

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Work Plan
Meeting date	26 November 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee is asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Committee considers, updates and confirms its Work Plan and is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to hold informal briefing sessions as discussed at the work planning session; and • Agree membership for the working group regarding Family Hubs across BCP.
Reason for recommendations	The Council's Constitution requires all Overview and Scrutiny Committees to set out proposed work in a Forward Plan which will be published with each agenda
Portfolio Holder(s):	N/A – O&S is a non-executive function
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background –

1. All Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) bodies are required by the Constitution to consider work priorities and set these out in a Work Plan. When approved, this should be published with each agenda.

2. It is good practice for the Work Plan to be kept under regular review by the Committee. Between meetings O&S Chairs and Vice Chairs, in consultation with officers, suggest updates to the Work Plan to ensure proposed topics remain timely, fit for purpose and allow sufficient time for report preparation as appropriate. The Committee is now asked to review, update and/ or confirm the latest Work Plan update. See the **draft** Work Plan attached at Appendix B to this report.
3. The draft Work Plan at Appendix B is being fully refreshed based on recent annual work programming activity undertaken by the Committee. This included a workshop held in autumn 2024 to refresh work programming good practices and explore potential work areas, followed by survey consultation to establish the committee's priorities. The priorities emerging from this work will be updated in the work plan at Appendix B for the committee's consideration and formal adoption.

O&S Framework and Lens

4. The committee's work programme is based on [a framework](#) developed by scrutiny members and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to reflect good scrutiny practices and assist BCP scrutiny committees in their approach to work programming.
5. The framework outlines that scrutiny work will be divided into three categories of:
 - Proactive scrutiny
 - Reactive scrutiny
 - Pre-decision scrutiny.

Information only items should be received in other ways, reserving committee and working group capacity for value-added scrutiny. The Committee's Work Plan at Appendix B is structured to reflect this.

6. O&S statutory guidance recommends that a 'lens' or key set of priorities be established by O&S committees, to clearly communicate their role and how they will add value to the work of the organisation. The lens also clarifies the role of the committee to the public. During the Committee's annual work programming activity, possible lens options were discussed but the committee did not agree one at that time.

Principles of Good Scrutiny

7. The Constitution requires that the Work Plan of O&S committees shall consist of work aligned to the principles of the function. The BCP Council O&S function is based upon six principles:
 - Contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend';
 - A member led and owned function – seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development;
 - Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process;

- Engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence;
- Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the Council;
- Agility – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.

Process for agreeing Work Plan items

8. An O&S committee may take suggestions from a variety of sources to form its Work Plan. This may include suggestions from members of the public, officers of the Council, Portfolio Holders, the Cabinet and Council, members of the O&S Committee, and other Councillors who are not on the Committee.
9. The Constitution requires that all suggestions for O&S work will be accompanied by detail outlining the background to the issue suggested, the proposed method of undertaking the work and likely timescale associated, and the anticipated outcome and value to be added by the work proposed. No item of work shall join the Work Plan of the O&S Committee without an assessment of this information.
10. Any councillor may request that an item of business be considered by an O&S Committee. Councillors are asked to complete a form outlining the request, which is appended to this report at Appendix C. The same process will apply to requests for scrutiny from members of the public.
11. A copy of the most recent Cabinet Forward Plan will be supplied to O&S Committees at each meeting for reference when determining items of pre-decision scrutiny. The latest version is supplied as Appendix D to this report.

Resources to support O&S work

12. The Constitution requires that the O&S Committees take into account the resources available to support their proposals for O&S work. This includes consideration of councillor availability, officer time and financial resources. Careful and regular assessment of resources will ensure that there is appropriate resource available to support work across the whole O&S function, and that any work established can be carried out in sufficient depth and completed in a timely way to enable effective outcomes.
13. It is good practice for O&S Committees to agree a maximum of two/ three substantive agenda items per meeting. This will provide sufficient time for Committees to take a 'deep dive' approach to scrutiny work, which is likely to provide more valuable outcomes. A large amount of agenda items can lead to a 'light touch' approach to all items of business, and also limit the officer and councillor resource available to plan for effective scrutiny of selected items.
14. O&S Committees are advised to carefully select their working methods to ensure that O&S resource is maximised. A variety of methods are available for O&S Committees to undertake work and are not limited to the receipt of reports at Committee meetings. These may include:
 - Working Groups;
 - Sub-Committees;
 - Tak and finish groups;
 - Inquiry Days;

- Rapporteurs (scrutiny member champions);
- Consideration of information outside of meetings – including report circulation/ briefing workshops/ briefing notes.

Further detail on O&S working methods are set out in the Constitution and in Appendix A – Terms of Reference for O&S Committees.

Options Appraisal

15. The O&S Committee is asked to review, update and confirm its Work Plan, taking account of the supporting documents provided and including the determination of any new requests for scrutiny. This will ensure member ownership of the Work Plan and that reports can be prepared in a timely way. Should the Committee not confirm its forthcoming priorities, reports may not be able to be prepared in a timely way and best use of the meeting resource may not be made.

Summary of financial implications

16. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The Committee should note that when establishing a Work Plan, the Constitution requires that account be taken of the resources available to support proposals for O&S work. Advice on maximising the resource available to O&S Committees is set out in paragraphs 14 to 16 above.

Summary of legal implications

17. The Council's Constitution requires that all O&S bodies set out proposed work in a Work Plan which will be published with each agenda. The recommendation proposed in this report will fulfil this requirement.

Summary of human resources implications

18. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

19. There are no sustainability resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of public health implications

20. There are no public health implications arising from this report.

Summary of equality implications

21. There are no equality implications arising from this report. Any councillor and any member of the public may make suggestions for overview and scrutiny work. Further detail on this process is included within Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

Summary of risk assessment

22. There is a risk of challenge to the Council if the Constitutional requirement to establish and publish a Work Plan is not met.

Background papers

None.

Appendices

Appendix A – Overview and Scrutiny Committees Terms of Reference

Appendix B - Current Children's Services O&S Committee Work Plan

Appendix C – Request for consideration of an issue by Overview and Scrutiny

Appendix D – Current Cabinet Forward Plan

Appendix E – Scrutiny request regarding family hubs