

TITLE OF REPORT: Review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements

REPORT OF: Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

Purpose of the Report

1. This report asks the Cabinet to recommend Council to approve changes to the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements which will be piloted for six months with effect from 1 September 2017.

Background

2. Overview and scrutiny committees are appointed by the Council and discharge the functions conferred by Part 1A of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended). These Committees form an integral part of the Council's decision making framework, working within it not outside it or against it.
3. Overview and scrutiny in Gateshead is a constructive process which is open, accountable and looks outwards at the broader issues affecting local people rather than just focusing on internal issues. It works alongside other parts of the Council to make a contribution to policy development and aims to add value through its work rather than duplicate activity.
4. The Council's approach to its overview and scrutiny arrangements has been relatively unchanged since they were introduced. The approach has been reviewed to ensure that overview and scrutiny in Gateshead:
 - Is first and foremost member led.
 - Enhances the leadership role of OSC Chairs and Vice Chairs in driving forward, directing and shaping individual OSC work.
 - Enhances engagement and involvement with OSC members in shaping the focus of the work of specific OSCs.
 - Creates stronger relationships/linkages with the Executive.
 - Enables Overview and Scrutiny to better understand and track how it is influencing Cabinet policy / decision making going forwards.

Proposal

5. Following the review it is proposed to change the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements as set out in appendix 1 with effect from 1 September 2017. The revised arrangements will be subject to review after six months.

Recommendations

6. Cabinet is asked to recommend Council to approve the revised overview and scrutiny arrangements as set out in Appendix 1, subject to them being reviewed after six months.

For the following reason:

To ensure that the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements reflect the points set out in paragraph 4 above.

Policy Context

1. The proposals aim to improve the Council's decision making structures to help it deliver Vision 2030 and the Council Plan.

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3. Overview and scrutiny in Gateshead is a constructive process which is open, accountable and looks outwards at the broader issues affecting local people rather than just focusing on internal issues. It works alongside other parts of the Council to make a contribution to policy development and aims to add value through its work rather than duplicate activity.

Proposals

4. The proposals outlined below set out options which are aimed at ensuring that overview and scrutiny in Gateshead:-
 - Is first and foremost member led.
 - Enhances the leadership role of OSC Chairs and Vice Chairs in driving forward, directing and shaping individual OSC work.
 - Enhances engagement and involvement with OSC members in shaping the focus of the work of specific OSCs.
 - Creates stronger relationships/linkages with the Executive.
 - Enables overview and scrutiny to better understand and track how it is influencing Cabinet policy/decision making going forwards.

Work Programme Event

5. It is proposed that an OSC work programme event be introduced into the OSC Work Programme Development process. This would be a half-day session to which all councillors on OSCs and Cabinet members would be invited. The event would also involve the OSC Co-ordinator, Senior Managers and OSC leads.
6. Information would be presented, led by the Strategy Group, on key issues/challenges/legislative changes affecting the work of the Council within the forthcoming twelve months which fall within the specific remits of each OSC.
7. A roundtable discussion on the emerging themes/work programme topics for each OSC would then be chaired by each OSC Chair (supported by Vice Chair). The OSC Chairs/Vice Chairs would identify a list of potential issues for inclusion in the work programme, including potential review topics, case studies for each OSC.
8. The list of issues would then be circulated to all councillors on OSCs and they would be given a further week to put forward any additional suggestions. Any

additional suggestions would be fed back to the relevant OSC Chair/Vice Chair for consideration and copied to the other Chairs/Vice Chairs and OSC leads.

9. Matters could also be referred to OSC, on an ongoing basis, by councillors in the usual way and by the Strategy Group as they arise.

Task and Finish Groups

10. Currently all OSC policy reviews are carried out with the involvement of the full membership of each OSC over a number of the OSC's scheduled meetings. Going forwards it is proposed that there is an option for such policy reviews/additional policy matters to be driven forwards by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each OSC, supported by a smaller number of "self-nominating" councillors from each OSC, who would form "task and finish" groups, where it is felt that this would add value.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny

11. Work programmes for all OSCs will in future include pre-decision scrutiny of key issues within their remit likely to come before Cabinet in the forthcoming twelve month period.

Policy Issues

12. Issues previously considered by Advisory Groups (eg policy consultations etc) will be subsumed into the work programmes for all OSCs, to be dealt with within appropriate timescales.

Revised OSC Work Programme Report Review

13. This report will be presented at the end of each OSC work programme period to highlight all the recommendations each OSC has made to Cabinet and identify the action Cabinet has taken in response. OSCs would then be able to track how they were influencing Cabinet decision making and enable them to provide appropriate feedback.

Cabinet Member Updates on Performance

14. Cabinet members will be invited to present an update on performance within their portfolio area to the relevant OSC twice a year at those meetings where the OSC considers performance against the Council Plan/Vision 2030.

Senior Officer/Cabinet Member Attendance at OSC

15. It may be considered appropriate in future that OSCs consider exercising their powers to call on particular senior managers/Cabinet members to attend OSCs to present on particular matters/respond to specific questions.

Implementation of Proposals

16. There is sufficient flexibility within the current governance arrangements to allow for the majority of the proposals outlined above to be implemented relatively

quickly although the suggestion for a work programme event would have to wait until early 2018 as the consultation process for the work programmes for 2017-18 has now been completed.

Advisory Groups

17. The revised arrangements set out above would mean that key issues previously referred to the Policy Advisory Group would now fall within the remit of the appropriate OSC. Therefore, it is suggested that the Policy Advisory Group could be disbanded.
18. However, it is considered that there is still a role for a Corporate Advisory Group to consider budgetary and other major issues on which the Cabinet wish to seek councillors' views, as and when necessary. This Advisory Group would be chaired by the Leader of the Council.

Consultation

19. Consultation has been undertaken with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet members and the Chairs of OSCs.

Alternative Options

20. The proposals set out above have been developed to strengthen the Council overview and scrutiny arrangement. Whilst other options may be available the proposals outlined are felt to be the most appropriate approach.

Implications of Recommended Option

21. Resources

- a) **Financial Implications** - The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources confirms that there will be no additional costs resulting from the proposed changes.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** - Nil.
- c) **Property Implications** - Nil.

22. Risk Management Implications - Nil.

23. Equality & Diversity Implications - Nil.

24. Crime & Disorder Implications – Nil.

25. Health Implications - Nil.

26. Sustainability Implications - Nil.

27. Human Rights Implications - Nil.

28. Area & Ward Implications – All wards.

Background Information

29. Nil.