

Scrutiny Commission Draft Forward Plan Items (November 2023)

Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u> ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the topic of concern to local residents? What is the level of interest amongst particular communities / groups? Has the topic been identified by Members / officers / partners? Has there been negative press about the topic? 	3 = high public interest 2 = medium public interest 1 = low public interest
<u>A</u> rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the topic affect all parts of the district or only selected areas / communities? 	3 = entire district 2 = multiple wards 1 = single ward
<u>P</u> erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there / has there been a high level of dissatisfaction amongst service users? Is there evidence of poor performance in this service? Do we understand why performance is poor? Is the service costly to run relative to other areas? Does this relate to a priority in the Council Strategy? 	3 = poor performance / high priority 2 = fair performance / medium priority 1 = good performance / low priority
<u>E</u> ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the issue one where the committee can exert influence and add value? Are changes to policy and / or legislation planned that will affect the service? Is work already underway or planned to investigate the issue? Are changes already planned for the service? 	3 = good chance to deliver change 2 = fair chance to deliver change 1 = little chance to deliver change
<u>R</u> esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can the review be delivered with existing resources and in a timely fashion? 	3 = good availability of resources 2 = some resource constraints 1 = poor resource availability

Topic:	Recruitment of Foster Carers	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council is struggling to recruit foster carers leading to more residential care home placements and increased costs. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no evidence that this is a particular concern for local residents. There have been articles in the national and local media about the shortage of foster carers. This has been identified as a priority for scrutiny by senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The low number of foster carers means that more children are being placed into care homes. Social care costs for children are very high and there has been considerable growth in the numbers being placed in care, which is putting pressure on budgets. Increasing the number of foster carers is a priority in the Council Strategy with a target to increase the number by 12% by 2027. 	3
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an area where Members can bring local knowledge to bear. This is an opportunity to learn from other areas / best practice. Potential overlaps with other scrutiny topics such as broken market for children's social care placements. 	2
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be handled as an item at a scheduled meeting. Scheduled for November 2023. 	3
	TOTAL	13

Topic:	Budget Scrutiny	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review the Executive's Budget proposals and make recommendations in respect of those proposals, particularly in the light of projected budget deficits. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u> ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles in local media. • Wider interest in local authority finances in the national media due to several councils issuing S114 notices or at risk of doing so. • Budget scrutiny flagged as important by senior officers and welcomed by Exec Members. 	3
<u>A</u> rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u> erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predicted £8.7M overspend at the end of Q1, which is in excess of available reserves. • Ensuring sustainable services is a priority in the Council Strategy. • Reasons for overspend are clearly understood and measures have been put in place to manage spend. 	2
<u>E</u> ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget scrutiny is an important function of the Scrutiny Commission. • There is comprehensive advice on the CfGS website about how to undertake financial scrutiny. • Strict controls on expenditure are already in place. 	2
<u>R</u> esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covered to a limited extent through the quarterly capital and revenue reports. • A special meeting is proposed in February to allow for scrutiny of the budget for 2024/25. 	3
TOTAL		13

Topic:	Parking Strategy	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced car park revenues post-Covid • Role of parking in regeneration and place-making. • The draft Parking Strategy is out to public consultation in autumn 2023 and is due to be adopted April 2024. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking matters are of concern to many residents. • There have been several articles in the press about parking matters, including pavement parking, anti-social behaviour in car parks, and displaced parking from rail stations. • Not identified by Exec Members nor senior officers as a priority for scrutiny review. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide. 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking revenue has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels due to more people shopping online and increases in people working from home. • There are actions related to parking in the Council Strategy linked with town centre masterplans and supporting the economy. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an area where Members can bring local knowledge to bear. • This is an opportunity to learn from other areas. • This is an opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny. 	3
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be handled as an item at a scheduled meeting. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2023/24 municipal year. 	3
	TOTAL	13

NB: It has been confirmed that the parking Strategy will go to Executive for approval on 8 February 2024, which will be before the next available Scrutiny Commission meeting on 27 February. Therefore, it is recommended that this should not be included in the work programme.

Topic:	Asset Review	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to consider whether disposal of assets is in the best interest of the Council and if alternative options have been fully considered. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u> ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members have cited public concerns regarding risk from Council's making property investment. • Recent article in the Economist about reduced productivity when working from home. • Building running costs are significant, which impact on Council tax bills. 	2
<u>A</u> rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple wards 	2
<u>P</u> erformance / <u>P</u> riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council owns / leases a significant number of properties. Some of these (e.g. Market Street) are nearing the end of their service life and maintenance costs are increasing. Others are now surplus to requirements as a result of the move to hybrid working under Timelord 2. There is an opportunity to reduce costs, derive an income from leasing buildings or generate capital receipts from the sale of buildings. • Rationalisation of corporate buildings and co-location of Council Services is one of the six priority areas listed under the Council Strategy Priority 1.B - Transform the way the Council works to deliver operational excellence. 	3
<u>E</u> ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope for the Assets Review has yet to be agreed. However, high level principles have been prepared and initial efforts are looking at the running cost, purpose, and carbon impacts of WBC buildings. It would be sensible to wait until the draft recommendations are available. • The Commission may be able to add value by ensuring that the review has considered all options for future use of the buildings and has fully taken account of all costs and impacts. 	3
<u>R</u> esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be handled as a single item on one of the scheduled meeting agendas, or at a dedicated meeting and could be programmed from 2024/25. 	3
TOTAL		13

Topic:	% of Children on Free School Meals Who Achieve a Good Level of Development at Foundation Stage	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance has been consistently amongst the lowest of any local authority in England. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little evidence of public / media concern, but... Will be of great concern to affected families. Consistently flagged in WBC performance reports. Identified as a priority for scrutiny by Exec Members and senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of persistent gap in attainment between those on free school meals and other children (currently 35.8% vs 64.8%) West Berks is amongst the poorest performing local authorities in England for this indicator (4th quartile). '<i>Create a plan to close attainment gap: focus on early years and deprivation</i>' is an action in the Council Plan. 	3
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are ongoing efforts to address the issue through schools, but many local schools are academies, so are outside of LA control. Need to understand what approaches have already been explored. Difficult for schools to do much where they have small numbers of affected children. Could consider how other local authorities have successfully closed the outcome gap and identify if there is any learning that could be applied in West Berkshire. 	2
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex issue – would require task and finish group or dedicated meeting. Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2024/25 municipal year. 	2
TOTAL		12

Topic:	Early Years Capacity (Wraparound Care)	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to investigate the impacts for schools in West Berkshire of the Government's ambition for all schools to provide wraparound care between 8am and 6pm for school-age children by September 2026. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare costs widely reported as a significant issue for families in the national media. • But little evidence of recent reporting in local media. • Provision is good at some local schools, but poor at others. • Identified as a priority for scrutiny by senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 Budget used to announce government commitment for all schools to provide wraparound childcare by September 2023. • This is likely to be challenging for smaller schools to provide in a cost-effective manner. • No public data has been found to show how many West Berkshire schools already provide this, but a national survey showed 64% offered wraparound care, 15% before school only, 1% after school only, with 20% offering no provision. • Not a Council Strategy Priority but flagged by senior officers. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 Councils selected to trial wraparound childcare, including Wiltshire and Hampshire, so opportunities to learn from others. • Opportunity to gather evidence from local schools. 	2
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex issue – would require task and finish group. • May be best to consider this once the new arrangements are in place. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2024/25 municipal year. 	2
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Environment Strategy – Operational Review	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review progress in implementing the Council’s Environment Strategy, including the agreed Delivery Plan. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple stories about environmental issues in local and national media. • High level of interest in climate and ecological issues from local community groups. • Topic not identified as a key issue by Members / senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery Plan shows most actions are on-track or have been delivered, but still a significant number are behind schedule or are yet to start. • Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency is a key theme of the draft Council Strategy. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last reviewed in August 2021. • There is an Environment Advisory Group that already oversees delivery of the Environment Strategy, so there would be an element of duplication. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be covered as an agenda item at a future meeting. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2023/24 municipal year. 	3
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Waste Strategy	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste is one of the biggest areas of Council expenditure. • Need to reduce environmental impacts of waste and recycling. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste matters are of concern to residents, particularly in relation to bin collections, recycling and HWRC access. • Government recently announced reforms to local authority recycling arrangements. • There have been stories in the local media about waste and recycling matters, including issues with food waste and overflowing dog poo bins. • Phasing out charges for green bin collections is one of the Administration's Manifesto commitments. • Not identified by the Executive or senior officers as one of their priorities for scrutiny review. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Berkshire is already in the top quartile for recycling rates. • Currently only achieving satisfactory levels of street cleanliness. • Increasing the level of waste reused, recycled or composted at home, from public spaces and through our recycling centres is a priority identified in the Draft Council Plan • The current contract is costly. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Advisory Group already feeds into the development of the Waste Strategy, so there would be an element of duplication. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the strategy would be a long process, so this would require multiple updates / inputs. • Could be handled as standing items at scheduled meetings. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2023/24 municipal year. 	3
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Royal Mail	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor quality of service, with many communities receiving infrequent / irregular mail deliveries. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The topic is of concern to local residents, with anecdotal evidence of patients missing medical appointments as a result of mail not being delivered. There have been articles in the national and local media about the poor performance of Royal Mail. This has not been identified as a scrutiny priority by Executive Members of senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is widespread evidence of poor performance, with some communities in West Berkshire only receiving post once or twice per week and some communities did not have post for two months. There were issues with postal votes not being delivered to the Council offices at the May 2023 elections. Nationally, Royal Mail is failing to meet its targets for delivery of first and second class mail. The service is provided by a third party, so it is not covered by the Council Strategy. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Royal Mail is not obliged to attend to give evidence to the Scrutiny Commission or act upon any of its recommendations. Ofcom has already opened an investigation into the Royal Mail's failure to meet its delivery targets for 2022/23. Ofcom is also undertaking a wider review of the Royal Mail and will provide advice on how the universal postal service might need to evolve to better reflect the changing needs of postal users. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be handled as an item at a special scrutiny meeting. Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2023/24 municipal year. 	3
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Broken Market for Children's Social Care Placements	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rising demand and lack of availability leading to high cost of children's care home placements. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no evidence that this is a particular concern for local residents. Some articles in the national media. Identified as a priority for scrutiny by Exec Members. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social care costs for children are very high and there has been considerable growth in the numbers being placed in care, which is putting pressure on budgets. Increased spend is linked to difficulties in finding foster care placements and a shortage of suitable care home places locally. There is no evidence of poor performance by Council services. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an opportunity to learn from other areas / best practice. Potential overlaps with other scrutiny topics such as fostering and rising demand for SEND children with complex educational needs. 	2
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex issue – would require task and finish group. Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2024/25 municipal year. 	2
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Recruitment and Retention	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges with the Council recruiting and retaining staff. • High levels of agency staff. • Pressure of work. • Issues around career development. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little evidence of public / media concern, but... • Agency staff and recruitment costs are significant, which impact on Council tax bills. • There are articles in industry journals about the challenges local authorities face in recruiting / retaining staff, but not in the wider media. • This has been identified by senior officers as a priority. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover is running at around 15%, which is lower than the public sector average. • Vacant posts were running at 373.2 FTE in May 2023. • The Council has been struggling to recruit staff to certain services (e.g., social care) and so usage of agency staff is high, leading to high levels of spend. Agency spend has fallen due to tighter controls on recruitment. • Considering ways to improve our recruitment processes whilst reducing agency costs is one of the six priority areas listed under the Council Strategy Priority 1.B - Transform the way the Council works to deliver operational excellence. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be duplication with the work of the Personnel Committee. • Work is already underway to address the issue. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be handled as a single item on one of the scheduled meeting agendas, or at a dedicated meeting and could be programmed from 2024/25. 	3
TOTAL		11

Topic:	Housing	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising costs of living are making housing unaffordable for some residents. • Rising mortgage costs are unaffordable for some landlords. • Concerns about the management of the Housing Register. • Concerns about a lack of engagement by the social housing sector. • Need to accommodate asylum seekers 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents have raised concerns with local ward members about management of the housing register. • There have been local media articles about asylum seekers sleeping in tents outside the Council offices. • This has not been raised as a priority for scrutiny by Exec Members / senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is anecdotal evidence of residents' concerns about management of the housing register. • There is no evidence of poor performance by Council services. • The Council Strategy identifies the following priorities related to housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify solutions for homelessness ○ Create housing forum for tenants ○ Deliver more houses for Social Rent and Affordable Rent ourselves and through joint ventures. 	2
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a complex and wide-ranging issue, with a number of macro-economic / political factors that are outside of the Council's control. It may be better to have a tighter focus on a particular aspect of housing where there is potential for scrutiny to have an impact. • Cost of living / housing issues are being picked up by the Health and Wellbeing Board to a limited extent. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex issue – would require task and finish group. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2024/25 municipal year. 	2
TOTAL		10

Topic:	Libraries Service	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns about funding model - failure to secure parish council contributions has left a budget shortfall. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous articles in the national media about library closures due to a lack of funding. Article in the local media about insufficient staff cover. There is no evidence that libraries are a concern for local residents, but valued by those who used them as 'warm spaces' last winter. This has not been identified as a potential scrutiny topic by senior officers. 	2
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are considerable funding pressures on the Libraries Service, with a number of town / parish councils not contributing. There is no evidence of customer dissatisfaction, but visitor numbers have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. There is no evidence of poor performance. Libraries are not a priority identified within the Council Strategy. 	1
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny previously considered the findings of the 2021/22 Libraries Review at the March 2023 meeting. The Executive report on options for improving the Libraries Service is shown as deferred in the Forward Plan. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be considered at a future meeting. May be best to consider this once the 2024/25 budget has been confirmed. 	3
TOTAL		10

Topic:	Retendering of Bus Services	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to improve accessibility to services for local residents. • Need to reduce bus subsidy costs. • Increased bus usage is required to tackle congestion. 	
Criteria		
<u>P</u>ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus services are important to those who rely upon them. • However, there is little evidence of widespread public interest and no media articles highlighting issues or concerns. • Neither Executive Members nor senior officers have identified this as a priority for a scrutiny review. 	1
<u>A</u>rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District-wide 	3
<u>P</u>erformance / <u>P</u>riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to identify any major concerns. • The Draft Council Strategy indicates that the Council will seek to develop a Public Transport Strategy – this may be a more useful point for Scrutiny Commission to engage. 	1
<u>E</u>ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport Advisory Group would feed into the Bus Strategy, so there would be an element of duplication. 	1
<u>R</u>esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be handled as an item at a scheduled meeting. • Subject to prioritisation, review could be started within 2023/24 municipal year. 	3
TOTAL		9

Topic:	Cultural Heritage Strategy Delivery Plan	
Key Issues:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The delivery plan has stalled due to a lack of staff resource. 	
Criteria	Aspects	Scoring
<u>P</u> ublic Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little evidence of public / media concern, but... Was flagged as an issue by the Council's previous Heritage Champion. Members of the Fees and Charges Task Group wanted to review the finances of Shaw House. Not identified by Exec Members / senior officers as a priority for a scrutiny review. 	1
<u>A</u> rea Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-wide 	3
<u>P</u> erformance / <u>P</u> riority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy is not currently being implemented due to a sustained vacancy. The Council Strategy includes the following goal: 'Work with partners to maintain a safe District and improve Health and Wellbeing. Increase visits to Council leisure and cultural facilities'. However, it does not feature strongly in the strategy. 	2
<u>E</u> ffectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main issue appears to be a lack of staff resource. Until this has been addressed, there is little for Scrutiny to review. 	1
<u>R</u> esources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be handled as a single item on one of the scheduled meeting agendas, but there are competing topics that are considered more important. 	1
TOTAL		8