

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	25 July 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Forward Work Programme of the Corporate Improvement Select Committee
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alexander Polak, Statutory Scrutiny Officer Kunwar Khan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>Appendix A</b> – Draft Forward Work Programme 2023-24 for Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee <b>Appendix B</b> – <a href="#">‘Scrutiny and Work Programming’ – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (2022)</a> <b>Appendix C</b> – Healthy Life Expectancy – Adult Social Care Improvements’ Task and Finish Proposal

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out a draft Work Programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC). The report explains how Members and officers have shaped the draft work programme. CISC Members are invited to agree it as a starting point, noting that it will continue to change as the year gets underway.
- 1.2 This report recommends launching the committee’s first Task and Finish Group immediately, as per appendix C, to:
- explore the causes of the gap in healthy life expectancy between Slough residents and their neighbours,
  - explore how the Council’s Adult Social Care services contribute to addressing this issue, and how well they do this (using a framework against which the council will be publicly reviewed from September 2023 onwards); and
  - make recommendations to Cabinet.

#### **Recommendations:**

The CISC is recommended to:

- 1. Review and agree the Forward Work Programme (Appendix A) subject to any amendments by the committee; and**
- 2. Commission a ‘Healthy Life Expectancy – Adult Social Care Improvements’ Task and Finish Group as per Appendix C by electing a Chair and, if possible, agreeing its members.**

## Commissioner Review

*[Due to compressed timescales for the work programming process, commissioner comments may not be available at the time of publication – they will be added ASAP.]*

## 2. Report

### Best Practice for Work Programming

- 2.1 Appendix B explains why work programming is necessary and how to do it well. It is guidance provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, who have been assisting Slough Borough Council by providing induction and training for councillors and officers, and who have assisted with the production of the draft work programme presented at appendix A.
- 2.2 The process followed by Slough this year has been based on this guidance, adapted for Slough's situation.
- 2.3 The document states that a strong and effective work programme underpins the work and approach of Scrutiny. Thought and time has to be given to developing a work programme that reflects the issues important to the local population but also gives provides times and space for horizon scanning on big, long-term, cross-cutting issues and trends.
- 2.4 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny conclude that ultimately, this comes down to the need for clarity on scrutiny's role, ie what scrutiny exists to do at the council.
- 2.5 In Slough, the role of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee has been very clearly defined, as part of the Council's response to the [improvement directions it has received from the Secretary of State](#).
- 2.6 The [new terms of reference of this committee](#), which were agreed at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2023 and noted by this committee in June 2023, state:
 

“The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee shall:

  - (i) Monitor and drive improvement against any Directions by the Secretary of State and other external or internal inspections, reviews, performance information at their own discretion.
  - (ii) Monitor and drive progress of major corporate improvement initiatives.
  - (iii) Scrutinise and contribute to the council's budget-setting cycle and monitor the council's financial recovery
  - (iv) Scrutinise proposals for, and delivery of, major savings initiatives, including their impact on partners and residents.”

### Improvement & Recovery Context

- 2.7 The Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan sets out the corporate priorities to be delivered to ensure that it addresses the key areas of concern as set out by Government directions. Much of this committee's work this year will relate to this plan.

2.8 This plan also includes actions for the improvement of scrutiny itself. The following areas of the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan are relevant to work programming:

- a. Reframe the main committee's focus – ideally no more than two items per meeting and focussing on improvement and recovery.
- b. Doing more in-depth work via Task and Finish groups.
- c. Developing a cohesive work programme, concentrated on the council's plans for financial and organisational recovery.
- d. Continuing and improving the council's whole-year focus on financial management in scrutiny.

2.9 Therefore, the work programme for the committee must both contribute to the improvement and recovery of the council AND represent an improvement in the way Slough Borough Council does overview & scrutiny.

### How Topics Were Identified

2.10 The following process has been followed to generate Appendix A:

- A workshop was held for outgoing Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Members in March 2023. Their recommendations for future overview and scrutiny topics were published in the [Scrutiny Annual Report 2023 which was noted by Full Council in March 2023](#).
- A series of sessions for 'Extended CLT' (all Exec Directors and their direct reports) to generate proposals for constructive scrutiny topics including:
  - Presentation by officers who supported last year's Task and Finish Groups
  - Training session delivered by Sunita Sharma, an associate with Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
  - Longlist of topics circulated to CLT for comments
- A workshop for CISC Members on 4 July, designed by Sunita Sharma, to review the longlist generated from the above exercises, add items from this year's scrutiny members, make a shortlist and prioritise the items.
- A CLT item on 5 July to feed back the committee's priorities
- Draft Forward Work Programme developed by Democratic Services with the assistance of Sunita Sharma, in discussion with CISC Chair.

2.11 The process encouraged officers and Members to have a strategic focus on:

- The Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan (I&RP);
- Service Areas – Best Value Plans;
- Budgetary Control;
- Capital Receipts Plan; and
- Critical Service resilience (Children and ASC&H).

### Shortlisting and Creating the Work Programme

2.12 To aid discussion and prioritisation of topics a grading table with a scoring system was developed and provided to officers and Members using the following headings (additionally some members scored how much value scrutiny of each topic could add).

<b>Corporate Recovery and Improvement</b>	<b>Other Council Priorities / Corporate Plan</b>	<b>Strategic, Significant and Timely</b>	<b>Residents / Service Delivery</b>	<b>Final score</b>
(1-10)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(Max: 25)

- 2.13 The scoring was weighted in favour of topics that were important to and impacted on the delivery of the improvement and recovery plan.
- 2.14 Suggestions were made for both the main committee and for task and finish groups.
- 2.15 At the 4 July workshop, Members suggestions were underpinned by the need to balance the tension in supporting the Council's in its challenges and addressing the concerns and issues raised by residents.
- 2.16 The draft Forward Work Programme at appendix A is the culmination of the discussions and feedback received on 4 July in-person workshop held at Observatory House. A degree of judgement has been needed – for example it has not been possible to schedule items exactly in the priority order indicated by Members, for various practical reasons. However the work programme is felt to be very much in the spirit of the discussions had by CISC members on 4 July.
- 2.17 Further prioritisation needs to take place throughout the year to maintain a strategic focus, and it can be expected that issues will arise throughout the year, as suggestions from Cabinet Members, other Members and officers. Therefore the work programme will be updated continuously through the year, led primarily by the Chair with input periodically from the Committee.
- 2.18 CISC's time is limited and Members have been advised to prioritise ruthlessly. An issue not appearing on the work programme does not mean that CISC members feel it is unimportant. It maybe that some issues can be pursued by Members through other routes outside of the Committee's work programme.

2.19 Eight topics emerged from the 4 July workshop as being significantly more highly rated by councillors than the others. Some topics which were similar have been combined. The eight shortlisted issues were:

- The budget and finances of the council, including delivery of savings
- Asset Disposals Programme
- Future of the Housing Repairs Contract
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Health Inequality (The life expectancy gap / Public Health / Adult Social Care Assurance Programme)
- Resident Engagement and Building Trust
- Slough Children First – journey to improvement
- Children Missing Education

2.20 These topics generated the most interest while being reasonably strategic, relevant and timely for the council's improvement and recovery plans and decision-making timetable.

- 2.21 These topics have been included in the draft work programme at Appendix A, either as whole-committee items or as Task and Finish Group proposals. Members are invited to consider whether this satisfactorily represents their wishes.

### **Phasing the Work – the Task and Finish ‘taxi rank’**

- 2.22 It is suggested that Members phase in their task and finish work through launching the first topic for consideration at this meeting. This will be followed by the next topic being launched at the September meeting and the third at the October meeting. This way the work of launching and closing T&Fs is reasonably spread out to make best use of resources.
- 2.23 The committee may run a maximum of three T&Fs at any one time, subject to the availability of Member and Officer resources. As each T&F completes its work there is the possibility of launching the next T&F in the list. This has been referred to as the ‘taxi rank’ approach.
- 2.24 A so-called ‘taxi rank’ of task and finish group topics is presented in appendix A. This list can be expected to grow and change as the year progresses.

### **3. Task and Finish Group Launch: Healthy Life Expectancy – Adult Social Care Improvements**

- 3.1 Ideally the committee would be in a position to launch its first task and finish group at this July 2023 meeting, however time has been very short between the member workshop and the deadline for papers, limiting the choice of which topic could be launched, for practical reasons.
- 3.2 Happily, the officers involved in supporting one topic from the committee’s shortlist – ‘Health Inequality (life expectancy gap) and Adult Social Care Improvement’ – were keen to demonstrate the value of their proposal to councillors and have produced a scoping document (appendix C) extremely quickly.
- 3.3 The appendix sets out how well this topic meets the criteria by which the committee chooses its priorities. In particular, it is notable that the opportunity to do this work will soon expire as the current review of Adult Social Care in line with the incoming CQC inspection regime will be completed by the autumn.
- 3.4 If the committee wishes to commission this T&F to commence now, it must elect one of the councillors from its ‘pool of chairs’ to lead the work. The most important criteria for this choice is: “which councillor is most enthusiastically interested in the subject matter?” Experience has shown that this is by far the greatest determinant of a T&F group’s success.
- 3.5 Ideally, the committee would also agree membership of the T&F group at this meeting. There must be a minimum of three to proceed. These do not have to be CISC Members – T&F members may be drawn from any councillor except members of the Cabinet. Again, enthusiasm should be the strongest criterion for inclusion in the group, however it is also desirable to ensure a degree of political proportionality ie members of at least two Groups being on the T&F.
- 3.6 Since this T&F is being launched with a shorter lead-in period than most will be in future, there may not have been time for Group Leaders to seek volunteers to join

this T&F. In this case the committee may opt to allow the Chair to agree membership of the T&F over the coming weeks on this occasion, in order to allow the work to get underway swiftly.

#### **4. Implications of the Recommendations**

##### *4.1 Financial implications*

4.2 This is not a decision-making report so there are no direct financial implications. Where further work is required to respond to the issues identified, any recommendations from CISC will be made to the Cabinet.

##### *4.3 Legal implications*

4.4 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new political management system for local councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. To provide a counterweight for this, the Act also introduced the concept of 'overview and scrutiny' – sometimes referred to simply as 'scrutiny' – whereby every council with an executive management structure is required to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This enables the rest of the council to scrutinise the executive by investigating their decisions and policies, and issuing reports and recommendations where any shortcomings are identified.

##### *4.5 Risk management implications*

4.6 Overview and Scrutiny, commonly referred to as Scrutiny, is a statutory function and is currently subject to government direction in Slough. Failure to develop and approve a Forward Work Programme for Corporate Improvement and Scrutiny (the main and only Overview and Scrutiny Committee) would increase the risk of challenge and criticism.

##### *4.7 Equality implications*

4.8 The FWP covering report includes reference to the CfGS scrutiny principles, which together with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and Nolan's principles, includes provisions that are linked to the Equality Act duties, including, inter alia, a requirement to maintaining integrity, respect the rule of law, ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

#### **5. Appendices**

**Appendix A** – Draft Forward Work Programme 2023-24 for Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

**Appendix B** – [‘Scrutiny and Work Programming’ – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny \(2022\)](#)

**Appendix C** – Healthy Life Expectancy – Adult Social Care Improvements' Task and Finish Proposal