

Scrutiny Improvement Review - Action Plan – August 2023

No.	Recommendation	Action	Timescale
1	Political group leaders play a key role in resetting the level and standard of collaboration and transparency in scrutiny to allow it to function as a crucial part of council governance – accountability, policy and decision-making and improvement. Leadership is a must have ingredient in making this change. Leaders need to set the standards for others	Agreed. Leader has emphasised the importance of effective cross-party Scrutiny and its potential increased role in policy development	Ongoing – new Leader (May 2023) has confirmed the key role played by O&S as part of effective governance and decision making
2	A clearer focus on democratic accountability - Scrutiny of Executive members should form a key part of the work plan, with Executive members regularly attending Scrutiny to answer questions on items falling within their portfolio responsibilities is vital	Agreed. Executive Members now attend O&S meetings routinely to present items and to answer Member questions	Ongoing
3	Leader to attend Scrutiny on a quarterly basis to present an integrated finance and performance report and to be held to account for Council performance and progress. Perhaps adopting a ‘select committee’ style	Agreed. Attendance by Leader and CEX is scheduled every 6 months.	Next attendance due at O&S Management Committee on 16 January 2024
4	More emphasis on scrutiny’s shaping role - With a clear mapping for scrutiny in early policy development and key-decisions. Involving scrutiny early and sharing information in a transparent way, based on trust and co-operation	Agreed. Regular meetings between Executive Members, Scrutiny Chairs and CLT to “horizon scan” and discuss items and the effectiveness of Scrutiny	Ongoing – potential improvements in O&S “Overview” function discussed with Leader at meeting in July 2023
5	Scrutiny avoids the main focus on updates and presentations. The task of providing Scrutiny members with the essential core knowledge to be sufficiently effective in the scrutiny task could be developed as briefings or ‘master classes’ where the topic is complex. Lengthy learning exercises can squeeze scrutiny capacity	Agreed. Training programme for Scrutiny Members being developed with “one off” briefings on key issues. Focus on timely circulation of papers in advance of O&S meetings	Ongoing

6	Resist scrutiny being a source of political point-scoring. Intentionally targeting scrutiny as a forum to gain a media headline is a disruptive and diluting activity. This does not prevent disagreement or different perspectives being debated	Agreed. Training for Scrutiny Chairs to control meetings more effectively. O&S Management Chair has reminded Members that conclusions should be reached on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds	Ongoing – review in 2023/24
7	Develop regular communication and information sharing so that Scrutiny can be a resource to inform (often improve) Executive decision making. This could be achieved through holding triangulation meetings between scrutiny chairs, Executive members, and relevant Directors to consider future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans. It would also present an opportunity to share and discuss opportunities to involve Scrutiny as an improvement asset	Agreed. As discussed in 4 above. Regular discussion on topics, timing, training and team (i.e. ensuring that the right people are in the room when issues are considered)	Quarterly meetings
8	Work planning to be a committee-based responsibility – review the need for a Co-ordinating committee to oversee this	Agreed. O&S Management Committee sets annual work programme. Each O&S Committee then reviews and develops its own programme. All the O&S Chairs sit on the Management Committee	Annual work programming process starts in January each year – extra/urgent items can be introduced during the year
9	Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee - Engaging members, officers, partners, and the public to prioritise the topics for review	Agreed. As part of annual work programming process	Ongoing – as above
10	Build on the current approach to financial Scrutiny, MTFs/ budget scrutiny. We have produced guidance on financial scrutiny with CIPFA ¹ , setting out scrutiny activity to complement Councils' annual financial cycle. The guide suggests ways to move budget and finance scrutiny beyond set-piece scrutiny 'events and quarterly financial	Agreed. Community & Corporate O&S Committee reviews Budget development each year. Training provided for all Members on Budget Scrutiny. CIPFA guide shared with Members each year	Ongoing in 2023/24

	performance scorecards being reported to committee		
11	Set clear priorities for Children’s, Adult Social Care and Health scrutiny as areas where scrutiny must be fully engaged and properly focused. (Especially LAC, Safeguarding, SEND, changes to health and social care [with potentially large cost implications], and others	Agreed. These issues are scrutinised by Children’s Services O&S and HOSC. These Committees develop their own work programmes. Review need for additional Member training	Ongoing
12	Review the need for the O&S Management Committee. Or consider its purpose and its role within the overall Scrutiny structure,	O&S Management Committee has the oversight role and has its own extensive work programme. It also carries out the Call-In function. Its role is clearly established in the overall Scrutiny structure	Ongoing
13	Consider extending the use of task and finish group work – or alternative scrutiny arrangements – To ensure the most effective use of time and resources and to deliver maximum impact.	Agreed. Task & Finish Groups have operated successfully with detailed reports and recommendations to the Executive. This will continue in 2023/24	Ongoing
14	Change the way that information is provided to Scrutiny members for oversight - Reduce the number of items coming to Scrutiny solely for information and consider how information on the following matters could be shared with Councillors, outside of committee	Agreed. More effective briefings and pre-meeting work to ensure effective meetings and alternative methods of information sharing	Ongoing
15	Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny – so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not excessively detailed and is understandable by Members	Agreed. See 14 above.	Ongoing
16	Review how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured – This could include putting a ‘recommendations monitoring report’ at the beginning of agendas to orientate Scrutiny towards outcomes-focused meetings,	Agreed. Implement a more effective “feedback loop” following O&S recommendations to the Executive. Annual O&S report to Council	Ongoing

	alongside an emphasis on finding strong recommendations from questioning, to present to the Executive as improvement or challenge proposals.	outlines key issues scrutinised and the impact on residents. Follow-up reports on the recommendations made by Task & Finish Groups. Action tracker in each Scrutiny Agenda	
17	More skills development support is offered for the key roles of Chair and Vice-Chair – To provide them with the confidence they need in leading the scrutiny function.	Agreed. 1 to 2 training pilot implemented for Chair and Vice-Chair of the O&S Management Committee – using the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny experts. Consider further training in 2023/24	Ongoing – subject to budget constraints
18	Consider further Scrutiny development and training for all Committee members - To develop a common understanding of what “good” Scrutiny practice looks like.	Agreed. Member training programme being implemented - suggestions include: introduction to Scrutiny; Budget Scrutiny; HOSC; Children’s Services; Charing and Questioning skills. Circulation of updated guidance and CfGS “how to” briefings	Ongoing – subject to budget constraints
19	Providing additional briefing or expert involvement as required - To assist Scrutiny members in becoming more capable to develop questioning strategies that will deliver high-impact and value-adding Scrutiny	Agreed. Expert witnesses have attended Task & Finish Group meetings. Co-opted members on Children’s Services O&S Committee	Ongoing
20	Cross-party pre-meetings for Scrutiny committees could be established - with a specific focus on identifying priorities and members working together to develop lines of enquiry so that recommendations are more likely	Agreed. These cross-party meetings have been successful in the past – look to re-establish for each O&S Committee in 2023/24	2023/24