

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	9 March 2023
Head of Service	Lisa Jones, Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Report author	Rhian Evans, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Title	Scrutiny Work Programme

1. What is the report about?

1.1. The report seeks Communities Scrutiny Committee to review its draft forward work programme (see Appendix 1). As part of its review the Committee is asked to reflect on the implications of the focus on business critical operations during the emergency phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and the work underway under the recovery phase, whilst also prioritising matters which the Committee deems important to scrutinise.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 To seek the Committee to review and agree on its programme of future work, and to update members on relevant issues.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee

- 3.1 considers the information provided and approves, revises or amends its forward work programme as it deems appropriate;
- 3.2 appoint a representative to serve on the Capital Scrutiny Group;
- 3.3 appoints representatives to serve on the various Council Service Challenge Groups; and
- 3.4 determines whether any key messages or themes from the current meeting should be publicised via the press and/or social media.

4. Report details

- 4.1 Section 7 of Denbighshire County Council's Constitution sets out each Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference, functions and membership, as well as the rules of procedure and debate.
- 4.2 The Constitution stipulates that the Council's scrutiny committees must set, and regularly review, a programme for their future work. By reviewing and prioritising issues, members are able to ensure that the work programme delivers a member-led agenda.
- 4.3 For a number of years it has been an adopted practice in Denbighshire for scrutiny committees to limit the number of reports considered at any one meeting to a maximum of four plus the Committee's own work programme report. The aim of this approach is to facilitate detailed and effective debate on each topic.
- 4.4 In recent years the Welsh Government (WG) and Audit Wales (AW) have highlighted the need to strengthen scrutiny's role across local government and public services in Wales, including utilising scrutiny as a means of engaging with residents and service-users. From now on scrutiny will be expected to engage better and more frequently with the public with a view to securing better decisions which ultimately lead to better outcomes for citizens. AW will measure scrutiny's effectiveness in fulfilling these expectations.
- 4.5 Having regard to the national vision for scrutiny whilst at the same time focussing on local priorities, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) recommended that the Council's scrutiny committees should, when deciding on their work programmes, focus on the following key areas:
- budget savings;
 - achievement of the Corporate Plan themes (with particular emphasis on their deliverability during a period of financial austerity);
 - any other items agreed by the Scrutiny Committee (or the SCVCG) as high priority (based on the PAPER test criteria – see reverse side of the 'Member Proposal Form' at Appendix 2);
 - Urgent, unforeseen or high priority issues; and

- Supporting the Council's recovery work in relation to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on Council services, the local economy and the county's communities

4.6 Scrutiny Proposal Forms

As mentioned in paragraph 4.2 above the Council's Constitution requires scrutiny committees to prepare and keep under review a programme for their future work. To assist the process of prioritising reports, if officers are of the view that a subject merits time for discussion on Scrutiny's business agenda they have to submit a formal request to the SCVCG seeking Scrutiny to consider a report on that topic. This is done via the submission of a 'proposal form' which clarifies the purpose, importance and potential outcomes of suggested subjects.

- 4.7 With a view to making better use of scrutiny's time by focussing committees' resources on detailed examination of subjects, adding value through the decision-making process and securing better outcomes for residents, the SCVCG decided that members, as well as officers, should complete 'scrutiny proposal forms' outlining the reasons why they think a particular subject would benefit from scrutiny's input. A copy of the 'member's proposal form' can be seen at Appendix 2. The reverse side of this form contains a flowchart listing questions which members should consider when proposing an item for scrutiny, and which committees should ask when determining a topic's suitability for inclusion on a scrutiny forward work programme. If, having followed this process, a topic is not deemed suitable for formal examination by a scrutiny committee, alternative channels for sharing the information or examining the matter can be considered e.g. the provision of an 'information report', or if the matter is of a very local nature examination by the relevant Member Area Group (MAG). No items should be included on a forward work programme without a 'scrutiny proposal form' being completed and accepted for inclusion by the Committee or the SCVCG. Assistance with their completion is available from the Scrutiny Co-ordinator.

Cabinet Forward Work Programme

- 4.8 When determining their programme of future work it is useful for scrutiny committees to have regard to Cabinet's scheduled programme of work. For this purpose, a copy of the Cabinet's forward work programme is attached at Appendix 3.

Progress on Committee Resolutions

- 4.9 A table summarising recent Committee resolutions and advising members on progress with their implementation is attached at Appendix 4 to this report.

5. Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group

- 5.1 Under the Council's scrutiny arrangements, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) performs the role of a coordinating committee. The Group met on 19 January 2023 and considered a number of scrutiny requests. At the conclusion of its deliberations it referred the 'Denbighshire's Moorlands – Fuel Load & Fire Risk Management' item to this Committee for detailed examination. This subject features on the Committee's business agenda for the current meeting.

- 5.2 The Group's next meeting is scheduled for the afternoon of 9 March 2023.

6. Committee representation on Council Boards and Groups

Capital Scrutiny Group

- 6.1 Periodically the Committee will be asked to appoint a representative to serve on various Council Boards or Groups.
- 6.2 At its meeting on 13 December 2022 Cabinet approved a new capital process and supported the draft Terms of Reference for a new Capital Scrutiny Group (CSG) – copy attached at Appendix 5. This Group will meet six times a year. In May, July, September, November, January and March, with all meetings being held virtually.
- 6.3 Each Scrutiny Committee is being asked to appoint a representative to serve on this Group. The appointed representative will be expected to report back to the

Committee on the CSG's work under the standard business item on the Committee's agenda, 'Feedback from Committee Representatives'.

- 6.4 A special meeting of the CSG is expected to be held in April 2023 at which the Group will approve its Terms of Reference. The Committee is therefore requested to appoint its representative.

Service Challenge Groups

- 6.5 Recently, an e-mail was sent to all Committee members seeking expressions of interest to serve as the Committee's representatives on a number of the Council's Service Challenge Groups. In response to that request the individuals listed on Appendix 6 have to date expressed their interest in taking up these appointments. The Committee is asked to consider and confirm the appointments, and to also appoint representatives to serve on the vacant positions.

7. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

- 7.1 Effective scrutiny will assist the Council to deliver its Corporate Plan in line with community needs and residents' wishes. Continual development and review of a coordinated work programme will assist the Council to deliver its corporate themes, improve outcomes for residents whilst also managing austere budget and resource pressures.
- 7.2 Whilst the decision on the Committee's forward work programme itself will have a neutral contribution on the Council's aim of becoming Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030, the Committee by effectively scrutinising all matters examined by it can help support the delivery of this ambition.

8. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 8.1 Services may need to allocate officer time to assist the Committee with the activities identified in the forward work programme, and with any actions that may result following consideration of those items.

9. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

9.1. A Well-being Impact Assessment has not been undertaken in relation to the purpose or contents of this report. However, Scrutiny through its work in examining service delivery, policies, procedures and proposals will consider their impact or potential impact on the sustainable development principle and the well-being goals stipulated in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

10. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

10.1. None required for this report. However, the report itself and the consideration of the forward work programme represent a consultation process with the Committee with respect to its programme of future work.

11. Chief Finance Officer Statement

11.1. Not applicable

12. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

12.1. No risks have been identified with respect to the consideration of the Committee's forward work programme. However, by regularly reviewing its forward work programme the Committee can ensure that areas of risk are considered and examined as and when they are identified, and recommendations are made with a view to addressing those risks.

13. Power to make the decision

13.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

13.2 Section 7.11 of the Council's Constitution stipulates that scrutiny committees and/or the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group will be responsible for setting their own work programmes, taking into account the wishes of Members of the Committee who are not members of the largest political group on the Council.