

To: **Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **01 September 2020**
Report of: **Head of Law and Governance**
Title of Report: **Scrutiny Review Groups 2020/21**

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To agree Review Group topics and administrative issues for 2020/21
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	All
Recommendations: That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:	
1.	Note the previous decision that the Finance and Performance Panel undertake a Budget Review, agree that this review will be supported for the Housing section by members of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
2.	Select the topic of the second Review Group from: climate emergency, domestic abuse, and citizen engagement.
3.	Appoint a Chair to selected Scrutiny Review Group from the membership of the Scrutiny Committee and decide the number of members
4.	Seek nominations from political groups for membership of the Review Group following the Committee meeting, and for those Review Group members to hold a scoping meeting to agree a proposed in-depth scope for ratification by the Committee at a future meeting.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Outline Rationales for topics proposed for consideration as Review Group topics

Introduction and background

1. At its meeting on 06 July 2020 the Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Committee's work plan for the civic year 2020/21. In considering that report it was noted that decisions regarding Scrutiny Review Group topics would be considered at the Committee's August meeting. That meeting, however, was cancelled, and this decision was therefore deferred until the current meeting.

Review Groups - Introduction

2. Scrutiny Review Groups are Scrutiny's opportunity to found small sub-groups to carry out detailed reviews, 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.
3. The agreed Scrutiny Operating Principles state that if the Committee runs three Standing Panels, as it has chosen to do this year, there is capacity to run two Review Groups over the course of the civic year. At its meeting on 02 June 2020 the Committee agreed to the recommendation that the Finance and Performance Panel undertake the annual review of the Council's budget. The Committee therefore has to decide on the topic of its other Review Group, and administrative issues around both.
4. Review Groups are not required under the Committee's Operating Principles to reflect the Council's political balance but the Committee will use the following cross-party principle guide for appointment:

4 members: 2 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green
6 members: 3 Labour, 2 Lib Dem, 1 Green
5. Review Group Chairs are required to be members of the Scrutiny Committee. However, the remaining membership may be made up from any non-executive members of the Council. Chairs may be asked to report back to the Scrutiny Committee on progress of the Review Group.
6. No substitutions are allowed on Review Groups. This is due to the need for continuity of membership within a focused area of review and avoids duplication of work.
7. It is the Scrutiny Committee which commissions and agrees the scope of the work of Review Groups and therefore has final agreement on their recommendations.

Budget Review Group

8. Scrutiny of the Council's budget proposals for the forthcoming year is a core responsibility of the Scrutiny function, and operates as part of the Council's wider budget consultation process as mandated within the Council's constitution. As such, it has been an annually-recurring Review Group, taking place in early January each year, following the publication of the Council's draft budget proposals. Heads of Service are invited to talk through the budget proposals in their area and to respond to questions arising from them.
9. Due to the overlap in skills required, members of the Finance Panel (now Finance and Performance Panel) have historically been appointed to undertake the Budget Review, with the Chair of the Finance Panel taking on the role of Chair of the Budget Review Group. This was confirmed by the Scrutiny Committee on 02 June

2020 as part of the establishment of the Finance and Performance Panel. Historically, members of the Housing Panel (now Housing and Homelessness Panel) have been invited to participate in the meeting at which Housing-related budgetary proposals were considered.

10. The model of extending membership relating to Housing has worked well in previous Budget Review Groups, and it is recommended that it be replicated. The Committee is therefore recommended to agree that in addition to the Finance and Performance Panel members, members of the Housing and Homelessness Panel participate in Housing-related budget questioning.

Other Review Group Topics

11. At its previous meeting, the Scrutiny Committee agreed three topics to have three outline rationales developed. These topics were as follows:
 - Climate Emergency
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Public participation in decision making and citizen involvement
12. Attached to this report is Appendix 1, which contains the outline rationales requested, which have been put together following discussion with relevant officers and members.
13. The Committee is asked to review these rationales and agree one Review Group topic to take forward. It is also recommended that a Chair for the Review Group be appointed.
14. The typical number of members for such Review Groups is four or six. Both have worked well in the past, though additional members provide wider opportunity for involvement and greater resilience in case of illness or other absence.
15. As referenced in paragraph 7 of this report, the Scrutiny Committee is ultimately in control of the Review Groups it establishes. Practically, however, it is difficult to agree membership of the Review Groups at the same time as they are established. It is recommended, therefore, that the Committee agrees to seek nominations from political groups for membership of the Review Group following the Committee meeting, and for those Review Group members to hold a scoping meeting to agree a proposed in-depth scope for ratification by the Committee at a future meeting.

Conclusion and Next Steps

16. The Committee is asked to agree the recommendations as set out in the summary of this report. The Committee will have a further opportunity to consider the scope of the chosen Review Groups when the proposed scopes are put together by nominated Review Group members for sign-off. The date of this will be dependent on the timing of the Review Group, which will be dependent on the topic chosen and the membership.

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Background Papers: None