

Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Audit Committee – 12 February 2015

FOR INFORMATION: SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014-15

Summary:

This report is provided in order to share information that will help develop the relationship between scrutiny and the Audit Committee. It explains the background and purpose of the scrutiny work programme, which is developed, managed and monitored by the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

The report shows:

- the overall Scrutiny Work Programme, including work being carried out through various Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups established by the Committee;
- the work plan of the Scrutiny Programme Committee itself;
- the work plan of the Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel; and
- contact list of lead scrutiny councillors and officers for all current activities.

Lead Councillor	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer	Dave Mckenna, Manager, Scrutiny Unit
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1. Developing the Relationship between Scrutiny and the Audit Committee.

1.1 The chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee recently met with the chair of the Audit Committee and convener of the Service Improvement & Finance Performance Panel to discuss how the relationship between scrutiny and the Audit Committee could be developed in order for:

- Mutual awareness and understanding of the work of scrutiny and audit committee
- Respective work plans to be coordinated and avoid duplication / gaps
- Clear mechanism for referral of issues, if necessary

1.2 The follow actions were agreed:

- i) Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee / Convener of Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to be copied into Audit Committee agenda and vice versa
- ii) Scrutiny Work Programme / Service Improvement & Finance Panel Work Plan to be published in Audit Committee agenda for information and vice versa
- iii) At least once a year chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee to appear at Audit Committee to share work plan and for a 'health-check' and vice-versa
- iv) Audit Committee chair to be invited to Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference
- v) Chairs to raise any issues re. coordination / duplication on ongoing basis
- vi) Where matters to be referred from Audit Committee chair should write letter to chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee

2. The Scrutiny Work Programme

2.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee is responsible for developing the Council's scrutiny work programme, and managing the overall work of scrutiny to ensure that it is as effective as possible.

2.2 The broad aim of the scrutiny function is:

To carry out a significant and constructive programme of activities that will:

- help improve services;
- provide an effective challenge to the executive;
- engage members in the development of policies, strategies and plans; and
- engage the public.

2.3 At the same time the committee must ensure that the work of scrutiny is:

- manageable, realistic and achievable given resources available to support activities
- relevant to corporate priorities and focused on significant areas
- adding value and having maximum impact
- coordinated and avoids duplication

2.4 The scrutiny work programme is guided by the overriding principle that the work of scrutiny should be strategic and significant, focussed on issues of concern, and represent a good use of scrutiny time and resources.

3. Methods of Working

3.1 The work of scrutiny is undertaken primarily in three ways – through the committee itself and by establishing informal panels (for in-depth activities) or one-off working groups:

- a) **Formal committee meetings** – as well as developing and managing the overall work programme, the committee will focus on holding Cabinet Members to account by holding formal questioning sessions, and provide challenge on specific themes over the course of the year - this may cover a broad range of policy and service issues. Matters considered at committee meetings will typically be 'one-off' opportunities for questions, which will result in the committee communicating findings, views and recommendations for improvement through chairs letters to cabinet members, and where appropriate by producing reports.
- b) **Informal panels** – Scrutiny panels are established, with conveners appointed by the committee, to carry out in-depth inquiries (sometimes referred to as reviews) or undertake in-depth monitoring of particular services. The use of panels helps to ensure that scrutiny can be flexible and responsive to issues of concern:

i) Inquiry Panels: to undertake discrete in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis. These would be significant topics where scrutiny can make a real difference. Inquiry panels will produce a final report at the end of the inquiry with conclusions and recommendations for cabinet (and other decision-makers), informed by the evidence gathered. Inquiry Panels will reconvene to follow up on implementation of agreed recommendations and cabinet action plans and impact of their work.

Every piece of scrutiny work suggested for inquiry will start off as a 'working group' – with an in-depth inquiry only following if the group agreed it was necessary and could suggest appropriate terms of reference to the committee (including key question that is to be explored, evidence gathering that might be necessary, and timescales). The 'working group' approach will involve a detailed presentation of the subject matter at the outset (with advice from relevant cabinet members / officers and provision of existing research & information) which will enable opinion and proposals to be submitted to cabinet member(s) if these can be clearly expressed at that point, with no further work needed, or help inform decisions about the focus of any inquiry that is necessary.

ii) Performance Panels: to provide in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas. Performance

panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant cabinet members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, about services.

c) **Informal working groups** – Although the majority of scrutiny work is carried out through the committee and panels, the committee can also establish informal working groups of councillors. This supports flexible working where it has been agreed that a matter should be carried out outside of the committee but does not necessitate the establishment of a Panel. This method of working is intended to be light-touch – effectively a one-off meeting to consider a specific report or information, resulting in a letter to relevant Cabinet Member(s) with views and recommendations.

3.2 This arrangement helps to achieve more focused and potentially quicker pieces of scrutiny, and provide flexibility to deal with things in different ways depending on the issue, and improve impact.

3.3 Non executive councillors who are not members of the committee have the opportunity to participate in panels and other informal task and finish groups. New panel / working group topics, once agreed, are advertised to all non executive councillors and expressions of interest sought. The membership of panels and working groups is then determined by the committee. More than one political group should be represented on each panel / working groups. These bodies also need to be of a manageable size in terms of team working and effective questioning. A minimum of 3 members should be present at all meetings.

3.4 The following information is appended:

- the overall Scrutiny Work Programme, including work being carried out through various Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups established by the Committee (*Appendix 1*)
- the work plan of the Scrutiny Programme Committee itself (*Appendix 2*)
- the work plan of the Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel (*Appendix 3*); and
- contact list of lead scrutiny councillors and officers for all current activities (*Appendix 4*)

4. Monitoring the Work Programme

4.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee maintain an overview of all scrutiny activities to ensure that the work programme is co-ordinated and effective. In particular the committee monitors progress of work undertaken by the informal Panels and Working Groups and findings to ensure that this work is effective and has the required visibility. Performance Panel conveners attend the committee on a regular basis to provide updates and enable discussion on key activities and impact.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Any costs that arise out of work plan activities, for example expenses for witnesses or transport costs, are not envisaged to be significant and will be contained within the existing Scrutiny Budget.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

7. Equality & Engagement Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific equality and engagement implications raised by this report.

Background papers: None

Date: 4 February 2015

Legal Officer: Wendy Parkin

Finance Officer: Paul Beynon

Access to Services Officer: Sherill Hopkins

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Overall Scrutiny Work Programme

Appendix 2: The Committee Work Plan 2014/15

Appendix 3: Service Improvement & Finance Panel Work Plan 2014/15

Appendix 4: Scrutiny Councillor / Officer Leads