

Supplement for Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 14 July 2021
6.00 pm

Topics for Scrutiny Commissioned Reports

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To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 14 July 2021
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Scrutiny Commissioned Reports

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To agree the topics on which Scrutiny wishes to commission reports for consideration during the year
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	All
Recommendations: That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:	
1.	Agree the list of priority topics (in green in Appendix 1) for Scrutiny-commissioned reports, having made any amendments required, and note that the Scrutiny Officer will apportion those topics to the relevant dates and forums for consideration.
2.	Agree to consider drafts scopes of the currently listed topics for Review Groups at its 03 August meeting and select the priority topic for a Review Group at that point.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Scrutiny longlist of topics for Scrutiny-commissioned reports
Appendix 2	Explanation of the TOPIC scoring criteria

Introduction and background

- Each year, the Scrutiny Committee formulates a work plan, following the appointment of its new membership at Annual Council in May. The Scrutiny work plan is a live document that sets out what issues will be considered by Scrutiny and at which meeting. At its meeting of 08 June 2021 the Committee agreed to a flexible work plan, under which its priorities would be identified, allowing movement in the timing of reports on the Council's Forward Plan to be managed more in line with the Committee's wishes. One consequence of this is that it is not helpful to plan which reports from the Forward Plan the Committee wishes to consider more than three months in advance.

2. However, Scrutiny does not simply consider Cabinet items on the Forward Plan. It may also scrutinise issues independently of the work of the Cabinet. This it may do through Scrutiny-commissioned reports, and its Review Groups.
3. The Committee is therefore asked to identify and agree the topics on which it would like to commission reports, and to take steps to narrow down its choice of Review Group topic.

Selecting Topics for Scrutiny-commissioned Reports

4. The Scrutiny Officer contacted all councillors and senior officers in April and May 2021 to request ideas for Scrutiny-commissioned reports. The Committee was asked to email ideas for additional Scrutiny-commissioned reports to the Scrutiny Officer. The combined list of these suggestions forms the basis of Appendix 1, which also provides the recommended list of items to take forward.
5. Scrutiny best practice stipulates that work plans should be developed based on sound criteria with a clear rationale for topic selection.¹ Over recent years the Scrutiny function has relied on the 'TOPIC' acronym as its criteria for scoring different proposals. A key for understanding the TOPIC scoring system is included as Appendix 2. The scoring system is nuanced and aspires to be objective, but the Committee should use its best judgement in agreeing which items to take forward.
6. The Scrutiny Officer has carried out an initial assessment in Appendix 1 to score each of the items based on his own judgement and understanding of the issues. These provide an indicative score but are not the sole basis for deciding between items; for example, one suggestion was over the value for money of the Covered Market, a topic the Committee discussed about at its last meeting. Consequently, it has not been included within the recommended list even though it would have merited it in terms of its importance as a topic.

Resource Implications of Selecting Scrutiny-commissioned Reports

7. The Council has one dedicated Scrutiny Officer post responsible for supporting the work of the Scrutiny Committee, its standing panels and review groups.
8. Where the Committee requests to consider a Cabinet report, the resource implications will be minimal because the report will have already been produced. Where the Committee commissions its own report from officers on a new issue, the resource implications are more significant for both the Scrutiny Officer and the officers involved in producing the report, which will be in addition to their normal duties.
9. Owing to this, meetings of the Scrutiny function should seek to have an average of one Scrutiny-commissioned report per meeting. Ignoring the number of Companies Scrutiny Panel meetings held due to changes to be agreed at this meeting, there are 18 meetings between August and the end of the civic year. The Committee is asked to agree a list of around 22 priorities from the list of suggestions. The extras

¹ Auditor General for Wales. 2014. "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!: Scrutiny in Local Government Improvement Study.

to enable greater flexibility over the topics, and therefore which Committee or Panel meeting they are sent to.

10. A few issues to note for clarity: some Scrutiny-commissioned reports are already scheduled. These are included in the number of potential reports. Also, the Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel has suggested that the Panel have a running theme of tenant engagement throughout the year, and that it dedicates its allotted reports to looking at that in greater depth. This has been included within the Scrutiny Officer recommendation.
11. The resource requirements are most significant for review groups, where there is potential to increase the workload for several council officers and councillors. Accordingly, the organisation has capacity to carry out one review at a time and the Committee should consider any advice from officers on the timeliness and scheduling of review work.

Review Groups

12. In some instances, the Scrutiny Committee may consider it more effective to establish a small sub-group to carry out a detailed review, where it would be impractical for the whole committee to be involved. Review Groups are informal task and finish groups established by the Scrutiny Committee to gather evidence and produce a report and recommendations on a specific issue within a limited timeframe.
13. The work of a review group should be focused, time limited, and involve in depth research and scrutiny in the interest of developing recommendations for service improvement. The recommendations emerging from review groups are supported by a comprehensive report produced by the Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the review group.
14. Often, review groups seek the help of external experts to inform their work, and involve the public where possible. Members of these groups should have the interest and time to commit to undertake in-depth scrutiny and policy development work. For the time and commitment they require, review groups are widely considered to be the most effective form of scrutiny, so long as they remain well targeted, well supported, councillor-led reviews.²
15. It is recommended that review groups are chaired by those members who champion a specific issue for review. As with any standing panels, review groups should reflect a cross-party make up of four to six councillors.
16. To date, the issues that have been suggested as review group topics are set out below:
 - Child Poverty
 - Covid bounce-back
 - Budget Review Group

² Stoker, G., John, P., Gains, F. Greasley, S and Rao, N. 2007. *The New Council Constitutions: The Outcomes and Impact of the Local Government Act: Evaluation of Local Governance Research Project*. Department of Communities and Local Government.

17. The Scrutiny Operating Principles state that the agreed capacity for Review Groups is two per year if, as has been agreed, the Committee runs three Standing Panels. As part of its remit, the Finance and Performance Panel is tasked to undertake a review of the budget, meaning there is one space remaining. Draft scopes of the other topics will be available for consideration at the Committee's 03 August 2021 meeting unless the Committee wishes to make a decision on its preferred topic now, whereupon a fuller scope would be put forward to the Committee for sign-off at its 08 September meeting.

Conclusion and Next Steps

18. The Committee is asked to agree the recommendations as set out in the summary of this report. The Scrutiny Officer will begin to schedule items for the Committee work plan in discussion with relevant officers based on the priorities provided.

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Background Papers: None

**Longlist of Suggested Scrutiny-commissioned Report Topics
and Recommendation for Inclusion**

Suggestion	T	O	P	I	C	Total	Comments
Leisure provision update	2	3	3	2	2	12	
Review biodiversity policies and plans (Biodiversity Action Plan is out of date)	2	3	3	2	2	12	
Reviewing delivery of the Council's net-zero delivery plans	2	3	3	2	2	12	Suggest link with Climate Emergency Review Group response instead
Scrutiny-commissioned performance reports	2	3	2	2	2	11	
Housing Performance	2	3	2	2	2	11	
Climate Emergency Review Group update	2	3	3	1	2	11	
Domestic Abuse Review Group update	2	3	2	2	2	11	
Council tenant involvement and empowerment (4 reports)	2	3	3	2	1	11	
Covid-recovery	2	3	3	1	2	11	Suggest add to list if not chosen as a Review Group
The Covered Market - value for money?	2	3	2	2	2	11	Recently considered by Scrutiny
Council supported advice centres – value for money?	1	3	3	2	2	11	
Major projects review – lessons learnt	2	3	2	2	2	11	
Inequality more broadly- economic, social and educational attainment	2	3	3	1	2	11	
Future of the city centre- post Covid	2	3	3	1	2	11	
Procurement Strategy review	2	3	2	2	2	11	
Waterways update	2	3	3	1	2	11	
Tourism Review Group update	2	3	2	1	2	10	Already scheduled for August Scrutiny Committee

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Suggestion	T	O	P	I	C	Total	Comments
Childhood poverty in the city	2	3	3	1	1	10	May be too big a topic if not selected as a Review Group
Review changes needed for the next local plan revision	2	3	2	2	1	10	
OCHL building specifications	1	3	2	2	2	10	
Update on the Council's retrofit of its housing stock to increased environmental standards	1	3	2	2	2	10	
Youth Ambition programme	1	3	2	2	2	10	
The value of Social Impact Bonds	1	3	2	2	1	9	Recommended over others of the same score because it follows on from issues raised by last year's Budget Review Group
Council owned garages: future uses- too small for modern cars- useful space for housing?	1	2	2	2	2	9	
Health inequality the city in the light of Covid and the role of city council	2	3	2	1	1	9	
Impact of HMO regulations	1	3	2	2	0	8	Likely to have a Cabinet report coming
Empty houses in the city	1	3	2	1	1	8	
Review of ODS depot feasibility assessment	2	2	0	2	2	8	Likely to have a Cabinet report coming
Creating a healthier city population and role of city council	1	2	2	1	1	7	
Fly-tipping and littering: a review of other council approaches	1	2	3	1	0	7	
Dog fouling	0	2	3	1	0	6	

Appendix 2: 'TOPIC' Scoring Criteria for Scrutiny Work Plan Items

Criteria	Description	Scoring
T imely	Work plan prioritisation should take account of work in other areas, and avoid duplication. Key questions to ask include: Is now the best time to consider this issue? Are legislative or policy changes afoot? Is the issue due for inspection or auditing?	Is it timely to consider this issue? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2
O xford Priority	Work plans should take account of the Council's overall vision for the area. Committees should ensure that a good proportion of their work relates to the Council's plan and priorities. This is key in demonstrating how Scrutiny can add value to the Council.	Is it a council priority? No - 0 Somewhat - 2 Yes - 3
P ublic Interest	Councillor's representative roles are an essential feature of Scrutiny. They are the eyes and ears of the public, ensuring that services meet local needs. The interests of local people should therefore influence and guide the issues chosen for scrutiny.	Is it of significant public interest? No - 0 Somewhat - 2 Yes - 3
I nfluence	Scrutiny Committees have varying levels of influence, depending on the issues they review. They are better placed to influence council services than external agencies. Will your input drive outcomes and change, or be unwelcome and lack impact?	Can we have meaningful influence? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2
C ost	Services or decisions which incur a high level of income, expenditure or savings should be prioritised. Effective scrutiny of financial matters is a cornerstone of good scrutiny, and significant spending plans should not go unscrutinised.	Is the issue costly? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2

The TOPIC scoring system has been developed to assist Scrutiny Committees in prioritising work plan items. Criteria led work planning has been advocated by national governance experts and organisations alike, premised on the objective prioritisation of items against pre-set criteria. TOPIC can be used as a reference guide for councillors in selecting items, or it can be rigidly applied as a scoring system. How strictly the criteria is applied will depend of the number of items suggested and the resources available.

Whilst the scoring system aspires to be objective, it cannot necessarily take account of the nuances and complexities of all issues, and Committees should use their best judgement in agreeing which items to take forward.

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Response from Susan Sale, Head of Law and Governance regarding Scrutiny's request from the last meeting to make pointers on the EV Strategy Report prior to publication

My understanding is that the Scrutiny Committee wished to publish a report to Cabinet on their views as to what should be included in the EV Strategy, before receiving or considering the Officer report to Cabinet. My understanding is that the Officer report will be making recommendations to Cabinet concerning the scoping of the EV Strategy, but there will be a significant further piece of work to be completed before the Strategy itself is produced in draft and recommended to Members.

My concern is that recommendations from Scrutiny at this point would not have included any advice from Officers at all; it is usual practice for advice from the professional officer body to be considered by Members before making recommendations.

Further, it is unusual for scrutiny to be making recommendations to Cabinet, without considering the officer report.

The officer report on the scoping of the EV Strategy is of course going to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14th July, where Scrutiny will have opportunity at that stage to consider the report, and the officer advice and recommendations contained within, and provide their recommendations in writing and verbally to Cabinet at their meeting on 21st July, before any decision is made.

I anticipate that the report to Cabinet on 21st July will be about the scoping work to be undertaken to inform the strategy rather than a draft Strategy to be considered. So there will also be opportunity at a later stage for scrutiny to consider any proposed draft EV Strategy before it is recommended to Cabinet for adoption.

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