

**Committee:** Cabinet **Date:** 24 May 2018  
**Title:** CfPS Review  
**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Simon Howell, Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration  
**Report Author:** Richard Auty, Assistant Director - Corporate Services **Key decision:** No  
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## Summary

1. The council commissioned the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to carry out a review of the effectiveness and impact of its current approach to overview and scrutiny. Ian Parry, from the CfPS, carried out the review and presented his findings to the 27 March 2018 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

If adopted, his recommendations will have implications for the way the Cabinet interacts with Scrutiny.

## Recommendations

2. That Cabinet accepts the recommendations in the CfPS report.

## Financial Implications

3. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report

## Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

## Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	In order to put the CfPS recommendations in place there needs to be communication and consultation with relevant members and officers
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None

Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

## Situation

6. The council commissioned the CfPS to review scrutiny arrangements. This piece of work took place at the beginning of 2018 and involved on-site interviews with councillors and officers, a review of documents including agendas and minutes and an observation of the February 2018 Scrutiny Committee meeting.
7. The scope of the report was to “assess the current approach to scrutiny and make recommendations aimed at improving its impact and effectiveness in Uttlesford District Council”.
8. More specifically, the review considered the value and impact of scrutiny in terms of:
  - Effectively holding the executive to account
  - Contributing to policy making
  - Acting as a voice for the public
  - Adding value to whole council decision making
9. The final report is attached as Appendix A. It highlights the following strengths:
  - Scrutiny is generally well organised and is welcomed in the council.
  - Relationships between scrutiny members and officers are good and there is a general willingness to support scrutiny.
  - Scrutiny and executive members in general have a good relationship and scrutiny aims to be objective. It is not seen as threatening or negative.
  - Members appreciate the role of scrutiny and want it to become better.
  - In the main cabinet decisions are transparent and accessible for call-in or scrutiny.

- Scrutiny members take their role seriously and are willing to develop and improve.

10. The report also lists areas for improvement. These are:

- Overview and scrutiny is underachieving. It lacks purpose and authority.
- It is widely valued, but not consistently understood and there are wide differences of opinion about its purpose, potential and function.
- It does not provide sufficient impact and value in shaping and improving decision-making and performance in the council.
- Scrutiny is too focused on monitoring and therefore missing opportunities to provide strategic input.
- There are signs that scrutiny is not integral to or valued as part of the decision and policy making process.
- Cabinet is not sufficiently visibly accountable to scrutiny. Scrutiny is not effectively holding it to account. Cabinet members are often observers or not present at scrutiny meetings.
- There is too little structured scrutiny and too much consultative activity - information giving or clarification-seeking in scrutiny meetings

11. While acknowledging established processes for work planning and managing the meetings are in place, and that meetings are polite and good natured, the report notes that Scrutiny Committee meetings tend to be led from the Chair, who will often be the main questioner, and that there is no pre-planned or constructed scrutiny. Mr Parry also comments that the meeting pace is slow and there is little evidence of members acting as a team with clear lines of enquiry.

12. The CfPS goes on to make the following 11 recommendations to address the identified weaknesses in current arrangements:

- Create a common understanding and purpose for scrutiny (Mission)
- Leader and Cabinet members all directly accountability and visible
- Relationship with cabinet - structured meetings to discuss scrutiny
- Corporate team to have greater oversight to ensure scrutiny plays its full role
- Scrutiny planning forum to set strategic objectives for the plan

- Consideration of public input and access
- Scrutiny built-in as integral part of decision-making and policy forming process
- Annual report and performance review on scrutiny effectiveness and impact
- Further skills development – members, chair (key skills/advanced chairing skills)
- Structure of meetings – set objectives, create lines of enquiry etc
- Briefings for scrutiny – Ensure that scrutiny members have necessary information and facts to prevent scrutiny meetings becoming information exchanges

13. More detail on these recommendations is contained in the attached report.

14. The Scrutiny Committee has accepted the recommendations and requested Cabinet consider the report and its implications.

15. Officers are discussing how to implement the recommendations and Cllrs Dean and G Barker, the committee’s Chairman and Vice-Chairman will be involved in those discussions. An action plan will be presented at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. However, before an action plan can be compiled, officers need to understand Cabinet’s views on the recommendations and how Cabinet wishes to be involved in developing the council’s response to the proposals.

## Risk Analysis

16.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
If Cabinet does not agree the recommendations then some of the improvements outlined in the report cannot be put in place, leading to a less effective change	2 – the research and report was carried out by an experienced, independent organisation which understands public sector scrutiny. This	3 – the report identifies key changes that should be made. In the opinion of the CfPS these are important improvements that would	Involvement of Cabinet members in formulating and implementing recommendations.

programme for the scrutiny function	gives confidence to the suitability to the recommendations	lead to lasting change. If they are not put into place then the positive impact would be diminished.	
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1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.