

**Committee:** Scrutiny

**Date:** 22 June 2023

**Title:** Work Planning

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## Summary

1. The Scrutiny Committee is required to approve an annual work programme.
2. This report presents the work programme for 2023/24 as at June 2023 and explains the approach to work planning which has proven successful over a number of years.

## Recommendations

3. The committee approves the work programme, accepting that there will be in-year amendments.

## Financial Implications

4. None

## 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.

The Uttlesford District Council Constitution

## Impact

- 6.

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Communication/Consultation      | The work programme is developed in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Scrutiny and the wider membership of the Scrutiny Committee |
| 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. Under the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Committee (Article 4, Section 2.4), it is a responsibility of the committee to: *“approve an annual work programme, including the programme of any sub-committees they appoint so as to ensure that the committees’ and sub-committees’ time is effectively and efficiently utilised”*.
8. The approach to work planning for the Scrutiny function has evolved over the last few years, with various approaches tried. The successful elements have been adopted; the less successful have not been repeated.
9. The Scrutiny function has benefitted from keeping a good amount of flexibility in its plan. Inevitably, matters can arise during the course of any year and having the breathing space in the work programme to accommodate such matters has been of real benefit over the last four years.
10. Additionally, there are some items which would benefit from pre-scrutiny but which cannot yet be timetabled. These can be added to the work programme in the coming weeks and are detailed later in this report.

## Existing work programme items

11. As part of its work to monitor and scrutinise work in the executive’s areas of responsibilities, the committee has received regular reports on key areas of work. It is proposed that this practice continues during the 2023/24 year and items have been added to the work programme accordingly:
12. **Economic Development Recovery Plan** – this three-year plan was originally established to support business recovery after the Covid pandemic. It continues to support economic recovery, particularly through the cost-of-living crisis, but also delivers work through four sub-priorities:
  - Business engagement and support
  - Skills and training
  - Inward investment
  - Creating a Greener Local Economy
13. Funding totalling £1 million was allocated to delivering the plan and this year (2023/24) is the final year of that funding.

14. **Climate Crisis Action Plan** – A Climate Crisis Strategy was approved by Full Council in 2021 and an action plan developed to deliver the strategic aims. The plan covers both inward and outward-facing initiatives. It is currently being reviewed to ensure its focus is targeted at fully deliverable actions.
15. Funding totalling £1 million was allocated to climate crisis actions. Additional funding continues to be secured from external sources.
16. **Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy** – All, or at least the bulk, of the February meeting each year is given to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget papers. These include the General Fund budget, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. Scrutiny is the first body of the council which considers the budget papers. From the committee, they go on to Cabinet and finally Full Council for approval.
17. **Corporate Plan** – the committee has in previous years commented on the Corporate Plan, which sets out the council's priorities for the next four years. Because there was an election in May, work has only recently started in earnest on the new Corporate Plan. It will be brought to the committee when ready.

#### **Other work programme items**

18. There are other areas of work which, subject to the Committee wishing to see them, will undergo pre-scrutiny ahead of Cabinet discussion.
19. **Blueprint Uttlesford** – This is the council's transformation programme and the vehicle through which the necessary budget savings and organisational change will be delivered over the next four years. The project will report regularly to Cabinet and the additional input of Scrutiny Committee could be of benefit.
20. **Performance Monitoring** – Once the responsibility of the now former Governance, Audit and Performance (GAP) Committee, Full Council voted in May 2023 to move this responsibility to Cabinet along with merging the remaining responsibilities of GAP with the Standards Committee to create the new Audit and Standards Committee.
21. What this means for Scrutiny is that it can request the quarterly performance monitoring data ahead of presentation to Cabinet. The committee may not wish to see it every quarter but it is suggested that the first quarter is brought to the committee so it can get a feel for what the report looks like and decide how best it can contribute to the performance monitoring process. It may be, for example, that the committee may wish to focus on a particular area of concern at a future meeting, rather than monitoring the entire suite of performance indicators.
22. Members should note that the performance report that will be presented to Cabinet is not the same as that which was presented to GAP – the basket of indicators has been streamlined and over time benchmarking data will also be introduced.

23. At the time of writing, the performance reporting timetable was not available so it has not yet been possible to include it on the work programme document.
24. **Local Plan** – During the last four years, the committee established Local Plan-specific Scrutiny Committee meetings. The intention was that the committee would monitor progress while the Local Plan Leadership Group would be the body at which policy development was discussed. In practice, it was found that this separation was difficult to maintain and much of the Local Plan work ended up being double-handled, with similar discussions taking place twice.
25. Local Plan scrutiny meetings will therefore not be organised in this council term; however it remains in the committee's gift to request occasional Local Plan reports be brought to the committee should there be areas of sufficient concern.

### **Matters raised by members**

26. In addition to all of the above, there are a number of other potential areas of work which have been raised. It is probably not realistic to incorporate all of these in the work programme, but ultimately it is for the committee to set the work programme it wishes, taking into account officer advice.
27. **Social Housing Delivery** – the opportunities to deliver new council and other social housing in the district.
28. **Minor applications** - the quality of service and process for determination. It may be appropriate to discuss this when the first quarterly performance report is presented to Scrutiny.
29. **Investments** – The council has an Investment Board which monitors the performance of the council's commercial investment portfolio and reports into Cabinet but changes to the portfolio might merit Scrutiny input.
30. **External issues** – the Scrutiny Committee can request attendance from external public bodies if it wishes. Some years ago the committee had more of a focus on this than on internal council matters but experience suggests it is not a particularly effective use of the committee's time. While there is no requirement for representatives from such bodies to attend, the Committee is within its rights to ask. There has been a request from a non-committee member, via the Chair, for the committee to consider issues around water supply/pollution.
31. The committee also now has the responsibility to carry out the functions assigned to a Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee as per Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. This is a relatively recent addition to the committee's responsibilities and has yet to be enacted. The Act states:

*Every local authority shall ensure that it has a committee (the "crime and disorder committee") with power—*

*(a) to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions;*

*“(b) to make reports or recommendations to the local authority with respect to the discharge of those functions.*

32. The full text of Section 19 can be read here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/48/section/19/enacted>

33. Consideration will need to be given as to how best to meet the requirements of the Act.

### **Scrutiny Committee Maturity**

34. This final section of the report briefly considers the maturity level of the Scrutiny function in the council. It is officers' view that the maturity level of the committee has increased over the last four years. The following table sets out levels of maturity:

| <b>Level of Maturity</b> | <b>Structure of work</b>  | <b>Behaviours</b>  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Immature                 | Focus on post-decision call-ins<br><br>Work topics influenced by party political loyalties or personal views              | Obvious party lines<br><br>Conflict over control             |
| Semi-mature              | Pre-Cabinet scrutiny<br><br>Work topics considered in an open and independent way   | Evidence of trust and respect between Scrutiny and Executive |
| Mature                   | Meaningful policy development role<br><br>Work topics considered in conjunction with Executive to bring the greatest good | Strong mutual trust and respect                              |

35. Officers' view is that the scrutiny function has moved firmly into the semi-mature space, with a noticeable shift away from use of call-in powers (which are still available should they be required) to consistently applied pre-scrutiny of Cabinet decisions. This scrutiny can be, and often is, robust but also fair and considered.

36. Accepting that pre-scrutiny must remain a major part of the committee's role, a further move towards policy development at a point over this four-year term would only be of benefit to the council and the public it serves. It will require equal commitment from the Executive and the committee and is a longer-term aim but is included in this report to bring it to the committee's attention at the earliest opportunity.

### **Risk Analysis**

| Risk   | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions   |
|--|------------|--------|--|
| The work programme is either too busy to effectively deliver outcomes, or focused on matters which will not bring the greatest benefit | 2          | 2      | Committee acknowledgement that it is better to do a few things well than attempt to take on too much |

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.