



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2021/2022

A Message from Councillor Danielle Stone, Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021-2022

This Annual Report highlights some of the work that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during its first year and what issues the Committee will concentrate on next year.

Overview and Scrutiny is a vital part of local democracy and good governance. It is really important that the work of scrutiny adds value and improvement and I feel that the budget scrutiny work undertaken by the Committee really demonstrated that. I was pleased to attend the February 2022 meeting of Cabinet and highlight the recommendations of the Budget Scrutiny report.

Before the Committee held its first meeting in June 2022, as part of the Council's comprehensive Councillor induction programme, specific training for Overview and Scrutiny was held. This key training delivered by the Deputy Chief Executive of the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Governance to make sure that all Scrutiny Councillors were furnished with the knowledge prior to the inaugural meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee developed an interim short-term work programme ahead of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees agreeing the Work Programming process for 2021-2022. We asked the citizens of West Northamptonshire to suggest topics for future Scrutiny reviews. There were in excess of fifty suggestions from the public and the Committee values and encourages the input from the public into its work programming process. Similarly, to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this Committee held a workshop in the winter 2021 and carefully considered the suggestions. These suggestions, Cabinet's priorities for the year and ideas put forward by the Committee formed the basis of the Committee's work programme 2021-2022. There has been public interest in the work of the Committee, with some members of the public addressing a meeting, or observing the proceedings of the meetings. I hope that this increased in 2022-2023.

The work of the Committee has been varied and in particular, I would like to thank my colleagues who sat with me on Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2021/2022.

This report is not a complete commentary of everything the Committee has achieved but is a summary of some key highlights of the work undertaken in 2021-2022. I do hope that you enjoy reading it.



Councillor Danielle Stone
Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose of Overview and Scrutiny

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remit of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership

The membership of the Corporate O&S Committee was made up of 17 non-Executives during 2021/2022:

Councillor Danielle Stone (Chair)

Councillor Sam Rumens (Vice Chair)

Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice Chair)

Councillors:

May 2021 – November 2021

from November 2021

Aziz Rahman (Aziz)	
Sally Beardsworth	from November 2021
Councillor Michael Brown	
Paul Clarke	
Maggie Clubley	
Terrie Eales	May 2021 - November 2021
Rupert Frost	
Keith Holland Delamere	from November 2021
Mark Hughes	
David James	
Koulla Jolley	
Ian McCord	from November 2021
Dennis Meredith	May 2021 - November 2021
Colin Morgan	
Ken Pritchard	
Brian Sargeant	
Walter Tarasiewicz	

How does Overview and Scrutiny make a difference?

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

Effective Scrutiny

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

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

Terms of Reference for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The terms of reference of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

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

What has Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee achieved during 2021-2022 and how was this impact made during 2021-2022?

The Committee held seven formal meetings during 2021/22 as well as one informal workshop style meeting in respect of the draft budget for the Council 2022-2023. The Committee set up three Task and Finish Groups during 2021-2022 and these are scheduled to commence their work in the Municipal year 2022-2023. Some key areas of work by the Committee and the outcomes resulting from this work are detailed below. The Committee's work programme, meeting details and papers can be located on West Northamptonshire Council's [website](#)

Training

As stated on page 1, early in the municipal year 2021/2022, the Committee received comprehensive training delivered by an expert of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The training was particularly valued as it focussed on work programming and the role of Overview and Scrutiny. Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Officers supporting the Scrutiny function have continued to ensure the knowledge base is development and examples of best practice built during the year, examples being attendance at the Centre for Scrutiny and Governance annual Conference and attendance at the East Midlands Scrutiny network meetings and various webinars offered by the Centre for Scrutiny and Governance. I am pleased to report that Councillor Stone, Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2021-2022 will be attending the East Midlands Scrutiny network in the spring to talk about the budget scrutiny process that the Committee adopted for 2021-2022.

What has Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee achieved during 2021 - 2022

The following are examples of the scrutiny work which has been undertaken by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2021/2022:

Contract Management and Procurement

Social Values Act 2013

Budget monitoring - Revenue Monitoring Report

School Budgets

The Council's Draft Budget 2022-2023

Transformation Projects

The work of the Association for Public Excellence (APSE)

Convening three Task and Finish Groups - Treasury Management, Modernising Systems and Expenses Policy

Contract Management and Procurement

The Committee scrutinised contract management and procurement and the links to social value. The Committee was provided with key information from the Head of Procurement and constructive

challenge was provided on the role of procurement. This information formed background evidence gathering for the Committee's work on Social Value.

Social Value

The Committee considered and provided Scrutiny input into the development of social value and how the Council could positively affect communities by considering socio-economic and environmental factors when planning and implementing decisions and processes. The Committee also heard from a representative of the University of Northampton regarding the Social Value Framework that had been designed to support and fund the voluntary, charity and social enterprise sectors and extract social impact research; which was a collaborative exercise including various key partners such as the NHS, Police and other organisations. The County Framework is designed to: Define, Sustain and Measure Socioeconomic Development within Northamptonshire. The Committee scrutinised the Social Value Framework and the positives of the social value approach was emphasised but concern was highlighted regarding businesses allocating a percentage of profits to the social sector and whether this may raise prices to customers, meaning that residents would be paying more to cover costs.

Association for Public Services (APSE)

The Committee received a presentation from a representative of APSE on how APSE can help Scrutiny Committees to review contracts, including social value. The presentation included details of the role of local Councils in delivering social value and community level economic outcomes, social value in outsourced contracts and reviewing the performance of contracts and the performance of services. The Committee welcomed that West Northamptonshire Council had set up a Social Value Task and Finish Group made up of Officers of the Council in order that a greater understanding of how Social Value links into contract reviews and reviews of service. The Committee recommended that this Task and Finish Group should receive similar input on Social Value from APSE to maximise Social Value across all of the Council's activities.

School Budgets

The Committee provide scrutiny input into school budgets around the four-block funding model for the Dedicated Schools Grant: Schools Block, High Needs Block, Early years Block and the Central Schools Services Block. The Committee welcomed this funding model, providing constructive challenge on the progress made on the budget, welcoming the fact that an overall deficit was not predicted. The Committee requested that two Members attend all meetings of the schools Forum as observers on behalf of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Revenue Monitoring Report

Prior to Cabinet receiving the report Q1 – Revenue Monitoring Report 2021 – 2022 the Committee considered and provided Scrutiny input into it. This was the Council's first public finance document

since West Northamptonshire Council was formed. The Committee considered the new build programme as part of the Housing Revenue Account, the financial status of the predecessor Councils that detailed the carried forward balances and the actual expenditure and income for 2020-21 prior to being audited. The level of reserves for the Authority was considered along with the financial pressures associated with delivering services during the Covid19 pandemic.

Budget Scrutiny

The Committee scrutinised the Council's draft 2022/23 budget in detail and provided scrutiny input. Budget Scrutiny was undertaken by the whole Committee in the form of a "Spotlight" Scrutiny Review. The Committee focussed its budget Scrutiny on three key areas:

- Carbon neutrality and Highways
- Children's Trust
- Strength Based Working model and financial savings associated with it

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

The Committee's recommendations included that there was a need for a costed plan which clearly sets out how the Council can be Carbon neutral by 2030. The Committee welcomed the investment in highways services and the increase of 19 new FTEs. After robust challenge to the Children's Trust budget, the Committee supports the long-term view of aiming for zero based budgeting in future years. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the Strength Based working model and commends the savings detailed in the draft Budget 2022/2023. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee proposed a move to the Living Wage Foundation's living wage of £9.90 for all staff employed by the Council from 1 April 2022 and that care staff should be similarly remunerated.

As part of its budget scrutiny process, the Committee asked for and received information about how the budget aligns to the corporate plan. The Committee further asked for this to become the practice for budget setting and for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be involved at an earlier stage. The Committee agreed that the budget Scrutiny process would start in October 2022.

The Committee's [report](#) was appended to the report on the budget that was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 15 February 2022. Comprehensive responses were received by the Committee to further queries that were raised at the meeting.

Task and Finish Groups

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

- Expenses Policy
- Treasury Management
- Modernising Systems

Critical Friend to Cabinet

Cabinet Members and Senior Officers attended various meetings of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provided the detailed reasoning behind the various key issues. These are summarised at pages 6 and 7 of this Annual Report. By doing this, it provided comprehension and clarity for the Committee on the issues detailed in its work programme.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme 2021/2022

The Committee has addressed key issues as detailed at pages 6- 7, and other subjects that were considered during 2021/22. The Committee's work programme was put together by the Committee which was then approved by the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Group, that comprises the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny committees. As previously stated, the development of the Committee's work programme was informed by a public consultation exercise carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny function in autumn 2021. This enabled members of the public and representatives from community groups to suggest issues for scrutiny review. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered all suggestions within its remit alongside other potential priorities to produce its final work programme.

Looking ahead

The work of the three Task and Finish Groups (Expenses Policy, Treasury Management, Modernising Systems) will commence in the Municipal year 2022-2023. There are a number of key issues contained within the work programme for example, budget monitoring and budget scrutiny and these will continue to be key focus areas for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.