

**Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY
SELECT COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 3

Date: 22 MARCH 2016

2016/2017 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year.

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 determine the subject matters to be added to a 'long list' work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2016/2017.
- 2.3 That consideration be given to including in the work programme specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).
- 2.4 That the 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 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 January and February 2016 Members provided feedback on current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2016/2017 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. It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the Scrutiny work of 3 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.

4. MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2016 all Members of Scrutiny Committees were emailed 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 comment on current Scrutiny activity and any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements. Members provided challenge around the following areas:

- Promoting past scrutiny investigations – “it would be good to have a central place on the Council's Democracy pages which includes links to past reviews or investigations into key areas that effect the Town.”

Response: Over time a lot of Scrutiny reviews have been undertaken by Members and there is limited scope at Committee meetings to return to reviews to monitor progress. Therefore collating past Scrutiny reviews into one place on the Council's Website would be a useful repository of past Scrutiny activity. Officers will start the process of collating these documents, starting with previous Select Committee reviews, during the summer in 2016.

- Shorter scrutiny reviews – “Members need to be careful that the topic isn't too big, for example the LCB scrutiny raised a lot of issues that need to be looked at but could not be addressed sufficiently in the Scrutiny, for example, town wide versus ward funding, ward Councillors working together.”

Response: The Scrutiny Officer is attending an Institute of Local Government (INLOGOV) training event in March addressing issues such as “Should scrutiny reviews be shorter and simpler? Could effective recommendations be made with minimal or no supporting reports?”

- Focus on a big issue and give enough time to examine it – “The CSC review into Locality Budgets has been very good, we have begun to make some good suggestions and the witnesses have been well chosen and useful. My previous experience of scrutiny was the Environment and Economy Committee which had a much looser focus.

I think scrutiny works best when we focus on a big issue and give ourselves time to really examine it from every angle.”

Response: Ditto the response above. A case can be made for conducting one in-depth review or for more numerous short term reviews, to this end the learning derived from the INLOGOV training session in March should stimulate a healthy discussion for Scrutiny Members to consider which approach they favour.

4.3 Some further feedback was received from Members during recent Scrutiny Member Training, this included the following points:

- The scrutiny process must be more Member led and Members must take greater ownership
- There must be time made available to engage in scrutiny investigations/info gathering. Time committed must be utilised efficiently
- Members need to work on prioritisation
- Members need to work on identifying sources of verbal and written evidence and assessing the value of them.
- Members should review decisions post implementation
- Members must feel able to challenge evidence presented
- Any papers/ reports/evidence must be presented in a timely way
Members can say that they won't consider issues presented late

5. MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members Suggestions for future Scrutiny review items

5.1.1 Following the canvassing of Members, both in 2015 & 2016 the following topics have been suggested as potential scrutiny review items:

2015:

- Frequency of emptying of litter/dog bins (Scrutinised dog fouling in 2013)
- Recycling (Scrutinised in 2013/14)
- Facilities in open spaces (bins to benches to play equipment)
- Employment advice, training and skills for young people (Scrutiny completed February 2013 and revisited in December 2014)
- Fly tipping, and how SBC interacts with other agencies i.e. Environment Agency
- Environmental Law (EU Regulations) and how SBC interprets them
- Large Recycling containers around shopping precincts e.g. The Oval Car park. Are they in the best position?
- Green Travel Plan (Revisited by Members in 2015)
- Opportunities for encouraging more biodiversity in SBC verges, through the cultivation of wild grass meadow flowers along selected verges. (This issue was addressed by a Local Community Budget grant).

- Herts Highways – Scrutiny of the repairs to main roads in Stevenage such as Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way. (This is a County Council function so not suitable as a scrutiny theme)
- Litter Picking
- Collection of recycling from small centres i.e. car parks

2016:

- Open spaces – perhaps linked to public health. How is the Council using its leisure facilities and open space to promote public health?
- Play areas – rationalised some years ago with a plan to enhance/maintain those retained but due to funding cuts this has been thwarted. Officers have identified that this issue will be reviewed internally in 2016-17 so would not be suitable as a scrutiny review item. However, Members could meet with Officers to carry out some policy development of this issue.
- Public Realm – does the planned maintenance of the public realm align with that of the County Council?
- Cleaning of Underpasses, frequency of the current cleaning regime.
- Allotments. Officers have suggested that this would be a useful piece of scrutiny to gauge how local communities are helping to run these community assets.
- Employment advice, training and skills for young people. This idea was raised in 2015-16 and raised again in 2016. Officers have said that this issue was scrutinised in 2012-13 and revisited again in 2015, there are currently no staff to support such a review.
- Local Neighbourhood shopping centres: How can they be improved, what are their future prospects? How can the Council encourage small businesses to locate in them? Officers have said there are some barriers to carrying out a lengthy review of this area linked to the Council's regeneration programme for the Neighbourhood Centres, including timing, finance and officer capacity.
- Neighbourhood maintenance. The Chair, Cllr Michael Downing has said he would speak to Cllr Simon Speller re Co-operative Neighbourhood Management to see if there is any scope for scrutiny with this work. This would cover looking at the "friends of" groups like Town Centre Gardens and the engagement of local communities to get the public to "own their patch"
- The promotion of publicly available toilets across the Town and within the regenerated area will be a key requirement for scrutiny. This would involve the provision of toilets in public buildings and ensuring suitable access to information on their location.

5.2 As described above a number of the topics suggested in 2015 were covered by Member briefings such as fly tipping, environmental law and recycling. Other matters have recently been scrutinised by Members (but were raised by Members new to the scrutiny process), this included issues such as dog fouling, littering, refuse and recycling employment advice, training and skills for young people. The Green Travel Plan was also revisited by Members in

2015. The suggestion regarding Biodiversity was addressed by a Local Community Budget application. Hertfordshire Highways is not a matter that can be effectively scrutinised by the Council as it is a County Council function.

- 5.3 As detailed at 4.2 officers are attending a training seminar in March 2016 at the Institute of Local Government, University of Birmingham which will address the issue of the pros and cons of having longer detailed reviews versus simpler and shorter reviews with effective recommendations made with minimal or no supporting report at all. Members are therefore recommended to agree a 'long list' of items for potential scrutiny reviews, see Recommendation 2.2, following which a decision can be taken as to which approach best fits Scrutiny Members and meetings and reviews be arranged accordingly.
- 5.4 If Members agree to a 'long list' of scrutiny themes then these could be grouped into themed areas which could be tackled at one off themed meetings. Taking the issues that Members have raised and that Officers have suggested could be effectively scrutinised these could be grouped into the following themed areas (i) Cleaning and Maintenance of Public Realm, including the provision of public toilets; (ii) Open spaces linked to the public health agenda; (iii) Allotments; and (iv) Neighbourhood regeneration and maintenance. Following these themed meetings agreed actions and recommendations would be first agreed with the Committee and then raised with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and officers. Alternatively Members may wish to focus on one of the themes suggested above and continue to undertake a more detailed review.
- 5.5 Work Programme Schedule for 2016/17
- 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 2016/17 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 CSC Members.
- 5.6 Future Town Future Council
- 5.6.1 In future years each Scrutiny Committee should be mindful of the nine themed areas of the Chief Executive's Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme. As these strategically important projects are delivered over the coming five years, Members may wish to align their Scrutiny Work Programme against the delivery these projects. However, it should be noted that the FTFC has its own governance arrangements that will ensure it is regularly reviewed and scrutinised, therefore any scrutiny activity carried out by Members that aligns to the FTFC projects will be in addition to and complement those governance arrangements and therefore there is not a requirement on Members to choose these projects as a Scrutiny review theme.

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 four years including those that have previously been revisited are as follows:
- Residential Parking – Use of Garage Compounds (Completed March 2012. This issue was revisited when Members carried out policy development on Garages Asset Management Plan, February 2016)
 - Fixed Penalty Notices (Dog Fouling) (Completed January 2013)
 - Refuse & Recycling (Completed January 2014)
 - Inward Investment Opportunities & Business Support (Completed June 2012 and revisited in February 2015)
 - Training & Employment Opportunities for Young People (Completed February 2013 and revisited in December 2014)

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2016/2017

- 7.1 Following consultation with the Strategic Director (Environment) and the Heads of Service for Planning, Regeneration and Transport; Property and Estates; and Environmental Services the following matters have been identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the Portfolio Holders for Environment & Regeneration and Economy, Enterprise and Transport during the Municipal Year for 2016/2017:
- Play Areas – Lead Officer, Lee Myers
 - Co-mingling of Recycling - Lead Officer, Lee Myers
 - Planning Policy - The Local Plan - Lead Officer, Zayd Al-Jawad
 - Planning Policy - CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) - Lead Officer, Zayd Al-Jawad
 - Planning Policy - potential Article 4 Direction (requiring planning permission) for HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) - Lead Officer, Zayd Al-Jawad
- 7.2 In line with organising meeting dates to deliver the Committee's work programme, as detailed at section 5.5.1, dates for the above Policy Development items will be scheduled into Members diaries once the relevant Head of Service confirms when Scrutiny Members can undertake this work, ahead of consideration by the Executive. If any further matters are identified by officers Members will be notified and a meeting invitation sent to Members in due course.

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 Select 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 to 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

None

APPENDICES

None