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| Agenda Item No: | 11 |  |
| Committee: | Council | |
| Date: | 21 July 2025 | |
| Report Title: | Overview & Scrutiny Panel Annual Report 2024/25 | |

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1** The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report reflects what has been undertaken and achieved by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel during 2024/25 and takes a forward look at the programme of work and challenges for the Overview and Scrutiny in 2025/26.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1** 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 Panel.
- 2.2** Article 6 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 the Council.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1** That full Council acknowledges the broad scope of work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel during 2024/25.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Wards Affected | All |
| Report Originator(s) | Amy Brown, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance amybrown@fenland.gov.uk Elaine Cooper, Elections Team Leader ecooper@fenland.gov.uk |
| Contact Officer(s) | As above |
| Background Papers | Overview and Scrutiny Panel Agendas, Report and Minutes for 2024/25: Browse meetings - Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Fenland District Council |

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

1 CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

In the delivery of my role as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, I am pleased to be able to present to you the Annual Report for 2024/25 and a forward look to 2025/26.

Over the last municipal year and during my second term as Chairperson, the Panel welcomed Councillor Hicks as a new member.

Working together, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel has sought to diligently fulfil its important role in overseeing the performance and delivery of services. We have had a busy and varied year receiving and scrutinising information from Cabinet and officer colleagues, partners and outside bodies. We have benefitted from detailed presentations complimented by pertinent Q&A sessions as well as an informative update training session in relation to scrutinising the budget.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the future work programme will be published with the Agenda for each meeting and will continue to focus on issues that are of paramount importance to local residents and businesses. This will include the return of some long-standing annual items such as the budget, business plan and a review of core services but there will also be opportunities to consider matters of emerging importance as the year progresses.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has played a part in contributing towards the work of the Panel this year. I am looking forward to another year in my role as Chairperson. I remain confident that the Panel can maintain the high standards expected of it and that it will continue to work with colleagues and partners to make a positive difference to the people of Fenland.

Maureen Davis
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Panel 2024/25

2. THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 2024-2025

Councillor Maureen Davis - Chairman
Councillor Elisabeth Sennitt Clough – Vice Chairman
Councillor Brenda Barber
Councillor Gavin Booth
Councillor James Carney
Councillor Lucie Foice-Beard
Councillor Roy Gerstner (until October 2024)
Councillor Alan Gowler
Councillor Anne Hay
Councillor Paul Hicks (from October 2024)
Councillor Sidney Imafidon
Councillor Dr Haq Nawaz
Councillor Dal Roy
Councillor Andrew Woollard
Councillor Gary Christy (Substitute)
Councillor John Clark (Substitute)
Councillor David Connor (Substitute)
Councillor Stuart Harris (Substitute)
Councillor Jason Mockett (Substitute)

3 INTRODUCTION

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

- 3.1.1 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 executives are 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.
- 3.1.2 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 Safer Fenland Partnership.
- 3.1.3 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides 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.

3.1.4 The Localism Act 2011 consolidated the wide range of scrutiny legislation into a single place, largely unamended from previous legislation. This aims to increase local accountability and transparency of public services as well as enhancing the involvement of local service users.

3.1.5 DLUHC issue guidance on the function of Overview and Scrutiny with the latest update having been published on 22nd May 2024.

3.1.6 All Overview and Scrutiny meetings are held in public session and attendance and involvement of the public is actively encouraged either via questions or suggestions for our work programme.

3.1.6.1 Main responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny

3.1.7 The role of Overview and Scrutiny has five broad functions:

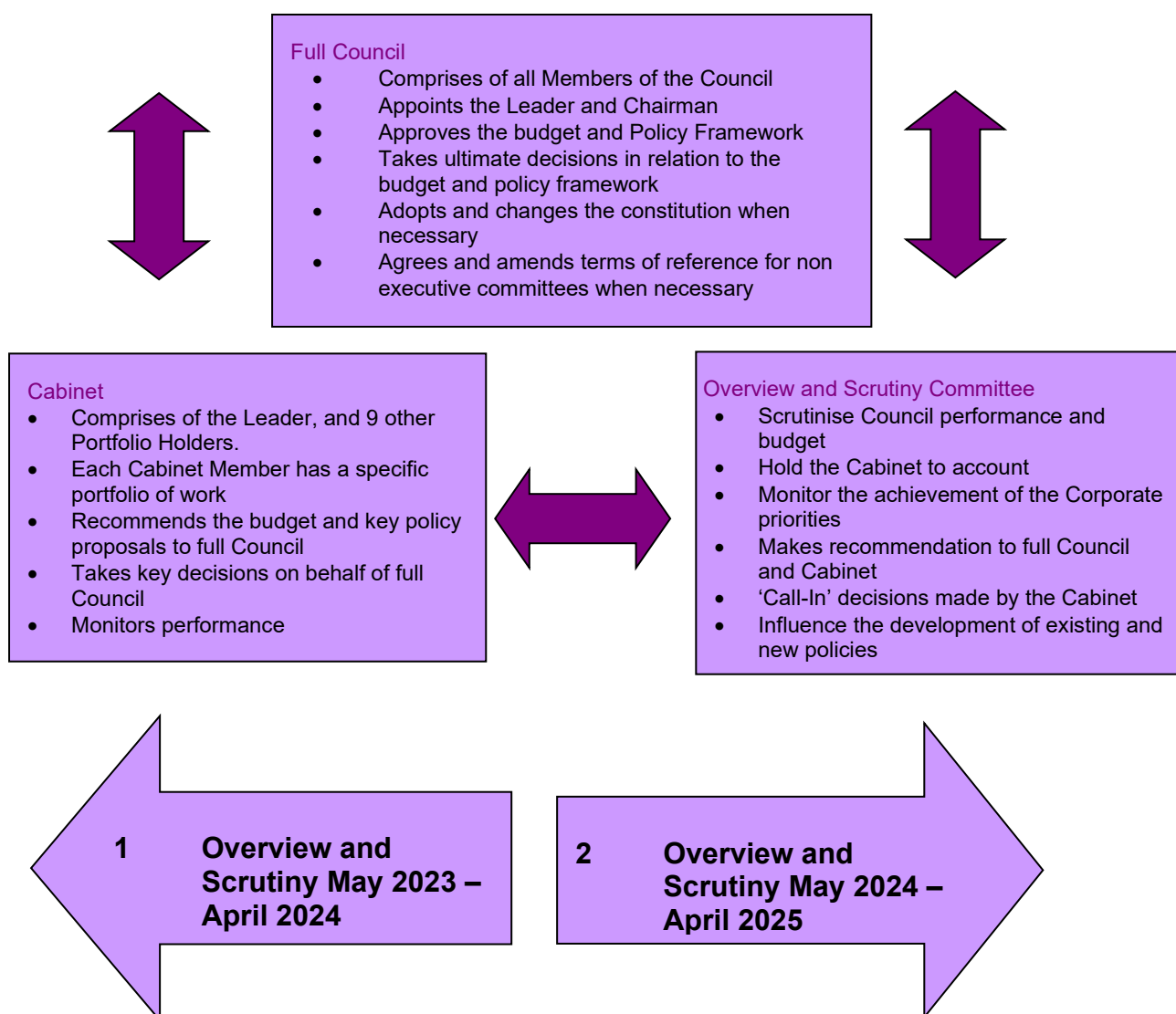
- Holding the Council's Executive and its statutory partners to account in the public interest. This enables more transparent and effective decision making.
- Supporting the development of effective policies and initiatives which have a beneficial impact on the community through policy overview and development.
- 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 and leaders.

| 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' |

3.1.7.1 Appointing Members onto Overview and Scrutiny

3.1.8 On an annual basis and with input from the group leaders, it is the responsibility of full Council to appoint an Overview and Scrutiny Panel at their annual meeting which usually takes place in May. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel consists of thirteen members drawn from the political groups in the same proportion as they are represented on the Council as a whole. There are also 6 substitutes also allocated on a politically proportionate basis.

Relationship between Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council



3.2A BACKWARD LOOK TO 2024 - 2025

What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel achieved in 2024/25

3.2.1.1 External Advisors/Partners

3.1 The panel looked at an array of different topic areas; most could be dealt with by drawing on the knowledge and expertise of Fenland District Council 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.

3.2.2 Fenland's Overview and Scrutiny Panel continues its commitment to collaborating with partner organisations. The table below highlights the external partners the Overview and Scrutiny Panel have already engaged with, when undertaking the scrutiny function during 2024/25.

| Agenda item | External Advisor/Partner | Organisation |
|--|---|--|
| Review of Delivery of Leisure Services | Matt Wickham Andy Harris Dan Palframan | Freedom Leisure |
| Review of Road Safety Partnership & Vision Zero | Simon Burgin | Cambridgeshire County Council |
| Review of Growth Service and Impact of Economic Development in Fenland | Steve Clarke, Domenico Crillo Alexis McLeod Preshalin Govender | Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority |
| Presentation and Questions relating to Water Supply, Treatment and Flooding in Fenland | Grant Tuffs Natasha Kenny Lucy Hodge | Anglian Water |

3.2.3 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 continue with this successful approach during 2025/26.

3.2.3.1 How the Work of Overview and Scrutiny is Linked to the Council's Corporate Priorities

3.2.4 Fenland District Council's Business Plan is the vision for the future of Fenland, clearly setting out a series of priorities that will be the focus of the organisation for the next twelve-month 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 in meaningful priority areas is achieved.

3.2.5 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 |
|---|---|-----|---|----|
| Review of Delivery of Economy & Planning | | | | |
| Annual Meeting with Leader, Deputy Leader and CEO | | | | |
| Review of CIS & Investment Board Update | | | | |
| Review of Transformation & Communications | | | | |
| Progress against Corporate Priority: Environment | | | | |
| LGO Annual Review of Complaints | | | | |
| Draft O&S Annual Report 2023/24 | | | | |
| Draft Business Plan 2025/26 | | | | |
| Budget Report | | | | |
| Fees and Charges 2025/26 | | | | |

3.3 Overview and Scrutiny Call – In

3.3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel have the opportunity to scrutinise Executive decisions that have been made but not implemented through the 'call-in' mechanism.

3.3.2 In accordance with the Council's constitution, decisions of the Executive 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. If the necessary number of Members, either the Chairman or Vice Chairman of any panel, or any 3 members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel or any 10 Members of the Council, ask for a decision to be called in for scrutiny, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel 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.

3.3.3 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 Panel decides not to refer the matter back, no further action is taken, and the decision can take effect.

- 3.3.4 The call-in procedure does not apply where the decision being made by the Executive 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. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel or in his/her absence the Chairman of the Council must agree that the decision proposed is reasonable in all the circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency. Decisions taken as a matter of urgency must be reported to the next available meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel together with the reasons for the urgency.
- 3.3.5 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 Executive were called in for overview and scrutiny as a matter of course.

The call-in procedure is therefore utilised when other means of influencing decision making have failed. Fenland District Council did not utilise the call-in procedure at all during 2024/25. There were 4 occasions during 2024/25 when the Chairman exercised her power to waive the need for call-in during on grounds of urgency; the award of a contract in relation to mixed dry recycling, acceptance of SFP funding, authorisation of a procurement in relation to a waste transfer station and the purchase of a property portfolio to meet housing duties.

3.4A FORWARD LOOK TO 2025/2026

3.4.1.1 Fenland's Priorities

- 3.4.2 In Fenland's Business Plan 2025/26 the Council's corporate priorities remain:

- Communities
- Economy
- Environment
- Quality Organisation

- 3.4.3 It is important that the work of Overview and Scrutiny complements these priorities to ensure services are being delivered to highest quality and any scrutiny work adds value. In addition to our four core priorities, our Cabinet Members have selected a number of capital investment projects they are aiming to deliver across Fenland in the next three years. The Fenland Inspire! projects focus on enhancing our much-loved sport, leisure, and

open space facilities, as well as preserving and celebrating the district's rich heritage and built environment. The Overview and Scrutiny work programme will also be informed by The Fenland Inspire! projects agenda.

3.4.3.1 What the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will achieve in 2025/26

3.4.3.2 Strategic Priorities

3.4.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel will continue to articulate recommendations associated with the work plan and monitor how effectively the recommendations have been received and endorsed by the associated decision-making bodies.

3.4.4.1 Work Programme

3.4.5 The Overview and Scrutiny work programme is a detailed programme that indicates the topics that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel will scrutinise. The work programme is developed on a rolling basis and has been updated and revised for the forthcoming municipal year. Topics already identified for inclusion include a review of the Council's Corporate Priorities including Communities, Economy and Planning, Quality Organisation and Environment as well as Q&A sessions with partner organisations such as the Road Safety Partnership, ARP, Clarion Housing, Policing and Hospital Matters, Freedom Leisure Anglian Water and the Arts Council. This will also sit alongside regular items such as scrutiny of the Budget and Business Plan and the Council's management of complaints.

3.5 CONTACTS

3.5.1 Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel is enhanced by the involvement of Fenland residents, service users, our partners and local businesses as they bring an alternative perspective whilst also providing external challenge. If, therefore, you would like further details about any of the work mentioned in this report, or on how residents and partner organisations can contribute to the work of Overview and Scrutiny within Fenland we would very much welcome your input, please contact:

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