

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 8 June 2010

**Subject:** Developing the Scrutiny Work Programme

**Responsible Officer:** Alex Dewsnap -  
Divisional Director, Partnership  
Development and Performance

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:** None

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This report sets out the process that will be followed in order to establish the scrutiny work programme for 2010 - 11

### **Recommendations:**

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee are asked to:

- I. Note the process for the development of the scrutiny work programme and the methodologies at their disposal for delivering the programme
- II. Note and comment on the initial items proposed for inclusion in the programme
- III. Call for a further report to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on 27 July outlining in more detail
  - a. the potential scope of each project,
  - b. a possible methodological approach to each project, and
  - c. the priority rating of each project

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **The Process**

Every month, the Overview and Scrutiny committee meets formally to consider items which have been included on its agenda. These items are generally in the form of reports or presentations from officers and cover issues which do not appear to require detailed investigation. The agendas are determined by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the committee.

However, not all items can be considered at committee as they will often require more time than can be made available and also require more detailed background information than can be presented to the committee to enable the committee to reach an informed decision or to make robust recommendations to cabinet. As such, each year scrutiny councillors agree to undertake a number of investigations in addition to the items that they consider at the formal committee. These issues are identified from a number of different sources:

- Areas where performance appears to be poor – this can be supported by the work of the Performance & Finance sub committee<sup>1</sup>
- Issues which have been raised with the scrutiny lead members<sup>2</sup>
- Issues raised by residents (complaints, councillor calls for action, residents surveys/consultation exercises)
- Issues raised by senior managers/portfolio holders/partners which they would like scrutiny's help to investigate
- Changes to the council's policy where scrutiny can provide a helpful 'critical friend' challenge

At the beginning of the municipal year, the scrutiny team pulls together a 'long list' of projects from the sources above and presents this to the Overview and Scrutiny committee. The team provides commentary for the committee on each proposed item for investigation covering:

- The potential focus for the investigations,
- Potential problems which might be associated with the investigation and
- A preferred methodology.

This long list of projects is also prioritised in accordance with the following criteria:

- The relative performance of the service compared to others included in the long list
- The level of public concern regarding the issue
- The likelihood of resolution following investigation
- The anticipated impact of the project on capacity to deliver the council's corporate priorities or the priorities in the sustainable community plan

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<sup>1</sup> The scrutiny function in Harrow currently has four committees: the Overview and Scrutiny committee and the Performance and Finance sub committee, the Call-In sub committee and the Education Call-In sub committee

<sup>2</sup> Lead members sit on either the Overview and Scrutiny committee or the Performance and Finance sub committee and are champions in their specialist areas. They provide a gateway to scrutiny

- The capacity to support the delivery of the council's transformation programme – in particular, Total Place and Better Together
- Whether other investigations have been scheduled in the area – such as inspection programme, council improvement programme (CIP), Lean programming – it is important that scrutiny investigations do not duplicate other investigations, there are limited councillor and officer resources and these must be put to the most efficient use.

The committee can also decide to undertake a more detailed investigation of an issue initially presented as an item on the committee agenda.

The committee has at its disposal a number of 'non-committee' methodologies through which it can deliver its work programme. It is important that the methodology is proportionate to the seriousness/complexity of the issues raised. The different methodologies are outlined below.

- **Challenge panel** – a cross-party group of councillors meet with officers for a **one-off** discussion of a particular issue. The challenge panel process is a very short, sharp process offering an opportunity for the more detailed consideration of straightforward issues than is available at the committee.
- **Light touch reviews** – a cross-party group of councillors will meet a number of times in order to gather information from witnesses, to consider policy advice or perhaps to visit other authorities. This methodology is best suited to consider more difficult issues for which sufficient evidence cannot be gathered at a single meeting. Light touch reviews typically take around 2 – 3 months to complete.
- **In-depth reviews** – In some circumstances, scrutiny identifies serious issues which it wishes to investigate or is indeed asked to investigate on behalf of Cabinet or the council's senior management. If, in considering the gravity of the issue, it becomes apparent that the amount of work required to develop competent recommendations to cabinet will need significant levels of evidence then an in-depth review made up of cross-party representatives is appropriate. This process enables much more detailed investigation of an issue with evidence from a wide range of witnesses and sources along with visits to other providers. In-depth reviews typically take 6 – 9 months or more to complete.
- **Standing reviews** – it is often the case that the Overview and Scrutiny committee wishes to monitor performance of a particular issue, where for example long-term change is proposed. In these circumstances, rather than send a number of repeat reports to committee where time to consider the issue is limited, the committee can decide to set up a standing review. This cross-party group will meet on a regular basis to review progress on the issue and will make regular reports (perhaps twice a year) back to the committee. In this way scrutiny is able to monitor developments more fully whilst developing expert knowledge of the subject being considered. Standing reviews last the length of time of the project which is being monitored.

## 2010/2011 Work Programme

As the current committee is meeting for the first time and is at the start of a new administration, the process of determining which projects councillors wish to include in their work programme is at a very early stage. The paragraphs above have identified the process by which the work programme is developed and undertaken, the paragraphs which follow outline the thinking thus far on the kind of topics which might be included in the 2010 – 11 programme.

The 2006 – 10 administration undertook a wide range of projects and by the end of the term, in May 2010 had concluded all of them. However, during the final year, the outgoing Overview and Scrutiny committee identified a number of projects which it wished to recommend to the incoming committee are included in the ongoing work programme. These projects include:

Performance of the Kier contract	This project was deferred from the 2009/10 work programme
Budget	Councillors have recommended the reconstitution of the standing review of the budget which considered the effectiveness of the council's financial planning processes in the previous administration
Transitions – Total Life Passport	Previous scrutiny councillors had placed a high priority on this project but insufficient time was available to complete prior to the election. However, a workshop held between scrutiny councillors and officers identified the potential scope and focus for the project should it be included in the current work programme.
Integrated Strategic Plan	This is a significant change programme for health services in West London and will need to be carefully monitored. Detail with regard to proposals and how consultation will be run is still awaited. Scrutiny may wish to participate in a joint overview and scrutiny committee <sup>3</sup> with other boroughs
Young people and citizenship	This was suggested during discussions between Children and Young People lead councillors and the Corporate Director for Children's Services
Increasing the involvement of residents in sports	This could support the development of a strategic approach to sports in the borough.
Recession monitoring	The members of the sustainability review undertaken in 2009/10 expressed a wish to continue to monitor the council and partners response to the recession.
Anti Social Behaviour Strategy	The council is developing its Anti Social Behaviour strategy. Scrutiny will be consulted as part of the development of this strategy and councillors may like to include this consultation in the committee's work programme
Single Equalities Scheme for Harrow Council.	The council is developing a Single Equalities Scheme. Scrutiny will be consulted as part of the development of this strategy and councillors may like to include this consultation in the committee's work programme

<sup>3</sup> Joint Overview and Scrutiny committees are established when proposals for health service change are deemed 'substantial' and are likely to impact on more than one borough.

Members of the committee will be aware of the significant challenges that the council and our partners are likely to face during the lifetime of the new administration. The council's response to these challenges can have a significant impact upon how services are delivered to local people. In these circumstances, it is important that scrutiny councillors are able to offer challenge to proposals as they are developed in order to safeguard the well being of residents. The work programme must be flexible enough to accommodate these issues as they arise.

### **Next Steps**

This report has outlined the process for development of the scrutiny work programme and has identified a number of projects which members of the committee may wish to include in the programme. Members are asked to call for a further report to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny committee on July 27<sup>th</sup> to make final proposals regarding items to be included in the programme for the forthcoming administrative year.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report

### **Performance Issues**

There are no specific performance issues in this report. The report to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny committee providing further detail on options for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme will include an analysis of performance information as the performance of the service will be one of the criteria for inclusion in the work programme.

### **Environmental Impact**

There are no environmental issues associated with this report.

### **Risk Management Implications**

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

### **Corporate Priorities**

The delivery of the council's corporate priorities is one of the key criteria for inclusion of topics in the scrutiny work programme.

## **Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

Not necessary for this report.

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Lynne Margetts,  
Service Manager Scrutiny  
020 8420 9387

### **Background Papers:**

There are no background papers