



Public Accounts Select Committee

Select Committee Work Programme Report

Date: 14 March 2024

Key decision: no.

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: Not applicable

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Outline and recommendations

To advise members of the completed work programme for 2023/24 and to propose draft themes for the Committee's work programme for 2024/25.

The Committee is asked to:

- note the completed work programme attached at appendix C.
- review the issues covered over the course of 2023/24.
- review the forward plan of key decisions at appendix D.
- consider priority themes for the 2024/25 work programme.

Timeline of decision-making

June 2023 – Draft Committee work programme agreed

July 2023 – Committee work programme agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

September 2023; November 2023 and January 2024 – Committee work programme reviewed at formal meetings.

1. Summary

- 1.1. Each Select Committee is required to agree a work programme for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the beginning of the municipal year. As this is the last meeting of the Public Accounts Select Committee in 2023/24, members are being asked to put forward suggestions for the 2024/25 work programme. Please note, however, that the 2024/25 work programme will not be formally agreed until the first meeting of 2024/25.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is asked to:
- note the completed work programme attached at appendix C.
 - review the issues covered over the course of 2023/24.
 - review the forward plan of key decisions at appendix D.
 - consider priority themes for the 2024/25 work programme.

3. The work programme

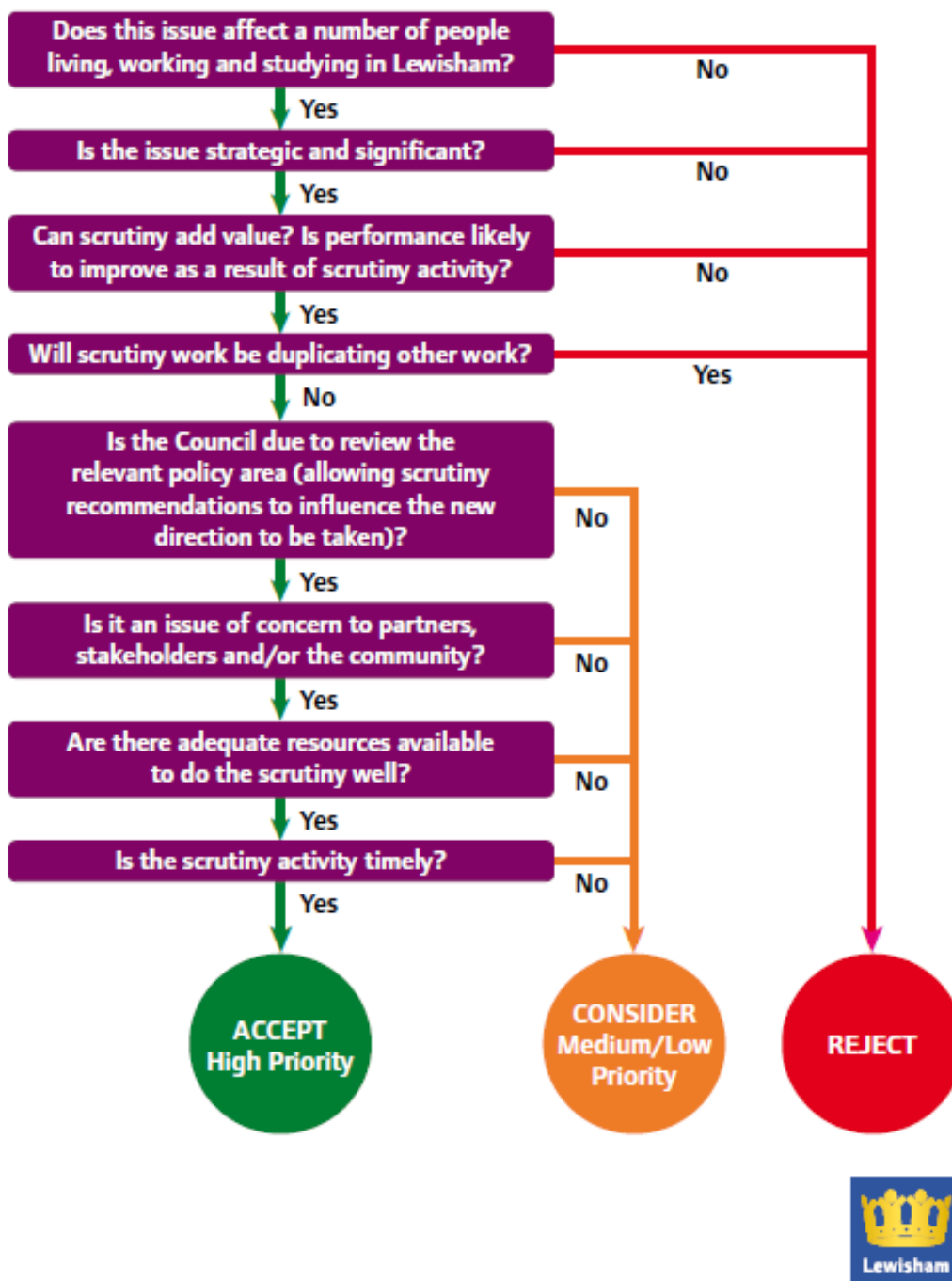
Issues covered over the course of 2023/24

- 3.1. The Public Accounts Select Committee met five times in the municipal year 2023/24. The completed work programme is attached at Appendix C.
- 3.2. Key issues covered by the Committee this year have focused on the Council's financial resilience. At each meeting, the Committee has considered the Council's financial monitoring position and the Chair of the Committee has met on a regular basis with the Executive Director for Corporate Resources – as well as lead finance officers from across the Council.
- 3.3. The Committee has also allocated time to reviewing areas of budget pressure. In September 2023, it considered the management and delivery of the Council's capital programme. The Committee also invited an external expert to speak on social value, alongside the Committee's consideration of the Council's social value annual report. In a referral to Mayor and Cabinet, the Committee recommended improvements to the monitoring and management of the Council's approach to social value.

Timetable for setting the 2024/25 work programme

- 3.4. Five committee meetings will be scheduled for the 2023/24 municipal year. A draft work programme will be put forward at the first meeting of the municipal year, taking into account key issues and the Committee's previous work.
- 3.5. At this meeting, Members are asked to review the Committee's work over the past year and consider suggestions/priority themes for 2024/25. Forthcoming key decisions are set out in appendix D.
- 3.6. Work programme suggestions should be considered against the Committee's terms of reference (see appendix A) and the prioritisation chart set out below, and be achievable in terms of the meeting time available.
- 3.7. The Committee should also give consideration to issues of local importance and decisions due to be made by Mayor and Cabinet. Items within the work programme should be linked to the priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2022-2026:
- Cleaner and Greener
 - A Strong Local Economy
 - Quality Housing
 - Children and Young People
 - Safer Communities
 - Open Lewisham
 - Health and Wellbeing

Scrutiny work programme – prioritisation process



4. Financial implications

- 4.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme will have financial implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, all scrutiny select committees must devise and submit a work programme to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the start of each municipal year.

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1. The public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 6.2. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 6.3. There may be equalities implications arising from items on the work programme and all activities undertaken by the Select Committee will need to give due consideration to this.

7. Climate change and environmental implications

- 7.1. There are no direct climate change, sustainability or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. However, in February 2019 Lewisham Council declared a Climate Emergency and proposed a target to make the borough carbon neutral by 2030. An action plan to achieve this target was subsequently agreed by Mayor and Cabinet (following pre-decision scrutiny by the Sustainable Development Select Committee)¹. The plan incorporates all areas of the Council's work. Items on the work programme may well have climate change and environmental implications and reports considered by the Committee should acknowledge this.

8. Crime and disorder implications

- 8.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Items on the Committee's work programme may have crime and disorder implications and these will need to be considered as part of the reports on those items.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

10. Report author and contact

If you have any questions about this report please contact: Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager), timothy.andrew@lewisham.gov.uk (020 8314 7916)

¹ See <https://lewisham.gov.uk/TacklingTheClimateEmergency> for a summary of the Council's work in this area.

Appendix A

The following roles are common to all select committees:

(a) General functions

- To review and scrutinise decisions made and actions taken in relation to executive and non-executive functions
- To make reports and recommendations to the Council or the executive, arising out of such review and scrutiny in relation to any executive or non-executive function
- To make reports or recommendations to the Council and/or Executive in relation to matters affecting the area or its residents
- The right to require the attendance of members and officers to answer questions includes a right to require a member to attend to answer questions on up and coming decisions

(b) Policy development

- To assist the executive in matters of policy development by in depth analysis of strategic policy issues facing the Council for report and/or recommendation to the Executive or Council or committee as appropriate
- To conduct research, community and/or other consultation in the analysis of policy options available to the Council
- To liaise with other public organisations operating in the borough – both national, regional and local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working in policy development wherever possible

(c) Scrutiny

- To scrutinise the decisions made by and the performance of the Executive and other committees and Council officers both in relation to individual decisions made and over time
- To scrutinise previous performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives/performance targets and/or particular service areas
- To question members of the Executive or appropriate committees and executive directors personally about decisions
- To question members of the Executive or appropriate committees and executive directors in relation to previous performance whether generally in comparison with service plans and targets over time or in relation to particular initiatives which have been implemented
- To scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the borough and to invite them to make reports to and/or address the select committee/Business Panel and local people about their activities and performance
- To question and gather evidence from any person outside the Council (with their consent)
- To make recommendations to the Executive or appropriate committee and/or Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process

(d) Community representation

- To promote and put into effect closer links between overview and scrutiny members and the local community
- To encourage and stimulate an enhanced community representative role for overview and scrutiny members including enhanced methods of consultation with local people
- To liaise with the Council's ward assemblies so that the local community might participate in the democratic process and where it considers it appropriate to seek the views of the ward assemblies on matters that affect or are likely to affect the local areas, including accepting items for the agenda of the appropriate select committee from ward assemblies.
- To keep the Council's local ward assemblies under review and to make recommendations to the Executive and/or Council as to how participation in the democratic process by local people can be enhanced
- To receive petitions, deputations and representations from local people and other stakeholders about areas of concern within their overview and scrutiny remit, to refer them to the Executive, appropriate committee or officer for action, with a recommendation or report if the committee considers that necessary

- To consider any referral within their remit referred to it by a member under the Councillor Call for Action, and if they consider it appropriate to scrutinise decisions and/or actions taken in relation to that matter, and/or make recommendations/report to the Executive (for executive matters) or the Council (non-executive matters).

(e) Finance

- To exercise overall responsibility for finances made available to it for use in the performance of its overview and scrutiny function.

(f) Work programme

- As far as possible to draw up a draft annual work programme in each municipal year for consideration by the overview and scrutiny Business Panel. Once approved by the Business Panel, the relevant select committee will implement the programme during that municipal year. Nothing in this arrangement inhibits the right of every member of a select committee (or the Business Panel) to place an item on the agenda of that select committee (or Business Panel respectively) for discussion.
- The Council and the Executive will also be able to request that the overview and scrutiny select committee research and/or report on matters of concern and the select committee will consider whether the work can be carried out as requested. If it can be accommodated, the select committee will perform it. If the committee has reservations about performing the requested work, it will refer the matter to the Business Panel for decision.

The Public Accounts Select Committee has these specific terms of reference:

- (a) To exercise all the functions and roles of the overview and scrutiny committee in relation to the following matters:
- To make reports and recommendations to the Council or the Executive which promote the better custodianship of the Council's finances and to make recommendations for best financial practice across the authority.
 - To investigate the possibilities for improving the Council's financial management practice and to make reports and recommendations to Executive or Council as appropriate.
 - To encourage the highest standards of financial custodianship where necessary overseeing training activity for all members in this area.
 - To consult on and to comment on and make recommendations to the Executive in respect of the actual and proposed contents of the Council's budget and without limiting the general remit of the committee, to hold the Executive to account for its performance in respect of all budgetary matters.
 - To receive reports as appropriate from the Audit Panel in respect of their overview of contract procedure rules and financial regulations.
 - To make recommendations and reports for consideration by the Executive or Council to improve procurement practice.
 - To scrutinise the effectiveness of the Audit Panel.

Appendix B- Effective Scrutiny Guidelines

At Lewisham we:

1. Prioritise

It is more effective to look at a small number of key issues in an in-depth way, than skim the surface of everything falling within scrutiny's remit. We try to focus on issues of concern to the community and/or matters that are linked to our corporate priorities. We only add items to the work programme if we are certain our consideration of the matter will make a real and tangible difference.

2. Are independent

Scrutiny is led by Scrutiny Members. Scrutiny Members are in charge of the work programme and, for every item, we specify what evidence we require and what information we would like to see in any officer reports that are prepared. We are not whipped by our political party or unduly influenced by the Cabinet or senior officers.

3. Work collectively

If we collectively agree in advance what we want to achieve in relation to each item under consideration, including what the key lines of enquiry should be, we can work as a team to question witnesses and ensure that all the required evidence is gathered. Scrutiny is impartial and the scrutiny process should be free from political point scoring and not used to further party political objectives.

4. Engage

Involving residents helps scrutiny access a wider range of ideas and knowledge, listen to a broader range of voices and better understand the opinions of residents and service users. Engagement helps ensure that recommendations result in residents' wants and needs being more effectively met.

5. Make SMART evidence-based recommendations

We make recommendations that are based on solid, triangulated evidence – where a variety of sources of evidence point to a change in practice that will positively alter outcomes. We recognise that recommendations are more powerful if they are:

- Specific (simple, sensible, significant).
- Measurable (meaningful, motivating).
- Achievable (agreed, attainable).
- Relevant (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- Time bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).