

**Meeting: OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 4

Date: 20 MARCH 2014

2014/2015 SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

Authors – Jackie Cansick Ext. 2216
Contributors – Stephen Weaver Ext. 2332
Lead Officers – Scott Crudgington Ext. 2185
Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext. 2332

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Workplan for the Overview & Scrutiny 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 consideration be given to including in the workplan specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).
- 2.4 That the Policy Development work identified for the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.
- 2.5 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 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Select 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 the relevant 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 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Budget & Policy Framework Items
- 3.7.1 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 2015/2016 HRA and Rent Setting
 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
 - Savings and Growth Proposals
 - Stevenage Borough Local Plan
 - Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule
 - Council Tax Support Scheme
- 3.7.2 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.

4. SCRUTINY – SUMMARY OF EVALUATION BY MEMBERS

- 4.1 In February 2014 all Members of Select Committees and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 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 should be conducted in more detail with more meetings but understand that resources & officer time are limited
- The Portfolio Holders should have no influence during deliberations
- Continued monitoring of previous reviews should take place
- 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 through January and February 2014 the following topics have been suggested:

- SBC Media and Communications, including (i) supporting community development/community groups (ii) public and internal communications expenditure and (iii) Communications between SBC and Stevenage residents – specifically the website and how information is relayed in printed form (suggestion from 3 O&S Members)
- Use of LCBs: ‘whether individual members are really getting value for money from their LCBs’ and ‘Grant funding/LCB in respect of guidelines on what is considered appropriate/acceptable funding and what checks are in place in to verify the integrity of the bid prior to it being submitted to Councillors (suggestion from 3 Members). This suggestion has also been raised with the Community Select Committee as a potential joint review with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Section 106 funds: amounts, transparency and accessibility - suggest a proper "root and branch" review (from Sports Stevenage and 1 O&S Member)
- Potential development of the Community Councillor role as part of a “Co-operative Communities” priority, including LCB’s as levers/pump primers (suggestion from 1 O&S Member)

- The "Co-operative Council" branding and failures in community consultation: especially the Comet article before Christmas re cutbacks (from Sports Stevenage)
- The major item on the programme every year should be the Budget. The Committees should concentrate on those items listed under areas of responsibility, prioritised according to the vulnerability to major financial risks (suggestion from 1 O&S Member)
- Impact of any actual redundancies including support available from SBC (suggestion from 1 O&S Member)

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 –
- Treasury Management Strategy
 - Members' Expenses and Hospitality

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2014/2015

- 7.1 The following matters have been identified, in consultation with the Strategic Director (Community), for potential Policy Development to be worked on with the Portfolio Holder for 2014/2015 –
- Design of the 2015/16 Council Tax Support Scheme
 - Looking after the towns assets - a sustainable capital strategy
- 7.2 Any further information available regarding other Policy Development for the Committee 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