

APPENDIX B - Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan

Update – 3 November 2022

Actions

The actions proposed below, in addition to the actions already completed and reported in the appendix, are designed to primarily address the following Directions:

3.c. “An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of the scrutiny function, to include a review of the Authority’s strategic risk register to make it fit for purpose”

And to assist with addressing the following Directions:

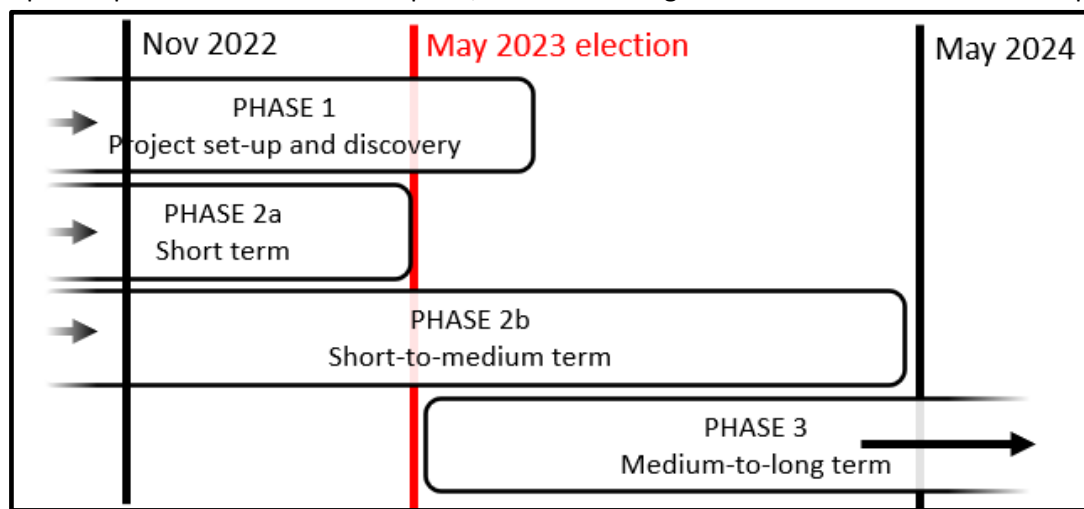
3.b. “An action plan to achieve improvements in relation to the proper functioning of democratic services [understood to mean ‘democratic governance as a whole’], to include rapid training for council officers, a revised term of reference for the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, and the agreement of an Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21.”

5. “In the first six months devise and then implement 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 respective roles in driving improvement and the way in which the Authority and its activities are regulated and governed and the way in which this is monitored, and breaches rectified.”

7. “In the first six months take steps to enable better and evidence-based decision making, including enhancing the data and insight functions to enable better evidence-based decision making.”

Timescales

Full project and resource planning will be part of phase 1. Until this is complete, the timescales given are broad and indicative. All phases are expected to overlap.



No.	Headline Action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
1.	Set up project management and reporting arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align plan, materials and reporting with whole-council approach to recovery action planning and reporting • Seek programme/project management resource • Create informal 'Democratic Governance Improvement Group' chaired by Monitoring Officer, populated by key governance roles across the council and action owners from this plan, to collaborate on, oversee and propel delivery of this plan • Assess baseline and benchmark via eg survey of staff and members 	Monitoring Officer	PHASE 1
2.	Respond to CfGS review in relation to reorganising scrutiny arrangements	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Commissioned Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to undertake a review of scrutiny function.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Draft report received and reviewed at officer level, initial actions taken eg training based on draft findings</i> • <i>Member training delivered based on early draft findings</i> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the CfGS report and linked officer report • Establish which member/s will lead on the development of the scrutiny function • Work with members to review and develop these proposals for Slough, bringing a report to Full Council as necessary for any associated constitutional changes. • Implement changes as soon as possible – eg from January 2023 if practicable, in order to address current issues asap and to build momentum and good practice in advance of election and induction in May 2023. • Key CfGS recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ move to a single, monthly Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ work programme and agendas... exclusively focused on the priority areas of council recovery plan, finance and improvement ▪ agenda should not exceed two substantive items which should both relate to the improvement plan. 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	<p>PHASE 1</p> <p>PHASE 1</p> <p>PHASE 2a</p> <p>PHASE 2a</p>

No.	Headline Action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commissions up to 3 time-limited T&Fs at once, clearly aligned to council priorities. ○ CISC chair and vice chair should also meet on a regular monthly basis with the Leader and necessary officers to discuss and align the business of scrutiny with council priorities and recovery plans ○ Scrutiny training for chairs and all scrutiny members to focus on general scrutiny good practice, effective scrutiny of council finances and acquiring analytical and questioning techniques. ○ political awareness training for all senior officers and any officers who interact with scrutiny. ○ Training for Cabinet Members on working with and getting the best from a collaborative relationship with scrutiny ○ review of the process for signing off papers be conducted to ensure that it is proportionate, supports their timely distribution and transparency ○ introduce pre-meetings before formal committee between all scrutiny members to provide the space to identify priorities and agree questioning strategies ○ Chief Executive should review the officer resource given to scrutiny to ensure that it is sufficiently senior and has the capacity to give the support members need, increasing that resource if necessary ○ Hold CfGS-facilitated session with members to action plan from the findings of the review. 		
3.	Formulate a cohesive work programme for scrutiny, tightly focused on scrutiny of the council's plans for financial and organisational recovery and progress against those plans.	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work programming events held in-year with officer and member involvement</i> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate a cohesive work programme for scrutiny, tightly focused on scrutiny of the council's plans for financial and organisational recovery and progress against those plans, in line with the CfGS recommendations. 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 2a

No.	Headline Action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
4.	Re-instate regular all-member briefings outside of formal committee settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propose regular programme of ‘all-member scrutiny briefings’ to improve all members’ knowledge and connection to the business of the council, increase scrutiny bandwidth and take ‘for information/learning’ items out of committee setting allowing better prioritisation of impactful items. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Populate forward plan of briefing items ○ List briefings in Corporate Schedule and alongside scrutiny work programmes, for visibility and ownership by senior officers and members ○ Create programme of 10-minute bitesize learning sessions at the outset of each 20 min briefing, with 30 mins for questions ○ Create library of those sessions which can be recorded for the benefit of members not able to attend 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 2a
5.	Elevate and support the role of the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the Chair of O&S with proper internal and external support for the role including an LGA-provided mentor and regular meetings with Statutory Scrutiny Officer and lead officers. • Review the Special Responsibility Allowance attracted by the Scrutiny Chair position and other scrutiny lead roles, via an Independent Remuneration Panel 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 2a
6.	Improved mechanisms for holding Cabinet Members to account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review strength of cabinet connections with scrutiny eg regularity of attendance, opportunities for portfolio updates etc (perhaps via new all-member briefings) • Cabinet Members to be expected to attend and front items at scrutiny relating to their portfolio areas, rather than just officers 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 2a
7.	Recruit resource to vacancies in Democratic Services and Scrutiny	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recruitment of interim head of governance and statutory scrutiny officer.</i> • <i>Business Case approved for recruitment to reinstated scrutiny role</i> <p>Next Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit to some of the scrutiny and democratic services vacancies, taking account of the very challenging budget reductions required over the coming years. 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 1

No.	Headline Action	Detailed actions	Action Owner	Indicative timescale/priority of future actions
11.	Review constitution re: scrutiny rules and practice, including call-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review constitution re: scrutiny rules and practice, including call-in 		PHASE 2a
12.	Improve overall support for Scrutiny Members to continuously improve effectiveness of scrutiny	<p>Action to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>[see elsewhere – training and induction programme for scrutiny members]</i> <p>Next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [see elsewhere – training and induction programme for scrutiny members] Offer intensive officer support of O&S Chair including regular meetings with the scrutiny officer With the support of CfGS, empower scrutiny members to self-evaluate their performance in committee and plan steps towards further improvement. Implement system of pre-meetings with facilitated identification of key lines of inquiry for key items 	Monitoring Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer	PHASE 2a & 2b