

**SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION – 2024/2025****Report of the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Governance****1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 Scrutiny Reviews provide Members with the opportunity to work in small, informal groups to examine policy and service delivery in greater depth. Whilst the approach needs to be flexible and tailored to the work in question, the following guidelines are intended to support consistency and good practice for Scrutiny Review Panels.
- 1.2 This report outlines the Scrutiny Review process, provides a framework within which they should be undertaken and will support Scrutiny Committee Members with the selection of Scrutiny Review topics for the 2024/25 municipal year.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Scrutiny reviews have an important role 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 a Scrutiny Review 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 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 officers and Members. It was therefore the view of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee that reviews should only be undertaken where there was a clear rationale to do so.

**3. SELECTING A TOPIC**

- 3.1 Topic selection is of crucial importance to the success of the scrutiny process. Scrutiny Committees should be encouraged to consider the engagement and 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 Appropriate issues or topics for a Scrutiny Review may be identified through the following sources:
  - Corporate priority areas, as identified within the Council Plan
  - Issues arising from items included in the Authority's Forward Plan
  - Cabinet/Council requests
  - Issues identified by Members (perhaps through Ward Surgeries, complaints from constituents, etc)

- Identification of poor performing services or services where there is a high level of public dissatisfaction (identified through residents surveys, consultation exercises, levels of complaints, etc)
- Topical issues (perhaps the subject of media attention or public concern)
- Issues raised by external inspection and/or audit.

3.3 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

3.4 The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee previously agreed a process for examining and testing possible areas of Scrutiny work which included:

- The 10-question approach outlined in the Appendix to this report. Ideally, any topic should meet at least five of these criteria however 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 – the council must 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. Similarly, some issues for Scrutiny may be cross cutting, whereas others may have already been addressed elsewhere, or duplicate Internal Audit work or external audit inspections.

3.5 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. MEMBERSHIP**

4.1 Members who wish to sit on a Scrutiny Review Panel are requested to nominate themselves at the June meeting of the Scrutiny Committee within the appropriate item. Where Members are unable to reach an agreement within the meeting, the clerk will email Members following the meeting to reach a resolution.

4.2 The expectation is that the Scrutiny Review Panel should be Chaired by the Vice Chair of the parent Scrutiny Committee.

- 4.3 It is recommended that a Scrutiny Review Panel should consist of no less than three Members. Whilst Scrutiny Review Panel membership should be politically balanced where possible, this is not a requirement.
- 4.4 Given the commitments associated with conducting a Scrutiny Review, it is encouraged that Members who volunteer should have knowledge and/or interest in the topic selected. As other Members of Council have delegated their authority and trust to those subsequently appointed to serve on the Scrutiny Review Panel, Members are expected to dedicate the time and commitment to the Scrutiny Review in order to complete their work in an effective manner.

## **5. CONDUCTING A SCRUTINY REVIEW**

- 5.1 Scrutiny Reviews can take a variety of forms, from a detailed review spread over a number of months to a short, sharp concentrated focus on a high profile issue (i.e. a single meeting or two/three meetings). They offer the opportunity to use a variety of more diverse working methods in order to adapt to the needs of different reviews topics, including making visits, and use of interviews and publicity events to encourage community participation and public engagement in scrutiny.
- 5.2 In relation to the scope of a review, the Local Government Association's 'A councillor's workbook on scrutiny' advises that unless planned properly scoping can be a lengthy exercise. Therefore, a good scope should set out:
- The topic of the review, and an explanation for why the topic is being framed in the way it is – including a reference to Scrutiny's overall role
  - The objective of the review and its expected impacts and outcomes
  - The strategic context
  - The overall method (and why it's the right method for this topic at this time)
  - The key individuals and groups involved, and how they will be involved
  - Other key sources of research which will be used, how they will be analysed, by whom and when
  - The timescale for the review – when meetings will happen, where, and who will be involved
  - A communications plan relating to all the above
  - A statement of the resources which will be necessary to deliver the above
- 5.3 Members of the Scrutiny Review Panel will determine the information and evidence needed for the purposes of the review. The Scrutiny Review Panel can gather evidence through a variety of ways, including (but not limited to):
- written evidence – this may be provided by relevant Council Officers, Members, Stakeholders, representatives from public or private sector organisations or statutory organisations, academic or 'specialist' witnesses
  - oral evidence and interviews with external and internal witnesses
  - site visits
  - visiting other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils
  - research
  - holding public meetings to seek views on an issue
  - talking to/ focus groups with people who are affected by the issue

5.4 Evidence received by the Scrutiny Review Panel should be carefully examined, discussed and debated to enable the Panel to agree its recommendations. The Chair's role is key in ensuring all have an opportunity to participate and to achieve a consensus.

## 6. TIMETABLE FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW

6.1 Scrutiny Committees are invited to suggest a scrutiny topic at the June cycle of Scrutiny Committees:

- Communities & Transport – 10 June 2024
- Corporate, Resource Management & Governance – 11 June 2024
- Children & Families – 12 June 2024
- Adult Social Care & Health – 13 June 2024
- Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change – 13 June 2024

6.2 The proposed scrutiny review topics will be presented to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on 1 July 2024 and the Council Meeting on 11 July 2024.

6.3 The below provides a guide of the key identifiable stages of a Scrutiny Review and associated timescales.

Stage	Key Activities	Date
Topic Selection	Scrutiny Committees are requested to select a scrutiny review topic	W/C 10 June 2024
	Proposed scrutiny review topics presented at Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	1 July 2024
	Council meeting requested to give approval to the Scrutiny Review Programme for 2024/25	11 July 2024
Scoping	Informal meeting with the Members of the Scrutiny Review Panel to discuss the scope of the review and establish the lines of enquiry with support of the Lead Officer	August
	Lead Officer to draft the scoping report for the consideration and agreement of the Scrutiny Review Panel	August/ September
Evidence Gathering	See 5.3 above for guidance	September – January
Reporting	Scrutiny Review outcomes meeting to establish the proposed content and recommendations of the final report	January
	Draft final report (with recommendations) considered and signed off by the Scrutiny Review Panel	February
	Draft final report published for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee	W/C 17 February 2025
	Draft final report of the Scrutiny Review Panel considered by the Scrutiny Committee and submitted for onward consideration by Cabinet	W/C 3 March 2025
	Cabinet to consider the Scrutiny Review report	18 March 2025

	and recommendations	
Feedback, monitoring and evaluation	Cabinet to draft a response to the Scrutiny Review report and recommendations therein which should be submitted to the parent Scrutiny Committee for consideration	6 -12 months after the conclusion of the review

## **7. ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

- 7.1 Following consideration of the Scrutiny Review report by Cabinet, the responsible officer will be asked to prepare a response to identify what action the Council has taken with each of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review final report for consideration by the Cabinet and parent Scrutiny Committee.
- 7.2 To monitor the progress of the Scrutiny Review recommendations, the parent Scrutiny Committee should track the progress of the changes being implemented, evaluate and assess impact and conduct further investigation and make additional recommendations if necessary.

## **8. OFFICER SUPPORT**

- 8.1 Each Scrutiny Review Panel will be allocated a Lead Officer from the relevant service area. It is the Lead Officers responsibility to provide all necessary advice and support to the Scrutiny Review Panel for the purpose of conducting the review and for the overall co-ordination of the review. This includes drafting, coordinating and producing reports/ information, responding to requests for data, arrangement of visits with the relevant stakeholders, the drafting of the final report for approval by the Scrutiny Review Panel and assisting the Cabinet in the drafting and submission of the report responding to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Panel.
- 8.2 Administration / project management support will be provided by officers in Democratic Services who will act as clerk and provide support to the Lead Officer as required. This includes arranging the meetings, preparing the agenda/ papers for circulation to the Scrutiny Review Panel and producing the minutes of the meetings and evidence gathering sessions.
- 8.3 In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (PR4) within the Constitution, Officers providing evidence to the Scrutiny Review Panel will make themselves available to attend meetings and provide written information as requested.

## **9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the selection of Scrutiny Review topics to be carried out during the 2024/2025 municipal year in line with the above guidelines.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Damian Eaton on telephone number 0161 474 3207 or alternatively email [damian.eaton@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:damian.eaton@stockport.gov.uk)