

**TITLE OF REPORT: Review of Annual Work Programme**

**REPORT OF: Jane Robinson, Chief Executive  
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and Governance**

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### **Summary**

The report updates and seeks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's views on the current position with regard to the annual work programme.

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### **Background**

1. At its meeting on 30 March 2015, the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme based on the Council's policy framework. This work programme was then agreed by the Council as part of the policy planning process.
2. In line with the process agreed by all OSCs this OSC selected its case studies using a process designed to help make linkages between potential topics and the Council's policy framework.

### **Proposals**

#### **OSC Review Topics for 2016/17**

3. In advance of the OSC agreeing its review topic for 2016-17, members of the OSC have been invited to identify any issues which may potentially be appropriate for a detailed review by 18 December 2015. It is proposed that those issues put forward by members are added to the list of potential review topics for consideration by the OSC at the start of the municipal year, unless the issue is already being, or would more appropriately be, dealt with through other processes within the Council. Members will be notified if this is the case and advised as to how their issue is being dealt with.

### **Case Studies**

4. Case studies have been included within OSC work programmes to provide an additional means of examining specific issues of concern or carrying out more detailed work on a particular topic.

5. The case study for 2015/16 is:
  - Implementation of Universal Credit in Gateshead (30 November 2015)
6. Each OSC has identified specific issues to be considered through the case study method and it was agreed that in view of the timing of case studies within the 2014-15 work programmes that feedback on their effectiveness be sought during its work programme review in 2015/16.
7. During 2014/15 the OSC considered the following case studies :-

### **Impact of Welfare Reform**

The OSC focused on:-

- detailed case studies setting out the impact of welfare reform on Gateshead residents, businesses and the Council.
- details of the actions taken to mitigate the impact of the reforms.

Having examined the issues the OSC :

- Queried whether free school meals will be included within the Universal Credit payment and noted that it was reported that the rollout of Universal Credit was now forecast to be complete by 2018/19 and the inclusion of school meals had not yet been confirmed.
- Received information that when benefit rules are transgressed, this can result in the loss of benefit to claimants. The Committee was advised that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for imposing these sanctions and that the reasons for the imposition of sanctions is not shared with the Council.
- Requested that details in relation to the overall performance and use of the Social Fund be provided for a future meeting, along with case studies showing where tenancies have failed or where the Council has been unable to support residents.
- Requested and agreed that a special meeting of the Corporate Resources OSC be convened (mid- March 2015) to consider and scrutinise DWP sanctions, equalities issues and performance targets. The Committee agreed to invite a representative from DWP to attend the special meeting.

The OSC was satisfied with the actions taken to mitigate the impact of welfare reform on Gateshead residents. The Committee has since received a further monitoring report and hosted a special meeting on DWP Sanctions, equalities issues and performance targets.

### **Fit for Future and Chanel Shift**

The OSC focused on:-

The progress being made in relation to Channel Shift and Agile working within the Council's Transformation programme including:-

- information detailing the current customer contact analysis and activity in relation to face to face contact, telephony and website development.
- the benefits of agile working and the opportunities being explored as part of a wider programme of Agile and new ways of working
- the opportunities / benefits of channel shift which included:
  - Opportunities to unlock cost savings through self-service,
  - Lower cost of transactions carried out online,
  - Meeting customer demand and expectation and;
  - Reducing avoidable contact.
  
- the benefits to users of the GOV.UK website.

Having examined the issues the OSC :-

- Acknowledged the potential security issues but raised concerns about the frequency by which passwords need to be changed on mobile devices. The Committee was informed that all Local Authorities are required to comply with the Public Service Network rules concerning passwords.
- Considered that it would be inappropriate to expect a new employee to be able to work remotely without the support of colleagues.
- Highlighted that there are a significant number of disadvantaged residents, some of whom do not have access to computers / bank accounts and therefore the approach to channel shift must take this into account.
- Expressed support for proposals to improve the website.
- Suggested that email newsletters could be used to provide details of public consultations so that more residents are aware and are able to respond.

The OSC was satisfied with the level of progress being made in respect of Channel Shift and agile working and the approach being taken, particularly in relation to proposed improvements to the Council's website.

## **Recommendations**

8. The Committee is asked to

- (i) Note that any issues identified by members of the OSC as potential review topics by 18 December 2015 will be included in the list of review topics to be considered by the OSC at the start of the municipal year unless such issues are being or would more appropriately be dealt with via other Council processes.
- (ii) Give its views on the review monitoring process carried out so far.
- (iii) Give its views on the effectiveness of the case studies carried out in 2014/15.