

**Meeting: OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item: 4

Date: 21 MARCH 2017

2017/2018 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 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 scrutiny Select Committee.
- 3.4 Officers have also been requested to bring to the Committee's attention Policy Development items that the 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 2017/2018 will be circulated to Members which 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. Details of the timing of Policy Development meetings will be circulated to Members following the advice of the relevant Assistant Directors.

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 2017 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 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: Given ongoing budgetary pressures it is not envisaged that further resources to support scrutiny can be made available, unless activities elsewhere in the Council are deprioritised. However, supporting scrutiny is a key focus 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 evidence 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 for the Select Committees 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.
- 4.4.2 With regards to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee much of its time is taken up with scrutinising the work of the Executive Committee as meetings are routinely scheduled within the Executive decision “call-in” period, as well as meeting informally to carry out Policy Development work on matters before they are considered at the Executive. With this in mind Members are asked to consider how they might effectively carry out any further scrutiny reviews. Perhaps briefings and discussion items on any issues that Members are interested in would be an option given the time and resource constraints on the Committee.

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:

Issues raised in 2015 & 2016 by Scrutiny Members but were not scrutinised by the Committee:

- The way the Council Consults with residents
- 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”
- The transfer of various responsibilities and agency agreements to the county council over the last few years
- Success of Shared Services? Revenues and Benefits? The IT Partnership with East Herts DC, how well is this working?
- Public Engagement - the annual survey- “does it ask the right questions? What are we doing with the answers?”
- How is the Council preparing to deliver digital services?

Potential Scrutiny Issues raised by Members in 2017:

- The way we consult: “I am not sure whether this is covered by Scrutiny, but I have had complaints about the way that Council consults its

residents. This was specifically about parking, but it seems like there are some flaws in the way we ask residents for their views on things” (Officer Comment: This work will be picked up by the Communications LGA Peer Review and subsequent O&S Review. This matter was also raised at the Community Select Committee who have asked for a copy Terms of Reference/Scope of the LGA Peer Review)

- Scrutinise the scrutiny process: “Can we scrutinise the scrutiny process and look at other Councils models” (Officer Comment: There is potentially some scope in discussing with the Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network if there is capacity amongst other Hertfordshire authorities in carrying out a peer review. Also Members could be provided with some desk top research on other models that are in operation)
- Success or otherwise of services and responsibilities that have been transferred to the County Council since 2001
- Indoor Market: “Is it being run properly on a commercial basis? (**X3 suggestions**) How do we attract stallholders and increased footfall?” (Officer comment: This matter was also presented to the E&E Select Committee, who agreed to include this in their work programme, so any scrutiny by the O&S would need to be joint with E&E)
- Golf Club: “What is the financial viability of the Golf Club?” (Officer Comment: on the back of an external review of the leisure management contract a piece of work is currently be undertaken in conjunction with SLL and the Council’s consultants to look at options for developing new income streams and reducing costs across the leisure facilities including the Golf Course. The outcome of this piece of work can be shared once completed which is likely to be in April / May 2017).

5.1.2 Issues raised by residents via social media and the website

5.1.3 This year the Council’s corporate social media (twitter and facebook) as well as pages on the SBC website were used to encourage residents to raise scrutiny issues. The issues that were raised by the public were directed to both the Community Select Committee and the E&E Select Committee for them to consider as part of their work programme. There were no issues raised that specifically relate to the O&S Committee.

5.2 Members are asked to consider which of the above items at 5.5.1 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 or briefings where Members can ask questions and make comment as suggested at 4.4.2?

5.2.1 Members should note that whatever issues they agree to be scrutinised as a main review item would be subject to a full scoping process and subsequently a scoping document would need to be agreed by the Committee at a future meeting. Other items which can be addressed by a briefing/discussion item may not require a full scoping document.

5.3 Work Programme Schedule for 2017/18

5.3.1 When the Scrutiny Work Programme is agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees 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 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 Council's Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) programme. As these strategically important programmes are delivered over the coming years, Members may wish to align their Scrutiny Work Programme against their delivery. 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.

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:

5.5.2 Customer – Community Select Committee:

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

5.5.3 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

5.5.4 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 Assistant CE's, Scott Crudginton, Matt Partridge & Tom Pike).

5.7 Strategic Director, Matt Partridge from the Senior Leadership Team has overall responsibility 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:

- Section 106 Agreements 2014-15
- Members' Expenses and Hospitality 2013-14
- Council Tax Support Scheme 2012-13

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2017/2018

7.1 Following consultation with the Assistant Directors for Corporate Services & Transformation, Finance & Estates & Corp Projects and Customer Service & Technology (To be appointed) the following matters have so far been identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the Municipal Year for 2017/2018. Further Items may be identified by officers at the meeting:

- Digital Strategy
- Co-operative Council Commitment Refresh (Summer 2017)
- Consultation Strategy (Autumn 2017)

- 7.2 In line with organising meeting dates to deliver the Committee's work programme, as detailed at section 5.3.1, dates for 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