

Slough Borough Council

Report To: Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

Date: 30 July 2024

Subject: Forward Work Programme of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee

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Ward(s): All

Exempt: No

Appendices:

Appendix A: Developing the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024/25: Report to Members and Officers in advance of work programming.

Appendix B: Pre-decision Scrutiny of strategies, policies, new services, outsourcing of services and service improvement. (Guidance for executive directors, heads of service and scrutiny councillors)

Appendix C: Selecting Topics for Scrutiny (a guide for scrutiny councillors)

Appendix D: Draft Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out a draft Work Programme for the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC). The report explains how Members and officers have shaped the draft work programme.
- 1.2 CISC Members are invited to agree it as a starting point, noting that it will continue to change as the year gets underway.

Recommendation:

- a. **That the Work Programme at Appendix D be agreed, subject to any amendments agreed by the committee.**

Commissioner Review

This is an appropriate programme focussing on key issues that affect the council's recovery and the concerns of residents. With limited resources it is always difficult to prioritise but the recommendations strike a good balance of topics. The next challenge for the committee will be to use their limited time wisely to ensure that they are able to draw out the key issues in each area."

2. Report

Best Practice for Work Programming

- 2.1 A strong and effective work programme underpins the work and approach of Scrutiny. Thought and time has to be given to developing a work programme that reflects the issues important to the local population but also gives provides times and space for horizon scanning on big, long-term, cross-cutting issues and trends.
- 2.2 The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) is invited to review and agree the work programme presented in Appendix D, whilst noting that it is a living document and is intended to continue to evolve in response to events over the course of the period covered. In the usual course of things, it will also be fully refreshed after each Annual Council and this is the first of those full refreshes in this four-year municipal cycle.
- 2.3 Appendix A sets out the approach to work programming taken in May and early June 2024. This approach was backed up by guidance on early pre-decision scrutiny proposals (Appendix B) and Guidance on prioritisation (Appendix C) which had been produced during the prior year based on best practice and agreed by the committee.
- 2.4 The approach also reflects recommendations arising from the [CfGS review which was reported to CISC in April and Full Council in May](#).
- 2.5 In Slough, the role of the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee has been very clearly defined, as part of the Council's response to the [improvement directions it has received from the Secretary of State](#). The [terms of reference of this committee](#), which were agreed at the Council's Annual Meeting in May 2023 and noted by this committee in June 2023, state:

"The Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee shall:

- (i) Monitor and drive improvement against any Directions by the Secretary of State and other external or internal inspections, reviews, performance information at their own discretion.
- (ii) Monitor and drive progress of major corporate improvement initiatives.
- (iii) Scrutinise and contribute to the council's budget-setting cycle and monitor the council's financial recovery
- (iv) Scrutinise proposals for, and delivery of, major savings initiatives, including their impact on partners and residents."

- 2.6 The latest action plan for the continued improvement of the scrutiny function was endorsed by Full Council in May 2024, and this work programme is designed in step with that plan.

How Topics Were Identified

- 2.7 The following process has been followed to arrive at a draft work programme for the coming year:
 - The outgoing committee gave consideration to future topics in their Annual Report to Council;
 - A public call for scrutiny items was put out via Citizen Space and publicised by/with councillors;

- Several rounds of idea generation by Cabinet and senior officers via CLT meetings, with topics submitted in a standardised format;
- Scrutiny training session re: work programming 21 May 2024;
- Scrutiny/CLT 'market stalls' event on 5 June 2024; and
- Scrutiny committee prioritisation workshop immediately following the 'market stall' event on 5 June.

2.8 Members had already identified during the prior year their approach to several main strands of their work over the coming year, all of which fit with the committee's focused terms of reference. Each of these is expected to generate additional priority items through the course of the year, so space and flexibility have been left in the work programme to allow for these new areas of focused work:

2.8.1 **Budget setting process and monitoring the council's financial recovery** – the committee intends to set up a Task and Finish group, to last longer than the usual T&F process ie most of the year, which will monitor delivery against savings targets (to identify potential in-year issues) and take part in the budget setting process

2.8.2 **The Council's transformation (improvement and recovery) journey** – the committee has prioritised topics below which it feels comprise major aspects of the council's improvement and recovery journey, and will monitor the council's corporate transformation process via quarterly updates for further items arising as the council's plans (such as its 'target operating model') become clearer. The committee has left room in its work programme for issues arising to be added to its agendas through the year on a prioritisation basis, since this is currently a period of significant change in the council's approach to transformation and the committee needs to be able to be responsive to this as it develops.

2.8.3 **The improvement and recovery of Slough's Children's Services** - this is recognised as a priority issue which is subject to a separate long-running government intervention; a T&F is already underway at the beginning of the year and the committee's plans for involvement in this area of work is expected to evolve during the year.

2.9 This draft work programme does not include standard items such as the periodic consideration of the committee's updated work programme, recommendations tracker, actions log etc.

2.10 This work programme does not include the schedule of pre-meetings, briefings and all-member briefings which will be co-ordinated in the run-up to each item.

2.11 In addition to the above, CISC must give consideration to topics which address its statutory duties – the scrutiny improvement action plan already refers to the need to resolve the local/regional question of joint health scrutiny, for example.

2.12 The committee was reminded at various key points of the advice from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in their recent review:

“The committee and its Chair will need to be wary of being swayed by issues which are arising as areas of concern amongst councillors, even if they are affecting multiple wards, and maintain a rigorous process of selection for scrutiny work programmes and agendas. The committee needs to accept that in the short term its focus must be on recovery and transformation even if this is to the exclusion of other issues. The committee might wish to consider how it approximately divides its time,

perhaps setting allocations such as 40% financial recovery, 40% transformation 20% for the wider issues regarding policy change or pan-borough issues.”

Shortlisting and Creating the Work Programme

2.13 At the CLT/CISC workshop on 5 June the main shortlisted items were investigated by individual members through one-to-one conversations with individual CLT members, with reference to the written material provided on a standard format by the councillors, officers or public who had suggested each item. This was immediately followed by a sifting and prioritisation session, in the form of an informed debate and collective scoring exercise. The main topics arising out of this process are shown below, with the scoring applied by the committee. Some similar topics were combined by the committee, and the lowest scoring do not appear on the list.

(scores out of 100 - max total score: 500)						
Top Topics proposed by Members / Officers / Public	APPROPRIATENESS FOR CISC			PRIORITY		SCORE
	Validity of issue for scrutiny (thinking about borough-wide impact or inequality of service)	The degree to which there is sufficient Evidence to proceed at this stage	Potential Impact of Scrutiny	Urgency	Fit: Relevance to improvement and recovery and or corporate priorities	
Productivity Planning	Automatic inclusion - Improvement & Recovery					500
DLUHC Commissioners Reports	Automatic inclusion - Improvement & Recovery					500
Children’s Commissioners’ and OfSTED Reports	Automatic inclusion - Improvement & Recovery					500
PCC public session	Automatic inclusion - statutory duty					500
Health topic TBC - noting developments with Joint HOSC	Automatic inclusion - statutory duty					500
SCF - Journey To Good	Automatic inclusion - T&F already launched					500
Target Operating Model	90	40	80	90	100	400
SCF Business and Improvement plan	85	90	50	80	90	395
NEETS (possible T&F option, may suit an event)	85	90	90	60	70	395
Safer Slough Partnership	90	90	90	80	30	380
Sewage discharge in waterways	100	90	75	70	40	375
Community Asset Strategy - influencing HOW this is done, when it is done (T&F preferred)	90	10	85	80	75	340
Climate Change / Carbon footprint / 3 Rs / Travel	30	75	10	20	20	155

2.14 The scoring was necessarily unscientific, but was a useful exercise which has directly informed the work programme presented at Appendix D.

2.15 Review and refresh of the forward plan needs to take place throughout the year to maintain a strategic focus, and it can be expected that issues will arise throughout the year, from budget management and briefings for example. The work programme will therefore be updated continuously through the year, led primarily by the Chair and Vice Chair with input periodically from the Committee.

- 2.16 CISC's time is limited, and Members have been advised to prioritise ruthlessly. An issue not appearing on the work programme does not mean that CISC members feel it is unimportant. It is likely that some issues can be pursued by Members through other routes outside of the Committee's work programme. A number of briefings are already included in the work programme at appendix D, outside of committee time.
- 2.17 A critical consideration of the committee was to ensure that the recovery journey of Slough's Children's Services was suitably prioritised amongst the work of the committee in the coming year, and a Task and Finish group on this topic has been prioritised first; it has already launched.
- 2.18 These topics have been included in the draft work programme at Appendix D, either as whole-committee items or as Task and Finish Group proposals. Members are invited to consider whether this satisfactorily represents their wishes.

3. Implications of the Recommendations

Financial implications

- 3.1 The work proposed is expected to be delivered within the council's available financial and resource envelope for scrutiny. If additional scrutiny work arises, the expectation is that other topics will need to be de-prioritised in order to meet this requirement.

Legal implications

- 3.2 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new political management system for local councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. To provide a counterweight for this, the Act also introduced the concept of 'overview and scrutiny' – sometimes referred to simply as 'scrutiny' – whereby every council with an executive management structure is required to have an overview and scrutiny committee. This enables the rest of the council to scrutinise the executive by investigating their decisions and policies, and issuing reports and recommendations where any shortcomings are identified.

Risk management implications

- 3.3 Overview and Scrutiny, commonly referred to as Scrutiny, is a statutory function and is currently subject to government direction in Slough. Failure to develop and approve a Forward Work Programme for Corporate Improvement and Scrutiny (the main and only Overview and Scrutiny Committee) would increase the risk of challenge and criticism.

Equality implications

- 3.4 The FWP covering report includes reference to the CfGS scrutiny principles, which together with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and Nolan's principles, includes provisions that are linked to the Equality Act duties, including, inter alia, a requirement to maintaining integrity, respect the rule of law, ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

4. Appendices

Appendix A: Developing the CISC forward Plan 2024/25: Report to Members and Officers in advance of work programming

Appendix B: Pre-decision Scrutiny of strategies, policies, new services, outsourcing of services and service improvement. GUIDANCE FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS, HEADS OF SERVICE AND SCRUTINY COUNCILLORS.

Appendix C: SELECTING TOPICS FOR SCRUTINY - A GUIDE FOR SCRUTINY COUNCILLORS

Appendix D: Draft Forward Plan 2024-25

Appendix A:

Developing the CISC forward Plan 2024/25: Information for officers and Members.

1. Introduction

The scrutiny forward plan needs to be extended into the coming year. There may be a new chair and new committee members after 16 May.

The Draft Forward Plan will be shaped over the course of three committee workshops in end of May/June. The forward plan will then be reviewed by commissioners before being formally approved by CISC at their first meeting 25 June 2024.

This note is to brief officers and CISC Members, setting out the tasks in each workshop and who should attend.

2. Overview

There will be three main categories of scrutiny work/proposals to build into the forward plan for 2024-25 as follows:

1. Scrutiny topics identified by residents and members, drawn from various sources including members ward experience, surgeries case work etc (which may or may not come under the following two headings); to include update requests arising from 2023/24;
2. Scrutiny of the MTFs and budget setting for 2025-26 and in year financial management and performance management; and
3. Scrutiny of significant strategy, policy and service developments (including those relating to the commissioners' directions and best value requirements) proposed by Officers based on their plans for the coming year.

Detail of these three categories of scrutiny work, follows in **Section 3**, including aims and objectives in relation,

The committee's terms of reference, and the recent advice by the CfGS, points members towards categories 2 and 3, but they will be keen also to cover point 1.

There are 3 in-person workshops booked in the Council Chamber:

- a. 21 May: 18:30 - 20:00
- b. 28 May 18:30 – 20:30
- c. 5 June: 18:30 – 20:30

Table 1 below sets out the objectives for each workshop in relation to each Category

Scrutiny Category Workshop	1. Member/resident proposals	2. Budget management and planning	3. Planned strategy development / service improvement work (inc. that previously identified as recovery work)
a. 21 May Attending: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members • Scrutiny officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General overview of sessions a.-b. agreeing key principles, practical implications and limitations. • Group work to review proposals and agree those to be taken forward to sessions b. and c. 		
b. 28 May Attending: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members • Scrutiny officers • All EDs; and • HoS submitting pre-decision proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify links with work streams arising in 2 and proposals in 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and agree with Finance team a pragmatic adaptation of the CIPFA guidelines that delivers more impactful budget scrutiny with least impact on officers. • Discuss same for scrutiny of in-year budget management and performance management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is now a consensus that there is little to differentiate work related to commissioners' directions from other significant strategy development and service improvement. • Advance email to directors with Guidelines and template requesting submission of proposals for CLT on 9 May prior to final submission by 20 May regarding pre-decision scrutiny of strategy/service development/improvement • Relevant directors to elaborate and 'promote' their proposals and allow members to prioritise, agree most appropriate scrutiny method and timings • Populate CISC agendas accordingly.
c. 5 June Attending <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members • Scrutiny officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortlist of remaining proposals for members to prioritise, add to forward plan informed by EDs and relevant heads • Timetable updates and for information reports as per trackers • Discuss and Identify briefings and training needs and build into year • Final draft forward plan for 25 June approval 		

3. Detail of each Category

3.1 Category 1: Residents'/Members' proposals.

Included in this Category:

- Proposals from Members following a call for submission of topics by 20 May following the [Topic Proposal guidelines](#) adopted in Dec 2023.
- Proposals from Residents arising from an invitation on CitizenSpace to submit borough-wide issues concerning them, requesting information similar to that provided by members
- Topics on the 2023/24 Reserve list
- Complaints data – 'top ten'
- Casework stats – 'top ten'

What's the aim in relation to this Category?

To ensure that scrutiny's work programme takes account of wider evidence reflecting issues of concern to residents

Objectives:

Members invited to identify credible proposals for scrutiny topics following established [Topic Proposal guidelines](#) before the whole process gets underway, In this way links can be identified to work streams and topic proposals arising under Category 2 (Budget/finance) and 3 (transformation/pre-decision|), so avoiding duplication of effort.

Statutory scrutiny topics will also be fed in at this stage, for members to feed into when and how these are covered in the year.

Members will also be invited to propose and prioritise topics and timings of training / all member briefings programme for 2024-25

3.2 Category 2: Budget planning, performance and financial management

Included in this category:

- [CiPFA guidelines](#);
- Budget development stages, milestones, nature of interim reports; and
- Information that will allow timely scrutiny of under-over-spends, delivery of savings, income targets, tracking of outputs and achievement of outcomes.

What's the aim?

To ensure that CISC is given the opportunity to carry out better financial scrutiny, propose real-time improvements to the budget and MTFs development and in year budget management and feed into subsequent annual cycles.

Objectives:

Members to set up a 9-12 month Finance T&F Panel

The proposal is that this work to be undertaken by a small Scrutiny Panel (3-4 members), that is flexible and focussed, starting end May through to end November 2024 for Budget planning and Sept through to March 2025 for Budget and Performance Management.

Develop a workplan based on CIPFA guidelines that reflects the capacity and approach for budget development and management in Slough and that addresses issues such as exception reporting, more granularity on expected and actual spend and savings

Determine finance tie in with corporate performance indicators and progress on relevant delivery workstreams

How does it feed into the work of the committee?

Standing item on CISC agendas for Panel to update CISC on the Task and Finish Panel's activity and impact and to raise any topics or recommendations arising for the main committee to consider.

What Outputs and outcomes are expected?

- Councillors will have a greater understanding of the council's financial arrangements and situation;
- Scrutiny of monitoring management and mitigation of variance for achievement of in-year savings and overspend.
- Recommendations via CISC to assist with the development of the budget and MTFS and final review of draft Budget and MTFS
- Monitor the council's financial position in-year (and the MTFS) via the finance information being submitted to cabinet,
- Recommendations to CISC for topics/areas arising which need closer attention by the main committee; and
- At the end, make recommendations about how best to do financial scrutiny in future years.

3.3 Category 3: Requests for pre-decision Scrutiny of significant Strategy development and Service improvement work.

Included in this category

- Proposals from Directors regarding pre-decision scrutiny opportunities arising from planned strategy and policy development and new/improved services

What's the aim?

To provide the committee the opportunity to undertake higher value scrutiny via committee items or T&F groups to:

- Add value through early involvement pre-decision scrutiny (rather than final oversight pre-decision scrutiny currently the norm) in areas of strategy development/service improvement:

- Get traction and the opportunity to add value by overall monitoring and involvement in work relevant to commissioners' directions and best value.

What happens at the planning workshop?

CLT plus other key senior managers attend to present and discuss scrutiny potential:

- For transformation work;
- For other/new policy development topics.

How does it feed into the work of the committee?

A series of topics scheduled across the year for main committee work and a prioritised list of T&F topics.

What outputs and outcomes are expected?

On transformation:

- A greater understanding amongst councillors of the council's transformation process and how this supports the council's recovery including becoming financially sustainable
- Make recommendations via CISC to assist with the development of the TOM and other key aspects of the transformation programme
- Monitor the council's recovery progress via the information being submitted to cabinet, to identify areas which need closer attention by the committee; and
- At the end of the year, make recommendations about how best to do pre-decision scrutiny in future years
- Recommendations fed into final proposals to cabinet on key strategy development and service improvement.

Appendix B
Slough
Corporate
Improvement
Scrutiny
Committee:



Pre-decision Scrutiny of strategies, policies, new services, outsourcing of services and service improvement.
GUIDANCE FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS,
HEADS OF SERVICE AND SCRUTINY
COUNCILLORS.

April 2024

Michael Edley

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1.0 Introduction

This guidance¹ is primarily for officers leading the development of strategies, policies, and services, but also offers CISC members a summary of how proposals for pre-decision scrutiny will be generated and then, if adopted, some key factors to be considered in scoping of the work.

Pre-decision scrutiny is where an authority's overview and scrutiny function looks at a planned decision before it is made by the executive.

This can happen in two ways:

- Shortly before a decision is made by the executive, usually two or three weeks before, (the traditional approach in Slough 2023/24)

or more preferably;

- looking at the development of a proposal as it takes shape several months before it goes to the executive. This approach offers more opportunity for Scrutiny to add value (providing residents' perspectives at an early stage for example) and is the focus of this guidance.

Looking at decisions, well before they are made, provides an important means to influence those decisions, and to improve them. It gives scrutineers an opportunity to challenge assumptions that may have been made as the proposal is developed; it also gives them the chance to consider how decision-makers have considered what risks might arise from the implementation of the decision, and how those risks might be mitigated.

Whatever the timing, the goal is to ensure that scrutiny is able to truly influence a decision and **not** just act as a rubber stamp or to carry out work that does not feed into the decisions itself in an especially effective way.

2. Pre-decision scrutiny: Some time before the decision.

Ensuring early engagement between the executive and scrutiny especially regarding the former's future work programme should inform the scrutiny work programme. For example, an executive director might advise the scrutiny chair that the authority plans, in nine months, to agree a new housing strategy or review a partnership or contract arrangement which is due for renewal in the near future.

A director may already have a view as to the added value being sought from Scrutiny or this can take shape in discussion between scrutiny members and service officers,

Because of limited resources on both sides, Directors and Members will probably seek to focus on those aspects where there is alignment between the relevance of members' experience and insights and specific areas that are deemed critical to a strategy/Policy/new service being effective.

¹ Elements of this guidance are taken from Government, CfGS and LGA Guidance as well as based on personal experience.

Members can then plan their work programme to look at some or all of the key elements of that strategy as they are being considered – key pieces of evidence (such as proposed housing targets), emerging priorities (dealing with shortages in social housing), financial implications (budgets to be spent on maintenance) and the extent to which the authority is engaging with key stakeholders (E,G, by speaking to tenants and leaseholders).

It is important to ensure that this work aligns with the work being undertaken by the executive in developing the final decision. This is the only way of being sure that the work will ultimately have value. Figure1, sets out the key stages in policy and strategy development and related activities where Scrutiny may add value.

It may also make sense to reserve pre-decision scrutiny to major decisions and significant strategic matters with a potentially high resident impact/interest. It will also require a commitment to openness by the executive.

1.1. Benefits from adopting this form of scrutiny.

There are a number of benefits from involving scrutiny early in the decision-making process as follows:

- Challenging assumptions and making evidence-gathering more robust. Scrutiny could gather its own evidence to contribute towards the decision-making process, and can triangulate evidence being used by the council against that held by other partners and stakeholders.
- Scrutiny can consult those directly affected by the decision impartially and independently.
- Scrutiny can look at projections relating to the impact of the decision – financial, social, economic, environmental – and consider whether those projections and assumptions are justified.
- Developing realistic plans and targets. Several months before a decision is made, the ultimate outcome – in terms of substantive measurable targets – will probably not have been finalised. Scrutiny can help to impartially develop challenging but realistic targets that will be focused on outcomes rather the outputs, and which will be more difficult to “game”.
- Securing ownership and buy-in to the final decision. Engaging with scrutiny will help the executive to understand the expectations of the wider group of elected members and, by extension, the public (see below).
This should ensure that the final decision takes account of such expectations and may reduce the risk of call-in or political disagreements which will hinder the decision’s ultimate implementation.
- Engaging with and satisfying the public. Around the country scrutiny has, in recent years, significantly enhanced its capabilities in engaging with the public. This expertise can be brought to bear in helping the council to understand local needs, with this engagement being led by councillors who approach this discussion with no vested interest or stake in the final decision.
- The amount of time devoted to the work will depend on the extent to which it is considered to be a priority by scrutiny councillors. The usual principles around adding value, ensuring impact, prioritisation and work programming will apply.
- In all other respects, pre-decision scrutiny should not differ from other kinds of scrutiny investigations.

1.1. Approach options for Pre-decision Scrutiny

Pre-decision scrutiny also allows more scope for adopting different approaches than the traditional agenda item report or a standard task and finish group such as:

- 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. This can be condensed into a single day through a conference style approach (needs lots of upfront work);
- 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; and
- A mix of the above.

More informal approaches, such as those above may be less daunting and can be more flexible to accommodate the engagement preferences of residents or ‘community advocates’ than the calling of witnesses for participation in a formal committee meeting.

3.0 Submitting Proposals

Officers (typically Directors and Heads of Service) are welcome to submit proposals at any time in the municipal year, although a new annual forward plan is developed in a series of workshops in May/June each year. This is probably the best time for a proposal to be considered by CISC Members.

An outline of the May/June workshops can be found here: [Plan for development of the CISC forward Plan 2024 Draft.docx](#)

Table 1 below should be completed by the relevant HoS/project officer. This should be emailed to Michael.edley@slough.gov.uk by the date specified in the development plan above. Officers will be required to attend the 2nd of the three workshops to elaborate on and promote their proposals, following which members will prioritise those submitted for inclusion in the forward plan alongside Finance scrutiny work, scrutiny of the improvement plan and resident/member proposed topics.

Key to CISC Members' considerations will be timing, especially in relation to other scrutiny work, and proposals that offer a clear steer as to where the focus of the work should be directed (**Fig 1**) and how this would add value to the development of the strategy/service.

Once a proposal has been adopted, the Scrutiny officer will provide a template to scope the work in advance of the launch of the project. This will be the subject of a scoping meeting with the chair 6-8 weeks before the launch of the work (approved at a formal CISC)

4.0 Final Thoughts

There will need to be some form of updating or reporting to CISC to ensure that a record can be made of the impact of this type of scrutiny, where members' contributions / interventions will typically be adopted by officers and incorporated into the final proposal put before cabinet. One would be more likely to expect the scrutiny committee to receive a final draft **for information** before it goes to Cabinet for example. The final draft should acknowledge and detail the positive interventions of members.

Should members feel strongly that credible suggestions have not been adopted, then they may decide to make recommendations to Cabinet when the final report is submitted for decision by them.

Table 1: Scoping of Pre-decision Scrutiny

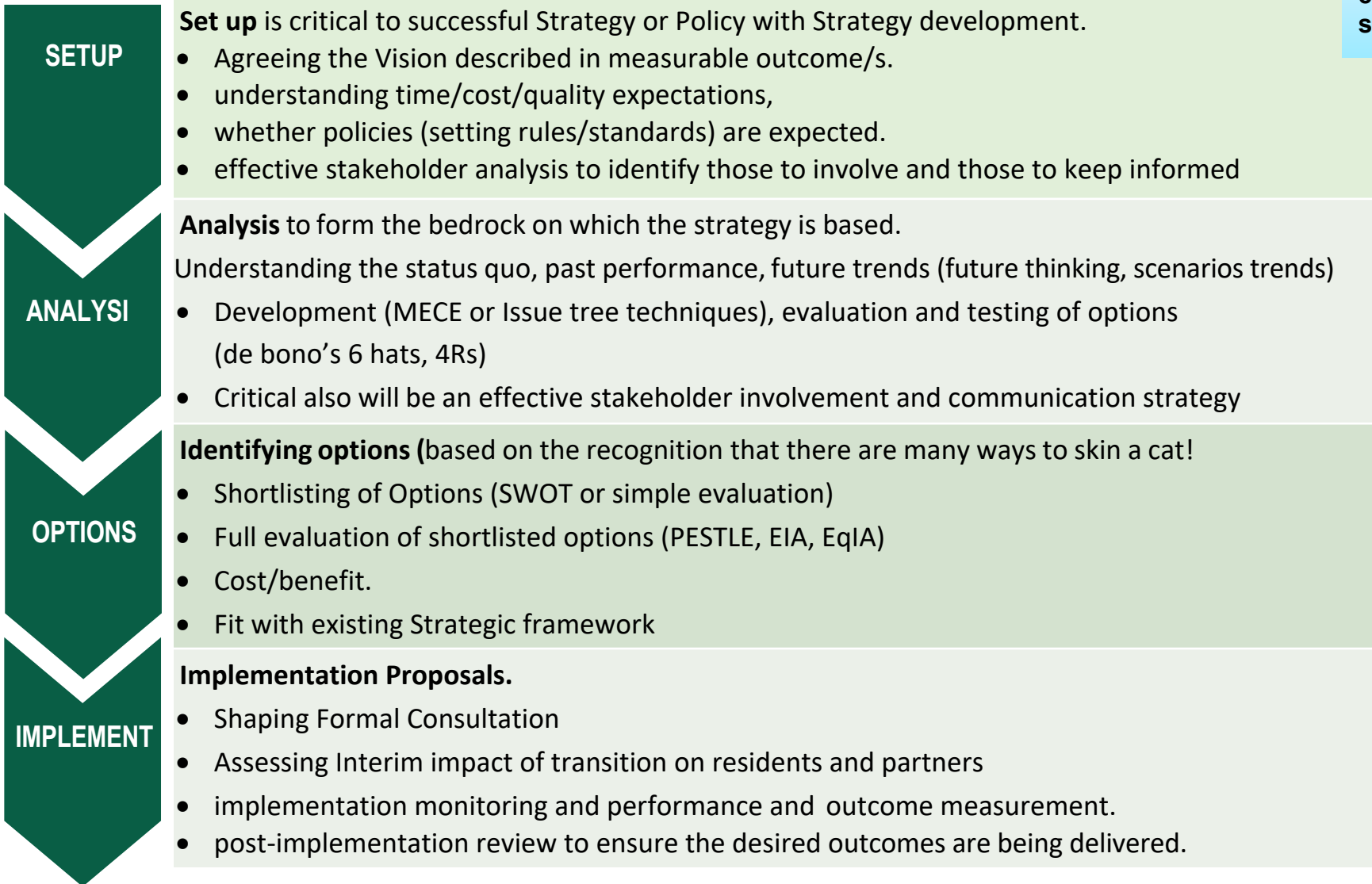
TOPIC		Updated	22 July 2024
Scrutiny Officer	Michael Edley	When will work start	
Strategic Lead		When will you put before cabinet?	
Project Lead		KEY STAKEHOLDERS	
Exec Director			
Stages in strategy / policy / service development (Ref Fig 1)		Activities where you believe Scrutiny could add Value	Notes
SETUP			
ANALYSIS			
OPTIONS DEVELOPMENT, SHORTLISTING, EVALUATION & SELECTION			
IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING, RISK MANAGEMENT, PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND TARGETS			
OVERALL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT		Stages where you believe Scrutiny could add value	

Figure 1. Key stages and activities in the Development of strategies and Policies

Key stages

Key Activities where Scrutiny might add value:

Scrutiny could act as the honest broker in all/elements of engagement with some/all stakeholders.



Engagement with stakeholders

APPENDIX C

**Slough
Corporate
Improvement
Scrutiny
Committee:**



SELECTING TOPICS FOR SCRUTINY

A GUIDE FOR SCRUTINY COUNCILLORS

November 2023

Michael Edley

This guide has been designed to support Scrutiny Councillors in Slough as they develop the scrutiny forward work plan. It relates specifically to scrutiny of issues/matters of concern in the borough, often related to the underperformance or poor delivery of public services

This does not directly apply to the scrutiny of strategy and policy development work, although many of the principles would also apply. A separate guide, written mainly for officers but relevant to Members, can be found here:

[Guidance for scoping pre-decision scrutiny topics](#)

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1. 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;
- **Hold to account** the Leader, Leadership Team and senior Council officers for their decisions;
- **Contribute** to the development of policy and the improvement of services by investigating issues of local concern;
- **Review** Council policy, the way policies are implemented and their impact on local people; and
- **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 scrutiny².

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 May -June each year. The initial draft will draw upon: Mapping legislative and constitutional requirements; Horizon scanning by directorates (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.

² 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 concern⁴
- 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 borough⁵ 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.

³ 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

⁴ CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/

⁵ 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 Programming⁶

“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’.⁷

3.3 Criteria for selection of topics (Fig 1.)⁸

“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”.

⁶ CfGS, Good Scrutiny Guide, pg24 www.CfGS.org.uk/the-good-scrutiny-guide/

⁷ MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), paragraph 11, pg.8

⁸ MHC&LG, [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#), Paragraph 57, pg.23

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.

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?⁹
- 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

⁹ 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.

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.

Committees can draw upon a variety of methods and tools, in designing 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. This can be condensed into a single day through a conference style approach (needs lots of upfront work);
- A series of single-issue 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; or
- A mix of the above.

Key to producing good recommendations¹⁰ is that scrutiny uses these techniques to involve residents, councillors, officers and stakeholders, to learn from their expertise, experiences and perspectives. This then becomes the evidence base to back up recommendations.

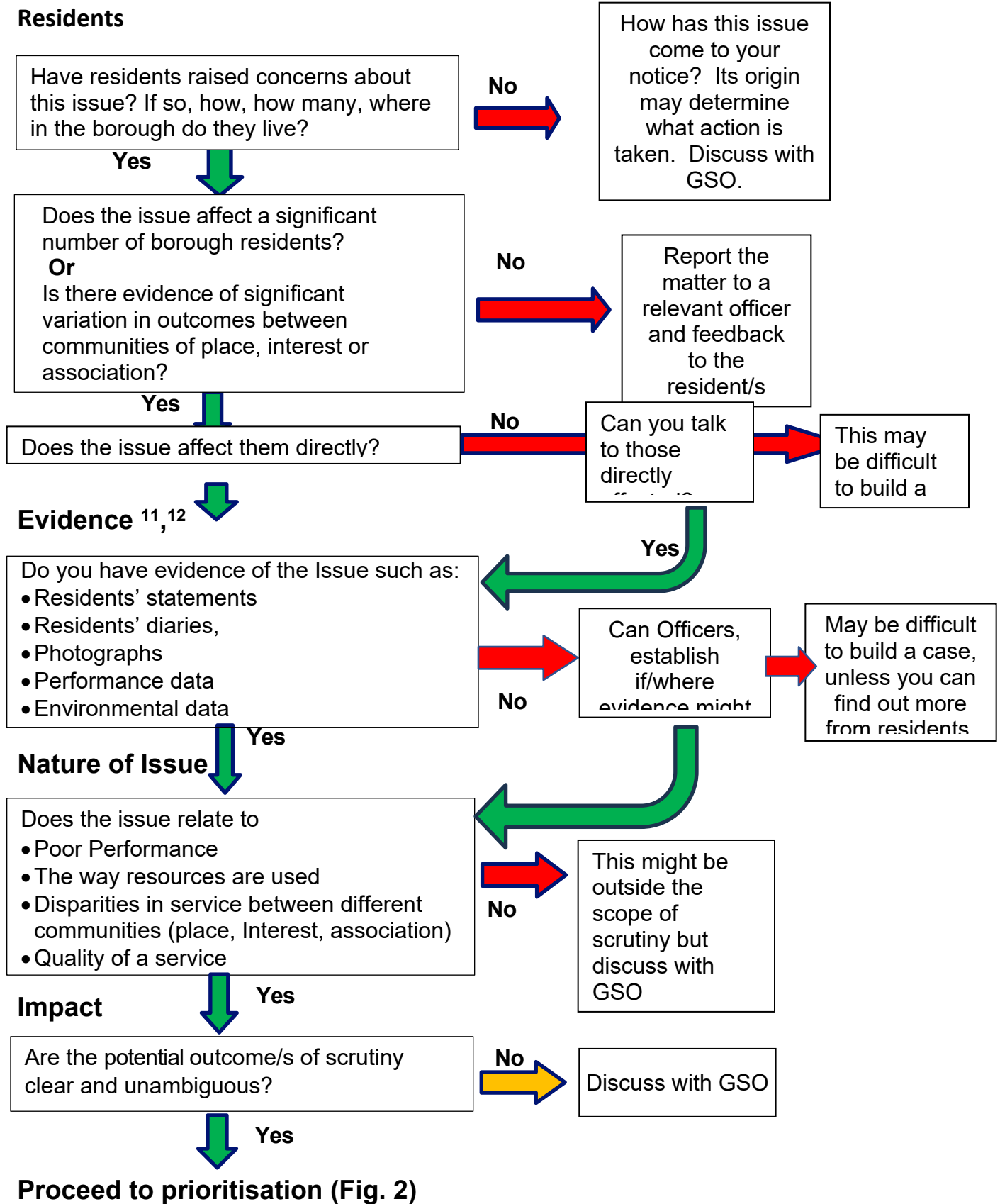
In selecting their approach to scrutiny, members will need to draw upon the skills, knowledge, and experience of officers in relevant departments as well as the Governance and Scrutiny Officer. It will be important to discuss, with these officers, their current and future work pressures in coming to 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

¹⁰ [Guidance Making Good CISC Recommendations.docx](#)

- Requiring the Leadership Team to explain their decisions and, in doing so, helping them improve their actions.

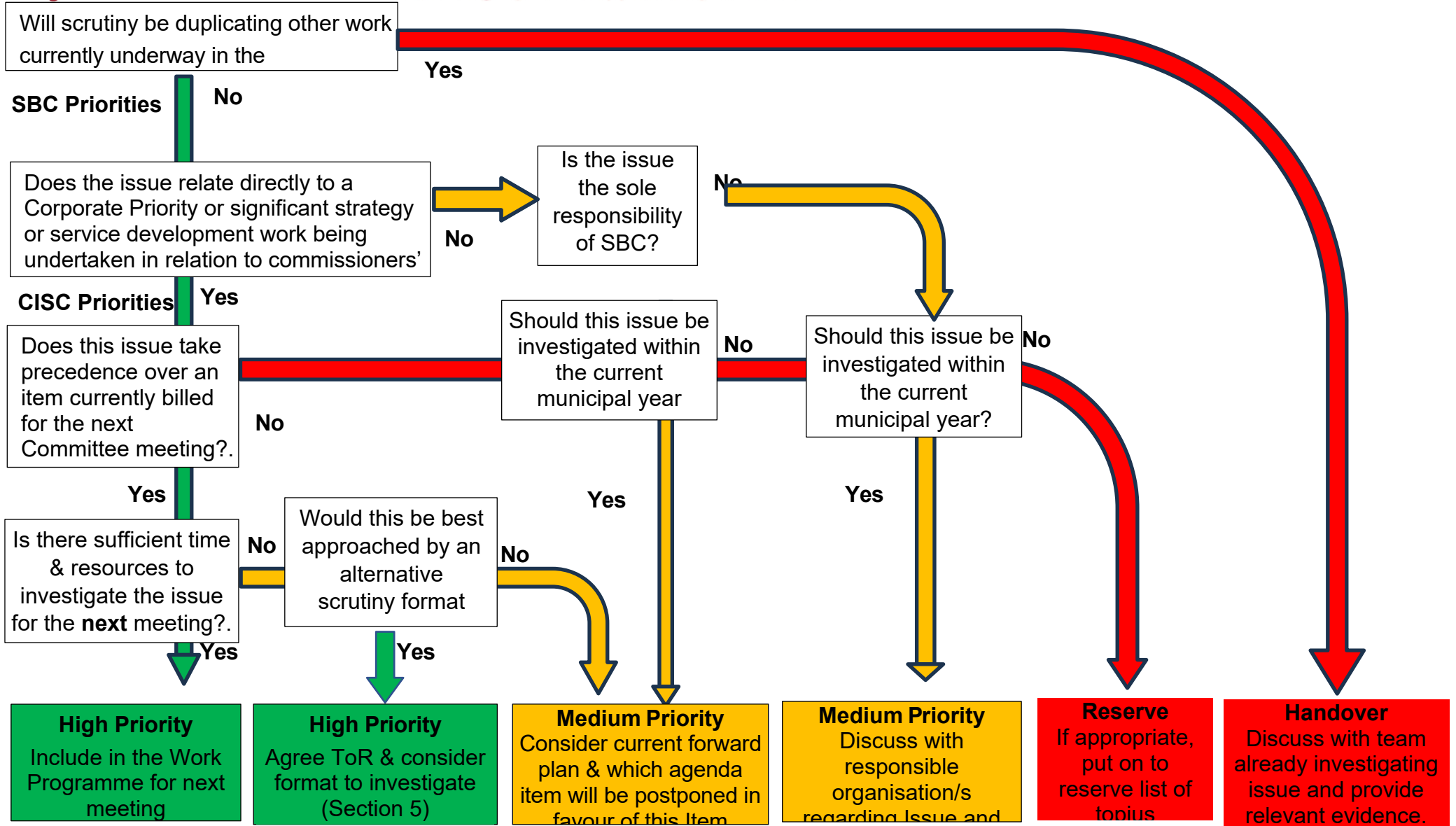


¹¹ [Data Sources for Slough](#)

¹² [Guidance on pre-decision scrutiny](#)

Figure 2. PRIORITISATION

Growing a place of opportunity and ambition



Appendix A PROPOSAL FOR SCRUTINY

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