

Report To:	PRINCIPAL SELECT COMMITTEE
Date:	8 JUNE 2023
Heading:	SCRUTINY FUNCTION AND WORK PROGRAMMING
Executive Lead Member:	NOT APPLICABLE
Ward/s:	ALL
Key Decision:	NO
Subject to Call-In:	NO

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Members of the Principal Select Committee with practical guidance for scrutiny practitioners and an overview of the Council's refreshed scrutiny function following the Annual Council Meeting. Finally, Members are asked to consider and select topics for the 2023/2024 work programme.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the Principal Select Committee are recommended to:

- a. Note and reflect on the guidance for scrutiny practitioners included within this report and appended as Appendix A (*Scrutiny Practitioners Guide*) and Appendix B (*Scrutiny and Work Programming*).
- b. Note the revised structure for the Council's scrutiny function following the Annual Council Meeting.
- c. Consider and select topics for the 2023/2024 work programme.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

It is the responsibility of the Principal Select Committee, as established in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, to maintain overview and management of the scrutiny work programme. This includes adding new topics for inclusion as necessary.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered. Approving and managing an effective work programme is set out within the Scrutiny Rules of Procedure within Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

Detailed Information

SCRUTINY PRACTITIONERS GUIDE

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is a social purpose consultancy and national centre of expertise. The purpose of the CfGS is to help organisations achieve outcomes through improved governance and scrutiny.

The CfGS promotes better governance and scrutiny, both in policy and practice. Through research and policy development, the CfGS provide a library of free to access guidance and best practice.¹

Scrutiny Practitioners Guide is a research paper published by the CfGS that acts as a comprehensive introductory guide that aims to provide an overview of the main facets of scrutiny, and a summary of some of the key tools and skills needed to improve and enhance scrutiny.²

The guide is aimed at anyone working in or with Public Services likely to come into contact with Scrutiny, specifically with a primary audience of:

- Members of scrutiny committees, including Chairs and Vice Chairs
- Scrutiny officers
- Council leaders and other Cabinet members
- Those new to scrutiny, whether officers or members

The guide features three separate sections focusing on Scrutiny Basics, Culture and Behaviours, and Scrutiny Skills, covering a wide range of topics including, but not limited to:

Scrutiny Basics

- What is scrutiny?
- The principles of good scrutiny
- Why is scrutiny important?
- What does scrutiny do?

Culture and Behaviours

- Awareness of political dynamics
- Accessing information

¹ Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, *About the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny*, 2022.

² Megan Ingle – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, *Scrutiny Practitioners Guide*, 2022.

Scrutiny Skills

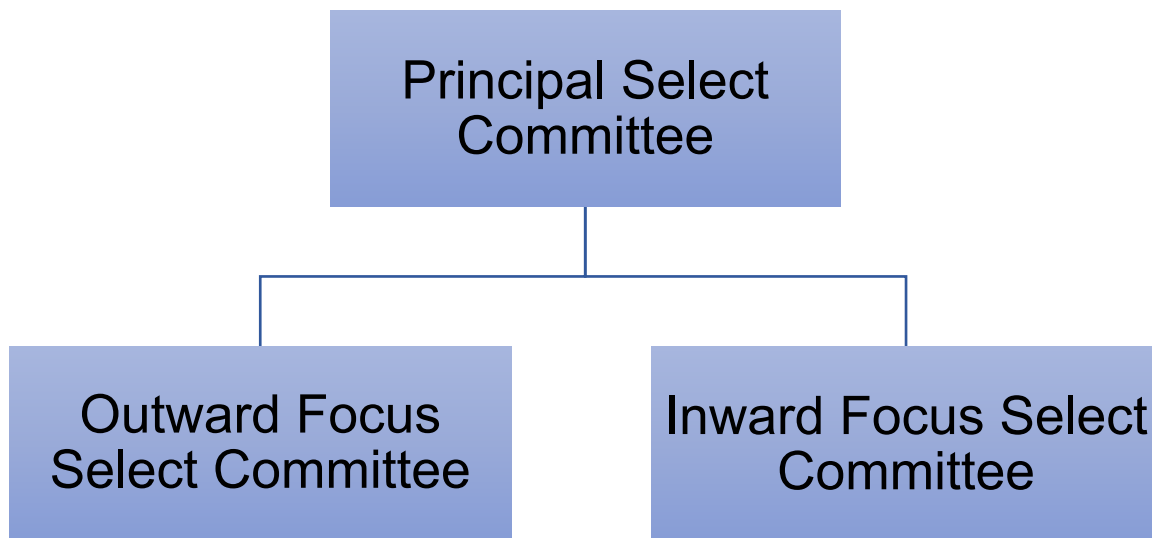
- Work programming
- Chairing skills
- Questioning skills

The *Scrutiny Practitioners Guide* is appended to this report as Appendix A. It has also been circulated to all scrutiny Members through email. Members are asked to read through the guidance and reflect on the content in readiness for discussion at the meeting.

ASHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY FUNCTION

Following the Annual Council Meeting on 25 May 2023, numerous changes were approved to the Council's scrutiny function. Primarily, this included the renaming and refocusing of the three scrutiny committees.

The basic structure of the Council's scrutiny function is as follows:



Principal Select Committee

The Principal Select Committee is appointed by Council to maintain an overview of the work undertaken by the Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees. This incorporates management of the scrutiny work programme, including selecting topics for inclusion on the work programme and delegating topics to each Committee as appropriate.

The Principal Select Committee has an important role in monitoring the Council's performance through regular reports, which can often highlight potential areas for scrutiny involvement across the Council.

The Principal Select Committee also undertakes regular scrutiny of the Council's finances, with particular attention to the annual budget and tax setting process.

Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees

The Outward and Inward Focus Select Committees are appointed by Council to carry out reviews of topics added to the scrutiny work programme by the Principal Select Committee. On rarer occasions, the Committees also undertake work as requested by Council or the Executive.

WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024

As explained by the Local Government Association in *A Councillor's Workbook on Scrutiny*, work programming is the process for determining which topics scrutiny will look at over the coming year, either at committee or through task and finish groups. This involves evaluating a number of factors to decide which topics are to be investigated and when. The process typically involves long-listing and then short-listing topics before making a final decision.³

Scrutiny and Work Programming is a further guidance document made available by the CfGS with a specific focus on work programming.⁴ The guidance includes sections explaining:

- The principles of scrutiny
- Planning scrutiny work
- Methods for carrying out work
- Impact of scrutiny work
- Reviewing and evaluating

Scrutiny is a member led function, driven by Member commitment to improve services and the lives of residents. Committee Members are asked to consider the following potential sources (among others) of suitable work programme topics:

- Issues of community concern
- Service delivery concerns
- Council outcomes, objectives, and priorities
- Partnership objectives
- The Forward Plan
- Peer challenge outcomes
- Performance
- Emerging policy and legislation

When approving work programme topics, Members are asked to use effective processes to select topics that will contribute towards the best and most effective programme. This means having clear terms of reference in mind and considering many different sources of information to help inform topic selection.

This involves approving items to the work programme:

- Of community concern
- With defined objectives and clear outcomes
- That add value to the Council's performance and/or service delivery
- That contribute to the Council's Corporate Priorities

³ Local Government Association, *A Councillor's Workbook on Scrutiny*, 2017.

⁴ Natalie Rotherham – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, *Scrutiny and Work Programming*, 2022.

Members should also avoid including items on the work programme that are unsuitable for review for different factors that could include 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.

Finally, the Council's scrutiny function has limited time and resources, meaning the work programme must be manageable. It is not possible to include every topic suggested through work programme consultation. Effective long-listing and short-listing of topics is critical to the success of the function.

The *Scrutiny and Work Programming* guidance document is appended to this report as Appendix B. It has also been circulated to all scrutiny Members through email. Members are asked to read through and utilise the guidance, alongside the guidance included within this report, while selecting items for the 2023/2024 scrutiny work programme.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Members will be mindful of the Council's Corporate Plan and the priority objectives set out within when reviewing and selecting topics for the work programme.

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any legal implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any financial implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	

Risk:

There are no risks resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any risks identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Human Resources:

There are no HR implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any HR implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no environmental/sustainability implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any environmental/sustainability implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Equalities:

There are no equalities implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any equalities implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications resulting from the recommendations within this report.

Any other implications identified relating to items added to the 2023/2024 work programme will be considered appropriately as part of the established review process, in line with best practice and guidance.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

None.

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