

## **Slough Borough Council**

**Report To:** Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 24 June 2025

**Subject:** Forward Work Programme of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

**Chief Officer:** Sukdave Ghuman, Monitoring Officer

**Contact Officer:** Ben Bix, Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny (Interim), Statutory Scrutiny Officer

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**Ward(s):** All

**Exempt:** No

**Appendices:** Appendix A - Draft Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025-26

### **1. Summary and Recommendations**

- 1.1 This report sets out a draft Work Programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) set out at Appendix A. The report explains how Members and Officers have shaped the draft work programme.
- 1.2 The work plan also includes two Task and Finish Groups that were approved at the CISC meeting on 29 April 2025 and will be launched at this meeting. One will focus on in-year budget management and budget planning for 2026-27, the other on scrutiny of the Improvement and Recovery Programme.
- 1.3 CISC Members are invited to agree the work programme as a starting point, noting that it will likely change as the year gets underway, in response to changing circumstances.

### **Recommendation:**

- a. **That the Work Programme set out at Appendix A be agreed, subject to any amendments agreed by the committee.**

### **Commissioner Review**

This report was circulated to Commissioners in June 2025.

## 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 must be given to developing a work programme that reflects the issues important to the local population but also provides time and space for horizon scanning on significant, long-term, cross-cutting issues and trends.
- 2.2 The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) is invited to review and agree the work programme presented at Appendix A, whilst noting that it is a living document and is intended to continue to evolve in response to events over the course of the period covered. In the usual course of things, it will also be fully refreshed after each Annual Council and this is the first of those full refreshes in this four-year municipal cycle.
- 2.3 The approach to work programming, taken over the course of three workshops in May and early June 2024, has been broadly similar to the approach adopted in May-June 2024 and December 2024 which was described in detail in [Scrutiny Forward Plan 2024-25](#)
- 2.4 This approach was supported by guidance on early pre-decision scrutiny proposals and guidance on prioritisation which was produced during the prior year based on best practice and agreed by the committee.
- 2.5 In Slough, the role of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee has been 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."

### Task Groups

The Task Group on the Improvement and Recovery Programme will focus on Items (i) and (ii) above through a monthly series of workshops on issues arising from the meetings of the Corporate and Service Improvement Board or identified by the task group itself with reference to the I&R action plan.

The Budget management and Budget planning task group will similarly operate over the course of the year locking into the milestones set out by the Director for Finance.

- 2.6 The latest 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 accordance with that plan.

### **How Topics Were Identified**

- 2.7 The following process has been followed to arrive at a draft work programme for the coming year:
- The outgoing committee gave consideration to future topics in their Annual Report to Council;
  - A public call for scrutiny items was put out via Citizen Space and publicised by/with councillors;
  - Several rounds of idea generation by Cabinet and senior officers via CLT meetings, with topics submitted in a standardised format;
  - CISC member topic proposal workshop on 20 May 2025;
  - Scrutiny joint workshop with CLT on 27 May 2025 ; and
  - Scrutiny committee prioritisation workshop on 4 June 2025
- 2.8 Members had already identified during the prior year their approach to several main strands of their work over the coming year, all of which fit with the committee's focused terms of reference. Each of these is expected to generate additional priority items through the course of the year, so space and flexibility have been left in the work programme to allow for these new areas of focused work:
- 2.9 **Budget setting process and monitoring the council's financial recovery** – the committee intends to set up a Task and Finish group, to last longer than the usual T&F process ie most of the year, which will monitor delivery against savings targets (to identify potential in-year issues) and take part in the budget setting process
- 2.10 **The Council's transformation (improvement and recovery) journey** – the committee has prioritised topics below which it feels comprise major aspects of the council's improvement and recovery journey, and will monitor the council's corporate transformation process via quarterly updates for further items arising as the council's plans (such as its 'target operating model') become clearer. The committee has left room in its work programme for issues arising to be added to its agendas through the year on a prioritisation basis, since this is currently a period of significant change in the council's approach to transformation and the committee needs to be able to be responsive to this as it develops.
- 2.11 **The improvement and recovery of Slough's Children's Services** - this is recognised as a priority issue which is subject to a separate long-running government intervention. There are proposals under discussion to integrate the Children's Improvement Plan with the Corporate Improvement Plan. This would simplify matter for scrutiny as the I&RP task group could then incorporate the children's action plan in its investigations.
- 2.12 If integration does not take place, then an alternative approach must be sought by the Scrutiny Officer.
- 2.13 This draft work programme does not include procedural or administrative items such as the periodic consideration of the committee's updated work programme, or its recommendations tracker.

- 2.14 This work programme also does not include the schedule of pre-meetings, briefings and all-member briefings which will be co-ordinated in the run-up to each item.
- 2.15 In addition to the above, CISC must consider 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.

### **Shortlisting and Creating the Work Programme**

- 2.16 After the first 2 workshops, in addition to topics that were either statutory or automatically included due to their relationship with Improvement and Recovery a long list of topics from different sources (Table 1). These then became the focus of a sifting and prioritisation session, in the form of an informed debate and collective scoring exercise. The scoring was necessarily unscientific, but was a useful exercise in normalising variety in scoring scale of members to produce a list ordered on the basis of combined quality of criteria and fit with the work of the committee.
- 2.17 The main topics arising out of this process were then assigned a committee date that together formed the draft Forward Plan (Appendix A)
- 2.18 Review and refresh of the forward plan needs to take place throughout the year to maintain a strategic focus, and it can be expected that issues will arise throughout the year, from budget management and briefings for example. The work programme will therefore be updated continuously through the year, led primarily by the Chair and Vice Chair with input periodically from the Committee.
- 2.19 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 is likely that some issues can be pursued by Members through other routes outside of the Committee's work programme. A number of briefings are already included in the work programme outside of committee time.

## **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 to meet this requirement.

### ***Legal implications***

- 3.2 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced new political arrangements for local authorities 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 executive arrangements 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 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.

### ***Equality implications***

- 3.4 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.

## **4. Appendices**

**Appendix A:** Draft CISC Forward Plan 2024-25