

**Meeting** ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

**Portfolio Area**

**Date** 23 March 2022

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE - POSSIBLE WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS BASED ON MEMBERS' SUGGESTIONS 2022-23**

**23 MARCH 2022**

**Authors** Stephen Weaver | 2332

**Contributors**

**Contact Officer** Stephen Weaver | 2332

**1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year from a list of suggested possible work programme items by Members.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4) be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, (see section 5), the Committee determines the subject matters to be added to a work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2022/23.
- 2.3 That the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings to carry out policy development work identified so far for the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committees are asked to draft their work programme ahead of the new Municipal year in order that work may begin as soon as the Committees are appointed at Annual Council. Any outstanding and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.
- 3.2 During February 2022 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.
- 3.3 When considering what work to undertake in the coming year, Members may wish to consider if the matter in question is of a cross-cutting nature and might lend itself to being considered jointly with another Select Committee.
- 3.4 Officers have also been requested to bring to the Committee's attention, likely Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) policy development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports there are submitted to the Executive.
- 3.5 The Committee may also consider whether specific time should be allocated for monitoring or review of recommendations of previous studies. During the summer the Committee will receive a copy of the Action Tracker for the Community Select Committee at which time the Committee can note progress on past reviews and determine whether they wish to bring back any further detailed updates on specific former review items at that time.
- 3.6 It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the scrutiny work of three Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that work plans are in place in order that the call on those resources and on each Committee's time on all its activities are prioritised and evenly spread across the year. To make best use of the resource it is suggested that each Committee chooses 1 substantive review item for the year which will be the Committee's main review, undertaken over a number of meetings. In addition the Committee could receive between 2 or 3 one-off single issue performance items and 3 to 4 Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) meetings during the year.

### **4 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY**

- 4.1 In February 2022, all Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees were emailed a survey to gauge views of the Scrutiny work undertaken and ideas for future studies. The following summary is based on the 8 replies received from the 23 Members who are on one or more of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- 4.2 Members were asked to (i) comment on current scrutiny activity and (ii) identify any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements and (iii) state what training needs they may have. Members provided comment and challenge around the following areas that relate to the Environment & Economy Select Committee:

**Survey Question 1 - Please rate the following aspects of this year's scrutiny activity:**

What reviews did you take part in? SS scoring: 3 = good, 2 = okay, but and 1 = not okay really

- E&E completed its Economic Impact of Covid-19 pandemic 3 - excellent
- E&E Council's Climate Change as well as some one-off items 3 so far

- Economic impact of pandemic ok but didn't really establish any actions to be taken?

**Survey Question 2 - What aspect of scrutiny could be improved to provide a better scrutiny service?**

1. More **officer support for the Scrutiny Officer**;

2. A clear **portfolio of methods / processes for different types of reviews**, to codify them (must be my officer background peeping through);

3. A coherent and standard **Gap Analysis approach to major reviews** as per the Best Value reviews we did 1998 – 2010ish (happy to expand with SW and the three Chairs).

Summary: Step 1 = Where are we? Step 2 = Where should we be? Step 3 = What are the gaps? Step 4 = So, what are we going to do about them?!

As previously discussed but never taken forward, a structural change is needed whereby the chair and vice chair of scrutiny are chosen not by the leader or Executive but by secret ballot of scrutiny members.

Also, much more involvement of non-councillors is needed, as 'expert' or ordinary witnesses and consultants, and more use of the 'public's views

More public involvement in scrutiny - publicise meetings and make it clear that the public are welcome to attend. A more timely response to recommendations

When we receive presentations, etc. I would like to be better signposted to the raw underlying data, for example in the resident survey, so I can better draw my own conclusions.

The most desirable changes would see Scrutiny resources matching its supposed importance in the Council. Unfortunately the chances of this happening are small, but we do need some respect for the integrity of our work plans. I accept the need for improvisation in recent times, but it has been very difficult to do a good job in the circumstances.

Priorities for the future. Where are we with the review of Scrutiny itself? We do need to be sure that we have the best system to make use of limited resources. I think the Council's ways of engaging the public are still based on outmoded ideas about consultation and we could look at this and learn from better practice elsewhere, including outside local govt.

...I think it would be good to have a roadmap of all of the projects the council is working on to help us be clear on what we are going to be consulted on and when. A one page gannt chart or something similar would be really helpful showing key milestones of each, including consultation periods and when they will come to which scrutiny group

**Survey Question 3 - Regarding supporting you in your Scrutiny role is there any specific training you would like for next year, and would you (occasionally) like to receive information about possible Member Scrutiny training?**

I would like the Scrutiny Officer and Members to run our own Training and Development, but then I would like to transform MMPs too. Too much generic stuff from the LGIU, some of which we will always need! New members need full and proper support. The last few batches of new members seem very unaware of crucial aspects of their roles and of their conduct. (I partly

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| blame social media for encouraging a verbal recklessness, with potential legal, safety and safeguarding implications.)  |
| No, but happy to receive information about training.  |
| A general refresher training session on the role of scrutiny, which could be useful for newer Members. Yes, I would like to receive information about possible Member training.   |
| The recent email of You tube video of Executive meeting with video timings of specific topic was very helpful.  |
| Watch other scrutiny work - other council practice?   |
| Yes, information on relevant training would be useful. Particularly in obtaining and processing data. What data is available to us as Councillors? What investigative tools can we use?, call-in, freedom of information requests, access to information as Cllrs, etc., etc. |

## 5 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

### 5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

- 5.1.1 In response to Survey question 4 "What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in scrutiny work programme for next year" The following issues have been raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items:

| <b>Survey Question 4 - What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in the (E&amp;E Select Committee) scrutiny work programme for next year? (Max 3 items)</b>   | <b>What type of review (main, PHAG, one off performance)?</b>   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residential parking and the vehicle mass limits allowed.</li> <li>2. Overgrown hedges and responsibility for them, reporting methods for them and publicising this to residents.</li> <li>3. Delays with tenant requested repairs and in particular fences.</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. One off performance review</li> <li>2. ditto</li> <li>3. ditto</li> </ol> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning - how is the planning department reconciling council policy on Environment and Climate Emergency?</li> </ul>  | (linked to E&E current main review)   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to scrutinise how the Council will fund its carbon reduction ambitions. If this is one of the most difficult problems the Council faces in the next 5-10 years, what are its options? What funds can be bid into? Are we bidding into those funds? etc., etc. This would be a large piece of work in its own right.</li> </ul> | (linked to E&E current main review)   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of the review on the Climate Emergency</li> </ul>   | (Continuation of E&E current main review)   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking</li> </ul>   | One off performance review  |

### 5.2 Statutory and Standing Items

- 5.2.1 Unlike the Community Select Committee the Environment and Economy has no statutory or standing items.
- 5.3 Members should note that whatever issues they agree to be scrutinised as a main review item would be subject to a full scoping process and subsequently a scoping document would need to be agreed by the

Committee at a future meeting. Other items, which can be addressed by a briefing and discussion item, may not require a full scoping document.

#### 5.5 Work Programme Schedule for 2022/23

5.5.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Environment & Economy Select Committee, the Scrutiny Officer will, using the agreed dates for generic Select Committee meetings in the Calendar of Meetings, draw together a work programme schedule for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, including scrutiny review meetings, monitoring of previous reviews selected by Members and policy development meetings, which will be circulated to Members, and electronic diary invites will be sent to all Environment & Economy Select Committee Members.

#### 5.6. Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny

5.6.1 The Assistant Directors will take a leadership role in assisting and supporting the relevant Scrutiny Committees and specific reviews that align to their area of expertise. The Assistant Directors (ADs) will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair and Vice-Chair briefings and offering support to the Scrutiny Officer in providing written and oral evidence for reviews as well as identifying 'Critical Friends' and other review witnesses. The Assistant Directors will liaise with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder(s) and the Senior Leadership Team (CE and Assistant CE's).

5.6.2 The Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy has responsibility for supporting the Environment & Economy Select Committee.

5.6.2 Strategic Director, Tom Pike from the Strategic Leadership Team has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe.

### **6 MONITORING REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS VIA THE ACTION TRACKER**

6.1 The Committee may consider there is a need to undertake some follow-up work on recommendations arising from previous studies. It may be considered sufficient to simply request update briefings from the relevant Heads of Service to be circulated to Members at appropriate intervals. However, if the Committee requires more detailed consideration or examination of the progress of previous recommendations, this should be factored into its work programme. To help assist Members to consider this, an updated Action Tracker document will be brought to the Committee in the summer and any additional work programme items will need to be added following that meeting.

### **7 PORTFOLIO HOLDER ADVISORY GROUP - POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2022/23**

7.1 In line with the Council and Executive work plan, the following items have been identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the 2022/23 Municipal Year:

- Sustainable Travel Towns PHAG with Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Briscoe to be scheduled towards the end of 2022

7.1.1 The above schedule is subject to change and may be added to. Members will be contacted with a meeting invitation closer to the PHAG meeting.

7.2 These meetings are private informal meetings Chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and supported by the relevant Assistant Director.

## **8 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

8.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8.1.2 A small budget of £1000 is held to support the work of the Select Committees in their research and study.

### **Legal Implications**

8.2. The role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees is set out in the Local Government Act 2000. The recommendations made in this report are to facilitate the Committees to fully undertake this role.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

8.3. There are no direct Equalities and Diversity implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Specific equalities and diversity implications are considered during each scrutiny review.