

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 8 March 2007

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- **Current programme**
 - (1) **To note the progress made in completing the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/07;**
 - (2) **To consider the items within the work programme that will not be completed this year for carry forward to the Work Programme for 2007/08;**
- **Overview and Scrutiny Programme 2006/07**
 - (3) **To consider and formulate a programme for the forthcoming year and in particular whether resources should be allocated to:**
 - (a) **outstanding current reviews;**
 - (b) **new requests (as attached);**
 - (c) **priorities within the draft Council Plan for 2006/2010; and/or**
 - (d) **the Council's Forward Plan.**

Introduction

1. The Overview and Scrutiny rules state that this Committee must approve an Overview and Scrutiny work programme prior to the annual Council meeting each year.
2. As this Council year draws to a close, attention now needs to focus on the completion of this task for the forthcoming year.
3. The Committee is requested to give a clear indication at this meeting on the work that they wish to see included in the plan. This will enable officers to compile a programme and bring forward a draft plan with resourcing implications for the next meeting on 6 April 2006.
4. Members will note from the existing plan (**Appendix 1**) the progress made in ensuring its completion. During the course of the year, three of the five 'Task and Finish' Panels will have achieved their respective terms of reference. The Committee, at its next meeting may wish to consider the formal disbandment of these Panels. As detailed in the Scrutiny Annual Report elsewhere on this agenda, the Standing Panels also made progress and finished most of their work for this year.
5. In determining a new programme the Committee may wish to consider the following issues:
 - (a) **Current work**
6. Members will be aware that a few items in the current plan have yet to be completed. Mostly these are ongoing matters or cyclical. Contained in the current programme is a list of

all outstanding items. Members may wish to consider whether further time should be allocated to these areas to enable completion. Members and officers need to be realistic when considering this process to be sure that the necessary work load can be completed within the timescale of the plan. Similarly Members and officers need also to consider whether items where no progress has been made for a while should be removed from the programme and slotted back at a time when progress is achievable.

8. Most of the residual items relate to the Standing Panels. Some however, cover the work of the Task and Finish Panels which have yet to complete their terms of reference. The Committee may wish to consider the future of this Panel, in particular whether any aspects of the work should be refocused or reprioritised to ensure progress is made.

9. The Committee may also review the terms of reference of the current Standing Panels with a view to assessing whether they should be continued or restructured in any way to facilitate the new programme.

10. Reviews to be continued will need to be prioritised and allocated an appropriate time limit.

(b) New requests

11. Officers have sought new proposals from both Members and Senior Management through the weekly bulletin. These are attached **Appendix 2** for consideration. Any new requests received before the meeting will be tabled or circulated separately. It is important that Overview and Scrutiny is seen to 'add value' to the Council's established plans and priorities and not undertake reviews that have limited or no value set against that background.

12. There are options for each request. The Committee may:

- Establish a new Task and Finish Panel – This option is suitable for topics that are issued-based and time limited with clearly defined objectives.
- Add items to the work of the Standing Panels or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself.
- Defer the item to the mid-year review point in light of other requests; or
- Turn down the request.

(c) The Council Plan

13. The Committee will note that one of the main functions of scrutiny is to review the key corporate priorities contained in the Council Plan. This is to identify whether scrutiny can 'add value' and contribute to the realisation of the any of these objectives through review. Members are asked to determine whether time should be allocated in the next year calendar to facilitate any aspects of the plan covering the years 2006-2010. A copy of the final version Council Plan action plan is attached as **Appendix 3**.

(d) Forward Plan

14. The Committee will be aware that scrutiny has expressed a commitment to undertaking a more pro-active role in scrutinising the work of the Executive and in particular developing its pre-scrutiny work. They may wish therefore to allocate provision to reviewing the Forward Plan of the Cabinet. This option should enable scrutiny to identify in advance items and allocate provision accordingly. The presently published plan is attached at **Appendix 4**.

(e) Overview & Scrutiny - Monitoring Meeting

15. As part of its review of member training for next year, the Constitutional Affairs Standing Scrutiny Panel has discussed the arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of Overview & Scrutiny. In establishing the new system, the Council agreed that it should be regularly monitored to ensure that it was meeting the Council's requirements.

16. The Panel felt that a full-blown review seminar was not necessary this year, the previous seminar having been held only relatively recently. The Panel felt however that a more informal discussion on any concerns and improvements should be held to satisfy council policy.

17. With this in mind, members have been invited to attend a two hour session on 3 April 2007, commencing at 7.30 p m. It is hoped that as many members as possible attend. Members have also been asked to give notice of any concerns in advance using a pro forma. These should relate to how O&S works not to specific issues, unless these illustrate a wider point.

18. The Panel said that they felt that discussions should centre on operational matters which can be implemented fairly easily. They wished to avoid constitutional changes on the grounds that the Overview & Scrutiny was completely revised only 2 years ago.

19. The Panel has asked officers from Research & Democratic Services to facilitate the session. This session may bring forward issues for the work programme and should further work be required officers will report back to the next meeting.

(f) Other Commitments

20. In determining the future programme, emphasis should be placed on the standard requirements contained in the Overview and Scrutiny Rules. In particular the Committee should ensure that the agreed programme has sufficient officer and member resources to support it, establish a reserve list for any items which do not find a place in the plan, and review all proposals to ensure that they relate to the Councils Policy Frame work

21. The Committee should also ensure that future commitments are properly prioritised. A criteria has been produced for this and should be used to rank items in terms of importance.

22. It is anticipated that the programme will be reviewed six months after implementation.

