

Response to Centre for Public Scrutiny Health-check Recommendations

Panel Response to Centre for Public Scrutiny Recommendations

CfPS Recommendation	Suggested response/proposal for change
<p>1. Support greater openness and inclusiveness, encouraging rigorous and independent-minded scrutiny.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny training for all members and specific training for chairmen/vice chairmen • Include in refreshed Member Guide to Scrutiny • Promote transparency initiatives including public cabinet and webcasting of Select Committees • Promote and make more accessible the Forward Plan and cabinet and committee work plans
<p>2. Recognise the sovereignty of scrutiny as an essential democratic check and balance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include in Constitution and refreshed Member Guide • Senior Officers should attend scrutiny meetings when required and should be aware of the importance of scrutiny and of the necessity to engage. • Scrutiny training for all members • Training/guidance for staff and particularly senior level (Director/Head of Service) • Officers of the Council to be aware of and comply with the requirement to attend and provide timely information to select committees.
<p>3. Ensure clear methodology in the creation of work programmes that segments, prioritises and aligns with the council's plans and essential change plans. This should be member-led but in consultation with cabinet and corporate officers to assist in identifying the critical and high priority areas for scrutiny to select. Regular communication and exchange of ideas between Scrutiny, Cabinet and Officers would help to maintain a balanced work programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members to own and be part of the work programme planning process • Ensure work programme planning (BPG) checklist is used consistently • Establish consistent liaison arrangements between select committee chairmen/vice chairmen, cabinet members and relevant support officers • Scrutiny work programme to be reported to annual Council meeting • Select committee chairmen to meet regularly to review the overarching scrutiny work programme and share best practice
<p>4. The Children and Young People's Select Committee has additional challenges and responsibilities. It will need to continue to prioritise</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYPSSC to hold informal session to review the outcomes of the CfPS report (and invite the Cabinet

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<p>its activity with laser-focus precision to drive the crucial Children's Services - Ofsted Action Plan. This will need to recognise the significant challenge that the service faces and the need for scrutiny to be constructive and impactful, but also managing its demands on an already pressurised service. It should resist becoming distracted by less critical or low priority issues.</p>	<p>Member to attend, along with relevant officers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All CYPSSC members to review the committee's work programme and ensure it focuses on priorities • Specific training session on scrutiny of children's social care
<p>5. Cabinet Members and Members of Select Committees acknowledged the requirement for greater transparency and holding policy decision-makers to account. Select Committees should ensure that Cabinet Members are the focal point of their meetings and are objectively and constructively challenged. And through them their Corporate Directors who are responsible for services and delivery plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote business planning focus on service priorities, outcomes and policy direction and the plans and aims of the Cabinet Member/Cabinet • Fewer officers to attend select committee meetings; focus should be on holding the Cabinet Member to account, supported by their Director(s) • Arrange reports to Select Committees to identify strategic and policy issues and service priorities and reduce operational focus • Identify other ways for members to receive information about service operations and performance • Greater use of public cabinet meetings for decisions and debates to include cross party and Select Committee members.
<p>6. Cabinet or Cabinet Members should provide formal feedback to scrutiny on their recommendations and policy shaping work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This already happens, with Cabinet Member responses to recommendations being reported formally to the committee. Need to ensure consistent practice and approach. • Need to consider earlier response to members than to following meeting • More opportunities for earlier scrutiny input into policy development to be developed, to include Cabinet Member feedback on outcomes • More direct contact between Select Committee spokespersons and Cabinet at future public Cabinet meetings

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7. The role and purpose of the Business Planning Group may need review and clarification of its purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Panel is not recommending any change to Business Planning Groups, other than the agendas for meetings be shared with all committee members and the notes of minutes be shared as soon as possible (rather than waiting for the next formal committee meeting).
8. The frequency of meetings and their duration could be reviewed to support pace and impact. Agenda length may also be reviewed with a view to ensuring less, but more in-depth and impactful scrutiny.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently, PFSC has 6 meetings in the calendar per year, with CYPSSC, ECFSC and HASC having 5 per year. However, additional meetings are often arranged (e.g. ECFSC has had 8 meetings per year for the past 3 years) There have been fewer TFGs in recent years, so select committees could be encouraged to consider different ways of working to enable scrutiny outside formal meetings More themed meetings to be held, providing in-depth focus on a specific priority area
9. The Council may benefit from considering Member interests, experience and skills when appointing to Select Committee to increase skill capacity where practicable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A register of members' areas of interest was developed in previous years, but it did not prove successful. Group Leaders to be consulted to identify any measures that would assist them in the appointment process
10. Committee reports should be produced with the task of scrutiny in mind. Clarity, brevity and simplicity are essential. It may also be useful for reports to include or highlight particular areas where scrutiny may wish to focus attention without unduly influencing Member authority and independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report template for select committee should be reviewed, with a clear focus for scrutiny (developed by the Business Planning Group using its scrutiny checklist) and key lines of enquiry. It is critical that reports for scrutiny be provided in time for the deadline for publication of agenda papers. Sending out reports for scrutiny late (as "to follow" papers) should only happen in exceptional circumstances. Timeliness of reports for scrutiny is essential to enable members to prepare and to carry out any relevant independent research or to check details with report authors.
11. Public access to scrutiny is good and should be encouraged further. Potential areas may be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All select committees to review work programmes and identify opportunities for public engagement

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<p>to take an external focus in some of scrutiny's work to focus on issues of high interest to communities or localities. Select Committees may like to consider holding enquiry days on specific issues to act as listening and enquiry sessions which may influence and support policy development.</p>	<p>and different ways of working, to include enquiry sessions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All select committees (and PFSC in its overview role) to consider making use of the provision within the Constitution that enables Scrutiny debates at Full Council. • Will be more public debate and challenge at public cabinet meetings • The profile of scrutiny should be raised both within and externally to the Council through the use of social media and items debated at County Council, where appropriate.
<p>12. Many members expressed a gap in their knowledge and skills relating to scrutiny and would value training and development. Our assessment suggests that general training of the essential principles and practice of scrutiny, questioning techniques and work programme planning may be of particular value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny training programme to be developed, to include regular refresher training and specific sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairmanship skills - Questioning skills - Carrying out independent research
<p>13. To support Member development and increase their level of expertise, specific briefings or sessions on specific areas to inform and educate Members prior to key scrutiny activity may help Member engagement and outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of scrutiny work programmes to include identification of opportunities for briefings/member days
<p>14. Members may benefit from a simple scrutiny guide and set of protocols to embed good scrutiny practice which can be sustained over time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Guide to Scrutiny to be refreshed.