



OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEES' REPORT TO COUNCIL

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

For Members **to note the headline activity of the Council's overview and scrutiny function** in the period October 2024 to February 2025.

For Members **to endorse the Executive Scrutiny Protocol** at Annex 1 for adoption by the Council in line with statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny.

BACKGROUND:

As part of the ongoing process to raise the profile of the work of Select Committees and to ensure appropriate visibility of scrutiny work and outcomes, regular reports are provided to Council. These are an important opportunity to evaluate the contribution that scrutiny committees make to the work of the Council and to highlight their achievements. In addition to the usual update, this report seeks Council approval of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol at Annex 1 for formal integration into the Codes and Protocol section of the Council's constitution.

EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

Background

1. Every local authority is required to put in place arrangements for overview and scrutiny (O&S), however legislation is not prescriptive, recognising that authorities are locally accountable and best placed to determine what scrutiny arrangements best suit their individual needs. There is flexibility to decide the number of overview and scrutiny committees, the approach to call-in, pre-decision scrutiny and other common aspects of a scrutiny function. The broad approach is outlined in the Constitution, often supported by underpinning protocols defining more detailed practical expectations and ways of working.
2. Statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny was published in 2019 and updated by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government in April 2024. A central theme of this guidance is the importance of a strong organisational culture which supports scrutiny to provide effective

challenge and a commitment to scrutiny across an authority, not just amongst those members and officers with a scrutiny role. This guidance advocates adoption of an executive-scrutiny protocol to clarify the practical expectations of scrutiny committee members and the executive, as well as cultural dynamics.

Timing & drivers

3. When originally conceived, the Protocol was expected to form the basis of induction and training of new scrutiny members and committee Chairs following Council elections in May 2025, and to become the platform for scrutiny training and education across the Council at the start of a new Council term. In light of Local Government Reorganisation, with elections postponed and a limited lifetime remaining for this Council, there is a less pressing requirement for a protocol to support new member induction. Nevertheless, the benefits of recording ways of working to ensure clarity and consistency of approach remain. Widespread staff turnover at all levels of the organisation has meant a loss of historic knowledge around scrutiny processes, procedures and expectations which the new protocol will help address and there will likely be some member turnover arising from by-elections in the remaining two years of the Council.
4. The protocol will ensure clarity around ways of working between the executive and scrutiny and consistency of approach for the new Council term whilst also bringing Surrey into line with governance best practice.

Aims

5. The primary aims of the protocol are to:
 - To record existing ways of working and to formalise what is already in place
 - To capture ways of working in one document for ease of reference.
 - To strengthen guidance in specific areas including pre-decision scrutiny, forward planning and scrutiny recommendations.
 - To enhance collaboration between scrutiny and the executive on forward planning to drive purposeful scrutiny which delivers value to residents and the Council
 - To bring added focus on the positives impact of scrutiny and the ways it can support the continuous improvement of the council and the services it delivers.
6. Statutory guidance identifies early and regular engagement with scrutiny on the executive's future work programme as an important characteristic of a strong scrutiny culture. The protocol describes new arrangements for quarterly forward planning meetings between Committee Chairs and Cabinet portfolio holders to improve engagement on pipeline issues and ensure scrutiny is focused where it can most add value to the work of the Council and benefits to residents. It also highlights the importance of

effective forward planning by Directorates to enable pre-decision scrutiny to be timetabled where appropriate, which in turn minimises risk of call-in.

Consultation

7. This protocol has been developed through the Select Committee Chair and Vice Chairs Group in consultation with the Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet.

SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE ACTIVITY October 2024 to February 2025

8. For the first time Select Committees submitted interim recommendations to Cabinet on the budget in November providing a greater opportunity to influence the final budget recommended to Council by Cabinet. This was followed by public scrutiny sessions in December to consider the draft revenue and capital budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2029/30. Members probed the assumptions underpinning the figures, and the risks associated with efficiencies and made a second report to Cabinet in December.
9. The Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group met three times to discuss challenges and share best practice. The group prioritised development of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol noting that it captured a number of important principles particularly around enabling scrutiny to influence Council business in a meaningful way and encouraging open, trusting relations between the Cabinet and Scrutiny. In addition, the group oversaw the development of a Scrutiny Member Handbook to provide practical guidance for new Councillors on their scrutiny role and implemented a Strategic Scrutiny Plan to increase visibility of the range of scrutiny activity across the Committees, drive strategic prioritisation and help identify cross-cutting issues or gaps.
10. The Leader and Chief Executive attended a meeting of the Chairs Group to outline next steps on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and to preview the establishment of a Member Reference Group comprising Select Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and other senior backbench members to facilitate member and scrutiny engagement in the development of Surrey's LGR proposal to government. This group held its first meeting on 20 February 2025.

Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee:

11. At its November meeting, CFLLC Select Committee explored the support given by CFLL to children with existing care, SEND or disabilities as they approach adulthood, and how they help prepare them for the transition to being supported by Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships, querying progress made in areas found by an internal audit to need improvement.

12. In December, the Committee encouraged the Service to prioritise achieving a target of 15 hours Alternative Provision a week, except for those Children and Young People with complex needs, and to monitor how well the Alternative Provision is meeting the child's needs and enabling them to return to full-time education.
13. Having reviewed the Libraries transformation, the Committee recognised the importance of funding sufficient staff to provide community hubs, identified as a key factor in helping to reduce isolation in society. The Committee also scrutinised the proposed next year's Budget for CFLL and recommended the prioritisation of recruitment into frontline roles, and ensuring this funding was not redirected where filling them is difficult. It probed deeper into what is spent on statutory versus discretionary services and recommended protecting the costs of preventive services and building in inflationary costs, due to the positive impact of early help on both outcomes for children and on the budget in terms of reducing statutory demand. Members learned more about early help commissioned by the Council on a site visit to a family centre in February.

Resources & Performance Select Committee:

14. The committee investigated the council's approach to asset management, both directly and through Local Authority Trading Companies, making a range of recommendations concerning the council's risk profile, leasing strategy and Economic Prosperity Strategy. The Committee requested further updates to maintain oversight and provide continued assurance of these areas. In December, the Committee explored the risk profile of the budget and encouraged work to drive down risks noting concerns around deliverability of the capital programme and the efficiencies envisaged through transformation. Members probed property maintenance issues recommending that a review of the maintenance backlog is undertaken.
15. The Committee provided further scrutiny of the Customer Transformation Programme exploring the benefits and notable successes of projects such as FixMyStreet as well as the risks inherent in delivering complex programmes. A report and recommendations were made to Cabinet requesting a review of any future spending and investment in light of local government reform. There was continued oversight and scrutiny of Unit4 performance in which the Committee recognised the ongoing challenges and work to resolve issues and stabilise the platform. The Committee highlighted its continued concern about the number and nature of outstanding issues, the cost and impacts to the council and its staff and requested an early update on progress. Background briefings were provided to increase the committee's understanding of artificial intelligence and facilities management contracts.

Adults & Health Select Committee:

16. The Committee scrutinised the national Police led initiative called Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) at its October select committee. Right Care Right Person is designed to change the way the emergency services respond to calls involving concerns about mental health and represents a transformative approach to managing emergency responses related to mental health concerns, vulnerable people, and welfare concerns aimed at optimising outcomes to ensure the delivery of appropriate care by the designated provider.
17. The committee reviewed the Mental Health Improvement Plan (MHIP) - with a focus on working age adults to understand the number of people of working age in Surrey who are not working because of mental health issues. Members probed the underlying issues and how these could be addressed to deliver improvements for Surrey residents, especially those experiencing the poorest health outcomes within the 21 Health and Wellbeing Strategy Key Neighbourhoods.
18. The committee scrutinised the backlogs of Cancer and Elective Care and elective (planned) care across Frimley ICS, and Surrey Heartlands ICS to understand what progress had been made to address them and to increase diagnostic capacity. Waiting time targets have long been a part of the NHS performance requirements, however following the disruption and delays caused by covid the focus has been on addressing and reducing the number of patients waiting for treatment. Prior to the covid pandemic, most patients were seen and treated within 18 weeks of their referral. During the pandemic, waiting lists grew as services were reduced to redirect resources and keep the general public safe from risk of infection. The committee learnt that the last 12 months have seen further challenges in terms of reducing waiting lists as a result of the capacity lost due to Industrial Action by doctors.
19. In December the committee scrutinised The Dementia Strategy, to review the progress made to implement the joint health and social care dementia strategy for Surrey 2022-2027. This strategy captures the voices of people with dementia, and their unpaid carers and families were central to the development of the strategy, alongside national and local evidence of need. The Committee wanted assurance that sufficient preventative measures are being provided to reduce dementia, as well as improving the dementia care pathway for the Surrey population.
20. The Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee met twice to hear from Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust and NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board on progress being made to evaluate a shortlist of possible sites for a new hospital by 2030, due to the current hospital having been built using Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The Committee were updated on contingency planning and how the building is being kept safe and services maintained, as well as on the New Hospital Programme. The Committee probed risk management in relation to the RAAC maintenance

works, transformation opportunities and received updates on the Frimley Park Hospital extension (M-Block) a new diagnostic centre, and the New Frimley Park Hospital Communications and Engagement Strategy and overarching Frimley Health strategy.

Communities, Environment & Highways Select Committee:

21. In December the CEH Select Committee scrutinised Surrey Fire and Rescue Service' Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-2030. The Committee endorsed the CRMP's aim to balance current resources across the whole of Surrey, aligned to risk, and its objective in supporting the Council's No One Left Behind vision. The Committee particularly welcomed the Fire and Rescue Service's use of technology to ensure a dynamic and agile fire service across the county. The Committee recommended that the Fire Service continues to explore closer working relationships with Health partners and that it promotes a preventative model to risk.
22. The Committee reviewed the Climate Change Progress Assessment going into the financial year 2023/2024. There have been a number of successes over this period including the now completed streetlighting LED replacement programme and the retrofitting of Council properties to reduce both emissions and energy bills. The Committee asked the Cabinet to reconfirm its commitment to the targets for 2030 and 2050 and to seek more resources from central government.
23. In February, the Committee scrutinised the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) which the Council has a duty to publish under section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) Act 2000. The Committee considered the proposals contained in the ROWIP to maintain and improve the rights of way in Surrey, including footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic, requesting that Cabinet prioritise the actions necessary to maintain our public rights of way. Noting that Council cannot deliver the plan without extensive collaborative working with partners, the Committee asked Cabinet to ensure that stakeholders and volunteers were properly supported and that work was joined up across all Council services, including Leisure services, Public Health, Local Transport Planning and Vision Zero initiatives, to achieve the ambitions set out in the plan to support and improve public Rights of Way .

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS:</u>

1. That Council **notes the headline activity of the Council's overview and scrutiny function** in the period October 2024 to February 2025.
2. That Council **approves the Executive Scrutiny Protocol** at Annex 1 for inclusion in the Codes and Protocols section of the Constitution.

Lead/Contact Officers:

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Sources/background papers:

[Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK](#)

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Draft Executive Scrutiny Protocol

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