



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2022/2023

A Message from Councillor Dermot Bambridge, Chairman, Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This is the second Annual Report of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), and it details some of the work of the Committee during 2022-2023.

It has been another busy year for the Committee with one comprehensive review being completed: Tree Strategy Policy and two Oversight Groups continuing with their work: Active Travel and Highways (Joint with Corporate OSC).

Instead of a complete commentary of all that Place OSC has achieved over the year, this Annual Report provides a short summary of the key highlights of the work that O&S has been engaged in during 2022/2023.

The Committee has completed a vast amount of work through formal meetings, Task and Finish groups and Oversight groups. Through the scrutiny work, the Committee has made recommendations to Cabinet. The Tree Strategy and Policy Working Group reported its conclusions and recommendations to the Committee at its meeting on 18 October 2022.

I am pleased to highlight that Overview and Scrutiny continues to become involved with decisions at an early stage.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in and have supported Scrutiny over the past year. I would also like to convey my thanks to the witnesses and members of the public who have contributed to scrutiny's work this year. Their participation brings knowledge, ideas, and enthusiasm to the work of Scrutiny.

I hope that you find this report informative and interesting.



**Councillor Dermot Bambridge,
Chairman
Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Purpose of Overview and Scrutiny

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

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

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

At West Northamptonshire Council during 2022/23, these roles were carried out by three Overview and Scrutiny committees: Place, People and Corporate OSCs. These committees are made up of Councillors from different political groups, known as non-Executives, and who are not part of the Cabinet.

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

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

Remit of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)

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

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership

The membership of the Place O&S Committee was made up of 15 non-Executives who were during 2022/2023:

Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chairman)

Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice Chairman)

Councillors:

Rufia Ashraf

Antony Bagot Webb
William Barter
Pinder Chauhan
Paul Dyball
Terrie Eales
Louisa Fowler
Enam Haque
Paul Joyce
Charles Morton
Kevin Parker
Bob Purser
Richard Solesbury-Timms

How does Overview and Scrutiny make a difference?

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

Effective Scrutiny

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

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

Terms of Reference for Place OSC

The terms of reference of Place OSC:

Built and natural environment
Transport and highways
Community safety and regulatory services (including statutory crime and disorder scrutiny)
Economic development, regeneration, and growth
Statutory scrutiny of flood risk management

What has Place OSC achieved during 2022-2023 and how was this impact made during 2022-2023?

The Committee held six formal meetings during 2022/23. One Task and Finish Group completed its comprehensive review during the year and reported in the autumn of 2022. The Committee has set up an Oversight Group to provide Scrutiny input into a key Policy which will meet at the key

milestones. A further Oversight group, with Corporate OSC is scrutinising the Highways contract. Some key areas of work by the Committee and the outcomes resulting from this work are detailed below. The Committee's work programme, meeting details and papers can be located on West Northamptonshire Council's [website](#)

Call-In

During the year the Committee received one Call-in, in relation to the Cabinet decision of 14 June 2022 – UK Levelling Up Fund Round Two, it was rejected by the Committee and the Committee recommended to Cabinet that the process for Round 3 is reviewed to include all ward members and the voluntary sector early in the consultation.

Focussed and Targeted Scrutiny work during 2022/2023

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

- Highways and Transport Contract
- Tree Policy and Strategy for the Council (pre-decision Scrutiny)
- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny
- Northampton Town Plan (Planning and growth)
- Flood Risk Management
- Active Travel Strategy
- Draft Fly tipping Policy
- Net Zero
- West Northamptonshire Libraries Strategy 2024-2027
- Digital Infrastructure IAA Progress
- Home to School Transport Policy
- Waste and Resources Strategy

Highways and Transport Contract Oversight Group

Together with Members of Corporate OSC, an Oversight Group was established in 2022 that will meet to monitor the contract at various key stages.

Tree Policy and Strategy for West Northamptonshire Council

The Committee undertook pre-decision Scrutiny into a Tree Policy and Strategy for the Council. A Task and Finish Group was established, and an in-depth review took place during 2021/2022 and the early half of 2022/2023 with the final report of the Group received by the Committee in the autumn of 2022. The Group received a wealth of information and data from desktop research as

well as from a number of expert advisors and made a number of recommendations around the content of the Tree Policy and Strategy.

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee under Sections 19 & 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. The Committee can review the work of the Community Safety Partners in relation their crime and disorder functions and can also deal with Councillor Calls for Action in relation to Crime and Disorder matters. An annual report from the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) informs the O&S Committee of work undertaken; non-Executives decide whether further review or scrutiny is required. This report focuses on the levels of performance in the light of reduced resources and what measures have been taken to meet any shortfall in performance. This demonstrates excellent working relationships between non-Executives and partners. The Committee receives a report each year from the CSP to continue to inform its crime and disorder role.

Waste and Resources Strategy

Although this is not a Scrutiny Working Group, the Vice Chairman of the Committee Chairs this Group and reports back to each meeting detailing progress made by the Group on developing a Waste and Resources Strategy for West Northamptonshire Council.

Northampton Town Plan

The Committee provided scrutiny input and challenge into the Northampton Town Plan particularly in relation to the development of the M&S and BHS site, and this work is expected to continue during 2023, which will enable the Committee to provide further input and challenge on the progress of the development.

Local Plan Northampton Part 2

The Committee provided scrutiny input and challenge into the Local Plan Northampton Part 2. The Committee understood that the Plan needed to be passed onto full Council for adoption so that the Council could start working on the WNC plan. There was a vigorous consultation process that the Plan went through.

Flood Risk Management

Flood Risk Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee (England) Regulations 2011 were introduced under the Local Government Act 2000. The Local Government Act 2000 permits Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review and scrutinise Risk Management Authorities in relation to their flood management work. The scrutiny of Flood Risk Management is within the remit of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee provided challenge to the

process for flood risk management for West Northamptonshire Council in particular around housing development sites and drainage, farming techniques, flooding and flood plains, tree planting and flood causes. The Committee was pleased that there is funding available to undertake flood work that the Council could apply for. The Committee will continue to undertake the scrutiny of flood risk management annually.

Active Travel Strategy

The Committee, in the form of an Oversight Group is providing pre-decision scrutiny into the Council's plans for an Active Travel Strategy and the health and environmental benefits of such a Strategy at key milestones:

- Review the Ambition Statement
- Review the first draft of the Strategy
- Review consultation feedback and the final Strategy
- Review specific scheme proposals prior to public consultation

The work of the Active Strategy Oversight Group is expected to conclude by the end of 2023 when the draft Active Travel Strategy produced.

Fly-Tipping Strategy

The Committee considered and provided challenge to the progress of the actions outlined in the Action Plan of the Fly Tipping Strategy.

Net Zero

The Committee provided scrutiny comment into the Sustainability Strategy and the Council's intention to Net Zero WNC's own emissions by 2030 and those of residents and businesses by 2045. The Committee realised that it was important that planning policy played a role in ensuring that buildings were built appropriately to allow the installation of panels and noted that solar panels would be installed on the roof of One Angel Square, the Council's head office. This would only cover the Council's needs. Other Council owned properties were being considered for the installation of solar panels, which would allow surplus electricity to be fed back into the grid.

West Northamptonshire Libraries Strategy 2024-2027

The Committee provided input and challenge into the West Northamptonshire Libraries Strategy 2024-2027, particularly around the future aims for libraries as part of the Strategy and the public library priorities. The Committee felt that a mobile library service would be beneficial, particularly for those in rural areas living further away from libraries and the need for inclusivity for all children and promotion of reading. The Committee requested communication to be sent to all Town and Parish Councils within West Northamptonshire on the possibility of transforming more telephone

boxes and spaces into a bookstore to create access points. The Committee shared how proud it was of the Council's library service which they highlighted did a tremendous job of connecting communities and promoting social cohesion.

Proposed changes to Home to School Transport Policy

The Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny into the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy. It was realised that the Policy update would bring the Council in line with statutory government guidance, but whereas other authorities included SEND transport for children within their policies, WNC had made the decision at cabinet to continue their commitment to providing transport for SEND children. The Committee highlighted the need for the Council to be fair and inform parents and make communications available that if a child was allocated a school that was further away, school transport would be provided but if the parents chose to send their child to a school further away, they would be liable to pay for their transport to school. It is important to get the communications correct on Home to School transport, and to consult with schools and school governors, as well as Parish Councils.

Critical Friend to Cabinet

Cabinet Members and Senior Officers attended various meetings of Place O&S Committee and provided the detailed reasoning behind the various key issues. By doing this, it provided comprehension and clarity for the Committee on the issues detailed in its work programme.

These are excellent examples of the Committee's critical friend role and the healthy relationship that exists between Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. They emphasise also the robust challenge offered by scrutiny.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/2023

The Committee has dealt with key issues as detailed at pages 5, 6, 7 and 8 of this Annual report, and other matters that were considered during 2022/223.

Looking ahead

The work of the Active Travel Oversight Group will conclude Municipal year 2022-2023. The Highways Oversight Group will continue to scrutinise the highways contract. There are a number of other key issues contained within the work programme for example, crime and disorder scrutiny, scrutiny of flood risk management, the Local Plan for West Northamptonshire, and the Waste Strategy.