

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



24 July 2024

Refresh of the Work Programme 2024/25 for Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of Helen Bradley, Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESC OSC) with an updated draft work programme for 2024/25.

Executive summary

- 2 ESC OSC review their work programme each year to reflect the objectives and associated outcomes and actions identified within the Council Plan and in the context of the County Durham Vision 2035.
- 3 The proposed ESC OSC work programme has been framed around the shared County Durham Vision 2035 based on the three strategic ambitions – ‘more and better jobs’, ‘long and independent lives’ and ‘connected communities’.
- 4 Overview and Scrutiny work programmes are designed to be flexible to accommodate items which may arise throughout the year. This flexibility is particularly important as we have an extensive work programme and we must ensure we are able to accommodate issues that may arise during the term of the work programme.

Recommendations

- 5 The ESC OSC is recommended to:

- a) Receive and comment on the proposed draft work programme for 2024/25 (copy attached at appendix 2).
- b) Agree the ESC OSC work programme for 2024/25 and the flexibility it offers to respond to emerging issues.
- c) Consider identifying a topic for future light touch review activity.

Background

- 6 Scrutiny committees adapted to the change during the pandemic and some of these adaptations have become a part of business as usual for the committee such as briefing reports being used to provide information to members of the committee and the more recent addition of informal information sessions. The ESCOSC work programme is refreshed annually and takes into consideration the priorities of the Committee and areas identified by the service.
- 7 The current overview and scrutiny committees work programmes are informed by:
 - County Durham Vision 2035
 - Council Plan
 - Cabinet's Notice of Key Decisions
 - Partnership plans and strategies
 - Performance and budgetary control data
 - Changes in government legislation
 - Key questions for improving performance
 - Local priorities
- 8 The County Durham Partnership agreed a Vision for County Durham 2035 which sets out our strategic direction and what we would like to achieve over the next 15 years and is written around three broad ambitions for the people of County Durham:
 - More and better jobs
 - People live long and independent lives
 - Connected communities
- 9 Each ambition contains a number of objectives together with some council specific objectives. Following the refresh of the Council Plan in February 2024, it is now structured around five themes which reflect our contribution towards achieving the three ambitions within the Vision for County Durham as well as the council's own improvement agenda:

- Our Economy
- Our People
- Our Communities
- Our Environment
- Our Council

Council Plan 2024-2028

- 10 The Council Plan is the primary corporate planning document for the County Council and details Durham County Council's contribution towards achieving the objectives set out in the Vision for County Durham 2035 together with its own change agenda. It aims to provide a readable and accessible summary for members, partners and the public of our priorities for the county and the main programmes of work that we will undertake to help achieve these priorities. The Plan will now be refreshed each year to reflect the integration of corporate and financial planning.
- 11 Both the Vision for County Durham and the Council Plan are structured around the three ambitions for the county and our own improvement agenda. The 'our council' theme captures the corporate initiatives the council has identified and wants to undertake to achieve the ambitions within the vision:
- a) Our resources will be managed effectively
 - b) Create a workforce for the future
 - c) Design our services with service users
 - d) Use data and technology more effectively
 - e) We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture
- 12 The key themes which apply to the ESC OSC are 'Our Environment' and 'Our Communities' with the relevant ambitions detailed below:

Our Environment

- a) A physical environment contributing to good health
- b) A carbon neutral county
- c) Reduced impact of waste and pollution on our environment
- d) A protected, restored and sustainable natural environment

Our Communities

- a) Towns and villages which are vibrant, well used, clean, attractive and safe
- b) Good access to workplaces, services, retail and leisure opportunities.

Current Work Programme

13 During 2023/24 the ESC OSC prioritised items to be considered at formal meetings of the committee due to the size of the work programme. Reports on other items were circulated via email to members. The committee has been involved and contributed at various workshops, has hosted several informal information sessions as well as undertaking budgetary and performance monitoring, visits, responded to a consultation and considered overview and progress monitoring reports and presentations. The work of the committee in 2023/24 is detailed below.:

- **Consultations**
 - Climate Emergency Response Plan 3

- **Workshop**
 - Tourism Offer in County Durham
 - New Place Brand for County Durham

- **Areas of overview and monitoring activity**
 - Woodland Management
 - Tree Management Policy
 - Highways, Footways and Bridge Maintenance
 - Ecological Emergency Action Plan
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy
 - Strategic Leisure Framework
 - Library Transformation
 - Strategic Waste
 - Fly Tipping
 - Allotment Improvement Plan
 - Bereavement Services
 - Community Protection Services
 - Climate Emergency Response Plan 2&3
 - Energy from Mine Water Projects
 - Green Corridor Project
 - Management of DCC Land for Biodiversity
 - Environment and Climate Change Partnership Update
 - Environment Awards

- **Briefing Reports**
 - Heritage Coast
 - Community Action Team
 - Winter Maintenance
 - Capital Maintenance
 - DCC Fleet
 - Environmental Campaigns
 - Work of the Flood Risk Management Authorities for County Durham

- **Visits undertaken**
 - Hardwick Park
 - Morrison Busty
 - Heritage Coast

- **Informal Information sessions**
 - Fuel poverty
 - Pest Control
 - Air Quality Management Plan

- **Budgetary and performance monitoring:**
 - Quarterly budgetary monitoring for the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Service Grouping.
 - Quarterly corporate performance monitoring for the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Service Grouping.

14 In addition, the ESC OSC has also considered the following areas which cut across objectives in the Council Plan or cut across the remit of other Overview and Scrutiny Committees including:

- County Durham Visitor Economy
- Regional and Local Transport Policy and Delivery
- Destination Management Plan for County Durham

Areas for Consideration in the ESC OSC Work Programme

15 Members of the ESC OSC are asked to agree the proposed draft work programme for 2024/25 that has been prepared and is attached at appendix two. The draft work programme is very comprehensive

drawing on topical areas across the remit of the committee and it should be noted that it is also flexible.

- 16 Paragraph 13 & 14 of the report identifies the activity undertaken by the committee during 2023/24. The committee is asked to consider areas for inclusion in the work programme for 2024/25 in light of the current Council Plan and the Vision for County Durham 2035. Appendix 2 of this report sets out a draft work programme for consideration.
- 17 Members are encouraged to consider identifying areas of scrutiny investigation (for light touch review) from the work programme.

Conclusion

- 18 The work programme identifies areas of work that fall within the remit of ESC OSC and is flexible in its delivery.

Background papers

- [Council Plan 2024-2028](#)
- [County Durham Vision 2035](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

The Overview and Scrutiny work programme is an important element of the Council's governance and risk management arrangements.

Procurement

Not applicable