

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 DECEMBER 2021

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE, MEMBER AND SCRUTINY MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: NOT APPLICABLE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report highlights items scheduled in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme and items that may be considered in 2021/22. It includes details of those items that have yet to be assigned to a specific meeting.
- 1.2 The work programme includes both items previously agreed by the Committee and those that the Committee is required by the Constitution to consider.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee prioritises proposed topics for inclusion in the work programme attached as Appendix A and, where appropriate, determines the high level form and timing of scrutiny input.
- 2.2 That the Committee, having considered the Forward Plan attached as Appendix B, suggests a list of items to be considered at its meeting on 18 January 2022 and beyond.
- 2.3 That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Extract as attached as Appendix C be considered.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To allow the Committee to set a work programme which provides focussed Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Committee has varied its approach to overview and scrutiny activity over recent years. Currently it seeks to enter the process of policy development at an early stage and consequently may consider items associated with service action plans.
- 4.2 The need to observe Constitutional requirements and monitor the Forward Plan for appropriate items to scrutinise remains a key aspect of work programming.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Each Committee meeting includes the opportunity for Members to comment on and input to the Committee's work programme.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.
- 6.2 The Committee is asked to review the Forward Plan at each regular meeting to identify potential issues for inclusion in the work programme. Identification of a focus for the Committee's future activity should be identified at this stage wherever possible.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 In line with the recommendation of the Corporate Peer Challenge 2020 Executive Members are invited to present reports that fall under their remit and to make presentations on specific issues that the Committee wish to consider.
- 7.2 The Committee now considers a wide range of issues, where appropriate, commencing its reviews early in the policy development process. By doing this it seeks to ensure assumptions are challenged at an early stage, mistakes are avoided and eventual outcomes provide optimal benefit to the community.
- 7.3 The Committee seeks to ensure that consideration of agenda items minimises additional burdens on staff resources. Wherever possible, requests are made for the presentation of documents already in existence rather than the production of new documents specifically for the Committee.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Work Programme

- 8.1 The Committee's work programme for the year requires reviewing at each meeting and direction is sought from the Committee on the items they wish adding. Appendix A contains the work programme for 2021/22
- 8.2 When considering additional topics, their risk assessment and prioritisation will ensure that the most appropriate items are taken forward to the work programme.

Forward Plan

- 8.3 The Forward Plan for 5 November 2021 is attached at Appendix B for consideration.

Corporate Peer Challenge

- 8.4 The Committee agreed at the meeting held on 14 July 2020 that the actions regarding the Overview and Scrutiny Committee included in the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan be appended to all future reports in order to:

- Act as an aide memoire when considering the work programme;
- Consider any actions that need further work;
- Asses the effectiveness of changes made.

- 8.5 The Committee is asked to consider the Action Plan and any updates provided at Appendix C.

- 8.6 In respect of line 56 regarding formal training for Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee training options are being explored for provision in the new Civic Year.

- 8.7 Members are asked to contact the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager if they have any particular suggestions regarding this proposed training.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Under Section 6.2.5 of the Constitution, the Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme. However, it must ensure it retains sufficient capacity within the programme to meet its statutory obligations.

- 9.2 Section 6.2.7 (u) of the Constitution allows the Committee “to appoint time limited task and finish Topic Groups to undertake detailed scrutiny work and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet.”

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Dependent on how they are applied in practice, the scope of the options presented in Sections 7 and 8 have the potential to be wide reaching. As detailed Section 14, Human Resource Implications, the wider the reach, the more significant the impact on officer time in terms of report writing, data analysis and committee meeting attendance. Given recent funding pressures and the consequent reduction in officer numbers, significant requests to support scrutiny work will limit officer time available to spend on activities such as identifying and delivering cost reductions, income generation and project management.

- 10.2 Although not significant, a committee attendance allowance of £25.17 per officer per evening meeting is payable to officers in attendance. This is in addition to providing time off in lieu, or overtime as an alternative.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Effective overview and scrutiny of policy, administrative, service delivery and expenditure decisions helps reduce the risk of an inappropriate decision being made. The scope and time frame for scrutiny interventions should be considered in the light of the potential impact of inappropriate scrutiny leading to decisions not being made, inappropriately made or not made at the right time.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no direct equality implications arising from the report. Effective scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains transparent, accountable and open which ensures that the delivery of public services benefits all aspects of the community, where practical.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The widening of the reach of scrutiny reviews has the potential to significantly impact on officer time in terms of the reprioritisation of already agreed projects, their scope or timetabling and resources. There is also the potential for additional resource requirements in relation to report writing, information collection and analysis and committee attendance. Delivery of service plans to achieve the Council’s agreed Corporate Plan objectives might, therefore, be potentially negatively impacted.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix A – Work Programme for future Committee meetings
- 15.2 Appendix B – Forward Plan for 5 November 2021
- 15.3 Appendix C – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan in regard to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 16.1 William Edwards
Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager
01462 474259
ScrutinyOfficer@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.2 Reuben Ayavoo

Policy and Community Engagement Manager
01462 474212
reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk

16.3 Legal Services
LegalServices@north-herts.gov.uk

16.4 Human Resources
HRhelp@north-herts.gov.uk

16.5 Ian Couper
Service Director- Resources
01462 474243
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk

16.6 Tim Everitt
Performance Improvement Officer
01462 474646
Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1. Previous reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and forward plans.