

## **SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Approval of Workplan</b>
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#### **List of Appendices**

#### **Appendix A – Scrutiny Work Plan 2021-23**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1. For Scrutiny members to consider the draft workplan attached at Appendix A and approve the content.

##### **2 Executive Summary**

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2.1 Scrutiny members of both the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee agreed that work-planning was key to an effective scrutiny function and agreed that a Scrutiny Conference be organised to facilitate the drafting of a workplan.

2.2 A Scrutiny Conference was attended by Scrutiny members on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021 where they identified key areas that they wanted to scrutinise. Since the Conference, members have developed more detailed proposals in relation to the identified areas and a draft workplan has been drafted as a result of the proposals.

2.3 This report attaches the workplan and asks members to provide comments and approve should they be satisfied with its contents.

##### **3 Recommendations**

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It is recommended that the Scrutiny Commission;

3.1 Note that the workplan attached at Appendix A has been drafted as a result of;

- 3.1.1 Members identification of topics at the Scrutiny Conference
- 3.1.2. Members prioritisation of topics at the Scrutiny Conference
- 3.1.3 Members considering the long list of topics and providing further detail about what they wanted to scrutinise that would have an impact

3.2. Provide comments about whether the topics have been categorised correctly to have the most impact

3.3 Provide comments about whether suggested dates for when items included in the Workplan are satisfactory

3.4 Subject to comments, approve the workplan attached at Appendix A

3.5 Note that the workplan is a living document and shall be reviewed at each Scrutiny Commission meeting.

## **4 Report Background**

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The Scrutiny Commission agreed to adopt a two-stage approach to work planning. This consisted of information gathering and discovery followed by identification of topics and a prioritisation exercise.

In May 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued statutory guidance which councils “must have regard to when it is exercising their functions”. Accordingly, this Council should commit to upholding the Guidance and working towards effective scrutiny for the benefit of North Northamptonshire.

At previous Committee meetings, members agreed to hold the first Scrutiny Conference for North Northamptonshire Council. Members were keen to engage with stakeholders and identify issues on a cross party basis that would form the basis of a workplan for the upcoming year. Members agreed that the event would be open to all scrutiny members and substitutes and would be facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

The Statutory 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 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”.

There are several inputs that should be considered in building an effective workplan. These are members ideas, community concerns, Corporate Plan, Portfolio Holders and discussions about their individual portfolio objectives, Officers and Forward plan. It is also important to get input from partner organisations.

### **4.1 Prior to the Conference**

A survey was drafted to understand the important issues that North Northamptonshire wanted scrutiny to include in their Workplan. The survey was open from Monday 13 September 2021 to midnight on Sunday 26 September 2021. It was sent to contacts within the Council database which included stakeholders, partners and staff. It was also regularly pushed out on the website and social media. The majority of responses were received from those people working or living in North Northamptonshire.

Local and national issues were identified, and the key issues are identified below.

Local:

- Housing growth
- Social care
- Planning and enforcement
- Drugs and anti-social behaviour
- Housing and homelessness
- Public transport
- Incineration
- Parking
- Roads and highways infrastructure

National:

- Health care
- Social care
- Climate change
- Drugs and crime
- Housing and homelessness
- Highways

The survey was also sent by the Scrutiny Chairs to all North Northamptonshire Council members to ensure that there was engagement with a wide range of elected members; this included the Executive.

The results of the survey were presented at the Scrutiny Conference to assist members in identifying key topics to include in the workplan.

It is noted that around 50% of respondents were either “not aware” or did not provide a substantive response to if they were aware of what the scrutiny function is. The Scrutiny Chairs are keen therefore that greater promotion of scrutiny is undertaken, particularly considering that scrutiny should be a public facing function.

#### **4.2 Conference agenda- Information gathering and discovery**

The Conference was broken into two sections which focussed initially on information gathering, knowledge and discovery followed by interactive work on identifying key issues and prioritisation. Essential information that should be considered when developing a workplan was presented by Ian Parry from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, who facilitated the event.

It is a vital element of promoting an excellent scrutiny function that there is “regular engagement between the Executive and Scrutiny”. The Scrutiny Chairs were keen for the Leader to attend the Conference and his attendance for this section of the event was welcomed to show his support for an effective and impactful scrutiny function. The Council wants to ensure that it has an open and transparent culture with strong governance at its heart and critical friend challenge of the Executive will be key to this.

It is important that this positive relationship continues, and Scrutiny members should consider developing an Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in the coming months to support an effective relationship and to provide a framework for disagreement and debate

which is a healthy part of the scrutiny function. In addition, it is important that the nature and extent of individual Executive member's participation in any agenda items brought before Committee or working groups/panel relevant to their portfolio are clarified to make sure that they are held to account. The Scrutiny Chairs will be seeking scrutiny members views on how this is undertaken in the coming months.

As part of information gathering, the Chief Executive presented the draft Corporate Plan to members. The Corporate Plan is due to be considered by the Executive on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021. This will provide the strategic framework for the Council and sets out the Council's focus and aims until 2024. Members noted that the Corporate Plan is important in developing the Workplan.

As is outlined above, the results of the public survey were also presented to members for consideration and provided members with stakeholder's views on what they should scrutinise throughout the year.

#### **4.3 Conference agenda- identification of topics and prioritisation**

Following the initial information discovery phase of the Conference, Members were asked to identify key issues that they considered were important for Scrutiny to include on their workplan. This was an interactive and collaborative session and members were asked to align the proposed topics to the draft Corporate Plan priorities. Once topics were identified, members were asked to work in Groups to prioritise them.

Members were provided with a range of ways that they could prioritise topics and they agreed the way that they wanted to score and prioritise identified topics. A simple scoring methodology was used and enabled constructive debate. Following the Conference, all scores were collated, which allowed a long list of topics in rank order to be developed.

Following conclusion of the Conference, a long list of topics was collated and sent to all Scrutiny members. Many of the topics identified were generic and wide ranging. It was therefore important to narrow them down and understand what outcome members wanted to get from scrutinising them. Members have provided further details which have been used to collate the workplan.

### **5 Issues and Choices**

The draft workplan is attached at Appendix A. The format of the proposed workplan has been reviewed by the Scrutiny Chairs and was also presented to members at the Conference. The workplan consists of three different tables.

#### **5.1 Topics**

- These are in depth reviews which will be dealt with through a combination of specific evidence gathering meetings that will be arranged as and when required and other activities, such as visits and will be considered in a Panel/Task and Finish environment. A scoping exercise would be undertaken

with scrutiny members prior to commencement of the review with clear objectives identified.

## **5.2 One off items/ Recurring Items**

- These will be dealt with at scheduled meetings of the Committee.
- There will be some items that will be recurring such as performance, budget forecasts, review of Forward Plan, etc.
- There will be some items that will be one off items on a topic that members are particularly interested in scrutinising, but they do not warrant a full review. These topics have been identified from the long list proposed by members

## **5.3 Pending Items**

- These will consist of items suggested to be added to the workplan, but which haven't yet been considered in detail. It is proposed that where a member suggests that an item is added to the scrutiny workplan or future agenda within Committee that it is added to this section. The Scrutiny Chairs can then decide what action to take so that any items added are properly thought out in terms of value, duplication and resource.

It was recommended by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny that as the Committees will meet 6 times per year and aim to have more focused, in depth and high impact scrutiny, it is likely that they will need only 12 topics to scrutinise in Committee. These should be split between a limited number of task and finish/scrutiny hearings/spotlight events and "one off items".

Topic work as identified within the workplan will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and be manageable within the resource base of the Council and agreed with the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission. There is already one Task and Finish established to scrutinise the levelling up agenda and those areas identified as left behind. A Panel to review Outside Bodies has also already completed its work. It is recommended that no more than two task and finish/scrutiny hearings/spotlight events can be accommodated at any one time and therefore although a number are identified within the workplan, it will be important for members to prioritise and allocate suggested timings to them.

Guidance was also provided that members should select 9 topics throughout the year. This would leave a remainder of 3 additional areas that might arise out of later discussions. The workplan should be fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances and this would provide that flexibility.

Suggesting "topic work" is.

- Knife Crime
- S.106 Agreements
- Levelling Up
- Asset Rationalisation and Use

Suggested one-off items are.

- Children's Trust Introduction to Governance and Performance
- Climate Change- implementation of Action Plan

- Integrated Care System
- Homelessness, including Registered Social Landlords
- Public Transport, including bus services & strategy and rail services
- Major highway capital works and how they are prioritised for implementation within existing budgets.
- Review of the delivery of the Bus Services Improvement Plan and outcomes of the Enhanced Partnership
- Review of performance of the new highways contract providers following the first year of service.
- Performance of Special Educational Needs “SEND”

It will be important that when members are suggesting items for inclusion on future agendas or for inclusion in the workplan that they consider the wider impact of the Workplan and whether items need to be re-prioritised to allow another item to be reviewed. Therefore, it is suggested that where items are suggested within a Committee that they are added to the “Pending Items” list to allow the Scrutiny Chairs to determine the impact on the workplan and scrutiny.

Members should also note that there are some topics that can be dealt with outside of committee and there are some issues which perhaps do not need scrutiny, such as questions from the community. Officers will explore over the coming months an appropriate mechanism such as an online folder system to manage these enquiries and the ability of members to “work offline” to give them assurance and report back to Committee if required.

The workplan at Appendix A shows where items proposed and prioritised by members have been categorised and has some timings. Members should however consider whether they have been categorised as they would like and when items should be considered. Once the workplan has been agreed, a Forward Plan for the upcoming year for both Committees will also be developed and sent to members so that they can easily identify when they will be scrutinising topics.

## **5.4 Finance and Resources Committee**

It is vital to have sufficient scrutiny capacity to focus on the budget process and medium-term finance plan. There are also other challenges for scrutiny such as the capital programme, treasury management and any external investments or commercial arrangements. The relevant work programme will need to ensure that it is properly integrated with the process.

The workplan includes one off items that the Committee will regularly consider, such as budget monitoring and performance of some corporate services. It also identifies the important role that the Committee will have in the budget setting process. At the last Committee, members agreed to a budget process which would enable scrutiny prior to the proposed 2022/2023 budget being considered by Council.

Members should note that the constitutional remit of the Committee is however limited to these items and therefore whilst members of the Committee shall be invited to become members of in-depth reviews, the Committee does not have the authority

to set them up. One off items to the Committee will therefore be rare unless specifically in relation to financial/performance matters.

## **6 Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **6.1 Resources and Financial**

The Scrutiny Panels will be supported by Democratic Services. With any scrutiny work there will be a resource impact from an officer perspective. Scrutiny may make recommendations that will have financial implications and these will be identified on a case by case basis.

### **6.2 Legal**

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a requirement to have a 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 committee is not decision making but has the power to gather evidence and make recommendations based upon its findings.

### **6.3 Risk**

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

### **6.4 Consultation**

The Chair of the Scrutiny Commission and the Chair of the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee has been consulted on the proposals.

### **6.5 Climate Impact**

None.

### **6.6 Community Impact**

The proposals would have a positive community effect and would allow involvement and transparency in the scrutiny function.

## **7 Background Papers**

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None.