

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/16

**FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

27th JULY 2015

AGENDA ITEM 3

DRAFTING A SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE 2015/16 MUNICIPAL YEAR
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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To set out a proposed approach to assist the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee in drafting a work programme for the 2015/16 municipal year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee:

- 2.1 Form a view on the adequacy of the proposed approach for devising a scrutiny work programme and provide recommendations for improvement for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- 2.2 Consider the service areas within the remit of the Committee and identify a long list of proposed topics to scrutinise; and
- 2.3 Authorise the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to undertake a more detailed review of the long list of proposed topics to inform the Committee in producing a shortlist of topics at its September 2015 meeting.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee meeting scheduled for the 2nd July 2015 is considering a report that sets out a series of proposals to support further improvement in the Council's scrutiny arrangements. A copy of this report can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

- 3.2 One particular theme included within the 2nd July 2015 report is around devising more prioritised scrutiny work programmes; the following sections of this paper set out a proposed approach to help Members move toward achieving this.
- 3.3 Research by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) over a number of years has reinforced that effective work programming is essential for effective scrutiny. Done well, it can help to lay foundations for targeted, incisive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Done badly, scrutiny can end up wasting time and resources on issues where the impact of any work done is likely to be minimal.
- 3.4 From a local authority perspective it is recognised that effective and prioritised scrutiny is needed now more than ever in light of the on-going unprecedented reductions in funding. This is also the case for Rhondda Cynon Taf and a range of proposals, including within the area of work programming, are currently being considered to help further improve the Council's scrutiny arrangements and the impact it has.

4. THE COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY STRUCTURE

- 4.1 The Council amended its scrutiny structure at the Annual General Meeting on 20th May 2015 to support, amongst other things, a more thematic approach and create better alignment with up dated management arrangements. The revised structure is:
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
 - Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee;
 - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee;
 - Health and Well-being Scrutiny Committee; and
 - Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee (and Crime and Disorder).
- 4.2 In the case of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, Appendix 1 notes its broad remit in terms of the service areas / themes it will have responsibility for scrutinising.

5. DEVISING A SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

- 5.1 Set out below is a suggested approach for consideration by the Council's scrutiny committees in the development of work programmes. To help inform this, the CfPS has published a short guide to explain the basic principles behind good work programming, based on research undertaken. This can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

5.2 Before moving onto the suggested approach, it is important to set this work in the context of the overall purpose of scrutiny, which is:

- To hold Cabinet to account;
- To contribute to the development of policy and review existing policies, for example, by investigating issues of local concern; and
- To consider aspects of the Council's performance and that of its partners.

5.3 In addition, the CfPS as part of its research over a number of years' has concluded that work programming needs to be **member led** if scrutiny is to be truly effective.

5.4 With the above information in mind, a suggested approach and accompanying timeline for devising a scrutiny work programme for the 2015/16 municipal year is noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – A suggested approach and timeline

Month	Activity
July 2015 scrutiny meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List produced of service areas / themes that come within the remit of the Committee (Appendix 1) together with a suggested criteria for topic selection; • Scrutiny committees to identify a long list of potential topics and using a criteria, produce a shortlist of proposed topics (for further fact finding work to be undertaken on e.g. mini-scoping exercises, proposed methodologies / approaches to complete reviews).
Aug – Sept 2015 (more detailed work co-ordinated by Scrutiny Officers and Performance Management officers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake consultation with officers, Cabinet Members and partners (as appropriate); • Carry out more detailed research on shortlisted topics to define proposed scopes and methodologies / approaches; • Proposed timetable of meetings drafted to deliver the programme of scrutiny work.
Sept 2015 scrutiny committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The up dated information (produced throughout August and September) presented to scrutiny committees for consideration and if deemed appropriate, recommended sign off by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S).
Sept / Oct 2015 O&S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended programmes reported to the O&S for consideration and if deemed appropriate, sign off; • Project planning to progress e.g. membership of groups and officer support.
Reporting progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up dates on reviews to be reported to each scrutiny committee (in line with timescales agreed by each committee).

5.5 To assist Members' thinking when devising their work programme, other information that may be helpful is set out below.

Short-listing of topics

5.6 In addition to the information noted at Appendix 1, other principles to take account of when considering topics include:

- Public Interest: the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny;
- Extent: priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the County Borough;
- Duplication: work programmes must take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort; and
- Balance: achieve a balance between pre-decision scrutiny, policy development and performance monitoring.

Methodologies (or approaches) to scrutiny reviews

5.7 Scrutiny Reviews represent an opportunity for Members to examine in more detail a particular subject or issue to find out more, speak to the individuals responsible and recommend ways in which things might be improved or changed to deliver more positive results. Possible approaches include:

5.7.1 **Reviews** - these are detailed reviews that can be conducted by the full scrutiny committee or a smaller group or panel of members and will meet over several meetings that focus on an issue of concern. They will have an agreed scope, including the reasons for the review, and a detailed project plan regarding evidence gathering and completion. The aim is develop evidence-based recommendations to make a positive difference.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough; • Involvement of key witnesses; • Scrutiny officer support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very resource intensive; • Bureaucratic – administered as any other Council meeting; • Significant time commitment for officers and members; • Formal setting.

5.7.2 **Short reviews** - these follow the same principles as above but are completed over one or two meetings. They will have a briefer scope and project plan. This is suitable for a very specific topic or when the issue is time critical. In addition, 'one day' scrutiny reviews have also been used where a smaller

group of members will meet with all the relevant stakeholders, in a series of sessions, to discuss an issue in an informal “one-day workshop” setting.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal setting; • Involvement of key witnesses; • Cross sharing of ideas; • Scrutiny officer support; • Builds relationships; • Economical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides overview only with limited opportunity for follow up of issues; • Some issues identified cannot be followed up but can be highlighted for future reviews.

5.7.3 **Light touch scrutiny reviews** – these usually involve 2 / 3 members and generally involve a smaller piece of scrutiny. Members work independently to meet with service areas and recommend a way forward on the issue. Scrutiny Officers only become involved later in the process and can offer guidance to members when drafting recommendations and any final report. For this reason, “Light Touch” Reviews are less resource intensive and can be a very economical way of conducting a piece of scrutiny work.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct discussions with officers; • Informal setting; • Unbureaucratic; • Quick and efficient; • Limited resource requirement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow focus – only reflects the view of 2 / 3 members; • Limited support for members; • Provides overview of the issues not a detailed look.

5.7.4 A recurring theme for each approach is the need to have regard to the resource implications and time commitment required of those involved in reviews. Topics for review must be fully scoped and well thought out to ensure they have purpose and will be able to contribute to tangible outcomes.

5.7.5 It is also considered not possible for Scrutiny Committees to do everything that might be suggested; Members involved in Scrutiny must therefore be selective and ask particular questions to identify only the very best topics for more in-depth consideration. It will be important for Scrutiny Committees to show why it has been decided to conduct a review into a particular topic and Members will need to consider the arguments both for and against conducting a review before making a decision.

5.7.6 As a result of the above, there will no doubt be the need for Members to balance the desire to examine a large number of topics with the likelihood of securing greater impact through focussing on a small number of items in more detail.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Research by the CfPS over a number of years has reinforced the principle that effective work programming is essential for effective scrutiny.
- 6.2 The Council has identified a number of areas for improvement, including work programming, and is currently in the process of addressing this as part of a wider programme of activity.
- 6.3 To support this, a proposed approach to work programming has been set out to help inform members' decisions in this area.

Service area / theme	Possible topic		Is it line with a corporate priority?	How well is the service performing?	Does it represent a high financial risk?	Is it identified as a strategic risk?	Is scrutiny likely to impact in service improvements or other measurable benefits?	Will the outcome involve additional expenditure and is it likely that such resources will become available?	Is the scrutiny activity timely – will changes be possible at this stage?	Include as a shortlisted topic?
	Topic area	High level scope			Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Quarterly Performance Reports / Exception Reports (financial and operational performance)										
Treasury Management										
Revenue budget consultation process										
Statutory performance reporting requirements e.g. the Corporate Performance Report										
Monitoring the implementation of medium term service planning decisions approved by the Executive										

