



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 8 NOVEMBER 2023
Subject	FORMULATION OF COMMITTEE WORK PLAN
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Accountable officer	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	For the committee to formulate a work plan for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year.
Annexes	Annex A – Initial Committee Work Plan Annex B – TOPIC Scoring Criteria
Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Agree that when considering the Executive Forward Plan the Committee will agree a priority order of reports for pre-decision scrutiny at the next meeting.2. Agree to use the 10 January 2024 meeting as a “Spotlight” session to scrutinise the Draft Budget 2024/25.3. Agree to schedule an additional “spotlight” meeting on a date to be agreed by the Director of Governance, in consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to scrutinise the Publica Review.4. Request that all members of Council send any suggestions for items to be included on the work plan to the Democratic Services Business Manager by Friday 24 November.5. Agree that the “long list” of suggested work plan items will be ranked by officers using the TOPIC Scoring Criteria (Annex B) and presented to the Committee on 6 December, in order to

	inform the Committee's adoption of a work plan.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Executive, Director of Governance and Director of Finance

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Council on 27 September 2023 agreed to replace the Council's three overview and scrutiny committees with a new, single, Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Overview and Scrutiny works within a work plan which is normally agreed annually and kept under review at each meeting. This report invites the Committee to agree arrangements for the formulation of the Committee's work plan for the remainder of the current Council year.

2. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXECUTIVE REPORTS

- 2.1 Part of the rationale for Council agreeing to establish a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to ensure that the approach of pre-decision scrutiny could be properly embedded as part of the Council's executive decision-making process.
- 2.2 Forthcoming Executive decisions are notified on the Council's Forward Plan for a minimum of 28 days (subject to urgency rules). The Forward Plan will be a standing item on Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas to enable the Committee to select which reports it wishes to scrutinise at future meetings, before those reports are presented to the Executive. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will typically meet on the Wednesday before each Executive meeting and will have the opportunity to discuss the reports with the Executive Member and lead officer, and to submit recommendations to the Executive meeting. Any such recommendations will be drafted by Democratic Services and the wording approved by the Chair and Vice Chair after the meeting. The Executive is obliged to respond to recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny in writing and any such responses will be reported back to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 2.3 As a rule, the Committee is advised to normally scrutinise no more than two Executive reports at any meeting. This is to ensure that there is space on Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas for scrutiny of other topics that are prioritised by members. However, Executive reports are subject to a robust clearance process during which they may be delayed to a later Executive meeting or removed from the Forward Plan altogether. For this reason, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is advised to select 3 or 4 Executive reports for scrutiny at its next meeting in priority order, in case some of those reports do not come forward for decision on the expected timescales.

3. "SPOTLIGHT" MEETINGS

- 3.1 The Committee will have the ability to schedule "spotlight" meetings to enable scrutiny of particular issues affecting the district or Executive decisions in more depth than would be possible at a normal Committee meeting with multiple agenda items. This approach is considered to be good scrutiny practice.
- 3.2 The Committee is recommended to agree to use the 10 January 2024 meeting as a spotlight session for scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2024/25. The Committee is further recommended to agree that a spotlight meeting will be scheduled to enable focused scrutiny on the Publica Review; a proposal that a number of services currently delivered by Publica Group will be repatriated to the Council.
- 3.3 The dates of the spotlight session on the Publica Review will be fixed by the Director of Governance, in consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and

notified to Committee members. These spotlight sessions will be normal meetings of the full Committee, with substitutions allowed in the normal way.

4. WORK PLANNING

- 4.1 An initial work plan for the first couple of meetings of the Committee has been suggested by officers, which the Committee is recommended to agree. This initial work plan largely contains selected Executive decisions for pre-decision scrutiny, plus an update on Fly Tipping Enforcement which was previously on the work plan for the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Several other items from the work plan of the previous committees are now being taken forward in the form of all-member briefing sessions (e.g., flood management, health, housing associations).
- 4.2 In addition to Executive decision for pre-decision scrutiny, the work plan shall contain other topics or issues that affect the district or its people. The Committee is recommended to request that all members of Council can suggest issues for inclusion on the work plan. To enable the Committee to agree a work plan at its next meeting it is suggested that a deadline for suggestions is set as Friday 24 November 2023.
- 4.3 It is further recommended that the TOPIC scoring criteria attached as Annex B is used as a method for ranking the suggested issues based on: timeliness, organisational priority, public interest, the ability to influence, and cost. Items that score highly against these criteria would rank as a higher priority for inclusion in the Committee's work plan than items with lower scores. This system simply provides a method of prioritisation, it will be for the Committee to decide which items to include in its work plan. The Committee is recommended to agree that the work plan items suggested by members will be scored against the TOPIC criteria, with the outcomes of that exercise reported to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee, on 6 December.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 An alternative to holding spotlight meetings would be to deal with the Budget and the Publica Review at scheduled committee meetings. This option is not recommended as there would be insufficient time available for effective scrutiny.
- 5.2 A second alternative would be to establish "task and finish" groups specifically to perform scrutiny of these items. This is a reasonable alternative approach but is not recommended on the basis that task and finish groups with a relatively small membership would provide fewer opportunities for members to participate in scrutiny of these important matters.
- 5.3 An alternative to applying the TOPIC scoring criteria to suggested work plan items would be for the Committee to receive the long list and consider what to do with each item in turn. This approach is likely to be less efficient than receiving the long list with scoring and discussing whether or not items should be included in the work plan on an exception basis.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The additional meetings can be supported by officers within existing resources.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has powers under the Local Government Act 2000 which include the power to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken in connection with the discharge of executive (and non-executive) responsibilities, and to make recommendations. The Committee is also empowered to make reports or recommendations on matters which affect the district or the inhabitants of the district. There is no legal requirement for the Committee to agree a work plan but this is considered to be good practice.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 There is a risk that if the Committee did not take an effective approach to planning and prioritising its workload then important decisions and issues might not be subjected to appropriate democratic oversight and scrutiny.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 There are no equality impacts arising from this report.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None.

(END)