

Date of issue: 22 December 2023

MEETING:	CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Councillors: Shaik (Chair), Khawar (Vice Chair), Escott, Hulme, Iftakhar, Mann, Matloob, Mohindra, O'Kelly, Stedmond, Smith and Wright)
DATE AND TIME:	THURSDAY, 4TH JANUARY, 2024 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	MANIZE TALUKDAR 07871 982 919

NOTICE OF MEETING

Scrutiny Committee members are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.



STEPHEN BROWN
Chief Executive

Press and Public

Attendance and accessibility: You are welcome to attend this meeting which is open to the press and public, as an observer. You will however be asked to leave before any items in the Part II agenda are considered. For those hard of hearing an Induction Loop System is available in the Council Chamber.

Webcasting and recording: The public part of the meeting will be filmed by the Council for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The footage will remain on our website for 12 months. A copy of the recording will also be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy. By entering the meeting room and using the public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings.

In addition, the law allows members of the public to take photographs, film, audio-record or tweet the proceedings at public meetings. Anyone proposing to do so is requested to advise the Democratic Services Officer before the start of the meeting. Filming or recording must be overt and persons filming should not move around the meeting room whilst filming nor should they obstruct proceedings or the public from viewing the meeting. The use of flash photography, additional lighting or any non hand held devices, including tripods, will not be allowed unless this has been discussed with the Democratic Services Officer.

Emergency procedures: The fire alarm is a continuous siren. If the alarm sounds immediately vacate the premises by the nearest available exit at either the front or rear of the Chamber and proceed to the assembly point: The pavement of the service road outside of Westminster House, 31 Windsor Road.

AGENDA

PART I

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

1. Declarations of Interest

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 November 2023

3. Register of Recommendations and Action Tracker

To Follow

This report provides information relating to:

Appendix A: The status of recommendations, to improve policy or practice, made by the committee, and that require the approval of the Cabinet (or relevant portfolio holder); and

Appendix B: Actions arising from meetings usually relating to:

- Requests for further information from officers;
- Administration of the committee and general support to members; or
- Proposals or requests for updates to a particular agenda item either to be circulated for information or to be an item on

the forward plan.

SCRUTINY CHALLENGE ITEMS

4. Update on Progress from the Improvement and Recovery Board To Follow

This report provides an update on progress of work arising from the directions of the Best Value Commissioners. These relate to:

- Avoidance of Poor Governance or Financial Mismanagement & Financial Update;
- Asset Disposal Summary;
- Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Action Plans;
- Internal Audit Action Plan;
- Procurement and Contract Management Action Plan;
- Information Technology Action Plans;
- Culture Change;

- Subsidiary Company Review; and

- Better Data and Insight for Evidence Based Decision Making

5. Human Resources Improvement Programme: Update on Progress and Future Plans To Follow

This report provides an update to the Committee on the progress of improvement work by Slough Council's HR service to ensure it is fit for purpose.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

6. Update on task and finish report: Review of Workforce Strategy Business Case for Slough Children First (SCF) To Follow

In February 2023 the Committee made a number of recommendations to Cabinet regarding the Workforce Business Case for Slough Children First.

**AGENDA
ITEM**

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

These recommendations were the result of an investigation, in the autumn of 2022, by a Task and Finish Group, that reported its findings to the People Scrutiny Panel in January 2023.

This report provides CISC with an update on the implementation of those recommendations.

7. The Forward Work Plan

To Follow

This report sets out the future work of the Committee to May 2023. It was reviewed by members in December and there are proposed changes to the workplan going forwards.

The Forward Plan also now includes all member training events and briefings.

The work programme may be subject to further change should new priorities arise at short notice.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next committee meeting is 30 January at 18:30 in Observatory House.

As well as standing items, members will focus on the draft budget plans for 2024-25.

REF (CISCREC)	Committee Date	Agenda Item	Detail of recommendation:	Cabinet Date	Response received to date	Date of Response	Response Detail	Accepted?: Y/ N/ P[ARTIAL]	Notes
0.14	1st Feb 2023	5	Move to a 2-stage corporate complaint process with extended timescales at each of the two stages	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.15	1st Feb 2023	5	introduce accessibility of different languages on the council's website reflective of the ethnic makeup of the borough, to make it easier for customers to access service and navigate information relating to service requests	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC	The Councils website is now judged as 10th in the country for accessibility.	Y	
0.16	1st Feb 2023	5	Make the online complaint page more robust	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.17	1st Feb 2023	5	Encourage officers to use various communication methods when investigating complaints	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.18	1st Feb 2023	5	Strengthen the learning and improvements captured through complaints and ensure that these are incorporated in all future complaints' report	27-Feb-23	Y	TBC		Y	
0.19	23-Jan-23		The start of the procurement process must be well managed, with clear outcomes and deliverables in the procurement specification, which include outcomes-based deliverables, gateways, monitoring, timelines, milestones and reporting.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Commercial service works closely with service areas to plan timely procurement activity which is assisted by a robust forward plan, this ensures that the procurement process is well managed and tenders are scored against the outcomes and deliverables in the specification. The service ensures that comprehensive records are maintained including a register of the progress of live procurements.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.2	23-Jan-23		When assessing tenders for work they should be scored against the outcomes and deliverables in the specification and the results retained as evidence.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.21	23-Jan-23		Where authority is delegated to Officers for the award of a high value/high risk contract, this should be in consultation with the lead member. Members must be properly consulted with evidence of decisions in writing and their agreement clearly sought.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Council has updated its constitution with a list of significant officer decisions which require a formal decision report to be published. This includes contracts over the financial threshold of £180k and any decision exercised following specific delegation from Cabinet. Such record should record the consultation process and comments from the consultee. This takes place during briefings	Y	
0.22	23-Jan-23		Council staff must follow a proper governance process, as set out in the updated Contract Procedure Rules, including having an effective and up to date forward procurement plan.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	The Council has an annual procurement plan agreed by Cabinet and this is updated throughout the year as required, with the last one approved at September cabinet.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place

0.23	23-Jan-23	Cabinet reports for procurement must set out the evidence base for a particular recommendation and have an effective options appraisal as part of the report. Consideration should be given to phasing procurement and reserving future decisions to Cabinet for high value / high impact commissioning.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	All procurement activity that require a cabinet report, have an options appraisal, however it is important that a business case methodology is used and cabinet authority is sought at the most appropriate time during the procurement cycle. Where cabinet authority is not required, a full business case is developed which sets out case for change, the options appraisal and the cost/benefit of the proposal. In addition, the forward plan report to cabinet in April and September provides an outline of the procurement including deliverables and outcomes.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.24	23-Jan-23	Contracts on the Council's contract register must be risk assessed to identify the scale of the risk for each contract. This should be done using a standardised risk assessment matrix that considers contract value, business value and impact, sourcing and contractual complexity, and	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	These actions are underway as part of the development of the contract management strategy and toolkit, which will assist contract managers to appropriately contract manage high risk contracts. This is due to be in place by the end of October 2023.	Y	
0.25	23-Jan-23	There must be a dedicated contract manager for high-value/impact contracts identified through the risk assessment process. This officer should be appropriately trained and should have responsibility for monitoring the contract and ensuring compliance with the contractual requirements. The officer should keep records of contract meetings and should convene formal monitoring meetings as required by the contract. The officer should raise any risks with the relevant Executive Director. The officer should have access to legal and finance advice, as required, to assist with their role.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	Y	
0.26	23-Jan-23	Meaningful Key Performance Indicators must be developed for contracts and reviewed and followed up regularly at contract review meetings to ensure that any performance issues are discussed and challenged accordingly. For more significant commissioning arrangements, contract review meetings should include operational and strategic meetings with key officers in attendance. These meetings should be confidential to allow for full and frank discussion, with opportunity to agree minutes to be put in the public domain where updates are to be provided to a formal member meeting. If a contractor is invited to attend a formal Member meeting, consideration should be given to allowing this to take place in Part 2 to allow for a more detailed discussion about any issues.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	This action is underway as part of the development of the contract management framework. The council's contract management support lead is involved at the earliest stages of procurement of high risk contracts to ensure that appropriate KPI's are identified and a contract management plan is in place to monitor them. This is due to be in place by the end of March 2024.	Y	

0.27	23-Jan-23		A standardised framework for contracts should be implemented, which includes a contract management plan for each contract, tailored to take account of value and impact of the contract. This considers important mechanisms for the management of a contract, including roles, responsibilities and governance, dispute resolution, key performance indicators, and exit plans.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	Y	
0.28	23-Jan-23		When commissioning management consultancy, consideration should be given to the payment mechanism and if this is on a time and materials basis, there should be close monitoring of the value being delivered via this arrangement and consideration of alternatives, such as recruiting in[1]house resource.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	Careful consideration is given to the commissioning of management consultancy and consideration of the options through development of the procurement business case that is scrutinised at procurement review board.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.29	23-Jan-23		When commissioning services, ensure that decisions are informed by data, including benchmarking data where available, to demonstrate value for money for Slough's residents.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	This is done through improvement of business cases and cabinet reporting. Business cases are scrutinised at internal strategic boards to ensure that they meet the intended strategic aims.	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
0.3	23-Jan-23		Ensure there is an effective mechanism to review commissioning activity, including reviewing whether the arrangement delivered on the intended strategic aims and capturing any lessons learned. Regular reports should be presented to CLT and the Lead Member responsible for contract management.	27-Feb-23	Y	October 24 2023	as above	P	P indicates response suggesting that relevant mechanisms were already in place
1	26 September 2023	3	<p>a. That where appropriate, the action/improvement plans to deliver the Directions are couched in terms of Outcomes: and</p> <p>b. Under Direction 5, Culture Change: The expression of outcome/s will prove helpful to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Provide the focus for IRB work; · Establish the building blocks of a Public Engagement and Communication Strategy; and · Restore a more positive dialogue with residents, businesses and service users. 	16 October 2023					This recommendation was not formally addressed by cabinet at its last meeting, steps are being undertaken to resolve

2	24 October 2023	4	<i>That a plan is developed and implemented with the objective to increase, over time, the data collected relating to the protected characteristics of all service users/customers and residents, Services should be prioritised on agreed criteria that should include: potential for inequality to affect access; impact on the individual; cost of data collection, and ease of data collection. This will provide assurance that our services do not carry unconscious bias to the detriment of any individuals or communities of place, interest or association (including PCs as a priority). This should be reflected as an equality objective in the strategy.</i>	20 November 2023					Link to work on Evidenced based decision making?
3	24 October 2023	4	<i>That future reports on PSED offer greater emphasis/detail about objectives and work carried out in relation to residents and services.</i>	20 November 2023					
4	28 November 2023	4	Focus resources on those areas where self-assessment has identified the most opportunity for improvement. Consideration should be given to whether some areas could be safely deprioritised in order to deliver more impactful improvements in another areas.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
5	28 November 2023	4	Carry out an audit of officers' data analysis skills to identify the analytical skills and capabilities of officers in different departments across the organisation. Staff with data skills should be used to help mitigate those risks identified by the self-assessment that are dependent on data collection, analysis and interpretation (recognising that not all risks are addressed by this skillset).	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
6	28 November 2023	4	Prepare an 'inspection visit action plan' that will be used to guide the council upon receipt of notification of a pending inspection.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
7	28 November 2023	4	Ensure that the Integrated care systems/Board continues to be engaged with and that it understands its role and relevance in an inspection of Adult Social Care (noting that they will be subject to their own CQC inspection too).	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC
9	28 November 2023	4	Document the Slough Story and a Vision for ASCs ambition as soon as possible and circulate it to stakeholders as the first phase in the Council's engagement on the pending CQC assessment.	15 January 2024					Relates to findings of the Task Group on ASC preparedness for CQC

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
	Action Number Cisca	DETAIL	Lead Member/ Officer	Delegated to	Deadline	Actioned Y/N	Date Completed	Detail of action taken	Date of CISC	Related Item No	Notes
1	0.1	In relation to Improvement and recovery the Director undertook to provide the most up to date information on delivery of actions to Members after the meeting.	Sarah Hayward	Dean Tyler	04-Jan-24	Y			27/06/2023	5	
2	0.2	Noted that Members could request the inclusion of KPIs in the scrutiny work programme at appropriate times during the procurement and commissioning cycle, and officers would be available to help Members shape their key lines of enquiry	SH	DT	Future relevant scrutiny items	Y		Training is being provided on performance data and other datasets available to scrutiny. The reports will be held in the reference Library for members	27/06/2023		
3	0.3	AT asked Members to provide feedback about how future such scrutiny reports could be better structured.	AT	All committee members	20-Oct-23	Y			27/06/2023		
4	0.4	The Lead Member for improvement and Recovery undertook to investigate concerns about Nova House and request that an update report be provided to a future meeting of the Committee	Cllr Smith SH								
5	1	Revised information going forward that reconciles the RAG status of the Directions with Outcomes and the workstreams to deliver them with actions, outputs and milestones that will indicate progress	Cllr D Smith Sarah Hayward (SH)	DT	04 January 2024	Y			26/09/2023	3	
6	2	That in future quarterly reports, the commentary includes a summary of the direction of travel and momentum for the Directions.	Cllr D Smith SH	Dean Tyler	04 January 2024	Y			26/09/2023	3	
7	3	More information to be provided to understand the reasons and plans for the carry forward monies related to drug and alcohol Table 7 in item 4 alongside budgeted activity in Appendix 1 item 5	Cllr Chahal Adele Taylor (AT)	Neil Haddock	23 rd October 2023	Y	25/10/2023	The carry forward relates to the Public Health funding allocation in respect of the Drug and Alcohol Team programme for 2022/23 of £38k with the programme underspending by £14k. The underspend was due to slippage in the delivery of the programme mainly relating to a small number of rehab and detox placements not going ahead as originally planned. The carried forward budget of £14k will be added to this year's budget with commitments to match resulting in no impact on the current forecast variance in 2023/24.	26/09/2023	4&5	This was requested to assist members to 'follow the money' and to inform their understanding of budgeting for scrutiny of 24/25 budget. Circulate to members via scrutiny officer
8	5	Scrutiny members have offered their support to Adele Taylor and finance officers to trial budget dashboarding	AT		31 March 2024			Would make sense to incorporate this presentation element into discussions about Budget Srutiny 2025-26	26/09/2023	4&5	Possibly link it to budget setting cycle for 24-25 budget.
9	6	Scrutiny officer to develop and propose process to suggest new potential agenda items for forward plan	Stephen Taylor	Michael Edley (MTE)	28 November 2023	Y	23-Nov	Circulated to members. Already adopted	26/09/2023	6	Members need a process that they can have confidence in and manages stakeholders expectations. Proposal to be circulated in advance prior to fomal adoption on 28th Novg
10	7	Request for more detail on the projects in Phases 2 and 3	Simon Sharkey-Woods SSW		28-Nov-23	Y	25/11/2023	The list in Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of the projects the ICT & Digital Team has on its portfolio. As requested by Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee, each entry has a statement about the resident impact they will have.	24/10/2023	3	Appendix A for action Cisca007.docx
11	8	Further information regarding the Ark data centre suppliers	SSW		28-Nov-23	Y		The new Crown Hosting Data Centre (ARK) provides: -secure, scalable and resilient data centre facilities for public sector customers (central government, local government, defence, health, policing and justice) -all services are secure to Official as MINIMUM standard (For details of exactly what this means go here: Government Security Classifications Policy -use best of breed energy efficiency technology, complying with HMG greening government ICT strategy -have dedicated public sector data halls -comply with National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) guidelines and Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) guidance -are brand new, built from the ground up highly resilient Tier 3 facilities. Tier 3 is defined as: A data centre with multiple paths for power and cooling, and redundant systems that allow the staff to work on the setup without taking it offline. This tier has an expected uptime of 99.982% per year. -built in multiple site synchronous replication for assured business continuity -scalable and resilient connectivity to network services framework, PSN, N3 and RLI/SLI services -uses high speed data centre interconnects.	24/10/2023	3	
12							25/11/2023				

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K																																																						
14	9	Residents' access to the council through new IT and its availability to particular communities to be referred to the Task Group on resident engagement	SH & MTE	Caroline Adlem & Michael Edley	28-Nov-23	Y	28/11/2023	This will be included in the task & finish groups investigations	24/10/2023	3																																																							
15	10	Refresh of IT Strategy in January to be brought to Committee	SSW		May onwards 2024			To support the review of the 3-year strategy we will be undertaking a peer review by the LGA that will focus on the Councils ability to continue to move forward with ICT and Digital improvements.	24/10/2023	3																																																							
16	11	Share information of resident interaction with WEBSITE forms etc	SSW		28-Nov-23	Y	25/11/2023	Here are the top 20 form submissions for October 2023: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Form Title</th> <th>Submissions Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>General enquiry</td><td>4794</td></tr> <tr><td>Council tax enquiry v2</td><td>2141</td></tr> <tr><td>School admissions enquiry</td><td>644</td></tr> <tr><td>Customer access book an appointment</td><td>628</td></tr> <tr><td>Contact us</td><td>457</td></tr> <tr><td>Report missed bin collection</td><td>381</td></tr> <tr><td>Household support fund application</td><td>366</td></tr> <tr><td>Employment application</td><td>219</td></tr> <tr><td>Free school meals application - Eligibility outcome</td><td>195</td></tr> <tr><td>Free school meals application</td><td>190</td></tr> <tr><td>Report flytipping, flyposting or flyboarding</td><td>186</td></tr> <tr><td>Garden waste collection</td><td>133</td></tr> <tr><td>Report a highways issue</td><td>128</td></tr> <tr><td>Concessionary bus pass application for the elderly and disabled</td><td>116</td></tr> <tr><td>Council tax enquiry</td><td>102</td></tr> <tr><td>Order a new or replacement bin</td><td>98</td></tr> <tr><td>Housing service repairs request</td><td>96</td></tr> <tr><td>Community centres for hire enquiry</td><td>95</td></tr> <tr><td>Bulky waste collection</td><td>83</td></tr> <tr><td>Report a statutory nuisance</td><td>79</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Form Title	Submissions Count	General enquiry	4794	Council tax enquiry v2	2141	School admissions enquiry	644	Customer access book an appointment	628	Contact us	457	Report missed bin collection	381	Household support fund application	366	Employment application	219	Free school meals application - Eligibility outcome	195	Free school meals application	190	Report flytipping, flyposting or flyboarding	186	Garden waste collection	133	Report a highways issue	128	Concessionary bus pass application for the elderly and disabled	116	Council tax enquiry	102	Order a new or replacement bin	98	Housing service repairs request	96	Community centres for hire enquiry	95	Bulky waste collection	83	Report a statutory nuisance	79	24/10/2023	3	More generally, here are the stats for the website as a whole during October 2023: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Total web users</th> <th>Total E-forms completed (excluding staff forms)</th> <th>% of desktop users</th> <th>% of mobile users</th> <th>% of tablet users</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Oct-23</td> <td>201,585</td> <td>12,089</td> <td>41.8</td> <td>56.3</td> <td>1.9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Total web users	Total E-forms completed (excluding staff forms)	% of desktop users	% of mobile users	% of tablet users	Oct-23	201,585	12,089	41.8	56.3	1.9
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17	12	Progress report on ICT digitisation and modernisation to come to CISC in 6 months	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25 to take place in May/June 2024	24/10/2023	3																																																							
18	13	Propose progress report on PSED to fall a few months after T&F report on engagement and to include self assessment against EDI framework	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	4																																																							
19	14	information on how the council will actively draw upon the diversity of SBC workforce to moderate and inform service development and improvement	SH		May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	4																																																							
20	15	Request that, in future procurement updates, where new procurements are reported, there is clarification that this relates to new contracts not existing contracts reported in the over £500 spend reports	SH	Clare Priest (CP)	May 2024 onwards			Will be included in Forward Workplan Review for 2024-25	24/10/2023	5																																																							
21	16	Suggestion that Procurement considers picking up, outside of scrutiny, cost benefit of issues and possibilities of in-cab IT	SH	CP	N/A	-	N/A	Not a scrutiny matter	24/10/2023	5	CP to contact Cllr Iftakhar for more detail and inform of action outside of scrutiny																																																						
22	17	Cllr Stedmond to pass on to Chris Stratford, outside of scrutiny, details regarding outstanding issues with a number of housing repairs for residents in his ward	MG	Chris Stratford (CS)	N/A	-	N/A	Not a scrutiny matter	24/10/2023	5	CS to respond to Cllr Stedmond outside of scrutiny																																																						
23	18	Cllr Hulme to pass on information to MTE gleaned from pilot CQA authorities to include in Task group report	MTE		November 10 2023	Y	10/11/2023	Information included in formulating recommendations in report	24/10/2023	5																																																							
24	19	2025-26 budget scrutiny arrangements are put in place that follow or closely align to CIPfA guidelines.	AT	MTE, Chair +AT	26-Mar-24				28/11/2023	3	https://sloughbc-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/p/personal/michael_edley_slough_gov_uk/EQBahCH_CMBJkfrDK_9p4ocBxa48HuBIEF1OVsd-a1kohA7e=pZFFm																																																						
25	20	Committee to request an update, on the effectiveness of the housing actions set out in the presentation as a "for information" report	Pat Hayes (PH)	CS	May 2024 onwards			Note in the first instance, may want to ask for an update "for information" but consider option for Committee report in 24/25 forward planning	28/11/2023	3																																																							

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: People Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 31 January 2023

CONTACT OFFICER: Sarah Wilson, Principal Lawyer

WARD(S): All

PART I**FOR DECISION****TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT – REVIEW OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY
BUSINESS CASE FOR SLOUGH CHILDREN FIRST****1. Purpose of Report**

As part of improving the Council's company governance, the Panel decided to set up a task and finish group to review Slough Children's First (SCF) draft business plan. Approval of the business plan is a reserved matter and will be approved by Cabinet alongside approval of the contract sum for 2023/24. The work of the task and finish group was intended to allow informed recommendations to be made to Cabinet on the business plan. To ensure a sufficiently in-depth piece of work, the Group focused on reviewing the workforce strategy business case as opposed to seeking to review the whole business plan.

The report seeks approval of the report attached at Appendix 1, including the recommendations, which have been split up into recommendations for the Council, for SCF and for the wider partnership of agencies who support children's safeguarding and wellbeing activities.

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Review and comment on the report attached at Appendix 1.
2. Recommend to Cabinet:
 - (a) That the Task and Finish Group Report is considered and the recommendations for the Council are accepted and acted upon;
 - (b) That Cabinet or the Cabinet Committee receives updates on progress against the recommendations as part of updates on SCF governance.
3. Request that the Chief Executive submits the Task and Finish Group Report to the SCF Board of Directors for consideration and acceptance of the recommendations.
4. Request that the Chief Executive submit relevant recommendations to the relevant partnership forums with a view to lead agencies being identified for each recommendation.
5. Note that a report will be brought back to Scrutiny in the next municipal year providing an update on progress against the recommendations.

Comments of Commissioners

“Commissioners would like to commend the task and finish group for the work they put in and the scope of their coverage. The approach they have followed and the learning they have obtained should flow through into future work and members should be thanked for setting such a good standard. DLUHC Commissioners look forward to reviewing the responses and implementation plans that follow the recommendations.”

3. Slough Corporate Plan

- A borough for children and young people to thrive

The Council’s corporate plan emphasises the need for children and young people to be able to access services that keep them safe and secure. This includes a focus on delivering preventative help to children and families. It also includes a focus on raising aspirations and delivering opportunities for young people to prosper. Support for children and young people should be seen as a whole Council and wider partnership responsibility. Whilst SCF have a key responsibility to deliver statutory services to safeguard children and young people, many of the recommendations in the report relate to recommendations for the wider partnership.

- A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users

In their report to DLUHC published 28th July 2022, Slough Borough Council Best Value Commissioners expressed uncertainty regarding the deliverability of the Council’s current savings plan. It was also flagged that the financial pressures arising from the current model of delivery of SCF are not possible to contain without an impact on service delivery. The Council will need to ensure it sets a fair baseline budget for SCF to allow it to deliver on its responsibilities. The Council also needs to ensure that SCF is utilising its funding in a way that is supporting good outcomes for children in a cost-effective manner. It is clear from the report that many of the strategies and approaches adopted by SCF are delivering high quality services and leading to improvements in recruitment and retention of staff. However, the national and local pressures mean that a different approach may be needed to support children and families in the future.

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

The recommendations are seeking to ensure that the Council’s limited resources are used to best effect. This includes ensuring that strategies are targeted at increasing recruitment of permanent staff and retaining and developing a high performing workforce. This will allow for continuity of case worker for children and families. In addition, the recommendations for the Council relate to appropriately commissioning and designing services so they support children and families via services targeted at mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse and early years. Finally, there are key recommendations aimed at the wider partnership of agencies that support children and families to ensure that the limited amount of public funding within the Borough of Slough is appropriately targeted at those most in need.

(b) Risk Management

The Council's highest corporate risk relates to a failure to appropriately safeguard children and support families to ensure that children are kept safe and well. This report and its recommendations are key to inform Council decision-making across a wide range of services, which will demonstrate that the Council is taking a whole system approach to its responsibilities to children and young people.

(c) Legal Implications

The Secretary of State for Education has powers to issue a direction in relation to specified social services functions relating to children under s.497A of the Education Act 1996. Various directions have been issued in relation to statutory functions in Slough since 2014. The sixth statutory direction was issued in April 2021. This requires that the Council secures that prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF and the Council jointly and other prescribed children's services functions are performed by SCF on behalf of the Council. The Council was also directed to enter into a new service agreement to implement the discharge of these functions and continue to comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State, his representatives and the Children's Services Commissioner in relation to

- i. ensuring that the Council's children's social care functions are performed to the required standard;
- ii. the terms of the Service Agreement that require the Secretary of State's consent or approval;
- iii. the operation of the Direction.

SCF is a wholly owned company and therefore the Council as its sole owner makes decisions on reserved matters as set out in its Articles of Association. These include approval of an annual business plan covering a three-year period. SCF is required to submit a draft business plan by 30 September in the previous financial year. SCF submitted a high level 7-year plan containing invest to save business cases in the summer of 2022. However, due to the significant level of investment being requested, the DfE agreed to commission a review which was undertaken by Mutual Ventures. This review is appended at Appendix 2 and makes a series of findings and recommendations, including concern about some of the assumptions being applied and alternative areas of focus.

(d) Equalities Implications

The Council and SCF are obligated to comply with duties under the Equality Act 2010. The services are generally intended to support children and young people and their wider families. Certain communities will be disproportionately represented within the cohort of children and families being supported. Some recommendations are particularly focused on specific protected groups, including early years support, youth services and families experienced poor mental health. There is also a recommendation about utilising the diverse population as a positive as many of the existing staff really enjoy the difference they can make within the town.

5. **Supporting Information**

Appendix 1 is a report of the Task and Finish Group set up to review the SCF draft business plan. The Group agreed to focus on workforce strategy and interviewed a number of individuals and groups of SCF staff to inform its report. It also reviewed national publications and data provided by SCF.

The Group would like to place on record its thanks to staff within SCF and the DfE Commissioner. The morale and passion that staff showed to their work was positive to see and the Group identified many areas of good practice, including good links with the local university, embedded strategies to support staff to progress their careers within SCF and excellent leadership and management support to allow staff to feel safe and supported. It was noticeable that the things that often made the most difference were not those that cost a lot of money, but demonstrated the care and commitment of the workforce.

The report highlights the national context and pressures around children's social care and the move to strength based or restorative based approaches to allow children to stay with their family network where targeted support allows this. The Group also noted the importance of the wider children's workforce and the need to focus on and develop this wider workforce to meet needs at an earlier stage. Schools clearly play a significant role in the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and the Council's education service must ensure that these key partners work together and support children at risk of missing education and being out of school. The report highlights the improvements that have been made in Sunderland City Council, particularly in relation to ensuring the participation of children and young people in training and that they are at the heart of decision-making across a range of Council services.

The report highlights the need for effective partnership working at a strategic and operational level and opportunities for agencies to join up on recruitment and apprenticeship opportunities. The report also highlights the risks for SCF if other parts of the Council are not operating at the right level, therefore the Council needs to carefully consider the impact of its savings plans on those services that provide early help and support services that impact on children and families. These include early years, education, community safety, youth and housing services.

It was noticeable that the current strategies of recruiting and developing newly qualified and overseas qualified staff was starting to work in terms of reducing the turnover and bringing down caseloads. Managers shared positive experiences of supportive leaders and managers that compared favourably with other places they had worked. It was recognised that strong leaders are key to a motivated workforce and the Panel was pleased to note that there were interviews for a new Executive Director / Chief Executive of SCF prior to Christmas and an appointment has been made, as the turnover of senior leaders in the past has been very damaging to the workforce.

In terms of investment, the report flags that many staff want to see opportunities for progression and investment in learning and development. This was more important than retention bonuses, which can be seen as divisive and unfairly applied. This is on the basis the SCF is paying salaries that are broadly comparable to its immediate neighbours and that it is seen as an employer who will support and develop its staff.

The work of the transformation team was particularly recognised and as this is funded by a DfE grant which is ending next year, this would be an area that should be prioritised for investment.

Finally, the report highlights the need to focus on outcomes for children and understanding the impact of decisions on children, young people and families. The lack of stability in the workforce is highly damaging to children and can lead to them having to tell their story to multiple people. On the positive, there is an opportunity to put children and young people at the heart of decision-making by involving them in workforce planning, being visible at senior levels in the organisation and to lead and participate in training. It was clear to the Group that an edge of care team would make a real difference to older children at risk of criminal exploitation, family breakdown and domestic abuse.

6. **Comments of Other Committees**

Cabinet will be asked to consider the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group when making decisions on a variety of matters, including approval of the SCF business plan.

The People Scrutiny Panel may wish to consider whether it wants to add a topic to its work programme on multi-agency working to protect and support children and young people.

7. **Conclusion**

The Task and Finish Group welcome feedback on its report and hope that the themes and recommendations will be taken into account by the Council, SCF and wider partnership.

8. **Appendices Attached**

Appendix 1 – Review of workforce strategy business case for SCF – Report by the People Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group

Appendix 2 – Mutual Ventures review of SCF draft business plan

9. **Background Papers**

None

The draft business plan and business cases that are referred to will be appended to the Cabinet paper, but until that point, they remain confidential. The list of documents available to the Panel are either published documents or are exempt documents at this time.

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Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

26th September 2023

item	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	<p>Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.</p> <p>Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24. (Annex A, Paragraph 3a of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</p> <p>Proper functioning of scrutiny. (Annex A, Paragraph 3c of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022)</p>	<p>Scrutiny Challenge – Quarterly Improvement and Recovery</p> <p>Budget Monitoring Q1 23/24 and Budget Outturn 22/23</p> <p>Revised Scrutiny Forward Work Programme</p>	<p>To receive a report – scrutinise key areas and monitor progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery.</p> <p>Strategic scrutiny and budget monitoring of 23/24 and 22/23 Outturn as this will inform the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 24/25 and beyond which will underpin the Council's budget proposals.</p> <p>To agree the revised CISC Forward Work Programme after Commissioners' feedback.</p>	<p>Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny</p> <p>Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny.</p> <p>Critical friend role.</p> <p>Forward Planning</p>	<p>Stephen Brown, Chief Executive</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement</p> <p>Adele Taylor, S151 Officer and Executive Director</p> <p>Alex Polak, Statutory Scrutiny Officer Kunwar Khan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager</p>

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

24 October 2023					
	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICT strategy that enables service delivery and communications with residents. 	Direction Deep Dive on: ICT; and	To receive a report about the Council's ICT and procurement (including contract management) functions as identified in the priority area/reference column by the Government and Commissioners.	In-depth review of the progress against the directions. Holding to account – oversight, monitoring and scrutiny.	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the procurement and contract management function. (Annex A, Paragraph 3e of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022) 	Procurement		pre-decision scrutiny and policy development. Critical friend role.	Clare Priest, Head of Commercial Services
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To meet the Council's statutory responsibility to publish equality information and objectives. 	Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Council Decision-making (compliance and new objectives)	To receive a report providing assurance to CISC on the Council's specific duties under the Equality Act to help comply with the public sector equality duty. Public authorities must publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty; they must prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years.		Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

28 November 2023					
	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
4	Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24.	Scrutiny of Council's 2024/25 Budget setting process	To receive a report about the budget setting process 2024/25. Seeking assurance in line with Directions relating to finance, MTFS and budget. Final details of the item to be confirmed by finance.	Oversight, monitoring and policy development. Pre decision scrutiny, oversight and monitoring	Adele Taylor, Executive Director and S151 Officer (Annex A, Paragraph 3a of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022)
5	ASC CQC new inspection regime – The ASC assurance programme touches a number of key improvement and recovery areas.	Adult Social Care and the new CQC Regime – Report back from T&F	To receive a report with recommendations from the ASC T&F as the parent committee before it goes to Cabinet.	development; in-depth review and critical friend role.	T&F Chair: Christine Hulme Marc Gadsby, Executive Director, Adult Social Care Amanda Halliwell, CQC Project Manager /CQC workstream.
6	Improving public trust and engagement with residents to enable better service delivery as part of wider organisational change.	Launch T&F 2 – Resident	To agree topic and scope of the T&F work.		Sarah Hayward, Executive Director Strategy and Development Caroline Adlem, Head of Communications and Resident Engagement

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

4 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.	Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge – Improvement and Recovery	To receive a report – scrutinise key areas and monitor progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement
4	Assurance that HR function is fit for purpose	Deep Dive on Human Resources – Direction of travel and ‘fit for purpose’	To receive a report providing assurance and progress ensuring that business support services such as HR are ‘fit for purpose’	Holding to account – oversight and monitoring.	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement

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30 January 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
3	To scrutinise key areas and seek assurance that Adult Social Care Service is undertaking the necessary improvement work to reduce the risk of poor CQC inspection outcome.	Adult Social Care Transformation Programme	To mitigate the risk of poor CQC inspection outcome for Adult Social Care (ASC) services.	Oversight, monitoring and critical friend. Policy development.	Marc Gadsby Executive Director, Adults (People)
4.	Financial sustainability; closure of long-term budget gap across the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS); and balanced financial forecast for 2023/24. (Annex A, paragraph 3a of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022)	Scrutiny of Council’s Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25 (Capital and Revenue – Savings, Growth, EqIA, Risks and MTFS)	To receive a report about the Council Draft Budget Plan 2024/25.	Pre decision scrutiny Critical friend and budget recommendations to Cabinet.	Adele Taylor, S151 Officer and Executive Director

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

22 February 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	Practice improvement for Children with SEND – Ofsted	Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).	Report on practice improvement for children with SEND – monitoring of actions taken and progress made to address the priorities identified by Ofsted and CQC in their inspection report	Oversight and monitoring.	Sue Butcher Chief Executive, Slough Children First. As it stands this is too big and wouldn't be adding value. Hold as marker for childrens but prob not this exactly
Page 17	Improving public trust and engagement with residents to enable better service delivery as part of wider organisational change.	Report from the T&F 2 (Resident engagement and building public trust) launched in October 2023.	Reporting progress to the parent committee.	In depth review; policy development and monitoring	Sarah Hayward, Executive Director, Strategy and Improvement Chair of T&F Cllr Manku, Chair of CIS

Subject to Change

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

26 March 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
1	Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted	Launch of Task and Finish Group 3 – Journey to Good – SCF	To provide input to develop a plan of engagement with local communities including faith, disabled LD and other relevant groups.	Policy development and critical friend role.	Sue Butcher Executive Director – Children’s Services, Chief Executive, Slough Children First. Chair of CISC, Cllr Manku
	Implementation of an estates strategy to make clear how the Council will use its assets to enable service delivery. (Annex B, 2b of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022)	Scrutiny of Council’s Estate Strategy and its implementation	To receive a report on the implementation of the Council’s estates strategy to review how the Council is using its assets to enable service delivery; value for money; impact on resident and council’s finances – what external validation or checks are in place; what have been/are the key challenges and opportunities.	Oversight, monitoring and critical friend.	Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property

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Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

23 April 2024

	Priority Area, Reference / Directions	Topic / Issue	Purpose	Type of Scrutiny	Responsibility
	Council-wide Improvement and Recovery monitoring following Government Directions.	Quarterly Scrutiny Challenge –Improvement and recovery progress	To scrutinise key areas and gain wider insight into progress of actions relating to improvement and recovery.	Oversight, monitoring and policy development.	Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement
	Statutory scrutiny responsibility for crime and disorder functions.	Crime and Disorder/Policing Report (Timing TBC, subject to all Member briefing)	To receive a report with a view to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.	Monitoring and oversight. Annual attendance at scrutiny.	Matthew Barber, Police and Crime Commissioner Superintendent Lee Barnham

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Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

May 2024 Onwards					
Page 20	<p>Annex A, Paragraph 6 of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</p>	<p>Governance and operation of subsidiary companies</p>	<p>To receive a report demonstrating that Council has compiled or adequately progressing with the letter and spirit of the Direction 6 relating to review by Authority of its companies, including any subsidiaries but excluding Slough Children First (SCF). For those companies that it is agreed to continue, make sure that the Directors appointed by the Authority are appropriately skilled in either technical or company governance matters to make sure each Board functions effectively. For those companies which it is determined not to continue with in this form, to establish a plan to internalise, close or sell as appropriate.</p>	<p>Oversight and Monitoring.</p>	<p>Patrick Hayes, Executive Director Housing and Property</p>
	<p>Annex A, Paragraph 7 of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</p>	<p>Data and Insight Report</p>	<p>To appraise and reassure the Committee as to what steps have been taken to enable evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement</p>

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

Page 21	<p>Annex A, Paragraph 3f of Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</p> <p>Monitoring of Corporate Performance</p>	<p>Progress against Directions: Scrutiny of ICT and HR improvements progress</p> <p>Quarterly Corporate Performance Report Organisational Culture Change Programme – <i>Flexibility to be taken as a report or a T&F.</i></p>	<p>enable more effective decision making.</p> <p>To review and scrutinise progress relating to HR and ICT directions/commentary/report by Commissioners.</p> <p>To receive a quarterly performance report in order to review and scrutinise council's performance. A report to the main item or a T&F – TBC.</p>	<p>Oversight and monitoring.</p> <p>Oversight and monitoring.</p> <p>Policy development. Critical friend role.</p>	<p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p> <p>Sarah Hayward, Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement.</p>
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Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

Task and Finish Group Topics 'Taxi-rank' in Priority Order	
Topic / Issue	Comments
Adult Social Care (ASC) Assurance Programme/New CQC regime Page 22	<p>The ASC assurance programme touches a number of key improvement and recovery areas.</p> <p>CQC will place a lot of emphasis on the importance of good Leadership and Culture as well as on Customer Service and experience.</p> <p>The initial assessment suggests opportunity for value to be added through scrutiny/T&F. Timely scrutiny engagement, through this Task and Finish Group will help assure that the service is focussing on the right priorities and making required improvements. This will also offer critical friend challenge around assurance programme and delivery of the outcomes through an action plan. Starting in September 2023.</p>
Resident Engagement and Building Trust	Building and maintaining public trust through resident engagement is an important component for SBC. Agreement in principle with the service.
Journey to Good – Slough Children First	<p>Participation/engagement is identified as an area of development by Ofsted so a T&F can add real value.</p> <p>A Task and Finish Group focussing on developing community and faith groups involvement in improving children services. This will ensure that enhanced partnerships bring different skillsets and experiences. Agreement in principle with the service.</p>
Organisational Culture Change Programme – <i>Flexibility to be taken as a report to the main committee if it was felt more appropriate.</i>	<p>Paragraphs 5 of the Commissioners' letter of 14 August 2023 as well as Government Directions to Slough on 1 September 2022</p> <p>Culture and behaviour change Task and Finish Group to review progress and provide input to comply with implementation of a programme of cultural change to rebuild trust between officers and members, to the satisfaction of the Commissioners. This should make sure both Members and Officers understand the scale of the challenge and their</p>

Appendix B: Forward Work Programme 2023-24 as at November 2023

	<p>respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated; governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified. Introduction/review of (a credible and comprehensive) culture change programme with targets and measures of success (5f). Timing and the form to be confirmed in consultation with the service.</p>
<p><i>Any appropriate deep dive items can be suggested as a proposal for a future T&F Group subject to the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Alignment with the Directions/Council's Corporate Plan (Improvement and Recovery Plan);</i> • <i>Slough's progress and direction of travel;</i> • <i>Commitment and support from the CISC Chair and relevant Executive Director to enable effective and efficient delivery to add value – 'But-For/So-What' test.</i> • <i>Statutory guidance/constitution/remit.</i> 	<p>TBC.</p>

Subject to Change

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Appendix C Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee:



SELECTING TOPICS FOR SCRUTINY

A GUIDE FOR SCRUTINY COUNCILLORS

November 2023

This guide has been designed to support Scrutiny Councillors in Slough as they develop the scrutiny forward work plan. It does not directly apply to scrutiny of policy development, although many of the principles would also apply.

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1.0 The role of scrutiny.

Your key responsibilities, as a member of the Council's scrutiny committee are:

- To reflect residents' concerns about public services in Slough, either because they are failing to deliver as expected across the borough or that certain communities of place, interest or association are receiving a poorer service than others;
- To hold the Leader, Leadership Team and senior Council officers to account for their decisions;
- To contribute to the development of policy and the improvement of services by investigating issues of local concern;
- To review Council policy, the way policies are implemented and their impact on local people; and
- To scrutinise decisions before they are made and implemented or to scrutinise the implementation of decisions.

As you consider the prioritisation of the scrutiny work programme, you will want to consider these responsibilities. Councillors best carry out these responsibilities when they drive scrutiny with an independent mindset (as the statutory guidance requires), amplifying the voices and concerns of local people, driving improvement in service provision for them, and providing constructive challenge to the Leadership Team.

Scrutiny does not mean a generalised oversight of the Council and its partners or mirroring their agendas. Often there is a belief that trying to do anything "less" would result in key issues falling between the gaps. In fact, keeping a general watching brief over everything in the local area would not be possible. As the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) notes, if you try to do that it would greatly reduce the impact of scrutiny¹.

Whilst the Leadership Team is an important partner, it should not direct your work, nor should you shadow their agenda.

1.1 The forward plan

It is usual that a Forward Plan is shaped in June-July each year. The initial draft will draw upon: Mapping legislative and constitutional requirements; Horizon scanning by directorate (performance reports, inspections, risks); Reviewing issues identified by residents (inc. surveys, complaints, member enquiries, FOI); Members proposals; Review of last year's work programme and 'leftover' topics and any ongoing investigations; A long list will then be subject to prioritisation to deliver an annual programme of, on average 2 key topics per Committee meeting. Members should also consider the format of the investigation.

The resulting forward work plan should be constantly checked to ensure that items remain relevant, and that there is the opportunity to reprioritise items or address new unexpected issues as and when necessary.

¹ CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, pg. 22-23 www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/

2.0 What topics are suitable for scrutiny?

“Scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects the area or the area’s inhabitants”

This means that scrutiny is not limited to reviewing Council Services. Topics that scrutiny could consider are:

- High profile issues in the borough and high-profile national issues impacting the borough, issues of local political contention, issues on which people hold strong views and areas of local community concern³
- Investigations that “follow the council pound” from the bottom-up – i.e: scrutiny of organisations that receive public funding to deliver goods and services in the borough⁴ from the perspective of local people at the receiving end;
- Topics with a ‘focus’ for scrutiny chosen by you and fellow scrutiny councillors. Statutory guidance suggests that selecting a focus, such as ‘risks’, ‘authority’s finances’ or ‘the working with partners’, can help you filter the right topics for the authority at a given time and cutting across substantive topics/areas; and.
- Residents’ suggestions, risk and complaints data, council priorities outlined in the Council Plan, emerging policies and strategies, and ward councillor suggestions are all potential sources of topics for the work programme.

3.0: Proposing a topic

A member can propose a topic for scrutiny at any time and, in doing so, should consider the criteria set out in Section 4.0 and Figure 1. A template is available (Appendix A) for you to complete that will provide important information relating to key scrutiny criteria, upon which the Committee will accept or reject your proposal.

In submitting a topic for the Committee's consideration, you should provide as full an account as possible of the issue you are concerned about, providing any relevant evidence you can.

Once you have completed the Scrutiny Topic Proposal Form (Appendix A), you should email it to the Committee Chair (copied to the Governance and Scrutiny Officer (GSO). The Chair will probably contact you to discuss the topic before it is put before the Committee at the next available meeting.

² MHC&LG, Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, paragraph 49-51, p21 www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities

³ CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/

⁴ MHC&LG, Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, paragraph 46 pg.20 www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities

3.1 Deciding Scrutiny Topics: Work Programming⁵

“Effective work programming is the **bedrock** of the scrutiny function. Done well it lays the foundations for **targeted, incisive** and **timely** work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Done badly, scrutiny can end up wasting time and resources on issues where the impact of any work done is likely to be minimal.”

When choosing topics for the work programme, members should:

- Prioritise topics where scrutiny can make an **impact, add value** or contribute to policy development;
- Achieve a **balance** between the **kinds of tasks** undertaken to fulfil your responsibilities;
- Achieve a balanced **spread of items** over the year;
- Incorporate a **range of methods and tools** to carry out scrutiny work; and.
- Leave some **space for urgent response** to changing events.

The work programme should **not** include information items – relevant background information will be communicated to you regularly, but it should not be part of committee meetings.

3.2 Saying “No”

It will **not** be possible to tackle every topic suggested for the long list. Just like Parliamentary Select Committees, scrutiny needs to look at the right things in a detailed way. This means that scrutiny councillors must prioritise some topics over others, through shortlisting. Shortlisting is necessary ‘to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority’.⁶

3.3 Criteria for selection of topics (Fig 1.)

⁷ “Scrutiny members should accept that shortlisting can be difficult. Scrutiny committees have finite resources and deciding how these are best allocated is tough. They should understand that, if work programming is robust and effective there might well be issues that they want to look at that, nonetheless are not selected”

You must be highly selective and apply common criteria to the decision process to be certain that the very best topics are chosen. You may proceed by answering systematically key questions about each topic.

⁵ CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, pg24 www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/

⁶ MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), paragraph 11, pg.8

⁷ MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), Paragraph 57, pg.23

Firstly, consider:

- Does this issue affect a significant number of borough residents?
- Are some residents in a community of place, interest or association not getting the same service as others?
- Is there any initial evidence that suggests there is an issue that warrants the committees attention? and
- Can scrutiny add value, for example by contributing to better performance?

If you have answered no, then **leave those topics out**, but consider alternative courses of action (Fig. 1.). If you have answered yes, then proceed to the next stage (Section 4.0) and prioritise when and how scrutiny will be carried out.

4.0 Prioritising a scrutiny topic. (Fig 2)

If the key criteria set out in Section 3.0 are broadly met when evaluating an issue/topic, then the Committee must decide the level of priority it should be afforded. If a topic does not duplicate others' work in the organisation, prioritisation can be determined considering the following issues:

- Is the issue strategic and significant?
- Is it an issue of concern to stakeholder organisations and/or external partners?
- Is the scrutiny timely/what does it take precedence over?⁸
- Are the resources available to conduct a scrutiny investigation
- What would be the most appropriate way to conduct a scrutiny investigation

As scrutiny in Slough takes shape it will look to increase local community involvement, inviting members of the public to suggest topics themselves. It will then become increasingly important to be able to show why and how decisions have been reached.

During prioritisation discussions you should be prepared to put the arguments in favour of including a topic or outlining the potential risks and disadvantages. It will require careful thinking to prioritise topics that will add the most value and have the greatest impact on local people's lives. The flowcharts (Figs. 1 and 2) at the end of this guide are designed to help you do that in a systematic way.

5.0 What methods and techniques are available for scrutiny work?

As you decide what and how many topics to prioritise for inclusion in the work programme, you will need to consider the amount of work required to review each one, and the best way to conduct the work. The amount of time and resources needed to conduct each review will have an impact on the number of items you can include in the work programme.

Scrutiny Committee will gather evidence, hold meetings in the community, seek external expertise and look at practice elsewhere as they undertake detailed reviews of the topics members have identified to address the priorities reflected on the work programme.

⁸ Normally there will be an average of 2 key agenda items per meeting. It therefore follows that if a new scrutiny topic is proposed then a topic currently on the forward plan must be sacrificed.

The Committees can draw upon a variety of methods and tools, in designing to each topic and feasibility considerations driving the design of each review. The list below provides examples without being exhaustive:

- Task and finish group reviews with a few members meeting informally over a period to scrutinise one topic in depth;
- A short scrutiny review: A short, sharp review might take a few weeks, with members meeting two or three times over that period. It might be possible to transact such a review between the meetings of a formal committee (so, one meeting involves a review being commissioned, and the next sees the report of that review group coming back to committee for approval).
- A “Roundtable” bringing together councillors, experts, local people, and others;
- A series of single-issue non-committee meetings with various forms and participants;
- A single-issue committee meeting;
- Focus groups, workshops or a survey of people affected by an issue;
- A standing panel or (notionally) time-limited committee. When scrutiny is shadowing long-term working (for example, a major NHS reconfiguration or Budget setting) setting up a more open-ended arrangement may be appropriate.
- Targeted site visits;
- A ‘hearing’ at a committee meeting to ask key questions on a decision’s implementation, risks and measures of success;
- A longer-term detailed scrutiny review (lasting a few months);
- An agenda item at an ordinary committee meeting; and
- A mix of the above.

Key to producing useful recommendations is that scrutiny uses these techniques to involve residents, councillors, officers and stakeholders, to learn from their expertise, experiences and perspectives.

In selecting their approach to scrutiny, members will need to draw upon the skills, knowledge, and experience of officers in relevant departments as well as the Governance and Scrutiny Officer. It will be important to discuss, with these officers, their current and future work pressures in coming to a conclusion about the approach and timing of each scrutiny review, especially if it is new to the existing work programme.

Well thought-through and well-planned inquiries will ensure a focused and business like review that will have an impact in:

- Setting the agenda around which decisions are taken; and
- Requiring the Leadership Team to explain their decisions and, in doing so, helping them improve their actions.

Figure 1. CRITERIA FOR SCRUTINY TOPICS

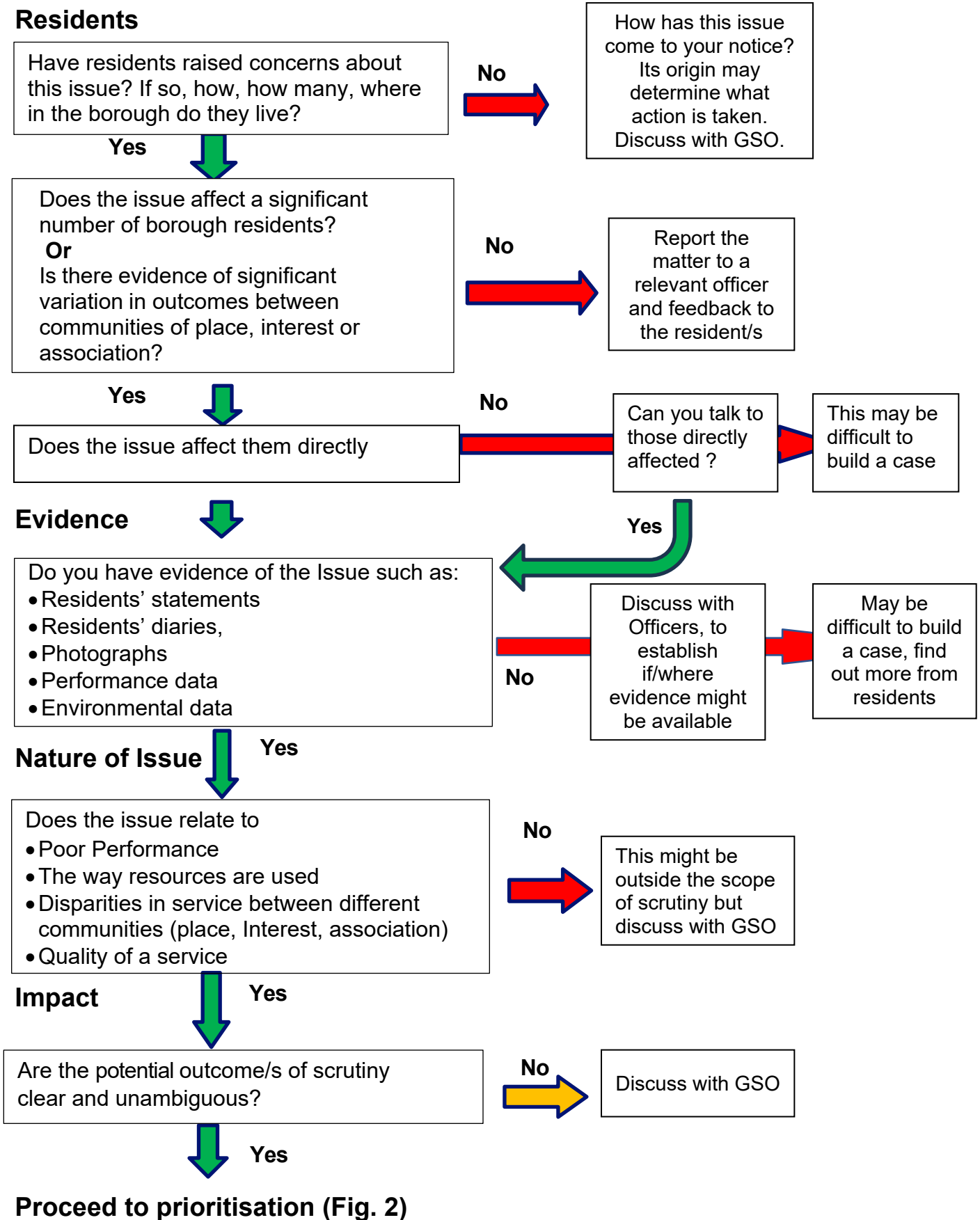
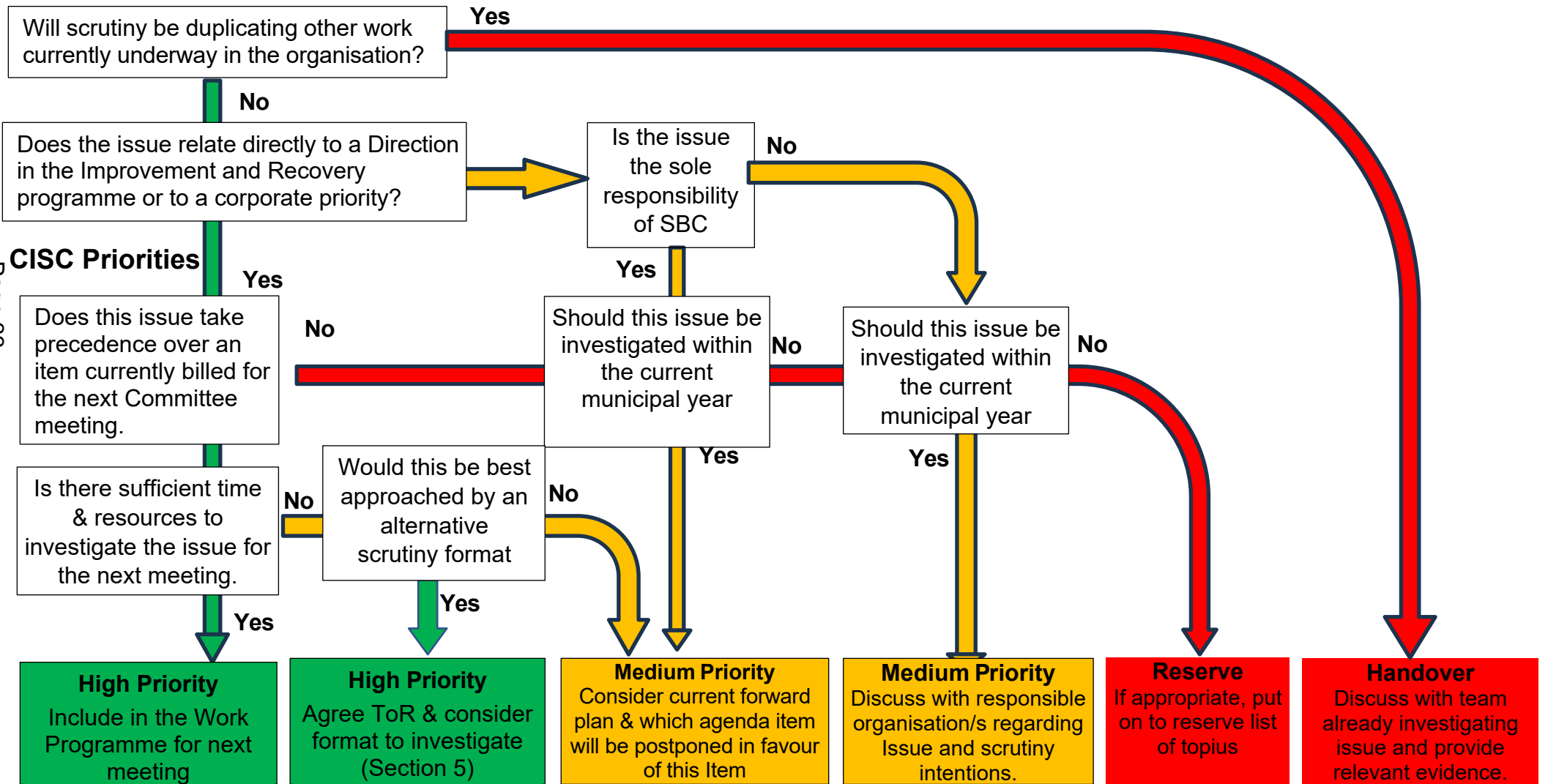


Figure 2. PRIORITISATION

SBC Priorities



Name

Date:

Brief description of Issue

How did this issue come to your attention?

What proportion of the borough;s residents are affected?

EVIDENCE: Set out /Point to the evidence you have in relation to this issue

OUTCOME/S: What improvement/change could scrutiny achieve

CISC Member evaluation of topics

Evaluating Proposals: Key principles

- a. Acknowledge that evaluation is largely subjective
- b. Addresses 2 key questions:
 - a. Is the proposal a good scrutiny topic in principle
 - b. Where does it fit amongst items already on the forward plan or do we add to discussion re 2024-25 FP in May/June
- c. Attempt to convert subjective views (about validity, evidence, impact, urgency and fit) into collective grading to allow workable/acceptable means to compare topics
- d. Also need to avoid parallel/duplicate investigations and allow for partner orgs to be engaged if implicated
- e. Incorporation into the forward plan is on basis of 1 in 1 out & 2 key items per meeting

Process

1. Proposers to summarise briefly with Q&A from colleagues
2. Each member to score each proposal for Validity, Evidence, Impact, Urgency and Fit, based upon your personal assessment of the information in each document
3. Combine and collate individual scoring to come to final average score and ranking for each proposal.
4. Discussion on outcome of ranking and recommendations for changes to Forward plan Feb-April to CISC on 4 Jan if appropriate
5. After this review, will need to advise relevant directors of changes

.NB: this is similar to that undertaken in June/July and is based on CfGS guidelines

CISC Member evaluation of topics

Appropriateness for CISC

Proposal	Validity of issue for scrutiny (thinking about borough-wide impact or inequality of service)	Score	The degree to which there is sufficient Evidence to proceed at this stage	Score	Potential Impact of Scrutiny	Score	TOTAL SCORE A/300
	Your notes	x/100	Your notes	x/100	Your notes	x/100	x/300
A							
B							
C							
D							

Partners and alternative investigations

	Are other organisations also implicated?	If Yes: Which organisations	Could / Is this issue be/ing investigated elsewhere?	If Y: Where?	Conclusion Proceed Refer Defer
	Y?N		Y/N		
A					
B					
C					
D					

Priority

	Urgency Degree of urgency to address the issue	Fit: Relevance to improvement and recovery and or corporate priorities	Total B	Which item might this replace on Feb/March/April draft agendas	Total score/ A+B	Recommendation Replace Defer Other
	Score /100	Score /100	Score /200	Date and item	Score /500	
A						
B						
C						
D						