OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 March 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: NOT APPLICABLE

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights items scheduled in the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2024-25 civic year. It also includes items that have not yet been assigned to a specific meeting of the Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Committee prioritises 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 most recent iteration of the Forward Plan, as attached at Appendix B, suggests a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.

2.3. That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan as attached at Appendix C be considered.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3.2 The need to observe Constitutional requirements and monitor the Forward Plan for appropriate items to scrutinise remains a key aspect of work programming.

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.

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 Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

6.2 The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee are sent the latest Forward Plan upon publication.

6.3 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 The LGA Peer Committee Support was undertaken in 2022 and finalised in January 2023, which focused on the Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees. Recommendations for Overview & Scrutiny were made and are set out in the Action Plan at Appendix C.

7.2 In line with the recommendation of the Corporate Peer Challenge 2023 Executive Members were invited to present reports that fall under their remit and to make presentations on specific issues that the Committee wish to consider.

7.3 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.

7.4 The Committee seeks to ensure that consideration of agenda items minimises the 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 items they wish adding. Appendix A contains the work programme for 2024-25.

8.2 When considering additional topics their risk assessment and prioritisation will ensure that the most appropriate items taking forward to the work programme.

Forward Plan

8.3 The Forward Plan for February at Appendix B. Members can view currently published forward plans here: Browse plans - Cabinet, 2024 | North Herts Council (northherts.gov.uk)

8.4 Members are reminded that the Forward Plan acts as public notification of key executive decisions during the next four months and beyond that it is a working document subject to regular amendments.

Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

8.5 The Committee agreed at the meeting held on 20 June 2023 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.
- Assess the effectiveness of changes made.

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

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Under section 6.2.5 the Constitution, the Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme however it must ensure it retains sufficient capacity within the programme to meets 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.”

9.3 In accordance with the Council’s Constitution, the approval of the future scrutiny work programme falls within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Depending 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 in 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 for 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 timeframe for scrutiny interventions should be considered in 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 this report. Effective scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring the 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. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no known environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 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 or 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.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024-2025

16.2 Appendix B – Forward Plan – 14th February 2025

16.3 Appendix C – Corporate Peer Committee Support Action Plan in regard to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Previous Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Forward Plans.