

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**
13 October 2020

Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme 2019-2023
Statutory Scrutiny Officer

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks formal agreement of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on the proposals for revising the Overview & Scrutiny work programme in light of the national health pandemic.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has been discussing a revised programme and this report pulls together revised priorities, updated scope for reviews, proposed timescales, virtual ways of working and the impact of the pandemic on affected services.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 that each Panel's proposed review scope be commissioned;
- 2.2 that these reviews are prioritised for the purposes of allocating resources;
- 2.3 that the scope for each future review be brought back to the Commission before commencement to ensure they have been updated in light of the national health pandemic in terms of their focus, approach and timing.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 To agree a deliverable overview & scrutiny work programme which prioritises the restart of review activity responding to the national health pandemic and aligning scheduling with the Council's Renewal Strategy whilst remaining flexible enough to accommodate urgent short-term issues.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 **Refocus** – balancing the Council Plan timescales, resources available and recovery schedule of services to create a deliverable work programme focusing initially on Covid-19 related reviews. Depending on the progress of reviews it is anticipated that each Panel will deliver at least one fewer review than originally planned but incomplete activity can be finished off quickly. As the Council recovers the Commission and Panel Chairmen are keen to manage new pressures on services carefully and refocused reviews should support service activity rather than detract. **This is the preferred option.**
- 4.2 **Continue from pause** - the overview and scrutiny programme was paused and could simply be restarted where it left off. This however ignores the primary objective of the design of the work programme which was to support the delivery of the Council Plan. The programme would no longer be aligned to delivery timescales as these have now changed and does not reflect changed priorities.

- 4.3 **Abandon incomplete review activity** – the programme could be restarted at the appropriate time abandoning incomplete activity. This would not be palatable as the work programme was created based on prioritised topics so earlier topics remain important to elected members and it would not feel appropriate to leave detailed activities incomplete.
- 4.4 **Redesign work programme** – given the significant impact of Covid-19 on the Council's services the work programme could be redesigned on the Council's new priorities. This would add significant delay to the restart of review activity and there will be opportunities to reconsider the work programme content in the future once the impact is quantified. Delivery of the work programme will be reviewed by the Commission at least six-monthly.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Significant time, effort and resources were put in to supporting the new overview and scrutiny arrangements and the work programme which were agreed in November 2019. The new arrangements had not had the chance to fully develop and be embedded within Bracknell Forest before they were paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to restart, in a COVID appropriate manner, the process to enable scrutiny to continue to add value and be more productive than the previous arrangements. The current arrangements functioned effectively for five months, before the pandemic impacted on resources and the ability to safely meet in person.
- 5.2 When the country entered lockdown there was clearly a pause in relation to holding meetings, as existing legislation required personal attendance of Members which was no longer possible due to the Government's clear direction regarding social distancing. This impasse was remedied with the passing of regulations on 4 April providing the legal basis for holding meetings virtually. The Commission therefore met remotely for the first time on 27 May 2020 and regularly after; having now had sufficient meetings to have caught up on the programme of Commission meetings.
- 5.3 The Commission recognised and acknowledged, in its 27 May O&S Commission meeting, that:
- Policy activity across the Council was likely to be pushed back
 - Capacity to support reviews would not return immediately when services refocused on non-Covid19 related activities
 - Live scrutiny was difficult to facilitate during the fast-paced situation as very few Executive decisions were being made. Elected Members were being briefed twice weekly on operational level decisions which closely followed government guidance
 - Proposed programme for the Commission recognised reduced resources available and focused on activity that would add value immediately e.g. Digital Access which had been critical during lockdown period
 - Members were able to continue to discuss their ideas, but these informal discussions would not be supported by officers or able to be broadcast as public sessions
 - Important that scrutiny was transparent and accessible to the public so the outcome of these discussions would need to be fed back into the work programme in the future

- 5.4 As a result, a revised programme of Commission meetings has been agreed for the remaining municipal year.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission programme	
27 May	Commission meeting
9 July	Commission meeting (Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection in attendance)
12 August	Commission meeting (Executive Member for Transformation and Finance in attendance)
15 September	Commission meeting (Executive Member for Council Strategy & Community Cohesion - Leader of the Council and Chair of the Executive in attendance)
13 October	Crime and Disorder Panel (Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection) invited COVID Community impact assessment - Education and schools related mental health (Executive Member for Children, Young People & Learning - Vice-Chair of the Executive and Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Housing) invited
11 November	Budget Scrutiny (Executive Member for the Transformation and Finance) invited Corporate Plan Overview Report
2 December	Climate Change Strategy update (Executive Member for the Environment) invited
6 January	Council Plan Overview Report
17 February	
2 March	

- 5.5 Therefore, following the revised work programme of the Commission, the Panel Chairs were asked to review their work programmes, recognising that the Council's resources were diminished, due to the pandemic and that some services wouldn't have the capacity to support a review until the post-pandemic recovery phase. The COVID impact has meant that some previous timescales are no longer deliverable.
- 5.6 The Commission is aware that whilst review activity was paused the Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinators were redeployed elsewhere in the Council to support the Council's response to the pandemic. The redeployment activity for one member of staff has come to an end and she is back working within the team to progress upcoming reviews, however she will be reducing her hours of work from the beginning of November. The redeployment of the second member of staff has been extended for another nine months in order that vital work can continue to be delivered. In response to these staffing changes two secondments are being recruited to so that the capacity of the team will not be reduced.
- 5.7 As with the previous programme it will not be feasible to support each Panel running a review concurrently. The team will have capacity for multiple review activity to overlap and this will need to be carefully managed. Once commenced it is important to recognise that any delay in completion of a review could impact on the commencement of another Panel's activity. It is important to note that the dates relate to the proposed commencement of the review and each Panel would need to

conclude a review before embarking on another. It would be feasible, however, for councillors to undertake independent research to contribute to the development of evidence packs and identification of expert witnesses for upcoming reviews.

- 5.8 As councillors, officers and external witnesses increase engagement with the technology available to work remotely it will create opportunities for evolving how reviews are delivered. This includes how reviews are scheduled; making use of break out meetings; wider councillor engagement; recording meetings for absent members to review later; involving national expert witnesses and using collaborative tools for developing evidence packs and capturing findings.
- 5.9 Following discussions with the Chair and Vice-Chair of each Panel it is proposed that the review activity is reordered as set out in the tables below and combined as a proposed programme at Appendix A. This has been discussed in principle and informally supported by the Commission. Each initial review has been refocused and the revised scope attached at Appendix B for agreement and prioritisation by the Commission.

Education, Skills and Growth	
As of March 2020	Recovery proposal
19-20 Q1 Care Leavers Education and Skills	Care Leavers Complete
19-20 Q3	
19-20 Q4 County Lines Communities & Education and Skills	
19-20 Q1	
20-21 Q2 SEND Education and Skills	
20-21 Q3	20-21 Q3 Apprentices Education and Skills
20-21 Q4 Apprentices Education and Skills	
21-22 Q1	21-22 Q1 CIL Economic resilience
21-22 Q2 CIL Economic resilience	
21-22 Q3 Governors Education and Skills	21-22 Q3 County Lines Communities & Education and Skills
21-22 Q4	
22-23 Q1 Topic TBC TBC	22-23 Q1 SEND Education and Skills
22-23 Q2	
22-23 Q3	22-23 Q3 Governors

	Education and Skills
22-23 Q4	

Environment and Communities	
As of March 2020	Revised proposal
19-20 Q4 Burials Communities	Burials Pt 1 Complete
20-21 Q1 Food Waste Protecting and enhancing our environment	
20-21 Q2	
20-21 Q3 Residential Parking Protecting and enhancing our environment	20-21 Q3 Strategic Housing – Registered Social Landlords Review Communities
20-21 Q4	
21-22 Q1 Integrated Enforcement Protecting and enhancing our environment	21-22 Q1 Food Waste Protecting and enhancing our environment
21-22 Q2	
21-22 Q3 Housing Allocation Policy Communities	21-22 Q3 Residential Parking Protecting and enhancing our environment
21-22 Q4 Topic TBC	
22-23 Q1 Topic TBC	22-23 Q1 Integrated Enforcement Protecting and enhancing our environment
22-23 Q2	
22-23 Q3	22-23 Q3 Topic TBC
22 – 23 Q4	

Wellbeing and Finance	
As of March 2020	Recovery proposal
19-20 Q4 Healthy eating, activity and exercise Caring for you and your family	
19-20 Q4 Isolation and Loneliness Caring for you and your family	
20-21 Q1	
20-21 Q2 Digital Access Value for money	<i>(completed as a Commission review in July 2020)</i>
20-21 Q3	
20-21 Q4	20-21 Q4 Community Impact Assessment and Residents' Survey Caring for you and your family
21-22 Q1 Primary Care Networks Value for money	Reordering is on hold for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion of incomplete Healthy eating, activity and exercise • Digital Access • Isolation and Loneliness • Mental Health • Primary Care Networks • Unsafe discharge • Topic TBC
21-22 Q2	
21-22 Q3 Mental Health Caring for you and your family	
21-22 Q4	
22-23 Q1 Unsafe discharge Value for money	
22-23 Q2 Topic TBC TBC	
22-23 Q3	
22-23 Q4	

5.10 In the meantime non-executive members have been keen to restart scrutiny to have more of a hands-on role and make a more constructive contribution to the work of the Council. In addition to the core Panel membership, all non-executive members can take part in review work and the new approach relies on the active involvement of a significant number of non-executive members to be delivered effectively. The current remote working facilitates this participation and there is an opportunity to encourage a higher level of active engagement.

5.11 The work programme is therefore designed based on:

- Prioritisation of topics as identified by members
- Officer resource availability – both within services and within scrutiny support
- Council Plan delivery dates
- Members' capacity to engage

5.12 Finally, it is noted that the main reason of having a clear and agreed published plan, is to allow the Commission and Panel to be strategic in their approach, having a long-term view on the development of the council. At this time of considerable disruption,

the strength of scrutiny, is that it has its focus on the long-term development of the council and how the council can meet its communities needs. In order to do this deep strategic thinking, it needs to engage with stakeholders and the community itself. This can only be done, if these key players in the process can see in advance what is going to be discussed and therefore have time to mobilise and ready themselves for the Panel and Commission enquiries.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Advice

6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Other Consultation Responses

6.3 These are included in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.4 An initial screening has been completed and is attached at Appendix D. The process of devising the work programme is based on delivering the Council's agreed objectives and monitoring performance. Councillors prioritise activities based on co-ordinating with delivery timescales and in consultation with relevant senior officers. Throughout all scrutiny activity members are reminded to consider what equality impacts there may be, and this is delivered in a way to not create barriers to wider involvement e.g. timing of review activity, length of reviews and access to information. As part of the scoping process for each review an EIA screening will be more explicitly undertaken and a full assessment undertaken if required.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 Effective scrutiny is important to the successful functioning of local democracy by securing the efficient delivery of Council services and driving improvements. A robust work programme is essential in order to ensure that overview and scrutiny activity contributes successfully to the work of the Council. Poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and/or service failure.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Ann Moore, Democratic & Registration Services - 01344 352260

Ann.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Appendix A – Proposed combined work programme

Appendix B – Proposed review scope for initial reviews

Appendix C – Work programme updates

Appendix D – Initial Equalities Screening Record Form