

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	16 September 2020
SUBJECT:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2020/21
REPORT FROM:	Lynne Ridsdale – Deputy Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Marie Rosenthal – Strategic Advisor
TYPE OF DECISION:	Non-executive
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain.
SUMMARY:	This report sets out proposals for the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the year.
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide comments on the proposed work plan and the joint working with Health Scrutiny on the Covid 19 crisis, • Agree the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2020/21
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	Agreed <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality/Diversity implications:	Contained in the Report
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Wards Affected:	All
Scrutiny Interest:	Yes

Joint Executive Team	Cabinet Member/Chair Briefed	Ward Members (if necessary)	Partners
01/09/20	01/09/20	N/A	N/A
Scrutiny Committee	Other Committee	Council	Comms
N/A	Health Scrutiny	N/A	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee needs to agree a balanced work programme which includes pre decision scrutiny, policy development and review, investigative scrutiny, holding the executive to account, and performance monitoring.
- 1.2** The work programme needs to takes account of relevant factors such as: the work programmes of the executive and other committees, strategic priorities and risks, audit and regulatory reports and recommendations, single-integrated plan and partners strategic priorities and relevant community issues.
- 1.3** The Covid 19-crisis is the single biggest strategic priority and risk facing Bury at the present time.
- 1.4** The Council's scrutiny function has an important role to play in maintaining a form of scrutiny in the current Covid-19 crisis in Bury for several reasons:
- Substantial decisions are being made which are likely to have an impact on the lives of residents and the places they live.
 - The council and its partners should be trying to draw on the perspective of as broad as possible a range of people as it responds to the crisis;
 - Scrutiny activities do not take senior officers and senior members away from the task in hand – they are the task in hand. Councils are democratic institutions, which is why they are leading the local response – councillors have a vital role in feeding into and bolstering this response in the communities they serve, and the scrutiny function provides a mechanism for this work to feed into overall strategy;
 - This crisis will not be ending any time soon. Suspending scrutiny arrangements for a few weeks was necessary – while remote working arrangements were impossible to make and as councils tackled the immediate need for an operational response. But this suspension cannot be indefinite.
- 1.5** Against that background the Committee needs to review its Work Plan for the remainder of the year and how it can support the council, partners and local people during the crisis. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has produced useful guidance for scrutiny committees on how to operate

during the crisis which has been used in compiling this report.
<https://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=covid-19-guide-2-scrutiny>

- 1.6 In agreeing a work plan, scrutiny members will also need to be mindful of the pressures on cabinet members and officers in responding to the Covid crisis and commit to conducting scrutiny in a way that is timely, supportive and proportionate.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 The current crisis will involve a contraction of scrutiny's usual role in investigating any issues "affecting the area or the area's inhabitants". A tighter focus on a smaller range of issues – essentially, critical business focusing on "life and limb" matters for local people – is suggested to be the best way to proceed.
- 2.2 The committee will probably wish to maintain a watching brief over general council services and activity especially if they relate to the COVID-19 response and other life and limb matters. Other matters would probably need to go on hold.
- 2.3 It is proposed that the response to Covid 19 and the Council's finances be the focus of the Committee's work for the remainder of the year

3.0 OVERSIGHT OF THE SYSTEM RESPONSE TO COVID-19

- 3.1 The council and its partners are engaged in a significant amount of activity relating to the operational emergency response. Scrutiny cannot second guess this response or seek to "oversee" it – partners will be moving fast and acting accordingly.
- 3.2 The Health Scrutiny Committee are responsible for scrutiny of health and adult social care functions. It will also have a key role to play in monitoring the health response to the crisis. It has reviewed its work plan to focus on the COVID-19 response.
- 3.3 It is suggested that this Committee can play a useful role in monitoring the non-health and adult social care aspects of the 10 point recovery plan adopted by the Cabinet in July 2020.
- 3.4 The committee are also recommended to keep a watching brief on the council's work to protect vulnerable children; both in the school setting and in their homes. Children and young people will be subject to unique pressures associated with the impact of the crisis, principally related to the closure of educational and childcare settings. Scrutiny can play a role in understanding these impacts and suggesting ways to provide further support and protection.

4. MAINTAINING OVERSIGHT ON MATTERS RELATING TO COUNCIL FINANCES.

- 4.1 Financial matters are critically important as the council struggles with increased expenditure associated with the pandemic alongside significant losses of income.

- 4.2 The Committee also has an important constitutional role to play in reviewing the Cabinet's initial budget proposals in November and making final submission on the council tax and budget proposals being recommended to council in February 2021

5. NEW WAYS OF WORKING AS A SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 5.1 It is possible that the remaining 4 committee meetings will have to be conducted on a remote basis. This will make public participation in the meetings more difficult and require meetings to be shorter and more focused in style.
- 5.2 It is suggested that the format of these meetings change as follows:
- A single substantive agenda item for every meeting, with discussion being supported by a short covering report complemented by verbal updates from officers and other witnesses.
 - A clear outcome and objective for this discussion. These outcomes will have been agreed beforehand by the Chair and others, usually by way of a pre-meeting;
 - An expanded space for questions from the public. Officers are looking into how this can be improved. Ideally written questions being submitted beforehand, or potentially through live questioning – probably via text.
 - Reflections on the council's, and partners', overall response on the issues where the committee is carrying out work based on community insight and general review of documentation.

6. TASK AND FINISH WORK

- 6.1 There is an education task and finish work due to complete next month. This may need to be deferred, and restarted (possibly with shifted scopes) once the immediate crisis is over.
- 6.2 The Centre for Public Scrutiny are advising that whilst there may be a call for the use of task and finish work while the crisis is ongoing. Councils should think extremely carefully about this. The "lead time" of typical task and finish working will not lend itself to the rapid response needed on this crisis.

7. GREATER MANCHESTER SPACIAL FRAMWORK (GMSF)

- 7.1 The Cabinet and Council will be considering the content and arrangements for public consultation of the GMSF in October 2020. It has been suggested that given its significance for Bury, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the documentation in advance of the Cabinet in order to provide additional evidence and comments to support any decision. Dates are still being agreed but it is suggested to hold an additional committee meeting in early October to facilitate this.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 A reworked Work plan is set out at Appendix 1 for the Committee to approve. This is based on meetings the Chair has had with the Chair of Health Scrutiny and officers over the last few weeks.

Background Papers:

Cabinet report- COVID-19 Response and Recovery Update 29 July 2020.

Centre for Public Scrutiny – Scrutiny and supporting the Vulnerable 2020

Centre for Public Scrutiny – Guide 2 – Approaches to scrutiny during the crisis2020

Centre for Public Scrutiny – the Scrutiny Evaluation Framework April 2017

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