

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Review of Centre for Governance & Scrutiny Recommendations

Background

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee with agreement from the Combined Authority Board commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to carry out a review of the scrutiny arrangements at the CPCA in March 2021.

The Committee received the recommendations (Appendix 1) from the review at their June meeting and have been working during the 21/22 municipal year to implement the changes suggested.

The CA Board received the CfGS report in September 2021 and requested that the O&S Committee report back on progress and that the Committee provide the Board with their view on how the review has helped the Committee to add value to the CPCA and improve the way in which the committee carries out its work.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Review

The CfGS review had nine key actions which the Committee and supporting officers have been working hard to implement. The table below outlines the actions and progress made on these actions.

Overview and Scrutiny Action and Progress Table

Action	Progress
The Chair to convene an informal session for the committee to explore and decide on a renewed and more explicit focus for their work.	Meeting held on 12 th July – further informal sessions can be scheduled at the committee's request if required.
The Chair, the Mayor and the CA Monitoring Officer to begin meeting regularly to ensure that the strategic purpose of scrutiny is understood and acted on	The Chair, Vice Chair, Mayor and DMO have met twice and regular session are being scheduled going forward.
When a clear role and purpose for scrutiny can be clearly articulated, work on internal communications to be carried out to ensure that this is understood by the wider CA (including CA Board members and officers).	Chair and Vice chair met with the Executive Team in December.



CA officers, in support of the Chair, to engage with constituent councils to better understand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how their nominated members can be better supported, and - how the business of CA scrutiny can be administered to support members to attend and engage with the work of the function 	<p>Meeting held with Constituent Council Democratic Service Teams.</p>
A role profile setting out mutual expectations for scrutiny members – including around information access, support arrangements and requirements around commitment – to be agreed and circulated.	<p>Role profile including information sharing protocol approved by Committee.</p>
A new approach to the sharing of information with scrutiny members which involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) an end to the regular sharing, and scrutiny of, Mayoral decisions at committee, with information being shared on an ongoing basis outside of committee to inform the appropriate escalation of issues to committee based on need; b) more clarity to members in the management of items and reports deemed to be exempt from publication c) the assignment of individual councillors to act as “rapporteurs”, to develop a subject expertise in specified areas of policy, to highlight issues of importance to the chair for escalation to committee and potentially to lead on questioning on such matters. 	<p>The Committee still have the option to ask questions at CA Board but have started to move away from this process and have engaged with officers informally to receive relevant information and provide feedback.</p> <p>Rapporteur role description has been agreed and four pieces of rapporteur work have been undertaken by Committee members reporting back to the Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accommodation Strategy - Devolution Deal - One CAM Closure - Community Learning
Use of shared information, the forward plan and frequent Chair/Mayor/MO conversations to identify forthcoming decisions, and to discuss the developing work programme.	<p>Regular meetings agreed with the Mayor in principle – also to include conversations with relevant directors and CEO as the committee deem necessary.</p>
In the short term, the scheduling of regular, short, informal sessions for the committee to discuss and agree work programming priorities. Move forward with a proportionate approach to targeted task and finish working in the medium term	<p>Scoping Document developed and agreed by committee.</p> <p>No task and finish groups created this year.</p>
The programming of a regular and general Mayor’s Question Time to allow high profile, direct holding to account of the Mayor to continue	<p>First Mayor’s Question Time – November 2021</p> <p>Second Mayor’s Question Time - Members of the Public March 2022</p>



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Work by the MO and others to consider how scrutiny can productively be engaged in the ongoing governance of SPVs

Training session for the Committee provided in October 2021 and updated terms of reference for the Committee approved in December 2021.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Review of Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's Recommendations

Overview and Scrutiny Committee members believe that the review has benefited not only the Committee, but also the perception of scrutiny across the Combined Authority. Members are more positive about the work that scrutiny at the Combined Authority does; engagement from both officers and the CA Board has improved and relationships are more positive than in previous years. The new arrangements are still bedding down and it is hoped they will deliver further progress over time.

The introduction of a scoping document to shape the Committee's investigations, and the use of rapporteurs to carry out discrete pieces of work, have led to a much more engaged Committee that is focused and provides more constructive and valued contributions to the Combined Authority. There needs to be a mechanism to ensure this continues into the future.

The introduction of a Mayor's Question Time to provide direct scrutiny of mayoral decisions has been successful and provides an opportunity for members of the Committee to keep a watching brief over the activities of the Mayor and the Combined Authority Board. This has enabled the Committee to move away from the shadowing of the CA Board agenda as the key focus of their remit, although the Committee have opted to retain the option to ask questions at CA Board if they believe this to be necessary. The focus is now on lead members of the Committee building ongoing relationships with officers between meetings.

The Committee endeavour to achieve the balance between providing oversight of the decisions of the Combined Authority and the Mayor and carrying out pieces of proactive and in-depth scrutiny of the same. The recommendations from the CfGS have provided a set of initial tools for the Committee to use to tackle this balance for ensuring that scrutiny at the CPCA adds value.

Conclusions

The Committee believe that the CfGS review has helped to highlight key issues for the Committee and has provided a good starting point for the Committee to begin to adapt the way in which it operates.

There is no 'right way' to carry out scrutiny at Combined Authorities, and it is a challenge for all those involved to find the right role for Overview and Scrutiny at the CPCA. As the CfGS review stated, 'In common with the situation in other combined authorities, the combined authority has struggled to find a role for scrutiny.'



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Looking forward the Committee will need to engage with the Governance Review currently being undertaken and consider how the results from that review align with the recommendations from the CfGS. The Committee will need to spend some time in the new municipal year deciding how it wishes to manage its work programme and what its focus needs to be.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny review has been very helpful in providing a starting point for the Committee to consider their arrangements and to begin taking steps to make improvements. The review has also helped to start conversations with the Mayor, CA Board and senior management team at the Combined Authority to help develop an understanding of the importance of scrutiny and the need for all to engage with it in the right way to ensure that it adds value to the Combined Authority.