

Meeting ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area

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ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME ITEMS FOR 2024-25

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year from a list of suggested possible work programme items by Members.

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 determines the subject matters to be added to a work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2024/25.
- 2.3 That the process to carry out pre-scrutiny policy development work (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 and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.

- 3.2 During January 2024 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2024/25 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, likely pre-scrutiny policy development items that the Select Committee might be requested to consider and comment on before reports there 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. During the summer the Committee will receive a copy of the Action Tracker for the Community Select Committee at which time the Committee can note progress on past reviews and determine whether they wish to bring back any further detailed updates on specific former review items at that time.
- 3.6 It is recognised that there is a limited dedicated officer resource for the scrutiny work of three Scrutiny Committees and therefore it is important to ensure that work plans 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. To make best use of the resource it is suggested that each Committee chooses 1 substantive review item for the year which will be the Committee's main review, undertaken over several meetings. In addition, the Committee could receive several one-off single issue performance items and a number of pre-scrutiny policy development items during the year.

4 MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING SCRUTINY

- 4.1 In January 2024, all Members of the Council's 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 5 replies received from the 25 Members who are on one or more of the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- 4.2 Members were asked to (i) comment on current scrutiny activity and (ii) identify any issues that could be addressed to improve the current arrangements and (iii) state what training needs they may have. Members provided comment and challenge around the following areas that relate to the Environment & Economy Select Committee

Survey Question 1 - Please rate the following aspects of this year's scrutiny activity:

Ever – the review into teenage pregnancy. Recently – the necessary review into progress with the climate emergency. Grinding slow but starting to get the outcome-based information we need and some evidence that the issue is getting embedded in SBC.

The local bus service review was one of the few topics where I felt the discussion was meaningful and could actually have a beneficial impact on residents and inform my handling of casework.

For outcomes, Climate. The discussion has I believed impacted the direction of SBCs response to Climate Change. For breadth, and relevance to concerns in the community, The Bus Review and the Cost of Living in equal measure.

Survey Question 2 - What aspect of scrutiny could be improved to provide a better scrutiny service?

Confidence in what we are doing. Recognition that scrutiny is not a threat but a necessary part of a Council's work. In theory scrutiny is on a par with the Executive. Maybe but we have got closer to being independent of the Executive with changes to the way chairs are appointed, knowing that the way we investigate is unlikely to be a series of set piece speeches but probing and follow up questions, recognising that scrutiny cannot be whipped (or there would be little point seeking and uncovering information).

More bread-and-butter issues, things people engage with and care about every day. Less focus on high level things, like climate change (which has been done to death). While issues like this are important, with all the best will in the world the realistic ability of the Council to impact these high-level issues is microscopic. More everyday issues that we can have realistic influence over.

More opportunities for pre -scrutiny, so that members impact policy decisions. , though a balance has to be struck with scrutiny work that originates outside of the Exec, or senior leadership team.

Communication between Portfolio Holders and scrutiny. The attendance of Portfolio Holders at scrutiny is mixed.

Sticking to a structure where scrutiny topics come back around again. This has been the case with Climate. The Bus Review deserves an annual airing. I respect there is limited time and resource, and we must prioritise.

Within my own Committee, on large topics like climate (The Chair) needs to delegate more, and give committee members an area to work on, and lead on questions.

Survey Question 3 - Regarding supporting you in your Scrutiny role is there any specific training you would like for next year, and would you (occasionally) like to receive information about possible Member Scrutiny training?

We need training by local government linked organisations outside SBC (e.g. CfPS and successors, LGIU, LGS) so we can explore other ways of doing things and be aware of the risks of not doing scrutiny properly. That must include in person interactive training perhaps working through an example.

I believe scrutiny is an invaluable space to develop thinking around policy areas. In so many areas of the SBCs work national policy is evolving at pace (housing, climate, planning). Scrutiny can be a space where SBCs approach can be modified. This is also an invaluable for member education as well. Member education needs to keep pace with changes in Local Government, but Members have a responsibility themselves to do groundwork on this, and shouldn't expect to be spoon fed by officers.

5. MEMBERS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

5.1.1 In response to Survey question 4 "What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in scrutiny work programme for next year" The table below lists the issues raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items. The Chair's issues are detailed at 5.1.2:

5.1.2 As well as the three priority areas listed in the table below, which the Chair has suggested, the Chair has picked up the views expressed by Members through the year and is aware of the following issues being of interest:

- The value of regeneration in terms of local job creation, in initial construction and added employment opportunities. Town Centre and wider regeneration and Jobs.
- The Bike Hire Scheme – Review early adoption uptake and behaviour change.
- Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Bus Annual Review.
- Community Climate Projects – Outcomes and Process.
- SBC Social Housing Decarbonisation Retrofit for Climate Change agenda – linked to Cost of Living.

Survey Question 4 - What issues would you like to be considered for inclusion in the (E&E Select Committee) scrutiny work programme for next year? (Max 3 items suggested per Member)	What type of review (main, one-off performance or Pre-scrutiny Policy Development,)?
<p>1. <u>Town centre regeneration.</u></p> <p>2. <u>Climate (Ongoing)</u></p>	<p>(1. Main review)</p> <p>(2. One off update – already agreed for annual monitoring)</p>
<p>1. <u>Residential parking</u></p> <p>2. <u>Tree management strategy</u></p> <p>3. <u>Maintenance of the street scene</u></p>	<p>(1. One off performance review)</p> <p>(2. Picked up as a Pre-scrutiny policy development item in Feb 2024)</p>

	(3. One off performance review)
1. <u>The Skills agenda in Stevenage: Testing the local skills development strategy</u> 2. <u>Climate Change Update</u> 3. <u>Update on the station gateway, and new railway station.</u>	(1. Main review) (2. One off update – already agreed for annual monitoring) (3. Main review)
1. <u>Recycling</u> 2. <u>Biodiversity</u>	(1. Main review) (2. (Pre-scrutiny item in Feb 2024))

5.2 **Statutory and Standing Items**

5.2.1 Unlike the Community Select Committee the Environment and Economy has no statutory or standing items but following completion of its review of the Council’s response to the Climate Emergency now has a watching brief on Climate Change.

5.2.2 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 and discussion item, may not require a full scoping document.

5.3 **Work Programme Schedule for 2024/25**

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 2024/25 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 Environment & Economy Select Committee Members.

5.4 **Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny**

5.4.1 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 (ADs) will support each review through its various stages, from scoping of reviews, attending Chair and 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).

5.4.2 The Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy has responsibility for supporting the Environment & Economy Select Committee.

- 5.4.3 Strategic Director, Tom Pike from the Strategic Leadership Team has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny function, deputised by Strategic Director Richard Protheroe.

6 MONITORING REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS VIA THE ACTION TRACKER

- 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 work programme. To help assist Members to consider this, an updated Action Tracker document will be brought to the Committee in the summer and any additional work programme items will need to be added following that meeting.

7 PRE-SCRUTINY POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2024/25

- 7.1 In line with the Council and Executive work plan, items that are identified for potential Policy Development to be undertaken with the relevant Portfolio Holders during the 2024/25 Municipal Year will be diarised as an agenda item. Where dates are known to carry out this work, these will be published in Committee's agreed work programme. It may be necessary, on occasions, for a separate pre-scrutiny policy development meeting to be scheduled.

8 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 8.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Legal Implications

- 8.2. The role of Overview and Scrutiny 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.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.3. 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.