

Subject: Overview and Scruting		iny Annual	Status:	For Publicat	tion
	Report and Work Programme				
Report to: Council			Date:	17 th July 20)24
Report of:	Report of: Committee & Membe		Lead Member:	Environmen	t and Corporate
	Manager			Services	
Key Decision: Forward Plan		lan 🗌	General Exceptio	n 🗌 Spec	ial Urgency
Equality Impact Assessment:		Required:	No	Attached:	No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment: Re		Required:	No	Attached:	No
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1 **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council approve the Annual Report 2023/24 and Work Programme 2024/25.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The annual report informs of the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023/24 and section 6 highlights how scrutiny has made a difference.
- The work programme at section 12 details the proposed scrutiny items for 2024/25.

3 BACKGROUND

The annual report and work programme are required to be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and agreed at Full Council each year.

4 DETAILS

- 4.1 The annual report and work programme summarises the work undertaken during 2023/24 and sets out the proposed work to be carried out by the committee during the coming year in 2024/25. The work programme provides a draft of what is expected to be brought before the committee in 2024/25 and is a working document which allows for fluidity and for new items to be added as required.
- 4.2 The report was sent to Corporate Management Team for their input into the proposed agenda items and timescales for planned work, and a consultation meeting took place with the chair, vice-chair and officers on 5th June. The report was also presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24th June 2024.
- 4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee made a recommendation for Council to approve the Annual Report for 2023/24 and Work Programme for 2024/25.

5 RISK

There are no specific risk issues to consider arising from this report.

6 FINANCE

All work must be contained within existing budgets and resources.

7 LEGAL

The committee is required to produce an Annual Report for Full Council.

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8 POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific policy and equalities implications. All work undertaken by the committee will have regard to equalities and follow Council policy.

9 REASON FOR DECISION

To inform of the work carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023/24 and outline of the work to be carried out during 2024/25.

No background papers.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Annual Report 2023/24 and Work Programme 2024/25

Foreword from the 2023/24 Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Councillor Samara Barnes



This report highlights the activity and work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period of 2023/24 and the expected programme of work for 2024/25.

The committee has been extremely busy during 2023/24, which is reflected in the list of policy items, performance reviews, external scrutiny and task and finish group work which has been undertaken over the course of the year. We are also pleased to highlight how scrutiny has made a difference at section 6.

It is important for scrutiny members to be involved at an early stage to influence the decision making process and to play an important role as 'critical friend' to Cabinet. This ensures the Council's policies and procedures are robust and also supports good governance and effective decision making. The report highlights which policies, plans and strategies have come before the committee for pre-decision review and where changes have been implemented to strengthen policies and processes.

This year there has been a more focussed work programme, and where suitable, reports have been circulated for comment and updates have been provided by briefing notes to allow the committee more time to focus its attention on more significant items.

The committee is also committed to continued development, and this year members have participated in external training provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Continued development in scrutiny will ensure we continue to add value in the work we do.

As always, I would like to thank all members of the committee for the contributions they have made throughout the year, in addition to supporting officers and those external to the Council who have provided us with their knowledge and expertise to assist us with our committee and task and finish work.



Message from the Lead Member 2023/24 Councillor Adrian Lythgoe

The overview and scrutiny process ensures that both Council services and those services of its partners, are delivered in an appropriate way and encourages further development and improvements for members of the local community who access these services.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to support and challenge the Cabinet and provides assurance in respect of policy development and review, acting as a 'critical friend'.

Whilst Cabinet members regularly attend the committee meetings, the updates to Cabinet from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has kept Lead Members fully briefed on the work being undertaken. This assists our work in capturing suggestions for further improvement of public services.

Both councillors and officers continue to work together to ensure the best provision of services for the people of Rossendale.

1. Background

- 1.1 Overview and scrutiny is a way of achieving open and democratic accountability for the provision of public services. Local authorities operating an Executive Leader and Cabinet Model have an overview and scrutiny function which is carried out by non-Cabinet members who act as a critical friend to the Cabinet to hold them to account. In Rossendale the committee is politically balanced and made up of 10 councillors and one co-opted member. Overview and Scrutiny is not a decision making committee, but is there to monitor and influence those that are, i.e. the Cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee report their work back to the Cabinet who then decide whether recommendations will be accepted, and if not, explain their reasons for their decision.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a role in performance monitoring, and also policy development and review. The committee also undertakes more in-depth reviews by establishing task and finish groups. These are usually comprised of five politically balanced councillors (non-Cabinet members), who review specific issues and make recommendations for change and improvements, for example, in policy or service provisions. Task and finish groups are limited to a maximum of two operating at any one time to ensure there are sufficient resources to undertake an effective review.
- 1.3 Overview and scrutiny is not a mechanism for the investigation or settlement of individual complaints, as the Council has a separate complaints/member enquiry process for this. Nor can the committee look at individual planning or licensing decisions.
- 1.4 The committee welcomes suggestions for investigation and suggestions can be put forward at any time. Any suggestions received are considered as part of the work planning process for the Annual Work Programme.
- 1.5 The Council continues to work in line with statutory guidance and the Constitution, and where possible the chair, vice-chair and relevant officers attend North West Employers' Scrutiny Networks to keep up to date on the latest developments in scrutiny.

2. Internal scrutiny

Policy scrutiny

2.1 <u>Pre-decision</u>

During 2023/24 the committee was consulted on a variety of strategies, policies and plans. Feedback and recommendations were sought on the following prior to a decision being made or prior to further development:

- Housing Benefit War Pension and Armed Forces Disregard Policy
- Communications Strategy 2023-25
- Disabled Facilities Grant Policy Review (Housing Assistance Policy)
- Retention and Disposal Policy

A briefing note on the Climate Change Strategy was also circulated to provide members with a progress update.

Performance scrutiny

2.2 <u>Quarterly Performance Reports</u>

The committee continued to monitor quarterly performance reports (which incorporate the quarterly update on the use of RIPA). If required, the committee can call a relevant senior officer to the committee meeting to answer questions and provide further clarification, or matters can be scrutinised in more depth through the Performance Management Task and Finish Group and fed back to the next committee. During 2023/24 the Head of People and Policy provided the quarterly updates to the committee and provided further clarification where requested.

2.3 <u>Performance reviews and ongoing monitoring</u>

The committee received a variety of performance updates during 2023/24 with some items being part of the work programme and some being brought to Overview and Scrutiny for a specific reason for discussion. This internal review and monitoring activity included:

- Annual Equality Workforce Profile this item is required to be reported to the committee on an annual basis to review the Council's workforce profile.
- Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter and Council Feedback Update
 this item is required to be reported to the committee on an annual basis and reviews the annual breakdown of formal complaints and compliments.
- Customer & Digital Strategy Projects Update this item was included in the work programme as a briefing update and provided the opportunity to review the progress of year 1 and year 2 projects as well as inform of the work to be completed in year 3.
- Health and Well-being Plan Update this item was included in the work programme as a briefing update and provided the opportunity to review the progress of the Health and Well-being Plan.
- Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)/Incorporating the Local Development Scheme – the AMR is required on an annual basis to report on the delivery of the Adopted Rossendale Local Plan, as agreed by the committee on 7th March 2022. This was distributed to all members to keep them updated of its progress.

An Ease the Squeeze Update was also provided to keep members updated on the package of support the Council was delivering to help Rossendale residents through the cost of living crisis.

3. External scrutiny

The committee received a number of presentations and updates from external organisations, which are summarised as follows:

3.1 Lancashire Constabulary

As set out in the Overview and Scrutiny terms of reference, the committee acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee under the requirements of the Police and Justice Act and related statutory guidance from the Home Office. Lancashire Constabulary attend the committee each year to give a presentation on performance and progress against crime indicators. Chief Inspector Ogdin and Inspector Grey attended in January 2024 to provide the annual update and answered questions from committee members. They also provided a specific update on tackling anti-social

behaviour, particularly in relation to off road bikes. As a result of the update the committee asked Cabinet to ensure that Council officers were working as closely as possible with the Police in relation to dealing with off-road bikes.

3.2 <u>Citizens Advice</u>

In February Citizens Advice (East Lancashire) provided a briefing for members on their work and range of services offered. They informed how they were funded and noted how Council funding assisted them in attracting additional external sources of funding. They reported on their key outcomes and achievements over the last 12 months as well as highlighting the continued increase in enquires relating to the cost of living, including energy and food.

The following key points were noted from the update:

- According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, Rossendale was in the top 20% for employment deprivation in England and the service was working in partnership with Rossendale Works/Active Lancashire to help offer paid employment and work placements.
- At the time of the briefing, the areas with the highest number of cost of living issues in Rossendale were Worsley and Irwell wards.
- Since October last year, the top three types of assistance enquiry related to energy, debt and Personal Independence Payments (PIP).
- Since early 2022 there had been a 150% increase in the number of people contacting the service for charitable support and food bank assistance.

3.3 Credit Unions

The credit unions provided briefing notes to keep the committee updated regarding their work. This included the types of accounts available (for savings and loans), membership information and other services offered, such as their members being able to join Family Funeral Plans. They were also planning volunteer recruitment drives to help attract additional admin staff and board members.

In January, the First Choice Credit Union highlighted the following key points:

- Savings had decreased since 2021 whilst the amount out on loan had increased (including the number of Family Loans).
- There had been an increase in the usage of the mobile app including from established members, and the number of enquiries to the telephone and online service had also increased this year.
- Through the partnership with Fairquid, the number of employers engaged had increased, which would subsequently increase the number of new members and loans issued.
- Over the last year improvements had been made to the website and social media presence to engage more people in the local community.

In February, Bacup Credit Union highlighted the following key points:

- Total loans and advances to members on the 30th September was £200,158. The majority of loans were top up loans and there was a decrease in the overall amounts loaned in 2023, reflecting hardship in the local financial climate.
- The liquidity ratio was in keeping with national requirements for Credit Unions (5.41%).
- This year the use of the online web service had increased, along with significant increases in the use of the telephone service. There would be

further focus on IT infrastructure updates and they were looking to exploit social media more effectively in 2024 in order to to increase the loan book by 10% and increase memberships.

• They had successfully relaunched the schools service and had also facilitated office work experience placements for students.

3.4 <u>Leisure</u>

In September 2023 the Chief Executive of Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT), Samantha Sandford, provided a mid-year financial and performance update to the committee and highlighted key achievements as well as the planned ongoing work throughout the remainder of the financial year. Members noted the improvement in the quality of the data and information presented. A further update will be provided in June 2024 to reflect on the progress of the business plan for 2023/24 and to share the expectations of the business plan for 2024/25.

4. Health scrutiny

- 4.1 At the time of writing the report, the Lead Member for Health and Leisure is the East Lancashire representative for the Lancashire Leaders Group on Lancashire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board and also represents the Council on the Rossendale Health and Well-being Partnership and Lancashire County Council Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.2 The Rossendale Health and Wellbeing Partnership is open to any councillor to attend and issues of concern can be raised via the Lead Member for Health and Leisure for any of these meetings.
- 4.3 In November 2023 the committee was provided with a briefing note update on the Health and Well-being Plan which highlighted the progress made to date against the four priorities. The update also informed of the newly formed Men's health network led by a member of Men in Sheds, Haslingden; the Council's continued support in promoting warm and welcome places for local people and where they were available during the Winter of 2023, and the staff wellbeing day which had been held 21st June 2023. Other health events supporting the priorities of the Health and Well-being Plan included:
 - The Big Mental Health Connect event delivered by Rossendale Connected on 16th May 2023 and the Big Physical Activity Connect event funded by TaAF on 30th November 2023 at the Ashcroft, Whitworth. Big connect activities take place around every 6 months with different themes from the Health and Wellbeing Plan.
 - The first Park Run for Rossendale organised with Together an Active Future (TaAF) on 12th November 2023 in Victoria Park, Haslingden, which now takes place every week with around 90 participants. On the success of this a junior park run in Stubbylee Park is also being planned.

5. Task and finish group work in 2023/24

5.1 Road Safety

This work took place from September 2023 with the aim of helping residents feel safer when walking and cycling in their local communities by raising awareness of current safety issues and identifying best practice and how this could be implemented in Rossendale. A final report will be presented once the draft recommendations have been considered by relevant consultees.

5.2 Copies of task and finish group reports are available on the council's website via the link below: https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/10718/task_and_finish_group_reports

6. How has scrutiny made a difference?

- 6.1 Overview and Scrutiny continues to perform the important function of holding the executive (the Cabinet) to account, carrying out task and finish work and reviewing policies and strategies before implementation. For 2023/24 the following is worth noting:
- 6.2 Quarterly performance monitoring:
 - Quarter 4 2022/23 discussions focussed on temporary accommodation for homeless, RAG ratings, planning application targets, the regular review of all milestones, risks and key performance indicators, applying lessons learned and monitoring, the progress on the enforcement contract and Council communications procedures. As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:
 - To bring the Communications Plan to the committee with the channels of communication identified, the process for communications, and how it fits in with the external organisation and how it married together with the Communications Plan. This led to the amended Communications Strategy 2023-25 being presented to the committee, which was subsequently approved by Cabinet.
 - To let Overview and Scrutiny have sight of the new quarterly report before the September meeting to enable the committee to ensure there are clear markers for milestones on corporate projects and to better assist the Council in setting realistic targets. Following the meeting, the committee attended a workshop with Corporate Management Team to discuss this work further. A copy of the new report was also circulated to members prior to the September committee meeting.
 - Quarter 1 2023/24 discussions focussed on previous cost savings, website information, ageing workforce and the measure for Priority 1 A Thriving Local Economy. As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:
 - To put a covering message on the Economic Development websites to say that information was currently under review. This led to a message being added to the Invest in Rossendale website stating that the site would be undergoing updates and maintenance throughout February 2024. Following the request updates on the Visit Rossendale website were also completed and further work was ongoing.
 - Regarding the demographic split on the ageing workforce and risk 5, what contingencies were being put in place as mitigation for this. The committee were informed that age demographics of the workforce were reviewed as part of the annual business planning and continuity process. Plans were also developed to mitigate any risks that impact on staffing levels, including monitoring age profile within the service, recruitment and selection monitoring data, and planned retirements etc

- To review whether the performance measure "Engagements with the Visit Rossendale Website" was an effective measure for Priority 1 – A Thriving Local Economy. Following further review by Corporate Management Team and Cabinet members, this performance measure was subsequently removed.
- Quarter 2 2023/24 discussions focussed on processes around staff leaving the authority, recycling rates, processes for complaints and enquiries and the target for new housing completion completions. As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:
 - For the Head of Operations to attend when the next quarterly report is presented to provide further clarity on member questions, particularly in relation to the next steps to improve recycled waste following the recent campaign. Further information and clarification was provided by the Head of Operations when he attended the February meeting. Whilst the Check before you Chuck campaign had been well recognised, the Council would be focussing on engaging schools with recycling until the new requirements for food waste had been introduced.
 - To provide examples in the next report of sites under development in relation to the new homes performance indicator. An update was provided to members and information would be included in future reports where relevant.
 - To follow up an error being reported on the Council Tax application system. As a result members were subsequently informed that the error affected management information only and not claimants' entitlement. The issue would be fixed with the next software release.
- Quarter 3 2023/24 discussions focussed on town centre vibrancy, waste collections and recycling, road sweeping, new homes figures, complaint responses and Council websites. As a result of the discussions, the following action was recommended and actioned as follows:
 - To review and rationalise the Council's websites after considering customer use and place an "under review" message on any sites not fully up to date (e.g. Visit Rossendale). There were further updates to the Visit Rossendale website and the site would continue to be reviewed and amended.
- 6.3 Policy development the committee was consulted and provided feedback on policies before they were approved by Full Council or Cabinet and this included the annual budget reports. The following policies were revised prior to approval following recommendations made by the committee:

Communications Strategy 2023-25 - the committee recommended the following and subsequent changes were made prior to Cabinet approval:

- Making it clear in the report that the Council was working closely with an external provider.
- Making reference to how the decision was made to use an external company.
- Including information to detail what provision was required when the service was contracted out.

7. Introduction

- 7.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required to produce and agree an Annual Work Programme which sets out the expected work to be carried out in the coming year.
- 7.2 As well as outlining the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the programme should also identify proposed work to be undertaken by task and finish groups, of which there can be two running at any one time.

8. Cabinet involvement

8.1 As well as being able to make work programme suggestions, Cabinet has previously resolved that Council grant recipients provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on their work. Citizens Advice and the Credit Unions have continued to provide updates to the committee annually.

9. Standing agenda items

The Council's Constitution outlines the items Overview and Scrutiny considers on a regular basis. In addition, Overview and Scrutiny can look at other non-key decisions/updates as required. The items outlined in the Constitution are detailed below:

9.1 <u>Routine monitoring of the performance of the Council</u>

To review on a quarterly basis the Performance Report and invite officers of the Council to attend a future meeting if their service area is under-achieving on its target. Alternatively, if a service area is falling behind on their targets, the Performance Management Task and Finish Group may be re-convened to look into the matter.

- 9.2 <u>Policy development</u>
 - a) To deal with emerging policy and assist the Council in reviewing and developing policy as detailed in the Forward Plan.
 - b) Review and scrutinise decisions taken internally by the Cabinet, individual Cabinet members or officers of the Council.

9.3 <u>Scrutiny of the Council's budget</u> To be consulted and make recommendations on the Council's annual budget setting.

9.4 <u>Complaints/compliments</u>

- a) To monitor formal complaints received by the Council
- b) To receive information on the number of compliments received for each service area
- c) To monitor Ombudsman enquiries via the annual letter from the Local Government Ombudsman.

9.5 <u>Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)</u>

To deal with any relevant Councillor Call for Action requests and determine the appropriate course of action.

9.6 <u>Call-In</u>

To scrutinise decisions referred under the Council's Call-In Procedure.

9.7 Forward Plan

To monitor the Forward Plan and agree those policies to be scrutinised prior to decision by Cabinet/Full Council.

9.8 <u>To act as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee</u> To review local performance and progress against crime indicators.

9.9 <u>External/partner scrutiny</u>

To receive information from external organisations and partners whose operations affect the area to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working (with particular emphasis on those who receive funding from the Council).

9.10 <u>Leisure scrutiny</u> To monitor the performance of Rossendale Leisure Trust.

10. Drafting the 2024/25 Work Programme

- 10.1 The draft work programme in the table below is based on updates requested at previous committees, items identified from the Forward Plan and the standing items outlined in the terms of reference and as summarised in section 9.
- 10.2 Although the work programme is formally agreed, it may be amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as required. The table at section 12 sets out the basic agendas and planned reports/updates going to each committee. It is important to ensure that there is room for task and finish group reports and for any other items or policies, which may be added to the Forward Plan during the year.
- 10.3 This document was presented to Corporate Management Team on 9th April 2024 for advice, and comments regarding the items and suggested timescales. A meeting was also held with the chair and vice-chair and officers on 5th June to discuss the draft Work Programme and plan how to implement the agreed items. Following these consultations the draft work programme for 2024/25 at section 12 has been proposed.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The programme provides members with a clear plan of work and engages with our partners and grant recipients. The work programme is a living document and will be amended throughout the year as necessary.
- 11.2 Details of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings for 2024/25 can be found on the Committee Schedule on the Council website: <u>committee schedule</u>

Appendix 1

12. Work Programme 2024/25



Date	Торіс	Proposed areas in scope	Suggested Approach
Jun	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report and Work Programme (standing item)	To examine the previous year's progress and review the draft work programme for year ahead.	Report for comment
	Corporate Plan Update (standing item)	 To review the annual update with a specific focus on: Specific objectives and priorities Reviewing the action plan and performance monitoring 	Committee report
	Rossendale Leisure Trust Annual Report and Annual Update (external scrutiny) - confidential	 To scrutinise the report against the action plan with a specific focus on: How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. health, leisure, culture Examining how the 2024/25 plan will be implemented Performance monitoring against the 2023/24 action plan 	Committee presentation/ report
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council	Report for comment
Jul	Rossendale Borough Council senior management workshop	Review of policy, performance and value for money	Workshop
	Future task and finish topics	Agree task and finish programme	Workshop
Sep	Quarter 4 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Workforce Profile Report (standing item)	To scrutinise the workforce profile in relation to equalities.	Report for comment
	Ombudsman's Annual Letter Annual Council Complaints Review (standing item)	To scrutinise the Council's performance in dealing with/responding to complaints.	Report for comment
	Cabinet and Council reports	 Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Open Space and Outdoor Sports Supplementary Planning Document 	Report for comment Report for comment
		Climate Change Consultation	Committee report

		 Local Housing Allowance Safeguarding Policy 	Report for comment
Nov	Together Housing	 To scrutinise: value for money regarding service charges evidence from residents associations arrangements for dealing with: anti-social behaviour housing condition improvements vulnerable residents 	Deep dive session
Nov	Quarter 1 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Health and Well-being Plan Review (performance scrutiny)	 To scrutinise the Rossendale Health and Well-being Plan with a specific focus on: How the plan and community partners are improving health outcomes for residents Monitoring outcomes against the action plan Constructively challenging the specific health objectives and priorities 	Briefing note
	Feedback from Together Housing Deep Dive session	Members to feed back on the Deep Dive session with Together Housing	Deep dive feedback
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council	Report for comment
Jan	Lancashire Constabulary Annual Update (external scrutiny – statutory standing item)	 To scrutinise (as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee) the effectiveness of external partners in improving the lives of Rossendale residents with a specific focus on: How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. crime outcomes How effectively are partners using any council funding (where applicable) How the council can work more effectively with partners in the future 	
	Quarter 2 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Citizens Advice Annual Update (external scrutiny)	To scrutinise the effectiveness of external partners in improving the lives of Rossendale residents with a specific focus on:	Briefing note

		 How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. well-being How effectively are partners using any council funding How the council can work more effectively with partners in the future 	
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council	Report for comment
Feb	2025/26 Council Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (standing item)	 To scrutinise the draft budget for 2025/26 with a specific focus on: Allocation of resources Planned fees and charges 	Committee report
	Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/26 (standing item)	 To scrutinise the draft Capital Strategy and Capital Programme for 2025/26 with a specific focus on: Allocation of resources Planned projects 	Committee report
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council	Report for comment
Mar	Quarter 3 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council	Report for comment
	Communications Strategy Action Plan	To scrutinise performance against the action plan.	Committee report

Other reports expected during 2024/25: Council Tax and Non-Domestic Debt Management Policy