

Agenda Item 18.

TITLE	Developing the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 12 July 2016
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Effective Overview and Scrutiny helps to improve services, holds decision makers to account and engages with local communities. In so doing it helps to demonstrate that the Council and other public service providers are open and transparent and are delivering high quality, value for money services.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to consider the proposals in the report and agree improvements to the work programming process and timetable for 2017/18.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Each year the Committee approves a Work Programme for each of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Recent discussions have indicated the need for the Work Programme to be more robust and for greater engagement between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive. The report considers examples of best practice in Work Programming across the country.

The report sets out a revised programme for development of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2017/18. It also considers the involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in policy development across the Council.

Background

An effective Overview and Scrutiny function is underpinned by robust work programming. Effective work programming lays the foundations for targeted scrutiny of issues of local importance. It helps to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny adds value and makes a difference.

The recent Member Overview and Scrutiny Training session highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of the current work programming process. The session identified the need for a more structured process which involves the Executive at an earlier stage. This would help to focus on key priorities and reduce the risk of duplication of effort.

Some of the key elements of effective work planning were discussed during the training session and are set out at Annex A for information. In order to improve the quality of work programming, different Councils have developed different approaches. In order to gather and sift ideas for inclusion in Work Programmes, Councils:

- Seek ideas from Members, Officers, Parish and Town Councils and partner organisations;
- Engage with community groups and special interest groups;
- Seek public views via social media and the Council website;
- Carry out public surveys or use Citizens' Panels;
- Review corporate complaints and customer feedback;
- Review key corporate documents such as the Council Plan, peer reviews and major service inspections.

Once a longlist of potential items is achieved Councils then carry out a sifting process through initiatives such as awayday sessions with Members and partners or a Scrutiny Cafe which brings stakeholders together for a facilitated session aimed at producing a list of key items for review.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has produced a template for developing an annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. The key elements and timeframe are:

- January/February – Initial consultation with O&S Members, Executive Members, senior officers and partner organisations. Public engagement via the Council's website and social media.
- March – Produce a long list of potential topics for review. Consult O&S and Executive Members and Officers and publish details for further feedback.
- April – Produce a shortlist of topics. Carry out mini-scoping for each item. Consult O&S and Executive Members, Officers and partners about the proposed shortlist.
- May – sign off the Work Programme and the O&S Annual Report at the same meeting. Retain flexibility in the Work Programme so that urgent items can be incorporated during the year.

- November – mid-year review of the Work Programme by the O&S Management Committee.

Policy Development

Effective Overview and Scrutiny can assist in the development of new policies in support of the Council's priorities. Earlier in 2016, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Leader of the Council agreed a protocol relating to the involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in Policy Development. The protocol is attached at Annex B for Members to consider and comment.

Analysis of Issues

Members are requested to consider the examples of best practice set out in the report and agree areas of the current Overview and Scrutiny process where improvements can be made.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

List of Background Papers

Centre for Public Scrutiny report – A Cunning Plan

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Developing an Effective Work Programme

Planning the work programme	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keeping the work plan manageable ✓ Avoiding long lists of agenda items – less is more ✓ Balancing internal and external topics ✓ Ensuring a focus on Council/area priorities ✓ Picking up on real issues of public concern – but not problems that can be solved at other levels or by other means ✓ Keeping it under rigorous review - at every meeting 	

Do:

- ensure that the Scrutiny work programme focuses on the issues that matter most to both local people and the Council – for example, issues might fall in the following categories:
 - Value for money indicators – high cost, poor performance, poor satisfaction
 - Corporate and partnership priorities
 - Policy development
 - Response to regional/ national developments
 - Emerging issue, such as:
 - a particular concern to residents (residents surveys/ consultation exercises)
 - a request for investigation by either senior officers, Cabinet or partners into a problematic area
 - result of a Councillor Call for Action
 - source of a high level of complaints
 - potential to deliver long-term financial benefits to the organisation
 - Weak performance – based on PIs, persistent complaints etc – that needs an in-depth examination
- try to use the best quality information & advice from external and internal sources
- if you have them, use a simple set of simple criteria to determine whether or not topics are included in the scrutiny work programme and their priority

Don't:

- put items on the agenda just to get 'information' that you could get through an off-line briefing note
- put items on the agenda unless you are convinced you can discuss it can add value.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee then a reason must be provided. The relevant Director would also be afforded the opportunity to say why it would not be appropriate to create such a Task and Finish Group.

- In case of any disagreements about whether an Executive Task and Finish Group should be set up the Executive Member will make the final decision.