

Area Constituency Committees - Guide for May 2022 – March 2023

Purpose of Area Constituency Committees

To improve the quality of life for people in their area by acting as a ‘critical friend’ to policy makers and decision makers, enabling the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and driving improvements in public services.

Responsibilities

- Act as a forum for Members to bring forward local issues which potentially affect more than one Electoral Division
- Agree a Work Programme which lists items of business which the committee wishes to consider at future meetings
- Consider and respond to petitions submitted to the County Council which relate to the Constituency area and contain 500 or more signatures, in accordance with the Council’s petitions scheme
- Hear and respond to questions and statements from members of the public relating to anything affecting the community within the constituency area
- Undertake meaningful scrutiny of local health issues within their constituency area, complementing the strategic work undertaken by the Scrutiny of Health Committee
- Undertake meaningful scrutiny of local transport issues within their constituency area, complementing the strategic work undertaken by Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Act as consultees in major decisions that affect their constituency area (including responding to consultations)
- Maintain a working relationship with the local MP, sharing updates and information on relevant local issues being addressed by the committee.

Role of Committee Members

All members of the Area Constituency Committee have a key role to play in ensuring that Council and other public sector services are delivered effectively, efficiently and that they achieve good outcomes for local people. The things that committee Members can do, include:

- Contributing to the development of the committee’s work programme, providing constructive challenge and suggesting topics for inclusion

- Actively engaging with all stages of the committee review and scrutiny process, including any additional groups or meetings that are set up outside of the scheduled, formal meetings of the committee
- Developing constructive relationships with other members of the committee, the relevant portfolio holders and service leads
- Working apolitically as a committee, with a strong focus upon service improvement and outcomes
- Receiving the data, information and analysis that is presented in an impartial manner
- Assessing the data, information and analysis presented to the committee and testing the conclusions that are drawn
- Contributing to the development of recommendations, based on the committee's deliberations, which are specific, realistic and relevant.

Membership

The committee membership comprises County Councillors whose Electoral Divisions are within the Constituency area. The quorum for formal meetings of the committee is 3 voting Members.

All Area Constituency Committees have the discretion and power to co-opt additional members, but co-opted members do not have voting rights. An alternative to co-opting is for the committee to invite people with specialist knowledge to attend as and when required.

There are a small number of Electoral Divisions that are covered by more than one Area Constituency Committee. Where this is the case we usually ask the councillors concerned to nominate their substantive ACC. The substantive ACC is then that which a councillor would routinely attend and which they would vote at, should the need arise. You are able to attend the other ACCs meetings that cover your division and participate in those meetings but you will not be able to vote on any matters there.

This arrangement was put in place when the ACCs were introduced in 2018. It will be reviewed as part of the LGR Locality work stream and they work that they are doing to develop the committees and the responsibilities that they take on as part of the new unitary arrangements from 1 April 2023.

Meetings

The Area Constituency Committee will routinely meet formally four times a year. Additional meetings may be held, or working groups may be established and held, (either virtually or in-person), as necessary, at the discretion of the committee.

From May 2022, informal meetings of a committee's Members will be introduced and held every two months to build understanding of the local area, provide an opportunity for learning and development, and adopt the new model for delivery of area committees ahead of formal implementation in April 2023.

Formal meetings of a committee will be held at a venue within the Constituency area.

All venues should have good road and public transport access, access to Wi-Fi and any necessary ICT, and be compliant with relevant Health and Safety and Disability legislation.

Consideration should be given to having at least one formal meeting of the committee at a time and venue that best suits the local MP.

Informal meetings of committee Members, or of any Working Groups, may be held virtually using Microsoft Teams.

Meetings will usually be kept to a maximum 2.5 hours' duration.

A report providing feedback on each formal meeting of the committee, including any recommendations from the committee, is submitted to a meeting of the County Council's Executive.

Public Questions and Statements

An item of business on every committee agenda is "Public Questions and Statements". The procedures for Public Questions and Statements are set out in the County Council's Constitution (any member of the public to speak on any matter at a meeting for up to three minutes subject to an overall time limit of 30 minutes, subject to them giving notice to Legal and Democratic Services prior to a meeting).

The Chairman has discretion to waive the notice period and the restriction on the length of time for which a person can speak. The Chairman usually exercises their discretion depending on the amount of business scheduled for that particular meeting.

The need to engage with and respond to local issues identified by members of the public needs to be balanced by the need to ensure that scheduled items on the agenda can be dealt with effectively and efficiently within the time that the committee has available. The situation to avoid is one in which public questions dominate the meeting.

Committee members and co-opted members are disqualified from raising questions under this item of business. They can, however, contribute to the development of the work programme for the committee, highlighting local issues of concern that fall within the remit of the committee.

Members of the public should not be permitted to participate in debates and should vacate the speaker's chair/position on conclusion of their question/statement and/or after any permitted supplementary question has been asked.

Work Programme

The work programme is the document that the committee bases its work upon. The work programme is not a static document and should be kept under ongoing review.

The Democratic Services Officer (DSO) and the Chairman and Vice Chairman are expected to take ownership and management of the work programme and ensure

that it has items for the committee to review and scrutinise that are: relevant; in the public interest; add value; and being scheduled in a timely and efficient way.

The sources of items for the work programme can include:

- Performance data, information and analysis, in particular when it has been benchmarked against similar local authorities
- Inspection reports, such as those produced by the Care Quality Commission or OFSTED
- National research findings
- National policy changes
- National and local consultations and public engagement events
- County Council Plan
- County Council budget and delivery against savings proposals and targets
- Agendas for Executive
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Local issues raised by elected members, members of the public or highlighted in the media
- Local networks and partnerships.

Where an initial area of interest or line of inquiry is identified, further information is gathered to ascertain whether this is a valid area for review and local scrutiny that will add value and not duplicate work that is already underway.

The agenda for every formal meeting of the committee includes an item on the committee work programme. This provides Members with an opportunity to reflect on the issues that have been identified and assure themselves that such issues continue to be appropriate for the committee.

Links to County Council Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny aims to contribute to the Council's corporate outcomes in many ways, including:

- Enabling Councillors to become directly involved in the development of: policy and strategy; consultation and public engagement planning; and the performance management of the Council
- Keeping Councillors and the public informed of key issues, priorities and initiatives
- Enabling direct engagement with the people of North Yorkshire
- Acting as a critical friend and providing Cabinet Members and senior officers with a non-partisan forum in which to test out ideas, approaches and gain feedback and suggestions
- Providing a structure, through the call-in process, for scrutinising specific decisions of the Executive
- Scrutinising issues of public concern beyond the remit of the Council.

There are five thematic overview and scrutiny committees, each of which meets in public four times a year. It is important that the work of the Area Constituency Committees adds to and does not duplicate the work of the overview and scrutiny committees. This can be achieved by identifying issues of local concern, discussing

them with the relevant lead scrutiny officer and working out what role the Area Constituency Committee could play.

Any questions

Please contact Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, if you have any queries or concerns.

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