



## Scrutiny Management Board 31 October 2024

Report Title	Scrutiny Annual Workplan 2024/25 – October 2024 Update
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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? <a href="#">Our priorities for the future   North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)</a>	Modern Public Services

### List of Appendices

Appendix A – Scrutiny Workplans 2024/25

Appendix B – Executive Forward Plan (November 2024 – February 2025)

#### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. For Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) to consider the updated annual workplans for 2024/25, attached as Appendix A, and to approve its contents.

#### 2. Executive Summary

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- 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 Scrutiny Work Planning Process and Timeline:

As part of its core responsibilities, the Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) undertook a comprehensive work planning process for the 2024/25 period. The key milestones in this process were as follows:

- April-July 2024: Refinement of work planning process for 2024/25, incorporating committee suggestions;
- July-August 2024: Liaison with key stakeholders to discuss development of work plans 2024/25 for each scrutiny committee;
- 1 August 2024: SMB approval of the first iteration of the 2024/25 scrutiny work plans;
- While appreciating that the scrutiny workplans are living documents which may be subject to review and update to reflect any appropriate strategic needs and priorities of scrutiny, this paper presents the updated scrutiny forward work plans 2024/25 for final approval by the SMB, reflecting the thorough and collaborative planning process undertaken. The plans demonstrate the SMB's commitment to effective oversight and continuous improvement in the scrutiny function.

## 3. Recommendations

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3.1. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Management Board:-

- (a) Provides comments about whether the updated list of items included in the Scrutiny Workplans 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) Notes that there are no additional items generated by scrutiny which are not part of the updated Workplans;
- (d) Subject to comments made, approve the final iteration of the 2023/24 Workplans attached at Appendix A.

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

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- 4.1. Statutory guidance on scrutiny issued by the Government in May 2019 and updated in 2024 provides the foundation and building blocks for effective scrutiny. Key Points from the Statutory Guidance include:
- Scrutiny plays a fundamental role in local democracy by holding authorities accountable.
  - It helps drive improvements within the authority and ensures efficient service delivery. Effective Scrutiny Traits: Authorities with effective scrutiny arrangements share certain key traits: • A strong organisational culture that welcomes challenge.
  - Commitment from senior members and officials. Local Authority Autonomy: • Authorities are best-placed to determine which scrutiny arrangements suit their individual circumstances.
  - However, critical self-assessment and a culture conducive to effective scrutiny are strongly encouraged.
- 4.2. Statutory scrutiny guidance 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 strategic 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.
- 4.3. 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 relevant partner organisations.
- 4.4. For 2024/25 work planning, the Scrutiny Management Board adopted the following approach :
- April 2024: SMB review of updated positions from the three scrutiny committees (Corporate, Health, and Place and Environment)
  - April-July 2024: Refinement of work planning process for 2024/25, incorporating feedback and suggestions
  - July-August 2024: Liaison with key stakeholders to discuss development of work plans 2024/25 for each scrutiny committee
  - 1 August 2024: The first iteration of the 2024/25 Workplan was then considered and approved at the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 1 August 2024.

## 5. Issues and Choices

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### 2024/25 workplans

- 5.1. The updated 2024/25 workplans are attached at Appendix A. The new format of the proposed workplan is designed around each scrutiny committee and its meetings scheduled for 2024/25.

- 5.2. In considering its priorities for 2024/25, the Scrutiny Management Board prioritised some aspects of the outstanding 2023/24 workplan that had not yet been completed, together with new priorities for 2024/24, including important and regular performance monitoring reports.
- 5.3. Appendix A also sets out items already proposed for the 2024/25 work programme. It includes proposed agenda items for scheduled meetings of each committee, to allow certainty for officers preparing reports.
- 5.4. It should be borne in mind that the 2024/25 scrutiny cycle is shorter than in previous years due to the May 2025 local elections and the pre-election (purdah) period that precedes it, which will commence during March 2025. Due to the shorter year of activity and noting the number of carry forward items already proposed it was recommended that that a workshop style approach be undertaken by the Scrutiny Management Board, Head of Democratic Services, Scrutiny Manager and Scrutiny Officers to determine the 2024/25 work programme, prior to returning to a Scrutiny/Executive Conference format following the May 2025 elections – this took place on 1 August 2024.
- 5.5. Written proposals for items to be considered in-year can be requested in advance from Executive Members, Scrutiny Members and Corporate Leadership Team as necessary, caveated by the need for expectation management of the:-
  - i) number of items that can be considered at individual meetings whilst still allowing for effective scrutiny (no more than three substantive items);
  - ii) number of meetings to be held as a whole due to the May 2025 elections (provided in the work plans);
  - iii) the need for work undertaken, especially through scrutiny review panels, to be completed and submitted to the Executive (and partners as necessary) prior to the commencement of the pre-election (purdah) period during March 2025.

### **Executive Forward Plan May – August 2024**

- 5.8. 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.

### **General issues for consideration**

- 5.9. It is proposed that in order to provide for effective and focussed scrutiny, no more than three substantive items are considered at each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. Feedback from scrutiny members and officers has been that at times during 2023/24 some meetings had become unwieldy and did

not allow for enough time to undertake effective scrutiny where a substantial number of items have been placed on the agenda.

- 5.10. 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.
- 5.11. 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). Current and prospective Panels are also contained in Appendix A.
- 5.12. No items from individual members have been submitted for consideration to this meeting.
- 5.13. 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**

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- 6.1 Following approval of the updated scrutiny workplan for 2024/25, this will be communicated to all members of the three Scrutiny Committees, together with Executive members and Corporate Leadership Team officers.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **Resources and Financial**

- 7.1 Scrutiny Committees and Panels are 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.

### **Legal and Governance**

- 7.2 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.

## Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3 The work of Scrutiny assists with the delivery of the Council’s Corporate Plan.

## Risk

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

## Consultation

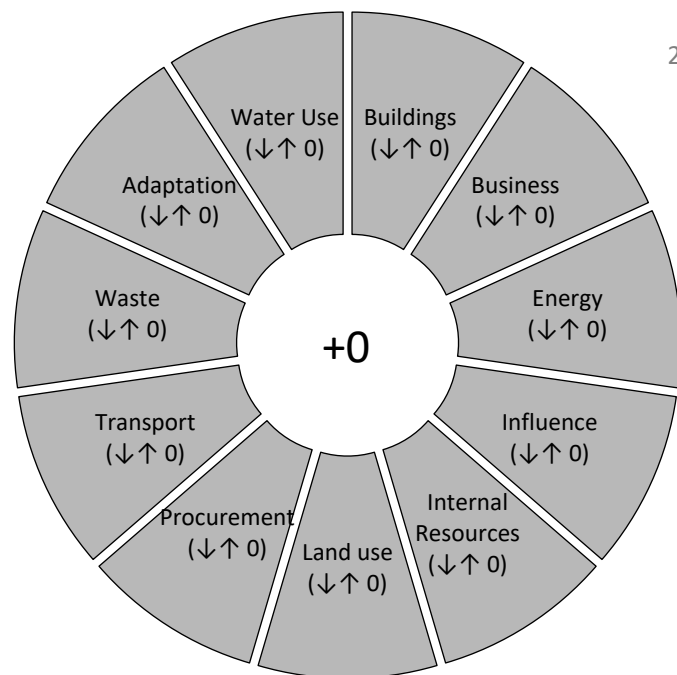
7.5 Consultation with key stakeholders – Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs; Corporate Leadership Team; senior officers and partners between July and August 2024. Given the nature of this dynamic process, this will continue throughout the municipal year.

## Equality Implications

7.6 None specific to this report.

## Climate Impact

7.7 None specific to this report.



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 2 mos away.

## **Community Impact**

7.8 None specific to this report.

## **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.9 None specific to this report.

## **8 Background Papers**

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8.1 [Scrutiny Procedure Rules – Part 7.1 of the Council's Constitution](#)

8.2 [Overview and Scrutiny Statutory Guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities](#)