

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY: SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

Introduction

CPCA requires external assistance in conducting an evaluation of its scrutiny function. This is a proposal for that work which reflects conversations with councillors on CPCA's overview and scrutiny committee in early March 2021.

Context

Amongst MCAs, CPCA has a unique operating context. While other MCAs are focused on a single conurbation, CPCA's economic footprint has three foci – Peterborough, Cambridge and the Fens. Economic development and growth priorities focus on connectivity improvements, such as East-West Rail, the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway, and CAM.

The nature of MCA activity influences the focus and operations of scrutiny. CA scrutiny is necessarily different from scrutiny in local authorities, and the operating context in CPCA means that it is unique amongst CAs. CfGS's approach towards the design and delivery of an appropriate methodology will reflect this distinctiveness.

Scrutiny in CPCA currently focuses on shadowing and monitoring the work of the executive. The work programme focuses on review of business carried out by executive committees – lead scrutiny members have been appointed to support this process.

Members wish to review the operation of the function with reference to recent informal guidance on CA scrutiny, published by CfGS in early 2021. In particular, members are keen to clarify scrutiny's focus, role and outcomes. Members also wish to consider the ongoing role of scrutiny as the CA seeks to carry out work which relates to post-pandemic recovery.

Objectives

Fundamentally we will look at:

- **Culture.** The mindset and mentality underpinning the operation of the overview and scrutiny process. This will involve a focus on the CA's corporate approach to scrutiny, and the attitude of those in executive positions to the operation of the function;
- **Information.** How information is prepared, shared, accessed and used in the service of the scrutiny function;
- **Impact.** Ways to ensure that scrutiny is effective, that it makes a tangible difference to the lives of local people.

We propose that we will:

- Review and consider lessons to be learned from arrangements operating pre-, and since the onset of, the pandemic;
- Focus on identifying practical improvement actions which will enable scrutiny to make an impact on the work of the CA and the wider area – for example, exploring how scrutiny's work will continue to intersect with business transacted at executive committees and the Board;

- In so doing look particularly at the work of trading companies and other commercial activity, and consider the most proportionate way to ensure effective oversight of these arrangements.

In reviewing the above we will have particular regard for the need to clarify scrutiny's focus and role.

Evidence base

The SIR method itself is based on substantial research carried out by CfPS since 2003, which includes regular reviews of good practice, large-scale surveys of scrutiny nationwide and a range of comprehensive support activity for individual councils.

The following elements are used as prompts to influence the healthcheck. They are not criteria against which CPCA's approach will be "judged", but a framework for discussion and debate on those issues and areas most important to the authority.

1. Organisational commitment and clarity of purpose
2. Members leading and fostering good relationships
3. Prioritising work and using evidence well
4. Having an impact

We will use these four elements as prompts to ensure that all key aspects of CPCA's activity are evaluated, mapped against the CA-specific areas of focus identified above.

Evidence gathering will consist of:

- **Desktop work.** We will review recent agendas, minutes and reports, and constitutional material relating to the operation of the scrutiny function. The desktop review will be relatively light touch in nature and will focus on identifying strengths which can provide direction towards a clear role for the scrutiny function;
- **Interviews.** We would seek to interview a relatively small group of members and officers to understand the attitudes and behaviours, and perceptions, that underpin scrutiny work. Ideally, this would include the Mayor, the chief finance officer, monitoring officer, a member of the Business Board, a representative from one of the constituent councils, officers supporting scrutiny and scrutiny members themselves;
- **Survey.** A survey is a standard part of our ordinary methodology, but the number of strategic stakeholders in the scrutiny function is sufficiently small that we expect to be able to capture relevant views through interview;
- **Observation.** We will review a small selection of recent webcasts.

Outcome

Our work is designed to conclude with an action plan to which the CA can sign up, and own.

This will be presented as a short formal report, supporting a detailed action plan which will be drawn together with members of the committee.

The action plan will meet usual expectations of these kinds of documents. It will be:

- Timed;
- Resourced;
- Owned – so responsibility for individual actions and the whole action plan will be clearly assigned;

- Iterative (so, it will focus on experimenting with different ways of doing scrutiny rather than establishing perfect systems from day one);
- Focused on culture and behaviour rather than structures;
- Predicated on periodic review;
- Integrated into the scrutiny work programme – so improvement is treated as part of scrutiny’s substantive work.

Cost schedule

CfGS applies a standard day rate of £750 across the work it delivers.

Activity	Resource (days)
Initial desktop review of documentation This will incorporate a review of CPCA strategies, plans, rules and procedures to understand the operating context for scrutiny	1
Interviews with key stakeholders – members (individually and/or as a small group as required), senior CPCA officers and others. The list will be agreed with members of the committee further to advice from the support officer.	2
Further desktop review and observation of recent meetings on the web This will incorporate more detailed review of agendas, reports and minutes of recent scrutiny meetings	2
Drawing together findings and report	1
Total	6 days (£4,500)

This work will be led by Ed Hammond (Deputy Chief Executive) with support from other members of the CfGS team as required.

This figure excludes VAT. We anticipate that this work will be carried out entirely remotely, and that a final report and/or action plan will be ready for submission to the CA formally shortly prior to the election, for the new authority to take forward thereafter.

EH 11/3/21