

**SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION AND  
SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME – 2021/2022**

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider the selection of Scrutiny Review topics by Scrutiny Committees to be carried out during the 2020/2021 municipal year.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.2 Scrutiny reviews have an important role to play in contributing to policy and service development. Scrutiny Review Panels are able to consider specific issues in a level of detail which individual service areas may not have the capacity to undertake; and by working with council officers, partners, service users and other stakeholders can help achieve council priorities and add value to directorates.
- 2.2 The success of scrutiny reviews is inherently linked to the topics identified for consideration. In order to maximise the value added by scrutiny reviews, it is essential to ensure that review topics are timely and where possible aligned with Council priorities. This focused approach to topic selection is particularly important in the current financial climate given the limited resources available to support reviews along with the additional pressure the process can place upon elected members. The view of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee previously was to only do reviews where there was a clear rationale to do so.
- 2.3 Whilst this still remains a priority, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee would also like to encourage all Scrutiny Committee to work with officers from Democratic Services to design a work programme for the 2021/2022 municipal year which makes the best use of the programmed meetings, identifies appropriate review topics to consider but also to explore new ways of working that perhaps had not been tried in recent years. In the guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government ‘*Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities*’ published in May 2019, there are a number of suggestions of best practice for scrutinising topics which Scrutiny Committee may wish to have regard to, these include:-
- A single agenda item on a committee agenda
  - At a single meeting
  - At a task and finish review of two or three meetings
  - Via a longer term task and finish review (which has been the traditional approach in Stockport)
- 3.4 Clearly, the options available are not limited to those outlined above and the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee would encourage each Committee and Councillors participating in Scrutiny to think innovatively and explore utilising a

variety of methods. The intention is that a full and comprehensive report on the findings and experience gained by each Scrutiny Committee, both good and bad, will be evaluated and incorporated in the 2021/2022 Scrutiny Annual report which it is hoped will then be used as a tool for making the best of Over and Scrutiny in future years.

### **3.0 Deciding upon Scrutiny topics**

3.1 Topic selection is of crucial importance to the success of the scrutiny process. Scrutiny Committees should be encouraged to consider the engagement of and the monitoring of other public bodies relevant to their committee, particularly in relation to services where there is integration with partner organisations and the public.

3.2 In addition to the Council's priority outcomes, Scrutiny Committees may also wish to consider the key themes behind the programme of growth and public service reform aimed at meeting future financial challenges and focusing on making the best use of existing resources, working with partners across all public services to make the changes needed to ensure that;

- Our neighbourhoods are successful and sustainable;
- Our communities are resilient and empowered;
- Our people are independent.

Some of the pitfalls that have been identified when selecting a topic are outlined below:

- The topic selected is too broad
- The rationale for scrutiny is unclear
- The topic is of low public concern
- The topic does not address aims and priorities
- The topic duplicates work that is already in progress
- The topic could be adequately addressed by other means and procedures

3.3 The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee will be asked at its meeting on 21 July 2021 to agree a process for examining and testing possible areas of Scrutiny work to include:

- The 10-question approach outlined in the Appendix to this report. Ideally, any topic should meet at least five of these criteria BUT if there is a good reason to make something a priority without meeting five, that is acceptable as long as the reasons for so doing are clear.
- Considering risk – we have to try to prioritise competing demands, especially given finite time and resources, and there may be risks involved in either doing or not doing a piece of Scrutiny work on any given subject.

- Cost and Duration – how feasible is any Scrutiny review will be completed within the municipal year.
- Duplication of activity – Some potential topics may duplicate others suggested that are circulating within the Scrutiny review topic selection process. Some issues for Scrutiny may be cross cutting; others may have already been carried out, or duplicate Internal Audit work or external audit inspections.

3.4 It is also suggested that Scrutiny Committees be requested to suggest one topic only but retain the freedom to hold “themed” meetings on a particular topic as may be appropriate.

#### **4.0 Timetable for selecting topics**

4.1 Scrutiny Committees will therefore invited to suggest a scrutiny topic at the September cycle of Scrutiny Committees, to consider options for new ways of working and to work with officers from Democratic Services to create a work programme that enables each Committee to make the best use of the resources available to it.

4.2 The Scrutiny Work Programme outlining the topics selected for reviews (not the individual work programmes for each Committee) will be presented to the Council Meeting on 7 October 2021 for approval, although the initial scoping of any reviews will take place in advance of the Council Meeting to enable traditional reviews to commence as soon as practicable and to enable officers to plan for any alternatives approaches which Committees have chosen to pursue.

4.3 The intention is that the Scrutiny Review Final reports will be considered by Scrutiny Committees in March 2022 prior to consideration by the Cabinet on 15 March 2022.

#### **5. Arrangements for Supporting Scrutiny Reviews**

5.1 Scrutiny Reviews will be allocated a Lead Officer from the relevant service area, who will be responsible for supporting the review. Policy / project management support will be provided by officers in Democratic Services.

#### **6. RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee is invited to consider and comment on the report prior to its submission to the September cycle of Scrutiny Committees.

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