

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE 15 June 2021
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Scrutiny Work Programme 2021-22
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	Simon Trevaskis – Senior Democratic Services & Governance Officer – Scrutiny
<b>PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:</b>	Councillor Sean Fitzsimons – Chair of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee
<b>PUBLIC/EXEMPT:</b>	Public

<b>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</b>	It is a requirement set out in part 4E: Scrutiny and Overview Procedure Rules of the Council's Constitution for the Scrutiny & Overview Committee to agree an initial annual work programme for itself and its sub-committees at its first full meeting of the new Council year.
<b>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:</b>	The Scrutiny & Overview Committee is asked to:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree the initial Annual Scrutiny Work Programme,</li> <li>2. Review and agree the process that will be used to manage the work programme as the year progresses.</li> </ol>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to set out the initial annual work programme for 2021 – 2022 for the Scrutiny & Overview Committee and its three sub-committees, namely the Children & Young People Sub-Committee, Health & Social Care Sub-Committee and the Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee. A copy of the initial work programme can be found at Appendix A to this report.
- 1.2. Although the work programme has been populated as far as possible at this stage, it is recognised that given the challenges facing the Council, the work programme needs to remain flexible enough to respond to emerging priorities during the year. To ensure that there is a consistent process for prioritisation of the work programme, this report also sets out how this will be managed.

## 2. ANNUAL SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

- 2.1. At its meeting held on 30 March 2021 the Scrutiny & Overview Committee agreed to accept the 13 recommendations made by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS), which were the end result of a Scrutiny Improvement Review conduct by CfGS. When agreeing these recommendations, the Committee agreed that the following three recommendations would be prioritised for delivery in the short term:-

1. Take action to ensure that scrutiny can play an immediate role in the Council's financial recovery.
  2. Set a more consistent approach to the provision of information to scrutiny councillors.
  3. More systematic prioritisation of the work programme.
- 2.2. The Committee also agreed that CFGS would be asked to continue working with the Council to use their expertise in the delivery of the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review. To that end, since the Committee meeting on 30 March, CfGS has engaged with officers and Members to develop an approach to delivering the three recommendations highlighted above.
- 2.3. As part of the work to frame an effective scrutiny function CfGS has suggested the following practical principles should be used to govern activity in 2021/22. These will be that:
- Scrutiny will focus only on business-critical activities, and in particular the Renewal Improvement Plan;
  - Scrutiny activity will be better co-ordinated between committees, and will be anchored by a method of escalating important items to committee;
  - The work programme will be more dynamic, although there will be certain matters on which in-depth scrutiny will be carried out (in committee by default although where necessary in task and finish groups);
  - Scrutiny will receive regular advice from the s151 officer and Monitoring Officer to assist in the development of the work programme and to ensure that scrutiny's work aligns with wider improvement activity;
  - The timely and proportionate provision of accurate and relevant information will be central to the above.
- 2.4. Given the challenges facing the Council, CfGS have proposed an initial approach to delivering the three recommendations which are interim measures. These are designed to support the stabilisation of the authority and the delivery of a balanced budget in 2021/22. Towards the end of 2021/22 (before the election) councillors will need to consider how effectively this system is working and how recommendations might be put to the new Council on how scrutiny is carried out. It is anticipated that this will involve further action on CfGS's wider recommendations.
- 2.5. Scrutiny Councillors have further identified a need for the Scrutiny Committee/Sub-Committees to ensure that any review of services undertaken also considers the quality of customer care, and the need to listen to the voice of the service user, carer/parents, and front-line workers. The importance of this has been recently underlined by the experience of the council tenants who lived in Regina Road.

### **3. ACCESSING INFORMATION**

- 3.1. In order for Scrutiny Members to be able to effectively prioritise their work programme towards the areas where focus is most needed, it is essential that there is timely access to a range of information and data if it is to be able to

make an assessment on progress made with the Croydon Renewal & Improvement Plan and delivery of the 2021-22 budget. To this end, CfGS is liaising with senior officers to ensure a process for regularly sharing information with scrutiny members is put in place as soon as possible.

- 3.2. Although the approach is still to be finalised, CfGS has suggest that information could be shared informally through the production of an information digest, which would be distributed as information becomes available. This would not preclude Members from making their own individual requests for specific information as needed.
- 3.3. As well as information on the ongoing delivery and management of services, it is important that information on the development of key policies is shared informally. As far as possible it is recommended that senior officers should:
  - Submit for inclusion in an information digest brief summaries of any plans or policies under development with a twelve-month horizon;
  - A gateway process should be built into all matters which will eventually form the basis of a report to Cabinet setting out how scrutiny involvement might be built in at the design stage.
- 3.4. If during 2021/22 cabinet advisory committees are established, this element of the scrutiny role will need to be revisited

#### **4. WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITIES**

- 4.1. In the report from CfGS, summarising the findings from their Scrutiny Improvement Review, it was recommended that the work programme should be exclusively focussed on “business critical” activities in 2021-22. CfGS has worked to refine these activities and is suggesting the following workstreams are allocated to each Committee/Sub-Committee:-

##### ***Scrutiny & Overview Committee***

W 1: Corporate recovery, including corporate oversight by exception.

W 2: Understanding and acting on risks. To initially focus substantively on BBB and the council’s reserves position

##### ***Children & Young People Sub-Committee***

W 3: Supporting local people and keeping them safe. To focus particularly on the council’s unaccompanied asylum seeking children obligations, post-pandemic child safety and safeguarding, and special educational needs

##### ***Health & Social Care Sub-Committee***

W4: Supporting local people and keeping them safe. To focus on improvement plans arising from the LGA’s diagnostic review and the ongoing health and social care integration;

##### ***Street, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee***

W 5: Supporting local people and keeping them safe. To focus on sustainable economic recovery post-pandemic (especially the Growth Zone) and on the expansion in social housing stock

- 4.2. At present planning of the work programme is overseen by the three Scrutiny Chairs. CfGS has suggested that there would be a benefit in identifying

workstream leads amongst the scrutiny membership for each of the above workstreams to assist the Chairs with reviewing information outside of meetings and prioritising items that should go to Committee/Sub-Committee for discussion.

- 4.3. It is proposed that this group of Scrutiny Chairs and Leads meets on a monthly basis, using the information provided in the digests to identify items for escalation. It is recommended that the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer attend these meeting to provide advice and guidance.

The purpose of these meetings will be to support scrutiny to:

- Adopt a risk-based approach to
  - The oversight of capital projects which complements the role of GPAC. Scrutiny's role here will be to understand how risk and the mitigation of risk impacts on how services are experienced by local people. Scrutiny will do this through regular liaison with the s151 officer and chair of GPAC to understand emergent risks and concerns attached to the delivery of the programme, which can then be brought to committee as part of the relevant workstream;
  - The oversight of the delivery of a balanced budget. Scrutiny can align itself to the work of GPAC by understanding where GPAC identifies pressures in the budget and seeking to investigate, understand and recommend action on those issues in detail;
  - The management by the Council of significant liabilities which may impact on the future financial position (BBB, Fairfield Halls, for example);
  - The delivery of a budget which aligns with the MTFs. Advice can be taken on the extent that the MTFs targets are being met.
- Ensure that oversight and management of finances is informed by a wider awareness of the experiences of local people;
- Ensure that matters of concern in respect of the workstream areas can be promptly identified and work designed to address them; again, based on an assessment of risk;
- Ensure that scrutiny can transact its continuing statutory functions, and other constitutional obligations. There are certain matters that scrutiny must periodically review (community safety, substantial variations of local health services). These meetings will ensure that those obligations are met.

- 4.4. It is recommended that summaries of the discussions at these informal meetings are reported back to each meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee.

## **5. WORK SCHEDULING**

- 5.1. CfGS has recommended that a maximum of two substantive items should be scheduled for any scrutiny meeting. No reports should be submitted to scrutiny for update or information; everything should go via the escalation matter for members to determine the format in which they wish to engage with the topic.

5.2. There are certain matters where the importance of the ongoing issue will require regular scheduled items and/or the establishment of task and finish groups. We suggest that these be:

- Oversight of the council's improvement journey generally, with a particular focus on culture (as part of workstream 1);
- Oversight of the establishment of a new culture and approach on risk – including direct member input into understanding the most significant strategic risks affecting the authority (as part of workstream 2);
- Creating a sustainable post-pandemic recovery for Croydon (as part of workstream 5).

5.3. A task and finish group has been set up to look at the economic recovery of the town centre. Given there is limited officer capacity to support task and finish reviews, it is suggest that this is the only group set up this year, with other work (including matters subject to escalation) being dealt with in committee.

5.4. Call-in remains a vital tool for councillors to be able to highlight decisions made, but not implemented, which cause significant worry and concern. It has been agreed that the call-in process will be reviewed to ensure it meets best practice, but it is not intended that this will result in any restriction to the process currently available for Members.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee is asked to approve the initial Annual Scrutiny Work Programme set out in Appendix A.

6.2. The Committee should also review the suggested approach for the ongoing management of the work programme, considering whether any changes are needed,

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Simon Trevaskis – Senior Democratic Services & Governance Officer - Scrutiny

## **APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

Appendix A – Initial Annual Scrutiny Work Programme