

Overview and Scrutiny Board

2024

25th June

Overview and Scrutiny Training – Outcomes of the Training and Work Prioritisation Session

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen May
Portfolio Holder Consulted	
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services
Report Author Claire Felton	Job Title: Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services Contact c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk email:
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	An Effective and Sustainable Council
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board RESOLVE:-

- 1) To determine whether to add items arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Training and Work Prioritisation Session to the Overview and Scrutiny Board’s Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year;**
- 2) Subject to any suggested tweaks, to determine whether to adopt the work prioritisation tool at Appendix 1 to enable the Overview and Scrutiny Board to select appropriate items for scrutiny during the year; and**
- 3) To update the layout of the Overview and Scrutiny Board’s work programme as detailed at Appendix 2 to the report.**

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 An Overview and Scrutiny Training and Work Prioritisation Session was held on Wednesday 12th June 2024.
- 2.2 The report details the outcomes of this training and invites Members to consider whether to add subjects suggested for scrutiny during the session to the Overview and Scrutiny Board’s Work Programme for 2024/25.

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- 2.3 Members are also invited to consider whether to introduce a work prioritisation tool to help the Board determine whether to select items for scrutiny.
- 2.4 Based on comments arising during the session, a new proposed layout to the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme is suggested in this report.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Introduction

- 3.1 The Council's approach to Overview and Scrutiny was highlighted by Members as a strength during the review of the authority's governance structure that was completed by the Governance Systems Task Group in 2023.
- 3.2 One proposal arising from this review was that an annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Prioritisation session should be held, in line with best practice.
- 3.3 Refresher training in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny function was delivered on 12th June 2024. This session also provided an opportunity for Members to hold the first work prioritisation session since the governance review was completed.
- 3.4 The session was attended by nine Non-Executive Councillors, Councillors R. Bailes, Dale, Gray, McDonald, Nock, S. Robinson and Stanley. One Cabinet Member, Councillor McEldowney, also attended the training.

Scrutiny Work Programme Prioritisation Tool

- 3.5 In discussing work prioritisation for the year ahead, Members started by considering best practice approaches to setting the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. As part of this process, Members noted that items which match the following are often considered best practice for scrutiny to investigate:
- Items linking to the Council Plan and key priorities within the plan
 - Issues that are a major priority or concern for the local community
 - Major potential risks or threats
 - Important opportunities or policy changes

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- 3.6 Reference was made to the importance of identifying the key items for scrutiny during the municipal year and Members noted the need to enable sufficient time to be allocated to each topic in a way that would add value. It was noted during the training that quality, rather than quantity, should be the focus of the overview and scrutiny function and that it was likely that the Board could add more value by focusing on reviewing one or two substantive items per meeting rather than by discussing numerous subjects, when there would be limited time available at meetings to add value.
- 3.7 Members also recognised that there were alternative ways to receive information and that doing so, through a “first look” for some topics, would create capacity on the work programme. Subjects suggested as potentially suitable for a “first look” Member Briefing included:
- The District Heat Network
 - Biodiversity
 - Street Sweeping
- 3.8 It should be noted that dates were identified at the start of the municipal year for potential Member briefings and items identified during the session for information could be scheduled for consideration at these briefings.
- 3.9 Some potential topics were discussed where Members noted that there were alternative options already available for Councillors to consider those matters in detail outside the Overview and Scrutiny process. It was suggested that these subjects might potentially not need to be the subject of scrutiny, which would free capacity within Overview and Scrutiny to focus on other subjects. This included:
- The Bromsgrove District Local Plan - Members noted this was due to be discussed with Councillors at forthcoming meetings of political groups as well as at meetings of the Strategic Planning Steering Group, which could be attended by all Members.
 - Levelling Up Project – Update on Funding – The suggestion was made that this could be discussed at meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group.
- 3.10 Members recognised that requests could be received to incorporate additional items into the scrutiny work programme during the year. This could include suggestions made by Councillors at meetings of the

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Board, items identified from the Cabinet Work Programme for pre-scrutiny and subjects referred to Overview and Scrutiny by Council.

- 3.11 Some concerns were raised that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme could become very busy, should all items that were suggested for scrutiny during the year be added to the work programme.
- 3.12 With this in mind, Members discussed the potential for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to adopt a work prioritisation tool. Some examples were provided during the training of the criteria that Members might wish to incorporate into a prioritisation tool. Based on these examples and the discussions amongst Members held at the training session, a draft suggest scrutiny work prioritisation tool has been attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration. It should be noted that as this tool is in draft form, Members may want to amend the content at the Board meeting in June 2024 to add or remove further criteria that Members feel would be helpful.

Subjects Suggested for Scrutiny

- 3.13 During the training Members discussed and identified some subjects that could be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for consideration during the 2024/25 municipal year.
- 3.14 In discussing these subjects, Members considered information shared during the training as well as the current work programme, the Cabinet Work Programme and other suggestions submitted by Members, (including those submitted in advance).
- 3.15 Based on these discussions, the following key subjects were suggested as a focus for scrutiny during the year:
- The Bromsgrove play audit – Members discussed the potential for the subject of the play audit to be discussed at a number of meetings of the Board, including an initial overview and scrutiny at one meeting followed by a detailed review of the draft report prior to Cabinet approval at another meeting. It was acknowledged that the play audit was also due to be considered by the Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG), but Members noted that Overview and Scrutiny had a separate role, through its challenge function, in respect of considering this subject.

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- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) – Concerns were raised about ASB in the District. The suggestion was made that this could form the basis of a report to the Board alongside the separate annual update to the Board concerning the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership in Bromsgrove District. Whilst the legislation in respect of the partnership does not enable Members to scrutinise the work of individual partner organisations, Members noted that the Council’s representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel could also be invited to attend the meeting when community safety and ASB is discussed, in order to assist with discussions concerning this subject.
- Changes to waste services in response to the Environment Act 2021 – Members noted that proposals detailed in the Environmental Act 2021, especially with regard to food waste collection services, would have implications for the authority and the wider District. There was general consensus amongst Members that detailed scrutiny of this subject would therefore add value.

Work Programme – Presentation

- 3.15 During the training, consideration was given by Members to the existing content of the Overview and Scrutiny Board’s Work Programme and the appropriate layout of this document.
- 3.16 It was noted that in recent years, standing administrative items have been included on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. Whilst these items may continue to be included on the agenda, they do not form the basis generally of substantive items on the agenda. Therefore, the suggestion was made that these items did not necessarily need to be listed on the work programme for consideration at every meeting and instead the focus could be on substantive items. This would potentially help Members to manage the Board’s workload.
- 3.17 Reference was also made to the inclusion of a reserve list of items on the Overview and Scrutiny Board’s Work Programme and Members noted that substantive items could be listed in this section of the work programme where no date had or could yet be set for consideration of those subjects.
- 3.18 Taking into account these suggestions, a draft updated Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme has been produced at Appendix 2 to

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this report. This updated work programme includes the key items for scrutiny that were identified during the training, as well as a list of items where the dates for consideration currently remain to be confirmed and a couple of other items that were already included on the work programme in the 2023/24 municipal year for Members' consideration.

- 3.19 It should be noted that as this is a draft work programme, the content can be amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Board. There also remains scope for the Board to update the content of the work programme during the course of the year to incorporate additional items that may be identified by Members. This could include items identified for pre-scrutiny during the year, as the Cabinet Work Programme is updated on an ongoing basis and published at the start of each month.
- 3.20 Whilst the dates of scheduled meetings of the Board have been recorded on the draft work programme, it should be noted that Members could convene additional meetings during the year where necessary.
- 3.21 Members are also asked to note the role of the Finance and Budget Working Group. Many reports scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet, which focus on financial matters, are routinely reported to the Finance and Budget Working Group for consideration. Meetings of the group need to take place prior to Board meetings, so that any recommendations arising from the working group can be reported to the Board.

Other Points Raised

- 3.22 During the session, reference was made to the way in which items are identified in the Cabinet Work Programme. Members suggested that there was a need for the narrative to be clearer so that the Overview and Scrutiny Board could identify the purpose of those items and make a reasoned determination as to whether those items would be suitable for scrutiny.
- 3.23 In addition, concerns were raised about changes to the dates when items are due to be considered by the Cabinet Work Programme and the implications that this could have for overview and scrutiny in terms of managing their work programme.
- 3.24 Consideration was also given to how Members could achieve the best outcomes through overview and scrutiny of particular subjects. The

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suggestion was made that, when considering the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme at meetings of the Board, Members could also identify some key lines of enquiry in relation to substantive items due for consideration at the following meeting of the Board. This would help Officers and other expert witnesses to prepare in advance of their attendance at meetings of the Board but would not prevent Members from asking additional questions on the subject during the meetings.

- 3.25 With this in mind, suggested wording has been included on the draft Overview and Scrutiny work programme, At Appendix 2, which highlights the actions that Members could take in future when considering the work programme at meetings of the Board.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has access to finite resources and it is important for Members to ensure that these are used in the most constructive way in order to effectively support the overview and scrutiny process at the Council.
- 4.2 A tool to help Members to select appropriate items for scrutiny during the year may enable the Overview and Scrutiny Board to make the best use of resources.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Board operates in accordance with relevant legislation and the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, detailed at Part 12 of the Council's constitution.
- 5.2 Whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Board may opt to consider a range of matters that can have an impact on the local community, the Board cannot scrutinise specific Licensing and Planning applications, which are subject to separate regulatory processes.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 6.1 Refresher training for Members and a review of the items that are due to be considered by the Board, scrutiny Task Groups and scrutiny Working Groups during the year should enable Members to ensure that the scrutiny function makes the best use of the resources available.

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This supports the Council's strategic purpose to be an effective and sustainable Council.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.
- 6.3 However, Members may consider issues relating to climate change and should have regard to the climate change implications of proposals put forward through the overview and scrutiny process during the year.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 There are no specific equalities and diversity implications.
- 6.5 However, Members may consider issues relating to equalities and diversity matters and should have regard to the equalities implications of proposals put forward through the overview and scrutiny process during the year.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There is a risk that if the Overview and Scrutiny Board tries to scrutinise too many items at meetings Members may not achieve constructive outcomes from scrutiny. The advice provided at the training was that a focus on a small number of substantive items at meetings can result in better quality overview and scrutiny than consideration of lots of subjects in a shorter period of time.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Draft Scrutiny Work Prioritisation Tool

Appendix 2 – Draft Updated Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Lead Director / Head of Service	Claire Felton	14 th June 2024

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Financial Services	Pete Carpenter	17 th June 2024
Legal Services	Claire Felton	14 th June 2024