Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan 2009/10

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> **Recommendation:** that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be advised which items this committee would wish added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees work plan for 2009/10.

1. Background

This is the last meeting of this Committee this civic year. At Appendix "A" is the current work plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee will note that it has not been possible to deal with all of these issues this year.

This had been mainly due to the number of issues being more than can be handled by the available staff resources and being overtaken by events particularly with this committee on health issues.

The Committee is invited to consider which of the issues from its current work plan it wishes to carry over and what new issues it would like to look at in the new civic year.

2. Work Programme

There are many sources for potential topics for Scrutiny and Members may wish to consider some of the following as a starting point for identifying topics:

- Councillors experiences
- Issues identified by Audits and Inspections (past and present)
- Results of Consultation
- Areas of poor performance
- Stakeholders concerns raised by the Council's partners and service users
- Consultation with Cabinet and Heads of Service on pertinent issues that are emerging or any forthcoming opportunities or threats
- Central government policy changes

Use of the **Forward Agenda** and **pre – Scrutiny**, can also provide more opportunities for involvement in the decision making process. If pre-scrutiny is well planned and used appropriately it should lead to successes and enhance the democratic process, while dealing with any barriers at an earlier stage than for example a call – in could achieve. When managed effectively, pre-

scrutiny can strengthen Officer's reports and if Council policies are to be robust, inclusive and ultimately, have Member buy-in, then pre-scrutiny can play its part.

This could be achieved by inviting Portfolio Holders to give regular presentations to the relevant Committee, during which they could highlight upcoming issues.

The overview aspect of overview and scrutiny continues to need to be developed at the council and the Portfolio Holder's assistance in drawing the committee's attention to long term policy issues will be welcome. The work currently being done by the Youth Engagement Task and Finish Group is a good example of this.

It would also be prudent to build some flexibility into the work plan to cover for urgent issues as they arise and for any Councilor Call for Actions that would fall to this committee to consider.

This Committee will have 6 meetings during the year and it is suggested that Scrutiny needs to be selective in identifying the areas it wishes to scrutinise and focus on issues where it can add value. Work programmes should allow enough time to do justice to all of the items on each agenda. In practice, this will mean being more selective in deciding which issues to scrutinise, perhaps focussing on one main piece of scrutiny for each meeting agenda.

Work Programmes should also contain clear links to Council priorities and National Indicator Set performance information and encourage an input from the Executive into the development of the Work programme.

3. **Selection Criteria**

It is proposed that an initial selection test should be applied for every potential scrutiny topic to ensure that the topics put forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for consideration meet the selection criteria.

When putting forward requests for new items members are asked to refer to these criteria.

Selection Criteria
An area with a high level of dissatisfaction where improvements to services would be likely
Poor or declining performance in service including the review of performance in areas where concerns had previously been addressed elsewhere
Is one of the Council's key priorities
The topic is an area of high public concern ~ demonstrated through consultation or highlighted via Councillor surgeries

A service that is an external priority in an area the Council supports or is a shared priority with the Local Strategic Partnership	
An area of high budgetary commitment	
New guidance or legislation is likely to impact on the way the Authority works	

Rejection Criteria
Scrutiny is unlikely to result in service improvements
The topic is already being addressed elsewhere
Scrutiny of this topic falls outside the remit and responsibility of the Council
The topic is better addressed initially by another party than through the Authority's scrutiny process
The objective cannot be achieved in the specified timescales
The topic is too broad

Members are also asked to consider:
- Is there a clear objective for scrutinising this topic?
- How does it link in with the Council's priorities?
- Is there evidence to support the need for scrutiny?
- What do we hope to achieve?
- What are the likely benefits to the Council and our customers?
- Are we likely to achieve the desired outcome?
- What are the potential risks?

4. **Prioritisation**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee will be asked to prioritise topics on the basis of importance and impact as to where they fit into the work programme. A simple grid will identify those that are of the highest priority.

Scoring Guide

Score	Importance indicator	Impact indicator
0	No evidence of links to the Council's aims and priorities	No identified benefits
1	No evidence of links to the Council's aims and priorities, but an ongoing area of public concern that falls within the Authority's remit	Minor potential benefits affecting one ward/customer group
2	Some evidence of links to the Council's aims but they may be indirect and the topic is not a current Council priority	Minor potential benefit affecting 2 or more wards/customer groups Moderate potential benefit affecting one ward/customer

		group. Potential benefit to an individual service area within the Council
3	Good evidence of links to the Council's aims and priorities and/or evidence of public concern	Moderate potential benefit affecting 2 or more wards/customer groups Substantial potential benefit affecting one ward/customer group. Potential benefit to a department within the Council
4	Strong evidence of links to the Council's aims and priorities and a high level of public concern	Substantial potential benefits for a significant proportion of the community Substantial potential benefits for the Council

If the committee does have a priority order for the items within this committee's remit it is asked to use this guide to score the items to aid the Management Committee.

5. **Conclusion**

A common pitfall for Overview and Scrutiny Committees can be the inclusion of topics on the work plan that are unmanageable, of limited interest to the community, purely for informational purposes, have few outcomes and fail to 'add value' to the work of the Council. As such the selection and prioritisation of topics is critical to the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny as such processes can ensure clearer focus, particularly in poor or weak areas of performance or major issues of concern to the wider community.

It is also important to note that Overview and Scrutiny has limited time and resources and therefore work plans need to be manageable. It is not possible to include every topic suggested by Members, Heads of Service or the Public in the Work Plan. Successful Scrutiny is about looking at the right topic in the right way.

The Committee is invited to advise which items would wish added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees work plan for 2009/10.

List of Appendices

Appendix "A" – Current work plan for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

List of Background Documents

None