
AUDIT AND REVIEW OF REVIEW COMMITTEE

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the process of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's audit and review of the Review Committee following the results of the LGA Peer Review conducted in 2019.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In 2019, a Peer Review was undertaken which examined Rochford District Council as a whole and identified key areas for improvement. Within these areas, performance of the overview and scrutiny function was highlighted as a cause for concern, with the following statement made: "the Council also needs to strengthen the scrutiny function which Members said does not play a positive role in policy development".
- 2.2 The Peer Review proposed that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny undertake work with Rochford District Council to work with Members and officers to ensure that its overview and scrutiny function is working effectively, and to develop actions to help the function improve.
- 2.3 The audit and review of the Review Committee has been postponed up until this period due to the impact and repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic which hit shortly after the completion of the Peer Review. As restrictions are now easing, this work can proceed.

3 THE CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY

- 3.1 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is a social purpose consultancy and national centre of expertise with the purpose of helping organisations achieve their outcomes through improved governance and scrutiny.
- 3.2 It is proposed that CfGS will work with Rochford District Council to support officers and Members in reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's overview & scrutiny function and in developing actions aimed at improving the function.
- 3.3 This audit and review is based on a tried and tested methodology utilised by CfGS since 2003, and is built around the content of the 2019 statutory scrutiny guidance and 'The Good Scrutiny Guide' published by CfGS in 2019.

4 AUDIT AND REVIEW OF REVIEW COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The CfGS has already identified certain areas where improvement is needed following the Peer Review. This includes:
- Clarity on the roles and responsibilities of scrutiny and scrutiny Members, and how this flows through to the way that the work programme of the Review Committee is prioritised and focused;

- The way that these roles and responsibilities align with the Council's overall ambition;
- The support and development opportunities available to scrutiny Members, including support to use information effectively;
- Outcomes from the scrutiny process – how these can be assessed and evaluated throughout the process.

4.2 CfGS will gather evidence through four different methods:

- Desktop work – a general sense-check of the Council's Constitution and rules of procedure where they relate to scrutiny, and of recent work plans, scrutiny scopes and review reports.
- Interviews – this will include the Acting Managing Director, Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director, Resources and Group Leaders, along with key officers and Review Committee Members.
- Survey – there may be a possibility, if needed, of including Members more widely or inviting them to comment more generally.
- Observation – observing Review Committee meetings in person or via meeting recordings.

4.3 Once all evidence has been gathered, the CfGS will put forward an action plan for improvements, which is deliverable and focused on ensuring that scrutiny within the Council is working effectively. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by late autumn with a report presented to the Review Committee in November 2021 which will in turn make recommendations to Full Council in December 2021.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There is a risk that if the scrutiny function of the Council does not operate effectively that policy development and decision making will be weaker, leading to a reduced likelihood of the Council achieving efficiency, economy and effectiveness in its operations.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of the work will be £4,800 plus reasonable expenses. This will be funded from reserves.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The requirement for local authorities to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in section 9F to 9FI in the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). Regard must be given to the

Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities (May 2019).

- 7.2 All local authorities to establish arrangements for effective scrutiny with sufficient power to
- (a) to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive,
 - (b) to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive,
 - (c) to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any functions which are not the responsibility of the executive,
 - (d) to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are not the responsibility of the executive,
 - (e) to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made.

9 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

to note the process for undertaking the audit and review of the operation of the Review Committee.



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Background Papers:-

None.

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