

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny and Overview Committee

3 November 2011

**AUTHOR:** Scrutiny Development Officer

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### WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

#### Purpose

1. To update the committee on progress and outcomes of work to date, and to enable the committee to plan its work programme for the remainder of 2011/12.

#### Options

2. The Committee may wish to agree the draft programme at Appendix A subject to amendments made at this meeting.

#### Considerations

3. At the meeting of 6 September the committee agreed to the draft work programme as presented, subject to the addition of two items: a presentation by Mears in December or February regarding the April 2012 housing repairs contract; and an update in March on the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership's restructure. The Corporate Manager Affordable Housing has now arranged for Mears to be represented at the February meeting.
4. Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was scheduled for this meeting but has been postponed to December with the Chairman's agreement. This will allow time for the all-member workshop of 17 November to scrutinise the MTFS in the context of the Council's 2012/13 draft Aims, Approaches and Actions which will be available by then.
5. The Leader has suggested that the committee might like to look at the Council's grants policy. At his portfolio meeting in September, a new process was approved in principle for consultation. The committee could usefully comment on the proposed process, as well as on any overarching policy and criteria to be applied to applications. The chairman has agreed to schedule this for the December meeting.
6. Further topics may be chosen from suggestions from residents, members, officers and partners, and the Council's Forward Plan as at <http://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=293&bcr=1>.
7. A revised draft work programme is at Appendix A and the Committee is invited to discuss, amend and agree this.

#### Selecting topics for scrutiny in 2011/12

8. In choosing topics for the work programme, Members are reminded of their agreed selection criteria as at Appendix B.
9. All activities need to add value to the work of the Council and contribute to the achievement of its corporate objectives.

10. The committee may also perceive that it now has a greater responsibility for helping the Council to demonstrate openness and accountability, given the reduction in external audit and inspection and the growing emphasis on self-regulation in public services.

### **Task and Finish Groups**

11. The Sheltered Housing task and finish group has held six meetings to date. They have developed some core values for the service and looked at a variety of delivery models which will form the basis for consultation sessions with service users during November.
12. A meeting with the County Council's new portfolio holder for Adult Services provided an opportunity to discuss the financial context for future service design and the 'preventative value' of sheltered housing support. He agreed that it made financial sense to invest in services which helped older residents to maintain their health and independence and prevented or reduced their need for more expensive forms of support. The task and finish group will meet later this month to examine the outcomes of consultation with residents; the intention is to report to this committee on 6 February 2012.
13. A second task and finish group was agreed at the last meeting, to take a closer look how well the Council learns from customer feedback. The review was completed in a one-day workshop which is reported at this meeting. The committee may like to reflect on this approach to task and finish work. Completing a topic in one day can be a highly effective use of time, and allows a concentrated focus. However it may not suit a topic where the list of witnesses or research requirements might evolve as the facts emerge.
14. The committee may now wish to plan for another task and finish group and a number of possible topics have been carried forward as follows:
15. Reviewing the Council's progress on its sustainability aims, focussing specifically on the 'greenness' of South Cambridgeshire Hall. The Climate Change Working Party is currently working on an action plan; the vice-chairman of this committee sits on the Working Party and may therefore be invited to provide an update on progress.
16. A review of communication and community engagement has been on hold pending the appointment of a communications manager. The new appointee arrived only four weeks ago and so managers have requested that a task and finish group be delayed until the New Year.
17. A decision on whether to review absence management has been deferred since June, awaiting the outcome of the work being undertaken by senior officers and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing. Data for the six months to 30 September is due to be published before the portfolio holder's meeting on 15 November 2011. The scrutiny monitors will update this committee in December.

### **Progress on past recommendations**

18. An update regarding the Planning Services task and finish group was given at the Portfolio Holder's meeting of 9 September and can be viewed at <http://moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=973&MIId=5683&Ver=4>. A full update is scheduled for this committee on 15 December. Meanwhile, Cllr Mason, who chaired

the task and finish group is maintaining a watching brief and will update the committee on progress as necessary.

19. Progress reports on other previous task and finish groups have been scheduled for monitoring during 2011/12.

20. **Implications**

Financial	The Committee has a discretionary budget of £5,000. Up to £3,000 may be needed for Member training. Some external venues carry a small hire charge. External witnesses and co-optees may claim expenses.
Legal	The Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to have at least one scrutiny committee. The Police and Justice Act 2006 requires that crime and disorder appears on at least one agenda each year. The Constitution states that the Committee will set its own work programme. The Localism and Decentralisation Bill seeks to expand the role of scrutiny.
Staffing/ capacity	The committee is supported by one scrutiny officer. Each item selected for scrutiny will require support by at least one lead officer. Capacity for sub committee work is also dependent on the number of elected members available and willing to participate
Risk Management	The potential burden on the organisation of supporting scrutiny work must be balanced against the potential value it can add. External scrutiny carries the risk of affecting the Council's relationship or credibility with partners.
Equal Opportunities	All proposed changes to policy or services require an Equality Impact Assessment
Involvement of Children and Young People	Children and Young People (CYP) have been actively invited to suggest topics and this will continue. The Committee has also agreed to involve CYP in reviews and to ensure that all reports to the committee demonstrate CYP involvement

**Consultation**

21. Cabinet, elected members, senior officers and residents have been invited to suggest potential topics. Parish councils continue to be consulted during the year.
22. Ongoing consultation with nearby councils, including the county council, explores the potential for joint scrutiny activities.

**Effect on Corporate Objectives**

23. The Committee's selection criteria ensure that any topic selected for scrutiny will contribute to at least one of the Council's priorities. Scrutiny itself helps to demonstrate that this is a listening Council, providing first class services accessible to all.

**Contact Officer:** Jackie Sayers, Scrutiny Development Officer Tel: (01954) 713451

**Draft Work Programme 2011/12**

17 November	All-members workshop on budget and service planning: MTFs; growth bids; potential savings; HRA self-financing arrangements; corporate objectives (3As)
15 December	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Corporate Objectives and Council Budget - including issues identified at the workshop of 17 Nov</li> <li>2 Grants process and policy</li> <li>3 Planning Services task and finish group update</li> <li>4 Performance Management task and finish group update – to include an update on Performance Improvement Action Plan</li> </ol>
2 February 2012	All-members Budget scrutiny workshop – based on draft 2012/13 budget
<del>2 February</del> 6 February	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Presentation by Mears: Housing Repairs contract</li> <li>2. 2012/13 Budget - including issues identified at the workshop of 2 Feb</li> <li>3. Waste and recycling service action plan - monitor progress on the target of 65% recycling and composting by 2012</li> <li>4. Report of the Sheltered Housing task and finish group</li> </ol>
29 March 2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Local Strategic Partnership</li> <li>2 CDRP restructure - progress report after six months</li> <li>3 Progress at Northstowe and Cambridge fringes</li> </ol>
3 May 2012 7pm	Cancelled

**Potential task and finish group topics:**

Communication and community engagement (current strategy is out of date)  
 Localism and Decentralisation Bill/ Act - impact on council, partners and residents (Royal Assent due November/December)  
 Absence management/ sickness performance – awaiting Sept 2011 data

**Other topics suggested:**

Job evaluation/ HR service – February?  
 SCDC achievement of sustainability aims – potential collaboration with Climate Change working group  
 Planning enforcement/ S106 compliance (consider in December with Planning t&f update?)



### PAPER Analysis



When considering whether to adopt an item onto its agenda programme, the Committee will score the item using the following criteria:

1. **Public Interest:** the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny  
(1= low public interest, 2=medium public interest, 3=high public interest)
2. **Ability to change:** priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence  
(1= little chance of changing, 2=reasonable chance, 3=good chance)
3. **Performance:** priority should be given to the areas in which the Council, and other agencies, are not performing well.  
(1= good performance, 2=moderate performance, 3=low performance)
4. **Extent:** priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the District.  
(1= only one ward, 2= multi-ward issue, 3=the entire District)
5. **Replication:** work programmes must take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort.  
(1= already well covered, 2=already partly covered, 3=not already covered)

Also of major importance is the extent to which any potential scrutiny issue has implications for the Council's priorities, as well as the overall vision:

“To make South Cambridgeshire a safe and healthy place where residents are proud to live and where there will be opportunities for employment, enterprise and world-leading innovation. We will be a listening Council, providing a voice for rural life and first-class services accessible to all.”