

**Report to:** People Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting:** 17 March 2025

**By:** Deputy Chief Executive

**Title:** People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

**Purpose:** To review and discuss the People Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

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***RECOMMENDATIONS:*** The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) review and agree the latest work programme set out at Appendix 1;
  - 2) Consider a scrutiny review topic for progression by the Committee;
  - 3) review upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's Forward Plan as set out at Appendix 2 to identify any issues that may require more detailed scrutiny.
  - 4) Nominate Members to join the proposed Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Joint Member Reference Group with Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee.
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## **1 Background**

1.1 The work programme is an important tool in ensuring the correct focus and best use of the Committee's time in scrutinising topics that are of importance to the residents of East Sussex, and the efficient and effective working of the Council. It also provides clarity for those who may be requested to give evidence to the Committee on the issues under review, and the questions the Committee requires answers to.

1.2 Discussion of the work programme provides the Committee with the opportunity to consider topics that it may be of value to scrutinise, and to decide whether further scoping work is required. This provides a basis for deciding the best way of scrutinising a topic, the timescale, and who from the Committee will be involved in carrying out the review work. If there are a number of potential topics for review, Members can determine the priority of the work within the resources available to the Committee.

## **2. Work programme and future scrutiny reviews**

2.1 The Committee is asked to review the items in the current work programme and discuss any amendments or additions to future agenda items and other scrutiny work based on current priorities for scrutiny. This may include topics or issues identified through the Committee's work on the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process discussed earlier in the agenda. A copy of the current work programme is contained in Appendix 1 of the report for consideration by the Committee.

2.2 The Committee is also asked to consider whether there are any potential topics for future scrutiny reviews that should be included in the work programme and agree which scrutiny review to undertake next from the list of topics identified in the work programme.

### ***Reference Groups***

#### School attendance

2.3 The Committee agreed in July 2024 to convert a planned scrutiny review on attendance into a Reference Group to provide timely input into targeted programmes which were developing at pace.

2.4 The Group met in January 2025 and considered the latest attendance data, national guidance and legislation, and progress of current initiatives. The Group welcomed the number of initiatives underway to improve school attendance and discussed engagement with parents and support for families, attendance for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and mental health support. The Group agreed to receive an update report in the summer on progress on the initiatives underway and agreed to consider the future of the Reference Group at its work programme item at this meeting.

## Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

2.5 The Government's English Devolution White Paper was released on 16 December 2024 and represents wide ranging and ambitious reform and reorganisation of local government structures in all two tier areas and public services more widely. It also strengthens the previous Government's direction of travel to Mayoral Combined Authority based local devolution. In February 2025 the Government announced that Sussex would be one of six areas included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), working towards establishing a Mayoral County Combined Authority on an accelerated timescale ahead of a mayoral election in May 2026. Also in February, the Minister of State for Local Government invited all two tier local authority areas to prepare plans for local government reorganisation, with areas within the DPP required to submit progress on these plans for unitary local government in March 2025 and final proposals in September 2025.

2.6 Subject to Government decisions, significant programmes of work will be required to deliver these reforms. Active Member engagement, insight and oversight, including through robust scrutiny arrangements, will be critical. Given the cross-cutting nature of potential implications for the County Council, from both devolution and local government reorganisation, the views of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group have been sought on the recommended approach. The Group recommended extending the terms of reference of Place Scrutiny Committee to incorporate devolution and local government reorganisation, given the weighting of potential implications towards services within the remit of Place, and that Place Scrutiny Committee establishes a joint Member Reference Group which will be open to members of both Place and People Scrutiny Committees, recognising the potential impacts on services across the Council and the need to draw on expertise from both committees. The proposed addition to the Place Scrutiny terms of reference has been recommended by Governance Committee and is subject to agreement by Full Council on 20 March. If agreed, the establishment of a Reference Group would be considered by Place Scrutiny Committee, also on 20 March.

2.6 The People Scrutiny Committee is asked to note these recommendations and, subject to Place Scrutiny Committee agreeing to form a Reference Group, nominate Members who wish to take part in this work. The proposed joint scrutiny Member Reference Group would develop and agree its own work programme to incorporate specific areas of Member interest for detailed scrutiny to inform any recommendations to decision makers at key points.

### ***Briefings and training***

2.7 As part of ongoing development, Members are invited to consider any other topics of interest for training or briefings to support their role on the Committee.

### ***Forward Plan***

2.8 A copy of the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions for the period 1 March – 30 June 2025 is included at Appendix 2. The Committee is requested to review the forthcoming items on the Forward Plan to identify any issues within the remit of this Committee that may require more detailed scrutiny. The Forward Plan is revised and published on a monthly basis and Committee members should regularly review the Forward Plan.

## **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 An important part of managing the work of the People Scrutiny Committee is regularly

reviewing its future work programme. This involves the Committee assessing its priorities, ensuring its ongoing reviews are completed in a timely fashion and identifying new areas for scrutiny.

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