

Scrutiny Management Board 29 February 2024

Report Title	Scrutiny Annual Workplan 2023/24 – February 2024 Update
Report Author	Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services/Statutory Scrutiny Officer ben.smith@northnorthants.gov.uk

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern Public Services

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed Revisions to Scrutiny Workplan 2023/24

Appendix B – Executive Forward Plan March – June 2024

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. For Scrutiny Management Board to consider the updated annual workplan for 2023/24, attached as Appendix A, and to approve its contents.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Scrutiny Management Board has overall responsibility for the direction and management of Scrutiny to ensure that non-executive members make an effective contribution to the improvement and development of the Council, its services, and other external public services for the benefit of North Northamptonshire.
- 2.2. As part of this responsibility, the Scrutiny Management Board developed an Annual Scrutiny Workplan during the summer of 2023, approving it on 7

September 2023. This report provides an updated position in respect of the following recent meetings of the three scrutiny committees.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Management Board:-
- (a) Provides comments about whether the updated list of dates for when items included in the Workplan are satisfactory;
 - (b) Considers whether any items in the current Executive Forward Plan, attached as Appendix B, should be added for pre-scrutiny at this stage;
 - (c) Considers whether any items recently generated by scrutiny should be added to the Workplan;
 - (d) Subject to comments made, approve the third iteration of the Workplan attached at Appendix A.
 - (e) Notes that the Workplan remains a living document which will be subject to review and may be updated
 - i. to reflect the changing needs and priorities of scrutiny; and
 - ii. following consideration of items requested by the three scrutiny committees and individual councillors.
- 3.2. *(Reason for Recommendations – To meet the Constitutional requirements for the Scrutiny Management Board to demonstrate its strategic responsibility for the Scrutiny function, its overall responsibility for the direction and management of Scrutiny, and to fulfil its obligation to develop, approve and monitor the Annual Scrutiny Workplan.*
- 3.3. *(Alternative Options Considered – Not to update the Scrutiny Workplan - however this would not demonstrate the Board’s strategic responsibility or provide the necessary strategic direction to the three Scrutiny Committees.)*

4. Report Background

- 4.1. Statutory guidance on scrutiny issued by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019 states that effective work programming is the bedrock of an effective scrutiny function. Done well it can help lay the foundations for targeted, incisive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Done badly, scrutiny can end up wasting time and resources on issues where the impact of any work done is likely to be minimal.
- 4.2. There are several inputs that should be considered in building an effective workplan. These are member ideas, community concerns, the Corporate

Plan, Executive Members and discussions about their individual portfolio objectives, officers and the Executive Forward Plan. It is also important to obtain input from partner organisations.

- 4.3. The Scrutiny Management Board adopted a two-stage approach to work planning for 2023/24. This consisted of information gathering from Executive members and Corporate Leadership Team officers at a workshop held on 8 August 2023, and a further workshop with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer to consider carry forwards from the previous 2022/23 workplan and new items proposed for the 2023/24 year.
- 4.4. The first iteration of the Workplan was then considered and approved at the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 7 September 2023.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The draft updated workplan is attached at Appendix A. The format of the proposed workplan is designed around each scrutiny committee and its meetings schedule for 2023/24, together with a section for scrutiny review panels, in order of priority.
- 5.2. Scrutiny Management Board members received a number of possible items that it may wish to consider at its Scrutiny/Executive Conference on 8 August 2023 from Executive Members and Corporate Leadership Team officers. Board members then developed a proposed list of items at a further workshop held with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer held on 24th August 2023.
- 5.3. In considering its priorities for 2023/24, the Scrutiny Management Board prioritised some aspects of the outstanding 2022/23 workplan that had not been completed, together with new priorities for 2023/24.
- 5.4. Attached at Appendix B is the latest Executive Forward Plan. It is important for the Scrutiny Management Board to regularly review the Executive Forward Plan, to ensure that it also fulfils its obligations for 'pre-scrutiny' to comment on and seek to influence positively Executive decisions that may be forthcoming, either during consultation periods or following consultation periods in advance of the relevant Executive meeting.
- 5.5. It is proposed that in order to provide for effective and focussed scrutiny, no more than two detailed items are considered at each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.6. In terms of scrutiny panels, the scrutiny procedure rules within the Council's constitution provide for the Scrutiny Management Board to add Panels to the Annual Workplan and determine which Committee shall be responsible for the Panels work. Panels should be used to ensure that the relevant Committee is having an impact and meeting its statutory duties.

- 5.7. Within the Council Constitution's Scrutiny Procedure Rules, there is provision for a maximum of four panels established at any one time across all Committees unless the Scrutiny Management Board agrees that there are exceptional circumstances (taking into consideration resource implications and advice from the statutory Scrutiny Officer). This exclude long standing Panels which meet annually (Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel and Budget Scrutiny Panel).
- 5.8. It is for the Scrutiny Management Board to decide what action to take on any proposed items, be they for committee or panel consideration, ensuring any that are added are properly thought out in terms of value, duplication and resource.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Following approval of the updated scrutiny workplan for 2023/24, it will be communicated to all members of the three Scrutiny Committees, together with Executive members and Corporate Leadership Team officers.
- 6.2. The Scrutiny Workplan is purposefully not fully populated at this stage. This is in recognition that there will be new and changing priorities to be considered throughout the remainder of the municipal year, regularly by the Scrutiny Management Board, and additionally through proposed items from the scrutiny committees and councillors.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. Scrutiny Committees and Panels will be supported by Democratic Services Officers and officers with subject matter expertise from within the relevant departments of the Council. Scrutiny may make recommendations that will have financial implications and these will be identified on a case by case basis.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a requirement to have an overview and scrutiny committee. The principal power of a scrutiny committee is to influence the policies and decisions made by the council and other organisations involved in delivering public services. The Scrutiny Management Board or the three scrutiny committees are not decision making but have the power to gather evidence and make recommendations based upon its findings.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1. The work of Scrutiny assists with the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. Failure to ensure an effective scrutiny function can lead to governance not being as robust. Failure to workplan would not be in line with statutory guidance and may lead to resources being allocated to matters which do not have an impact on the organisation and North Northamptonshire.

7.5. Consultation

- 7.5.1. None specific, although informal engagement has taken place with partners around items to be included on the workplan, and will continue throughout the municipal year.

7.6. Consideration by the Executive

- 7.6.1. The Executive participated in the Scrutiny/Executive workshop held on 7 August 2023, at which its departmental executive priorities were communicated to Scrutiny Management Board members.

7.7. Equality Implications

- 7.7.1. None specific to this report.

7.8. Climate Impact

- 7.8.1. None specific to this report.

7.9. Community Impact

- 7.9.1. None specific to this report.

7.10. Crime and Disorder Impact

- 7.10.1. None specific to this report.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. [Scrutiny Procedure Rules – Part 7.1 of the Council's Constitution](#)
- 8.2. [May 2019 - Overview and Scrutiny Statutory Guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities](#)