

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– Scrutiny for Climate and Place Committee



Approach to Climate and Place Scrutiny

Lead Officer: Jamie Jackson

Author: Jamie Jackson

Contact Details: Jamie.Jackson@somerset.gov.uk

Executive Lead Member: N/A

Division / Local Member: N/A

1. Summary

- 1.1.** The report sets out the responsibilities and expectations for the new Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee, detailing the Committee's functional areas of responsibility and principles of operation.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** The Committee are asked to note the details of the scrutiny function within Somerset Council and this Committee's wide-ranging areas of responsibility.
- 2.2** The Committee are asked to consider and comment on the utilisation of opportunities between formal meetings of the Committee.

3. Background

- 3.1.** 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
- 3.2.** Each of the scrutiny committees have a responsibility to fulfil a check and challenge function for decisions and policies made by the Executive.
- 3.3.** Each committee is also expected to contribute towards policy development when appropriate in order to influence.

- 3.4.** The scrutiny committees have no decision-making powers but have responsibilities delegated by Council. Each Committee can appoint a Task and Finish Group to undertake specific scrutiny review and recommendations back to it. All Task and Finish Groups will operate in accordance with the agreed Task and Finish Group Protocol. At the annual meeting of the full Council, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chief Executive will propose for the agreement of the Council, the number of Scrutiny Committees, the Terms of Reference and the number of scrutiny seats required to perform the scrutiny function for the forthcoming year. The Scrutiny Committees can work on together on cross-cutting services.
- 3.5.** The Scrutiny Committees are committed to developing of a respectful relationship between themselves, the Executive and external partners. The work of the Scrutiny Committees is underpinned by the following six principles:-
- To contribute to sound decision-making in a timely way 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.
 - To 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.
- 3.6.** The Climate and Place Committee has the following functional areas of responsibility to scrutinise:

Climate, Environment and Sustainability:

- Carbon Neutrality
- Climate Resilience and Adaptation
- Renewable Energy
- Country Parks, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Local Nature Reserves, AONB Partnerships (Countryside Services)
- Biodiversity (and net gain) and Ecology
- Sustainability
- Waste Service
- Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

- Water Management
- Flooding Response
- Coastal Protection Authority
- Somerset Rivers Authority

Infrastructure & Transport:

- Highways Authority
- Public Rights of Way
- Parking
- Active Travel
- Traffic Management
- Transport
- Public Transport
- Fleet Management
- Contracted Transport
- Strategic Transport Planning
- Road Safety
- Infrastructure Commissioning

Economy, Employment & Planning:

- Economic Development and Tourism
- Planning (conservation, enforcement, DM, local plan, waste and minerals, s106 allocations/CIL, Phosphates)
- Affordable Housing and Enabling
- City/Town Centre Management
- Trading Standards (Devon partnership)
- Skills
- Education Business Partnership
- Economic infrastructure, services and Innovation Centres
- Regeneration (non-housing)
- Major Projects
- Nuclear Power

- Scientific Services

3.7. 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;
- Consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy 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;
- As part of any investigation, review and scrutinise the decisions made by, and performance of, the Executive, Lead Members and senior officers as regards both individual decisions and over time;
- Question and collect evidence from any other person (with their consent) and invite witnesses to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings, proceedings or events

3.8. 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;
- Any Officer from the Senior Leadership Team;
- The Scrutiny Officer

- 3.9.** 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, 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 a performance report covering the activity of the whole Directorate every 6 months and it is intended that this would include Climate related activity, especially as it is a priority to embed this in all of the Directorate's activity.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** Initial discussions regarding the forward work programme have taken place between the Chair, Vice Chair, Executive Director and the wider Service Director team. The current intention is to allocate a general scrutiny theme to each meeting, such as water or transport, with any other urgent or time specific issues business also incorporated within the agenda.

5. Implications

- 5.1.** There are implications for the success and benefit of scrutiny if the Committee do not adhere to the principles stated in paragraph 3.5 or do not engage with the subject matter sufficiently, including the forward work programme.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Somerset Council Constitution 2023 – Part G

Note - For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author