

Report title	Overview & Scrutiny Select Committee Work Programme
Report author	Andrew Finch
Department	Democratic Services
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

To resolve

Synopsis of report:

Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme, i.e., draw up a long-term agenda and consider making it flexible enough to accommodate any urgent, short-term issues that might arise during the year.

Recommendation(s):

The Committee is invited to confirm which topics to cover for the 2023/24 year as part of its work programme, and intended course of action for dealing with those topics.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 Overview and scrutiny committees have statutory powers to scrutinise decisions an authority is planning to take, those it plans to implement, and those that have already been taken/implemented. Recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented.
- 1.2 Overview and scrutiny committees can also play a valuable role in developing policy, and effective overview and scrutiny should:
 - Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
 - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
 - Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
 - Drive improvement in public services
- 1.3 Councils who adopt the committee system are not required to have overview and scrutiny but may do so if they wish. Following an internal training session between the committee and the Corporate Head of Law & Governance, the vice chair of the committee has put forward an initial two items for consideration for the work programme for the remainder of the meetings for 2023/24:

- 1) Review of the grass cutting arrangements between Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council, lessons learned, and suggestions for future improvements.
 - 2) To investigate options for future direction in policy development to mitigate the impact of the density and proliferation of Houses of Multiple Occupation on residents of the RBC wards neighbouring the RHUL campus.
- 1.4 Evidence will need to be gathered to inform the work programming process. This will ensure that it looks at the right topics, in the right way and at the right time. Gathering evidence requires conversations with:
- The public
 - The authority's partners
 - Officers
- 1.5 Whilst invitations to external partners can be issued on the Committee's behalf, no external party can be compelled to attend an Overview & Scrutiny Committee, task and finish group, or any other council meeting as part of the process.
- 1.6 It is acknowledged that there needs to be a degree of flexibility throughout the year in order to also deal with matters that may crop up.
- 1.7 Selected topics can be scrutinised in several ways, including:
- (a) As a single item on a committee agenda
This often presents a limited opportunity for effective scrutiny but may be appropriate for some issues or where the committee wants to maintain a formal watching brief over a given issue.
 - (b) At a single meeting
Which could be a committee meeting or something less formal. This can provide an opportunity to have a single public meeting about a given subject, or to have a meeting at which evidence is taken from a number of witnesses.
 - (c) At a task and finish review of two or three meetings
Short, sharp scrutiny reviews are likely to be most effective even for complex topics. Properly focused, they ensure members can swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations, perhaps over the course of a couple of months or less.
 - (d) Via a longer-term task and finish review
The 'traditional' task and finish model – with perhaps six or seven meetings spread over a number of months – is still appropriate when scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail. However, the resource implications of such work, and its length, can make it unattractive for all but the most complex matters.
 - (e) By establishing a 'standing panel'
This falls short of establishing a whole new committee but may reflect a necessity to keep a watching brief over a critical local issue, especially where members feel they need to convene regularly to carry out that oversight. Again, the resource implications of this approach means that it will be rarely used.

1.8 Further meetings of the Select Committee are scheduled on the following dates, and a proposed course of action for the meetings is set out below:

- **30 November 2023**
Gathering information via introductions/briefings from officers and/or other relevant parties.
- **1 February 2024**
Debate the course of action required.
- **28 March 2024**
Agree on recommendations to committee(s).

1.9 Some authorities use scoring systems to evaluate and rank work programme proposals. If these are used to provoke discussion and debate, based on evidence, about what priorities should be, they can be a useful tool. Others take a looser approach. Whichever method is adopted, a committee should be able to justify how and why a decision has been taken to include certain issues and not others.

2. Conclusions

2.1 The Committee is invited to confirm which topics to cover for the 2023/24 year as part of its work programme, and intended course of action for dealing with those topics.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Background information to the request to includes HMOs as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Select Committee work programme