

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD– 4<sup>th</sup> JULY 2012**

**SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

**REPORT OF SCRUTINY GROUP SPECIALIST**

**1.0 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To enable the Scrutiny Management Board to consider and agree recommendations on the Scrutiny Work Programme.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Work Programme should be a two year programme, refreshed after 12 months.
- 2.2 To agree the allocation of suggestions to the Scrutiny Committees as shown in Appendix 2 for further consideration by each Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.3 To endorse the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee Chairmen in Appendix 2 for further consideration by the Scrutiny Committees.
- 2.4 To agree the indicative allocation of meetings to each Scrutiny Committee as set out in 6.3.
- 2.5 To note the items for the Scrutiny Management Board work programme as set out in section 7.2.

**3.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

- 3.1 None

**4.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 4.1 Following the implementation of the revised scrutiny committee structure and the appointment of Members to the committees at the AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012, the Scrutiny Work Programme needs to be agreed.

- 4.2 The process for setting the scrutiny work programme is set out in the Scrutiny Handbook and is shown in Appendix 1 with the timetable for agreeing the 2012/13 work programme.
- 4.3 The Scrutiny Management Board had acknowledged that with a 20% reduction in staff resource across the organisation, it was more important than ever for scrutiny to use resources efficiently and to add value with every piece of work carried out. The agreed approach was for scrutiny to focus on fewer, priority issues and in more depth.
- 4.4 To support this approach Assistant Directors and other senior officers were asked by scrutiny to suggest key areas of work and policy development opportunities within their service areas where scrutiny could make a difference, and where there would be capacity to support scrutiny work. The aim of this exercise was to help inform decisions about the work programme and it remains the prerogative of scrutiny members to determine which issues they want to scrutinise. However, capacity is an issue, and this must continue to be factored into work planning.
- 4.5 The Scrutiny Management Board may recommend items which should be prioritised for the work programme. The recommendations will be considered by individual Scrutiny Committees to agree the final work programme.

## **5.0 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

- 5.1 Appendix 2 shows the suggestions put forward for the 2012/13 scrutiny work programme and the items carried over from 2011/12 by lead Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.2 The table also shows:
- Where the item cuts across more than one scrutiny committee and work maybe carried out jointly
  - The indicative timetable where known
  - Comments made by officers for scrutiny members to consider in their selection of topics and method of scrutiny. This includes topics being reviewed or monitored by other Council committees so that work is not duplicated.
  - Any recommendations made by the Scrutiny Chairmen.
- 5.3 In the last three years changes to the scrutiny structure have necessitated a break in the work programme between municipal years which is very disruptive. However, in anticipation of the structure remaining stable for the foreseeable future, it is recommended that

there is a two year rolling work programme, refreshed after 12 months, to allow for continuity of work.

- 5.4 The work programme must be flexible to allow for important issues which emerge during the year to be scrutinised. However, if a new topic is added to the work programme, an existing item must be removed to avoid the work load becoming unmanageable and losing focus.
- 5.5 Members are asked to be rigorous and focussed in selecting topics for the work programme. It must be accepted that the scrutiny team and the organisation as a whole simply does not have the capacity to support scrutiny of all the issues Members may wish to scrutinise. Scrutiny Committees should select 3-5 key topics for the work programme, and other items should be removed. An exception to this is the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee which aligns its work programme to the budget process and proposals.

## **6.0 ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO SUPPORT SCRUTINY MEETINGS**

- 6.1 The allocation of scrutiny resources to support scrutiny committee meetings will be determined and managed by the Scrutiny Management Board. Adjustments may be made as deemed necessary to deliver the work programme depending on peak work-loads.
- 6.2 During 2011/12 there were 47 formal Scrutiny Committee meetings at which a wide range of issues were considered. As discussed earlier in this report, the aim now is for scrutiny to focus on a smaller number of key issues in more depth to improve the impact of scrutiny and to ensure the work programme is manageable with reduced resources.
- 6.3 The Scrutiny Chairman has therefore proposed a baseline of Scrutiny Committee meetings is set for 2012/13 as follows:

Scrutiny Management Board	6
Scrutiny Committees	6 each
- 6.4 Remaining capacity will be allocated flexibly by the Scrutiny Management Board to the Scrutiny Committees according to the requirements of the work programme and the availability of resources. This approach ensures the work load is manageable and allows flexibility to target resources where required.
- 6.5 The allocation does not include informal or sub-group meetings which

may be held to gather evidence as part of a review, briefing meetings or regional/external scrutiny meetings.

- 6.6 To increase capacity, scrutiny members have expressed their intention to hold “member only” meetings whereby members take responsibility for gathering evidence without the need for a scrutiny officer to attend a meeting. A protocol for member-only meetings already exists in the Scrutiny Handbook and it is recommended that this approach is trialled on a limited basis to test and evaluate the approach.
- 6.7 It should be noted that if the recent pattern of Call-in continues, this may have a significant impact on workloads and the work programme would need to be adjusted to take this into account.

## **7.0 SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 The Scrutiny Management Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the Council’s scrutiny function and for overseeing delivery of the work programme.
- 7.2 The Scrutiny Management Board work programme will include:
- Progress reports to monitor delivery of the work programme
  - Legislation updates and implications for scrutiny
  - Meetings to hold the Executive to account
  - Monitoring the implementation of scrutiny recommendations
  - Scrutiny of strategic issues identified by the Board
  - Statutory scrutiny of Community Safety Partnership
  - Decide Scrutiny Assembly meetings
  - Agree changes to the Scrutiny Handbook for consultation with Scrutiny Assembly, including Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Committees
  - Agreeing the Scrutiny Annual Report

## **8.0. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

There are no specific equal opportunity impacts arising from this report. Equal Opportunity issues will be considered as part of any scrutiny work.

## **9.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report. Environmental impacts will be considered as appropriate to the topics in the work programme.

**10. LEGAL COMMENT**

The proposals contained in this report are in accordance with the Scrutiny Handbook and the Council's Constitution.

**11. LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

Scrutiny members are asked to agree the work programme in the context of the Council's priorities.

**12. OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS**

There is an opportunity to focus the work programme on fewer topics and in more depth in areas of policy development where scrutiny can have a greater impact. There is a risk that too many topics are kept in the work programme so that it loses focus and impact.

**13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The work programme will have to be managed within existing resources and adjustments made accordingly to ensure that this is the case. Any variances will be reported through financial monitoring.

**14. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

There are no specific ward implications arising from this report.

**15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

Report prepared by Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist 01952 383114