



**Doncaster  
Council**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EVALUATION 2017/18**

**MARCH 2018**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. At its meeting on 30th January, 2014, Council agreed a number of changes to the Overview and Scrutiny function which sought to identify improvements and take account of best practise from leading Councils. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) agreed it would be timely to undertake a self-evaluation to consider the effectiveness of these changes during the 2017/18 municipal year.
2. The following key changes were introduced in May 2014:
  - Disapplying political proportionality on OSMC and the standing Panels to support greater cross-party involvement and Member engagement.
  - That the membership of OSMC consist of eight Members (previously 11) and include the Chairs of the four standing Panels, with the Vice Chairs of the standing Panels substituting for Chairs at OSMC where they are unable to attend.
  - That nine elected members be appointed to each of the 4 standing Panels (previously 13 Members were appointed to 3 Panels).
  - That OSMC's role as a business committee be enhanced to co-ordinate the work of the Panels and flexibility to consider any issues (except Health Scrutiny where specific statutory provision exists)
  - That the Panel structure be aligned to the current Directorate structure and include the establishment of a Health and Adult Social Care Panel that will incorporate the Council's statutory health Scrutiny function.
3. A cross party working group was established to undertake the review between September 2017 and January 2018. The review considered evidence primarily from elected Members and Officers. Comments were also provided by partners and members of the public who had attended Scrutiny meetings during the period of the review.
4. The recommendations agreed by the Working Group are set out below and include further information detailing the rationale for each recommendation.
5. Details of the evidence received during the review is attached at Appendices A and B.
6. The Working Group would like to express its thanks and appreciation to everyone who participated and contributed to the review.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7. The Working Group RECOMMEND that:  
(The supporting reasons are set out later in the report)

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Panels are realigned to the Doncaster Growing Together themes.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

A more systematic review of the Forward Plan is undertaken by Scrutiny Members to ensure opportunity for timely pre decision scrutiny.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

Links with Directorates remain through regular meetings with Directors or their Deputies, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

Fixed Meetings in the Council Diary continue to be scheduled for OSMC, and the Panels that consider Health and Children and Young People's issues.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

The Panels that currently include issues that fall within Regeneration and Housing and Community and Environment Scrutiny Panels schedule two fixed meetings in the Council Diary per year.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6:**

Review Work remains a key feature of Overview and Scrutiny activity.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7:**

Training and identification of best practice Overview and Scrutiny continue to be undertaken.

### **RECOMMENDATION 8:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Protocols be reviewed and updated.

### **RECOMMENDATION 9:**

Raising Awareness of Overview and Scrutiny activities through social media and other mechanisms are undertaken where appropriate.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

8. The review sought to evaluate whether the Council is providing an effective Overview and Scrutiny function following the structural and process changes implemented in 2014 and whether any suggestions for improvement could be identified.
9. The key changes to the Scrutiny function implemented by the Council in 2014 Included:
  - Disapplication of proportionality on OSMC and the Panels to encourage greater cross party participation;
  - Enhanced co-ordination and management role for the OSMC;
  - Greater focus on review work by the Panels through task and finish activities;
  - Establishment of a Health Scrutiny Panel; and
  - Working practices being more flexible (panel work not based around pre-determined meetings dates).

## **METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

10. A cross party working Group was established to undertake the review. Its membership consisted of the following Councillors:
  - Councillor Kevin Rodgers (Chair)
  - Councillor John Healy
  - Councillor Alan Jones
  - Councillor Andrea Robinson
  - Councillor Neil Gethin
  - Councillor Martin Greenhalgh
  - Councillor Nigel Cannings

## **KEY DATES**

11. The review was undertaken between September 2017 and January 2018 and included the following sessions:
  - 7th September, 2017 – OSMC agree working group;
  - 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2017 – Scoping Meeting;
  - 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2017 – Overview and agreement of Scoping Meeting;
  - 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2017 – Taking Stock and reviewing current arrangements and effectiveness;
  - 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2017 - Drop in session with Councillor Rodger;
  - 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2017 – What is Scrutiny's Role and Ways of Working and Accessing Information;
  - 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 – Agreeing whether changes are to be made to the existing model; and
  - 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017 – Agree draft recommendations.

## **KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY**

12. The key areas considered by the Panel were based around the lines of enquiry identified within the Centre For Public Scrutiny's Self Evaluation Framework and included the following:

- How does Overview and Scrutiny undertake its role of holding to account, undertaking policy review and development?
- How does Overview and Scrutiny gather and evaluate evidence?
- How are recommendations developed and responded to?
- Where does Overview and Scrutiny make an impact?
- Moving forward, how will financial and service pressures impact on the role of Overview and Scrutiny
- What will be the impact of wider governance issues such as devolution?
- What is the impact of the development of digital technology?
- How effective are Overview and Scrutiny's ways of working and Accessing information
- What are the opportunities for improvement?

## **SOURCES OF EVIDENCE**

13. The Working Group received evidence from:

- Officers who were invited to provide feedback on the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny further details are included at Appendix A;
- A member of public and Partners who attended Scrutiny Meetings during the review period were invited to provide feedback on Overview and Scrutiny further details are included at Appendix A; and
- Members who were sent a questionnaire to complete– a summary of responses is attached at Appendix B.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Panels are realigned to the Doncaster Growing Together themes.**

14. The Working Group acknowledged that the revised structure which emphasised OSMC's role as a co-ordinating Committee was working effectively. OSMC's remit to consider any issue (except those reserved for Health Scrutiny) at one of its regular meetings, whilst the Panels focused on review work, had evolved positively. The disapplication of political proportionality on OSMC and the Panels had also provided a greater opportunity for engagement in Scrutiny by all Members.
15. Members and Officers recognised however, that it would be appropriate for OSMC and the Panel's to better reflect the Doncaster Growing Together themes in their remits. Members believed the role of OSMC in co-ordinating work programmes aligned to strategic priorities was an important aspect of Overview and Scrutiny's role.
16. The exact remits of each Panel would need careful consideration and further investigation as the current Panel structure would not lift and shift into the DGT themes. A number of DGT themes were currently included in more than one Scrutiny Panel e.g. Children's issues would feature prominently in Doncaster Caring and Doncaster Learning. Members recognised that there was an opportunity for Panels to consider issues jointly where appropriate, with one Panel taking the lead on the issue under discussion. Consideration would also need to be given to ensuring there was an equitable workload across the Panels.
17. The Working Group recognised that whilst there was an appetite to improve the impact of Scrutiny this must be undertaken within existing resources. Members valued the support provided by the Scrutiny Support Officers but recognised that additional capacity may be needed on occasions. Members were informed that all officers had a duty to co-operate with Overview and Scrutiny and any specific additional support would need to be considered bearing in mind current priorities and capacity within Governance Services
18. Members also recognised that they had a role in being pro-active and effectively supporting the Overview and Scrutiny process by reading reports, preparing for meetings, managing their own diaries and reporting back from meetings.

**19. RECOMMENDATION 2: A more systematic review of the Forward Plan is undertaken to ensure opportunity for timely pre decision scrutiny.**

20. Whilst structural changes had seen a move to more review work there was detailed discussion around the value of pre-decision scrutiny. In particular the Working Group had observed a strong pre decision scrutiny model during its visit to Rotherham Council. Members recognised that Rotherham had different Governance arrangements to Doncaster and the current model in Doncaster was well established and had developed and matured over a number of years.
21. Whilst acknowledging the importance of pre decision Scrutiny the Working Group recognised that Scrutiny's opportunity to influence decisions was greater when it was involved early and Members could identify key issues and help shape future proposals. The impact and influence of Scrutiny was more limited where it was involved later in the decision making process e.g. immediately prior to Cabinet or through call In.
22. Members were reminded of the opportunities that exist to identify important decisions early by regularly reviewing the Forward Plan, discussing issues, with the Mayor, Cabinet Members and Directors and regularly reviewing work programmes. In particular review of the Forward Plan and work Programmes enabled all Members to engage with this process and identify issues for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Links with Directorates remain through regular meetings with Directors or their Deputies, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service.**

23. Chairs and Vice Chairs wished to continue their regular meetings with Directors. Members were also keen to meet with Assistant Director's and Heads of Service where necessary to build effective Member /Officer relations and improve awareness and understanding of service issues and future decisions.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Fixed Meetings in the Council Diary continue to be scheduled for OSMC, and the Panels that consider Health and Children and Young People's issues.**

24. The working Group was of the opinion that the current meeting arrangements for OSMC and the Panel that considered Health Scrutiny and Children's issues (particularly review of Safeguarding arrangements through the Doncaster Children's Trust ), worked effectively and did not require change. A one size fits all approach to Panel work planning had proved to be difficult as Health Scrutiny had to respond quickly to a range of important health issues and the Children's Scrutiny Panel undertook a regular review of Doncaster Children's Trust. The Working Group recognised that the current Panel names and remits may change slightly if realigned to the DGT themes and this would need to be taken into account.



**RECOMMENDATION 5: The Panels that currently include issues that fall within Regeneration and Housing and Community and Environment Scrutiny Panels schedule two fixed meetings in the Council Diary.**

25. The Regeneration and Housing Panel currently does not hold any scheduled formal meetings with the Community and Environment holding one meeting to meet its Crime and Disorder responsibilities. It was suggested that two fixed formal meetings for both Panels be set in the Council Diary to give an overview of priorities in these areas and take account of any evolving issues that may require consideration. The Working Group recognised that the current Panel names and remits may change slightly if realigned to the DGT themes.

**RECOMMENDATION 6: Review Work remains a key feature of Overview and Scrutiny activity.**

26. The working group was of the opinion that task and finish review work was an important mechanism to engage elected Members in policy development and decision making. No changes were recommended to the way in which Overview and Scrutiny undertook review work however, early involvement in policy development was encouraged particularly when reviewing Council policies.

27. Members supported the current arrangements for review work and recognised that engagement from the public, community representatives and partners ensured that Members were gathering strong and real evidence to support their recommendations.

28. Members recognised that Scrutiny work plans were ambitious and resources should be used effectively to deliver successful outcomes. Members stressed the importance of building up their expertise, knowledge and understanding of Panel issues by regular attendance and sharing responsibility e.g. Vice Chairs and/or other Members taking a lead on specific issues.

29. Members believed that the OSMC's involvement in the budget process and the on-going quarterly review of Finance and Performance issues provided the necessary opportunity to ensure effective financial scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDATION 7: Training and identification of best practice Overview and Scrutiny continue to be undertaken.**

30. Training for Scrutiny Councillors was essential to ensure they are able to undertake their role effectively and efficiently. The Working Group recommended that advanced questioning skills were a key requirement of effective Overview and Scrutiny and expressed a wish for this type of training to be provided. It was also suggested that best practice visits be undertaken periodically by both officers and Members and relevant briefings and guidance be circulated as necessary to Members e.g. Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) or Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).

**RECOMMENDATION 8: The Overview and Scrutiny Protocols be reviewed and updated.**

31. It was noted that a review of the Overview and Scrutiny Protocols would be helpful in providing up to date guidance and clarity on Overview and Scrutiny including key principles, ways of working, roles, relationships and processes.

**RECOMMENDATION 9: Raising Awareness of Overview and Scrutiny activities through social media and other mechanisms are undertaken where appropriate.**

32. Members discussed the importance of public engagement in Overview and Scrutiny. It was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny could raise its public profile by using social media to promote meetings and reviews. It was also suggested that Scrutiny meetings be audio and visually recorded and loaded onto the Council's website to encourage greater transparency and accountability.

33. Members recognised that social media could be very useful in highlighting future activities and encouraging public feedback on issues for review. However, Members acknowledged that this could be resource intensive particularly where timely responses were required when considering topical live issues.

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### SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

#### Comments from Members of the Public

1. “We felt privileged to be invited to talk about our concerns/issues and how our community is coping with on-going behaviours. However, we are not convinced that it will change anything as we have been here many times before with many agencies without feedback regarding solutions and ask what the Panel can do to alleviate our concerns”.

#### Comments from a Partner who took part in a Scrutiny Review

2. The meeting was very good and the Councillors were extremely engaged and involved within this area of work. We would have no issues with attending a scrutiny panel in the future if it provides assistance with the work being undertaken. There was surprise with the high level of attendance from Members.

#### Comments from the Leadership Team

3. Generally it was considered that the function was operating well, Members have developed their understanding and input of the function, undertaking, for example, question planning sessions, which has improved the quality and structure of debate. The work planning process is a key aspect and has improved over time. A summary of responses is detailed below.
4. What areas of Overview and Scrutiny have worked well?
  - Focusing on one key review area;
  - Hearing the views of service users and a range of agencies to provide good evidence based recommendations;
  - Useful to discuss major issues and the transformation agenda to both update Members but to also seek views on how things should be shaped going forward.
5. What areas of Overview and Scrutiny have not worked as well?
  - Formal agendas are sometimes too big resulting in important issues being squeezed.
6. What improvements can be made to ensure the Overview and Scrutiny function is fit for purpose going forward taking into account, for example, Doncaster Growing Together.
  - Worth Scrutiny structuring around the Doncaster Growing Together themes but ensuring, for example, Crime and Disorder and Health Statutory requirements were met.
  - Choosing a single issue for review and undertaking that one piece of work over the course of the year.

## Drop in Session with Councillor Rodgers, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

7. Councillor Rodgers held a drop in session with officers and the following comments were received:

### Strengths highlighted in discussion

- Willingness of Chairs and Vice Chairs to meet and plan review work;
- Chairs and Vice Chairs work collaboratively to improve the quality of meetings and development of quality recommendations;
- Good use of review work leading to high level recommendations being incorporated into strategy, adopted by the Authority and its partners, for example the Domestic Abuse review;
- Flexibility of review work to take in-depth look at an issue that has many common features across the Borough e.g. Crime and Disorder review.
- Overview and Scrutiny provides a “fresh pair of eyes”; and
- Change from an adversarial form of work had improved the work of the Committees.

### Potential Areas for Improvement Identified

- Members keeping to the agenda when in meetings;
- More detailed briefings for Members prior to meetings on strategic items;
- Possible visits by Members to partner agencies to gain an increased understanding and appreciation of their work, thus providing a richer picture;
- Align Panels to the Doncaster Growing Together themes;
- Utilisation of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs to provide evidence for review work;
- Possibility of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs attending partnership meetings to expand the influence of Overview and Scrutiny and provide deeper insight into the work of the Scrutiny function; and
- Possibility of undertaking a yearlong review on a Doncaster Growing Together theme.

The following report contains information gathered through a range of sources including the following

**1. Responses to Questionnaires**

A questionnaire was sent to all Members which sought the views of Members on the effectiveness of the current arrangements are being sought to help inform the review and identify key issues relating to current arrangements. A summary of the feedback and comments are as follows

Q. No.	Question	Totals to Individual Questions				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	The Scrutiny work programmes include relevant issues that support the Council's aims and objectives.	12	11	1	0	1
2	Scrutiny/OSMC engages effectively with Cabinet Members	5	13	5	1	6
3	Scrutiny/OSMC engages effectively with partners	5	18	2	1	4
4	Scrutiny/OSMC engaged effectively with senior officers	8	12	5	0	3
5	Scrutiny/OSMC effectively holds decision makers to account	5	17	3	4	1
6	Scrutiny/OSMC puts forward effective and evidence based recommendations	7	18	3	0	2

7	Scrutiny/OSMC enables the voice of local people & communities to be heard as part of decision & policy-making processes	6	11	7	3	3
8	Scrutiny/OSMC enables Councillors to represent their communities by raising local issues in a wider strategic context	9	12	6	3	0
9	Scrutiny/OSMC undertakes reviews which include a wide range of evidence and perspectives	9	16	4	1	1
10	Scrutiny/OSMC has a clearly defined and valued role in the Council's governance arrangements	9	15	5	1	1
11	OSMC provides an effective management and co-ordination role	11	11	2	2	5
12	Overview and Scrutiny Panel meetings are effective	10	14	4	1	1
13	Councillors receive the training they need to undertake their role effectively	10	13	3	2	2
14	Councillors are adequately supported to undertake their Overview and Scrutiny role	9	13	3	2	3
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>115</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>

### Questionnaire – Additional Comments

<b>Resources</b>	More resources are needed to make Scrutiny more effective
<b>Questionnaire</b>	Would have preferred an option neither agree or disagree rather than don't know - on the questionnaire. For example question 7 - I know that residents sometimes attend meetings but I am not aware that the 'public' know the function of Scrutiny or OSMC.
<b>Member Development</b>	Question 5 - in most cases strong chairs required. General - More in house training required for all panel Members in their Panels with experienced scrutineers and workshops with relevant officers and cabinet members.
<b>Member Development</b>	Cabinet Members and Officers hold all the cards. Councillors need much more training and support to enable them to ask relevant questions; offer critical friend challenge and come somewhere near to holding decision makers to account. Funds should be available for Councillors to access LGA and other recognised training body courses.
<b>Member Development</b>	I think more training would be beneficial, however, the quality of this is crucial (Q.13)
<b>Process</b>	Hopefully OSMC will scrutinise the answers closely as some questions may have borderline responses.
<b>Public</b>	Not much interaction with public for scrutiny work.
<b>Structure</b>	It may be realign scrutiny to the four areas in Doncaster Together and if possible add value and direction into the process.
<b>Work plan/ Public Engagement</b>	Contentious decisions always create public interest and will always be allowed to be heard.
<b>Public Engagement</b>	Feel that more scrutiny should be available to residents
<b>Engagement/ Relationships</b>	Cooperation and liaison with relevant parties is key, in building a strong working relationship with understanding of its purpose.
<b>Scrutiny Support</b>	The support and guidance from Chris and Caroline is exceptionally good. I think this in itself is the biggest contributing factor to the higher ratings I've given to sections of this questionnaire.
<b>Work plan</b>	I am concerned that groups with certain protected characteristics do not always get a hearing at Council; this is something scrutiny should look into.

<b>Structure</b>	My belief is that the Scrutiny Panel should not make the decisions political. However, I believe it does with Chair & Vice Chair from the same party it will never be impartial. We have had first-hand experience of this with recommendations that have no point.
<b>Councillor Feedback – to a recent review</b>	I'm ever so disappointed that I can't make this as these sessions have been incredibly insightful and well discussed by members. It has been great to discuss this issue that really is impacting every single community across Doncaster
<b>Other</b>	Some of the comments refer to information from limited number of meetings and minutes, etc. and until I gather/build-up of further knowledge on the Q&S it is difficult to express fully