

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
Date:	25 June 2024
Subject:	Forward Work Programme of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
Chief Officer:	Sukdave Ghuman, Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Colin Sweeney, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager Michael Edley, Governance and Scrutiny Officer
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Appendix A: Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the current Work Programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC). There have been some minor changes to that presented in July which are highlighted in the Appendix.
- 1.2 CISC Members are invited to note the changes and that it will continue to change as the year progresses.
- 1.3 A more formal opportunity to review the Workplan will be at the Mid-Year Workplan Review Workshop on 17 December 2024
- 1.4 Members attention is also drawn to paras 2.9 to 2.13 regarding scrutiny of Children's services.

Recommendation:

- a. **That the current Work Programme at Appendix A be noted, subject to any amendments agreed by the committee; and**
- b. **That members note the pending Mid-term review and developments regarding children's scrutiny.**

Commissioner Review

Commissioners are content for this report to be considered.

2. Report

Best Practice for Work Programming

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) is invited to note recent changes to the work programme presented in Appendix A,
- 2.3 Members are reminded that the Work Programme is intended to continue to evolve in response to events over the course of the period covered. A mid-term review in December will be an opportunity to review the committees work for the period Jan-April 2025.
- 2.4 In the usual course of things, it will also be fully refreshed after each Annual Council in May. This will be the second of those full refreshes in this four-year municipal cycle.
- 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](#). The [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.”
- 2.6 The scrutiny action plan for the continued improvement of the scrutiny function was endorsed by Full Council in May 2024, and this work programme is designed in step with that plan.
- 2.7 This work programme does not include:
- standard items such as the periodic consideration of the committee's updated work programme, recommendations tracker, actions log etc.
 - the schedule of pre-meetings, briefings and all-member briefings which will be co-ordinated in the run-up to each item.
- 2.8 In addition to the above, CISC must give consideration to topics which address its statutory duties – the scrutiny improvement action plan already refers to the need to resolve the local/regional question of joint health scrutiny, for example.

- 2.9 A further critical consideration of the committee is to ensure that the recovery journey of Slough's Children's Services is suitably prioritised amongst the work of the committee in the coming year. A meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair and both the Children's and MHLUC Commissioners was held to agree a way forward to resolve the challenges this posed.
- 2.10 Key to this was to address the request for a children's focussed Scrutiny Committee made by the Children's commissioner in his report of 24 July 2024 (CISC agenda Item 24 September 2024), whilst at the same time bearing in mind the clear direction of the MHLUC Commissioner and of the CfGS Mid-term review that, at this point in time, Scrutiny in Slough should be through a single overview and scrutiny committee.
- 2.11 The option of an extra committee was explored along with implications this posed for governance, the demands on officer resourcing and on members.
- 2.12 It was agreed, on balance, that the best option would be for CISC to undertake, on an annual basis, a full day scrutinising children's services to identify areas of concern that might warrant more formal in-depth scrutiny by CISC going forward.
- 2.13 The detail and resourcing implications of this approach is currently being worked through and will be brought to the committee in due course with a likely implementation in early Spring 2025.

3. Implications of the Recommendations

Financial implications

- 3.1 The work proposed is expected to be delivered within the council's available financial and resource envelope for scrutiny. If additional scrutiny work arises, the expectation is that other topics will need to be de-prioritised in order to meet this requirement.

Legal implications

- 3.2 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.

Risk management implications

- 3.3 Overview and Scrutiny, commonly referred to as Scrutiny, is a statutory function and is currently subject to government direction in Slough. Failure to develop, approve and review 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.

Equality implications

- 3.4 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.

4. Appendices

Appendix A: Current work plan 2024-25