

Committee: Scrutiny

Date:

Title: Work Planning

4 March 2021

Report Author: Richard Auty
Assistant Director – Corporate Services

Summary

1. This report sets out a suggested approach to developing the Scrutiny work programme for 2021/22, If successful, it can be used for subsequent years.
2. The approach is based on a recommended model from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGs).

Recommendations

3. The committee agrees the approach set out in this report.

Financial Implications

4. None – there are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 6.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Communication/Consultation | Scrutiny Committee members can consult with colleagues over possible topics |
| Community Safety | None |
| Equalities | None |
| Health and Safety | None |
| Human Rights/Legal Implications | None |
| Sustainability | None |
| Ward-specific impacts | None |

| | |
|---------------------|------|
| Workforce/Workplace | None |
|---------------------|------|

Situation

7. The Scrutiny Committee has not had a formal work programme in place for 2020/21 due mainly to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on resources as the council has had to deal with the emergency response and maintain normal council business as far as possible. The committee has managed its business well during this very difficult time, although several work streams have been slow to progress.
8. For 2021/22 committee members may consider it beneficial to have a more structured work programme in place with clearly defined topics, timescales and methods. Such a work programme can ensure sufficient time is spent on matters that the committee considers most important and prevents meetings from becoming overwhelmed with business. It would also ensure any scrutiny reviews were conducted at a reasonable pace to ensure final reports and recommendations are delivered in a timely manner.
9. The CfGS provides advice on the subject of work programme and the methodology outlined in this report is based on work the CfGS has done in other councils, adapted for Uttlesford District Council's structures and working practices.
10. In formulating a work programme, the Scrutiny Committee should consider the following:

Creating space for the most important things

- You can have more impact by doing less, but doing it really well
- Ask yourself, what 'value' can scrutiny add to this
- Ensure that the committee is not 'bogged down' with routine information reporting but focuses on what's really important for the future
- Set agendas that are laser-focused on a limited (perhaps two) key items per meeting

The inputs to your work programme

- Deliverables from the council plan (Corporate Plan and its Delivery Plan)
- Big projects and initiatives
- Cabinet Forward Plan
- Important issues that affect all or large parts of the community

What to leave out

- Reports presented routinely for information
- Update reports where scrutiny input is not required/necessary

Other ways to ensure oversight or scrutiny

- Task & finish groups to look at issues in more depth and detail to assist in shaping future policy etc. However, CfGS says these should be “used really sparingly”
- Using Members more to organise and investigate
- Individual committee members taking the lead on questioning for individual topics

11. **It is your work programme** and it is up to members what to include and what to leave out. However it is important to focus on the issues of importance as outlined above.

12. There are several inputs to a work programme and ideally it would include a mix of these inputs.

13. This is a matrix for generating potential scrutiny topics:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>CORPORATE PLANS (list 1)</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <p>Corporate Plan</p> <p>Delivery Plan</p> <p>Officer recommendations</p> | <p>MEMBER IDEAS (list 2)</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <p>Committee Member interests</p> <p>Discussions with the wider Council membership</p> |
| <p>COMMUNITY CONCERNS (list 2)</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <p>Partner organisations</p> <p>Community groups</p> <p>Parish/Town councils</p> <p>NOTE: Ensure the criteria for community input is clear to avoid issues which may not be suitable for scrutiny</p> | <p>CABINET INPUT (list 1)</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <p>Cabinet forward plan</p> <p>Discussions with the Leader and Portfolio Holders</p> |

14. For the purposes of developing a long list, these inputs can be divided into two categories:

- Topics devised from work set out by the Executive and contained in formal strategies and plans (list 1 topics)
- Topics devised from discussions with community groups/members/officers (list 2 topics)

15. Excluding Local Plan specific meetings, the Scrutiny Committee is timetabled to meet six times each year. The February meeting is reserved for budget matters. If the committee aims to have focused but in-depth discussion at meetings, it would be appropriate to limit each meeting to two main topics.

16. It is also important to leave some degree of flexibility in the programme for matters that may arise during the course of the year, although it must be remembered that Scrutiny should not, and does not have the capacity to, take on every request it receives.

17. Therefore assuming each topic will require two sessions at committee meetings it would be sensible to begin the year with a work programme comprising no more than five main topics.

18. Although not explicitly mentioned in the matrix, members should also consider how data can be used to generate or inform potential topics. An example is the Local Authority Health Profile data published by Public Health England. Members could consider any areas where Uttlesford is an outlier and what the council can do to make a positive difference.

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/health-profiles/2019/E07000077.html?area-name=Uttlesford>

19. The following is a suggested approach to prioritising potential topics. It is based on a CfGS methodology.

Develop your priorities

20. Using the inputs set out previously in this report, write a long list of potential Scrutiny topics. Your list should contain between five and 10 topics, ideally sourced from a variety of inputs.

21. Committee Members may wish to consider giving responsibility to one member, such as the Chair, to speak to the Leader and cabinet about potential topics.

22. The Committee may wish to allocate one member to liaise with the Corporate Management Team.

23. It is up to the Committee to decide if they wish to meet informally to discuss any matters during this process, but ultimately each member should submit their own long list.
24. To give committee members some assistance in devising their long list, the Chair and Lead Officer offer a few suggestions. The list below includes work that is currently paused. Members will need to include sufficient time for these topics in the work plan should they wish to continue them:
- The deliverability of the Climate Change action plan
 - Services provided to residents by other agencies (for example Essex County Council, the Police and Fire Commissioner, West Essex CCG)
 - Post-Covid economic recovery – how the council can support businesses during a time of transformation in response to ongoing risks
 - Airport Fly-Parking
 - Major planning applications

Prioritising

25. Once each committee member has completed their long list, they submit it. The ideas will be collated and a final long list will be sent back out, along with a scoring sheet. Selecting what to scrutinise and what you can afford to leave out or deal with in a different way will mean giving more priority to some things and less to others.

Scoring - setting a rationale for prioritising

26. Each member will, individually, score these priorities. A scoring system is below. It is important to stay objective when awarding scores. Members would score each suggested topic on the four criteria below, with a score from 1 to 5 for each criterion.

Scoring criteria

High general public concern

27. Is this topic something that affects or is of concern to a large part of the local population? Could it impact on them or affect them? Is it high profile and is there local interest?

Critical to council priorities and plans

28. Is this something the council is committed to deliver and is an important part of the council plan? Is it important that there is open and transparent accountability for it?

High financial value

29. Is there a significant amount of money involved or could there be? Are there implications for future budgets?

Risks in successful delivery

30. Is this a complex issue or project which may be subject to a risk of underachieving its objective or exposing the council to extra cost and or negative reputational impact?

31. If members agree this approach, a scoring sheet would be sent out for each member to complete individually and submit. From that, scores would be collated and a top 5 scrutiny topics devised from it.

32. Timescales are to be agreed but it is suggested that committee members are given about four weeks to complete both parts of this task. This should give sufficient time for the results to be reported to the April 2021 Scrutiny Committee meeting, the date for which is yet to be agreed. If that meeting takes place in late April, it would be possible to slightly extend the time available.

Risk Analysis

33.

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions |
|---|--|---|---|
| The committee does not agree this approach, or an amended version of it, leading to the lack of a work plan for 21/22 | 1 – the committee has previously acknowledged the need for a work plan | 2 – Scrutiny would be much less likely to add value | The approach outlined in the report is based on tested CfGS methodology and gives all committee members the opportunity to input into the creation of the work plan |

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.