

Improvement Action Plan to respond to the recommendations of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Review of the Scrutiny Function

As part of the Council's recovery and improvement activity, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) was commissioned to review the Council's overview and scrutiny function to identify areas for improvement and make recommendations on how those improvements could be made. Council accepted the CfGS report at its meeting on 13 September 2021, and delegated responsibility to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to develop and oversee implementation of an action plan to respond to the recommendations and address the issues raised in the report. This action plan sets out the actions to be taken to respond to those recommendations.

To succeed, the action plan is dependent on the Council having a culture which welcomes and is open to scrutiny, alongside scrutiny itself being more effective in how it works. The Action Plan encompasses actions which will support Executive and Scrutiny Members and senior officers in owning and driving these improvements. Accountability for delivering the Action Plan should be viewed as a whole Council responsibility.

Recommendation	Analysis of the issue by the CfGS	Accountable	Action	Delivery of Actions	Timescale	Status
1. Repurpose Scrutiny	To be effective, Scrutiny needs to be put on a recovery footing to fully align and integrate into the corporate plans for recovery. This should last for twelve months, then subject to further review. We believe this recovery can be achieved within the existing scrutiny structure of three committees. It will however require a refresh of scrutiny's	Scrutiny Chairs Leader Executive Chief Executive	A review of the existing work programme will be undertaken immediately. Work programmes for 2021/22 were developed with knowledge of the findings of the CfGS review, the work programmes will now be reviewed to have a clear focus on the Council's recovery and improvement activity, including transformation, financial challenges and the impact on citizens.	Scrutiny Chairs Scrutiny Support Officers With support from: Executive CLT	Ongoing but initial review of work programmes to be carried out prior to October 2021 committee meetings.	Completed

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	purpose and role. This should entail a twelve month focus on financial, and commercial challenges confronting the Council, service delivery within a tighter financial envelope and the risks involved achieving this at pace. It will also require a realignment between Audit and Scrutiny.		<p>Work programmes kept under ongoing review, with regular input sought from the Leader/ Executive, CLT and Chair of Audit Committee to help identify opportunities to add the greatest value and inform decisions about the specific focus for scrutiny.</p> <p>Key points for financial scrutiny identified throughout the year, including proposals for savings, in-year delivery, financial management. Scrutiny chairs co-ordinate financial scrutiny activity across the committees.</p>		<p>Immediate and ongoing</p> <p>Timescales and focus for MTFP scrutiny agreed with Corporate Director and Portfolio Holder in September, and co-ordination between committees agreed by chairs in September.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
2. Openness to Scrutiny	The current fault lines within Scrutiny include culture and behaviour, governance and structure, capacity and capability. These all need to be	<p>Leader Executive</p> <p>Supported by: Chief Executive, CLT</p>	New Scrutiny Protocol developed in line with the new Constitution and newly adopted Councillor/ Officer Protocol. Protocol to include access to information;	Scrutiny Chairs Scrutiny Officers Executive CLT	Draft protocol to be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 5 January 2022	Completed

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	<p>addressed as a whole Council matter. Change needs to impact further on culture and behaviours. Officers and Members need to be completely confident that sharing information in an open and transparent way, or challenge and constructive criticism is accepted and without reproach. This may be helped by a new protocol that sets out expectations and norms, including access to information.</p>		<p>expectations in relation to engagement with scrutiny, provision of information and attendance at meetings; expectations in relation to response to, and implementation of recommendations; and referrals to scrutiny.</p>			
3. Prioritisation	<p>Scrutiny work programmes need to be refocused almost exclusively on topics that address and support the Council's recovery plan. For the</p>	<p>Scrutiny chairs Supported by: Executive and CLT and scrutiny officers</p>	<p>Scrutiny work programmes to be re-reviewed immediately to ensure a focus on the Council's recovery and improvement activity, including transformation, financial challenges and</p>	<p>Scrutiny Chairs Supported by: regular engagement with the Executive and CLT</p>	<p>Ongoing but initial review of work programmes to be carried out prior to October 2021 committee meetings.</p>	Completed

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	<p>foreseeable future we would recommend that the Scrutiny work programme focuses on finance, the improvement plan and service transformation. Additional items should only be added where the Members are confident of scrutiny making an impact through their recommendations. Whilst maintaining Scrutiny's independence, work programmes should not entirely reflect Member preference, but be designed in consultation with the Council. For transparency and to provide further oversight, we recommend that the work programme is shared with the Improvement and</p>		<p>the impact on citizens. Each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to focus on a specific aspect of the Recovery and Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Regular meetings set up between scrutiny chairs and scrutiny support officers, officer leadership, and the lead Portfolio Holder to oversee engagement of the scrutiny committees with key corporate issues and 'trouble shoot' any barriers or challenges.</p> <p>Scrutiny Chairs and Scrutiny officers to be invited to attend Executive Panel on a regular basis for a discussion on how recent scrutiny items have impacted and added value and to identify future areas that Scrutiny could support.</p>		<p>CLT already receive the scrutiny work programmes for information/consideration</p> <p>Oversight and engagement meetings to commence from October 2021</p> <p>To commence from December 2021</p>	<p>Partially achieved</p> <p>TBC</p>

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	Assurance Board (IAB), during the period that the Board is in place.					
4. Meeting Agendas	Scrutiny committee agendas (across all committees) should be limited to two substantive items with recovery and service transformation as the focus – informed by a clear understanding of the Council’s current financial situation and ongoing plans. This requires a change of emphasis and ‘parking’ many of the current issues. This is particularly important for areas of high spend and high risk, such as health and care, children and oversight of external commercial interests. To	Scrutiny chairs	<p>Committee meetings limited to two substantive items, where possible. Each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee focused on a specific aspect of the Recovery and Improvement Plan and/or financial scrutiny. This will be achieved via the re-reviewing of work programmes and regular engagement with the councillor and officer leadership (see recommendation 1).</p> <p>The committee responsible for health scrutiny renamed the ‘Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee’ to highlight its remit in relation to adult social care.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Chairs</p> <p>With input from: Scrutiny committee members Executive CLT Senior officers</p>	<p>Immediate and ongoing</p> <p>Change of name of the health scrutiny committee agreed to commence from 1 October 2021.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>

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	accommodate this, health scrutiny needs to gain a greater focus on social care and a stricter prioritisation of health-related scrutiny topics.		Regular meetings between Chairs of Committees and Portfolio Holders to ensure awareness of priorities and where scrutiny can add value, informing the work programme.		Immediate and ongoing	Partially achieved
5. Parity of Esteem	We suggest that Scrutiny needs to be elevated in its role and should be led by Scrutiny Chairs having greater authority within the council. This could partially be achieved through a rebalancing of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) between Executive Members and Scrutiny Chairs to signal a change in recognised parity. This would give a clear indication that Scrutiny is an equal partner in the	Whole Council Leader Chief Executive Statutory scrutiny officer Supported by: Cabinet, Scrutiny Chairs Involving: All councillors, officer leadership and scrutiny support officers	The development of the Scrutiny Protocol will provide an opportunity to set a culture which values scrutiny and the value that it adds. It will set out how this will be demonstrated through the actions of the Leader and Executive. The Council does not agree that a review of SRA's is appropriate at this time. Parity of esteem is about more than this. Action will be taken internally to ensure scrutiny forms a visible part of council policy making and oversight	Leader Executive Scrutiny Chairs Statutory Scrutiny Officer Scrutiny support officers	Internet and intranet pages reviewed by end of November 2021 Review of presentation of scrutiny recommendations to form part of development of Protocol – to be completed by January 2022 (see recommendation 2).	Partially achieved Completed

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	governance process. It would diminish the often-held view that scrutiny is inferior to Executive positions.		<p>including how items are subject to scrutiny review, liaison between officers and executive members and how scrutiny recommendations are presented and considered by the Executive.</p> <p>Increased visibility of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer amongst councillors and CLT, achieved through attendance at meetings, via training and intranet presence etc.</p> <p>Scrutiny Chairs and Scrutiny officers to be invited to attend Executive Panel on a regular basis for a discussion on how recent scrutiny items have impacted and added value and to identify future areas that Scrutiny could support.</p>		<p>Statutory Scrutiny Officer to attend CLT and Leadership once a month to discuss the work programme and identify any forthcoming matters. From October onwards.</p> <p>From December 2021 onwards</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>TBC</p>

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6. Democratic Accountability	Committee meetings should comprise mainly of holding Executive Members, or where appropriate, the Leader to account, supported by officers. The emphasis is therefore on a strategic holding to account for progress and executive decisions that are driving essential change and recovery. Scrutiny's motive needs to be focused on helping to drive and improve, or to test the management of risk and quality of intended outcomes. Care will need to be taken that this political accountability does not become a space for generalised questioning –	Lead accountability: Leader Involving: Executive Members	On request, Executive Members to attend scrutiny committee to be held to account and involved in discussions on their portfolio. Expectations of informal and formal engagement to be developed as part of the Scrutiny Protocol.	Scrutiny Chairs Scrutiny Support Senior Officers	Cabinet Members invited to attend appropriate items with immediate effect Protocol by January 2022	Completed Completed

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	preparation and focus is essential.					
7. Chair and Member skills	Scrutiny Members needs to be upskilled and have greater confidence to challenge, explore and intercede. We recommend that a job description is prepared for the Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Member roles and that Chairs receive specialised 1-2-1 coaching and mentoring to build skills, experience, confidence and capacity in leading Scrutiny. For all Committee Members, there should be mandatory development and training. The aim should be for scrutiny to be a credible, sought after position, particularly from	Lead accountability: Statutory Scrutiny Officer Group Leaders	Job descriptions to be co-designed with Executive, Scrutiny Members and officers. To be shared with political groups to support identification of individuals for specific roles and, where appropriate, identify skill gaps. Programme of bespoke mandatory training reflecting the current position in terms of improvement and recovery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of scrutiny during improvement period • Scrutiny skills training e.g. questioning skills; understanding of scrutiny powers; making evidence-based recommendations 	Statutory Scrutiny Officer Scrutiny Support Officers With input from: Scrutiny Chairs and Executive Members	Job descriptions to be written by December 2021 Initial training delivered within three months, and ongoing support for chairs	In progress Completed and ongoing

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	Members with the necessary		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop bespoke scrutiny chair development plan which could include coaching and mentoring Funding for external training and support to deliver this procured from the Transformation and Improvement Fund. Engagement of Scrutiny Chairs and member in national and regional scrutiny networks and activities 			
8. Executive and Officer Skills	Executive Members would benefit from additional training and support regarding their role in working with Scrutiny, opening themselves to scrutiny and getting the best out of the scrutiny and accountability experience.	Leader Executive councillors and senior/ key officers	<p>Executive members and CLT to be involved in the development of the protocol and training needs agreed and identified through this facilitated process.</p> <p>Training developed and delivered to relevant officers, linked to the new Scrutiny Protocol and wider training to</p>	<p>Statutory Scrutiny Officer/ Scrutiny support officers</p> <p>Supported by: Executive Members CLT</p>	<p>To be linked to development of Protocol – to be completed by January 2022 (see recommendation 2)</p> <p>Facilitated workshop to take place November 2021</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>

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	Reinforcing the whole council approach to scrutiny, training and briefings should also be considered for officers.		improve governance and decision making.			
9. Information and expertise	Scrutiny needs to build greater expertise and insight, especially on the more technical aspects of finance, commercial activities and transformation. We suggest Scrutiny makes greater use of independent experts and more officer 'masterclass' style events to build Member knowledge, expertise and confidence. It might also extend its capacity through the managed use of a wider range of scrutiny methods, such as task groups and single-issue inquiry style sessions. To ensure	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	<p>Each Committee to consider its information and expertise requirements when setting the work programme, or if gaps are recognised.</p> <p>Appropriate action to be taken which could include briefings, requesting expert input at meeting, co-opting members etc.</p> <p>Scrutiny Protocol and job descriptions will set out expectations in this area.</p>	<p>Statutory Scrutiny Officer</p> <p>Supported by: Scrutiny support officers Scrutiny chairs</p> <p>Involving: engagement from senior and lead officers for identified issues</p>	<p>Job descriptions to be written by December 2021</p> <p>Immediate and ongoing (see recommendation 1)</p>	In progress

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	satisfactory access to information, there may need to be a refresh of scrutiny's powers.					
10. Scrutiny Support Capacity	Scrutiny relies on effective support from officers, particularly as investment is made to repurpose and raise standards. Currently there are inherent risks in the size of the officer core and the Council should consider increasing officer capacity and considering if training and development is needed.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer Chief Executive CLT	Decision to be taken on whether funding is available for additional scrutiny resource. Opportunities for re-establishing joint health scrutiny arrangements with Nottinghamshire County Council to share, and make best use of available resource to be explored.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer Scrutiny support officers Involving: Chair of Health Scrutiny Committee and scrutiny support officer	Decision on additional scrutiny resource by December 2021 Enable any agreed arrangements to be in place for municipal year 2022/23	In progress Revisit post-election