

Committee: Scrutiny

Agenda Item

Date: 8 July 2008

6

Title: Scrutiny Work Programme

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Item for decision

Summary

1. The Committee has previously considered a possible work programme for 2008/09 and at the last meeting it was decided that the draft programme be examined by members and officers and reconsidered at this meeting.
2. This report sets out some options for taking forward a programme of work that emanates from the previous draft, but more closely reflects the capacity available to resource the function.
3. The report also provides a suggested approach for taking forward the programme and involving members.

Recommendation

4. That the committee considers and determines its programme, as indicated in paragraphs 17 to 19 of this report.

Background Papers

None

Impact

5.

Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	It is intended that any actions arising from this report are funded from existing budgets.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	None

Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

Background

6. The Committee has previously considered a possible work programme for 2008/09 and at the last meeting it was decided that the draft programme (copy attached, with comments where appropriate) be examined by Members and Officers and reconsidered at this meeting.
7. Since the last meeting, the Head of Performance has secured a position with another authority and has left the organisation. In the short term, this has further reduced the limited officer time available to support the scrutiny function and it has been decided that, for the time being, the Interim Change Manager will work with this Committee.
8. Following informal discussions with the Chair of this Committee and the Interim Chief Executive, the author has prepared this report for members' consideration.

Possible areas of work

9. The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Committee include 'to monitor and review policy and advise policy committees and/or the Council as appropriate'.
10. Many of the items included in the initial draft of the work programme are over-ambitious, given the resources available and taking into account that the Committee is still 'finding its feet'. However, I have considered some possible areas of work that do arise from the suggestions contained in the draft programme and should be more manageable and relevant to the council in the short term.
11. Items could be undertaken as a discrete piece of work, which would not only help to develop the approach to scrutiny, but would also provide useful contributions to areas of policy development.
12. The work could be time-limited and, as far as possible, organised in a way that ensures that it fits within the relevant timetable for action.
13. The following are suggested areas where Scrutiny Committee could take a leading role :
 - A review of fees and charges – with particular reference to ensuring equality of treatment in concessionary charging. (A piece of work was initiated some time ago under the auspices of the then Review and Petitions Committee, but was not concluded and did not appear to address the issues of concessions). If this piece of work were undertaken first, it could aim for any recommendations to be picked up as part of the 2009/10 budget process.
 - Access to Services Inspection – the Performance Select Committee has recently received a report (see Agenda Item 11 of the Performance Select Committee papers for 24 June 2008) on

progress in implementing recommendations from the Audit Commission's inspection in 2007. This committee could possibly take on the role of monitoring further progress – a useful contribution towards a review of community engagement arrangements.

- Value for Money – the Council's approach to value for money is somewhat ad hoc, and could benefit from a review, for example, of how this issue is approached by other authorities.
14. In addition, some initial work has been done previously on the subject of the maintenance and management of public conveniences in the district. This work could continue to be included in the programme, with a view to bringing it to a conclusion.

The approach

15. Members of the committee could have an ongoing involvement in the chosen project, rather than awaiting reports from meeting to meeting. One way of approaching this would be for a small group of, say, three or four members of the committee to work with the appropriate officer(s) on some of the detail of the chosen topic. Once that piece of work is nearing conclusion, a different group could start work on the next chosen topic, thereby giving an opportunity for all those who wish to do so to become more involved in the work of the committee over a period of time.
16. This approach could be trialled during the current municipal year and then reviewed prior to the annual meeting in 2009.

Decisions required

17. The Committee is invited to:
- consider whether to adopt the approach outlined in this report;
 - if so, to confirm the first topic to be dealt with under this process; and
 - identify a small group of members to work on the topic.
18. The Committee is also invited to consider what further action should be taken in relation to the review of public conveniences.
19. Subject to the decisions on the above, it is suggested that the draft programme referred to in paragraph 6 above be further considered as part of a possible work programme for future years.

Risk Analysis

20.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That work is not satisfactorily concluded and therefore does not assist the Council in policy development.	1	2	The Committee ensures that work on its programme is undertaken, as planned