

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee

Date: 10 July 2024

Title: Progress Update – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Review
(March 2023)

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Service: Governance

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report explains the findings from and good practice recommendations made by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), initially reported in March 2023, following a review of Scrutiny undertaken by that body in 2022/23. The report also provides an update on significant progress made in implementing these good practice recommendations and suggestions for future areas of development.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to:
- (a) Note the findings from the CfGS Review, previously reported to and considered by the former Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in March 2023, set out at **Appendix A**
 - (b) Note the progress made in implementing the good practice recommendations, also summarised in **Appendix A** and set out in paragraph 3.4;
 - (c) Agree that the areas set out in paragraph 3.5 will continue to be a focus for Scrutiny's development in 2024/25 and beyond.

3. Introduction

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) – Scrutiny Improvement Review

- 3.1 The Authority's Scrutiny arrangements were reviewed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) in 2023/24. The CfGS is a national body which specialises in promoting governance excellence within local authorities. The findings from the CfGS Review were reported in full to the (then) Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in March 2023.
- 3.2 The full text of the CfGS Review Report is included in the table set out in **Appendix A** to this report. Progress made in implementing the good practice recommendations is also set out in that table.
- 3.3 The CfGS Review found that 'Scrutiny has the conditions for success' in North Tyneside. The report highlighted a shared understanding from members and officers of the importance of Scrutiny in good governance, and an understanding of the value that can be added to decision making by Scrutiny. The CfGS also commended the support of the Elected Mayor and Chief Executive to the Scrutiny process, in addition to the professional approach to Scrutiny which was found to be in evidence across members and supporting officers.
- 3.4 Since the report was received and considered in March 2023, the following improvements have been made in response to the review:
 - **The Scrutiny structure has been reviewed** – with eight former committees being reorganised into a main Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee and five Sub-Committees. This new Scrutiny committee framework was agreed by Annual Council in May 2023, and implemented immediately
 - **Better alignment with Core Corporate Plans** – the new Scrutiny committee framework reflects the agreed Council Plan themes and enables more direct focus on respective policy areas
 - **Development of the Scrutiny Work Programme** – this is led by the Scrutiny committees, with a menu of supporting intelligence to aid this decision-making provided by senior officers and Cabinet members
 - **Cabinet Member engagement** – a link Cabinet Member (or Cabinet Members) has been identified in respect of each Scrutiny committee / sub-committee. This is demonstrated at **Annex 1**. Cabinet members have met throughout 2023/24 with the Chairs of committees and

supporting officers, and attended meetings of the respective committees, which will continue throughout 2024/25

- **Strategic input from chief officers** – a lead Senior Leadership Team officer has been nominated to act as the lead for each Scrutiny committee, ensuring that all strategic information required by each Committee is made available
- **Additional Officer Support to Scrutiny** has been strengthened by dedicated resources within the Governance Service, and the designation of the Head of Governance as Statutory Scrutiny Officer.

3.5 There are some areas which should remain a focus for Scrutiny in the coming year. These include:

- **A 'fewer but better' approach when choosing Scrutiny Topics** – it is essential that Scrutiny focuses on fewer topics of greatest strategic value. Concentrating on fewer topics contributes to high quality scrutiny. This should be considered by each Scrutiny Committee when considering its work programme
- **Scrutiny Focus and Adding Value** – this can be developed further by making sure that:
 - specific objectives to be achieved by each piece of Scrutiny work are identified
 - outcomes that each piece of Scrutiny work is intended to achieve, with regard to core policy and decision-making, are identified in order that Scrutiny can hold itself to account on whether it has achieved its stated aims
 - we have fewer information reports
 - we clarify the aims and objectives intended to be achieved, when Cabinet members and officers are invited to attend meetings of Scrutiny, to ensure that attendance is focused
 - we make (and monitor) recommendations as a matter of course
- **Alternative formats of Scrutiny** – the CfGS advocated for the value of Task and Finish group working, and two Task and Finish Groups were established in 2023/24. The CfGS also recommended that other forms of specific, single-issue scrutiny are considered to help focus on key issues, such as Spotlight Sessions (one item scrutiny meetings) and Inquiry Days (one day, longer scrutiny sessions to involve interest groups and evidence providers). This should be assessed when considering the work programme for each committee

- **Co-opted members** – play a unique role in Scrutiny. We should develop our approach to supporting co-opted members in the Scrutiny process.

3.6 Senior officers, including specialist officers within the Governance Service, look forward to working with all Scrutiny committees in the coming year to embed the areas of good practice which have already been implemented and identify other areas of continued improvement focus.

4. Appendices

Appendix A: Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) Scrutiny Improvement Review (March 2023) – Update on Recommendations / Progress as at June 2024

Annex I: Link Cabinet Members and Lead Senior Leadership Team Officers (Scrutiny) 2024/25