Title: Options for a ‘small-scale’ Scrutiny Review in 2017/18

Report of the Commissioning Director, Education (and Scrutiny Champion for CSSC)

Open report For decision

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Summary:

Each of the Council's scrutiny select committees has a work programme which is a timetable of the matters the Committee wishes to consider in the current municipal year.

As well as scrutinising one-off reports, a part of the work programme may involve undertaking a Scrutiny Review into an area of interest for members where the select committee may add value and help the Council achieve its vision and priorities. This report explains what a Scrutiny Review entails and provides three options prepared by officers to the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC). After today’s meeting, there will remain only four CSSC meetings in 2017/18. Therefore, officers propose that rather than an in-depth scrutiny review, the Committee undertakes a ‘mini’/ small-scale scrutiny review this year.

The following are appended to this report:
A. The Committee's remit as described in the Council's Constitution
B. A chart explaining the Scrutiny Review process
C. Three options for undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review for members to choose from.
D. Draft Work Programme 2017-18

The CSSC is recommended to indicate which of the three options they would prefer to under-take a Scrutiny Review on. Members may ask for a topic of their choice to be put forward for consideration at the meeting, taking advice from officers as to whether a review of an alternative topic would be timely, impactful and deliverable. Members will note that a Scrutiny Review may only be undertaken on one topic, therefore the CSSC would need to agree upon one topic to take forward.

The Committee is also asked to agree its Work Programme for 2017-18.
Recommendations
The CSSC is recommended to:

(i) Agree a topic it would like to under-take a small-scale Scrutiny Review on in 2017/18, and
(ii) Agree its Work Programme for 2017-18

1. Scrutiny Work Programmes

Work Programmes generally consist of two types of scrutiny:

(i) Scrutiny Reviews

Usually, as part of their annual work programme, the select committees aim to complete at least one investigation into an area of member and/or public concern to make recommendations in order to improve services. These investigations are referred to as 'scrutiny reviews'. A scrutiny review usually involves a number of different stages including:

1. Agreeing the subject matter of the review according to given criteria
2. Drafting the terms of reference for the review/ key lines of enquiry (these are a set of questions/ specific areas the Committee wishes to consider, with a view to making recommendations for improvement in those areas)
3. Scoping the review (scoping refers to a detailed project plan outlining the suggested methods for gathering evidence including potential participants/ contributors to the review. It is a timetable designed to deliver what is set out in the terms of reference and includes the estimated date for the completion of the review, in accordance with internal scrutiny procedures and protocols)
4. Carrying out the review in accordance with the agreed scope
5. Producing a report of findings
6. Agreeing the contents of the scrutiny review report including the recommendations
7. Sharing the report with those involved with the review and finalising the report
8. Publicising the report
9. Monitoring the impact of the scrutiny review.

The chart at Appendix B describes the Scrutiny Review process in detail and the role of officers and members throughout. Appendix C lists the three possible areas for review that officers have put forward for consideration by members.

(ii) 'One-off' Items

Select Committees may also use the Work Programme to consider issues on a 'one-off' basis by, for example, asking representatives of a service to attend a meeting to have a discussion with members, or undertaking a site visit to a facility.

The draft Work Programme at Appendix D lists some areas members may wish to include, some of these being standard items and some being areas the CSSC of 2016-17 put forward for consideration, such as the item on Child Sexual Exploitation. Members, taking advice from officers, will need to agree what other items to include on the Work Programme for 2017-18.
2. Matters to Consider before deciding items to scrutinise

When deciding what matters should be scrutinised, whether they will be scrutinised it is good practice to reflect upon the following matters:

(i) The Committee’s Remit

First and foremost the selected topics must be ones which fall under the Committee’s remit, which is provided in Appendix A.

(ii) The ‘PAPER’ Criteria

When deciding which topic to select for review, best practice is to select topics that meet the following criteria:

― Public interest (be of importance to local residents)
― Ability to change (be within the Council and its partners’ power to change or influence)
― Performance (areas where scrutiny can add value are ones which require improvement)
― Extent of issue (priority should be given to issues that are relevant to a significant part of the Borough)
― Replication (avoid duplicating the work of other committees, bodies or organisations)

3. Next Steps - Scoping

Scoping is also known as methodology. It refers to the different methods that may be used to gather evidence for a Scrutiny Review and achieve what is set out in its terms of reference, including:

― Desktop-based analysis and research
― Commissioning reports or presentations from council departments, partner organisations, or external bodies to be considered at formal meetings or informal meetings
― Organising themed workshops with stakeholders
― Surveys, site visits, walkabouts, or ‘mystery shopping’ exercises
― Inviting experts, officers, partners, those who are affected by the issue or other relevant persons or organisations to give oral or written evidence to a Select Committee meeting.

Once members have selected a topic for review, officers will aim to produce a scoping report that will outline to members the suggested methodology for evidence gathering and the time-table for producing the report with recommendations. This will list which experts the Committee will talk to and what site visits will be undertaken, for example.

The draft scoping report may need to be put to members outside of a formal meeting for agreement, as the next CSSC meeting is not until 2 October 2017, and to wait until then would cause a delay in the delivery of the review.
As for one off reports on the Work Programme, these will be commissioned after today’s meeting.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Council Constitution available at:  http://moderngov.barking-dagenham.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=626&Year=0&Info=1

List of Appendices:

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