

Scrutiny Improvement Review carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny - March 2021

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) undertook a short scrutiny review in early 2021. The purpose of the review was to give the Council an external perspective on how well the current model of scrutiny is functioning and fulfilling its essential role of policy shaping, holding the Cabinet to account and reviewing issues of importance to local communities.

CfGS reviewed the current scrutiny arrangements, involving two days of evidence gathering through conversations with councillors and officers on 25th and 26th January 2021. In addition, they observed an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, reviewed key documents, and created and analysed a Member survey. CfGS met with 13 councillors and 8 officers, including the Council Leader, Deputy Leader, members of Cabinet, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chair, Members of the Scrutiny Committee, the Council's Chief Executive, Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team as well as Governance and Democratic Services Officers.

A workshop was held on 17 June 2021 to provide an opportunity to consider the findings from the review and to identify improvement actions to be taken forward. Members of the Cabinet, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Management Team and the Democratic Services Team were invited to attend.

Action points arising:

1. Continued learning and development opportunities to be offered to members of the O&S Committee.
2. Chairs and Vice Chairs of committees and task groups to continue to be offered specific training and development regarding their role.
3. Consideration to be given to providing structured decision-making training for Chairs and Vice Chairs of all committees.
4. Agendas for meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be reviewed to reduce the number of items that are to be noted, and to increase the number of items that enable scrutiny to be carried out within the committee.
5. The O&S Work Programme to be given greater prominence by bringing it higher up agendas of O&S Committee meetings..
6. To review the way in which the O&S Committee receives information about the budget and to be clear about its approach to scrutinising such information.
7. To reinvigorate the focus on Portfolio Holders (rather than officers) being held accountable for performance and their portfolios.
8. To discuss with the committee, the possible advantages of holding pre-meetings of the O&S Committee to ensure that members appropriately consider and plan the scrutiny of the items that are included on an agenda before it.

It should also be noted that since May 2019 there have been 15 scrutiny training and development events offered to councillors, the details of which are attached.

Peter Foulsham

Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager

15 July 2021