



Glasgow City Council

**Environment, Sustainability & Carbon Reduction
City Policy Committee**

Report by Head of Audit and Inspection

Contact: Duncan Black Ext: 74053

RESULTS OF COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

Purpose of Report:

To advise members of the main findings from the recent independent assessment of the Environment, Sustainability & Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee (ESCR CPC), undertaken as required by the Council's Standing Orders.

Recommendation:

The Committee is asked to:

- 1) Note the content of the report;
- 2) Consider the action plan, to be led by the Lead Officer, Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Regeneration & Sustainability, in conjunction with the Convener and Vice Convener; and
- 3) Refer the report to the Operational Performance and Delivery Scrutiny Committee.

Ward No(s):

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes No

consulted: Yes No

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Standing Orders require all Committees to undertake an effectiveness evaluation each year, and in year 3 of the Council an independent assessment. This report outlines the findings from the independent assessment, which has been undertaken by the Head of Audit and Inspection.
- 1.2 The scope of the review focussed on sharing best practice and potential ways to enhance the working of committees across the Council in the lead up to the next local government elections. This included the following questions:
- Is there a workplan agreed at least annually, and reviewed periodically?
 - Are agendas agreed in advance and do they follow the workplan?
 - Are papers and reports relevant, concise, accurate and accessible?
 - Do pre agendas take place and how do they operate?
 - Do all members have an opportunity to participate? Do members actively engage?
 - Does the Committee's work dovetail with other Committees to avoid duplication, but also to ensure that important and relevant issues are appropriately passed on?

Individual surveys for each Committee were also issued to all Committee Members, Chairs and Vice Chairs.

- 1.3 The period reported on is one of post-pandemic recovery. Following the assumption of emergency powers, policy and scrutiny committees did not meet with effect from 11th March 2020. The delivery of the ESCR CPC workplan was therefore significantly impacted by this suspension of meetings. City Administration Committee (CAC) then determined that City Policy Committees should recommence from August 2020, with the first meeting held on 8 September 2020 following an updated workplan. Since then, the Committee has been meeting using video conferencing.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Generally the Committee is operating effectively with no major areas of concern identified. Workplans and agendas are agreed in advance and agendas are very well managed by NRS officers. The Convener and Vice Convener are undertaking their required duties robustly and in line with expectations. They demonstrate a strong understanding of the papers coming to the Committee and manage questions and answers effectively. The committee reflects the political context of the Council with a Convenor from the minority administration and a Vice Convenor from an opposition group, which is gender balanced.

- 2.2 One of the challenges with the Committee is its very broad remit. It is observed that this has resulted in some areas having less focus than others (eg Environmental Health as opposed to Climate Emergency). That in itself is not necessarily an issue, but the broad remit should be considered at the next review of Council Committee structures. For example, the Climate Emergency agenda is so vast and deemed so critical that it may be better to include thematically across other committee remits.
- 2.3 Due to broad Committee remit, the workplan needs to remain agile. This is undertaken effectively by NRS officers; however the Committee may benefit from a brief tracking document that formalises matters being added / removed from the agreed workplan. This would enable the Committee Members to monitor the progress of the workplan.
- 2.4 The pre agenda process is well developed and ensures that papers coming to the Committee have gone through a robust review process. However, the current way of working by officers supporting the Committee requires papers to be submitted a number of weeks in advance of the Committee. It was also observed that pre agenda meetings can last a significant length of time. This brings added administration for officers and may mean that information is less up to date by the time of the Committee. It is also noted that officer involvement in the lead up to the Committee is significant.
- 2.5 It has been noted that the Committee tends to focus more on updates on operational matters, with less focus on proposing new policy developments. It was also observed that, whilst the quality of the questions and answers was generally strong, on occasion members would raise operational matters relating to specific local issues to their ward. The terms of reference of the Committee are clear that the Committee's purpose is around policies, strategies and plans. Whilst there is undoubtedly a link between operational performance and the future direction of policies, operational performance scrutiny is within the remit of the Operational Performance and Delivery Scrutiny Committee (OPDSC).
- 2.6 Related to this point is that some feedback has been provided that there is frustration that little definitive action arises from the work of the Committee due to its terms of reference. One way to address this would be to better link operational scrutiny in OPDSC with the work of ESCR CPC (and other policy development committees). OPDSC operational scrutiny could in turn more clearly inform the ESCR CPC workplan.
- 2.7 Officer support and attendance at Committee is strong. NRS officers have established an area of good practice that could be replicated in other committees: to proactively encourage attendance from officers that do not ordinarily attend or present papers to observe committees as development opportunities.

- 2.8 Whilst no significant issues were identified with the quality of papers being brought to the Committee, it is noted that the length of typical agenda papers are long and this may adversely impact on the members' ability to read and scrutinise the content within the timescales available. Where questions are unable to be answered by officers at Committee, there is an undertaking to revert to the member raising the question at a later point. Sometimes briefings are also offered to members. Committee Membership appear to be satisfied with this approach, but it does mean that some information, potentially material to the original paper, does not find its way to the public domain. A solution to this would be to formalise questions and answers in a standing document at each Committee, as is done at the Council's two scrutiny committees.
- 2.9 The Committee has made good use of working groups in recent years, most notably through the Climate Emergency Working Group.
- 2.10 Specific training has been offered to Members of the Committee in the form of carbon literacy training. This was well received. However, the broad remit of the Committee means that it is challenging to ensure all aspects are covered by relevant training. The scale of legislative developments from the Scottish Government adds to this complex landscape. Whilst it is not possible for ESCR CPC Members to be experts in all fields, consideration should be given to 6-monthly "horizon scanning" papers to sign post Members to any developments and training/briefing offerings.
- 2.11 All Members of Council Committees were invited to complete a survey on the Committee's effectiveness. This was co-ordinated by the Chief Executive's Department. For ESCR CPC, only 5 members returned out of 15. This low rate of return means it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the survey. However, the results are included in full in appendix 1 and the following specific comments were received:
- Papers received too late / not enough time to read papers; too many papers on the agenda; meetings are too long. This perhaps corresponds to the issue of the wide remit of the Committee (see para 2.2).
 - Confusion over the attendance at Committee of the City Convener for Sustainability & Carbon Reduction. It is deemed appropriate for City Conveners to attend City Policy Committee meetings, normally as observers, however it is for the Convener to decide whether to allow non-members of the committee to speak. It would be inappropriate for the City Convener to enter into any vote at the Committee.

3. Action Plan

No.	Observation	Recommendation
1	The ESCR City Policy Committee has a very broad remit and also sees its workplan often dovetailing with that of the Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm City Policy Committee. This means that agendas, papers and meetings are often long. This should be considered by the Council when the Council's Committee structures are next subject to review.	The remit of ESCR CPC should be explicitly considered when the Council next reviews its formal committee structures. One solution would be to consider embedding Climate Emergency considerations across all City Policy Committees, given its increasing prominence in the Council's priority areas.
2	It is to be commended that the Committee's workplan is subject to ongoing review and amendment to reflect the changing environment and priorities. However, this is currently managed by Council officers and there is no formal tracking of changes reported through the Committee.	Officers should consider bringing a tracking report to the Committee outlining any significant changes to the agreed workplan. This will ensure Committee Members have an opportunity to formally comment on the changes, and that it is a matter of public record.
3	It is observed that the ESCR CPC pre agenda process is very drawn out and requires a significant amount of officer time and resource. The approach also means that papers have to be prepared by officers a number of weeks prior to the Committee date, risking out of date information.	Through the Convener and Vice Convener, lead officers should review the process in which papers are finalised and considered through the ESCR CPC pre-agenda.
4	The Committee is tasked with examining Council policies, strategies and plans, and developing future policies. However, it is noted that at times the Committee can be drawn into focussing on operational areas and local ward matters through Members' questions and requests for papers.	Members should seek to avoid raising operational matters and seek to retain focus on policy and strategy development. This could be achieved through better linkages between operational scrutiny at OPDSC and the ESCR CPC workplan.
5	Whilst the standard of questions and answers at Committee is strong, where answers are not available during the Committee, they are addressed "offline". This means that on occasion not all Members will see the full subsequent answer, and also that it is not part of the public record.	Lead officers should create a standing "Q&A" paper for each meeting, consolidating any questions and answers (including associated documentation / information). This should form part of the Committee's agenda, meaning it is on the public record.

No.	Observation	Recommendation
6	Whilst training has been offered to Members over recent years, the breadth of remit for the Committee means that it is challenging for Members to remain adequately briefed on technical or legislative developments.	Lead officers should consider developing a brief 6-monthly horizon scanning paper to identify legislative / regulatory matters that Members may need to be aware of, and any training offering that could assist in these areas.

4. Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial: None

Legal: None

Personnel: None

Procurement: None

Council Strategic Plan: Equality and Socio- Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25? Please specify. N/A.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report? No significant impact.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage. N/A.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify: Part of the Committee's remit is the fulfil the functions of policy development in relation to sustainability and climate change.

What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal? N/A

Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target? N/A

Privacy and Data No privacy or data protection impacts

Protection Impacts: identified.

5. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- 1) Note the content of the report;
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Appendix 1

Briefing to: Duncan Black – Head of Audit and Inspection

Subject: Elected Members Survey – Review of Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee

Contact: Darren Keenan, Strategic Policy and Planning

Date: 30th September 2021

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Standing Orders require all Committees to undertake an independent assessment in year 3 of a Council Administration.
- 1.2 As part of this assessment a survey was distributed to all Elected Members of the Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee. It invited them to provide their views on various aspects of the committee and allowed suggestions for any areas of improvement to be considered. The survey was carried out between the 6th and 27th August 2021.
- 1.3 All 15 Elected Members were invited to complete the survey, of which 5 were returned; this represents a return rate of 33%.
- 1.4 The overall findings from the survey are mainly positive and are listed within this briefing, along with any additional limited written comments received. Please note that due to the small overall sample (15), and number of respondents (5), where appropriate whole numbers in brackets are listed along with percentages for information purposes.

2.0 Role of the Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee

- 2.1 All respondents (100%) agree that they understood the remit of the Committee. While a majority 80% (4 respondents) agree the Committee workplan reflects its terms of reference and that agendas cover items relevant to the Committee.
- 2.2 Table 1 below, shows that a majority 60% (3 respondents) agreed with every other statement listed relating to the Committee, while 40% (2 respondents) disagree.

Table 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to the Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee?			
	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
The Committee fulfilled its Terms of Reference	60% (3)		40% (2)
The workplan of the Committee reflects its Terms of Reference	80% (4)		20% (1)
Agendas cover items relevant to the Committee	80% (4)		20% (1)
I understand the remit of the Committee	100% (5)		
The Committee is effective in carrying out its remit	60% (3)		40% (2)
I am able to contribute to the development of the Committee workplan	60% (3)		40% (2)
The Committee influences decisions of the Council	60% (3)		40% (2)
The Committee influences policies of the Council	60% (3)		40% (2)
The Committee helps to drive the improvement function in the Council	60% (3)		40% (2)
The Committee helps the Council deliver better outcomes	60% (3)		40% (2)

3.0 Committee Papers

- 3.1 The majority of respondents (80% 4 respondents) are generally satisfied with committee papers issued before meetings, in terms of the quality of the papers, time before Committee when they are received, clarity of information included and the standard of minutes with regards to accuracy.
- 3.2 However, views are split in terms of what the papers are asking the Committee to do, with 40% (2 respondents) satisfied and 40% (2 respondents) dissatisfied. The remaining 20% (1 respondent) were undecided (Table 2).

Table 2: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following aspects of Committee papers?			
	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Quality of the Committee Papers	80% (4)		20% (1)
Time before Committee when papers are received	80% (4)		20% (1)
Clarity of information included in Committee papers	80% (4)		20% (1)
What the papers are asking the Committee to actually do	40% (2)	20% (1)	40% (2)
Standard of minutes with regards to accuracy etc.	80% (4)		20% (1)

3.3 Some additional comments were provided in relation to Committee papers. These included:

- Papers are received far too late, need more time to properly read through papers.
- Too many papers on the agenda.

4.0 Conduct at Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee Meetings

4.1 In terms of conduct at Committee meetings, the majority of respondents 80% (4 respondents) agree the Chair enables members to participate, that there open and constructive discussion, officers are generally able to answer questions and that officer attendance is satisfactory.

4.2 Respondents were slightly less likely to agree (60% 3 respondents) that where a question cannot be answered at Committee, a response is provided timeously.

4.3 When asked their views on time allocated to manage business, the frequency of meetings, members attendance at Committee and members behaving with respect, views were more evenly split (Table 3).

Table 3: Below is a list of statements relating to the conduct at Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee meetings. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each.			
	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
The Chair enables all members to participate	80% (4)		20% (1)
There is generally open and constructive discussion	80% (4)		20% (1)
Officers are generally able to deal with questions that arise	80% (4)		20% (1)
Where a question cannot be answered at Committee, a response is provided timeously	60% (3)		40% (2)
Sufficient time is allocated to allow the Committee to manage its business	40% (2)		60% (3)
The frequency of meetings allows the Committee to carry out its function	40% (2)	20% (1)	40% (1)
Members attendance at Committees is satisfactory	40% (2)	40% (2)	20% (1)
Officers attendance at Committees is satisfactory	80% (4)		20% (1)
Members behave with respect in meetings	40% (2)	40% (2)	20% (1)

4.4 Some additional comments were provided in relation to Committee meetings. These included:

- There seems to be confusion on the membership of the Committee – e.g. the NRS Convenor isn't a member yet in practice is.
- Meetings are too long – impairs ability to give papers proper attention.
- Shorter more regular meetings would be better.

5.0 Skills and Experience

5.1 A majority of respondents (80% 4 respondents) felt that the Committee has the right mix of skills and experience to carry out its remit (Table 4).

Table 4: Do you feel the membership of the Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee has the right mix of skills and experience to carry out its remit?		
	%	Number
Yes	80%	4
No		
Don't Know	20%	1

6.0 Performance Improvement

- 6.1 In terms of performance improvement, only 20% (1 respondent) agree the results from the last self-assessment were used to help improve the Environment, Sustainability and Carbon Reduction City Policy Committee; while 40% (2 respondents) disagree. A further 40% (2 respondents) were undecided.