

North Tyneside Council

Report to Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Date: 21 March 2023

Title: Review of Scrutiny Arrangements

Report from Service Area: Governance

Responsible Officer: Allison Mitchell **Tel: (0191) 643 5720**
Head of Governance

Wards affected: All

1.1 Executive Summary:

During 2022/23 the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny has undertaken a Review of North Tyneside Council's Scrutiny arrangements. This report presents the findings from that Review for Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee's consideration. The report also includes a proposal from the Chair of the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee regarding the future structure of Scrutiny committees in North Tyneside, for the Committee's consideration; and outlines the decision making route that would need to be followed to formally effect these changes (i.e. consideration by Constitution Task Group before agreement at Annual Council in May 2023).

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:

- (1) Considers the findings from the Scrutiny Improvement Review which was performed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny for North Tyneside Council during 2022/23, attached as **Appendix A**;
- (2) Notes that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny states that "the conditions for successful scrutiny are clearly present in North Tyneside";
- (3) Notes that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny has made a number of recommendations for improvement, including that the existing number of Scrutiny committees in North Tyneside should be reduced and the structure and remit of Scrutiny committees should be reviewed;
- (4) Considers a proposed future structure for the Authority's scrutiny arrangements which has been prepared by the Chair of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, attached as **Appendix B**; and agrees that this proposed structure will be submitted to Constitution Task Group for discussion, agreement or amendment during April 2023;
- (5) Notes that following the outcomes of that Constitution Task Group process, revised proposals for the number, names and remit of Scrutiny committees will in turn be proposed to Annual Council for agreement in May 2023;

(6) Agrees that members of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee (supported by senior officers) will develop an Action Plan to prioritise and progress other areas for improvement set out in the Scrutiny Improvement Review.

1.3 Information:

Background

- 1.3.1 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is a national body which exists to support local government as a sector in evaluating and improving scrutiny and other sector-specific governance arrangements.
- 1.3.2 In March 2022, through the Local Government Association, the CfGS offered to undertake a Scrutiny Improvement Review for North Tyneside Council. This Review was at no cost to the Authority. The aim of the review was to help support the Elected Mayor, Members and officers to ensure that scrutiny functions in North Tyneside are effective in delivering accountability, improving policy decision making, and making a quality contribution in the delivery of Council plans and overall improvement.
- 1.3.3 The Review was led by Ian Parry and Lisa Smart of the CfGS who engaged widely with elected members, co-opted members and officers of the Authority. Discussions held by the CfGS leads in March 2022 took place with:
- The Chair of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee
 - Chairs and / or Deputy Chairs of Scrutiny Sub-Committees
 - A discussion group with Labour members on Scrutiny committees
 - A discussion group with Conservative members on Scrutiny committees
 - One co-opted member of Scrutiny
 - Elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor
 - Cabinet Members (individually and in a discussion group)
 - Group Leaders
 - Chairs of other (non-Scrutiny) Committees of the Council
 - Democratic Services Officers
 - Chief Executive
 - Senior Leadership Team (individually and in a discussion group)
- 1.3.4 The report from the CfGS review is attached as **Appendix A**. The report states that the conditions for successful scrutiny are clearly present in North Tyneside. It comments on the positive attitude and commitment from members and officers, mature cross-party working which is established, the overall capacity and range of experience of members, and a strong belief that more can be achieved.
- 1.3.5 The CfGS report also highlights a number of areas where we can improve our approach to Scrutiny. Some of these recommendations can (and should) be addressed quickly; others will take time and practice to develop. Recommendations made by CfGS included in their report relate to:
- Officer support and organisational culture
 - Clarity on Scrutiny's role and responsibilities
 - A collaborative approach to Scrutiny
 - Scrutiny's focus and workplan
 - Scrutiny committee structure and scheduling
 - Scrutiny's output and impact
 - Chairing, member development and meeting preparation

- Public engagement.

Immediate Priorities – Number and Structure of Scrutiny Committees

- 1.3.6 In the immediate term one key area of focus highlighted by CfGS is the current number and structure of Scrutiny committees in North Tyneside. The CfGS have commented that the committee structure is very large and have recommended that the work of Scrutiny should be consolidated into fewer committees. The report also states that Scrutiny should be better aligned with the core priorities of the Council.
- 1.3.7 The remit and names of our existing Scrutiny committees have not kept pace with developments in the Council which have occurred over time and the current priorities as set out in the Council Plan. Because Scrutiny Committees are committees of Council, any change to those committees will ultimately be a decision for full Council to make.
- 1.3.8 The CfGS have suggested that Scrutiny could be structured in a number of different ways. Examples include:
- **Council Plan Priorities** – such as an overall co-ordination committee for Scrutiny, including responsibility for Finance; and five sub-committees covering the Council Plan priorities of Thriving, Secure, Family Friendly, Caring and Green
 - **Cabinet Portfolios** – which can facilitate greater visibility and accountability in the Scrutiny process, which exists to hold the Executive (Mayor and Cabinet) to account. However to ensure that any revised committee structure does not become too big, CfGS have commented that in other local authorities, three Scrutiny committees are sometimes established as ‘People’, ‘Place’ and ‘Corporate’ with Cabinet portfolios grouped under those broad headings and reporting into the three committees;
 - **Organisational Structure** – another possible way to structure Scrutiny committees is according to our Directorate structure. As with the option of structuring according to Cabinet portfolios however, to ensure that committees do not become too numerous, such an approach would benefit from grouping (again, perhaps according to ‘People’, ‘Place and ‘Corporate’ as set out in ‘Cabinet Portfolios’ above).
- 1.3.9 The Chair of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development has considered this aspect of the Scrutiny Improvement Review in some detail and has developed a proposed future structure for North Tyneside’s Scrutiny committees based upon the Council Plan priorities. This is set out at **Appendix B** for the Committee’s consideration.
- 1.3.10 In terms of process, Scrutiny committees are committees of Council and accordingly full Council is the decision maker if changes to the number, names or remit of such committees are proposed. If the changes proposed by the Chair of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee are to be effected, these would need to be considered by Constitution Task Group during April 2023. Once agreed (or amended) by Constitution Task Group, the proposed changes would then need to go forward to Annual Council in May 2023 for agreement.

Short and Medium Term Priorities – the next one to two years

- 1.3.11 Other important recommendations set out in the CfGS report cover matters such as:
- **Developing an increased focus on strategic issues** – more forward looking, with a focus for Scrutiny on fewer things of greater importance

- **Better workplans and agendas**, with more chance for member influence and prioritisation
- **Support and expertise** available to support each committee
- **Less focus on officer presentations**, ensuring that Scrutiny is not seen as a vehicle only for information sharing, and is able to operate more in discussion and scrutiny mode.

1.3.12 It is recommended that following the deliberations regarding the structure of the Scrutiny functions of committees, an Action Plan to address these and all other areas highlighted by the CfGS Review is prepared by members of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee (supported by senior officers) to ensure that desired changes are prepared for and implemented in a timely way.

1.4 Appendices:

Appendix A: Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – Scrutiny Improvement Review

Appendix B: Proposal from the Chair of Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on Future Structure of Scrutiny Committees

1.5 Contact officers:

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