

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2022/23</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 11 January 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Graham Ebers, Resources and Assets

## **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:

- 1) agree the process for developing the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2022/23;
- 2) agree the process for public consultation on the draft work programmes;
- 3) agree to finalise the work programmes at the meeting on 17 March 2022;
- 4) agree in principle that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out one or more detailed Scrutiny reviews during 2022/23.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

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 Plan and major policy or service changes. It aims to:

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

Each year the Committee approves work programmes for itself and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The report considers the process for identifying potential items for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes for 2022/23.

## **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. Effective work programming helps to:

- prioritise issues for in-depth work where Overview and Scrutiny can make an impact and add value;
- reduce the need for “information only” reports;
- achieve a balance between pre-decision scrutiny, policy development and performance/budget monitoring;
- contribute at an earlier stage in the decision making process;
- increase public and stakeholder involvement in Overview and Scrutiny;
- retain flexibility in order to respond to urgent issues arising during the year.

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

- January/February – initial consultation with Overview and Scrutiny Members, Executive Members, senior Officers and partner organisations. Public engagement with residents, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and partners via the Council’s website and social media;
- March – Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to finalise the Work Programmes;
- April – publication and implementation of the Work Programmes;
- November – mid-year review of the Work Programmes by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

## **Policy Development and Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Effective Overview and Scrutiny can assist in the development of new policies in support of the Council’s priorities. In recent years the Leader of the Council and Executive Members have attended the Committee’s meetings to discuss priorities for the year ahead and to identify issues which could benefit from input from Overview and Scrutiny. The discussions indicated a consensus that Overview and Scrutiny could play a larger role in policy development. This could be via pre-decision scrutiny of new policies or in depth reviews of specific issues which could lead to new policy development. Executive Members will be asked to suggest issues for inclusion in the 2022/23 Work Programmes along with the other stakeholders.

## **In Depth Scrutiny Reviews**

An important strength of Overview and Scrutiny is the capacity to carry out in depth reviews of policies or services provided by the Council or its partners. In depth reviews allow Members to drill down into a particular issue and consider evidence from service users, community groups, experts and other stakeholders. They also enable Members

to carry out research and broaden their knowledge of best practice in the public and private sectors.

In 2021 the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group published its second report which was submitted to the Executive in September 2020. The majority of the Group's 25 recommendations were accepted and are being used to strengthen delivery of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The Committee also established the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group with a remit to review the Council's policies and plans, consider opportunities for improved partnership working and the process for monitoring and reporting progress. At the November Council meeting a proposed Motion on the declaration of an ecological emergency was also referred to the Working Group for consideration.

2021/22 also saw the third iteration of Budget Scrutiny, carried out by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee examined draft proposals for growth, savings and Capital investment. Members scrutinised Executive Members and senior managers about Budget options, risk and the longer term financial horizon.

Building on the successful outcome of the Scrutiny process, highlighted above, it is suggested that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee again identify one or more topics for in-depth review during 2022/23, the reviews to be carried out by the Committees themselves or by Task and Finish Groups.

### **Scrutiny Review Issues**

The issues identified for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny should be of interest or concern for local residents and generate public interest and involvement in the Overview and Scrutiny process.

In order to generate ideas and involvement from local residents, community groups and stakeholders, it is suggested that the Council's website and social media be used to publicise the development of the work programme and to invite suggestions for inclusion. In considering potential issues for review, Members should take into account the previously agreed selection criteria:

- Whether the issue is of local, and preferably current, concern;
- Whether undertaking the review can be linked to the Council's Vision, priorities and underpinning principles or would help achieve these;
- Whether the topic is already being reviewed elsewhere within the Council (e.g. as part of the Continuous Improvement Programme);
- Is the topic one that is capable of being influenced by one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- Is the topic of manageable scope – not too wide-ranging and yet of sufficient size to warrant a scrutiny review;
- Whether sufficient resources are available to support the scrutiny review; If a review is warranted, should it have a high, medium or low priority?
- Whether the review should be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee itself or be delegated to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or a Task and Finish Group.

## **LGA Peer Review**

Members will be aware that the Council underwent an LGA Peer Review in late 2021. The Peer Review process provides an external perspective on the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and the opportunity to share best practice from other councils. The Peer Review covered five core elements:

- Local priorities and outcomes
- Organisational and place leadership
- Governance and culture
- Financial planning and management
- Capacity for Improvement

In addition, the Council asked the Peer Review Team to consider the following issues:

- How do we improve the relationship and the image of the Council with our residents?
- How can we further foster a data and insight driven organisation and improve our horizon scanning capability?
- How can we make our Overview and Scrutiny function more meaningful and effective?
- Is our approach to change sufficiently agile to meet our ambitions?
- How do we move organisationally to a culture of higher support, higher challenge?

The Peer Review report is expected in early 2022. It is suggested that the findings in the report be used to inform the development of the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2022/23. Feedback on the request relating to improvement of the Overview and Scrutiny function will be of particular interest to Scrutiny Members.

## **Scrutiny Issues**

As a reminder, the Action Tracker report, later in the Agenda, sets out the range of issues considered by the Committee in 2021/22 to date. The Forward Programme report sets out the issues to be considered in the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Work Programme development should allow flexibility for the consideration of urgent issues and the call-in of decisions made by the Executive. Once approved, the work programme issues will be timetabled into the programme of Overview and Scrutiny meetings during the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

## 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	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	NA	NA

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

### Cross Council Implications

None

### Public Sector Equality Duty

The issues raised during 2022/23 will raise the profile of Overview and Scrutiny across the Borough, including residents with protected characteristics defined under the Equality Act 2010. The aim is to achieve better outcomes and value for money for all the Borough's residents

### Climate Emergency – The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham borough by 2030

The reports of the O&S Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group have included recommendations aimed at strengthening the delivery of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan

### List of Background Papers

None

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