

TITLE OF REPORT: Development of OSC Work Programmes

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Summary

This report sets out the current position in relation to this OSC's work programme for 2020-21 and sets out the indicative approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021-22.

OSC Work Programme 2020-21

1. In light of the ongoing uncertainties arising in relation to the Covid -19 pandemic, along with the pressures on services that has brought and taking account of the Council's approach to the development of a new performance framework, we have consulted the OSC Chairs and put forward a more flexible approach to scrutiny for this municipal year.
2. This approach recognises the demands on services and the Council as a whole but, at the same time, ensures that we meet our statutory obligations to provide an effective scrutiny function and scrutiny concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider Council.
3. Since the start of the restrictions introduced in response to the pandemic, Gateshead's four main OSCs have met once during September 2020 to receive a progress update on the impact of the Covid -19 pandemic and an update on end of year performance for 2019-20 and it is anticipated that, given the ongoing position in relation to the pandemic, the main focus of OSC meetings for the remainder of this municipal year will be on the Covid-19 pandemic and the impacts of that.
4. As a result, it is proposed that outstanding issues from the 2019-20 work programmes should not be progressed at this time and the work of this OSC is refocused on the current Covid-19 related priorities and the impacts of that alongside a couple of other priority issues for the Council / partners which are already being progressed elsewhere so should not place any additional burdens on service areas (Appendix 1)
5. This in turn means a reduced programme of meetings with the four main OSCs meeting next in March 2021 as per the dates set out in the calendar of meetings

Development of 2021-22 Work Programme

6. At this stage, given all of the issues outlined above; the potential timing of any government settlements for local authorities impacting the Council's budget process

and the strong possibility that OSC meetings will continue to need to be held remotely for some time to come, it is considered that the approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021-22 is likely to have to be similarly flexible and any proposals will need to be indicative.

7. With this in mind, it is provisionally proposed that initial consultation with OSC Chairs and other elected members and officers on the proposed priority issues for the new work programmes for 2021-22 commences in February 2021.
8. This would align with the Council's budget process. It is also hoped that by then the situation in relation to the Covid 19 pandemic will have moved on sufficiently to allow for greater clarity on the potential nature and extent of scrutiny during 2021-22 (ie number of meetings/ issues to be scrutinised) and the potential priority issues scrutiny could progress on behalf of the Council and add value. Clearly, however, a continued focus on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in some form or another will be likely to be a major area of focus for the OSCs going forwards.
9. It is then proposed that discussions take place with members of OSCs at their meetings in March 2021 on emerging issues for the work programmes and relevant linkages with the new performance management framework.
10. Consultation will then take place with key partners on the emerging themes with a view to feedback being shared with the OSCs' at the OSCs' first meeting of the new 2021 -2022 municipal year and the OSCs new work programmes being agreed.

Recommendations

11. The Committee is asked to:
 - a) Note the position in relation to the OSC's work programme for 2020-21
 - b) Give its views on the indicative approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021- 22

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