

**Meeting: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 4

Date: 14 MARCH 2016

2016/2017 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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1. PURPOSE

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That feedback received from Scrutiny Members detailed at section 4 of the report be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas previously agreed and suggestions put forward by individual Members the Committee are invited to agree which items to add to its work programme as outlined in the report (see section 5).
- 2.3 That the Committee will resume the review into Communications following the completion of the LGA Peer Review into the Council's Communications.
- 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 for the Committee (see section 7.1) be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Select 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 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 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 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.
- 3.6 A draft calendar of meetings for 2016/2017 will be 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 will be reserved and once the Work Programmes 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 2017/2018 HRA and Rent Setting
- General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
- Savings and Growth Proposals
- Stevenage Borough Local Plan
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- New Homes Bonus Allocations

- 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. MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2016 all Members of Scrutiny Committees were emailed to gauge Members 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 really 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 – “we need to be careful that the topic isn’t too big or becomes too big, for example the LCB scrutiny raised a lot of issues that need to be looked up but could not be addressed sufficiently in the Scrutiny, for example, town wide versus ward funding, ward Councillors working together . I do think an MMP would be of great help and would be a good opportunity for peer learning.

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 – “I thought that the CSC review into Locality Budgets has been very good. I think 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 more 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 Following the canvassing of Members, both in 2015 & 2016 the following topics have been suggested as potential scrutiny review items:

- The way the Council Consults with residents (this issue has also been raised with the Community Select Committee, so it could be looked at jointly with that Committee)
- Scrutiny of the councils' interaction with residents. "How we disseminate information, how we consult and how we respond to feedback. Several consultations have very low returns and some of our community engagement goes unnoticed because it is not promoted efficiently. This could include social media as well as traditional forms of engagement and communication" (this issue has also been raised with the Community Select Committee, so it could be looked at jointly with that Committee)
- The transfer of various responsibilities and agency agreements to the county council over the last few years (this issue has also been raised with the Community Select Committee, so it could be looked at jointly with that Committee)
- Success of Shared Services? Revenues and Benefits? The IT Partnership with East Herts DC, how well is this working? (Previously raised by the SD Resources)
- Public Engagement - the annual survey- "does it ask the right questions? What are we doing with the answers?" (this issue has also been raised with the Community Select Committee, so it could be looked at jointly with that Committee)
- How is the Council preparing to deliver digital services?

5.2 Work Programme Schedule for 2016/17

5.2.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Community Select Committee the Scrutiny Officer will, using the agreed dates for generic Select Committee meetings in the Calendar of Meetings, draw together a work plan schedule for the 2016/17 Municipal Year which will be circulated to Members, and electronic diary invites will be sent to all CSC Members.

5.3 Future Town Future Council

5.3.1 It is hoped that in future years Members will be able to align the Scrutiny Work Programme for each Scrutiny Committee against the delivery of the nine themed areas of the Chief Executive's Future Town Future Council programme, as these projects begin to be delivered.

5.4 Continuation of the review into Communications

5.4.1 In line with recommendation 2.3 the Committee will resume the review into Communications following the completion of the LGA Peer Review into the Council's Communications. When the LGA review is complete Members will be invited to consider the Peer review outcomes against the original Scrutiny review Scoping document to see where Members can add value.

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 Scrutiny 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 Five years include –

- Communications 2015-16 (not yet completed)
- Section 106 Agreements 2014-15
- Members' Expenses and Hospitality 2013-14
- Council Tax Support Scheme 2012-13
- Treasury Management Strategy 2011-12

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2016/2017

7.1 The following matters have been identified, in consultation with the Assistant Director (Finance), for potential Policy Development to be worked on with the Portfolio Holder for 2016/2017 –

- Design of the 2017/18 Council Tax Support Scheme (Summer 2016)
- CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)
- Potential Article 4 Direction (require planning permission) for HMOs

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

None

APPENDICES

None