

ANNUAL SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY AND MEMBERS' SUPPORT COORDINATOR

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide options, provide support and advise Members on the development of the scrutiny work programmes for 2020/21.

2. DETERMINING SCRUTINY ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMMES

- 2.1 Members are required to determine the work programmes for their respective scrutiny committees to give focus and structure to the scrutiny activity to ensure that it effectively and efficiently supports and challenges the decision-making processes of the Council, and partner organisations, for the benefit of the people and communities of Sunderland City Council.

Principles Guiding the Development of Scrutiny Work Programmes

- 2.2 The following key principles should be taken into consideration when determining scrutiny work programmes:

Selectivity – Given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time constraints on Members and officers it is important that priority is given to key issues. Members should consider what can realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what each session is intended to achieve.

Value – Items should have the potential to 'add value' to the work of the council and its partners. If it is not clear what the intended outcomes or impact of a review will be then Members should consider if there are issues of a higher priority that could be scrutinised instead.

Ambition – Scrutiny Committees should not shy away from carrying out scrutiny of issues that are of real concern, whether or not they are the primary responsibility of the Council. The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to promote economic, social and environmental well being of local communities. Subsequent Acts have conferred specific powers to scrutinise health services, crime and disorder issues and to hold partner organisations to account.

Flexibility – Members are reminded that there needs to be a degree of flexibility built into each work programme to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration/comment during the year and

accommodate any developmental or additional work the falls within the specific committee remit.

Timing – Scrutiny activity should be timely and, where appropriate, the findings and recommendations inform the wider corporate developments at a time when they can achieve the most impact. All Members should look to avoid duplication of work carried out and the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee can assist in preventing this from happening.

Models for Carrying out the Work of Scrutiny Committees

- 2.3 Topics for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme will vary from single issue items for consideration such as policy and performance reports through regular updates on issues that the committee have adopted a more focused monitoring role to in-depth policy reviews.
- 2.4 There are a number of ways that Scrutiny Committees can deliver these topics through their work programmes. Members should consider the appropriate option to undertake each of the items selected for inclusion in the work programme. This may take the form of regular, on-going task such as the scrutiny of Cabinet business, performance reports or the annual budget, or alternatively, specific one-off issues, task and finish groups or in-depth policy reviews.

Support available for Scrutiny Activity

- 2.5 The Overview and Scrutiny function has dedicated scrutiny support from the Scrutiny Team to:
- Work with the Scrutiny Chairs to manage the work programme and coordinate the agenda, including advising officers and partner organisations on information required and guidance for witnesses submitting evidence to a scrutiny committee;
 - Provide support to scrutiny members through briefing papers, background material, training and development seminars etc.;
 - Facilitate and manage the work of any task and finish groups or policy reviews, including research, arranging site visits, inviting and briefing witnesses and drafting review reports for discussion and approval by the Committee; and
 - Promote the scrutiny function across both the organisation and externally.

3. OPTIONS FOR SETTING THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMMES

- 3.1 Each Scrutiny Committee sets its own agenda within the scope of its terms of reference. There are a number of potential methods that can be utilised to assist members in debating key issues to develop and populate the respective scrutiny work programmes.

- 3.2 Scrutiny is a member-led function of the council and however work programmes are developed there is an important role for Members to highlight issues of concern within their local communities. Elected Members are best placed to provide local knowledge and raise key community issues that could be added to the appropriate work programme either at the development stage or at any time during the committee cycle.
- 3.3 It is important to recognise the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the considerable implications for all facets of service delivery for the Council, its partners and the wider community.
- 3.4 There are also a number of potential scrutiny issues arising from the pandemic which would benefit from scrutiny involvement, including some of the legislative changes brought about as part of the Covid-19 response.
- 3.5 There will also be the issue of Member, Officer and partner involvement in any scrutiny activities that will, most likely, be difficult to organise in the initial aftermath of the lifting of current government restrictions, but this will allow time to plan and develop a suitable approach to work programme planning for the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Scrutiny is a Member led process and the work programme of each committee is owned, populated and monitored by Members of that committee. The work programme remains an important document as the schedule for each committee's work throughout the year. Therefore, work programme planning is an important aspect of the committee role and function and having as much contribution and input as possible will provide an ambitious and relevant work programme for the coming year.
- 4.2 The Covid-19 crisis has obviously impacted the work programme planning which would normally have taken place in May/June 2020, and with social distancing still in place a large-scale event would not be recommended currently. However, there is still the opportunity to develop work programmes during July/August through individual workshops which are more manageable through the processes that will be in place at this time to address the Covid-19 crisis.
- 4.3 The Committee cycle allows for the continued monitoring and development of the work programme through a regular agenda item and the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, in its coordinating role, allows for a complete overview of the scrutiny work programmes throughout the year.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That consideration is given to developing the scrutiny work programmes through individual workshops organised and developed through the scrutiny function. The workshops will take place during July/August and will aim to provide a number of relevant issues and topics for consideration and approval by the respective scrutiny committees.

Contact Officer: Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer
0191 561 1396
James.diamond@sunderland.gov.uk