

Meeting OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Portfolio Area
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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for the Select Committee for the new Municipal Year 2018-19.
- 1.2 To consider the issues raised by the Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Select Committee – Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Members’ feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny (see section 4) including their response to the Parliamentary Select Committee into the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees (see section 4.6), be noted.
- 2.2 That having considered ideas put forward by individual Members, and from the public (see section 5), the Committee determines the subject matters to be added to a ‘long list’ work programme of potential Scrutiny reviews items for 2018/2019.
- 2.3 That consideration is given to including in the work programme, specific monitoring or review of recommendations from previous studies (see section 6.2).

- 2.4 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 and unfinished studies, where applicable, might also need to be included.
- 3.2 During January and February 2018 Members provided feedback on the current Scrutiny activity and on ideas for the Work Programme for the 2018/19 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 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. 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.
- 3.6 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 HRA and Rent Setting
 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting
 - Savings and Growth Proposals
 - 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 2018, 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 10 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 Have a better range of witnesses (x2) - "I always think that it would be helpful to have a better range of witnesses, especially external, but appreciate this can be difficult to secure." and "More external witnesses and real life case studies."
- 4.2.2 Have more comprehensive responses from Portfolio Holders – "Better, more comprehensive responses from Portfolio Holders - Officers input during and after scrutiny has been of an excellent nature."
- 4.2.3 Monitoring recommendations – "Revisiting all of the topics within a certain timeframe, as I know for example at least one of the recommendations has not been implemented for the Locality Budgets."
- 4.2.4 Late submission of papers – "Scrutiny Members need time and resources to do the job properly. It is no good providing papers at the last moment."
- 4.2.5 Revise Members taking lead roles on reviews – "We need to revise the intention where Members are given individual areas to cover within a scrutiny."
- 4.2.6 Introduce debriefing sessions – "Introduce debriefing sessions following evidence gathering (which can be shorter meetings to discuss and digest information together)."
- 4.2.7 Scheduling of meetings – "Officers could do with being informed of known information about Members holidays and commitments prior to their setting."
- 4.2.8 Happy with the Service – "Pretty excellent service already"
- 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 and information 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 and evidence must be presented in a timely way
Members can say that they won't consider issues presented late
- 4.4 As part of the 2018 Members' Survey, Members have provided the following comment and suggestions for Scrutiny Member Training:
- 4.4.1 Scrutiny Public Opinion Survey – "I would like to explore setting out a survey in which to collect public opinion – where relevant parties can respond to relevant questions relating to the scrutiny topic, the data from which can be used to supplement scrutiny findings"
- 4.4.2 Improved evidence taking and questioning.
- 4.5 Annual Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference
- 4.5.1 The Scrutiny Officer and Councillor Jim Brown attended the annual Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference, where the following challenges were raised:
- 4.5.2 There was a strong emphasis on pre-decision policy development work with Scrutiny Committees, so to this end Stevenage is moving in the right direction with an increased emphasis on this.
- 4.5.3 Engaging the public in Scrutiny and in Policy Development is a challenge to all authorities and using digital platforms to achieve this is being pioneered by some authorities. Increased and meaningful public engagement can reduce the number of complaints
- 4.5.4 Challenging private partners who run services for local authorities is difficult but vital work which Members need to be prepared to do as they are protecting the public purse.
- 4.6 CLG Parliamentary Select Committee review into effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees
- 4.6.1 As part of the Members' Survey, Members were invited to consider the report and recommendations of the Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Select Committee review of the "Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees." The summary and recommendations of the Parliamentary Select Committee are appended to this report - from this Members raised the following issues:
- 4.6.2 "At Stevenage Borough Council, Chairs of Committees are given independent license to select scrutiny items – including those given by members of the public. We are not guided by the Executive either in any informal way or any formal way.
- 4.6.1 The scrutiny work that has happened and policy development work undertaken has led to positive changes to council policy and kept expectations of services high.
- 4.6.2 The scrutiny practice at SBC has led to external witnesses giving evidence against officer testimony, which has given rise to evidence based recommendations and Committee has been able to identify issues with existing policy."
- 4.6.3 "I tend to agree with Party Politics and Organisational Culture – Point 4. Scrutiny Committees should report to Full Council, then the Executive to respond back to Full Council. Point 5 and 6 we do anyway. I tend to agree

with points 7 and 8, though I think that the Chairs should be opposition Members. Accessing information - As far as I am aware, we receive all the information we require. We do points 12 and 13. Resources – Point 14, might be worth looking into. Point 15 – I think we do this. Point 16 – Might be worth looking into Member training and skills – we get training and can always ask for more. The role of the public – We engage with the public when necessary – not sure about digital engagement. Point 19 – We do this, but maybe more – hence my request – Stevenage Bus Service.”

4.6.4 “In principle, I agree with all the recommendations, of these the standouts are:

That Executive Members should attend meetings of scrutiny committees only when invited to do so as witnesses and to answer questions from the committee. – “This would lead to greater independence of scrutiny committees”

That there is great merit in exploring ways of enhancing the independence and legitimacy of scrutiny chairs such as a secret ballot of non-executive councillors. This “would allow greater involvement of back bench Councillors in the forming of scrutiny committees and give further independence from the Executive.”

There should be a greater parity of esteem between scrutiny and the Executive, and committees should have the same access to the expertise and time of senior officers and the Chief Executive as their Executive counterparts. Councils should be required to publish a summary of resources allocated to scrutiny, using expenditure on executive support as a comparator. – “I would hope by publishing expenditure, the right amount of scrutiny resource could be secured. My personal feelings are that scrutiny and its officers in all councils in England are a Cinderella service, undermanned and under-funded.”

Scrutiny committees must be able to monitor and scrutinise the services provided to residents. This includes services provided by public bodies and those provided by commercial organisations. Committees should be able to access information and require attendance at meetings from service providers.

4.6.5 Personally, I agree that it is inappropriate for scrutiny chairs to be appointed by the Executive.

- Scrutiny members need time and resources to do the job properly. It is no good providing papers at the last moment.
- I wonder if in smallish second-tier authorities it is worth revisiting whether the scrutiny model is better or whether a policy committee model would be more effective and engage members more. Where 29/30 members are not portfolio holders there can be a perception that scrutiny is to keep them busy but they can't actually change anything.
- Members on scrutiny should certainly not be “whipped.” We cannot know in advance what our questions might be as they can be prompted by presentations and remarks by others.

- Here and generally, who actually does policy development for planning?

5. MEMBERS' AND RESIDENTS' IDEAS FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEWS

5.1 Scrutiny Members' Suggestions for Future Scrutiny Review Items

5.1.1 The following issues have been raised by Members as potential Scrutiny review items:

5.1.2 Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) – “Are we getting value for money? Is the service cost effective?” (This issue has also been raised at the Community Select Committee as a potential scrutiny issue and has been added to their long list of possible work programme items).

Comment from the Strategic Director M Partridge: Members may wish to note that an external review of the performance of the Leisure Management Contract was undertaken in 2016/17. A set of actions was agreed with SLL which are being implemented. As a result of this review ongoing reductions in the management fee payable to SLL by SBC were agreed which become effective in the 2018/19 financial year.

5.1.3 Consultation re residents Survey – “Particularly with the experience of the residents’ survey (again) why are there so few younger people being involved in the residents’ survey – a major influence on Council policy? In comparison with the community population too many older people, owner occupiers and women participate in the survey.” (This issue has also been raised at the Community Select Committee as a potential scrutiny issue and has been added to their long list of possible work programme items).

5.1.4 Borough Local Plan – “I mentioned the Borough Local Plan before.”

5.1.5 New Homes Bonus – “We will be getting the New Homes Bonus.”

Officer Comment: This matter will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a pre-scrutiny item at the 19 March O&S Committee.

5.1.6 Digital strategy (x2) - “Not entirely sure what this is but I remember the frustration of some Members that IT are continuously coming back for another £400,000 or so on the promise that things will be better while other services are suffering from austerity and cuts” and “an overview of ICT led services to Council Customers. How do we ensure that customers can access services and information digitally?”

Assistant Director, Corporate Projects, Customer Services and Technology Comment: Digital strategy - The FRFC Connected to Customers Programme is driving the Council’s digital strategy, with priorities in 2018 to deliver a new website as well as more online self-serve options for residents which reduce the number of telephone transactions. The Assistant Director for Corporate Projects, Technology and Customer Services is leading that programme and in November 2017 the Council agreed a Technology Improvement Plan which enables that future on line service offer. A new Digital Transformation Manager role is currently being recruited to provide new digital expertise and

focus, and will design a clear digital work programme for the following years, to be reported in Summer 2018.

- 5.1.7 Bullying and Whistleblowing – “It is happening, how do we keep records and how easy is it for individuals to Whistleblow? I think this subject is worth pursuing but may be a little difficult to ascertain a clear picture. Nevertheless, I believe the subject is valid.”

Officer Comment: Scrutinising this would be very difficult given the need for confidentiality and the small number of cases that have occurred. In January the Council policy on safeguarding was updated and makes reference to the promotion of whistleblowing and there are links to the Council’s policy on Bullying and Harassment.

- 5.1.8 Diversity in the SBC workplace – “What is the percentage of people from diverse backgrounds in the organisation and how are we ensuring we enable their progression. I think this subject is worth pursuing but may be a little difficult to ascertain a clear picture. Nevertheless, I believe the subject is valid.”

Officer Comment: A position statement can be provided to Members as a one-off focus at a committee meeting which could help establish with Members where the Council currently is with this issue and how representative it is with its local population. This could in turn lead on to a piece of future Policy Development work.

- 5.1.9 Sickness – Members raised this when they considered the Performance Report at the O&S Committee in December 2017 and asked that this be put forward as a potential scrutiny review item for 2018-19.

Comment from the Strategic Director M Partridge: At this meeting Members were informed that a new sickness / absence policy was currently being implemented which would take some time to bed in prior to an assessment being made regarding its effectiveness. Further to this the Chief Executive had indicated at the staff roadshows that a conversation concerning this matter would have to take place to understand what officers could collectively do to improve performance.

Through discussion with the Chair it was suggested that when the new sickness absence policy is firmly established Members could look at some baseline data and comment on how successful the authority has been in tackling this issue.

- 5.1.10 Complaints – Feedback Handling - This work was started in 2017-18 but is unfinished and will need to be scheduled for 2018-19 to be completed.

- 5.1.11 Issues Raised by the Public – At the time of writing the report there had been no relevant issues raised by the public for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 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 paragraphs 4.2.1 and 4.4.2, including a more in-depth review or a one-off discussion item?

- 5.3 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.

5.4 Work Programme Schedule for 2018/19

5.4.1 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 programme schedule for the 2018/19 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 Community Select Committee Members.

5.5 Alignment of Scrutiny with the Strategic Leadership Team

5.5.1 It is important that the three Scrutiny Committees (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Community Select Committee and the Environment and Economy Select Committee) are aligned to the 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 for Housing and Investment (Jaine Cresser) and the Assistant Director for Communities and Neighbourhoods (Rob Gregory)

5.5.3 Place – Environment and Economy Select Committee:

Assistant Director for Direct Services (Craig Miller), Assistant Director for Regeneration (Pat Lewis), Assistant Director for Housing Development (Ash Ahmed) and Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory (Zayd Al-Jawad)

5.5.4 Transformation and Support – Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Transformation (Richard Protheroe), Assistant Director for Finance and Estates (Clare Fletcher) and Assistant Director for Corporate Projects, Customer Services and Technology (Clare Watson)

5.5.5 Role of the Assistant Directors and Scrutiny

5.5.6 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 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, Scott Crudgington, Matt Partridge & Tom Pike).

5.5.7 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 Assistant Directors 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.

6.2 Reports within the remit of this Committee that have been issued over the last five years and also those that have been revisited within the last five years are as follows:

- Section 106 Agreements 2014-15
- Members' Expenses and Hospitality 2013-14
- Council Tax Support Scheme since 2012-13
- Media & Communications 2015 & 2018

7. POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR 2018/2019

7.1 Following consultation with the Assistant Directors for Corporate Services & Transformation, Finance & Estates & Corp Projects and Customer Service & Technology 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 2018/2019:

7.1.1 Housing Development: Achieving synergies through the Housing Development Programme with other council priorities.

The Council established as a priority the goal to develop housing in the face of the acute housing crisis facing the town and a target (set by resource constraints and not by aspiration) to deliver 500 homes within 10 years was established. However, in pursuit of this target the Housing Development team has not simply opted to deliver the cheapest, smallest and most speedy of schemes. Instead we have sought to identify development opportunities that whilst demonstrating value for money, also demonstrate quality in design & size, affordability in terms of running costs, and provide for the whole town's needs. As the Housing development team draws these priorities and guiding principles into a development strategy, it would seem an appropriate subject matter for Overview & Scrutiny Committee to explore.

7.1.2 Council Tax Support Scheme and Universal Credit

7.1.3 Diversity in the SBC workplace

7.2 Any further issues that the Assistant Directors can give notice of for Policy Development work in 2018/19 will be updated at the meeting.

7.2.1 In line with organising meeting dates to deliver the Committee's work programme, as detailed at Section 5.4.1, dates for the above Policy Development items will be scheduled into Members' diaries once the relevant Assistant Directors confirm 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. These meetings will be informal Policy meetings Chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and supported by the relevant Assistant Director.

8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial Implications

- 8.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- 8.1.2 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

- 8.2.1 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.

8.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.3.1 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 DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Submissions from Councillors and the Public.

APPENDICES

Appendix - CLG Parliamentary Select Committee report and recommendations – Effectiveness of local overview and scrutiny committees