

Report To:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Date:	16 JULY 2020
Heading:	SCRUTINY WORKPLAN REFRESH 2020/2021		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The Scrutiny Workplan is a rolling plan of in-depth reviews, undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels A and B. It is a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda, with each item monitored by Committee Members to ensure appropriate terms of reference and progress.

Each year, the Workplan is revised and refreshed with new topics for review. This report aims to focus Members on discussing and approving appropriate topics for the 2020/2021 Scrutiny Workplan annual refresh. This report also briefly details the topics from the 2019/2020 Scrutiny Workplan that will be carried over due to the disruptions of the previous year. Additionally, this report provides a summary of recently released guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny regarding the role of scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, details of the proposed establishment of a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel are included.

Recommendation(s)

- a. Consider topics for approval to the 2020/2021 Scrutiny Workplan.
- b. Note the guidance provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
- c. Note the ongoing Scrutiny Workplan topics.
- d. Note the recommended establishment of a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Ensuring that the Scrutiny Workplan is refreshed annually, as well as reviewed consistently throughout the municipal year, is crucial

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered. Approving the Scrutiny Workplan is part of the Overview and Scrutiny Rules of Procedure set out within the Council's Constitution.

Detailed Information

Scrutiny Workplan

What is the Scrutiny Workplan?

Scrutiny at Ashfield District Council follows a Scrutiny Workplan approved annually by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The work programme is a rolling plan of in-depth reviews, undertaken by Scrutiny Panel A and Scrutiny Panel B. Alongside topic reviews, standing items are considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

These standing items are:

- Crime and Disorder
- Performance
- Budget
- Scrutiny Workplan

The Scrutiny Workplan outlines areas of work to be scrutinised over the next year by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Panels. Any topics added to the Scrutiny Workplan should have anticipated outcomes that will add value to services delivered by the Council and its partners and improve quality of life in Ashfield.

The Scrutiny Workplan is a live document and consultation on potential topics will be continued throughout the year with Service Directors, Third Tier Officers, and Members. Community engagement will also form part of the ongoing consultation process. All suggestions received will be discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the Scrutiny Workplan as a standing item.

Sources of Workplan Topics

There are many sources where topics for scrutiny review can be identified, including:

- Issues of community concern
- Service delivery concerns
- Review, audit, and inspection outcomes
- Issues relating to Council outcomes, objectives, and priorities
- Partnership objectives
- The Forward Plan
- Peer challenge outcomes
- Performance
- Budget
- Improvement plans

Selecting Workplan Topics

Scrutiny Workplan topic selection should be stringent, and Committee Members should use effective processes to select topics that will contribute towards the best and most effective

Workplan. This means having clear terms of reference in mind and considering many different sources of information to help inform the Workplan.

This involves approving topics:

- Of community concern
- That contribute to the Council's Corporate Priorities
- With defined objectives and clear outcomes
- That add value to the Council's overall performance
- That has potential impact for more than one section of the District's population
- That adequate resources are available to carry out a review
- That have not been reviewed recently

A common pitfall for Overview and Scrutiny can be the inclusion of topics on the Workplan that are unsuitable for review due to different factors.

It is advised that Overview and Scrutiny Members avoid topics that are:

- Unmanageable
- Purely for informational purposes
- Have limited anticipated outcomes
- Fail to add value to service delivery
- Fail to improve community wellbeing and quality of life

Scrutiny has limited time and resources meaning the Workplan must be manageable. It is impossible to include every topic suggested throughout Workplan consultation. Effective and successful scrutiny is about reviewing a beneficial topic in the

The selection and prioritisation of topics is critical to the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny function. A clear topic selection process ensures in-depth and effective reviews, resulting in impactful recommendations and improvements.

Due to the various delays in scrutiny work over the previous municipal year, four topics from the 2019/2020 workplan will need to be carried over to the 2020/2021 workplan. Therefore, it is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members approve **no more than two new topics** for the 2020/21 workplan. It is also recommended that Members develop a 'reserve list' of topics to be approved to the workplan later in the year.

Ongoing Workplan Topics

Bus Provision in Ashfield

Members approved the addition of Bus Provision in Ashfield to the scrutiny workplan at the June 2019 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members agreed an initial remit for the review, focused on social inclusion, local businesses, community transport schemes, areas of need, and funding opportunities.

Scrutiny Panel A has held two formal meetings on the topic, with involvement from the Director of Commercial Services for Trent Barton, and two representatives from community transport scheme Our Centre.

To progress the review, Members will be seeking involvement from a Nottinghamshire County Council representative to discuss funding opportunities for bus services in Ashfield, and how bus services may be changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Protection Service

Members approved the addition of the Council's Community Protection Service to the scrutiny workplan at the 18 July 2019 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members wished to review the objectives and remit of the service, how the service works with partners to achieve objectives, and to ensure the service remains fit for purpose while providing value for money.

Scrutiny Panel B has since held two formal meetings reviewing the topic with involvement from the Service Manager – Community Safety, Community Protection Team Leader, and Community Protection Officers. Terms of reference have been set, and Members have this far focused on:

- The origins, structure, and resourcing of the service
- The role of a Community Protection Officer
- Challenges facing the service
- The value of the Integrated Services Hub

To progress the review, Members may wish to revisit the previously set terms of reference to ensure they are still fit for purpose. Members also indicated a desire to explore the progress of software improvements within Community Safety, exploration of public consultation exercises, and how the successes of the service could be better communicated to the public.

Climate Emergency

A review of the climate emergency, considering climate change and how ADC can lead mitigation efforts. This topic was added to the Workplan in 2019. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed that this review would commence once the conclusions of the County study were published. An update on this will be provided in due course.

Service Personnel

Following its formation by Council, the Service Personnel Scrutiny Commission was established to consider the current policies and procedures in place across the Council's services and whether there were any areas for improvement that could better support veterans and service personnel.

This review will be carried out in collaboration with a local armed forces veteran, providing advice, experience and guidance. Originally intended as a stand-alone Commission prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work will now commence through Scrutiny Panel A to ensure it is progressed in a timely manner. Additional work will be carried out between the formal meetings and then reported back to the Panel.

Preliminary work has already commenced regarding collecting the service area specific information through a questionnaire.

Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has released a series of online guides designed to support councils on governance and scrutiny during COVID-19 and throughout the aftermath. The guides are intended to support councillors and officers on managing some of the challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis.

The online guides produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny include:

- Guide 1: Behaviour and Etiquette for Remote Meetings
- Guide 2: Scrutiny
- Guide 3: Councillors Access to Information
- Guide 4: Council's Support to Vulnerable People
- Guide 5: Council Finances, Scrutiny, and Audit (not yet published)

GUIDE 2: SCRUTINY

This guide covers the key arguments in favour of continued, robust member-led scrutiny during the COVID-19 crisis and sets out an approach to provide that scrutiny in a way that is proportionate and fits within the constrained resources that councils will have at their disposal.

Why Carry on with Scrutiny?

The guide states that maintaining scrutiny in the current crisis is critical for several reasons:

- Substantial decisions will be being made which are likely to have an impact on the lives of residents and the places they live.
- The council and its partners should be trying to draw on the perspective of as broad as possible a range of people as it responds to the crisis.
- Scrutiny activities do not take senior officers and members away from the task in hand – they *are* the task in hand. Councillors have a vital role in feeding into and bolstering the COVID-19 response in the communities they serve, and the scrutiny function provides a mechanism for this work to feed into broader strategy.
- The COVID-19 crisis will not be ending any time soon.

Overview and Scrutiny – Outreach and Support

The Centre for Public Scrutiny outlines a shift to recognise that scrutiny can be doing two additional things during the crisis:

- **Outreach** – getting an understanding from the local community and from councillors about the kind of issues and challenges that local people are experiencing.
- **Support** – understanding and supporting the council and its partners as they grapple with an unprecedented situation, aiding in understanding complex issues and in resolving associated problems.

A New Substantive Focus for Scrutiny

The council and its partners will be engaged in a significant amount of activity relating to the operational emergency response.

- Scrutiny can consider how well partners are working together, overseeing the systems that contribute to smooth, effective decision-making, and bringing influence to bear on disagreements or blockages.
- There will be services in the local area exposed to unique pressures. Scrutiny can productively keep a watching brief on council and partner action on these matters.
- Scrutiny can act as a conduit for community experiences. Local people will feel isolated, and councillors will be doing their best to provide support and assistance at ward level. Councils need a way of understanding how these trends are developing, and scrutiny can be a convenient way to draw those insights into the council's corporate work.

A Practical Model for a COVID-19 Scrutiny Panel

Having established the altered role of scrutiny during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the guide continues to outline a practical scrutiny structure that can support this role. Some guidelines are provided as to the form a COVID-19 related Scrutiny Panel could take:

- **A COVID-19 Scrutiny Committee** – meeting for 60-90 minutes every three to four weeks.
- **A single substantive agenda item for every meeting** – with discussion being supported by a short covering report complemented by verbal updates from officers and other witnesses.
- **A clear outcome and objective for this discussion** – these outcomes will have been agreed beforehand by the Chair and others, usually by way of a pre-meeting.
- **An expanded space for questions from the public** – questions submitted in advance, if confidence/usability of remote tools/virtual meetings increased, it may be possible to allow for a form of live questioning.
- **An accompanying update report at each meeting** – prepared by (or for) and presented by the Chair, setting out:
 - Matters the committee are aware of but where it isn't proposed the committee acts now.
 - Reflections on the council's and partners' overall response on the issues where the committee is carrying out work based on community insight and general review of documentation.

Support: Members' and Officers' Roles

Many democratic services and scrutiny staff have been deployed to assist in the operational response to COVID-19. Councils must bolster their ability to manage this for a sustained period and its right that councils' workforces be managed in a flexible way.

Awareness of the resource constraints under which scrutiny will need to work informed this guide produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Members should assume throughout the crisis that the amount of officer support available for their work is likely to be limited and will need to direct themselves accordingly.

After the COVID-19 Crisis

Further guidance will be issued by the Centre for Public Scrutiny as the pandemic restrictions ease and councils begin the task of reflecting on the crisis and its many consequences. The Centre for Public Scrutiny maintain that scrutiny can play a strong – and perhaps leading – role in the debrief activity in the aftermath of the crisis. For now, there is little that can be done to plan directly for this.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel

At the 30 June 2020 meeting, Cabinet considered a report providing a summary of what the Council has done to respond to COVID-19, a comprehensive update of the COVID-19 decisions taken to date, and exploration of arrangements for the recovery stage of the crisis.

Within the report, the proposed establishment of a new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel was presented to Cabinet, with a view to Cabinet recommending the establishment of the Panel to the next meeting of the Council. The Panel would be made up of 7 Members who are appointed in accordance with the requirements of political balance.

As set out in the report, it is suggested that the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel will review the Council's response to the pandemic, and take an active role in respect of the Council's recovery plans as requested by the Cabinet or as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Scrutiny Workplan.

Draft terms of reference for the Panel:

1. Responsibility for the review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and taking an active role in respect of the Council's recovery plans as requested by the Executive or as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Scrutiny Workplan, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Reviewing the Council's response to COVID-19, and identifying any short-term actions arising which improve operational and corporate resilience.
 - b. Policy development in respect of the Council's recovery from COVID-19, including preparedness for future waves of COVID-19.
 - c. Policy development in respect of respect of the Council's approach to the renewal of the local economy.
 - d. Policy development in respect of the renewal and reform of local government services, including the future structure of local government in Nottinghamshire.
2. To report any recommendations or considerations to the Executive in respect of the responsibilities outlined above.
3. The Panel will receive updates in respect of the implementation of the Council's Recovery Action Plan.

Following the 30 June meeting, Cabinet have formally recommended the establishment of a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel to Council. Council will consider this recommendation at the 9 July meeting. The outcome of this consideration will be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The Scrutiny Workplan should include issues based on performance, priority objectives, and community concerns; many of which contribute to the Council's corporate priorities outlined within the Corporate Plan.

Legal:

Consultation with Members on items for the Scrutiny Workplan is in accordance with the Rules of Procedure set out within the Council's Constitution.

Finance:

Any financial implications identified through items approved to the Scrutiny Workplan will be appropriately considered as part of the established scrutiny review process.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	None.
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None.
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to adequately monitor and refresh the Scrutiny Workplan could lead to items being added that fail to add value and fall outside of the remit of the Council's scrutiny function.	The Scrutiny Workplan is a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda, ensuring Members can appropriately monitor review progress and suitability.

Human Resources:

Any HR implications identified through items approved to the Scrutiny Workplan will be appropriately considered as part of the established scrutiny review process.

Environmental/Sustainability

Any environmental or sustainability implications identified through items approved to the Scrutiny Workplan will be appropriately considered as part of the established scrutiny review process.

Equalities:

Any equalities implications identified through items approved to the Scrutiny Workplan will be appropriately considered as part of the established scrutiny review process.

Other Implications:

Any other implications identified through items approved to the Scrutiny Workplan will be appropriately considered as part of the established scrutiny review process.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

- Scrutiny Workplan 2019/2020

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