

**Meeting:** Family Friendly Sub-Committee

**Date:** 6 July 2023

**Title:** Work Programme 2023-24

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**Service:** Governance

**Wards affected:** All

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## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposed approach to work planning for the Family Friendly Sub-Committee for 2023-24, together with an initial information base which the Sub-Committee may wish to utilise in considering and deciding on its outline work programme for 2023-24.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the information set out in this report regarding Scrutiny work planning, including good practice guidance from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- (b) Note that link Cabinet members and lead Senior Leadership Team officers will actively support the work and information needs of the Family Friendly Sub-Committee in the coming year, including providing information to support the Sub-Committee's work planning, at regular intervals during the year
- (c) Note that link Cabinet members and lead senior officers have been invited to submit suggestions on current and upcoming policy matters which the Sub-Committee may wish to consider when planning its initial programme of work for 2023/24; and that Committee members have also been invited by the Chair to put forward suggestions for Scrutiny

topics; and a list of suggested Scrutiny topics for 2023/24 is included in this report for the Sub-Committee's consideration

- (d) Using this information and the views of Sub-Committee members, decide an outline work programme for the year; and agree that work programming will be included as a standard agenda item at each future meeting of the Sub-Committee in order that the work programme can be flexed as necessary in response to emerging matters as the year progresses.

### 3. Introduction

#### *Background – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) Review*

- 3.1 The Authority's Scrutiny arrangements have recently been evaluated and restructured, following an external Scrutiny Improvement Review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The CfGS is a national body which specialises in promoting governance excellence within local authorities.
- 3.2 The CfGS report was considered in full by the former Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on 21 March 2023. The report is referenced in 'background information' below and can be accessed [here](#).
- 3.3 Following consideration of the CfGS report the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee proposed that the number and remit of scrutiny committees in North Tyneside should be restructured. This proposal was considered by the Constitution Task Group in April 2023 and reported to Annual Council on 18 May 2023. At that meeting Council agreed a new structure for Scrutiny, creating the new Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination and Finance Committee and five specialist sub-committees aligned to the Council Plan. One of these sub-committees is the Family Friendly Sub-Committee.
- 3.4 The meeting of 6 July 2023 is therefore the first meeting of the newly created Family Friendly Sub-Committee. This provides a good opportunity for the Sub-Committee to consider its approach to work planning, the information and input it will need to enable effective work planning, and the initial areas on which the Sub-Committee may wish to focus its work plan during 2023-24.
- 3.5 The Chair of the Family Friendly Sub-Committee has sought the views of Committee members, in addition to receiving information from the lead SLT Director and Cabinet members about potential policy areas. This is discussed in more detail below.

*CfGS – Good Practice Recommendations regarding Work Planning*

- 3.6 In their Scrutiny Improvement Review the CfGS made several 'good practice' suggestions around Scrutiny work planning. These included:
- (a) **A clearer focus on democratic accountability of the Executive** – the CfGS commented that scrutiny of the Mayor and Cabinet Members should form a key part of the work plan, and the Mayor and Cabinet Members should regularly attend scrutiny to answer questions on items falling within their portfolio responsibilities. Cabinet Members are also able to provide valuable information to support the identification of Scrutiny topics by the Committee and the Scrutiny work planning process.
  - (b) **Involvement of all Committee members in work planning** – the CFGS stated that work planning is key to ensuring that Scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. It went on to suggest that all members of each scrutiny Committee should have a chance to influence that committee's work programme; and further, that committee members should lead development of their committee's work plan, in order to have influence and ownership over committee activity.
  - (c) **Sufficient flexibility** – the CfGS noted that work planning is an on-going process and not just a one-off event. Whilst identification of a list of topics and priorities is sensible there will need to be flexibility in the work plan and time set aside to regularly revisit the relevance of topics in meetings as the local context changes.
  - (d) **Senior Officer Support** – the CfGS highlighted that the Mayor and Chief Executive both expressed a strong desire to support scrutiny and confirm that its role is central to open, transparent decision-making and accountability in the council. The CfGS commented that "buy-in at the most senior political and officer level is crucial to improvement and therefore highly valued". In addition to the identification of link Cabinet members, the commitment of the Authority's Senior Leadership Team to supporting the scrutiny function of the Council has been made clear. These officers possess a breadth of policy context for the organisation which will be a valuable information source for Scrutiny.
  - (e) **'Less is More'** – the CfGS stated that "there is evidence that when scrutiny focuses on fewer things of greater importance, more is achieved". This

would be worthwhile to consider when developing the scrutiny work plan. The CfGS also recommended considering the introduction of selection criteria to identify appropriate topics for the work plan, and bringing discussion of the work plan to the beginning of meetings, so emerging or changing priorities can benefit from considered discussion.

### *Taking these Ideas Forward*

- 3.7 The Family Friendly Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference, agreed by Council on 18 May 2023, are attached as **Appendix A**. This sets out the remit and focus of the Family Friendly Sub-Committee.
- 3.8 It must be emphasised that it is for the Family Friendly Sub-Committee to determine its work programme. However to aid the Sub-Committee in this process, some initial activity to identify potential work plan topics has been undertaken, outlined below.
- 3.9 For each Scrutiny Committee the links with lead Cabinet portfolios and Directorates of the Authority have been identified. These links are summarised in the diagram of Scrutiny Support Arrangements attached as **Appendix B**. For the Family Friendly Sub-Committee, the Cabinet Member responsible for Supporting and Protecting Children and the Cabinet Member responsible for Inclusion, Employment and Skills will be the link Cabinet Members. The Director of Children's Services will be the link Senior Leadership Team officer to provide ongoing and regular officer support to the Committee.
- 3.10 The Cabinet members and SLT lead officer have been invited to meet with the Chair of Committee to provide information and suggestions on policy topics which the sub-Committee may wish to consider when planning its programme of work for 2023/24. In addition, the Chair of the sub-committee has also invited members of the Committee to suggest areas which the Committee may choose to examine this year. Those suggestions are summarised in **Appendix C**.

#### 4. Background Information

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, Scrutiny Improvement Review Letter  
(published in the Agenda for Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on 21 March 2023) – see [here](#).

#### 5. Appendices

**Appendix A:** Family Friendly Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference, agreed by Council on 18 May 2023

**Appendix B:** Scrutiny Support Arrangements 2023/24

**Appendix C:** Initial Information Base and Suggested Work Plan topics to support decisions on the 2023/24 work programme by the Family Friendly Sub-Committee