

**Meeting** OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Portfolio Area**

**Date** 21 March 2023

## **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS FOR 2023-24**

### **21 MARCH 2023**

**Authors** Stephen Weaver | 2332

**Contributors** Tom Pike SD

**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 2023/24.
- 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 2023 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2023/24 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 Select 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 each Select 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. The O&S Committee will have to make a judgement as to whether it has the extra capacity to take on more work.

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

- 4.1 In February 2023, 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 22 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 Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

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

- Voids process review was good
- Voids has been productive, with some decent recommendations put forward
- E&E seems to be getting to grip with the climate emergency, but it's been a long journey. It still needs a commitment to get annual reports on outcomes like the total CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions in Stevenage; the recent O&S meeting on climate was extremely disappointing and left me worrying that the Council still hasn't really understood the subject or the urgency
- Some PHAG meetings have been poor – the Zoom format has not helped
- I hope the most effective piece of scrutiny will turn out to be the climate change work
- Getting £7,500 for the Old Town
- Effective (producing a result that is wanted) None

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

- Accountability
- Only scrutinise things you actually have the influence or cooperation to change.
- We did some work on 'scrutiny of scrutiny' a couple of years ago. I am not sure what has happened to it? Change of council leadership may provide a new opportunity to press for change here
- The public health scrutiny hasn't happened yet. It should.
- We are in a halfway house with the election / appointment of scrutiny chairs and national advice. Perhaps if we move further there will be further improvement. It is clear that some have a limited grasp of what scrutiny could do. It is not a sub-set of the Executive.
- I'd like to see more decisive action coming off the back of the exercise, maybe with some targets

**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?**

- Work shadowing opportunities to gain a more hands on experience of understanding experiences of different areas of SBC
- If there is going to be training, please can it be with something like the CfPS rather than in-house. We need to get wider experiences.

- Happy to receive any training offered x 2

## 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:

Survey Question 4 - What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in the (Com Select Committee) scrutiny work programme for next year? (Max 3 items)	What type of review (main, PHAG, one off performance)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT performance and future direction</li> </ul>	(Main review)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We already have a commitment to look at the latest census data for Stevenage. Some of the questions could be how are we responding to the changing demographic; how are we ensuring that future surveys will represent the population including by age, ethnicity and tenure; how well does the SBC employment profile match the community profile? (This suggestion is also being raised at the Community Select Committee)</li> </ul>	(Main review)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We did some work on 'scrutiny of scrutiny' a couple of years ago I think. I am not sure what has happened to it. Change of council leadership may provide a new opportunity to press for change here</li> </ul>	(Main review)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint service provision or services provided for SBC by other bodies. How is it working for Stevenage?</li> </ul>	(Main review)

### 5.2 Budget and Policy Framework Items

- 5.2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to scrutinise Budget and Policy Framework items. The following matters have been identified for scrutiny by the Committee as Budget & Policy Framework items -

- The HRA and Rent Setting
- General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
- Savings and Growth Proposals
- Council Tax Support Scheme

- 5.2.2 The Committee may be required to scrutinise any further Budget and Policy Framework items as and when required in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Article 4 and Section 4 Rules of Procedure.

- 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.

### 5.4 Work Programme Schedule for 2023/24

- 5.4.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny 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 2023/24 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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members.

## 5.5 Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny

- 5.5.1 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).
- 5.5.2 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, items that are identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the 2023/24 Municipal Year will be circulated to Members as and when required and Members will be contacted with a meeting invitation closer to the PHAG meeting.
- 7.1.1 These meetings are private informal meetings Chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and supported by the relevant Assistant Director. It is expected that there would be between 3 or 4 PHAG meetings a year per scrutiny Committee.

## **8 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

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

### **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.