

Sources of Work and Work Programme 2024/25

Date: 10 June 2024

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

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.

The Council's scrutiny function seeks to add value to the work of the authority by carrying out a range of different categories of work including policy and service review, performance monitoring and pre-decision scrutiny.

In addition, and to remain agile to decision making requirements, the Board could also seek to make recommendations through enhanced use of scrutiny statements that would deal with forthcoming issues quicker whilst also enabling scrutiny boards to exert further influence on policy development and decision making within the authority.

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.

What is this report about?

- 1 Scrutiny Boards are responsible for ensuring that their work programme prioritises issues where the Board can add strategic value, challenge service performance and/or respond to issues of significant public interest.
- 2 Scrutiny can also provide a valuable mechanism to consult members about new policy initiatives and as in previous years pre-decision scrutiny continues to be encouraged as an approach through which scrutiny can add insight and value to the achievement of the Council's ambitions.
- 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 was adopted in February 2022 and was last updated in 2023/2024. 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 '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 and the implications of the Office for Local Government (OFLOG) which was established in 2023, revised performance monitoring will therefore be a matter for consideration by the five Scrutiny Boards over the course of 2024/25 and beyond.
- 7 The Best City Ambition, following the 2024 refresh, 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 at today's meeting. 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.

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 Maintaining an overview of the Council's financial health is also a key element of the Scrutiny Board's work and the Board may wish to receive further financial health updates during the municipal year.

Strategic Partnership Board

- 11 As set out within its terms of reference, this Scrutiny Board may review or scrutinise the performance of the Children and Families Trust Board acting as a 'critical friend.'
- 12 In considering items of scrutiny work this year, the Scrutiny Board is encouraged to explore how it can add value to the work of the Partnership in delivering on the city priorities, and the obsessions and outcomes detailed in the Children and Young Peoples Plan.

School organisation proposals and objections procedure

- 13 Following the dissolution of the School Organisation Advisory Board (SOAB) in 2019, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board considered what role it could play as part of the school organisation proposals and objections procedure, which relates to maintained schools, in terms of still allowing an appropriate level of rigour and challenge to continue to exist where formal objections are received following the publication of a Statutory Notice to close a school; open a new school; or make prescribed alterations to a school. An approach was formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board in July 2019, and this is summarised in Appendix 2.

Executive Board

- 14 Elements of the Executive Board's work programme which relate to policy development are often known in advance. As key issues and policies arise the Board could consider undertaking pre-decision scrutiny work to support and enhance policy development within its remit.
- 15 Additionally, as per the Constitution Scrutiny is also involved in pre-decision scrutiny work linked to the Council's Budget and Policy Framework - such as the forthcoming Youth Justice Plan Update (due for approval by Council in July 2024), featured elsewhere on today's agenda.

Draft work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year

- 16 The draft work programme set out at Appendix 3 incorporates these matters if any are known, along with other annual update items so that members can consider and determine whether to proceed with these areas of work within the timescales available and to provide an initial overview of some possible work items in the 2024/25 municipal year.
- 17 In addition, reflected in the work programme are other known items of scrutiny activity, such as performance and budget monitoring and other identified areas of work recommended by the former Scrutiny Board to pursue in this new municipal year.

Working with External Partners

- 18 In recent months, the scrutiny function has sought to develop stronger links with the University of Leeds to explore potential collaboration on policy development and making use of the significant expertise the University has in that area. Whilst this is not fully developed there is potential for the Board to make use of this expertise when developing its work programme and more generally to hear evidence from academics in areas that fall under the Board's remit.

Voices of Children and Young People

- 19 In the 2023/24 municipal year the Board agreed to include the voice of children and young people in its work in future years. This will be led by the Principal Scrutiny Advisor working with the Voice, Influence and Change Team. Through this approach the Board's Work Programme could seek to reflect and where appropriate respond to the issues that children and young people believe to be the most important.

Other sources of Scrutiny work

- 20 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

- 21 Each Scrutiny Board has planned to hold eight formal or 'consultative'¹ meetings throughout this municipal year.
- 22 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.
- 23 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.
- 24 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.
- 25 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?

- 26 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.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 27 The terms of reference of the Scrutiny Boards promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the priorities of the Best City Ambition. The Boards are asked to consider proposed items of business within this context.
- 28 National guidance from both the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) advocates pre-decision scrutiny as a means through which scrutiny can improve and influence decision making. In particular it can offer an impartial perspective, challenge assumptions and strengthen evidence to support decision making, provide enhanced engagement with the public and understanding of local views and widen

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.

ownership of decisions as more elected members are consulted on their expectations linked to decisions.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

29 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.

What are the resource implications?

30 The Vision for Scrutiny², agreed by full Council, recognises that like all other Council services, 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:

- a) Seek the advice of the Scrutiny officer, the relevant Director and Executive Member about available resources;
- b) Avoid duplication by having a full appreciation of any existing forums already having oversight of, or monitoring a particular issue;
- c) 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 key risks and how are they being managed?

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

What are the legal implications?

32 This report has no specific legal implications.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Best City Ambition
- Appendix 2: Agreed approach on the role of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board as part of the school organisation proposals and objections procedure
- Appendix 3: Draft Work Programme 2024/25

Background papers

- None

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