

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council

22 February 2022

TITLE:	Scrutiny Review
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Paul Roberts – Council Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached

Appendix A – Paper Analysis Model

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Programming Group in the response to the feedback provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) following completion of their recent review of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council approves the recommendations contained with section 7.14 of the report with regards to overview and scrutiny work programme arrangements, member development and panel structure to take effect from the 2023/24 municipal year.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 During 2021 the Council invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to conduct a review of its arrangements for overview and scrutiny in order to provide assurance about existing practices and to consider further improvements. Council subsequently considered a report on 8 December 2021 that noted the outcome of the Scrutiny Review and approved a number of actions in response to the CfGS recommendations.
- 3.2 The actions included the establishment of an Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group which was tasked to consider a number of

recommendations which included work programme prioritisation, member development and a review of the structure of Overview & Scrutiny Panels.

- 3.3 Following the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2022 the Council also gave a commitment to take forward the findings from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.
- 3.4 Taking into account the recommendations from the CfGS and the research conducted options were developed and discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Programming Group which led to the development of a number of recommendations that were due to be considered by Council on 22 May 2022.
- 3.5 At the Council meeting it was proposed that the report be withdrawn for further consideration by councillors with view to a report being submitted to a future Council meeting in readiness for any change to take effect from the 2023/24 municipal year.
- 3.6 The Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group has since met to further discuss the options available and reached agreement on proposing the recommendations to Council contained in paragraph 7.14 of this report.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Effective scrutiny is essential in order that the Council can successfully achieve its objectives and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Programming Group has considered a number of options for the future structure of its scrutiny panels.

6. Implications

- 6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
No direct implications

- 6.2 Workforce
No direct implications

- 6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
No direct implications

- 6.4 Financial Considerations
The financial implications arising from the proposals in the report can be met from within existing budgets.

- 6.5 Legal
Consequential amendments will be made to the constitution

following the decision of Council. The Council's Constitution Review Working Group will subsequently review the detailed procedure rules for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

6.6 Climate Change
No direct implications

6.7 Consultation
Feedback was provided by the CfGS to an all member workshop. Further consultation with councillors has taken place through overview and scrutiny panel meetings and via the Overview and Scrutiny Programming Group.

6.8 Risk Assessment
No direct implications

Mark Trillo
Executive Director (Governance and Commissioning)

Web Links and
Background Papers

[Report to Council 8 December 2021](#)
[Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny programming Group](#)

Contact details

Linden Vernon
Head of Democratic Services
linden.vernon@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk

7. Detail

- 7.1 During 2021 the Council invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to conduct a review of its arrangements for overview and scrutiny in order to provide assurance about existing practices and to consider further improvements. Their report concluded that *'Scrutiny has the conditions for success'* and further that *'there are no critical issues for scrutiny at SMDC and the contributions that scrutiny makes are seen as mostly positive'*.
- 7.2 The CfGS made a number of recommendations to further improve and strengthen the Council's arrangements for scrutiny. Council subsequently considered a report on 8 December 2021 that noted the outcome of the Scrutiny Review and approved a number of actions in response to the CfGS recommendations.
- 7.3 The actions included the establishment of an Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group comprising the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, opposition group leaders and chairs of overview and scrutiny panels. The Group, chaired by the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Mike Gledhill, was tasked to consider a number of recommendations which included:
- Work programme prioritisation
 - Member development
 - A review of the number of Overview & Scrutiny Panels
 - To consider the structure of panels and potential to create sub-groups to focus on specific areas of work
- 7.4 The Group has met on a number of occasions to consider the above aspects and to develop recommendations for Council.
- 7.5 A report was considered that presented proposals for the future approach to agreeing the prioritisation of the Council's overview and scrutiny work programme. Councillors discussed the frequency of a member workshop to consider the work programme for the Council's overview and scrutiny panels, maintaining the focus of meetings and the need to foster an inclusive approach for all councillors.
- 7.6 Members of the Group were also presented with proposals from the CfGS for the delivery of 3 seminars (covering scrutiny essentials -the strategic role of scrutiny, chairing and leading scrutiny, questioning skills – the scrutiny tool kit) to members of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels. This was seen as being crucial to deliver after annual Council and as part of the next member induction programme. This has also been considered by the Council's Member Development Working Group.
- 7.7 The Council's current overview and scrutiny structure was last fully reviewed in March 2011 and further updated in 2018. To inform this work research has been conducted to assess the scrutiny committee structures for the ten councils that most closely match the demographics of the SMDC.

- 7.8 This found that when compared with its nearest neighbours SMDC has the highest number of panels and that nationally, a single committee model is the most common in shire districts.
- 7.9 The approach to the scrutiny of health issues in Staffordshire has also been considered. This has found that SMDC is the only district to have a specific scrutiny committee for this purpose.
- 7.10 The CfGS found that the number of members of each current scrutiny panel (19) to be very high number (and higher than all councils included in the research) to enable effective scrutiny and provide opportunities for everyone to engage. The Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group has therefore considered options with regards to this whilst attempting to ensure that all members continue to have the opportunity to be involved with the scrutiny process.
- 7.11 Following the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2022 the Council also gave a commitment to take forward the findings from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. These included:
- Greater focus on strategy and policy.
 - Earlier access to, and involvement with, core policy and decision-making activities.
 - Increased working programming across scrutiny and on a basis that is more elected member-led.
- 7.12 Taking into account the recommendations from the CfGS, the research detailed in this report and the previous discussions of this Group, options were developed for the Council's future scrutiny committee structure. A report was due to be considered by the reconvened Annual Council meeting on 26 May 2022.
- 7.13 At the Council meeting it was proposed that the report be withdrawn for further consideration by councillors with view to a report being submitted to a future Council meeting in readiness for any change to take effect from the 2023/24 municipal year.
- 7.14 The Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group has since met to further discuss the options available and reached agreement on proposing the following recommendations to council:

Work Programme Prioritisation

- That a member workshop to agree topics for scrutiny work programmes be organised to take place each year following Annual Council.
- That selection criteria based on the "PAPER Analysis" model be used to prioritise topics for consideration.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny programming Group monitors activity against the work programme and considers the appropriateness of changes as necessary.

Member Development

- That the member development proposal received from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny be approved and scheduled to take place as part of the 2023 member induction programme.

Panel Structure

- That the Council operates three, rather than the current four, main panels, these being:
 - Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel
 - Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel
 - A combined Health and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel
- That a standing sub-committee, to meet as required, be created for each of the three Panels referred to above as follows:
 - Resources – Finance and Performance Sub-Committee – focused on the development of the Council's budget and service performance.
 - Service Delivery – Growth and Economy Sub-Committee – focused on regeneration issues facing the district.
 - Health and Community – Health & Wellbeing Sub-Committee – focused on wider issues such as leisure matters.
- That a Chair for each sub-committee be appointed by Council and receive an allowance equal to the vice-chair of Overview and Scrutiny Panels. Minutes of sub-committee meetings to be reported to the parent panel.
- That each main Overview and Scrutiny Panel comprise 14 members and that each standing sub-committee have a membership of 10 councillors (who are not required to be members of the parent panel).
- That consideration be given to evening meetings starting at an earlier time to allow for detailed debate, to be agreed by political group leaders.