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## **FUTURE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

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### **Briefing Note by Clerk to the Council**

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## **SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE**

**12 January 2023**

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### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This briefing note provides Members with details of the proposed process for future Scrutiny reviews.**

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 As detailed in the Scheme of Administration, the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee is required to develop an annual programme of work for approval by Council, based on the following functions within its remit:
- (a) monitoring the performance of the Authority towards achieving its policy objectives and priorities in relation to all functions of the Council;
  - (b) reviewing the effectiveness of all the Council's work against agreed standards, targets and budgets for the levels of services provided; and
  - (c) acting as a focus for value for money and service quality exercises.
- 2.2 In practice, this means that as well as members of the Committee submitting subjects for review, proposals are also sought from other Elected Members and Community Councils for inclusion in a work programme.
- 2.3 During initial discussions at its meeting held on 8 December 2022, members of the Committee were asked to contact the Clerk to the Council with any subjects they would like considered for review.
- 2.4 Once the Committee has agreed what reviews it would wish to carry out, then a Programme of Work will be submitted for Council approval.

### **3 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR REVIEW**

- 3.1 In keeping with the remit of the Committee, Members need to focus on their strategic role, so it would not be appropriate for reviews to look at the detailed implementation of individual projects, which is an operational matter, but it would be appropriate for reviews to scrutinise delivery against a plan, or benefit realisation against a target. An example would



be that of the Councils' winter maintenance plan – it is fine to scrutinise the plan and performance against that plan, but not to look at day to day individual depot/gritting vehicle management.

- 3.2 In devising a programme of work for approval by Council, Members should be mindful of the need to demonstrate objectivity by developing a set of criteria against which individual proposals could be assessed. The first stage could be one or two threshold criteria. If these were not met, then the theme or issue being proposed would not be considered further. This would avoid abortive time being spent on issues or themes which were either inappropriate for review or where review would not be productive. The two threshold criteria proposed are:

- Is the proposed review within the scope of the Council and its objectives?
- Is the scope of the review clear and concise?

- 3.3 If the threshold criteria are met, then further points could then be taken into consideration:

- Is an improvement in service expected as a result of the review?
- To what extent could a review lead to a reduction in the costs of a service?
- To what extent could a review lead to an increase in income for the Council?
- How much budget is involved?
- How important to the public is the topic being proposed for review?
- Does the scope of the review take into account equalities for minority and other groups or particular sections of the Borders community?
- Is there any current performance deficit associated with the topic proposed for review?
- Is the review business critical to the Council's strategic objectives?

- 3.4 Members may also wish to take account of any other factors, such as the potential scale of the review and the resources required to take it forward.

## **4 TYPE OF REVIEW**

- 4.1 There are a number of ways in which the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee can proceed with reviews. The first of these is through an information Hearing. Depending on the topic for review, invitations are made to officers, portfolio holders and, if appropriate, representatives of other organisations to attend a Committee meeting and make a presentation on a particular subject. Members of Scrutiny & Petitions could then decide whether to consider the subject further either through a more detailed Hearing or through the setting up of a Working Group to make a more thorough investigation.
- 4.2 In a similar way to an information Hearing, a more focussed Hearing could be arranged, whereby members of Scrutiny & Petitions submit in advance to officers, portfolio holders and representatives of other organisations, questions which they wish answered. At the relevant Scrutiny & Petitions meeting, these pre-submitted questions would be supplemented by others,



to allow Members to delve deeper into the particular topic. The Committee could either make recommendations based on their findings or decide that the matter requires the setting up of a Working Group to probe further.

- 4.3 Again, depending on the topic, the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee could decide to set up a Working Group straight away as the best way to take matters forward, with a report on the findings and conclusions of the Working Group being considered by the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee. Membership of these Working Groups would not just be confined to members of Scrutiny & Petitions, but include other Councillors, as well as, where appropriate, representatives from other agencies. Should specialist knowledge be required, then invitations could be made to experts to address a Working Group or to become a member of, or advisor to, such a Group.
- 4.4 Any Working Group set up by the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee to investigate a particular topic would be required to submit for approval of the Committee a detailed remit in advance of its work. This will ensure that the Committee can check that the Working Group has not strayed from its original remit.
- 4.5 The breadth of some reviews will need to be taken into consideration, as will the number of reviews being undertaken at any given time, to ensure that Members and Officers do not become over-burdened and resources are not stretched too thinly. Depending on the subject matter, officers from various Services of the Council can provide support to Scrutiny & Petitions hearings and Working Groups.

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