



Report title: Horizon Scanning

To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date: 14th December 2020

Public report: Yes

Lead Member: Cllr Lorna Dupre – Chair Overview and Scrutiny

From: Anne Gardiner
Scrutiny Officer

Recommendations:

1. Consider the items for review to commence within the next twelve months taking into account the current Forward Plan of the Combined Authority and the work programme of the committee.
2. If agreement on (1) above to prioritise these items and agree the timetable for initial meetings and reviews; and to consider scoping these reviews.

Voting arrangements:

Any questions that are to be decided by the Committee are to be decided by a simple majority of the Members present and voting. If a vote is tied on any matter it is deemed not to have been carried.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Committee are asked to consider the items for review to commence within the next six - twelve months taking into account the current Forward Plan of the Combined Authority and the work programme of the committee respectively.
- 1.2 The Committee are asked to prioritise these items and agree the timetable for initial meetings and reviews; and to consider scoping these reviews.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Combined Authority has established an Overview & Scrutiny committee to comply with the requirements of the Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.

It comprises 14 elected councillors, two from each of the seven constituent councils, and reflects the political parties represented across the combined authority area. Its primary role is to review and scrutinise decisions of the combined authority and the Business Board.

The Committee monitors the Forward Plan of forthcoming key decisions and may call-in any of these decisions where members consider that further scrutiny and challenge is required. One request was made to call-in a Combined Authority decision in the last year but this was unable to proceed because the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 were not brought into force in time to enable a virtual meeting of the Committee to take place.

- 2.2 The Committee undertake other roles including pre-decision scrutiny where they can act as a “critical friend” to highlight key issues, and challenge policies at the developmental stage. The committee has set up two task and finish groups, one to consider the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro project and one to consider the Authority’s Bus Review.

The Mayor and Chief Executive attend meetings at least quarterly to update the committee and to answer any questions. The committee has also responded to the change in the Authority’s governance arrangements by revising its own arrangements for pre-scrutiny to allow lead members appointed by the Committee to formulate questions for the Executive Committees.

2.3 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SCRUTINY

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) identifies the four principles of good scrutiny as:

- Provide constructive “critical friend” challenge
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drive improvement in public services

The CfGS thinks that there are three further components of good scrutiny and good governance which support and reinforce these principles. These components are necessary in order for democracy at a local level to be participative; they are necessary for good scrutiny to thrive. These are:

- Accountability – an environment where responsibility for services and decisions is clear and where those holding responsibility can and are answerable for success and failure
- Transparency – the publication, proactively, of information relating to services and decisions to allow local people, and others, to hold policymakers and decision-makers to account
- Involvement – rules, principles and processes whereby a wide range of stakeholders (including elected representatives) can play active roles in holding to account and influencing and directing the development of policy.

2.4 Overview & Scrutiny Committees need to plan and manage their activities effectively in order to ensure that there is ongoing development of the overview and scrutiny function. A key tenet of making improvements is to focus upon topic selection and produce more robust work programmes to underpin improved ways of working taking a realistic account of the resources available. Ultimately Scrutiny Members want to be in the position of exerting a proactive and positive influence upon what the Combined Authority does in practice.

There is general consensus among scrutiny practitioners that topics should be carefully selected taking into account common criteria to enable objective choices to be made, and work programmes devised that reflect a committee's capacity to deliver that programme as well as officers' capacity to support it in that task.

2.5 The purpose of this agenda item is to enable the Committee to consider potential items for its work programme moving forward throughout this municipal year. Resources necessitate that a limited number of in depth reviews be undertaken, i.e. less than four per annum, but that there is scope for briefings, fact finding visits, and limited round table discussions to ensure that Members are well informed about what is happening across the services covered by the Committee's terms of reference as outlined in the Combined Authority Constitution.

2.6 WORK PROGRAMME

The current work programme, carried-forward from 2020/21, is included later in the agenda and the Committee should take this into account when formulating a programme for this municipal year.

Summary reports from the three Directorates within the Combined Authority, Delivery and Strategy, Housing and Communities and Business and Skills outlining key areas in the forthcoming year are supplemented to this report to enable the Committee to gain a good understanding of the issues ahead in the next 6 -12 months.

As an observation, while an agreed work programme will assist in managing committee activity, it should be recognised that unforeseen matters will arise from time to time that will affect Members' ability to achieve the goals within the work programme.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 No financial implications

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations.

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Briefing Note – Delivery and Strategy

6.2 Appendix 2 – Briefing Note – Business and Skills

6.3 Appendix 3 – Briefing Note – Housing and Communities