Title: Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee and Work Programme 2016/17

Report of the Chief Executive

Open Report For decision

Wards Affected: None Key Decision: No

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Summary:
This report outlines the responsibilities and commitments of the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (PAASC) and sets out the draft work programme for 2016/17.

Recommendation(s)
The Select Committee is asked to note the report including the draft work programme for 2016/17.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Overview and Scrutiny is a function of local authorities in England and Wales. It was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 which created separate Executive and Overview and Scrutiny functions within councils.

1.2 Councils operating Executive Arrangements (Cabinet) are required to create an Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is composed of councillors who are not on the Executive Committee (Cabinet) of that Council.
1.3 Overview and Scrutiny is a check and balance on the power of the decision makers. It holds them to account though a process known as call-in and through undertaking reviews.

1.4 Overview and Scrutiny may make recommendations for improvement to Cabinet and, under other legislation, may also make recommendations to other local bodies. Such bodies are under various obligations to respond or have regard to these recommendations such as Health and Police authorities.

1.5 To undertake its work effectively, each scrutiny committee needs to develop a work programme to manage its time.

2. **Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (PAASC)**

2.1 There are currently four themed select committees plus PAASC which incorporates the Council’s Audit Committee function.

2.2 The principle role of PAASC is to provide independent assurance, and to oversee and improve the Council’s:

- governance and regulation;
- assurance and risk management;
- fraud and corruption prevention;
- performance and compliance;
- sound financial management which achieves value for money; and,
- transparency and open government.

3. **Work Programme Overview**

3.1 Although the work of the Committee is heavy dominated with its statutory audit responsibilities it has a number of scrutiny functions including carrying out reviews into services that fall within its remit as well as looking into areas of under performance or local concern.

3.2 Due to the nature of the business at PAASC the approach adopted by the committee in 2014/15 involved the commissioning of a number of one off reports to allow members to cover a wide number of issues with the advantage of achieving quick wins/outcomes.

3.3 The Committee at this stage have been asked to include a report on the Housing benefits backlog (25 July) and it is intended to provide an information report at that meeting in relation to the Growth Commission with recommendations from other Select Committees. In addition, there will be reports at the meeting on 7 December relating to the Children’s Social Care Annual Report and Adoption and Permanence Annual reports 2015/16.
3.3 The work programme as attached as Appendix A is a document that is subject to change and Members can add, subtract, and defer items as necessary meeting by meeting.

4. Work Programme Considerations

4.1 The following areas form the basis of consideration of the committee's work programme.

4.2 Audit Committee Work

A significant proportion of the committee’s time will be dedicated to undertaking its audit responsibilities. This includes such actions as reviewing the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. This work has been scheduled into the work programme as attached and will be added to as necessary at appropriate times throughout the year.

4.3 Monitoring Previous Reviews

Monitor any previous work of the Select Committee to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

4.4 Ad Hoc scrutiny

PAASC can commission one-off scrutiny reports into any subject within the Committee’s remit. If Members feel that there is an issue which falls within the remit of the committee that warrants such attention, please notify the Democratic Services Officer responsible for the committee or alternatively raise the matter(s) at meetings so that arrangements can be made to commission reports for presentation at subsequent meetings.

4.5 In-Depth review

All select committees should they choose to do so can undertake in depth reviews into any matter within the remit of the committee, and make recommendations to relevant decision makers in accordance with the Council’s Scheme of Delegation.

4.6 When deciding on a topic to review, the PAASC should be mindful of the criteria that make for a good scrutiny subject matter:

- Fall within the Committee’s remit
- Potential impact for significant section(s) of the local community
- Matter of general public concern
- Within the Council and its partners’ power to change or influence
- Key deliverable of a strategic and/or partnership plan
- Key performance area where the Council needs to improve
- Legislative requirement
- Corporate priority
4.7 Call-in

Call-in is the process by which decisions of the Cabinet can be challenged before implementation by non-Cabinet Members by referral to scrutiny for further consideration. In the event that a Cabinet decision is called-in Members should be prepared to accommodate the call-in into the PAASC work programme.

There were no call-in reports in the year 2015/16.

*Part B, Article 5A of the Council’s Constitution outlines the responsibility scrutiny has for managing the Call-in process.*

4.9 Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

CCfA provides ward councillors with a way to take up local issues on behalf of the community. However, they are intended to be used only as a last resort, i.e. when a local issue remains unresolved despite having already exhausted all other avenues in trying to reach a resolution.

*Part B, article 5B of the Council’s constitution outlines the responsibility scrutiny has for managing Councillor Calls for Action.*

4.10 Petitions

Considering petitions in accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme which is available on the Council’s web site.

In March 2015 the Committee considered a petition calling on the Council to reverse its decision to convert the Civic Centre into a school. The matter was deferred pending the submission of further information and a request to Cabinet for funding to meet the cost of an independent external evaluation to be carried out of the costs of each option including those not originally shortlisted, together with a request for a range of further information and statistics. Following Cabinet’s decision in April 2016, a report has been presented to this meeting on the petition and changed circumstances as the Civic Centre is planned to be utilised as a wider educational facility within the community as well as retaining parts of the building for civic use and council meetings.

4.11 Budget Scrutiny

At this stage it is not clear how budget scrutiny will be conducted in 2016/17 as it is linked to the wider Ambition 2020

4.12 Monitoring Performance

A report on performance against the Corporate Delivery plan is scheduled to be presented on an annual basis.
5. **Dates of Formal PAASC Meetings and timings**

5.1 The scheduled dates for PAASC meetings in 2016/17 are as follows:

- Wednesday 29 June
- Monday 25 July
- Wednesday 21 September
- Wednesday 7 December
- Wednesday 1 February 2017
- Wednesday 5 April

5.2 The dates take into account a number of factors including statutory deadlines for a range of audit matters including reports from KPMG, the Council’s External Auditors. It also has regard to the summer and winter holiday periods and concludes in March.

5.3 Although the meetings dates for the PAASC are set down in the Council calendar they can be amended with reasonable notice. Moving meetings is however not advisable as re-scheduling inevitably results in clashes with other Member meetings.

5.4 All formal meetings are scheduled at Barking Town Hall which reflects the pending move of meetings owing to the closure of the Civic Centre and the potential for future meetings to be webcast. Committee Room 2 at the Town Hall has been booked for 2016/17 which has recording facilities.

5.5 The Select Committee is asked to agree the start time of meetings for the 2016/17 municipal year.

6. **Implications**

- **Financial**
  
  There are no financial implications directly associated with this report.

- **Legal**
  
  These are no legal implications directly associated with this report.

**Appendix A- Proposed work programme 2016/17**