



Joint Panel Meeting

Agenda

Wednesday, 22nd October, 2025

at 5.30 pm, or to immediately follow the Corporate Performance Panel which commences at 4.30pm.

in the

**Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday
Market Place King's Lynn and available for
the public to view on You Tube.**



King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 1EX
Telephone: 01553 616200

14th October 2025

Dear Member

Joint Panel Meeting

You are invited to attend a meeting of the above-mentioned Panel which will be held on **Wednesday, 22nd October, 2025 at 5.30 pm, or upon the rising of the Corporate Performance Panel, whichever is the later**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ** to discuss the business shown below.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. **Appointment of Chair for the meeting**
2. **Appointment of Vice Chair for the meeting**
3. **Members Present Under Standing Order 34**
4. **Declarations of Interest** (Page 4)
5. **Minutes from the Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 10)
6. **Scrutiny Governance Arrangements** (Pages 11 - 38)
7. **Date of the next meeting**

To be confirmed.

To:

Members of the:

Regeneration and Development Panel
Corporate Performance Panel
Environment and Community Panel

Portfolio Holders:

Councillor Beales – Leader of the Council

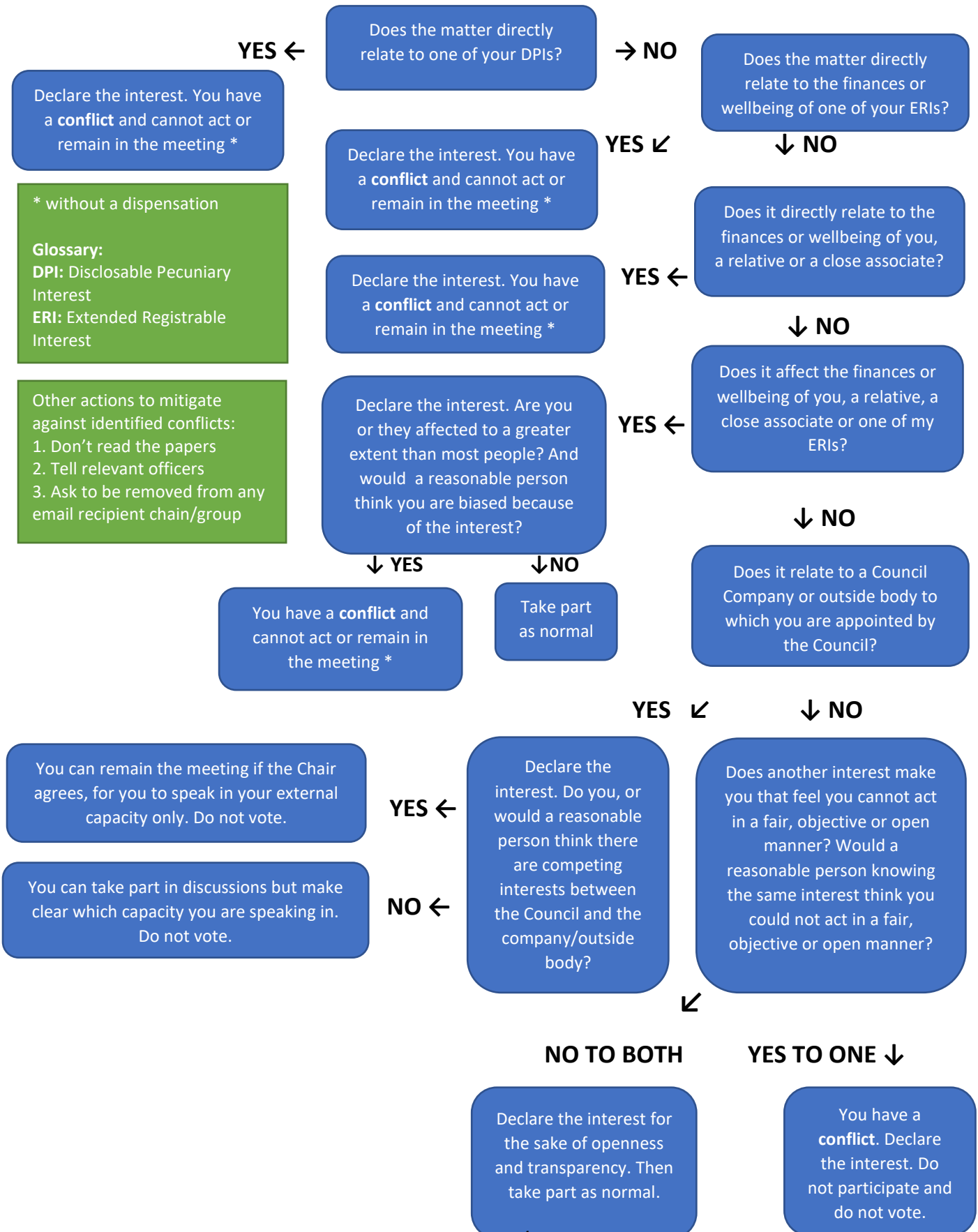
Officers

Alexa Baker – Monitoring Officer

DECLARING AN INTEREST AND MANAGING ANY CONFLICTS FLOWCHART



START



Declare the interest. You have a **conflict** and cannot act or remain in the meeting *

* without a dispensation

Glossary:

DPI: Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

ERI: Extended Registrable Interest

Other actions to mitigate against identified conflicts:

1. Don't read the papers
2. Tell relevant officers
3. Ask to be removed from any email recipient chain/group

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

JOINT PANEL MEETING

Minutes from the Meeting of the Joint Panel Meeting held on Monday, 15th September, 2025 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor B Long (Chair), R Blunt, A Bubb, R Colwell, C Crofts, P Devulapalli, D Heneghan, B Jones, A Kemp, P Kunes, T Parish (Vice-Chair), A Ryves and A Ware

UNDER STANDING ORDER 34: Councillors Bhondi, Bone, Bullen, Coates, Collingham, Fry and Nash (all remotely) and Everett and Rose (present in person).

CABINET MEMBERS:

Councillor A Beales – Leader of the Council
 Councillor S Ring – Deputy Leader and Business
 Councillor J Moriarty – Planning and Licensing
 Councillor C Morley - Finance
 Councillor J Rust – People and Communities
 Councillor S Lintern – Culture and Events
 Councillor M de Whalley – Climate Change and Biodiversity

OFFICERS:

Kate Blakemore – Chief Executive
 Michelle Drewery – Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
 Alexa Baker- Monitoring Officer
 Charlotte Marriot – Corporate Governance Manager
 Greg Pearson - LGR Policy Advisor

40 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

RESOLVED: Councillor B Long was appointment Chair for the meeting.

41 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

RESOLVED: Councillor T Parish was appointed Vice-Chair for the meeting.

42 **MEMBERS PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillors Everett and Rose were present under Standing Order 34 in person.

Councillors Bhondi, Bone, Bullen Coates, Collingham, Fry and Nash were present on Zoom under Standing Order 34.

43 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

44 **URGENT BUSINESS - CABINET REPORT - FINAL PROPOSAL FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN NORFOLK**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on YouTube.](#)

RESOLVED: That under Standing Order 7.2, the Final Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk be considered as Urgent Business at this meeting. It is required to be taken as an urgent decision due to the requirement to submit the final proposal to the Secretary of State by 26th September 2025.

The Leader, Councillor Beales introduced the report.

The Chief Executive commented further on the content of the report.

The Chair reminded Members this meeting was to scrutinise the proposal of the future of this council and not the principle of Local Government Reorganisation. The Chair invited questions and comments from the Panel.

Councillor Heneghan indicated her support for the proposal and was looking forward to the opportunities a new authority would bring. She added there would be no doubt which authority delivered which services. She thanked all Officers and the Leader for their hard work.

Councillor Kemp echoed Councillor Heneghan's comments on the proposal and indicated her support. She sought clarification and assurance on the calculations of financial figures and the viability of taking on three new services- Children Services, Adult Social Care and Transport Services. She asked for further details on the transition cost and how this was to be afforded.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented this was a matter of serious debate and questioned if these serviced could be run with local allocation. He explained having three unitaries allowed local determination. He referred to the report and appendices and highlighted the services and needs were analysed throughout the report. He provided assurance the numbers had been crunched and this was affordable. He added there was risk as this was only projection but outlined the current model was failing therefore moving to a model which has proven to work in other areas. He summarised there was going to be three distinct services and that partnerships can work.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer referred to the Member Briefing and presentation given previously which outlined the financial figures. She explained this was based on the 2025/2026 budget of all eight authorities. She added expertise was required in regard to new service areas and based on evidence and learning from others experience.

Councillor Kemp commented it would have been useful to Members to have seen those financial figures in the report.

The Chair, Councillor Long asked considering the financial figures being included for Norfolk County Council where was the money being spent and sought clarification if a demand analysis had carried out.

The Leader, Councillor Beales explained the proposed shape of the unitary had been questioned and Norwich City Council were a low spend but high income authority. He highlighted the complexity of six leaders and geographical areas and sustainability. He commented the west was financially robust, followed by the east and Norwich being sustainable. He highlighted the Section 151 Officers were challenging the figures to ensure the models were sustainable as required by the criteria from Central Government.

Councillor Colwell referred to financial sustainability and the earmarked reserved as a percentage of net revenue expenditure. He commented he understood this was being classified as a red risk but asked for further comments from the Section 151 Officer on this.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer explained as set out in the report a red rating is classified as having below 5% of earmarked reserves. She explained the policy at the Borough Council was to maintain a 5% minimum general fund reserve therefore the council would always be categorised as a red rating. She added this was also based on what was included in the medium term financial plan which outlined a shortfall in the budget for the next three years which was mitigated by use of the general fund reserves. She provided assurance the gap was actively being closed due to progressing with a savings and efficiency plan.

Councillor Crofts indicated his support for the proposal but questioned the implications of Suffolk proposal to only have one unitary.

The Leader, Councillor Beales explained there were two proposals within Suffolk – one from Suffolk County Council and a three unitary proposal from the District Councils. He commented the initial guidelines on populations had been softened. He highlighted there had been assurance provided from the new Secretary of State, Steve Reed that business continues as usual. Councillor Beales commented Suffolk's population of 750,000 was a challenge for three unitary and he

believed 300,000 was sustainable. He reminded Members, the Minister could approve a proposal with modifications.

Councillor Kemp questioned the implications on residents if there was not a local town configuration.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented there was a good relationship with Norfolk County Council but Norwich was different to West, South and East Norfolk in which the needs, demands and culture differed. He commented local flavour could not be represented from one location. He added there was no academic agreement on a good size of a council. He highlighted the success of a Council was down to quality and management.

Councillor Colwell commented he was surprised the boundaries included Attleborough and Watton. He commented in regards to feedback from residents, that if they wanted to engage with politics within West Norfolk it would take two hours to travel and consequently public transport needed to be considered.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented it was not just physical distance but also culture and villages should not be forgotten. He added King's Lynn would not replace Norwich and there would be hubs in Dereham and Thetford. He commented further there was real estate in Breckland.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Parish expressed his support for the three unitary but questioned the shadow authority and cost of employment of staff including appointments and redundancies.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer provided assurance this had been considered in the modelling. She explained modelling had included a reduction in senior officers such as Chief Executives and Section 151 Officers. She commented modelling and high-level assumptions had also been applied to County Services, for example creation of additional posts in relation to Children Services and Adult Social Care. She explained modelling included reduction in other staffing areas but it was expected that this could be met through vacant posts and natural slippage rather than compulsory redundancies.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented the anticipated budget for the western unitary was estimated at £620 million and employment figures were expected to increase to 3,500 in the West. He commented during the transition year, support from Officers was needed.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Bone indicated his support for the proposal and added this would stop the confusion with who provided services. He added he was pleased to see links with Breckland as there was similarities with King's Lynn.

Councillor Morley, Portfolio Holder for Finance highlighted the excellent work of the consultants and encouraged members to go through all pages of the report and appendices. He commented there was opportunities for the rural part of the district and previously the focus had been on King's Lynn. He added there was detail in the report which stated County expenditure was split on need and service use. He highlighted to Members in the report it identified West Norfolk as providing a financial surplus and strong planning.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Bullen commented on the differences and challenges of residents with West Norfolk to residents in the Fens and North Norfolk. He questioned how identity was to be conveyed to the Minister and MHCLG.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented there was no doubt of a good case being made. He added following conversation with MHCLG there was now recognition of Parish Councils and what they did. Councillor Beales commented this was a decision for all Members and the financial discipline remained. He identified the importance of Cabinet, Members and Officer coming together with Breckland.

The Chair, Councillor Long highlighted dialogue had begun pre Covid with Breckland and South Holland and potential structural changes/merges. He referred to previous legislation and sought clarification that within the submission changes/inclusion of different boundaries were allowed.

The Leader, Councillor Beales commented the 2007 legislation required a proposal to be submitted with existing boundaries but the secretary of state had the ability to modify boundaries however a compliant proposal needed to be made first before a request for modification.

Councillor Kemp questioned the financial liabilities and asked if the County Council £900 million worth of debt had been taken into account.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer explained the proposals sets out the modelling around a revenue budget which included servicing of the County Council debt. She added in terms of the debt this was part of the balance sheet and not modelled for in the proposal as it would be down to the new unitaries going forward to determine how this is apportioned across them. She explained from experience in other authorities it could take years to decide on how to disaggregate the balance sheet.

The Chair, Councillor Long commented on the importance of the debt being proportioned equally amongst the unitaries.

The Leader, Councillor Beales highlighted the assurance provided by the Section 151 Officer and the servicing of the debt had been included. He commented some of the debt would be pro rata across

the county and further discussion would be carried out in relation to debt.

RESOLVED: The Panel support the following recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council :

Recommendations to Full Council:

1. Notes the content of this report and the 'Future Norfolk: People, Place, Progress – Final Proposal for a Three-Unitary Model for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk' (Final Proposal) annexed to this report.
2. Endorses the Final Proposal for a three-unitary model for local government reorganisation in Norfolk.
3. Delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, the authority to make any necessary non-material amendments to the Final Proposal and to submit the Final Proposal to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

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DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

To be arranged when required.

The meeting closed at 5.46 pm

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Joint Panel		
DATE OF MEETING:	22 October 2025		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Monitoring Officer		
OPEN		WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

SCRUTINY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**SUMMARY:**

This report presents the findings of the Scrutiny Governance Review (set out at Appendix 1) carried out during July-September, which assessed the effectiveness of the Council's current Overview and Scrutiny arrangements against statutory guidance and recognised best practice.

The review identified inconsistent focus and limited strategic impact within the existing three-Panel structure (four with Joint Panel). The outcome of the review was that structural change is needed, and the recommendation of this report is to adopt a new two-Panel model to provide clearer separation between firstly internal performance scrutiny and secondly policy review and development complemented via external scrutiny.

In addition, a new Scrutiny and Executive Protocol is proposed to strengthen collaboration and accountability between these functions of the Council's governance model.

KEY ISSUES:

- Scrutiny impact is inconsistent, with only pockets of evidence that recommendations influence Cabinet decisions or shape policy at an early stage, with the Policy Review and Development function being underused.
- Member and officer resources are spread thinly, with significant time spent on overlapping meetings with low impact agenda items that add questionable value.
- Benchmarking shows that most similar Councils operate with one or two panels, achieving greater focus and efficiency on high-impact, strategic matters that improve outcomes for residents. This is creating a skills gap between Members of this Council and other Councils, which will potentially put Members of this Council at a disadvantage post Local Government Reorganisation.
- The relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive lacks consistently applied protocols, leading to variable engagement and mutual expectations.
- There is a need for stronger strategic alignment between scrutiny work programmes and the Corporate Strategy.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:**Option 1 – Two-Panel, Two-Stage Approach (Recommended):**

Stage 1: December 2025: Combine Regeneration & Development and Environment & Community Panels into one Panel of 12 Members called Regeneration & Community – Chair to be appointed at Full Council

Stage 2: May 2026: Move to a two-Panel model: one focused on internal scrutiny and one on external scrutiny and policy development. The Panels would be called the '*Corporate Performance Scrutiny Panel*' and the '*Strategic Policy and Stakeholder Review Panel*'

Option 2 – Two-Panel, One-Stage Approach:

Stage 1: May 2026: Move to a two-Panel model: one focused on internal scrutiny and one on external scrutiny and policy development. The Panels would be called the '*Corporate Performance Scrutiny Panel*' and the '*Strategic Policy and Stakeholder Review Panel*'

Option 3 – Single Scrutiny Panel:

Consolidate all scrutiny and policy development work into one panel supported by task-and-finish groups.

Option 4 – Maintain Current Arrangements:

Retain the existing three/four-panel structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Regeneration & Development and Environment & Community Panels are combined into one Panel of 12 Members called the '*Regeneration & Community Panel*'. The Chair and Panel Members shall be appointed by Full Council on 27 November 2025 with two Vice-Chairs to be appointed at the first meeting of the Panel. Authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make all consequential changes to the Constitution and Members Allowance Scheme.
2. At Annual Council in May 2026, a two-Panel scrutiny model shall be adopted with an internal scrutiny Panel titled the '*Corporate Performance Scrutiny Panel*' and an external scrutiny and policy development Panel titled '*Strategic Policy and Stakeholder Review Panel*' with terms of reference adopted into the Constitution as set out at Appendix 2. Authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make all consequential changes to the Constitution and Members Allowance Scheme.
3. The '*Scrutiny and the Executive Protocol*' at Appendix 3 is approved for adoption into the Constitution, to be reaffirmed annually by the Leader and Scrutiny Panel Chairs.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To streamline officer and Member time and create space and resource for additional scrutiny workshops and training to be delivered to Members over the next 6 months.

The three-panel structure has resulted in duplication and limited strategic alignment. The revised two-panel model will ensure scrutiny activity is concentrated on matters of highest corporate significance and public value. The new structure will provide a clear distinction between internal and external scrutiny functions, ensuring that Panels can specialise, develop expertise and deliver impactful recommendations that influence outcomes.

Adopting a new Scrutiny and Executive Protocol reflects the feedback from the Scrutiny Governance Review and published guidance and best practice.

1. Terminology

Scrutiny is shorthand for 'Overview & Scrutiny' which was a legislative function and concept first introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Under the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny is undertaken by the Policy Review and Development Panels.

Executive means the Cabinet, as the Council adopts the Leader and Cabinet model of governance.

2. Overview and Scrutiny Governance Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Governance Review was commissioned in response to feedback from Members, senior officers and the LGA Peer Review, which collectively identified that the Council's current scrutiny arrangements were not achieving optimal strategic impact, clarity of purpose or efficient use of Member and officer time.

The review sought to assess whether a structure change was needed to the Scrutiny function to enable it to:

- Focus on key strategic matters that add value and improve outcomes for residents;
- Provide robust and constructive challenge to the Executive ("critical friend" role);
- Shape policy development at formative stages;
- Operate from a clear, strategically aligned work programme; and
- Maximise the use of limited democratic and officer resource.

The review included: a Member and senior officer survey, consultation with Panel Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Group Leaders and Cabinet, benchmarking against other local district councils, and reference to national best practice and statutory guidance.

The outcome of the review is attached at Appendix 1.

A Gap Analysis within the review identified the following:

- External focus of agenda items is largely missing
- Policy Review and Development function not working properly
- Training, plus dedicated Chair training, needed
- Strategic Forward Work Programming needed
- The strategic impact of scrutiny needs improving
- Pre-meeting briefings would add value
- Scrutiny Officer support needed

The outcome of the Governance Review can be summarised as follows:

- The Survey returned mixed results but overall supported the status quo

- Local Benchmarking shows we are significantly out of step in terms of the greater number of Panels we have and their focus
- Feedback from Chairs, Group Leaders and Cabinet advocates for change
- Upskilling Members for Local Government Reorganisation is a key priority
- Member and officer resource should be used more strategically
- The Gap Analysis above identifies the areas for improvement
- Conclusion: structure changes are needed to achieve improved scrutiny

2. Proposal

Two-Panel, Two-Stage Approach (Recommended):

Stage 1: December 2025:

Combine Regeneration & Development and Environment & Community Panels into one Panel of 12 Members called Regeneration & Community – Chair and Members to be appointed at Full Council and two Vice-Chairs appointed at the first meeting

Retain the Corporate Performance Panel (CPP) in its current form to focus on internal performance.

Cease use of Joint Panels – joint work to be managed through coordinated programming between Panel Chairs.

Stage 2: May 2026:

Move to a two-Panel model: one focused on internal scrutiny and one on external scrutiny and policy development.

The Panels would be called the '*Corporate Performance Scrutiny Panel*' and the '*Strategic Policy and Stakeholder Review Panel*' with one Chair and Vice-Chair each.

Cease use of Joint Panels – joint work should no longer be needed with the clear distinction of roles.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider

Key Issues and Options are set out in the cover pages to this report and the Review at Appendix 1.

Guidance from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) [CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v4-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf](#) and the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny (MHCLG 2024) [Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK](#) emphasises that effective scrutiny should be strategic and focused on issues that will make the most impact; be valued by decision-makers; have clear alignment with the Council's priorities and Forward Plan and operates within a culture of mutual respect and trust with the Executive.

The current arrangements—three Panels plus Joint Panels—have been shown to create duplication on low impact items, reduce agility, limit strategic inquiry, dilute the policy development function and spread limited resources too thinly.

Addressing the findings of the Gap Analysis in the Governance Review with regards to training, development of Annual Work Programmes, scheduled workshops and pre-briefing and scrutiny officer support, etc will be progressed operationally.

5. Financial Implications

The proposed changes and approach to scrutiny will result in resource impacts that can be absorbed into the Democratic Services team and the Monitoring Officer function.

There will be a savings going forwards on Chairs and Vice-Chair Allowances if the proposed changes are adopted.

6. Any other Implications/Risks

The proposed changes will mitigate against the following risk in the Risk Register:

R7 Corporate Governance

The risk of failures in systems of governance within the council, within council owned/influenced organisations and partnerships and other collaboration arrangements, leading to governance issues, fraud and corruption, failures in management systems, poor policy and decision making.

7. Equal Opportunity Considerations

None.

8. Environmental Considerations

None.

9. Consultation

- Members and senior officers via a Survey
- Meetings with Group Leaders, Panel Chairs and previous Panel Chairs
- Consideration by the Constitution Informal Working Group

10. Background Papers

Minutes of the Constitution Informal Working Group Meeting on 11 June and 7 August 2025.

Scrutiny and the Executive Protocol



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1. Terminology

Scrutiny is shorthand for 'Overview & Scrutiny' which was a legislative function and concept first introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Under the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny is undertaken by the Policy Review and Development Panels.

Executive means the Cabinet, as the Council adopts the strong Leader and Cabinet model of governance.

2. Background

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced new models of governance for local authorities that moved away from the Committee structure, in which there is a **separation of decision-making** and **scrutiny** of those decisions.

The objective of the Leader and Cabinet governance model is to deliver greater efficiency, transparency and accountability of local authorities. The model is intended to ensure that decisions can be taken more quickly and efficiently than in the committee system, that the individuals or bodies responsible for decision-making can be more readily identified by the public and that those decision-makers can be held to account in public by overview and scrutiny committees.

The Executive is charged with **implementing** the agreed budget and policy framework. Overview and Scrutiny committees are charged with **holding the Executive accountable for that implementation**. The Act also envisages that Overview & Scrutiny Committees **advise** the Executive and Council **on policy development**.

Scrutiny is the counterweight to the Cabinet model of governance.

3. Purpose of the Protocol

This Protocol sets out the expectations on how the Council's Policy Review and Development Panels and Cabinet interact to enable the Panels to carry out an effective Scrutiny function.

The Protocol aims to establish a positive framework to enable the Panels to work effectively. It aims to promote and maintain an ethos of mutual respect, trust and courtesy between Panel Members, the Executive and officers and encourage constructive challenge.

4. Scrutiny's Functions

The Terms of Reference for each Policy Review and Development Panel are set out in Part of the Constitution, which sets out the Terms of Reference for the primary Council's Bodies.

Scrutiny is not decision-making. The core headline statutory functions of Scrutiny are as follows:

Function	What this looks like
Accountability	Holding the Executive to account for decisions, performance and use of resources.
Constructive challenge	Acting as a 'critical friend' to improve decisions and policies
Policy development	Contributing early to shape strategy and priorities.
Performance oversight	Monitoring how well services and partnerships deliver for residents
Community voice	Bringing residents' perspectives and evidence into decision-making
Transparency and learning	Ensuring decisions and outcomes are open to examination and improvement

5. Expectations of Scrutiny

Scrutiny Members will:

- Act as a constructive critical friend to the Executive, offering evidence-based challenge to support improved decision-making
- Focus attention on matters of strategic importance and outcomes for residents rather than operational detail
- Prepare thoroughly for meetings, considering all relevant reports, evidence, and policy context
- Ensure that questioning during meetings is purposeful and proportionate
- Direct political and policy questions to Portfolio Holders with technical questions being answered by officers
- Make recommendations that are clear, justified and capable of implementation

- Be purposeful and proportionate in requests for information and seek to minimise unnecessary burdens on officers or the Executive.
- Engage in respectful and professional dialogue with Portfolio Holders and officers.
- Treat all information received in confidence in accordance with the Constitution
- Focus their challenge on strategic matters that add value, impact and support continuous improvement
- Work with the Executive to develop key and strategic Council policies
- Where possible, identify and raise in advance specific requests for further information or other evidence required for the Panel's functions
- Work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome for residents
- Work with an atmosphere of openness and climate of mutual respect and trust between all participants.

Scrutiny Members will not:

- Use scrutiny as a forum for attributing personal criticism and blame
- Duplicate the work of other panels or committees, or commission reviews without clear purpose or relevance.
- Use Scrutiny to simply rubber stamp Cabinet proposed decisions
- Use Scrutiny as a purely personal agenda

6. Expectations of the Executive

The Executive will:

- Recognise and value the role of Scrutiny as a key element of good governance and democratic accountability
- Be prepared to:
 - present on a decision or proposed decision in their Portfolio to the Panel;
 - provide justification for the decision or proposed decision;
 - answer questions posed by Panel Members with regards to the matters underpinning the decision made or proposed; and
 - answer questions on the rationale and policy objectives which resulted in the proposal/decision.
- Engage openly, constructively and respectfully with Scrutiny

- Attend Scrutiny meetings when there is an item within their Portfolio on the agenda. In their absence they must arrange for the Leader or Deputy Leader to attend in their place
- Ensure they are fully prepared and briefed on the matters within their Portfolio Holders in order to be questioned and held accountable for their decision or proposed decision
- Provide clear, timely, and accurate information to enable effective scrutiny
- Respond formally to Scrutiny recommendations within agreed timescales, setting out actions taken or reasons for non-implementation
- Support Scrutiny's right to access information and evidence necessary to fulfil its statutory role
- Work with the Scrutiny to develop key and strategic Council policies
- Promote a culture of openness and transparency across the organisation in dealings with Scrutiny and encourage Scrutiny to be approached as a constructive process that contributes to learning and service improvement
- Ensure that forward plans and decision notices are kept up-to-date and shared proactively to support work programming
- Invite the Panel Chair, or a representative from the Panel, to attend the Cabinet meeting where recommendation from the Panel is being considered.

The Executive will not:

- Withhold information from Scrutiny except strictly in accordance with the Constitution and the legal framework.
- Seek to direct or control the work of Scrutiny Panels or their conclusions.
- Treat Scrutiny as a procedural formality rather than a meaningful part of decision-making.
- Use attendance at Scrutiny to promote political or personal agendas

7. Work Programming and Forward Planning

Scrutiny Panels will agree Annual Work Programmes at the beginning of each Municipal Year that are aligned with the Council's Corporate Strategy and the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team will be consulted by the Panels regarding the content of the Annual Work Programme before they are agreed by the Panels.

Work programmes will focus on strategic issues where Scrutiny can add value and impact and will be reviewed periodically by the Chairs of the Panels.

The Executive will support the planning process by sharing early notice of emerging policy proposals and forthcoming decisions.

The Scrutiny Officer will keep the Panels informed of the outlines of major decisions as they are developed, to enable to Panels to consider their contribution in accordance with this Protocol.

8. Training, Implementation and Review

All Scrutiny Members and substitutes will receive induction and ongoing development to support effective scrutiny.

Specialist training for Chairs and Vice-Chairs will be provided on questioning, evidence-gathering and relationship management.

The Scrutiny and Executive Protocol will be reviewed annually by Democratic Services in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, Panel Chairs and the Leader to ensure it remains current and effective.

Authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make non-material amendments to the Protocol.

The Scrutiny Officer and Monitoring Officer will be responsible for overseeing compliance with the Protocol.

Overview & Scrutiny Governance Review

²¹ Rebecca Parker, Democratic Services Manager
Alexa Baker, Monitoring Officer

Date: September 2025

Borough Council of
King's Lynn &
West Norfolk



Purpose of Review

The purpose of the review is to determine whether a revised structure is required for the Council's Overview & Scrutiny function which:

- Focusses on key strategic issues that add value
- Helps shape policies before decisions are made
- Identifies gaps, challenges and missed opportunities in the executive function at early stages
- Provides constructive and critical friend challenge
- Operates from a well populated Forward Plan linked to the Corporate Strategy, focussing on high impact agenda items
- Receives dedicated officer support and regular training

Structure of the review

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- Survey to all Councillors (senior officers also invited to respond)
- Consultation with the Constitution Informal Working Group.
- Informal discussion with current Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs.
- Informal discussion with previous Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs.
- Informal discussion with Group Leaders.
- Undertake benchmarking.
- Discussion with CLT and Cabinet

Whilst also incorporating the LGA peer review feedback...

Peer Review: Key Governance Findings

- Meetings too long and questionable what value was being added to the decision-making process
- Duplication of effort was noted
- Scrutiny structure – need for 3 panels (and then also Joint Panels) highlighted and questioned - many Councils of similar size only have one scrutiny committee with task and finish groups reporting to it.
- System of ‘everything’ going through scrutiny is creating bottlenecks – what is actually adding value?
- Member roles at scrutiny meetings unclear – who was chairing, who was on the Panel, etc
- Refocussing and streamlining the scrutiny panels to focus on outcomes would be of benefit

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Survey results

- **21 responses – 18 Councillors** so broadly one third of Councillors
- **Preferred number of panels:** Majority (62%) support **three panels**
- **Majority view:** Current scrutiny arrangements is “**Somewhat effective**” (62%)
- **25** Some value the **opportunity to question and contribute**, while others feel scrutiny **lacks impact** or is **poorly structured**
- **Panel size:** 67% say **12 members is about right**; others suggest 10–15 depending on structure
- **Opposition to one-panel model:** Seen as too broad, too much work, and risks diluting scrutiny
- **Desire for more impact:** Many felt scrutiny could be more influential and better aligned with Council priorities.

Survey results

- **Two Panels.** One that focuses on ‘Internal Scrutiny’ and one that focuses on ‘Policy Development and External Scrutiny’ – **76% they didn’t like this suggestion**
- **Two Panels.** Keep Corporate Performance Panel in its current format but merge R&D and E&C into the Regeneration & Community Panel - **57% they didn’t like this suggestion**

Local Benchmarking – 1 of 2

- Breckland Council (10am start time)

1 Overview & Scrutiny Commission - 12 Members

- North Norfolk District Council (9.30am start time)

27 1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 12 Members

- Fenland District Council (10am start time)

1 Overview & Scrutiny Panel – 12 Members

- South Holland District Council (6.30pm start time)

1 Performance Monitoring Panel – 15 Members

1 Policy Development Panel – 16 Members

Joint Panel combining the two Panels

Local District Benchmarking – 2 of 2

- Great Yarmouth Borough Council (6.30pm start time)

1 Scrutiny Committee - 13 Members

- Norwich City Council (4.30pm start time)

1 Scrutiny Committee - 12 Members

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- Broadland District Council (6-6.30pm start time)

1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 15 Members

3 Policy Development Committees (Housing & Planning, Economic Success, Environmental Excellence)

- South Norfolk Council (10am/2pm start times)

1 Scrutiny Committee – 9 Members

3 Policy Development Committees (Planning & Economic Growth, Health & Leisure, Environment)

Local District Benchmarking

Observations:

- Most local district Councils have one overview and scrutiny panel
- Where there is more than one, this is with a separation between the scrutiny function and the policy review and development functions
- We are out of step in terms of having three panels carrying out scrutiny and without a clear focus on policy review and development

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Chairs/Group Leader Feedback

1. Scrutiny Process and Effectiveness

Need for robustness in scrutiny was emphasized by multiple participants.

Scrutiny is seen as **effective** but **inconsistent**, with **peaks and troughs** in workload.

There's a call for **more time** to be allocated to scrutiny and for **earlier access to papers** to allow better preparation.

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2. Cabinet Member Engagement

Mixed views on Cabinet involvement: Some felt there was **too much Cabinet input** previously. Others stressed the importance of **Cabinet Members being scrutinised** and **answering questions**.

A suggestion to **update the Scrutiny and Executive Protocol** to clarify roles and expectations.

Chairs/Group Leader Feedback

3. Panel Structure and Participation

Concerns about **reducing the number of panels**, which could lead to:

Overloading a single panel

Loss of councillor experience and engagement

Joint Panels and **meetings between Chairs and Vice Chairs** were seen as working well.

SO34 provision (allowing all councillors to contribute) was highlighted as important.

4. Policy Development

The **policy development function is underused**.

Panels should be treated as **formal consultees** during policy formation.

A suggestion to **split the work programme** between scrutiny and policy development or have **separate panels** for each.

Cabinet Feedback

Overall picture of:

Do not really feel scrutinised

Policy Review and Development function lacking

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Low impact – Panel recommendations have had limited impact in changing or moulding a course of direction

External Focus Gap

The Terms of Reference for all 3 Panels say:

- review the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address the relevant Policy
- 33 Review and Development Panel about their activities and performance;
- question and gather evidence from any other willing person.
- make reports and/or recommendations to the full Council and/or the Cabinet in connection with the discharge of any of their functions

Aside from the Transport Strategy informal working group, this function has rarely been exercised

Member and Officer Resource

- For one item going through the democratic process, a responsible officer may need to attend 7 different meetings just to see the item through to decision (briefings, CLT, sifting and the convened meetings)
- Case study added up all the cumulative time of officers and Members getting one item through all stages of the democratic process – total was **37 hours**
- Member and Officer time is a resource and it is finite – how should this time be spent to achieve maximum impact and added value?

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Gap Analysis

- External focus of agenda items is largely missing
- Policy Review and Development function not working properly
- Training, plus dedicated Chair training, needed
- Strategic Forward Work Programming needed
- The strategic impact of scrutiny needs improving
- Pre-meeting briefings would add value
- Scrutiny Officer support needed

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Summary

- Survey returned mixed results but overall supported the status quo
- Local Benchmarking shows we are significantly out of step in terms of the greater number of Panels we have and their focus
- Feedback from Chairs, Group Leaders and Cabinet advocates for change
- 36 Upskilling Members for LGR and what scrutiny may be like in a new unitary is a key priority
- Member and officer resource should be used more strategically
- The Gap Analysis above identifies the areas for improvement
- Conclusion: structure changes are needed to achieve improved scrutiny

Options for Change

a. Two Panels - Two stage approach:

Immediately: merge R&D and E&C into one Panel called Regeneration & Community – appoint two Vice Chairs to R&C. No more Joint Panels.

May 2026: CPP becomes primary internal scrutiny panel and R&C becomes external scrutiny panel and performs the policy review and development function. No more Joint Panels.

b. Two Panels - One stage approach:

May 2026: CPP becomes primary internal scrutiny panel and R&C becomes external scrutiny panel and performs the policy review and development function. No more Joint Panels.

c. One Panel – One Stage approach:

May 2026: Change manage the transition to build up to new one Panel approach in May 2026

d. No changes:

Leave in situ until LGR

Next Steps

- Joint Panel – 22 October
- Cabinet – 11 November
- Full Council – 27 November