

Report to: Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 20 March 2025

By: Deputy Chief Executive

Title: Place Scrutiny Committee future work programme

Purpose: To review and agree items for the Place Scrutiny Committee's future work programme and receive updates on previous work.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Place Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Review and agree the agenda items for the future Committee meetings, including items listed in the work programme in appendix 1;**
 - 2) Consider a scrutiny review topic for progression by the Committee;**
 - 3) Review upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Forward Plan in appendix 2 to identify any issues that may require more detailed scrutiny for inclusion in the committee's future work programme; and**
 - 4) Agree to form a reference group, together with members from the People Scrutiny Committee, to provide scrutiny input into the proposals and arrangements for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.**
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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 examine 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 topics for review, the Committee 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 the future agenda items and other scrutiny work of the Committee for inclusion in the Committee's future work programme 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 topic to progress further from the list of topics identified in the work programme.

3. Forward Plan

3.1 A copy of the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions for the period 1 March 2025 to 30 June 2025 is included in appendix 2. The Committee is requested to review the forthcoming items on the Forward Plan to identify any issues that may require scrutiny work. The Forward Plan is revised and published on a monthly basis, and Committee members should regularly review the Forward Plan.

4. Working and Reference Groups

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 Subject to agreement of the revised terms of reference by Council, the Committee is asked to agree to form a Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Reference Group and to nominate committee members who wish to take part in this work. The proposed joint scrutiny Member Reference Group would then 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.

Asset Management Strategy

4.4 Since the last Committee meeting the Asset Management Strategy Working Group held its first meeting on 11 March 2025 to consider the work being undertaken on revising the Council's Property Asset Management Strategy and provide scrutiny input into the Strategy. The Working Group will meet again later in the year once more detail is known regarding devolution and the impact of the Local Government Reorganisation on the development of a revised Asset Management Strategy.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the work programme contained in appendix 1 and agree any future agenda items or topics for scrutiny reviews to be included in the future work programme. The Committee is also recommended to agree which scrutiny review topic to progress further, and establish a Reference Group together with members from the People Scrutiny Committee to provide scrutiny input into the work on Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation.

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