

TITLE	Improving O&S Work Programming, Monitoring and Reporting
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 24 February 2021
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

A key aim of the Overview and Scrutiny process is to engage with residents to identify topics of importance and to provide evidence of satisfaction with Council and partner services such as the NHS and Thames Valley Police. Another key aim is to provide assurance that public money is being spent wisely and is being targeted on the stated priorities of the public service providers. The proposals in the report aim to make Overview and Scrutiny more effective by strengthening the process for developing work programmes and more effective monitoring and reporting during the year.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) consider the proposed ideas for improving horizon scanning and the development of Overview and Scrutiny work programmes;
- 2) consider the proposed ideas for monitoring and tracking progress against Overview and Scrutiny recommendations;
- 3) note that potential items for the 2021/22 work programmes will be submitted to the Committee's meeting in March 2021.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council has a well-established Overview and Scrutiny process. As Council resources become more constrained it is important that Overview and Scrutiny focuses on key elements of service delivery and policy development, both inside and outside the Council.

At its meeting on 20 January 2021, the Committee began the process of developing O&S Work Programmes for 2021/22. Effective work programming is a Member-led process aimed at shortlisting and prioritising issues of community concern together with issues arising out of the Council Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan and major policy or service changes.

The report sets out proposals to improve "horizon scanning" to ensure that emerging issues and policies are factored into the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes at an early stage. It also contains proposals to track the actions taken in response to Overview and Scrutiny recommendations in order to strengthen the feedback loop and measure improvements.

Background

At its meeting on 20 January 2021, the Committee began the process of developing O&S Work Programmes for 2021/22. Effective work programming is a Member-led process aimed at shortlisting and prioritising issues of community concern together with issues arising out of the Council Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan and major policy or service changes. It aims to:

- reflect local needs and concerns;
- prioritise topics for scrutiny which had the most impact or benefit;
- involve local residents and stakeholders;
- be flexible enough to respond to new or urgent issues.

In order to generate ideas and involvement from local residents, community groups and stakeholders, the Council's website and social media are used to publicise the development of the Work Programmes. In considering potential issues for review, Members take into account the following selection criteria:

- Whether the issue was of local, and preferably current, concern;
- Whether undertaking the review can be linked to the Council's Vision and Corporate Delivery Plan;
- Whether the topic was already being reviewed elsewhere within the Council (e.g. as part of the Continuous Improvement Programme);
- Whether the topic was capable of being influenced by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- Whether the topic had a manageable scope – not too wide-ranging and yet of sufficient size to warrant a Scrutiny review;
- Whether sufficient resources were available to support the Scrutiny review;
- If a review was warranted, should it have a high, medium or low priority?

Over recent years, there have been examples of new policies and key decisions that have been implemented or taken without initial consideration by Overview and Scrutiny. Members have emphasised the importance of pre-decision scrutiny as an important method of influencing those policies and decisions. It provides an opportunity to challenge assumptions and to explore the ways in which risk has been assessed and mitigated.

At the January 2021 meeting, Members asked for a paper setting out some options to improve "horizon scanning" to ensure that potential issues of importance were identified early and factored into the Overview and Scrutiny work programming process.

Under the current arrangements, the work programming process begins at the start of each calendar year. Executive and non-Executive Members, CLT, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and residents are invited to contribute to a longlist of potential items. The list of items is then considered by the Management Committee in March, resulting in a proposed work programme for each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In addition to the approved list, other items can be added during the year. So, for example, the Covid-19 pandemic was added as a significant element of the 2020/21 work programmes. In addition to the agreed work programmes, the Management Committee considers the Executive Forward Programme at each meeting in order to identify further items of interest.

In order to identify potential items for the work programmes at an earlier stage, it is suggested that Members consider the following suggestions for improved horizon scanning:

- At the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in the new Municipal Year, the relevant Executive Member/s and Director/s be invited to attend in order to discuss priorities for the year ahead and any new/updated policies or plans that will be submitted to the Executive. As an example, the Leader and Chief Executive would be invited to the Management Committee whilst the Executive Member for Adult Social Care and the Director of Adult Services would be invited to HOSC.
- Members will recall the Executive-Overview and Scrutiny Protocol, agreed in 2019, which includes provisions for more regular dialogue between Overview and Scrutiny, the Executive and CLT. It is suggested that more regular meetings are set up to achieve the aim of improved information sharing and closer working. Those meetings could include discussion on emerging issues/policies which may benefit from early or pre-decision scrutiny. As a reminder, the Protocol is appended to the report.

Tracking Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations

At recent meetings of the Committee, Members have discussed the process for tracking the Committee’s decisions in order to ensure that appropriate actions are taken and a feedback loop is in operation. In order to strengthen this process it is suggested that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee introduces an Action Tracker report. The report would list recommendations/actions agreed at each meeting along with a simple progress update. This would enable Members to build up a picture during the year of progress on their decisions. It would also allow progress chasing to be carried out if specific deadlines have not been achieved. As an example, the table below sets out an Action Tracker report relating to the decisions taken at the January 2021 meeting. The report would then be updated at each subsequent meeting to build a picture of activity and progress throughout the year.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee – Draft Action Tracker 2020/21

O&S Management Committee – 20 January 2021		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
WBC Response to the Covid-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman to write to the Leader with two additional recommendations; • Funding for early years settings to be considered at Children’s Services O&S; • Add two new work programme items – Green Recovery and New Ways of Working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • TBC • Completed
O&S Work Programmes 2021/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin process for developing 2021/22 work programmes; • Report to Feb meeting on ways to improve horizon scanning and work programme development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • Completed
O&S Management Committee – March 2021		

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	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

Effective Overview and Scrutiny helps to drive service improvement, policy development and the achievement of value for money for the Borough's residents.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been given to Council's the Public Sector Equality. The ideas for improvement aim to raise the profile of Overview and Scrutiny for residents across the Borough, including residents with protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

Contact Neil Carr	Service Democratic Services
Telephone No 0118 974 6058	Email neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk
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