

Report for: Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13 June 2024

Title: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panel Work Programme Development**

Report

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Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non-Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 This report sets out how the foundations will be laid for targeted, inclusive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee agree the overall approach outlined at Section 5 of the report, including developing a two-year work programme for Overview and Scrutiny for 2024-26, for approval at its meeting on 14 October 2024; and
- 2.2 That the Committee give comments on how they would like to proceed with a consultative 'Scrutiny Café' event to engage with the local community about the work programme, as well as conducting an online scrutiny survey.
- 2.3 That, pending commencement of the finalised work programme, the Committee agree the provisional items for its meetings on 23 July and 14 October.

3. Reasons for decision

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) is responsible for developing an overall work plan, including work for its standing scrutiny panels. In putting this together, the Committee will need to have regard to their capacity to deliver the programme and officers' capacity to support them in that task.

4. Describe the issue under consideration

- 4.1 Following the expiry of the previous OSC work programme, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to develop a new work programme for itself and the scrutiny panels that ensures the Council's scrutiny function is used to best effect. Suggestions for what may constitute a successful work programme are outlined at Section 6 below.

- 4.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's should be mindful of its role in supporting policy development, and the opportunity it has to undertake more 'proactive' scrutiny work, as well as scrutinising the work the Council's Cabinet retrospectively.
- 4.3 In previous years, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has held a "Scrutiny Café" that brings together Council officers and community and stakeholder representatives to discuss which matters they believe would merit further consideration from Overview and Scrutiny, based on the concerns and views of the community and the expected areas of priority for the Council and its partners. This has been helpful in developing engagement with key external representatives and cultivating relationships that allow on-going ad hoc communication. Previously, the 'Scrutiny Café' had been supported by an online scrutiny survey, which provided a further avenue to hear from local residents about their views on what the areas of priority should be for Overview & Scrutiny.

5. Work Planning Process

- 5.1 A new work planning process will now need to be developed for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its panels. One of the key priorities of the current administration is around co-production and the need to engage with the community in a more meaningful way. Careful consideration will need to be given as to how engagement might best contribute to the development of the work plan.

Scrutiny Café

- 5.2 In 2022, a previous iteration of this committee agreed to undertake a two-year work programme. This work programme was informed by an online scrutiny survey that was open to local residents, businesses and community group representatives. The survey took place over July and August 2022 and it asked contributors to prioritise areas of focus for each of the scrutiny panels, based around the policy areas that each panel had responsibility for. The results of the survey then augmented a scrutiny café event on 16th September 2022. Invitations for the scrutiny café were sent out to a raft of community groups and VCS organisations in the borough. OSC members were also asked to spread the word of the event through their existing contacts and community networks.
- 5.3 The format of previous scrutiny café events was a group session, where participants were split into groups and they were asked to rank in order which policy areas they thought were most pressing, and therefore which policy areas they would like scrutiny to consider as part of its work programme. The results of the scrutiny survey and the scrutiny café were then consolidated and a list of the suggested areas for consideration were submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the following meeting. The results were incorporated into the work plan and the committee undertook to provide feedback on how it would incorporate the suggestions that were put forward. These ranged from undertaking detailed scrutiny review on a particular topic, through to requesting

reports on a topic at a meeting of the committee or one of the panels, through to submitting question/s to the relevant Cabinet Member at future scrutiny meeting.

- 5.4 Previous scrutiny café events have had mixed results. It is not easy to ask people to come and take time out of their day to speak to scrutiny when they have work and family commitments. It's also probably fair to say that many residents may not fully understand what the council does and how it works. Most would have even less understanding of the role of scrutiny within the council. Previous events have tended to end up with quite broad outcomes and have tended to gravitate to a position where all of the issues discussed were felt to be important. There is also a recognition that many of the people who contribute to these type of events are people who probably engage with the Council through a number of other forums. Furthermore, having fifty or sixty people in a room can have challenges around effective participation and making sure everyone is able to contribute.
- 5.5 In light of some of the challenges faced in previous scrutiny café events, Members should give careful consideration as to how best we can engage with service users on the work programme for 2024 [and 2025, if a two year work programme is agreed]. Members may wish to agree some minor amendments to the format used in the past or they may wish to agree a different format altogether. The below is put forward as a suggestion, in the hope that it may illicit further discussion. Members may have their own ideas about how a scrutiny café or other consultative event may be better formulated.
- 5.6 As an alternative to the previous scrutiny café events, one suggestion is that the Committee undertakes an open-day type event, possibly in George Meehan House. It is envisaged that members of local community groups and local residents would be able to come along and meet the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and put forward suggestions for areas that they would like to see included in the work programme. Individuals or groups would each have, say, a five-minute slot in which they would effectively be making a deputation to the committee about a particular topic or issue, and why they think that OSC should be looking into it as part of its work programme. It is anticipated that this will allow more qualitative proposals to be received and will facilitate members to be able to dig a bit deeper behind the issues and the extent to which it should be seen as a priority. There would be scope for members to ask questions and for the format of the event to be a bit more conversational in nature.
- 5.7 A consultative scrutiny café session is proposed for September. It is also proposed that an online scrutiny survey would be held prior to the event, following the end of the pre-election period in July. In the past, these have been a useful way of getting feedback from a wide group of people (and only require a few minutes of somebody's time). They tend to work best in providing quantitative feedback but are less effective on qualitative matters. It is proposed that the scrutiny survey will support the scrutiny café session. The information received from both would be compiled into a long document and the results would then undergo a process of deciding which areas members would like to incorporate into the work planning process and how these should be prioritised.

5.8 The work programme should reflect the council's priorities and should be targeted on issues where scrutiny can add real value. To enable this to happen, it is suggested that the long list of proposed items for the work programme could be consolidated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Relevance to council priorities
- Concerns about current performance
- The availability of resources
- The timeliness of the issue and whether it is being considered by another body within the council.
- The expected value added to the work of the council by incorporating it into the work programme
- The need to obtain a balance of different areas within the programme.

The Wider Work Programme

5.9 Given that it is likely that the process for creating a work programme will generate a large number of ideas, it is proposed that it again leads to a two-year work programme. This will provide a broad framework for the committee and panels to follow over their first two years, leaving some room for any highly significant matters that may arise. This will take the scrutiny work programme up until the next set of local elections in Haringey which will take place in May 2026.

5.10 There are meetings of the committee and its panels scheduled to take place before the new work plan for Overview and Scrutiny has been finalised. It is suggested that the panels should have a discussion about the work their respective work programmes at their next meeting.

5.11 The Leader and Executive have been invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee, on 23 July, to report on the Leader's priorities for the forthcoming year. This will hopefully inform the Committee's decision making about its work programme for the coming year. It is proposed that the Cabinet Member for Finance and Local Investment be invited to attend the following meeting, which takes place on 13 October. In addition, an update on the Council's financial position is normally provided to the first meeting of the committee of the autumn.

5.12 There may also be pressing issues or other matters that the committee wishes to add to the agendas for these upcoming meetings. It is proposed that the agenda for these meetings be finalised in consultation with the chair of OSC.

6. Effective Scrutiny Work Programmes

6.1 An effective scrutiny work programme should reflect a balance of activities:

- Holding the Executive to account;
- Policy review and development – reviews to assess the effectiveness of existing policies or to inform the development of new strategies;
- Performance management – identifying under-performing services, investigating and making recommendations for improvement;

- External scrutiny – scrutinising and holding to account partners and other local agencies providing key services to the public;
- Public and community engagement – engaging and involving local communities in scrutiny activities and scrutinising those issues which are of concern to the local community.

6.2 Key features of an effective work programme:

- A member led process, short listing and prioritising topics – with support from officers – that;
 - reflects local needs and priorities – issues of community concern as well as the Corporate Delivery Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy priorities
 - prioritises topics for scrutiny that have most impact or benefit
 - involves local stakeholders
 - is flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues

6.3 Depending on the selected topic and planned outcomes, scrutiny work will be carried out in a variety of ways, using various formats. This will include a variety of one-off reports. In accordance with the scrutiny protocol, the OSC and Scrutiny Panels will draw from the following to inform their work:

- Performance reports;
- One off reports on matters of national or local interest or concern;
- Issues arising out of internal and external assessment (e.g. Ofsted, Care Quality Commission);
- Reports on strategies and policies under development or other issues on which the Cabinet or officers would like scrutiny views or support;
- Progress reports on implementing previous scrutiny recommendations accepted by the Cabinet or appropriate Executive body.

6.4 In addition, in-depth scrutiny work, including task and finish projects, are an important aspect of Overview and Scrutiny and provide opportunities to thoroughly investigate topics and to make improvements. Through the gathering and consideration of evidence from a wider range of sources, this type of work enables more robust and effective challenge as well as an increased likelihood of delivering positive outcomes. In depth reviews should also help engage the public and provide greater transparency and accountability.

6.5 It is nevertheless important that there is a balance between depth and breadth of work undertaken so that resources can be used to their greatest effect.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

7.1 The contribution of scrutiny to the corporate priorities will be considered routinely as part of the OSC's work.

8. Statutory Officers comments

Finance and Procurement

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations set out in this report. Should any of the work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny generate recommendations with financial implications these will be highlighted at that time.

Legal

- 8.2 There are no immediate legal implications arising from the report.
- 8.3 In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the approval of the future scrutiny work programme falls within the remit of the OSC.
- 8.4 Under Section 21 (6) of the Local Government Act 2000, an OSC has the power to appoint one or more sub-committees to discharge any of its functions. In accordance with the Constitution, the appointment of Scrutiny Panels (to assist the scrutiny function) falls within the remit of the OSC.
- 8.5 Scrutiny Panels are non-decision making bodies and the work programme and any subsequent reports and recommendations that each scrutiny panel produces must be approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such reports can then be referred to Cabinet or Council under agreed protocols.

Equality

- 8.6 The council has a public sector equality duty under the Equalities Act (2010) to have due regard to:
- Tackle discrimination and victimisation of persons that share the characteristics protected under S4 of the Act. These include the characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (formerly gender) and sexual orientation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not;
 - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.
- 8.7 The committee should ensure that it addresses these duties by considering them within its work plan and those of its panels, as well as individual pieces of work. This should include considering and clearly stating;
- How policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share the nine protected characteristics;
 - Whether the impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate;
 - Whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Haringey;

- Whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people, are being realised.

8.8 The committee should ensure that equalities comments are based on evidence. Wherever possible this should include demographic and service level data and evidence of residents/service-users views gathered through consultation.

9. Use of Appendices

9.1 Draft Work Programme for 2024-25.

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

N/A