



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

West Northamptonshire Council

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2021/2022

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

This Annual Report is a summary of just some of the work that Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has undertaken during its first year and what issues the Committee needs to concentrate on next year.

I would like to commend the induction programme for Overview and Scrutiny and the development sessions for Overview and Scrutiny as well as Chairing skills which took place early in the Municipal year 2021/2022. This ensured all Scrutiny Councillors were equipped with all the relevant knowledge prior to the inaugural meetings of the committee. Following training from the national body - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - the work of this Committee started in the summer 2021 with the completion of an interim short term work programme. This soon developed into the Committee's annual work programme after consulting with the general public for their ideas for future Scrutiny review and Cabinet Members on their priorities for the year.

Public interest in the work of the O&S Committees is increasing and I am pleased that members of the public and Councillors who were not members of Place OSC have attended meetings and spoken on various agenda items. The public was invited to, and made a number of suggestions, to inform our Work Programme for 2021/2022, further details are contained within the body of this report.

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 2021/2022. I hope that you find this report informative and interesting.

Overview and Scrutiny work is Member led and evidence based and it is important that the work of Scrutiny adds value and makes a difference. The review work from 2021/2022 will be concluded during 2022 and I will be pleased to present the findings and recommendations of these to Cabinet.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved in and have supported Scrutiny over the past year. In particular, I would like to thank my colleagues who sat with me on Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2021/2022.

I would also like to convey my thanks to the many expert advisors that have contributed to the work of Place OSC this year. Their participation brings knowledge, ideas and enthusiasm to the work of Place OSC. I emphasise that the support of all those involved in Scrutiny Reviews is required for a successful outcome.



**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, these roles are 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 2021/2022:

Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chairman)
Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice Chairman)

Councillors:

Rufia Ashraf
Antony Bagot Webb
William Barter
Pinder Chauhan
Janice Duffy
Paul Dyball
Terrie Eales
Louisa Fowler
Enam Haque
Paul Joyce
Charles Morton
Kevin Parker
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 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. One Task and Finish Group has undertaken a comprehensive review during the year and is due to report in the summer 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. 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

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 Public Scrutiny annual Conference and attendance at the East Midlands Scrutiny network meetings.

Call-In

During the year the Committee received two Call-ins. One of these was withdrawn, regarding the Cabinet decision of 12 October 2021 - Old Lion Pub and St Peter's Church, Northampton Town, the second call in in relation to the Cabinet decision of 9 November 2021 – Harmonisation of the Garden Waste Collection Service across West Northamptonshire was upheld by the Committee.

Focussed and Targeted Scrutiny work during 2021/2022

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:

- North West Relief Road
- Tree Policy and Strategy for the Council (pre-decision Scrutiny)
- Farthinghoe Bypass
- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny
- Northampton Town Plan (Planning and growth)
- Flood Risk Management
- Active Travel Strategy
- Draft Fly tipping Policy

North West Relief Road

The Committee reviewed the funding gap for the North West Relief Road project, monitoring the current processes including quality and change. The Committee was mindful of the historical funding methodology for scheme developments and welcomed the funding methodology going forward for scheme developments, particularly welcoming the various gateways.

Farthinghoe Bypass

The Committee received a comprehensive update on the Farthinghoe Bypass and offered challenge where necessary, highlighting the need for public consultation to be taken with completion estimated at the autumn/winter 2023.

Tree Policy and Strategy for West Northamptonshire Council

The Committee agreed to undertake 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 with the final report of the Group expected to be 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 will make 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 will receive a report each year from the CSP to continue to inform its crime and disorder role.

Regeneration of Northampton Town Centre, including culture

The Committee provided scrutiny input and challenge into the Northampton Town Plan particularly in relation to the development of parking, transport and highways. Members commended the impressive Northampton Town Plan and highlighted the need to involve community groups. The Committee will receive a progress report in the Municipal year 2022/2023., scheduled within its Work Programme, which will enable the Committee to provide further input and challenge on the progress of the Transformation and Finance Programme. The Committee scrutinised the proposal

to devise a 'Future Use of Capital Receipts' Policy to allow the Authority to potentially transfer the funding of these costs into capital. The Committee expressed concerns that there should have been further input into this Policy, particularly from Councillors.

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 and welcomed the series of ongoing future projects and capital works designed to improve flood resilience in West Northamptonshire communities. The Committee was pleased to hear that flood risk management was being improved and that the resource would be brought in-house to enable all contracted work to be delivered. The Committee will undertake the scrutiny of risk management authorities annually.

Active Travel Strategy

The Committee was made aware of Council's plans for an Active Travel Strategy and the health and environmental benefits of such a Strategy. It was expected that the Strategy would be in place by the end of 2023. Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was keen to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of this Strategy and will therefore have an important role in providing input into the Strategy. The Committee set up the Active Travel Oversight Group that will provide scrutiny input at key milestones of Strategy. The Oversight Group will be convened during 2022/2023 and will provide input and challenge 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

Draft Fly-Tipping Strategy

The Committee contributed to the proposed charter and action plan of the draft Fly-Tipping Strategy. Constructive challenge on the progress that had been made was provided, overall, the Committee welcomed the proposed charter and action plan. The Committee will further consider progress of the actions outlined in the Action Plan at a future meeting in 2023.

Critical Friend to Cabinet

Cabinet Members and Senior Officers attended various meetings of the shadow 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 2021/2022

The Committee has dealt with key issues as detailed at pages 5, 6 and 7 of this Annual report, and other matters 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. The development of the Committee's work programme was informed by a public consultation exercise carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny function in the autumn 2021. This made sure that the public and representatives of various community groups were able to suggest issues for scrutiny review. Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered all suggestions within its remit alongside other potential priorities to produce its final work programme for 2021/2022.

Looking ahead

The work of the Active Travel Oversight Group will commence in the Municipal year 2022-2023. A further Oversight Group to scrutinise the highways contract has been appointed to look into this very important matter that will affect all residents in one way or another. As well as 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, and the Waste Strategy and these will continue to be key focus areas for Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.