

Scrutiny Committee Briefing

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Somerset
Council

Introduction

Background

Every Council with an executive management structure has to have a scrutiny function. Somerset Council has appointed 5 scrutiny committees to perform this function:

- Adults and Health
 - Children and Families
 - Climate and Place
 - Communities
 - Corporate and Resources
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- Each of the scrutiny committees have a responsibility to fulfil a check and challenge function for decisions and policies made by the Executive.
 - Each committee is also expected to contribute towards policy development when appropriate in order to influence.

Background cont.

Principles of scrutiny

The scrutiny committees have no decision-making powers but have responsibilities delegated by Council. Committees can appoint a Task and Finish Group to undertake specific scrutiny review and recommendations back to it.

Scrutiny Committees are committed to developing a respectful relationship between themselves, the Executive and external partners.

The work of the Scrutiny Committees is underpinned by the following six principles:-

- Contribute to sound decision-making by holding councillors and key partners to account as a 'critical friend'.
- Contribute to and reflect the vision and priorities of the Council.
- Enable the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process.
- Engage in policy development at an appropriate time to be able to influence the development of policy.
- Be agile and able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.
- For scrutiny to be a councillor led and owned function which seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development.

Background cont.

Communities Scrutiny areas of responsibilities

Functional areas that are the responsibility of this Committee are as follows:

Housing:

- Strategy and HRA Business Plan
- Arms Length Management Organisation
- Homelessness - Rough Sleepers pathway
- Housing Options & Allocations – Homefinder Somerset
- Housing and Leaseholder Management
- Housing Maintenance - Responsive and Planned (capital programme), compliance, void management
- Housing Development & Regeneration
- Tenant Services –Worklessness & Tenancy Management (new tenancies, income, debt and benefit support, rent setting, service charges tenancy compliance)
- Sheltered and Extra Care
- Housing Property Service
- Registered Providers and Partnerships
- Gypsy, Traveller and Van Dweller Services
- People Displacement Schemes and Services

Background cont.

Customer Services:

- Customer Service Strategy and Standards
- Corporate Customer Services
- Compliments & Complaints, Ombudsman cases
- Local Service Centres
- Customer Engagement and Access

Cultural Services:

- Libraries, Museums, Theatres
 - Leisure Centres, Facilities and Services (contract and direct)
 - Sports Development Partnership
 - Heritage Assets
 - Arts Centres, Facilities, Services and Development
 - Culture Facilities, Services and Development
 - Tourism Facilities, Services and Development
 - Community Facilities
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Background cont.

Regulatory and Operational Services:

- Environmental Health and Licensing
- Registrars
- Coroners
- Environmental Protection and Enviro-crime
- Building Control
- Port Health Authority
- CCTV and anti-social behaviour
- Safety Advisory Group
- Private Sector Housing
- Street Cleansing
- Grounds Maintenance
- Unauthorised encampments
- Parks and Play Areas
- Public Toilets
- Dog Wardens
- Bereavement Services
- Fairs and Markets

Background cont.

Methods of Scrutiny

In conducting its' business a Scrutiny Committee may:

- Undertake in depth analysis of a policy issue;
- Receive briefings and presentations on issues under consideration;
- Undertake research, community and other public engagement, particularly in the analysis of policy issues and possible options;
- Hold inquiries, workshops, public meetings and conduct public surveys;
- Invite advisors and assessors to assist them;
- Question Lead Members, Associate Lead Members and seek their views on issues and proposals affecting the Council's area;
- Question senior officers, and where appropriate suppliers and seek their professional views on issues, and / or their decisions and performance either in relation to service plans or in relation to particular decisions, initiatives or project;
- Liaise with national, regional or local external organisations operating in the Council's area so as to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working;
- Question and collect evidence from any other person (with their consent) and invite witnesses to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings, proceedings or events

Background cont.

Forward Work Programme

With regards the Committee's forward work programme, which will be an agenda item on every meeting agenda, the following can include items on scrutiny agendas:

- The Committee itself;
- Full Council;
- The Leader;
- The Executive collectively;
- Any Member of the Committee;
- Any other Member, for an issue affecting their division and where all other methods of resolution have been exhausted may request a matter is considered as part of a Committee work programme;
- The Monitoring Officer, the County Solicitor or the Scrutiny Officer
- Any Officer from the Senior Leadership Team;

Background cont.

Use of Scrutiny time and support

- Initial discussions regarding the forward work programme have taken place between the Chair, Vice Chair and the Executive Director team.
- The Committee are currently scheduled to meet on a bi-monthly basis and with such a comprehensive portfolio of responsibilities the opportunity to continue scrutiny through other mechanisms, in between formal meetings, becomes essential. This can be achieved through Task and Finish Groups, informal workshop/development sessions and Committee/member briefings.
- The Committee will also receive the budget monitoring reports and corporate performance reports covering the finances and activity of the whole Council on a quarterly basis.
- This Committee will be supported by myself and colleagues Leila Nicholson, Steph Gold and Rose Stokes.

Time for Questions



Contact email