrary to the law or would place the Council at risk of litigation.

6. Planning and Confirming a Review

- 6.1 If, having reviewed the proposal, an overview and scrutiny committee approves a topic for provisional inclusion in its work programme, a planning exercise should be undertaken by the committee before the topic is confirmed and work on the review begins. The Scrutiny Review Plan form set out at **Appendix 2** is to be used for this purpose. Planning a review is essential to minimise the risks that might prevent a review reaching its desired outcome. The planning exercise should build on the information contained within the Scrutiny Review Proposal. The form is constructed around the following seven steps: -

- **Scope**
There should be a clear statement about the scope of the review with a list of the matters which are in scope and will be covered by the review and a list of the matters which are out of scope and therefore will be outside the review.
- **Identifying the key objectives and issues**
There should be a clear articulation of what the review will seek to achieve and the issues that must be addressed to achieve the objectives. Some of this work must be carried out when the overview and scrutiny committee considers whether to include the review into its work programme.
- **Key Lines of enquiry (KLOE)**
Once the objectives and the key issues have been decided, KLOE should be determined to help focus the review and enable a consistent approach to a topic as the review progresses .
- **Outlining stakeholders and evidence**
There must be a clear picture of the evidence required to achieve the outcomes, including any witnesses or stakeholders.

- **Risks**

Potential risks need to be identified at the outset. These should include risks to delivery and other risks (i.e. cutting across work that is already ongoing by other committees).

- **Establishing a clear timeframe**

The timeframe for the beginning and end of the review will be established by the relevant overview and scrutiny committee. The planning process must determine how the review will fit into the overall timeframe that has been decided. It will be helpful to set out the dates and times of the meetings at the outset and any invitees to the meetings required at the planning stage to ensure that the availability of witnesses and stakeholders can be established as soon as possible to avoid delays to the review. If any visits are required these should also be timetabled at the outset to enable the planning of those visits to take place as early as possible.

- **Membership**

The review document should set out how many members are required and identify who they are, including any co-opted members. Members outside Scrutiny or officers of the Council should be classed as invitees and not co-optees to avoid any conflicts with the role of Scrutiny and other functions.

6.2 At the conclusion of the planning stage, the relevant overview and scrutiny committee will be required to review the Scrutiny Review Plan and will confirm if the review should go ahead or if the same or similar outcome could be achieved through alternative means.

7. Type of review

7.1 There are two types of scrutiny review; in-depth and spotlight. In-depth reviews involve a small review group nominated by the relevant scrutiny committee. Their aim is to produce a report for consideration by the cabinet. This type of review should include a clear timetable and should take no longer than 6 months.

7.2 A spotlight review may not produce a report for cabinet but may report its findings directly to the relevant cabinet member instead. A spotlight review could be completed in a single meeting but should take no longer than 2 months.

7.3 If a scrutiny committee approves an item for inclusion in its work programme, it shall determine which type of review is suitable in light of the proposal form and member discussion. This will form part of the planning process (see Section 3 and Appendix B).

7.4 Overview and scrutiny committees should be mindful of the resource implications of conducting reviews and should not undertake more than three reviews at any one time. These reviews shall be staggered so they are at various stages (i.e. scoping, evidence gathering and drafting recommendations) so as to balance workload. Should it appear likely that a review will exceed the timescales set out above, the matter should be reported to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee for approval.

8. The review

8.1 Collecting the information and evidence

8.2 Key issues and objectives will have been identified in the planning phase and a broad outline of the evidence required will have been suggested and included in the plan of the review. The next step is to identify the sources of the information required and the methods for collecting that information. Recommendations that will be formulated at the end of the review must be evidence based and be seen to reference the information that has been provided.

8.3 Evidence can be gathered from a variety of sources including identified best practice, current Council policy, proposed or recent Government legislation, previous or possible consultation, performance indicators, and any previous work or reviews that might be relevant.

8.4 Considering Witnesses

8.5 Witnesses have a key role to play in helping scrutiny reviews fulfil their objectives. Care needs to be taken when inviting witnesses to appear as the term can be off-putting. Informal initial approaches either face to face or by telephone may help to reassure potential witnesses, especially those outside the Council. Witnesses should be treated in a fair and constructive way. Throughout the hearing of the evidence stage, the Review objectives need to be constantly in mind and the information assessed against these. It is the responsibility of the Chairman of the Review to ensure that it remains focused and progresses in accordance with the time frame set out.

8.6 Creating a question plan

8.7 Providing a question plan for witnesses to consider prior to attendance at an overview and scrutiny committee or task and finish panel meeting will make the most of their attendance at the meeting.

8.8 Assessing the evidence and making recommendations

8.9 The review process can take several meetings. While the councillors involved should consider and scrutinise the subject throughout the review, time should also be set aside during the penultimate meeting to assess the information received to that point. When forming conclusions and recommendations, all the main points raised during the review should be considered to enable clear links to be shown between evidence and final recommendations. Officers will support Councillors in collating the evidence that has been provided and advising on the impact of the potential recommendations.

8.10 Recommendations are the purpose of the review process and should be aimed at tangible improvements in service delivery. The desired outcome of the review, outlined in the plan, should be at the forefront of Councillors' minds when forming final recommendations. When

making recommendations it is important to remember that it is not just the right answer that matters but also evidence of how this conclusion was reached. Recommendations should: -

- Link to the evidence provided
- Be concise, specific and be meaningful on their own.
- Link to the scope of the review
- Include methods for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations

Recommendations need not take the form of a detailed list of actions. They should instead reflect the outcomes that the review has identified that will lead to service improvements.

8.11 Officers of appropriate seniority within the relevant service should be involved in assisting Overview and Scrutiny Committees in developing recommendations. The Council's Monitoring Officer or their nominee should also be afforded the opportunity to review recommendations at a formative stage in order to provide input as to their lawfulness etc.

8.12 Prior to any report that makes recommendations being published ahead of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer must sign off the report. This is to ensure that any changes required as a result of legal or financial considerations can be considered prior to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee finalising their recommendations.

9. Reporting the outcome

9.1 Once the task and finish panel has approved its recommendations the Chair, supported by officers, will prepare a draft report. The draft report will then be considered at the final meeting of the task and finish panel. The report will then be referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and approval. The report will then be presented by the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee and/or the Chair of the review to the appropriate body (usually Cabinet). Bite-sized reviews may have a different reporting pathway to reflect their different approach.

9.2 A template for scrutiny reports is set out at Appendix B to this document.

9.3 Cabinet or other relevant body does not have to accept all the recommendations of the review but must consider the review and recommendations and provide reasons for their decision in relation to each of the recommendations.

10. Monitoring

10.1 Where the recommendations are accepted and there is a decision for implementation monitoring arrangements need to be put in place in order that progress can be measured. An overview and scrutiny committee will monitor progress and if progress is not satisfactory, further scrutiny can be undertaken.

10.2 Follow up regarding the outcomes of the scrutiny process will be communicated in the form of an annual report from each overview and scrutiny committee. The Annual reports

will be presented to full Council and will include an account of all the reviews that have been undertaken over the course of the year.

10.3 The Portfolio Holder may be asked to attend a meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee approximately six months after the Review report recommendations have been accepted by Cabinet to provide a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations. This could take the form of a report or verbal update, but there should be a clear focus on the outcome of the recommendations that were implemented and any benefits or unforeseen outcomes.

Scrutiny Review Proposal – Form A

Appendix A

This form should be completed by sponsoring member(s) or officers when proposing an item for consideration with the work programme of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The relevant overview and scrutiny committee reserves the right to reject suggestions or suggest alternative means for resolving the issues raised.

Proposer's name and title		Date	
Proposed topic title	<i>Insert title here</i>		
Background and reason for including the item in the Committee's work programme	<i>A brief outline of the background detailing why the scrutiny topic is suggested for review. This should focus on the value that will be added by the proposal. Authors should consider and reflect why scrutiny, in particular, is a suitable channel for exploration of the issue, rather than another council mechanism or area of the decision-making process.</i>		
Link to the Council's Corporate Priorities	<i>Please explain how the proposal will help contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities: Corporate Plan West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)</i>		
Key objectives	<i>There should be a clear explanation of what the review will seek to achieve.</i> <i>Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely).</i>		
Measure of effectiveness	<i>How will the effectiveness of the review be understood? Sometimes the success of a review can lie in outcomes that are not always measurable, but this should nevertheless be considered and reflected within the scope.</i>		
Spotlight or Full Review	<i>Enter the estimated timescale here.</i>		

Please return this form to: TBC

This form should be completed by the overview and scrutiny committee after the Scrutiny Review Proposal has been completed and the topic has been included in the work programme of that committee.

Topic title	<i>Insert title here</i>
Scope	<p><i>This should be a clear statement about the scope of the review with a list of the matters which are in scope and will be covered by the review and a list of the matters which are out of scope and therefore will be outside the review.</i></p> <p><i>The following is included in the scope of the review:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • <p><i>The following falls outside the scope of the review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
Link to the Council's Corporate Priorities (from Form A)	<i>Please explain how the proposal will help contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities: Corporate Plan West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)</i>
Key objectives and measures of effectiveness (from Form A)	<p><i>There should be a clear explanation of what the review will seek to achieve.</i></p> <p><i>How will the effectiveness of the review be understood? What are the potential outcomes of the review e.g. service improvements, policy change, etc? Sometimes the success of a review can lie in outcomes that are not always measurable, but this should nevertheless be considered and reflected within the scope.</i></p>
Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)	<p><i>Once the objectives and the key issues have been decided, KLOE should be determined to help focus the review and enable a consistent approach to a topic as the review progresses.</i></p> <p><i>Specify the key lines of enquiry that will underpin the initial planning of the review:</i></p>
Outlining stakeholders	<i>Stakeholders and witnesses: Identify stakeholders who will assist with the committee's investigation including officers, organisations, the public, and type of information to be considered. If the services subject to review are delivered with partners or shared with other Councils, the review must ensure those partners are an integral part of the review process, so</i>

	<i>identifying them at the scoping stage will ensure they are included.</i>
Outlining evidence	<p><i>Primary evidence: Identify what information is required to take the review forward, and what information is not already available.</i></p> <p><i>Secondary evidence: Identify background information, performance indicators, complaints, existing reports, legislation, central government information and reports.</i></p>
Outlining Briefings and/or site visits	<i>Reviews may seek to incorporate briefings and site visits as part of the evidence gathering process. Site visits should aim to inform members about issues under review and experience service delivery at a customer level.</i>
Risks	<i>Identify potential risks here. These should include risks to delivery and other risks (i.e., cutting across work that is already ongoing by other committees or partner organisations). Explain how these risks will be mitigated.</i>
Membership	<i>How many members are required? Please identify them here,, including any co-opted members (members who are not members of a scrutiny committee, or officers of the Council, should be classed as invitees not co-optees to avoid any conflicts with the role of Scrutiny and other functions).</i>
Timeframe	<i>Set out the dates and times of the meetings here. It is good practice to check the availability of any witnesses or stakeholders required at meetings to avoid delays to the review. If any visits are required these should also be timetabled at the outset to enable the planning of those visits to take place as early as possible.</i>



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Xxx Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Name of Review

Draft version 1 and date

Index

Chair’s Foreword 1 page nos

Executive Summary

Final Report including recommendations

APPENDICES

Appendix A Scope of the Review

Appendix B Core Questions

And further if applicable

Chair's Foreword

Add wording

Photo of Chair

Councillor xx

Chair, Task and Finish Group – xxx

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

- Councillors **xxxx**. who sat with me on this Review
- **Add**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key summary and then to include the conclusions and recommendations from the report

West Northamptonshire Council
Xx Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Report of xx Task and Finish Group
DRAFT - Version 1

1. Purposes and Rationale

1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny review was:

To add

2. Key Lines of Enquiry

Add

2.1 A copy of the scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

3. Context and Background

3.1 Following approval of its work programme for xx, xx Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on date commissioned the Task and Finish Group to undertake the review – xx An in-depth review commenced in xx and concluded in xx.

3.2 A Task and Finish Group was therefore established comprising Councillor xx (Chair); Councillors xx. xx, was co-opted to the review.

4. Corporate Priorities

4.1 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority - xx.

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

Background data, including:

Add from the scope

5. Methodology and Evidence Collection

5.1 Evidence was collected from a variety of sources:

6. Background data

Add

6.1 Background reports

Add

7. Presentation to set the scene

7.1 Salient points:

Add

Add more headings etc if applicable

8. Core Questions

8.1 The Task and Finish Group devised a series of core questions that it put to its key witnesses over a cycle of meetings (Copy at Appendix B).

8.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Task and Finish Group on **xxxxx**

8.3 Salient points of evidence:

Add details here

Salient points from each expert advisor with heading eg Cabinet Member for and then add bullet points of the evidence

9. Site Visit (if applicable)

9.1 add details of the findings

10. Conclusions and Key Findings

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

Add

11. Recommendations and Reasons

Recommendations should be referred to the Monitoring Officer for input prior to being submitted to the Cabinet for approval. Adequate reasons for the recommendations and alternative options considered should also be set out so that any future decision by the Cabinet can be recorded in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements.

11.1 The **xx** Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that:

12. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time. (standard recommendation?)

APPENDICES (page to separate report from appendices and then add appendices)