

## Sources of work for the Scrutiny Board

Date: 21 June 2021

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources)

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### **What is this report about?**

#### **Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions**

This report provides information and guidance on potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Board's terms of reference. In consultation with the relevant Directors and Executive Board Members, the Scrutiny Board is requested to consider and discuss priority areas of Scrutiny for the forthcoming municipal year.

### **Recommendations**

Members are requested to consider and discuss the information and guidance provided within this report when determining priority areas of Scrutiny work for the forthcoming municipal year.

## **Why is the proposal being put forward?**

1. Scrutiny Boards are responsible for ensuring that items of scrutiny work come from a strategic approach as well as a need to challenge service performance and respond to issues of high public interest. Scrutiny is also a valuable sounding board for new policy initiatives and therefore such pre-decision work continues to be encouraged.
2. To assist the Scrutiny Board in effectively managing its workload for the forthcoming municipal year, this report provides information and guidance on potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Board's terms of reference.

### Key sources of information

#### ➤ Best Council Plan

3. The Best Council Plan is a significant source of information in terms of highlighting the Council's key areas of priority over the coming months and years.
4. An updated Best Council Plan 2020-2025 was launched in September 2020, placing emphasis on the role of the Council's priorities in establishing a 'new normal' for life in Leeds after COVID-19. This is attached as Appendix 1 for Members information.

#### ➤ Performance Data

5. Performance monitoring remains a key element of the Scrutiny Boards' work and is also a valuable source of information to help identify potential areas that may warrant further scrutiny. The most recent performance data is therefore included as a separate agenda item for today's meeting (Agenda Item 5). This provides the Board with a summary of performance against the strategic priorities that are relevant to the Board's remit.

#### ➤ Financial Information

6. All Scrutiny Boards are consulted annually on the Council's initial budget proposals in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework. This is undertaken in conjunction with a review of the in-year financial health of the authority.
7. The 2021/22 budget proposals were agreed by Full Council in February 2021. The Scrutiny Board may wish to consider progress against the delivery of these and therefore a summary of the budget proposals relevant to the remit of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board is provided in Appendix 2.
8. Maintaining an overview of the Council's financial health is also a key element of the Scrutiny Board's work and therefore the Board may wish to receive further financial health updates during the municipal year.

### Recommended areas of work

9. Last municipal year, at its final meeting in March the Board highlighted a number of potential areas that the successor board may wish to look at in 2021/22. The Board undertook a significant inquiry item in 2020/21 focussed on pre-decision scrutiny of how

the council is developing new ways of working. This is linked to necessary changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic but also reflects recent trends in home working and the need for the Council to rationalise its estate both from a financial perspective and to reflect building usage and the likely changes that will be brought about by increased home working. This item remains on the work schedule and further details on this work stream are considered at agenda item 6.

10. In addition to the ongoing work on new ways of working the previous Board also highlighted potential scrutiny of Digital Information Services (DIS) both in terms of future vision and service strategy and, more specifically, on the approach to project and programme management. This item is addressed in more detail as agenda item 7 elsewhere in these papers.

### **Other sources of Scrutiny work**

11. Other common sources of work include requests for scrutiny, Call In requests and other corporate referrals. The Board is also required to be formally consulted during the development of key policies which form part of the council's Budget and Policy Framework.

### **Methods of working**

12. Each Scrutiny Board has planned to hold eight formal or 'consultative'<sup>1</sup> meetings throughout this municipal year.
13. Whilst the decision to hold any additional meetings is left to the discretion of each Board, historically Scrutiny Boards have also adopted other methods of evidence gathering outside of the public meeting setting, such as site visits and working group meetings.
14. Working groups comprise of a number of Members from a particular Scrutiny Board who may be appointed to carry out specific tasks on behalf of the Board. Suitable tasks for a working group may involve Members meeting on their own (for example for the purposes of developing reports and recommendations in connection with an ongoing Inquiry or terms of reference for a future Inquiry). Alternatively, they may entail activities which cannot realistically be undertaken within the confines of a formally convened Scrutiny Board meeting.
15. In all cases, the primary purpose of a working group is to obtain and/or develop information and to report back to a formally convened meeting of the Scrutiny Board. A working group cannot discharge the primary purpose of a Scrutiny Board i.e. it cannot undertake Inquiries independently from its parent Scrutiny Board, conduct Inquiries, issue reports/recommendations (other than to its parent Scrutiny Board) or in any way present itself to a third party as representing the views of the parent Scrutiny Board.
16. However, as set out within the Vision for Scrutiny, the Board must also remain mindful of the resource implications associated with the use of site visits and working group meetings when determining its work programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Consultative meetings are held remotely and webcasted live to enable public access. However, they are not a public meeting held in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.

## What impact will this proposal have?

**Wards affected: All**

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

17. The information presented within this report will assist Members to identify areas of priority within the Scrutiny Board's terms of reference and also help manage the Board's workload for the forthcoming municipal year.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

18. It is recognised that in order to enable Scrutiny to focus on strategic areas of priority, each Scrutiny Board needs to establish an early dialogue with the Directors and Executive Board Members holding the relevant portfolios. The Vision for Scrutiny also states that Scrutiny Boards should seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director and Executive Member about available resources prior to agreeing items of work.
19. The Director of Resources and relevant Executive Board Members have therefore been invited to today's meeting to share their views and contribute to the Board's discussion.

## What are the resource implications?

20. 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.
21. The Vision for Scrutiny<sup>2</sup>, 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.

## What are the legal implications?

22. This report has no specific legal implications.

## What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

23. There are no risk management implications relevant to this report.

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<sup>2</sup> This forms part of Article 6 within the Council Constitution.

**Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

24. The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Boards promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the best council objectives and it is widely recognised that co-opted members can significantly aid the work of Scrutiny Boards.

**Appendices**

25. Appendix 1 -- Best Council Plan 2020-2025.
26. Appendix 2 – Budget information relevant to the remit of the Board

**Background papers**

27. None.