

Agenda Item No: 4



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

[Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Review 2022/23]

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. Agree the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2022/23 municipal year.
 2. To raise any other issues or topics that would benefit from a scrutiny review.
-

Date of O&S meeting: 8th March 2022

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Ovenden

Relevant Portfolio(s): -

Summary: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews its work programme annually. Members have been asked to consider any topics for the scrutiny programme. Topics have been assessed using the Topic Selection Matrix and in consultation with the Chairman.

The report details the draft work programme for 2022/23, including any annual reports/updates expected to the Committee at various points in the year.

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers: **N/A**

Contact: Abi Moffatt, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Abi.moffatt@ashford.gov.uk

Report Title: Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Review 2022/23

Introduction and Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee adopts a new work programme each year. Members have been asked to suggest topics that they think would benefit from scrutiny. Topics suggested so far have been assessed by the scrutiny team and the Chairman via the Topic Selection Matrix (Appendix A). Currently there five topics for consideration by the Committee for the Work Programme. There is one Task and Finish Group topic listed, however, this will take several months to carry out and complete outside of the Committee Meetings. The council's Management Team have also been consulted over the work programme and support the future work of the Committee.
2. Details of suggested topics and any annual reports expected this year are outlined in this report. Members are asked to consider any other topics for the main Committee's work programme that can be brought forward as a presentation or written report.

Overview of Topics

Planning Service Update

3. During Budget Scrutiny meetings looking at the 2022/23 budget, Members were concerned over the ability of the Planning Service to deliver the savings target for this year. It was anticipated that difficulties would continue from the previous year owing to the constraints around recruitment and retention, as well as the far-reaching issues about Stodmarsh. The Task Group had agreed that the new Head of Planning and his Officers should be given the opportunity to deliver the department's objectives within the budget.
4. Members agreed that it was important to closely monitor the progress of the Service and an update report on this in later 2022 would be requested by the Committee. It was noted that the Planning Service were also expected to bring forward an update on the Section 106 Task Group recommendations during 2022.

Section 106 Process Task Group – Recommendations Update

5. Following the review of the Section 106 Process in 2021, a number of recommendations were made to improve the process. An initial recommendation was made to undertake a process mapping exercise of the Section 106 process. Once this had been completed, the rest of the recommendations would be progressed.

6. The recommendations were approved by Cabinet in November 2021. It was agreed that an update would be presented to the Committee in six months' time, to understand the next steps.

Freedom Leisure

7. After a year of operations, it was suggested that the new leisure operator could be reviewed. Scrutiny of this topic would examine how the service has been running, the savings made to the council and the levels of customer satisfaction with the service.
8. It was felt that a report would be sufficient to provide the update, as well as invite a representative from the Leisure operator to attend a future meeting to answer Member queries.

Mayoralty Arrangements

9. A Member proposed that the council's mayoralty arrangements should be considered for the Committee's work programme. It was felt that there had been some difficulty with finding Members who were willing to be appointed as the Mayor. As a score under 20 on the matrix, this would not normally be recommended to the work programme. It has been suggested that Members could give their feedback as part of a Member survey.

Hybrid Working

10. Hybrid working provisions were in place throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic and have remained in place to date. Members were interested in exploring how well the hybrid arrangements were working and in particular would like the Committee to consider this in terms of performance, customer satisfaction, savings, human resources and recruitment.
11. Remote working was considered during the scrutiny review of digital transformation, however, this was prior to implementation of a functioning hybrid working set up and therefore additional scrutiny could be beneficial. Some work has already been done within services to monitor staff performance in relation to hybrid working.

Consultation and Engagement

12. Consultation and Engagement has been an area of interest to the Committee over the last year. Work on this was delayed due to the impact that Covid-19 had on Officer's capacity to assist with the review. The Committee are able to include this within the work programme for 2022/23.
13. A Member proposed that the Committee could review inclusivity as a topic for scrutiny. It has been suggested that this topic be included as part of the scope for the Consultation and Engagement review. Scrutiny of this topic could help understand how the council engages with hard to reach residents in the Borough and the effectiveness of our communications.

Senior Restructure

14. During scrutiny of the 2022/23 budget, the Task Group noted that a report on the Senior Restructure would be forthcoming. It was noted that Cabinet were due to look at initial proposals in February 2022 and the Committee would consider them at this stage.

Annual Reports – Overview and Scrutiny, Performance, Sickness, Safeguarding and the Community Safety Partnership, Budget Scrutiny

15. The Committee will expect to receive six annual reports in the coming year;
 - Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report – A summary of all the work carried out by the Committee during the last year, including any recommendations.
 - Corporate Performance Reports – These are quarterly reports detailing the council's performance and an annual report is also produced to give an overview of the council's performance and achievements during the last year.
 - Annual Sickness Report – A report providing the Committee with annual sickness information for the recent year.
 - Safeguarding – This report provides the Committee with the council's annual safeguarding update. The report pays particular regard to the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development.
 - Community Safety Partnership (CSP) - This report provides the Committee with the community safety annual update. The report pays particular regard to the council's statutory obligation to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder, this work being progressed through the Ashford CSP.
 - Budget Scrutiny Task Group – The aim of the Task Group will be to review the draft budget for 2023/24 and consider financial risks. The Task Group will then produce final findings with recommendations to Cabinet prior to Full Council approval of the draft budget.

Conclusion

16. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2022/23 so far looks to prioritise key topics with the aim of completing at least one task and finish group addition to the wider work programme. There are a number of annual reviews expected to the Committee at various points in the year regarding the

council's performance, levels of sickness, and also updates on safeguarding and community safety.

17. This report seeks approval of the work programme for 2022/23 and asks Members to recommend any further topics for consideration in the future. It should be noted that Members are able to make suggestions for scrutiny at any point throughout the year by raising the issue at a meeting or by contacting the Chairman or Policy and Scrutiny Officer.

Contact and Email

18. Abi Moffatt, Policy & Scrutiny Officer
Abi.Moffatt@ashford.gov.uk 01233 330(394)