

Sources of work for the Scrutiny Board

Date: 20 June 2022

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Strategy & 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 about potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Scrutiny Board's terms of reference.
- In consultation with the relevant Directors and Executive Board Members, the Scrutiny Board is requested to consider and discuss potential areas of work for the Board for the forthcoming municipal year.

Recommendations

- a) Members are requested to reflect on the information and guidance provided within this report when considering potential areas for scrutiny for the forthcoming municipal year.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

1. Scrutiny Boards are responsible for ensuring that their work programme prioritises issues where the Board is able to add strategic value, challenge service performance and/or respond to issues of significant public interest.
2. Scrutiny can also provide a valuable mechanism through which to consult members about new policy initiatives and as such pre-decision scrutiny continues to be encouraged.
3. 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 City Ambition

4. The Best City Ambition, which was adopted in February 2022, replaced the Best Council Plan. It sets out the long-term vision for the city with a strong emphasis on the importance of partnership working.
5. The Best City Ambition focuses on tackling poverty and inequality, through activity that prioritises the three 'pillars' of health and wellbeing, inclusive growth and zero carbon. It also identifies four 'breakthrough priorities,' which will be the focus of cross-cutting, collaborative project teams.
6. The Council's approach to performance management is being reviewed following the adoption of the Best City Ambition in February and will therefore be a matter for consideration by the five Scrutiny Boards over the course of 2022/23 and beyond.
7. The Best City Ambition is attached as Appendix 1 for information.

➤ Performance Data

8. Performance monitoring remains a key element of the Scrutiny Boards' work and is also a valuable source of information to help identify issues that may warrant further scrutiny. The most recent performance data is included as a separate agenda item. This provides the Board with a summary of performance against the strategic priorities that are relevant to the Board's remit – although as noted above this is subject to ongoing review following the adoption of the Best City Ambition in February 2022.

➤ Financial Information

9. 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.
10. The 2022/23 budget proposals were agreed by Full Council in February 2022. The Scrutiny Board may wish to consider progress against the delivery of those proposals. With this in mind, an exert from the 2022/23 Revenue and Council Tax report, as agreed at the Full Council meeting in February 2022, is included at Appendix 3. This summarises the areas of the budget where a proportion of the directorate delegations relate to the remit of the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board.

11. 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.

Other sources of Scrutiny work

12. Other common sources of work include referrals to scrutiny, Call In requests and other corporate requests. The Scrutiny Board is 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

13. Each Scrutiny Board has planned to hold eight formal or 'consultative'¹ meetings throughout this municipal year.
14. 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.
15. Working groups comprise of Members of a particular Scrutiny Board who are 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.
16. 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, 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.
17. 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.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

18. The information and guidance presented within this report focuses on potential sources of work and areas of priority within the Scrutiny Board's terms of reference. This aims to assist Members when considering potential areas of scrutiny work for the forthcoming municipal year.

¹ 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 consultation and engagement has taken place?

19. In order to enable Scrutiny to focus on strategic priorities, it is recognised that each Board needs to establish an early dialogue with those Directors and Executive Board Members whose remits are aligned to that of the Scrutiny Board. 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.
20. The relevant Directors and 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?

21. 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.
22. The Vision for Scrutiny², 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?

23. This report has no specific legal implications.

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

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

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

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

25. 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

26. Appendix 1 – Best City Ambition

² This forms part of Article 6 within the Council Constitution.

27. Appendix 2 – Approved 2022/23 budget proposals relevant to the remit of the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board.

Background papers

28. None.