

23 July 2024

Areas of focus for 2024/25

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor P. Kaur – Education and Skills

Report

The purpose of this item is to provide relevant background information for Members so that the Committee's areas of focus can be agreed for 2024/25.

It is important for Members to consider the wide range of potential issues within their remit and which of these they could consider during the year.

When agreeing items, it is important that consideration is given to the level of value the Committee could add. It's important to prioritise work based on strategic importance, data, and timing.

Due to the change in national Government, the Committee may wish for the work programme to be flexible to enable it to adapt in response to national changes throughout the year.

Remits of the Committees

Following Annual Council, the remit of the Committee has been agreed as follows:

All aspects and general services related to the education and learning of children and young people. The scrutinising of education and learning performance in relation to the following priority in the Corporate Plan:

- Children have the best start in life and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.

Presentations from Leader and Portfolio Holders on their priorities

The Scrutiny-Cabinet Protocol encourages dialogue and communication between Scrutiny Committees and the Cabinet at all times; but especially with selecting items to scrutinise during the ensuing year. To assist with this, presentations on priorities within their respective portfolios will be received at the September meeting from:

Cllr. P. Kaur – Education and Skills

Presentation on services within the remit of the Committee

A presentation will be provided at the meeting providing more detail about the Council's services that fall within the committee's remit.

Items recommended from previous year:

The following items were recommended for consideration by the committee in the last municipal year:

- Mainstream school Pupil Place Planning – report on primary places.
- Post-16-provision – Children with SEND who are NEET.
- Post-16 Employment and Skills Service Strategy – update report.
- Alternative provision – update on SEND support at alternative provision.

Incomplete items from previous year

None

Budget scrutiny

Monitoring the financial performance of the Council is a valuable and important task that Scrutiny Committees are ideally placed to perform. It assists Members in identifying areas of operation that are underperforming that may require scrutiny.

It is suggested that all Scrutiny Committees consider the quarter 2 updates at a formal meeting. It is also suggested that the financial outturn for the previous year, quarter 1 and quarter 3 updates be circulated to Members outside of a formal meeting for information. Subject to the caveat that Members can request the reports to come to a Committee meeting if they wish, and that any significant budget pressures or changes will be raised with the Chair, to discuss the issue being formally reported to a Committee meeting.

Council performance

The Council Plan, as agreed by the Council, sets the strategic direction for the authority by reference to five priorities. Each priority has a number of measures allocated to it. Scrutiny committees may wish to consider monitoring progress against the measures that sit within their remit. It is the role of the Scrutiny Overview Committee to take an overarching view of performance against all measures included in the Council Plan.

Pre-scrutiny

A copy of the Forward Plans of key decisions from Walsall Council's Cabinet and the West Midlands Combined Authority Board are attached to this report. Updates of these will be provided to Committees at subsequent meetings. In respect to the Black Country Executive Joint Committee (BCJC), since March 2023, the Black Country LEP has been abolished. As such, the BCJC still monitors the implementation of projects until approximately March, 2026. Decision-making on

funds relating to the Black Country Enterprise Zone, will remain with the BCJC until March/April 2025, when it will revert to the Council for matters relating to Walsall.

Members should consider the forthcoming decisions and consider if there are any issues that they may wish to review and seek to influence prior to the Cabinet making a decision on these matters.

Working Groups

A working group is an effective method for Members of Scrutiny Committees to consider an issue in depth over a number of months and to produce a final report and recommendations to the Committee. Once completed, the report and recommendations can be considered by the Cabinet and/or Council. The challenge for Members is selecting the right topic at the right time and to provide the working group with an achievable brief.

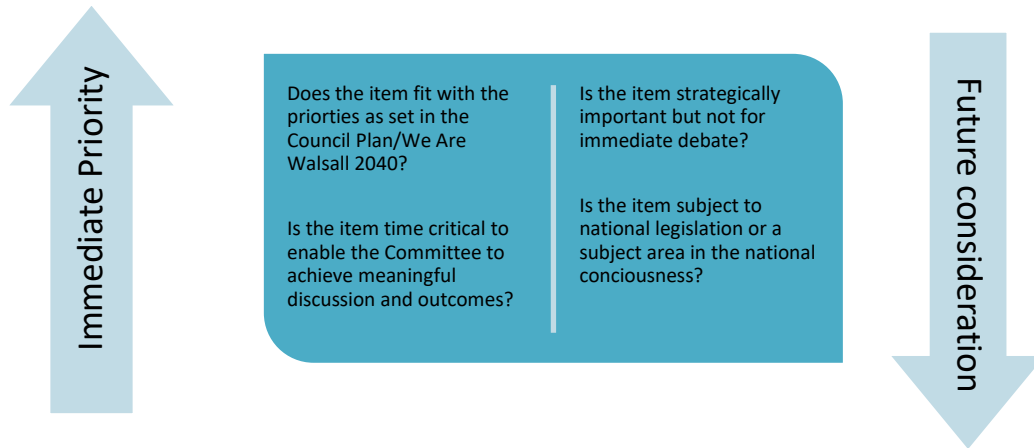
In terms of resourcing working groups, mindful consideration should be given to the number of working groups established. Therefore, it is recommended that no more than 3 working groups be established across all Scrutiny Committees.

Prioritisation

The remit of the Committee is very broad and the range of issues that could be considered during the year is vast. The challenge that Members face is in prioritising those issues that are the most important whilst still leaving sufficient capacity to address other issues that may arise during the year. To assist Members to manage the broad topics available, it is important that alternative methods of being informed and updated, away from Committee meetings, are used effectively. For example, Members could request briefing notes on particular topics thereby helping to create additional capacity for more substantial items at Committee meetings.

In terms of scheduling items, it is important that an agenda includes a manageable amount of business to enable the Committee to focus on topics in depth rather than to carry out superficial treatment that may require the Committee to revisit the topic at a later date.

Members should use a prioritisation tool, for example:



THINK PRIDE

- P**ublic - Is the subject matter in the public interest and concerns local people?
- R**ealistic - Is the matter achievable? Is there enough time to scrutinise, and are the resources available?
- I**nterest - Is this an area affecting a certain ward or the whole Borough/National?
- D**uplication - Is there work already ongoing? Is another Committee doing the same piece of work?
- E**ffect - Is there an opportunity to change and where Scrutiny can influence?

Statutory Guidance for Scrutiny

On 22 April 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published new statutory guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities in relation to Overview and Scrutiny functions. Whilst, this is new statutory guidance, majority of the changes refer to the inclusion of combined authorities relating to devolution and the Scrutiny Protocol. In practice, there has been no direct changes in the working arrangements for Scrutiny at Walsall.

Recommendations:

That, the Committee consider and agree the proposed work programme for the municipal year.

Contact Officer:

Nikki Gough

Democratic Services Officer

☎ 01922 654767

✉ nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk