


Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
Date:	13 July 2015	
Report Title:	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	

1 Purpose / Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report reflects what has been undertaken and achieved by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel during 2014/15 and takes a forward look at the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny in 2015/16.

2 Key issues

- The Local Government Act 2000 sets out the requirements of a modernised democratic structure for local authorities. The Act includes the establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Panel or Committee.
- Article 6 (3.4) of the Council's Constitution sets out the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's terms of reference. There is a stated requirement for the work and working methods of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to be reported annually to Council.

3 Recommendations

For the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to approve the Annual Report for forwarding to Council.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	-
Portfolio Holder(s)	-
Report Originator(s)	Councillor Jan French, Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny 2014 - 2015 Councillor Fred Yeulett, Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny 2015-16
Contact Officer(s)	Carol Pilson – Corporate Director 01354 622360; cpilson@fenland.gov.uk Anna Goodall – Head of Legal and Governance 01354 622357; agoodall@fenland.gov.uk Geoff Kent - Head of Customer Services 01354 622290; gkent@fenland.gov.uk
Background Paper(s)	Overview and Scrutiny Reports, Agendas and Minutes 2014/15

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

1 CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

It brings me great pleasure to introduce the 2014/15 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for Fenland District Council. This annual report shows the effective work that Fenland District Councillors have completed this year to investigate important local topics as well as holding our decision makers to account.

Scrutiny plays a vital role in delivering democracy as well as ensuring the Council's services are delivered to the highest standards. The need for strong scrutiny has never been more important due to the pace of change affecting local Government in addition to the fact that the financial resources available to the Council continue to reduce. It is vital therefore that Councillors are able to question decisions made whilst also contributing positively to the emergence and development of new policies and changes that are proposed. As this report shows, Overview and Scrutiny provides us with an invaluable mechanism to achieve that. I am confident that the Council's scrutiny function will continue to provide challenge to ensure that the Council continues to deliver effective services to the residents of Fenland.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the key achievements of the committee over the past year in addition to enabling the newly appointed Chairman to highlight the focus of the panel during the months to come.

I would like to thank all Members both past and present in addition to officers for their ongoing support and co-operation with the Overview and Scrutiny function this year. I would also like to thank the many representatives of partner organisations that have taken the time to contribute so positively to our work.

I commend this report to Council.

Councillor Mrs Jan French
Chairman 2014- 15

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2014-2015

Councillor Mrs Jan French, Chairman

Councillor Gary Swann, Vice-Chairman

Councillor David Broker

Councillor Mrs Virginia Bucknor

Councillor Sam Clark

Councillor David Hodgson

Councillor Simon King

Councillor Kit Owen

Councillor Robert Skoulding

Councillor Peter Tunley

Councillor Steve Tierney

1 INTRODUCTION - What is Overview and Scrutiny?

- 1.1 The Local Government Act 2000 requires Councils to have a committee with the power to review or scrutinise decisions or actions affecting the authority's area or residents. Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains effective and accountable. Scrutiny ensures that the Cabinet is held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve Council policies.
- 1.2 The power to scrutinise was further expanded by the Police and Justice Act 2006, which provided powers to scrutinise the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, known locally as the Fenland Community Safety Partnership.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provided more powers to local government to scrutinise other partner organisations. It also brings in other provisions that affect how scrutiny committees work, including powers over the creation of joint committees.

- 1.3 More recently, the Localism Act 2011 consolidated the wide range of scrutiny legislation into a single place, largely un-amended from previous legislation. This aims to increase local accountability and transparency of public services as well as enhancing the involvement of local service users.
- 1.4 It is important that a Panel is able to perform its functions in relation to both Overview and Scrutiny and the key differences in approach are set out below:

Overview	Scrutiny
Advising on the development of policies.	Ensuring that the Council's policies have been effectively implemented by the Cabinet.
Recommending how the Council's corporate priorities can be delivered.	Helping to monitor and drive improvements within the Council's corporate priorities.
Bringing a wider perspective to problem solving.	Holding decision makers to account
Examining broader issues affecting local communities.	Ensuring all service providers within a local community are providing 'value for money'

Main responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny

- 1.5 The role of Overview and Scrutiny has five broad functions:
- Holding the Council's Executive and its statutory partners to account in the public interest. This enables more transparent and effective decision making.
 - Supporting the development of effective policies and initiatives which have a beneficial impact on the community through policy review and development.
 - Contributing to continuous improvement in the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities.
 - Having a positive impact on the work and outcomes of external agencies and providers of public services.
 - Aiding Councillors in engaging with their communities and undertaking the role of community representatives.

2 A BACKWARD LOOK TO 2014 - 2015

What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel achieved in 2014/2015

External advisors/partners

- 2.2 The panel looked at an array of different topic areas; most of which could be dealt with by drawing on the knowledge and expertise of Fenland District Councillors and Officers. However, sometimes there is a need to call in external advisors to help the panel with their knowledge and to provide a different vantage point.
- 2.3 As will be explained later, a greater emphasis has been placed on Local Authority scrutiny, of and with partner agencies. Fenland's Overview and Scrutiny Panel is already undertaking this partnership working in a positive spirit, demonstrating its forward thinking. The table below highlights the external partners the Overview and Scrutiny Panel have already engaged with, when undertaking the scrutiny function during 2014/15:

Agenda item	External Advisor/Partner	Organisation
Update on Anglian Revenue Partnership (ARP)	Paul Corney	Anglia Revenues Partnership
Update on Roddons Housing Association	Anne Brighton	Roddons Housing Association
Safer Fenland partnership (SFP): Annual Scrutiny	Robin Sissons	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Fenland Health and Wellbeing Partnership Update	Val Thomas	Cambridgeshire County Council Public Health

- 2.4 As well as working with individual partners, the panel have also scrutinised other elements of partnership working through each of the respective corporate priority areas. The panel will build on this further in 2015/2016.

How the work of Overview and Scrutiny is linked to the Council's corporate priorities

- 2.5 Fenland District Council's Corporate Plan clearly sets out a series of priorities that will be the focus of the organisation over a 3 year period. To ensure these priorities are correct, deliver on targets and achieve outcomes, the Overview and Scrutiny work programme reflects the Council's priorities to ensure robust scrutiny can be delivered.

2.6 The table below illustrates how agenda items link in with Fenland’s priorities:

C – Communities

Env – Environment

E – Economy

QO – Quality Organisation

Topic/Issue	C	Env	E	QO
Progress against corporate priority: Environment				
Progress against corporate priority: Economy				
Progress against corporate priority: Communities				
Progress in Localism Delivery				
Fenland Health and Wellbeing Partnership				
Safer Fenland partnership (SFP) /Crime Disorder and Reduction partnership				
Fenland Tourism Board Update				
Annual meeting with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive				
Progress against corporate priority: Quality Organisation				
Draft Corporate Plan and Budget				
Council Tax Scheme				
Fees and Charges				
Community House				
Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy				
Wisbech 2020 Vision Update				

3 Specific reviews undertaken in 2014- 2015

3.1 Accommodation Review

3.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered a wide range of issues in relation to the needs and options for future accommodation requirements for the District Council along with associated proposals for modernising working practices.

3.3 A key driver for the Accommodation Review was the requirement to respond to Central Government’s efficiency agenda by ensuring the Council reduces its costs whilst minimising the impact on front line services to the local community.

- 3.4 The Council was not seeking to move out of Fenland Hall but seized an opportunity to explore the possibility of closer joint working of various public sector bodies across Cambridgeshire. In essence both Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council had office accommodation in close proximity to each other in March, both of which were under utilised. This prompted a detailed analysis of the business case for both organisations to better utilise their assets and potentially benefit from the potential of capital and revenue financial gains.
- 3.5 Three core proposals were considered as part of the review of the headquarters of Fenland District Council
- To relocate to the existing Hereward Hall site
 - To relocate to the existing Hereward Hall site and provide a new Council Chamber extension on the side
 - To remain at Fenland Hall, carry out limited improvements and look to attract partner organisations to share costs and promote joint working
- 3.6 In addition Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel also considered the potential for sharing the site and office space provision at The Base in Melbourne Avenue, March.
- 3.7 Members of the panel were presented with comprehensive information to help inform any resulting recommendations to Cabinet in relation to future accommodation requirements. Members felt that the business case was not overly compelling in terms of potential savings as some issues were still unknown which could have resulted in the savings being compromised.
- 3.8 As a result Members of the panel recommended option 3 namely to remain at Fenland Hall with limited improvements. Members did however agree that investigations to sharing the space at the depot on Melbourne Avenue, March continue in order to maximise potential revenue income. Both of the review recommendations were subsequently endorsed by Cabinet.

Grass Cutting and Grounds Maintenance Review

- 3.9 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel were keen to ensure that the grounds maintenance contract continued to operate as effectively and efficiently as possible. Concerns had been raised in relation to the grass cutting element of the contract meant that a review of this aspect of the service was timely and would ensure that the service is best positioned for the coming period. The resulting review aims and objectives focused on the following
- To examine the frequency of the grass cutting throughout Fenland.
 - To consider customer feedback received in relation to grass cutting, in particular grass cutting in cemeteries.
 - To examine the current approach of TLG's Performance Quality Monitoring System (PQMS) in order to assess the standard of the work undertaken and the effectiveness of the PQMS.

- To consider lessons learnt in relation to grass cutting and cemetery maintenance to ensure they are built into future service improvements.
- To consider how customer issues are reported, communicated and managed to ensure a high level of satisfaction.

3.10 The Review concluded the following

- The grass cutting specification in Fenland is at a higher standard than comparator Councils including 16 amenity grass cuts per annum and 18 grass cuts to cemeteries across the district per annum.
- The contract with Total Landscape Group (TLG) is robust and well managed.
- Customer feedback from many different sources, as well as officer and contractor inspections are used to ensure the contract specification is met and learning is applied to improve the service for local people when possible. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel were keen to ensure previous lessons learnt were reflected in any future Grounds Maintenance Contract.

4 Overview and Scrutiny Call – In

- 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel has the opportunity to scrutinise Cabinet decisions that have been made, but not implemented through the ‘call-in’ mechanism.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Council’s constitution, decisions of the Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder decision are published within 3 working days. There is then a further 5 working day period prior to the implementation of the decision in which Members are able to call in the decision. A call- in can be instigated by either the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the panel, any 3 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel or any 10 Members of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel then has to meet within 15 working days to consider the issue. Whilst this process takes its course, the decision taking process is suspended. If no call-in occurs, the decision is adopted.
- 4.3 If, having considered the decision, the Panel remains concerned about it, then it may refer it back to the decision making person or body for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concerns or, in exceptional circumstances, refer the matter to full Council. If referred back, the decision maker shall then reconsider the matter within a further 10 working days and amend the decision or not, before adopting a final decision. If however the Committee decides not to refer the matter back, no further action is taken and the decision can take effect.
- 4.4 The call-in procedure does not apply where the decision being made by the Cabinet is deemed to be urgent i.e. where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council’s or the public’s interests. This should be clearly stated in the record of the decision.
- 4.5 Because of the nature of the call-in procedure, it is generally recognised as a mechanism of last resort. Indeed Government guidance states that it would clearly be detrimental to efficient decision making if every individual decision of the Cabinet were called in for overview and scrutiny as a matter of course.
- 4.6 The call–in procedure is therefore utilised when other means of influencing decision making have failed.
- 4.7 Fenland District Council did not utilise the call in procedure during 2014/15.

5 A FORWARD LOOK TO 2015/2016

Policies and measures affecting scope of Overview and Scrutiny

- 5.2 The profile of scrutiny is changing nationally and as a result much is expected of us in response to the Localism agenda. This could include community involvement, scrutiny of and with partners, scrutiny of crime and disorder issues and supporting the scrutiny of health services.

Overview and Scrutiny amending its role

- 5.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel remains committed to achieving value for money and ensuring the Council is efficient and cost effective in the delivery of its corporate priorities. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel are also keen to focus on areas where they are able to add the greatest value being forward focused therefore making recommendations to Cabinet and having a positive impact on the future direction and future focus of the Council and its policies.

Fenland District Council's Priorities

- 5.4 In Fenland's Corporate Plan 2015-2018 the Council's corporate priorities are:

- Communities
- Economy
- Environment
- Quality Organisation

- 5.5 It is important that the work of Overview and Scrutiny complements these priorities to ensure services are being delivered effectively and any scrutiny work adds value.

What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel plans to achieve in 2015-2016

Strategic Priorities

- 5.6 We will work to raise the profile of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny work by better communicating our successes.

Work Programme

- 5.7 The Overview and Scrutiny work programme is a detailed programme that indicates the topics that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will scrutinise in the coming year. The work programme is a dynamic document and will be continually reviewed to ensure it is focused on adding the most value over the coming year. Topics already identified for inclusion include:

- Crime Disorder and Reduction Partnership
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Draft Corporate Plan and Budget
- Progress of Corporate Priorities: Economy, Environment, Communities
- Review of the Paperless project with associated recommendations to the Independent Remuneration Panel
- Comprehensive Spending Review
- Annual Meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive

Anna Goodall Head of Governance and Legal Services

agoodall@fenland.gov.uk