

**Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY
SELECT COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 4

Date: 1 MARCH 2017

2017/2018 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, and from the public (see section 5), the Committee determine the subject matters to be added to a 'long list' work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2017/2018.
- 2.3 That the comments regarding the Future Town Future Council programme and the relationship between Scrutiny and the officer Senior Leadership Team (see section 5.4 & 5.5 respectively) be noted.
- 2.4 That consideration be given to including in the work programme specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).
- 2.5 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 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/unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.
- 3.2 During January and February 2017 Members provided feedback on current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2017/2018 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 2017 all Members of 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 (12) 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:
 - 4.2.1 Opposition Members to Chair Scrutiny Committees - "Some of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees should be allotted to the opposition parties."

Response: Officers are unable to comment specifically about this suggestion. However, there are many different scrutiny models in operation in different local authorities within local government. Some authorities invite the opposition to chair scrutiny committees others do not, as such this is a matter for the majority group as this is in their gift who is nominated as Scrutiny Chairs, which are agreed at Annual Council.

- 4.2.2 Improve the Scrutiny presence on the SBC website – "The Council's website could be updated with some of the information about the most extensive investigations. A lot of work goes into these and they need to be more easily accessible to the public."

Response: Over time many 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 have begun the process of collating these documents into a single spreadsheet with hyperlinks to previous scrutiny activity. However, this is a time consuming process and will require more work before this is accessible via the Council's web site. This issue was

raised by Members previously, and the Scrutiny Officer has it as an objective to make progress in this area.

- 4.2.3 Access to previous scrutiny reviews – “I would be interested in having access to previous scrutiny topics, we could see what was done and the outcome and whether recommendations had been implemented.”

Response: Ditto the response provided at 4.2.2.

- 4.2.4 Fewer reviews – “Not too many reviews in one year, so that enough time is given to the topic to be scrutinised properly.”

Response: There is a balance to be struck with the resources available. Previously Members have indicated that they appreciate the in-depth reviews but also welcome a shorter look at some issues.

- 4.2.5 Linking the Modern Member Programme with issues raised by Scrutiny Members – “Better connection with the Executive and the MMP events. Feedback that addresses suggestions from Scrutiny.”

Response: The Scrutiny Officer is happy to explore with lead officers for the MMP events whether the issues raised by Members through scrutiny could, in part, inform the MMP events. This suggestion will be fed into the review of Member Training and Development activities.

- 4.2.6 More resources – “More resources (not going to happen).”

Response: Under the ongoing budgetary pressures it is not envisaged that further resources to support scrutiny can be made available. However, supporting scrutiny is seen as a feature of the work of the Assistant Directors, see paragraph 5.6.

- 4.2.7 Choice of topic – “The most important thing is the choice of topic – it should be focussed and with the ability to recommend changes that will actually be implemented.”

Response: Work Programme topic selection is very important, that is why Members dedicate time each year to consider what matters each Committee wishes to focus on. Scrutiny reviews make recommendations to the Executive and the Strategic Leadership Team, it is hoped that these recommendations are both evidenced based and reasonable and might, therefore, be implemented.

- 4.3 Members have also previously provided feedback following 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

4.4 The Scrutiny Officer and the Assistant Director Corporate Services & Transformation attended a training seminar in March 2016 at the Institute of Local Government, University of Birmingham, which addressed the issue of the pros and cons of having longer detailed reviews versus simpler and shorter reviews. The consensus from the training is that there is no single approach to carrying out Scrutiny and both approaches can be used, as there are pros and cons with either method. For example, if Members conduct longer detailed reviews then they can have some confidence that their outcomes and recommendations will be robust and evidenced based. However this approach is time consuming and takes up a lot of resources. In contrast if the objectives of a shorter review, ideally 1 meeting with responses reported to a later meeting, are modest, then it is possible to look at more issues during the year but the quality of the outcomes and recommendations may not be as robust compared to a longer review.

4.4.1 Therefore continuing with a mix of, longer in-depth reviews including witness interviews and site visits etc. and shorter one-off discussion items with responses reported back to the Committee would appear to be the best use of the current resource, but this is a matter for Scrutiny Members to decide.

5. MEMBERS' & RESIDENTS' 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 2016 & 2017 the following topics have been suggested as potential scrutiny review items:

2016:

Issues raised in 2016 by Scrutiny Members but were not scrutinised by the Committee:

- Open spaces – “perhaps linked to public health. How is the Council using its leisure facilities and open space to promote public health?”
- 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 raised this under Co-operative Neighbourhood Management to see if there was 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”

2017:

- Flood Risk Management – “including surface water flooding (Roebuck fields July 2015) and Shephall; SBC/HCC Officer liaison & input into local flood risk management strategy for Herts; public engagement; Section 19 Investigations; Suds (Sustainable Drainage System) Policy”
- Local Implications of Climate Change – “possibly as a Member briefing on the practical implications of climate change and how small local measures can mitigate its impact”
- Stevenage Indoor Market – “as an important base for small businesses in the town – indoor markets role in supporting business start-ups and self-employment; sustainability & cost of existing site? and “ Is it being run properly on a commercial basis? Do we attract stallholders & footfall?”(x3 suggestions)
- Refuse and Recycling Services – “opening times at the recycling centre/cost of junk orders; providing low cost solutions for disposal of large items for those on low incomes” and “Waste and Recycling Contracts & frequency of collections” (x2 suggestions)
- Enforcement of litter and street permit licences – “I’m interested in enforcement of litter and also stalls that set up without a permit – and also I’ve seen collection of money illegally”
- Highways – “I’m aware that this is not an SBC service but not happy with the service we are getting from HCC”
- Household Energy Efficiency & Solar Energy Use
- Buses – “what can be done to protect and improve the local services – perhaps a one-off briefing with all the relevant people around the table”
- Economic and Cultural value of town twinning to Stevenage residents (cross cutting with Community Select Committee)
- Safety of cycleways (x2) & pavements including lighting
- Lack of trees in the High Street
- Continuing lack of facilities in parks, particularly on Sundays
- Face to Face interaction between officers and residents – “My residents would like more face to face interaction with officers”
- Car Parking

5.1.2 Issues raised by residents via social media and the website

5.1.3 Following use of the Council's corporate social media (twitter and facebook) as well as pages on the SBC website the following issues have been raised by residents. For brevity the residents suggestions have been abridged:

5.1.4 fly tipping/ hare coursing/ ingress into the SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) sites and adjoining farmland by off roader bikes and 4x4s/ metal detecting/ fly grassing and roaming horses/ general upkeep of the lanes

The above suggestions were linked to a general comment from a resident that when these issues have been reported to the Police they do not attend and when discussed with SBC over the last five years on numerous occasions no solutions are found.

5.1.5 Street signs & overgrown trees "how visible street signs are with regards to maintaining the shrubberies around them? There are many street signs faded and in need of replacement." (The resident was informed that SBC had recently scrutinised this issue when it reviewed the maintenance of Trees, Hedges and Shrub beds)

5.1.6 Street Lighting (x2) (i) "Street lighting plays a part this time of year, the lack of it. I live in an area where the majority of residents are of the older generation in warden controlled houses. It's an issue that needs raising not just to save costs but actually for residents safety," and (ii) "How stupid it is turning street lights off at night, it's a burglars dream." (The residents were informed that this is a County function and HCC Scrutiny had recently scrutinised this issue when it reviewed the effect of the Partial Night Lighting)

5.1.7 Refuse & Recycling (x2) (i) "Please sort out the bin problem. It would be nice to have a better solution to all these recycling boxes sat outside piled one on top of the other." (an officer response on the current regime and future plans for recycling were provided to the resident) and (ii) "Do the bin men have to block the entire road off when trying to go to work or take children to school... Is it not possible to have them stop in busy streets for school runs or start after 9am? (This matter was passed to Environmental Services for them to comment on the specific issue the resident raised, on a more general note the residents were informed that the theme of Refuse and Recycling had recently been reviewed)

5.1.8 Highways (x2) (i) "The roads in Stevenage are appalling. You pay out for repairs that are cheap and only last weeks before potholes form again, then we wait months again to have those same now bigger potholes repaired. Please fix it properly, not cheaply the first time. A road that is re-laid properly should last for years." (The resident was informed that this is a County function and not something that SBC can scrutinise) and, (ii) Highways & Street Lighting "I recently had to walk to the town centre at 4.30am to catch an early morning bus to Luton airport. There was no street lighting making it difficult to see, and the roads and paths were icy and not gritted. I believe that the street lights are being upgraded to use LED units, which are cheaper to

use, why can't that saving be used to leave the lights on at night?" (The residents were informed that this is a County function and that HCC Scrutiny had scrutinised this issue when it reviewed the effect of the Partial Night Lighting)

- 5.1.9 Bus Service Cuts "Can we have the evening bus service on the SB8 restored? At present it stops at 7pm and was cut last year. Public bus services should be just that - a public service, they should not be for profit or shareholder gain but be affordable, frequent and reliable. I would also like to see a restoration of the bus link to London. The cut to bus services is having an adverse effect on people's ability to keep in touch with loved ones and is adding to the feeling of isolation."
- 5.1.10 Town Centre Regeneration The long overdue plan to regenerate Stevenage town centre seems bogged down by conflicting demands. A face lift could have been delivered long ago by using an architectural cladding, covering the open areas with glass, and adding more planting to soften the area. There should be a continuous and unobstructed pedestrian/cycle link from the Roaring Meg to the Old Town in the form of a Broadway with trees, green areas, with seating and lighting to make it feel safe and pleasant to walk along, with kiosks and a tram link to help increase footfall throughout. Also consideration should be given to road crossings. Pedestrians and cyclists should not be forced to navigate steps or ramps or dark underpasses. Too often there has been consideration only for car users when designing these areas.
- 5.1.11 Lack of Park amenity in Symonds Green There is the lack of a decent park in the Symonds Green area, it requires paths, shrubbery, trees, water features, cafe and bandstand for outdoor festivals. I can't understand why this area lacks many of the amenities enjoyed by other parts of the town.
- 5.2 Members are asked to consider which of the above items they wish to include in their work programme and which approach they favour to review the items, based on those suggested at paragraph at 4.4 and 4.4.1, namely a more in-depth review or a one-off discussion item?
- 5.3 Work Programme Schedule for 2017/18
- 5.3.1 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 2017/18 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 E&S Select Committee Members.

5.4 Future Town Future Council

- 5.4.1 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 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.

5.5 Alignment of Scrutiny with the Strategic Leadership Team

- 5.5.1 It is important that the three Scrutiny Committees (Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Community Select Committee and the Environment & Economy Select Committee) are aligned to the new Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), as such the following Scrutiny Committees are covered by the relevant nine Assistant Directors and SLT areas:

- Customer – Community Select Committee:

Assistant Director Housing & Investment, Jaine Cresser
Assistant Director Communities & Neighbourhoods, (To be appointed)

- Place – Environment & Economy Select Committee:

Assistant Director Direct Services, (Permanent post to be appointed – Interim Kevin Basford)
Assistant Director Regeneration, (Permanent post to be appointed -Interim Noel O'Neil)
Assistant Director Housing Development, Ash Ahmed
Assistant Director Planning & Regulatory, Zayd Al-Jawad

- Transformation & Support – Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

Assistant Director Corporate Services & Transformation, Richard Protheroe
Assistant Director Finance & Estates, Clare Fletcher
Assistant Director Corporate Projects, Customer Services & Technology, Clare Watson (from April 2017)

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 will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair/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 Strategic Directors, Scott Crudgington, Matt Partridge & Tom Pike).

- 5.7 Strategic Director, Matt Partridge from the Senior Leadership Team will provide overall support for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Tom Pike.

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 and also those that have been revisited within the last four years are as follows:

- Refuse & Recycling (Completed January 2014)
- Maintenance of Trees, Hedges and Shrub beds (Completed February 2015, revisited October 2016)
- Briefing on the Green Travel Plan – Action Plan (Revisited with officer briefing September 2014, October 2015 and again in November 2016)
- Briefing on Cleansing of Children's Play Areas (January 2015)
- 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)
- Business Technology Centre Review (Completed January 2016, update to Exec response July 2016)
- Briefing on Fly Tipping, Littering & Environmental Law (January 2016)
- Allotments (Completed January 2017)
- Briefing on Open Spaces (September 2016)
- Briefing & site visit report on Underpasses (September 2016 and updated November 2016)
- Briefing on the Provision of Public Toilets (October 2016 & to be revisited March 2017)
- Revisit to Recommendations and agreed actions from the Review of Environmental Campaigns & Fixed Penalty Notices (Dog Fouling) (October 2016)

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2017/2018

- 7.1 Following consultation with the Assistant Directors for Stevenage Direct Services (Interim – Kevin Basford), Regeneration (Interim – Noel O'Neil),

Housing Development, Ash Ahmed and Planning & Regulatory, Zayd Al-Jawad, 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 2017/2018:

- Recycling – Options of Future Direction - Assistant Director, (Interim – Kevin Basford)
- Car Parks Strategy - Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawad
- Town Centre Manager's Annual Report - Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawad
- Business Relationship Manager's Annual Report - Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawad

- 7.2 In line with organising meeting dates to deliver the Committee's work programme, as detailed at section 5.3.1, dates for the above Policy Development items will be scheduled into Members diaries once the relevant Assistant Director 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 of £2,500 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

Submissions from Councillors and the Public.

APPENDICES

None