

**Report of Head of Democratic Services**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)**

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

**Subject: Work Schedule**

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the remainder of the current municipal year.

**2. Background information**

- 2.1 All Scrutiny Boards are required to determine and manage their own work schedule for the municipal year. In doing so, the work schedule should not be considered a fixed and rigid schedule, it should be recognised as a document that can be adapted and changed to reflect any new and emerging issues throughout the year; and also reflect any timetable issues that might occur from time to time.

**3. Main issues**

- 3.1 On 16 March 2020, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Leeds City Council took the necessary step to cancel a number of planned meetings of various Committees, Boards and Panels. This included all Scrutiny Board meetings and any joint scrutiny arrangements where the Council acts as the lead authority.
- 3.2 Scrutiny Board Chairs were jointly involved in the decision-making process to cancel Scrutiny Board meetings in what were unprecedented and rapidly changing circumstances.

- 3.3 Scrutiny Board Chairs were actively engaged in the review and clearance of key decisions necessarily taken under the Council's Urgency provisions during this time, and call-in arrangements continued.
- 3.4 In cancelling Scrutiny Board meetings it was acknowledged that, after the urgency of the initial stages of the pandemic response, there would be opportunity to reflect and identify any lessons learned across different service areas and statutory local authority scrutiny functions would have an important role to play in this process.
- 3.5 With Council services focused on the urgent pandemic response and subsequent city recovery plan, the usual collaborative process of annual work programming for Scrutiny Boards was suspended. However, in May 2020 all Scrutiny Boards were briefed on decision making relating to the areas of the pandemic response that fell within their respective remits.
- 3.6 The Children and Families Scrutiny Board also held a working group meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 to complete a piece of work outstanding from last year surrounding the actions taken by the Council in response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report on the provision of suitable education for a child absent from school due to anxiety. In conclusion, the Scrutiny Board welcomed the actions that had been taken in response to the Ombudsman's report whilst also acknowledging the importance of the ongoing governance review work aimed at achieving greater consistency amongst clusters. It was agreed that the Director of Children and Families would reflect the views of Scrutiny as part of his update report to Executive Board in July.
- 3.7 The Scrutiny Board held a further working group meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to consider the update report of the Chief Executive on the Council's Response and Recovery Plan which was reported to the Executive Board on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020. During this meeting, the Board was also briefed on the latest position with regard to those service areas that fall within the remit of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, including Schools, Early Years/Childcare Provision, Children Social Care and Children's Homes.
- 3.8 Public sessions of all Scrutiny Boards have now re-started, albeit remotely. These sessions are also being conducted in a more streamlined format than traditional committee meetings in recognition of the fact that new remote ways of conducting public meetings need to be tested and adapted, and many services are also continuing to respond to the consequences of Covid-19 and the subsequent easing of lockdown restrictions.
- 3.9 The latest iteration of the Board's work schedule for the remainder of the municipal year is attached as Appendix 1 for consideration and agreement of the Scrutiny Board – subject to any identified and agreed amendments.
- 3.10 Executive Board minutes from the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020 are attached as Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider and note the Executive Board minutes, insofar as they relate to the remit of the Scrutiny Board; and identify any matter where specific scrutiny activity may be warranted, and therefore subsequently incorporated into the work schedule.

### Developing the work schedule

3.11 When considering any developments and/or modifications to the work schedule, effort should be undertaken to:

- Avoid unnecessary duplication by having a full appreciation of any existing forums already having oversight of, or monitoring a particular issue.
- Ensure any Scrutiny undertaken has clarity and focus of purpose and will add value and can be delivered within an agreed time frame.
- Avoid pure “information items” except where that information is being received as part of a policy/scrutiny review.
- Seek advice about available resources and relevant timings, taking into consideration the workload across the Scrutiny Boards and the type of Scrutiny taking place.
- Build in sufficient flexibility to enable the consideration of urgent matters that may arise during the year.

3.12 In addition, in order to deliver the work schedule, the Board may need to take a flexible approach and undertake activities outside the formal schedule of meetings – such as working groups and site visits, where necessary and appropriate. This flexible approach may also require additional formal meetings of the Scrutiny Board.

## **4. Consultation and engagement**

4.1.1 The Vision for Scrutiny states that Scrutiny Boards should seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director(s) and Executive Member(s) about available resources prior to agreeing items of work.

### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

4.2.1 The Scrutiny Board Procedure Rules state that, where appropriate, all terms of reference for work undertaken by Scrutiny Boards will include ‘to review how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on all equality areas, as set out in the Council’s Equality and Diversity Scheme’.

### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

4.3.1 The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Boards promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the best council objectives.

### Climate Emergency

4.3.2 When considering areas of work, the Board is reminded that influencing climate change and sustainability should be a key area of focus.

### **4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money**

4.4.1 Experience has shown that the Scrutiny process is more effective and adds greater value if the Board seeks to minimise the number of substantial inquiries running at one time and focus its resources on one key issue at a time.

4.4.2 The Vision for Scrutiny, agreed by full Council also recognises that like all other Council functions, resources to support the Scrutiny function are under considerable pressure and that requests from Scrutiny Boards cannot always be met.

Consequently, when establishing their work programmes Scrutiny Boards should:

- Seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director and Executive Member about available resources;
- Avoid duplication by having a full appreciation of any existing forums already having oversight of, or monitoring a particular issue;
- Ensure any Scrutiny undertaken has clarity and focus of purpose and will add value and can be delivered within an agreed time frame.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

4.5.1 This report has no specific legal implications.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

4.6.1 This report has no specific risk management implications.

### **5. Conclusions**

5.1 All Scrutiny Boards are required to determine and manage their own work schedule for the municipal year. The latest iteration of the Board's work schedule is attached as Appendix 1 for consideration and agreement of the Scrutiny Board – subject to any identified and agreed amendments.

### **6. Recommendations**

6.1 Members are asked to consider the matters outlined in this report and agree (or amend) the overall work schedule (as presented at Appendix 1) as the basis for the Board's work for the remainder of 2020/21.

### **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

7.1 None.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.