

# FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AGENDA

Thursday, 4 March 2021 at 1.30 pm. This meeting will be held virtually.

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From the Chief Executive, Sheena Ramsey

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Item	Business
1	<b>Apologies for absence</b>
2	<b>Minutes of last meeting</b> (Pages 3 - 8)  The Committee is asked to approve as a correct record the minutes of the last meeting held on 3 December 2020
3	<b>Education Response to Covid - Update</b>  Presentation
4	<b>Children Social Care Services Response to Covid - Update</b>  Presentation
5	<b>New Performance Management and Improvement Framework</b> (Pages 9 - 12)  Report of the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital
6	<b>SEND Ofsted Assurance Visit</b>  Presentation
7	<b>Work Programme 2020/21 and Development of Work Programme for 2021/22</b> (Pages 13 - 16)  Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance

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Tel: 0191 433 2088, Date: Wednesday, 24 February 2021

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**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Thursday, 3 December 2020**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor(s): M Hall, D Bradford, C Buckley, L Caffrey, B Clelland, P Craig, S Craig, C Davison, S Gallagher, L Kirton, K McCartney, E McMaster, M Ord, R Oxberry, Reay and K McClurey

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS:** Tim Kynoch, Rachel Walton and Jill Burrell

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor(s): G Haley

**F7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies received.

**F8 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

*Matters Arising:*

**F4 - Children Social Care Services Response to Covid**

It was questioned what is happening following the national changes which were due to end on 25 September 2020. It was confirmed that these changes offered more flexibility in legislation, for example being able to carry out Foster Carer assessments without medical certificates. This flexibility has now been removed and it is back to business as usual. It was noted that the service managed not to utilise much of these changes and therefore its removal has not had much impact on the service.

**F9 EDUCATION SERVICE RESPONSE TO COVID - UPDATE**

Committee received a presentation giving an update on the Education Service response to the pandemic.

In terms of what went well, it was noted that all schools stayed open during the initial lockdown, with places provided for vulnerable and key worker children and good contact was maintained with families not attending school. In addition schools worked with the School Meals team to ensure no child went hungry.

Robust risk assessments were put in place and good risk assessments were led by the Council's Health and Safety Team. Committee was advised that since

September the vast majority of children have thrived since returning to school.

Schools have advised that communication has been great throughout with daily briefings being sent out initially and weekly virtual meetings with Headteachers continues. Schools have appreciated that services have adapted so quickly.

In terms of what has not worked so well, these are mainly issues beyond the control of the schools and Council with a lot of mixed messages coming out of Government, and therefore that has been a lot of reliance on schools and Headteachers. For example around free school meal vouchers, track and trace and changing messages regarding GCSE's. there is also still concern about statutory assessments and accountability. It was noted that this has added to the growing pressure and anxiety in schools that is being felt by leaders and staff.

It was acknowledged that a number of lessons have been learnt, for example utilising technology and if this were to happen again contact with vulnerable families would need to be made even quicker. In addition, the redeployment of staff to roles where they can make a difference would be done quicker.

In terms of ongoing challenges, these were outlined as;

- Significant disruption of education due to 'bubbles' popping
- Staffing level becoming challenging in some schools
- Potential supply costs could have a very negative impact on budgets
- Tension / anxiety within many schools remains high – for example there has been an increase in the number of grievances, with more pressure on teachers who feel that they have never been off duty.

The point was made that there have been real issues with digital access for some pupils, this has been down to lack of equipment or affordability of access to data. This has led to difficulties for some children in completing their work as some schools have been reluctant to give paperwork to pupils. This issue was acknowledged as a concern and schools have been encouraged to do more 'blended learning'. A group was set up early on in the pandemic to look at what tools were available to them. An example was given of Carr Hill Primary School which went back to paper resources as it was felt that this was right for that community.

It was noted that early on in the pandemic, through a government scheme, vulnerable children were identified to receive laptops. Each school was then given a notional number of laptops they should receive, however this number was then lowered which resulted in some schools not receiving the quantity they should have.

Concerns were raised that if teachers have to isolate because their own child has been sent home to isolate they do not receive full pay. It was confirmed that this was a decision taken within HR and is not just in relation to schools but is across all services. Committee requested further information on the rationale of this decision.

It was asked whether there was any feedback on how year 6 children have transitioned into secondary school. It was noted that a number of secondary schools were creative with their transition arrangements, for example offering virtual tours, and there have been no reported problems outside of the ordinary for this year.

It was queried what the intake into nursery has been like this year, in particular in terms of speech and language skills. It was noted that the Early Years Team will be working on these figures and be making comparisons to previous years.

It was questioned as to what support is being provided to Teachers through the pandemic. It was confirmed that counselling services have been increased, and whereas previously Governors would challenge schools a different ethos is being created. In terms of SATS for example schools are being told to do what is right for the school and their children. The Service was keen to ensure staff were being listened to and therefore reassurance and counselling is continuing to be offered.

It was queried whether data is being collected around staff absence and the number of children working from home. It was confirmed that there has been close work with Public Health and they receive daily numbers of pupils and staff who are isolating on a school by school basis.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

#### **F10 CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID - UPDATE**

An update was provided on the response to Covid by Children's Social Care.

In terms of what has worked well, it was noted that all service within Social Care and Early Help continued to be delivered throughout the initial lockdown phase. All vulnerable children were supported by their care team and family time continued to be offered to all through both face to face and virtually, which depended on a full risk assessment. It was also noted that all staff successfully moved to remote working and staffing level remained viable throughout. Great support was offered from ICT services to ensure staff and families could continue to work and make contact.

The service continues to RAG rate children on how they will work from home. Through a DfE grant, 500-600 laptops were provided to vulnerable families. It was acknowledged however that this was not an easy feat.

It was noted that there has been an increase in the overall demand in Children's Social Care, with 11.8% more Looked After Children (LAC) compared to last year. The highest number of LAC that Gateshead has ever had was in the summer when there were 454 children, there was also a 9.6% increase in Children in Need. This created pressures as staffing levels have not increased and it also reflects the challenges faced by families. There has also been an increase in Early Help services with a 17% increase from last year.

Due to the increased demand on the service, more children have been placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), 24 more places than previous year. This has impacted on response time and has proven quite challenging.

During the most recent phase of the lockdown there has been more of an impact on the workforce with more Covid positive staff and therefore more isolation. The majority of staff have still been able to work but this has required the service to think

differently regarding how direct work was undertaken.

In terms of lessons learnt, the merits of re-deployment have been seen with the successful movement of staff into children's Homes. There has been successful recruitment of additional Social Workers at a time when other local authorities were putting their recruitment on hold. This has led to the appointment of some very experienced Social Workers. There has also been a number of benefits to using IT platforms, through teams, video meetings and virtual family time.

It was reported that, despite increased demand, services have been maintained and new initiatives taken up, such as the DfE Social Worker in schools programme which was launched in November. Through this programme there have been six Social Workers placed in schools across Gateshead, the initiative has been well received by schools.

In terms of ongoing challenges it was noted that maintaining good staff emotional wellbeing and morale is essential. Also, being responsive to staffing pressures and absences as an impact of Covid will continue to be challenging, although it was acknowledged that this has slowed down over the last week. A further challenge will be the ability to meet ongoing increase in demand, especially if the pattern of increasing number continues, this will be in relation to foster placements, residential provision and staffing levels.

It was queried whether the delays with partner agencies has led to increased cost burdens on the authority and whether there is any indication of what overspend there has been this year. It was confirmed that this is currently being worked on but that placing a child in a local authority placement is very different compared to IFAs and ideally our children and young people should be kept in local foster placements. Work is ongoing to increase the number of Foster Carers in Gateshead and it is hoped that due to the current situation, i.e. increased redundancies etc, more people will see this as an opportunity for a career change. Virtual open evenings are being held and so far 10 new families have come forward and assessments have started. It was acknowledged however that with a greater number of Foster Carers comes a need for more Social Workers, therefore it is expected there will be a large overspend on the budget this year, although Covid funding has also been received to offset some of that overspend.

It was questioned whether there has been an increase in the number of grievances within the Social Care Teams. It was confirmed that there has been no increase, the service has very robust managers who are very linked in with their staff. Although the service has had to adapt staff are receiving the support they need.

Committee requested that absence figures be shared to show yearly comparisons and also those absences relating to Covid.

RESOLVED - That the information presented be noted.

## **F11 APPROACH TO A NEW PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Committee received a report setting out the proposed approach towards developing a new performance management and improvement framework for the Council. The current framework ended in September and the new framework is being developed to better reflect the Council's priorities.

It was reported that it is important to have a tool to identify how the Council is delivering against the Thrive agenda, and therefore making a difference for local people. The new framework will be looking at if resources are in the right place which will be part of a broader framework. The framework should help get the Council from where it is to where we want it to be with clear analysis to understand where improvements and interventions need to be targeted to have the greatest impact.

The guiding principles were set out as;

- Shaped by Councillors to enable them to scrutinise performance
- Owned by all services and led by senior officers
- Based on delivery of Thrive
- Layered approach
- Integral to the budget approach
- Simple and responsive
- Engages employees through its development
- Quantitative and qualitative approach
- Locality based approached as well as population level
- Takes account of partnership working
- Intelligence led, including benchmarking, to review and improves
- Data hub approach – more accessible data behind a streamlined, corporate framework
- Measures the health of the organisation

A number of performance frameworks from other local authorities was provided to the Committee.

Committee was advised that performance management should help an organisation get from where it is to where it wants to be and is an important tool in identifying strengths and areas for improvement through interventions.

The point was made that the Thrive agenda and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy are based on a qualitative approach and therefore not about quantitative as many performance frameworks usually are. It was noted that the basic principles of both strategies are to reduce inequality, place based positive redistribution (equity between communities). It was acknowledged that these principles need to be reflected in any performance management framework and to make Thrive a reality these principles need to be unlocked. It was acknowledged as things change quickly it may be that the framework will need to start small and continue to be reviewed going forward.

It was agreed that the information contained in the framework needed to be

accessible and more condensed. It was also suggested that any under performance should be highlighted with the reasons why and how it would be addressed. RAG rating was also felt useful to continue into the new framework.

RESOLVED - That the views of the Committee be noted and any further views be provided to officers.

## **F12 DEVELOPMENT OF OSC WORK PROGRAMMES**

A report was presented on the current position relating to the OSC work programmes for 2020-21 and 2021-22.

As a result of Covid it was previously agreed that this year's programme would not go ahead and for next year the work programme would continue to have a degree of flexibility.

Discussions will be held with OSC Chair's in the new year and emerging themes will then be identified at the next meeting of this Committee in March.

One area of concern was raised relating to children's oral health as dentists have been badly impacted and Committee previously undertook a review on this issue.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That Committee noted the position in relation to the OSC's work programme for 2020-21.
- (ii) That Committee was satisfied with the indicative approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021-22.



**TITLE OF REPORT:** Delivering Thrive - a New Performance Management and Improvement Framework

**REPORT OF:** Darren Collins, Strategic Director, Resources and Digital

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## SUMMARY

This report sets out the proposed approach to performance management and improvement following engagement. The views of members of the Committee will be sought on the draft framework.

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### Background

1. Performance Management is used by local authorities to identify how well they are delivering services and making a positive difference as well as where improvements need to be targeted. It aims to help services get from where they are to where they need to be and inform decision in an efficient and effective way.
2. The Council's current performance framework has been in place for several years and has evolved over time. There is a need to develop a new framework that better reflects the priorities of the Council and which enables it to manage performance and demonstrate delivery against Thrive priorities.

### Development

3. The development of a new approach began by agreeing some underpinning guiding principles which aims to develop a framework that:
  - Is shaped around the characteristics needed to enable people to thrive
  - Is simple, responsive, timely and meaningful indicators
  - Empowers employees to drive improvement
  - Incorporates qualitative and quantitative approaches
  - Recognises locality-based approaches, population and community level interventions to improve
  - Considers partnerships, communities and aligned to key policies and strategies such as the Health and Well-being Strategy, housing and schools
  - Is intelligence led, using evidence to learn and improve
  - Considers how to incorporate a wider range of data, for example linking to a 'Data hub' approach
  - Measures the health of the organisation (balanced scorecard approach)
  - Enables members to scrutinise performance and see the impact of decision making
4. It was also clear that any new framework needed to be able to respond to the impacts of Covid-19 and the future shape and role of the Council.

## Engagement

5. Engagement across the Council both elected members and services has been a really important element of the development of a new approach to performance. Partner involvement has also been developing recognising that delivery of Thrive requires a range of partners working together to achieve better outcomes and address inequality. Engagement has been phased with this first seeking views on how to develop a new approach while more recently this has been used to seek views on a draft framework. Engagement has included:
6. Member engagement to date has taken place through:
  - Overview and Scrutiny Committees (November and December 2020)
  - Portfolio (November and December 2020)
  - Corporate Advisory Group (February 2021)
  - Chairs and Vice Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (February 2021)
7. Officer engagement has included:
  - Senior Leadership discussions with Corporate Management Team and Service Directors
  - Officer workshop
  - Employee focus groups
  - Trade Unions
  - Service / thematic discussions
8. The Council is also engaging with its partners including health partners and the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Health and Well-being Board.
9. Members will receive an overview of the outcome of engagement however key comments made so far include:
  - Thrive was the overarching policy for the framework supported by the Health and Wellbeing Strategy with a strong emphasis on tackling inequalities.
  - The framework should provide members with a tool to challenge and scrutinise how priorities are being delivered and their impact
  - To be used to inform decision making about interventions and resource deployment.
  - Consider how to draw on and make best use of existing data ensuring this is robust and accessible to a range of audiences
  - Must be meaningful to all employees being clear on how everyone contributes to Thrive
  - Analysis is a key element with interpretation of the data with qualitative and quantitative elements and enabling a 'deeper dive' into areas
  - A greater emphasis on inequalities was needed so understand the areas of greatest need and whether we are closing the gap
  - Highlighting both areas for improvement as well as achievements
  - Presentation a step forward but could be clearer still
  - Greater engagement of partners as this develops

10. This has been used to inform development and refine the new framework. Further engagement is also planned as, crucially, part of new approach will include review and reflection and continued engagement will be a key feature of this.

### **The new framework**

11. The purpose the new Performance Management Framework is to:

- Enable the Council to know whether the it is achieving its priorities. (Thrive Policy)
- Ensure that the Council's resources are being deployed effectively
- Make both short and long term effective decisions
- A whole systems approach – embedded in our partnership working to deliver the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

12. The new approach will be firmly based on Thrive, but framed within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the six policy objectives, which aim to address inequalities in Gateshead. This will also help to ensure that resources are being deployed in the areas that matter to local people.

13. Implementation is envisaged to be from April, though will be an iterative process recognising that the new approach requires culture change including greater ownership corporate performance across the organisation and empowerment of employees to drive improvement and better outcomes.

14. The Committee will receive a presentation setting out the outcome of the engagement to date and the revised draft framework.

### **Recommendation**

15. Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be asked to consider and provide views on the following:

- What are your views on the new framework?
- How will this help your scrutiny role?
- How would you like to be involved and engaged as this develops further into implementation and then review?

**Contact: Lindsay Murray**

**Ext: 2794**

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**TITLE OF REPORT:** **Work Programme 2020-21 and Development of Work Programme for 2021-22**

**REPORT OF:** **Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive  
Mike Barker, Strategic Director, Corporate Services  
& Governance**

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## Summary

This report is set out in two parts. The first part sets out the current work programme for Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2020-21 and the second part details the current position / next steps in the development of the work programme for this OSC for the municipal year 2021-22.

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## 2020-21 Work Programme

1. As a result of the uncertainties arising in relation to the Covid -19 pandemic, along with the pressures on services that this brought and having regard to the Council's approach to the development of a new performance framework, a more flexible approach was adopted for scrutiny during 2020-21.
2. This approach recognised the demands on services and the Council as a whole but, at the same time, has ensured that we have been meeting our statutory obligations to provide an effective scrutiny function and scrutiny has concentrated on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider Council.
3. The work of this OSC was 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 to avoid placing any additional burdens on service areas and a reduced programme of meetings was agreed.
4. The Committee's current work programme is set out at Appendix 1 and any changes to the programme have been highlighted in bold and italics for ease of identification.

## Development of 2021-22 OSC Work Programmes

### Background

5. At its December 2020 meeting the OSC acknowledged that the ongoing uncertainties relating to the Covid 19 pandemic, the lack of clarity on the outlook for local government finance alongside the strong possibility that OSC meetings will continue to need to be held remotely for some time to come, meant that the approach to developing the OSC work programmes for 2021-22 was likely to have to be similarly flexible and proposals were likely to be indicative.

6. It was also noted that a continued focus on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in some form or another would be likely to be a major area of focus for the OSCs at key points during 2021-22.

### **Current Position**

7. With this in mind, an initial consultation with OSC Chairs and other elected members and officers on the proposed priority issues for the new work programmes for 2021-22 was carried out between 1 and 15 February 2021.
8. It was highlighted that any suggestions for the work programmes should focus on priority issues that would support the Council's Thrive agenda and add value, taking account of the five priority areas outlined in the budget consultation; the development of the Council's new Performance Framework; the Gateshead Strategic Needs Assessment and the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
9. At this OSC meeting on 4 March 2021 there will be an opportunity for the OSC to comment on / discuss emerging issues for this OSC / put forward additional issues for consideration.

### **Next Steps**

10. Subsequently, in line with usual practice, partner organisations will be consulted on the emerging issues for each OSC for 2021-22 with a view to OSCs considering any feedback/ additional suggestions / endorsing their respective work programmes at their June 2021 OSC meetings and referring them to Council for agreement.

### **Recommendations**

11. The Committee is asked to:-
  - a) Note the work programme for 2020-21;
  - b) Comment on the emerging issues for this OSC's 2021-22 work programme / highlight any additional issues for consideration.

**Contact:** Angela Frisby

**Ext:** 2138

<b>Draft Families OSC Work Programme 2020/21</b>	
<b>10 September 2020</b> <b>1.30pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress update on the impact of the Covid - 19 pandemic</li> <li>• Update on end of year performance for 2019-20</li> </ul>
<b>3 December 2020</b> <b>1.30pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covid-19 Update – focusing on lessons learned and how this is impacting / has impacted on / changed the way the work of the Council is progressed in the longer term.</li> <li>• Performance Framework – PowerPoint Presentation – setting out the principles and some examples to facilitate a discussion about what members would like from a new framework.</li> <li>• Development of OSC Work Programmes – setting out the process for developing the work programmes for 2021-22</li> </ul>
<b>4 March 2021</b> <b>1.30pm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covid-19 Update - focusing on lessons learned and how this is impacting / has impacted on / changed the way the work of the Council is progressed in the longer term</li> <li>• <b>SEND Ofsted Visit</b></li> <li>• New Performance Framework – share with OSCs and seek approval.</li> <li>• OSC Work Programmes 2021-22 – Emerging Issues</li> </ul>

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