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## Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

### Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 7 June 2007

Subject: Work Programme – Sources of Work and Establishing the Board's Priorities

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

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### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report proposes guidelines for the development of a work programme for the Scrutiny Board.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that the most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for the Council highlighted the need to focus on the corporate priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan. Formulating scrutiny work programmes that demonstrate linkage to the Council's Corporate Plan is, therefore, an ongoing activity, as outlined in the 2005/6 and 2006/7 Scrutiny Annual Reports.
- 1.3 Members will also be aware that the CPA harder test focuses on performance management and the involvement of Members. This includes having a record of focused Member involvement in performance and identifying areas of under performance. The newly agreed, more robust, method for dealing with budget and performance information will therefore be embedded into the scrutiny process during 2007/8, as agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A separate item on performance management appears later on in this agenda.
- 1.4 Developments with the Local Area Agreement priorities and targets may also form a potential source of work throughout the year for the Board.

## 2.0 WORK PROGRAMME

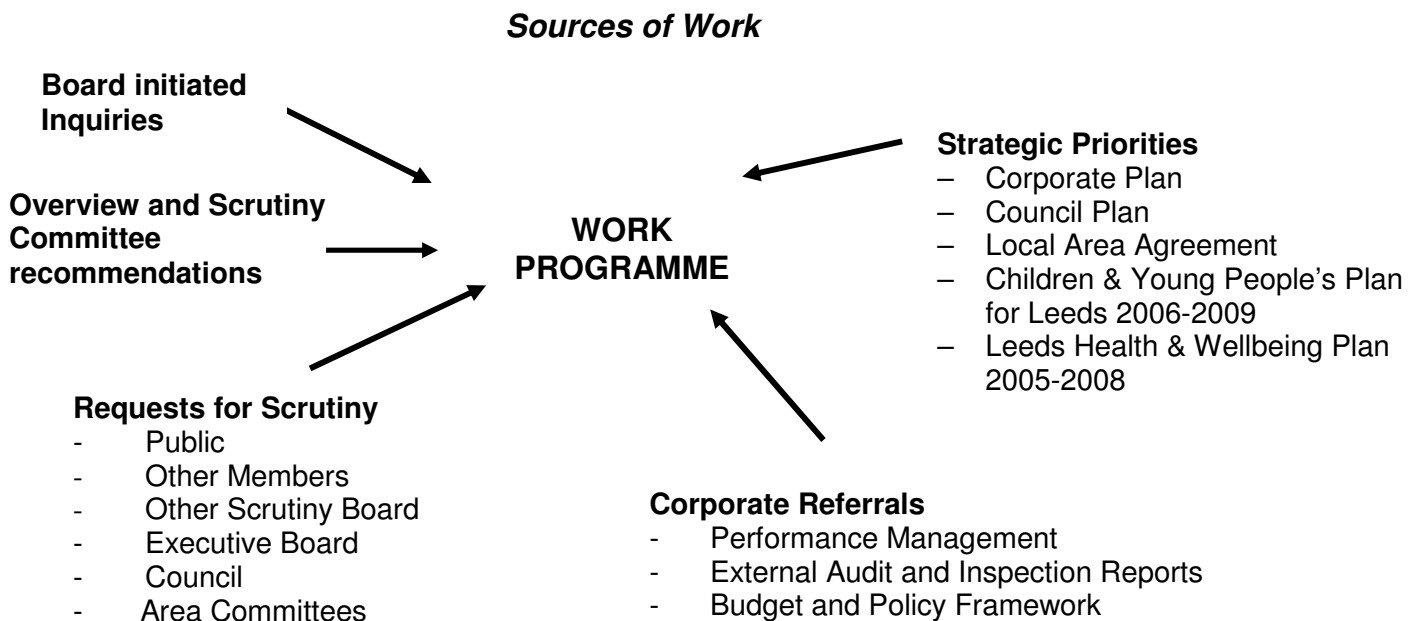
2.1 Scrutiny Boards perform a number of roles. These include:

- holding the Executive to account including the review of executive decisions;
- review and development of policy;
- performance monitoring and review in relation to the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan 2005/08 and Council Plan;
- evaluating and monitoring initiatives and pilot work;
- undertaking tasks as determined within the Council's Constitution.

2.2 The development of a manageable work programme enables Members to undertake:

- Effective planning of the Board's time and workload;
- The identification of priorities for inquiry, based on the Corporate Plan 2005/08 priorities;
- The allocation of financial and human resources to support the Board;
- Planning of evidence from councillors, officers and potential external witnesses allowing the provision of written submissions in advance where required;
- Informing the public in advance of the Board's proposed activities, thereby enhancing their ability to participate.

2.3 Scrutiny Board work comes from a number of different sources:



2.4 In addition, the 2007 Democratic Services survey of members' opinion of the scrutiny function highlighted possible areas for further work. A relatively low level of member satisfaction with "the extent of scrutiny of external partners" indicates that this area might be usefully explored. A lower level of satisfaction "that scrutiny recommendations make a difference" has been partially addressed in the 2007/8 scrutiny action plan with the introduction of SMART recommendations and a new method for tracking and monitoring recommendations in 2007/8.

- 2.5 These different elements will require forward planning and the Board will need to consider giving priority to the Corporate Plan 2005/08 strategic outcomes. The Board will also need to create a manageable workload. Over the last few years of Scrutiny Board work, experience has shown that the process is more effective if the Board seeks to minimise the number of substantial inquiries running at one time. The Board is advised to consider the benefits of single item agendas (excluding miscellaneous information and minutes) in order to focus on all the relevant evidence and complete inquiries in a shorter period of time. There are various mechanisms available to assist the Board in concluding inquiries quickly whilst the issues are pertinent, such as working groups and site visits.
- 2.6 Previous experience has shown that the majority of work is initiated by the Board itself and given that there will be a number of competing demands, this work needs to be carefully selected in order to reflect the priorities associated with the relevant strategic outcome within the Corporate Plan 2005/08 and Council Plan to ensure the Council is achieving those stated aims.

### **Work programming**

- 2.7 The Director of Children's Services, Chief Executive of Education Leeds and the Executive Members for Children's Services have been invited to attend this meeting of the Board to contribute to discussions about the Board's work programme.
- 2.8 Following those discussions, it is suggested that the Board agrees an outline work programme that prioritises the issues to be investigated. The work programme would need, in accordance with the protocols, to fairly reflect minority party concerns.

### **3.0 Recommendation**

- 3.1 Members are requested to agree issues for inclusion in the Board's work programme.

