

**WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COORDINATING GROUP**

**17 JUNE 2021**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Potential work programming process for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees</b>
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**List of Appendices**

None

**1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for the Scrutiny Work Programming process and timetable for 2021/2022.

**2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 Effective work programming establishes directed scrutiny of issues of local importance and ensures that Scrutiny adds value and makes a difference
- 2.2 Work Programming is the planning stage. Potential topics for scrutiny are identified for the year. These will be investigated either at a Committee meeting or through time limited Task and Finish Groups. It is typical for a long list to be drawn up initially that is reduced to a short list before a final work programme is approved.
- 2.3 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) states that an effective work programme is central to effective scrutiny. Therefore, a good Scrutiny Work Programme ensures that the Committees are focussing on priority issues, making best use of both time and resources. The

designing of a Work Programme for Scrutiny can promote public participation, transparency and demonstrate good governance.

- 2.4 The Coordinating Scrutiny Group will approve the Work Programmes for the three Scrutiny Committees.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee considers the proposals contained within this report as set out at paragraphs 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 and agrees the Scrutiny work programming process and timetable for 2021/2022.

#### **3.2 Reason for Recommendations**

- 3.2.1 One of Overview and Scrutiny's key roles is to undertake focussed work programming in order that it is ensured that Scrutiny contributes actively to the Council's objectives.
- 3.2.2 Each of the three Scrutiny Committees should have a Work Programme for the year, every year. This report sets out examples of best practice of how this could be achieved for the Committee's consideration, comment and approval.

#### **3.3 Option one**

- 3.3.1 A Work Programming event is scheduled for the summer 2021 that will engage all Scrutiny, other non-Executive Councillors and Cabinet Members in the format of an interactive workshop.
- 3.3.2 Prior to the event a short questionnaire could be devised asking just one question "what do you want overview and scrutiny to investigate over the next 12 months." It could be produced via an online survey, such as *SurveyMonkey* and shared by the communications team through the Council's various social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This would encourage public participation in the work programming process. This method has been used by a Local Authority previously and around 50 suggestions for potential scrutiny were received each; many of which have influenced the Work Programme. The suggestions would be summarised in table format for consideration by non-Executives.
- 3.3.3 Cabinet Members could be invited to the beginning of the event and each Cabinet Member would speak of their priorities for the year. From this, ideas for pre-decision scrutiny could be proposed for inclusion within the work programmes of each Scrutiny Committee. Pre-decision scrutiny is an important part of the Scrutiny function as it investigates a planned decision shortly before it is to be made by Cabinet; or it can carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the planned decision several months before it is considered by Cabinet. Pre-decision scrutiny is recognised as an effective means of scrutiny. Non-executive Councillors would have the opportunity to ask questions of the Cabinet Members at the event. Following Cabinet's presentations, they would leave the event; taking no part in further discussions being held by non-Executives regarding the drawing together of potential work programmes.

- 3.3.4 Executive Directors and Assistant Directors could be invited to attend the event and would offer advice on suggestions for potential Scrutiny review; for example, whether the issue was already being looked at within the service area, such information is important as to avoid duplication.
- 3.3.5 The Work Programming event could be set out in three separate groups of non-Executives, each group led by a Chair of the Scrutiny Committees. Each group would be asked to identify up to six key topics (a long list) for each of the Scrutiny Committees to include within its annual work programme. The Groups could consider the suggestions proposed by the public, suggestions put forward by Cabinet for both scrutiny review and pre-decision scrutiny and suggestions that non-Executives have themselves.
- 3.3.6 The groups would be given up to 60 minutes to suggest a long list of potential Scrutiny reviews and pre-decision scrutiny. The Chairs of the Groups would report back their individual Group's suggestion. A long list of topics would then be produced which would be considered by the Co-Ordinating Scrutiny Group; who would propose a short list of suggestions for each Scrutiny Committee to consider and them formally approve its work programme for 2021/2022.
- 3.3.7 The Work Programmes could comprise:
- Pre decision scrutiny topics
  - In depth Scrutiny Reviews, to be undertaken by time limited Task and Finish Groups set up by the Scrutiny Committees. The Chairs of the Task and Finish Groups would provide a short progress report to each meeting of the parent Scrutiny Committee.
  - Inquiry Days for short, sharp scrutiny reviews
  - Performance monitoring
- 3.3.8 The Work Programme should retain flexibility so that urgent items could be incorporated within the year as required.
- 3.3.9 Each Scrutiny Committee would monitor its Work Programme at each meeting.
- 3.3.10 Option one would allow for public participation in the work programming process and would give every Councillor the opportunity to be involved in the process.

### **3.4 Option 2**

- 3.4.1 A further option could follow a similar format to option 1, as above, but each Committee could hold a separate work programming event. This option would be more time consuming and could impact on time and resources.

### **3.5 Option 3**

- 3.5.1 The Scrutiny Committees could meet informally to discuss topics for inclusion within its work programme for the year. The Chair would then formally report back the suggestions to a meeting of the Co-Ordinating Scrutiny Group and the work programme would be formally

approved. This option would involve only Members of the Committee and could be seen to have limited other non-Executive involvement.

#### **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny and Governance advocates that scrutiny committees should agree a work programme at the start of each Municipal year; in order that issues can be scheduled for consideration and reports produced in a timely manner.
- 4.2 The Work Programming should consider the four core functions of scrutiny:
- Holding the Executive to account
  - Policy development and review (often carried out in the format of Task and Finish Group or Inquiry Days)
  - Performance monitoring and
  - External Scrutiny (agencies external to the Council)
- 4.3 It could also consider:
- The corporate priorities of the Council
  - Views of other Councillors, not a member of a Scrutiny Committee
  - Best practice in terms of the process for work programming
- 4.4 There is no set method of work programming for Scrutiny; each Local Authority devises its own methodology. However, the role of scrutiny should be focussed, and the work programming should be prioritised rigorously. It is usual for the work programme to be delivered by a combination of Committee work and Task and Finish Groups that could include committee reports by officers and external representatives, standing committee agenda items such as performance monitoring, scrutiny reviews. Evidence gathering could include consultations, workshops, evidence gathering sessions and site visits.
- 4.5.1 There is a need for flexibility within each Committee's work programme to allow for new topics to be included that could emerge during the year.
- 4.5.2 The Council's constitution states that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees will consult with other parts of the Council as appropriate, including the Cabinet, on the preparation of any work programme.

#### **5 Issues and Choices**

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- 5.5 The Committee is asked to consider the options for potential work programming as set out in paragraphs 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 of this report and agree the work programming process for the Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2021/2022. The Coordinating Scrutiny Group is responsible for approving the work programmes of the Scrutiny Committees.

## **6 Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **6.5 Resources and Financial**

**6.5.1** There are no immediate financial implications arising from the proposals.

### **6.6 Legal**

**6.6.1** Overview and Scrutiny operates within the provisions as set out in the Local Government Act 2000, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It has had specific powers relating to health services since 2001 and the crime and disorder since 2006.

**6.6.2** As set out in Part 7, paragraph 7.1.3 of the constitution “The Overview and Scrutiny function will develop a work plan as well as supporting policy development, providing pre-decision scrutiny where appropriate, holding decision-makers to account and exercising the formal call-in of executive decisions to review any concerns about the making of the decision.”

**6.6.3** Part 7.2 of the Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules states:

1.2 the Overview and Scrutiny Committees will consult with other parts of the Council as appropriate, including the Cabinet, on the preparation of any work programme.

1.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will take into account any views expressed following consultation under Rule 1.2 above in drawing up any work programme. They should take into account the resources, both Officer and financial, available to support its proposals.

### **6.7 Risk**

**6.7.1** To comply with the requirements of the Council’s Constitution, the work programmes of the three Scrutiny Committees must be formally approved by the Co-Ordinating Scrutiny Group.

**6.7.2** Scrutiny is essential to good governance and enables the voice and concerns of residents and communities to be heard and provides challenge and accountability.

### **6.8 Consultation**

**6.8.1** The various options as proposed at paragraphs 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 include the opportunity for non-Executives, Cabinet, the public and officers to be involved in the Work Programme process.

**6.8.2** Each meeting of the Scrutiny Committees will include the work programme as an agenda item, providing Members to comment on and input to the Committees work programme further.

## **6.9 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

**6.9.1** Any comments received by Members of the co-ordinating Scrutiny Group will be included in the final report regarding the Work Programme.

### **6.10 Climate Impact**

**6.10.1** There are no immediate climate impact implications arising from the proposals.

### **6.11 Community Impact**

**6.11.1** Scrutiny work will need to assess the implications of any recommendations made, including equalities and community cohesion implications.

## **7 Background Papers**

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None