

Scrutiny Committee



Report Title: Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023/24

Report to: Scrutiny Committee / Council

Date of meeting: 23 April 2024 / 14 May 2024

Responsible Director / Officer: Head of Legal and Governance, Monitoring Officer

Chairman of Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Bernard Williamson

Report Author: Corporate and Democratic Services Manager

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Annual Report is to inform Council and Members of the Public of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during 2023/24

The report provides details on reviews carried out, details the structure of Scrutiny within the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny processes and the principles of Scrutiny, along with membership details of the Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Committee recommend to Council:

- (1) Note the contents of the Chairman's Annual Report for the Scrutiny Committee for 2023/24.

1. Introduction by the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee

With the change from the 'committee' system to the 'cabinet' model of governance the current Scrutiny Committee was established following the annual meeting of the council in May 2023.

The beginning of the council year was taken up by training meetings to ensure that all members were able to engage and use the powers of scrutiny in a positive role for the council. These meetings were also used to establish a new 'Work' programme for the committee for the year 2023-2024.

On behalf of the Committee I thank Sammy Wintle (Corporate and Democratic Services Manager) and Christina Webb (Democratic Services Officer) for their work and support throughout the year. This has been undertaken in addition to their normal democratic officer work.

It should be noted that normally this is a dedicated role as recommended in government guidance. However, financial pressures on GYBC have resulted in this becoming a shared role under the guidance of the Monitoring Officer Caroline Whatling.

I thank all committee members for their contributions to the work and the growing confidence of the committee coming to terms with a new form of governance. This is not a 'whipped' committee and its value depends on the independence of members to fully scrutinise the decisions and work across all council areas of activity without fear or favour.

2. The role of Scrutiny Committee

- 2.1 The role and purpose of Scrutiny is to provide a key democratic mechanism for holding public-service decision-makers and providers to account as well as facilitating the improvement of public services within the Borough. Effective scrutiny enhances accountability, ensures transparency of decision-making, contributes to service improvement, and acts as a 'check and balance' on decision-makers.
- 2.2 Scrutiny Committee is led by local, elected Councillors and should be carried out in a proactive and constructive way and contribute to the delivery of efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of local inhabitants, visitors, and businesses.
- 2.3 The Scrutiny Committee conducts its proceedings in accordance with its Terms of Reference (as set out in 16.2, Terms of Reference of the Constitution) and the Proceedings of the Scrutiny Committee (as set out in 16.6 Proceedings of the Scrutiny committee of the Constitution).
- 2.4 Meetings of the Committee are open to the public and are mostly held in the evenings.

3. Scrutiny Committee Membership / Roles and Responsibilities

Membership

- 3.1 The Committee comprises 13 Members, 6 Conservatives, 6 Labour and 1 Independent member.

Members for 2023/24 were as follows: -

Councillor Williamson (Labour) (Chairman)

Councillor Freeman (Conservative (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Galer (Conservative)

Councillor Grant (Conservative)

Councillor Hammond (Conservative)

Councillor Jeal (Labour)

Councillor Mogford (Conservative)
Councillor Murray-Smith (Conservative)
Councillor Robinson-Payne (Labour)
Councillor Thompson (Independent)
Councillor Wainwright (Labour)
Councillor Waters-Bunn (Labour)

- 3.2 All Members except members of the Cabinet may be members of the Scrutiny Committee. However, no Member may be involved in scrutinising a decision with which they will be or have been directly involved.
- 3.3 In exceptional circumstances, the Scrutiny Committee shall be entitled to recommend to the Council the appointment of a co-optee where particular skills or knowledge are justified.
- 3.4 The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee shall be appointed by the Council. Where one group has majority control of the Council, the Chair will be drawn from a member of a minority group (which includes Members who are Independents) with the Vice-Chair of the Committee being drawn from any member of the Committee.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.5 The Council's Constitution details the various roles that the Chairman and Committee Members undertake whilst appointed to sit on the Committee.

Chair of the Committee

The Chair of the Committee will undertake the following roles:

- a) chair meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and promote the development and exercise of the scrutiny function according to the Council's Constitution
- b) ensure that the work of the Scrutiny Committee contributes to the Council's corporate objectives
- c) liaise with the Chief Executive and the Executive Directors to ensure that the workload of the Scrutiny Committee is managed effectively to enable it to carry out its role of:
 - i) reviewing the formulation of policy development
 - ii) and advising the Cabinet of areas of potential improvements
- d) liaise with Cabinet Members as appropriate
- e) contribute to the training and development of Members engaged in the overview and scrutiny role
- f) approve any report that the Committee may wish to submit to Cabinet; and

g) be the spokesperson for the Committee within the terms of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Committee Members

All Members of the Committee shall:

a) participate in the work of the Scrutiny Committee in ways that contribute to the Council's corporate objectives

b) seek to strengthen the Council through non-partisan participation in the Scrutiny Committee.

c) and undertake mandatory training to ensure they are suitably prepared to effectively discharge the scrutiny and review role.

4. The Committee's Work Programme 2023/24

4.1 The Committee at its first meeting agreed a work programme for 2023/24 which focussed on matters that affected Council Services and those issues that were deemed to be of particular importance to the communities and residents.

4.2 Each year, the Committee has a number of reviews that it carries out such as the Budget.

4.3 Key areas that the Scrutiny Committee discussed during 2023/24 were as follows: -

- Housing Investment Plan and Sheltered Housing Asset Review
- Council Tax Support Scheme – Consultation on options for a 24/25 Scheme
- Review of the Planning / Development Management department
- Social Housing Applications
- 1990 Environment Act
- Annual Action Plan
- Quarterly Performance Reports
- Quarterly Financial Reports

4.4 The related full formal Committee reports and resulting minutes may also be viewed on the Council's [website](#)

5. Member Working Groups / Task and Finish Groups

5.1 Following a request from a Councillor the Scrutiny Committee established one Task and Finish Group during 2023/24 as follows:-

- Hemsby Coastal Erosion Task and Finish Group – The Task and Finish Group was established to scrutinise the following issues: -
 - Seeking an understanding of why Hemsby was not awarded funding for Sea Defenses
 - Considering information submitted to the Environment Agency with regard to the number of homes which are permanent residences as opposed to Holiday lets and whether has impacted the scoring in terms of an application for funding of sea defenses.
 - Scrutinising the Business Case submitted to the Environment Agency to determine whether the content was a correct and complete representation of the position.
 - Identify what funding opportunities exist with regard to the Coastal Defenses and whether any funding would be available from Anglian Water

5.2 The Task and Finish have met once to discuss and agree the Terms of Reference and are due to conclude their findings and provide a report back to the Scrutiny Committee within a maximum of a 4-month period.

6. Call-ins and Councillor's Call for action

6.1 During the Committee year of 2023/24 the Scrutiny Committee called-in one item of business that had been considered by the Cabinet as follows:-

Date of Call-in	Councillors requesting Call-in	Title or report	Reason for Call-in	Outcome of call-in
18/12/2023	Wainwright Capewell Martin Jeal Robinson-Payne	Control Centre and community alarm Services Emergency Contract Decision	To allow the Committee time to ask key questions to responsible Officers and to ensure that the Committee receive all relevant information in order to confirm that the operational emergency clause was used correctly	Cabinet reconsidered the report at it's meeting on the 29 January 2024 and the decision was made to UPHOLD the original recommendations as approved.

6.2 The Committee received one Councillor Call for Action during the 2023/24 period.

Date of Councillor Call for Action CCFA	Councillors requesting CCFA	Reason for CCFA	Outcome of CCFA

13/2/2024	Wainwright Waters-Bunn Robinson-Payne	<p>Significant concerns regarding the Haven Bridge building in Cobholm. The Scaffolding company are making significant claims of the building being unsafe and that there is a risk to life.</p> <p>This has been an ongoing issue for nearly 2 years come March' 24. There has been no progress whatsoever. There are several businesses being affected by this road closure which NCC has now advised is closed until much later this year.</p> <p>Many residents are being affected by the closed road and lack of access to their homes.</p>	<p>Scrutiny received a report from the Head of Environment and Suitability at its meeting on the 27 February 2024. Following this meeting it was agreed that further information and update would be brought back to a later Committee date once information regarding survey of the premises was available and next steps could be considered.</p>
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7. Training and development

- 7.1 Scrutiny Committee received in depth training from a representative of the Local Government Assembly in June 2023.
- 7.2 Training developed specifically for the Committee is vitally important to support the continued development of Members and therefore any further training opportunities identified will be offered to the Committee.

8. Looking Forward

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Committee will continue to evolve by regularly reviewing its work programme and look for areas of development so that it can continue to focus on issues/areas where a positive impact could be delivered for the Council and its residents.
- 8.2 The Scrutiny Committee work programme will be monitored and maintained throughout the 2024/25 municipal year and will reflect local needs and priorities – issues of community concern as well as Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy priorities, prioritise topics for scrutiny that have most impact or benefit and be flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues.