

**Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY
SELECT COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 3

Date: 12 MARCH 2014

2014/2015 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Workplan for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That feedback from the Scrutiny Evaluation Questionnaire completed by Members be noted.

2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members from their Scrutiny Evaluation Survey and topics raised from Community Groups following canvassing of the groups through January and February 2014 (see section 5.1), the Committee determine the subject matter of its Scrutiny Study for 2014/2015.

2.3 That the Committee endorses the comments made in relation to those suggestions put forward for Scrutiny that for various reason would not be appropriate at this time (see section 5.3) and that those Community Groups/Members who have put forward these ideas be informed accordingly.

2.4 That consideration be given to including in the workplan specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).

2.5 That the Policy Development work identified for the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

2.6 That the Chair writes to all those Groups and individuals who have put forward suggestions for study thanking them for their interest and that they be sent details of the agreed workplan and opportunities to take part in the scrutiny work to be undertaken.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Scrutiny Committees are asked to draft their workplan ahead of the new Municipal year in order that work may begin as soon as the Committees are

appointed at Annual Council. Any outstanding/unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.

- 3.2 During February 2014 Members provided feedback from the Scrutiny Evaluation and Work Programme Planning Survey that had been circulated for Scrutiny topics for the 2014/2015 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 Policy Development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports thereon 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.
- 3.6 It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the Scrutiny work of 4 Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that workplans 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.
- 3.7 The draft calendar of meetings for 2014/2015 previously circulated to Members includes dates for meetings of Overview & Scrutiny Committee that are time critical as they are considering decisions taken by the Executive and Budget & Policy Framework matters. For other meetings of the Select Committees a number of dates have been reserved and once the workplans for each Committee have been drafted these specific dates can be allocated.

4. SCRUTINY – SUMMARY OF EVALUATION BY MEMBERS

- 4.1 In February 2014 all Members of Scrutiny Committees were provided with an Evaluation Questionnaire to gauge the positive aspects of Scrutiny work undertaken, how Scrutiny might be more effective and ideas for future studies. The following summary is based on the 15 replies that were received.
- 4.2 As part of the Survey, Members were asked what aspects of Scrutiny could be improved to provide a better service. By and large Members expressed satisfaction with the way Scrutiny is being undertaken but provided challenge around the following areas:
 - More support for the admin/investigation side of the Scrutiny Section
 - That reviews be conducted in more detail with more meetings but understand that resources & officer time are limited so could restrict this
 - The Portfolio Holders should have no influence during deliberations
 - Continued monitoring of previous reviews
 - Allow an opposition Member to Chair one Select Committee

- Use a “4 C’s methodology of Best Value Reviews (Challenge / Compare / Consult / Compete) as a template for relevant service reviews
- Allow time to ensure a thorough review is completed
- Provide more questioning skills training for newer Members
- Find out what third party contractors are doing when carrying out a service on behalf of the Council
- That information from officers (in some cases) could be provided in a more timely fashion to help Members undertake their review
- That the Scrutiny Officer continues to make sure that issues from previous reviews are not lost when the Committee structure changes

5. POTENTIAL SCRUTINY TOPICS FOR 2014/2015

5.1 Following the canvassing of Members and Community Groups following through January and February 2014 the following topics have been suggested:

- Energy Management of Council Buildings (from CAB)
- The future of open spaces dedicated to sporting activities and the shift from team games towards informal active recreations (from Sports Stevenage) – possibly a joint study with Community Select Committee
- Town Centre Regeneration, in its broadest terms
- Neighbourhood Shopping Centres: How can we help revitalise and re-energise them?
- Bio-Diversity Plan for the town
- Tree and Hedge Policy within the town (why SBC will not prune or fell tree’s blocking light, tree preservation orders, Hedge cutting etc)
- Relationship of Housing and Environment Departments when dealing with tenant or resident’s complaints
- Highway cleansing – cleansing in car parks
- Outcomes from regeneration activity

5.2 For information, ideas for studies put forward last year by Members (but were not undertaken) included -

- Getting more long term unemployed into work, looking at the Back to Work Programme – Unemployment in Stevenage
- Implementation of the climate change strategy and Implications for business and enterprise locally
- HCC Street Light Switch Off (Cross cutting with the Community Select Committee)
- Procurement from local business – Local Authority and business to business trading

- 5.3 Other ideas have come forward that are within the remit of this Select Committee but it would be recommended that at this time such study was not appropriate -

| <u>Suggestion</u> | <u>From</u> | <u>Comment</u> |
|---|---|--|
| Attracting shops to the town centre – what can the Council do to attract quality businesses to the town centre and have less fast food, pubs and betting shops? | Stevenage Haven/ Kadoma Link | This is governed by Planning Law, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) is limited through planning law and national and local planning policies. It can't determine who the end user is, but can only restrict use by the broader 'use classes' if there is a change of use. |
| Regeneration in the St Nicholas area - It is starting to look very shabby around this area | St Nicholas Community Association | The Council already has a plan for the regeneration of the Neighbourhood Centres so a scrutiny review would not be appropriate as suggested, and a focus on one area is possibly too specific (see option above at 5.1) |
| Outcomes from the Green Travel Plan | Members | This is perhaps too soon following the implementation of the Council's Green Travel Plan in 2013 but a written update or presentation on progress could suffice. |

6. MONITORING/REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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 workplan.
- 6.2 Reports within the remit of this Committee that have been issued over the last two years include –
- Inward Investment Opportunities & Business Support
 - Training & Employment Opportunities for Young People
 - Fixed Penalty Notices (Dog Fouling)
 - Refuse and Recycling

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2014/2015

- 7.1 At the time of writing the report no matters for Policy Development consideration with the Portfolio Holder have been identified. Any information available regarding this will be updated orally at the meeting.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial Implications

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

A small budget is held to support the work of the seven Committees in their research and study.

8.2 Legal Implications

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

8.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

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.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Evaluation Questionnaire – February 2014

APPENDICES

None