

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

### Setting Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme 2023/2024

18 OCTOBER 2023

#### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To invite the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider its work programme for the 2023/2024 municipal year. This report has been updated to include the prospective scrutiny topic of the electoral canvass as a prospective scrutiny topic.

#### REVIEW OF 2022/2023

2. At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 18 April 2023, a new structure for scrutiny arrangements in Middlesbrough was agreed including the decommissioning of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel. Consequently, scrutiny topics previously undertaken by the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel will now be undertaken by OSB, where appropriate.

For Members' information, relevant matters of interest considered by the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel have included:

- Council Tax Collection Processes (2018)
- Health and Safety Provision (2020)
- Boho X (2020)
- Member Communications (2021)
- Support for the Homeless (started 2023)

#### BACKGROUND

3. At the start of every municipal year, scrutiny panels discuss the topics that they would like to review during the coming year. OSB can examine topics in the same way as individual scrutiny panels. However, OSB should only review topics if:
  - They fall outside a relevant panel's remit;
  - The relevant panel has insufficient time to conduct the review and the topic is deemed to be of particular significance.
4. Work programmes are useful as they provide some structure to a scrutiny panel's activity and allow for the effective planning and preparation of work.
5. As part of the process for establishing the work programme, Democratic Services Officers gather information/views from a number of sources. Below is a list of topics which are anticipated to be of particular interest to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Members are advised that the list of possible topics is not exhaustive and that additional topics can be added and considered at the scrutiny panel meeting. Priorities from the Strategic Work Plan 2021-2024 are also listed below for information.

## Suggestions

Suggestion	Details
<b>Support for the Homeless</b>	OSB agreed to continue this review that was started in February 2023 by the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel. A Work Plan will be brought to a future meeting of OSB outlining how the review will be carried out.
<b>Electoral Registration</b>	<p>Member Suggestion:</p> <p>“In the course of the recent election campaign, I found a considerable number of houses that looked occupied, but where there was no-one on the electoral register. Also, when door knocking, I frequently found that people on the electoral register no longer lived there, and the people who did live there were not on the register. In addition, many Commonwealth and EU residents did not know their entitlements in terms of voting in our elections. Many unregistered people were also unaware that, even if they were not interested in voting, being on the electoral register affects people's credit rating and can be used as part of tenancy referencing and referencing for job applications. There is also the legal obligation to be on the list used for jury service, to support people's right to trial by their peers.</p> <p>While, no doubt, the council carries out its legal obligations, it appears that democracy and the welfare of residents might be better served if bigger and more frequent efforts were made to encourage people to register as voters where legally permitted. Practices from other local authorities could be of interest.</p> <p>I think the problem disproportionately affects the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas with high turnover of population, which tends to go with private rental properties rather than social housing and owner-occupied properties.</li> <li>• Areas with high numbers of students</li> <li>• Residents who have come from overseas and do not know their rights.</li> <li>• Young people from families where the parents do not value inclusion on the electoral register, and possibly young people leaving the care system.”</li> </ul>
<b>Cyber Security</b>	<p>Suggestion from an officer as part of a meeting of the Information Strategy group.</p> <p>The CfGS states that, “Within our research gathering process, we reviewed documents, including scrutiny committee minutes and agendas, conducted surveying, and interviewed elected members and officers. We discovered that:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• many councils had a digital strategy, which included cyber security, however</li> <li>• cyber security was not a salient issue that had been examined through scrutiny amongst most councils.</li> </ul> <p>It became apparent from interviewing that direct real-world experience of a cyber-attack has a transformative effect on councils, their members and colleagues, generating a longer-term increased interest and proclivity to undertake work on cyber security more widely. Specifically, members from such organisations advised that scrutiny could add meaningful value and bring about positive change.</p> <p>The CfGS also states, “Scrutiny committees may be dissuaded to undertake matters pertaining to cyber security as it, understandably, seems quite daunting due to the often-technical nature of the subject. However, neither members nor officers need to have detailed technical expertise in the subject. They can subject councils’ plans to challenge and take action to promote changes of behaviour on this matter within the organisation.”</p>
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### Strategic Plan Workplan 2021-24

<p><b>Priority:</b> Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour  <b>Supports the following aim(s):</b> People, Place &amp; Business  <b>Description:</b> We will tackle crime and anti-social behaviour head on, working with our partners to ensure local people feel safer.</p>
<p><b>Priority:</b> Climate Change  <b>Supports the following aim(s):</b> People, Place &amp; Business  <b>Description:</b> We will ensure our town acts to tackle climate change, promoting sustainable lifestyles.</p>
<p><b>Priority:</b> Physical Environment  <b>Supports the following aim(s):</b> People &amp; Place  <b>Description:</b> We will work closely with local communities to protect our green spaces and make sure that our roads, streets and open spaces are well-designed, clean and safe.</p>
<p><b>Priority:</b> Town Centre  <b>Supports the following aim(s):</b> People, Place &amp; Business  <b>Description:</b> We will transform our town centre, improving accessibility, revitalising unused assets, developing iconic new spaces and building more town centre homes.</p>
<p><b>Priority:</b> Quality of Service  <b>Supports the following aim(s):</b> People, Place &amp; Business  <b>Description:</b> We will ensure that we place communities at the heart of what we do, continue to deliver value for money and enhance the reputation of Middlesbrough.</p>

6. It should be noted that the suggested topics outlined above are exactly that, suggestions. The content of the scrutiny panel's work programme is entirely a decision for the panel to make. When considering the work programme, the panel is advised to select topics that will add value to the Local Authority's work.
7. In addition to undertaking the agreed work programme, scrutiny panels have also previously responded on an ad hoc basis to emerging issues - such as considering relevant new legislation, guidance or Government consultation documents. This approach occasionally results in further topics being identified for investigation or review throughout the year.
8. Overview and Scrutiny Board is also advised that, under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have a responsibility of community leadership and a power to secure the effective promotion of community wellbeing. Therefore, in addition to the scrutiny panel's generally recognised powers (of holding the Executive to account, reviewing service provision, developing policy, considering budget plans and performance and financial monitoring), panels also have the power to consider **any** matters which are not the responsibility of the Council but which affect the local authority **or** the inhabitants of its area. For example, nationally, local authorities have undertaken scrutiny work on issues such as flood defence schemes, policing matters, post office closures and rural bus services.

#### Scrutiny Work Plan Prioritisation Aid

9. Members are asked to use the aid attached at **Appendix 1** to prioritise issues where scrutiny can make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development in order to determine which topics are suitable for inclusion in its final work programme.

## **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

10. The scrutiny panel is asked to consider and determine suitable scrutiny topics for inclusion in its work programme for the 2023/2024 municipal year.
11. When considering its work programme, the scrutiny panel is asked to ensure that topics agreed for inclusion:
  - Affect a group of people living within the Middlesbrough area.
  - Relate to a service, event or issue in which the Council has a significant stake or over which the Council has an influence.
  - Are not issues which the Overview and Scrutiny Board or the Scrutiny Panels have considered during the last 12 months.
  - Do not relate to an individual service complaint; and
  - Do not relate to matters dealt with by another Council Committee, unless the issue deals with procedure.
12. It is suggested that the scrutiny panel has a mixture of working styles in its programme. This can include detailed and in-depth reviews, shorter topics, or one-off investigations.
13. Once the scrutiny panel has identified the areas of priority, support staff will draw those topics into a programme for approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

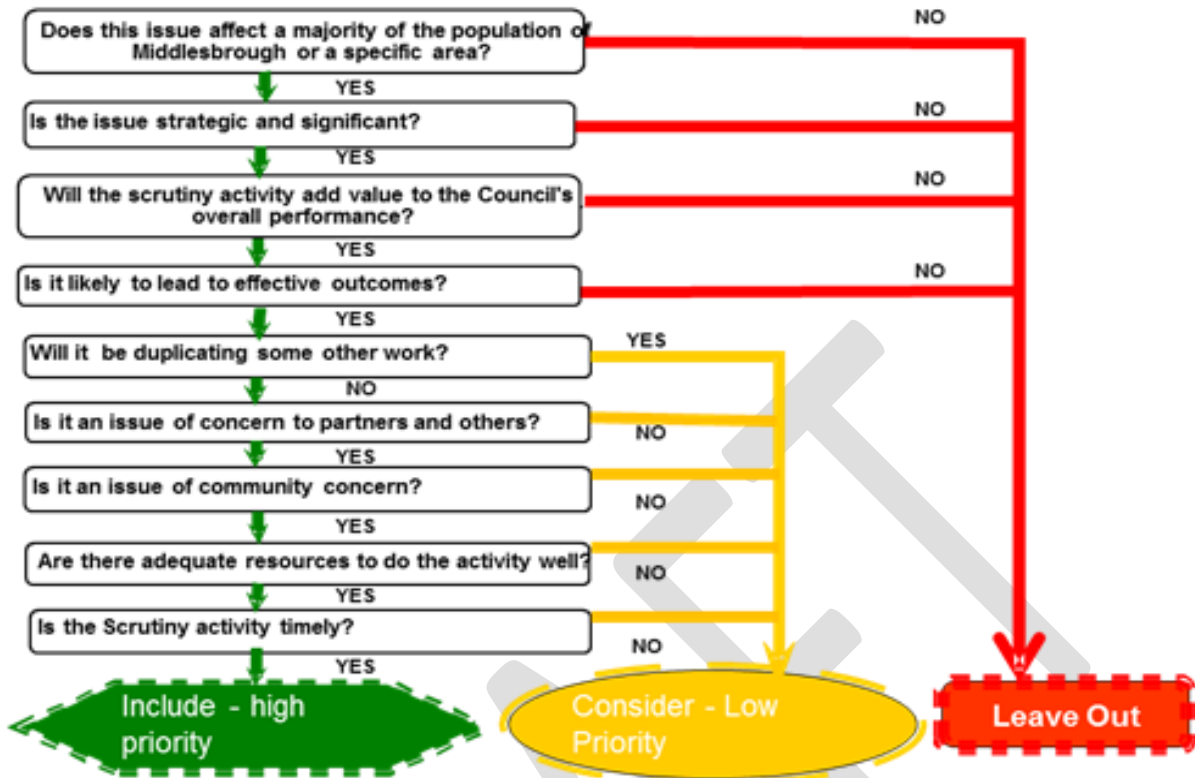
14. That, by utilising the Scrutiny Work Plan Prioritisation Aid (see Appendix 1), the Overview and Scrutiny Board considers the topics above for 2023/24.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

15. This report has relied on sources from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), Middlesbrough Council, the Local Government Association, LGiU and Gov.uk website.

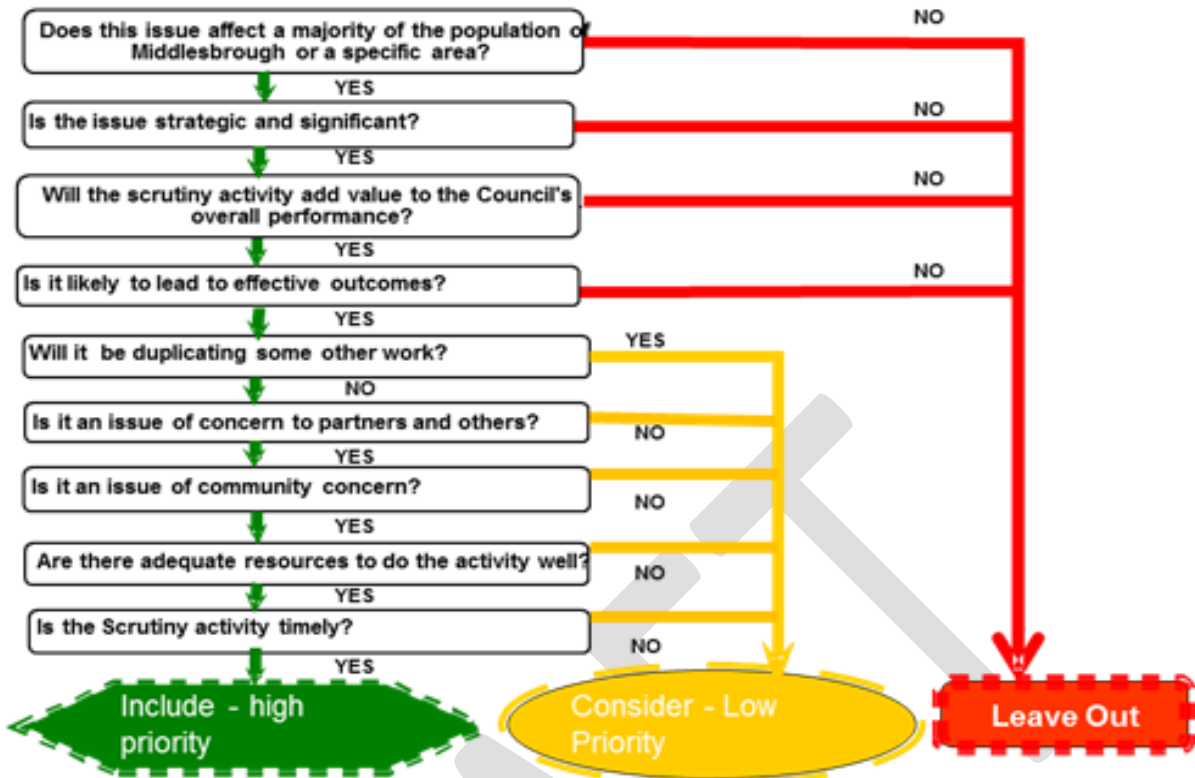
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APPENDIX 1

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