

TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

FROM: Scrutiny and Assurance Manager – Deb Thompson

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CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY SCRUTINY FUNCTION AND AREAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY CONSIDERATION

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the current scrutiny function within the Authority and suggest areas for future scrutiny consideration.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the contents of this report and approve specific recommendations as follows;
- 2.1.1 agree the areas to be subjected to scrutiny,
 - 2.1.2 prioritise the agreed areas to be scrutinised,
 - 2.1.3 allocate every Member of the Committee to at least one agreed area to lead and drive the review,
 - 2.1.4 determine a timeframe for each agreed area to start.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 **Political** – the role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an Authority's decision makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy/any organisation. Member relationships and cross-party issues can either help or hinder scrutiny outcomes; within Cambridgeshire, it should function without political bias in the interests of serving our local communities.
- 3.2 **Economic** – finite resources dictate that any work undertaken must have the potential to add value by driving improvement in the services provided to the public and/or using what is available in the most effective and efficient manner.
- 3.3 **Legal** - the requirement for local authorities in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Localism Act 2011 amended the Local Government Act 2000 to allow councils to revert to a non-executive form of governance; the 'committee system'. Councils who

adopt this system are not required to have overview and scrutiny but may do so if they wish. The legislation has been strengthened and updated since 2000, most recently to reflect new governance arrangements with combined authorities. Requirements for combined authorities are set out in Schedule 5A to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

There is no such legislative requirement on the Authority to have an overview and scrutiny function however in the interests of good practice, openness and transparency, it has chosen to do so in the form of the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 Equality impact assessments will be completed for each agreed area as work progresses and the scope of any such impacts is better understood.

5. Background

- 5.1 Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives organisational improvements. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and service failures. Recent high profile inquiries have highlighted the need for more and increased openness and transparency of decision making and robust scrutiny of those decisions. Alongside this is the demand placed on a scrutiny function for real time holding to account often through increased use of social media and digital technologies.
- 5.2 It is a fact, borne out of inspection results, that the Service and therefore the Authority is a high performing organisation within the sector; it welcomes challenge and committed Officers and Members recognise the value scrutiny can bring.
- 5.3 Terms of Reference for the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee were approved in 2021 and can be found via [cpfa-terms-of-reference-of-committees.pdf \(cambsfire.gov.uk\)](https://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/cpfa-terms-of-reference-of-committees.pdf)

6. Work Programme

- 6.1 The current Terms of Reference for the Committee details 21 responsibilities including it being responsible for ... *the scrutiny of performance and challenging the Authority when carrying out the responsibilities referred to below through an agreed annual work programme of Member-led reviews ... Agree a programme of Member-led reviews on any operational or strategic matter to ensure delivery of value for money compliant with best practice ... Develop arrangements for the scrutiny of the Authority's policies and services with a view to improving efficiency, effectiveness or economy.*
- 6.2 Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the Committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the Authority. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme and should be able to justify how and why a decision has been made to include/exclude an issue. It needs to be looking

at the right topics, in the right way and at the right time. The gathering of evidence to inform this may come from conversations with others and aggregated information from political groups about the subject matter of Members' surgeries; business cases and options appraisals (and other planning information) for forthcoming major decisions.

6.3 Member-led Reviews (MLR) were introduced in 2009. Some of those completed since then have had a significant impact on internal policies and procedures and external perceptions.

6.4 At its meeting in January 2023 the Committee agreed not to progress the MLRs relating to estates/property management and capital programme projects and shift the focus onto people themed areas (Minute 53 refers). Several other areas for potential scrutiny have also been raised at various Authority meetings and seminars including the following;

- Code of Conduct – review how the newly adopted Code is working (Fire Authority 10 February 2022, Minute 27)
- Pay Policy/Employee Pay (Fire Authority 10 February 2022, Minute 26 and 16 June 2022, Minute 42)
- Employee Recruitment and Retention (Overview and Scrutiny Committee October 2022, Minute 45)
- Service Culture (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 20 April 2023, Minute 62)
- Impacts and considerations due to population growth (Fire Authority 15 February 2024, Minute 106)
- Fire Authority structure to include membership size and Constitution (started then paused whilst the former Police and Crime Commissioners Business Case for Change was ongoing; never restarted)

6.5 Unfortunately, due to Member and Officer workloads, it has been difficult to coordinate and complete any MLRs; none of the above areas have been progressed.

7. Other Considerations - Community Risk Management Plan

7.1 As Members will be aware, the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) sets out our overall intentions and sitting behind it is a detailed action plan that prioritises how we use our limited resources to ensure we maintain focus on the most important things that need to be done. Our CRMP includes the areas for improvement highlighted in the HMICFRS report, so the Service can make sure the required progress is made. It also includes the actions needed to be taken, having considered the detail of various recent national reports that make recommendations for all fire and rescue services.

7.2 The Committee may therefore wish to consider including one of the priority areas from the CRMP in their work programme;

- new mobilising system in Combined Fire Control,

- service improvement project (operational response review),
- performance and talent management,
- productivity and efficiency,
- TRaCS and the implementation of the new post traumatic incident support process.

8. Other Considerations - Internal Audit

- 8.1 No significant issues have been raised by RSM auditors relating to the scrutiny function within the Authority.
- 8.2 The Committee will recall from its last meeting in October 2023, when the annual internal audit report (2022/23) was presented, that the auditors had completed seven assurance assignments (Minute 72 refers) and as can be seen on the agenda today, their Audit Plan for 2024/25 will cover six areas of review.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an Authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails. While everyone in an Authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by Members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an Authority.
- 9.2 Whilst it is recognised that (Committee) Members undertake a range of overview and scrutiny activities and that the Service continuously monitors and reviews what it does as part of normal day to day management activity, it is imperative that the Committee fulfills its MLR responsibilities.
- 9.3 By developing a more robust work programme, the Committee will be able to evidence its decision making in the selection of scrutiny areas and drive to completion MLRs that will add value and improve outcomes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact Officer
Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, May 2019	Hinchingsbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Deb Thompson Scrutiny and Assurance Manager deb.thompson@cambsfire.gov.uk
State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services 2021		
Fire Authority and its Committees Minutes - Various		