

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Executive Summary

Each year, the Chairman of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee prepares a report outlining the activities undertaken by the Committee. This year, the Committee has reviewed a wide range of topics and has completed both scrutiny and pre-decision scrutiny of the work of the Executive and the Council as a whole. The four Task Groups of the Committee – the Economic Development, Finance and Housing Task Groups – have continued to monitor and review these three core areas of the Council's activities. The Committee recently set up a further task group, Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group, to review the due diligence and process applied to the decision making and the continued requirement for Part II.

The Work Programme of the Committee is regularly reviewed and updated to take account of issues affecting the Borough at the time.

The Council is now invited to receive report.

### Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

**RESOLVE That** the report be received.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.
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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Date Published:** 22 July 2020

# Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is wide-ranging and includes a variety of areas for consideration that have been reviewed over the past year. These included areas such as the finance of major developments; internal scrutiny of Council processes; review of joint ventures and partnerships; contractual performance as well as various updates, such as Celebrate Woking, and areas for pre-scrutiny such as the HIF conditions and the proposed Woking Community Lottery.
- 1.2 The Committee commenced with a reminder to members of the Committee's terms of reference - the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are responsible for examining all functions and responsibilities of the Council. The Committee would ensure that the Council delivers its key aims and objectives, by creating an open, transparent mechanism for Councillor's to shape, question, evaluate and challenge the Council policies, decisions and performance.
- 1.3 Mandatory Scrutiny training was also provided to all members prior to the first meeting of the Committee. The successful training was facilitated by Mark Palmer, the Development Director from South East Employers (SEE) and Members noted positive feedback from the session.

### 2.0 Summary of Work Undertaken

- 2.1 Areas brought forward from the 2019/20 Municipal Year;
  - Licensing of the food premises;
  - Followed up with a letter from the previous chair of this Committee to the MP for a change in Government policy regarding the mandatory display of food hygiene status in catering outlets
  - Freedom Leisure - A report had come to the Committee and as various changes had happened in year and significant public concern was still being voiced this was put as an area for in-depth scrutiny.

#### The Work Programme

- 2.2 Every effort was made to ensure that the Committee was working with the forward plan for the Council to ensure forward scrutiny of decisions.

### 2.3 Areas identified for Scrutiny

#### Freedom Leisure

- 2.3 This was a continued piece of scrutiny work carried over from the previous municipal year, and was intended to be the key focus for the Committee in the current year.
- 2.4 The scrutiny was undertaken in four parts, which were;
  - A survey of residents in the Borough. The survey was aimed to capture the results of users and non-users of the leisure centre Both those who do and those who don't, seeking views on a range of areas. For those who do not use the facilities, information was sought on why they didn't and if they utilized alternative facilities elsewhere. This survey was conducted by an external organization on behalf of the Committee, but the Committee was instrumental in determining the range and scope of the survey.
  - A site visit to Pool in the Park by Committee members which was open to all members to attend. The Committee were shown into every area they wished, and our questions were responded to openly and freely at the time. A report on this visit was written by the Chair and sent to members.

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- An agenda item in O&S on the resident experience, with representation from both residents and Freedom Leisure.
- A second agenda item to consider the performance management by the Council of the contract.

### 2.5 Actions from this scrutiny; and outputs

- Report of findings into the site visit
- Survey outcomes, which it is planned will provide a baseline for a follow up survey to be conducted once the present renovations into the changing areas are completed.
- Changes to the way in which Freedom Leisure communicates to residents. A more proactive approach and also a more timely communication of any closures with clear explanations. It was found that Freedom Leisure and the Council were often doing work that was raised as concerns by residents, but that this was not well communicated. It was suggested that a communication action plan be implemented.
- A representative from Freedom Leisure to be invited as a member of the Health and Well-being Task Group. With a key emphasis to be on the inclusion of health within leisure.
- A report was written to the Freedom Leisure Partnership Board with recommendations from the findings of this scrutiny within its performance management brief.
- A recommendation that Freedom Leisure be on the agenda for the next year, following a second survey of residents, to ensure that the anticipated improvements in the public perceptions has been achieved.

### Anti-Social Behaviour and the possible relationship with youth provision.

2.6 This was due to come to the Committee on the 23rd March 2020.

### Children's Centres

2.7 Urgent consideration was given to the SCC decision to close the existing six children's centres, replaced with two centres, and reduce the budget for this area whilst increasing the age range to be managed.

2.8 The SCC consultation and proposal that WBC to take on some of the service under the Family Services was discussed by the Committee. Various changes were debated and the Committee sought assurance on a range of areas to ensure that the essential services would be retained, if in a different form.

2.9 A paper written from the Committee with recommendations to Council, on 25th July where recommendations accepted. A framework was discussed as to what the Council's responsibilities were in this respect and what was to be retained under Surrey County Council. This was followed up by the Chairman and Deputy Chair on behalf of the Committee with the Family Service leads within Woking Borough Council.

2.10 This was followed up by a presentation from the Family services team, which provided significant assurance on aspects such as; training of staff for an extended age range; the universal offer and how this is being provided via alternative provision; the bringing together of the previous Children's centre staff into one team within the Council and the associated robust governance around this; the capacity of the staff and the finances.

2.11 We also learnt of the benefits of this service now being part of the wider council team, with enhanced integration of services and joint learning across other teams.

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### 2.12 Action and outputs:

- A framework paper written to describe the actions and responsibility split between WBC and SCC, this was taken to full Council.
- A follow up on the agenda with an update on the progress of the transition to the new Family Services (this happened on Feb 24th).
- A follow up meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair with the Family Centre leads to discuss progress.

#### Scrutiny on the Victoria Square

2.13 Ray Morgan provided a presentation on the progress and detail of this development.

2.14 This considered both the finances and progress. Some delay will be due to the rebuilding of the red car park, however the overall project is still on track to be completed within the anticipated contract timing. The financial element was reviewed in the finance task group.

2.15 Actions and Outcome;

2.16 A section is now included in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, the 'green book'. Details of the Victoria Square development are discussed regularly in the Victoria Square Oversight group.

#### Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF)

2.17 The Housing Infra Structure Fund was announced in the summer. This area was on the agenda several times over the year, and culminated in agreement in Council.

2.18 Details of the application was discussed by the Committee following a verbal presentation by Ernest Amoako and a presentation by Ray Morgan.

2.19 Actions;

- A summary of the HIF bid was produced by the Chair for members.
- Follow up requested to consider the conditions on which the grant is offered.
- Follow up agenda item to O and S on the conditions and further scrutiny within the Finance task group
- Scrutiny pre Council on the terms of the bid.

#### Sheerwater

2.20 A presentation on the progress was provided by Ray Morgan regarding modifications to the original ideas for the site.

2.21 Actions:

- To come back to O&S for update
- Briefing to all members, done.

#### Play Areas

2.22 The Committee reviewed update on the refurbishment programme of the 42 play grounds within the Borough. The Chair and Vice Chair conducted a site visit of 13 of these prior to the meeting. Concerns were raised on the cleanliness of the play furniture, signage and age

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range recommendations. In particular the refurbishment programme appeared to be very protracted and this was challenged.

### 2.23 Actions:

- Increase the frequency of the refurbishment programme.
- Review the Council recommended play furniture on future refurbishments.
- The updated refurbishment and renovation programme to come back to the Committee.

### Joint Waste Solutions and Amey

2.24 The JWS team presented the data regarding performance of AMEY over the past year. Issues in performance were apparent at the end of last year and the Committee sought assurance that these were being addressed. The key areas of concern were staff and vehicle capacity, both of which the members were informed are being expanded. Members discussed the present provision against their understanding of the initial contract.

### 2.25 Actions:

- Cllr Davis as Portfolio holder offered to review the KPIs which are presented on this performance in the green book. This is following comments that the deteriorating quarter 3 and 4 position were not picked up by the present indicators. It was suggested that a review of these KPIs be undertaken so that in future any issues can be identified and picked up by members via this route.
- Enhanced communication and education from JWS for residents over their recycling offer.
- Update on expanded provisions for other areas of recycling as discussed to come back to the Committee.

### Empty Homes

2.26 This topic was suggested for review by the Committee via the Housing Task Group. The performance of the Council in bringing empty homes back into use dipped significantly last year as a result of pressure to implement the licensing of rental accommodation and staff capacity being diverted. It was noted that the performance in this year is significantly improved and is now ahead of its target. The Committee discussed the wider issues around this complex topic.

### 2.27 Actions:

- All ward members to be given the up to date list of all empty homes in their wards
- Encouragement that ward members identify other empty properties that they may well be aware of.
- Encouragement that members flag up issues that arise from empty homes in cases of ASB, vandalism etc. to the officers.

### Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

2.28 This is due to come to the Committee on the 23rd March 2020.

### Safer Woking Partnership and the Community Safety Plan

2.29 This is due to come to the Committee on the 23rd March 2020.

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### Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group

2.30 Council processes in regard to the Woking Football Club & Associated Developments.

2.31 An ad hoc task group was set up for detailed scrutiny into this.

2.32 Action:

- A report written from the Task group to be presented at the OSC on the 23rd of March with findings and recommendations.

#### For Overview;

- Procurement Process; rules and regulations, plus examples
- Celebrate Woking; achievements to date and the forward plan
- Flood alleviation plans, progress on these.
- Complaints, consideration of trends
- FOI requests; a large increase in these being presented. The Committee requested a further breakdown of those under the democratic services heading.

#### Financial scrutiny and overview

2.33 This was conducted throughout the year via a review of the Green Book and presentation of the Mid-Year Treasury management report to the Committee. More detailed review was conducted via the Finance task group.

#### Pre scrutiny

2.34 The community lottery suggestion was put to the Committee for consideration. A detailed presentation was provided by Phil Wright from Gatherwell and many questions and initial concerns allayed.

2.35 Action;

- A recommendation was made that the lottery be further considered in the Executive.

### **3.0 Membership**

3.1 The Constitution permits membership of 9 councillors. The membership this year has been: Councillor D Hughes (Chairman), Councillor M Whitehand (Vice-Chairman), Councillor J Bond, Councillor G Chrystie, Councillor S Hussain, Councillor R Mohammed, Councillor M Raja, Councillor C Rana and Councillor J Sanderson.

3.2 Attendance at meetings this year continues to improve. The subjects for the agenda have arisen from the Chairman and Vice Chairman, as well as other members and Committee members. The attendance record for the Members of the Committee is set out at Appendix 1.

3.3 A additional meeting was included in October 2019, from the original advance dates.

### **4.0 Task Groups**

4.1 Scrutiny of the Council's activities often takes place in task groups. There are four task groups which come under the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Economic Development Task Group (Chairman Councillor I Johnson)

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- Finance Task Group, (Chairman Councillor K Davis)
- Housing Task Group and Economic Development Task Group (Councillor I Johnson)

The fourth is an ad hoc task and finish group;

- Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group (Chairman Councillor D Hughes)

4.2 Appendix 2 contains summary reports by the respective Chairs on the activities and objectives of each Task Group for the year.

### **5.0 Further Areas of Scrutiny**

5.1 The main subjects are shown in 2.0 above. In addition, the Committee monitors financial and other indicators in the "Green book" which is a monthly set of management information and also looks at the treasury mid-year review. This report is necessarily written before the meeting in March and therefore there will be items not included as part of this report.

5.2 Over the past year areas for follow up and future review have been noted on a forward plan as a suggestion for further deliberation by the Committee.

5.3 It has not been possible to include all the topics referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the year due to time pressures, however the items that had not been scrutinised were included in the suggested additions to the Work Programme.

5.4 It is also recommended that the nominated Committee members for the 2020/21 Municipal Year discuss continued inclusion of the annual reporting topics, and whether O&S is the correct venue for these, especially if it is a performance review.

### **6.0 Acknowledgements**

6.1 The task group contributions are vital to the work of the Committee. The three standing task groups continue to provide review and scrutiny into topics which both come directly from Overview and Scrutiny and also from within their direct Terms of Reference.

6.2 Support from Officers to the Committee has been outstanding, particular thanks to Hanna Taylor, Jacqui Hutton and Joanne McIntosh.

6.3 The Committee has looked into a wide range of topics and has taken an in-depth approach to several of these. This has meant that guests have been asked to attend on several occasions to present and answer questions. The Committee are thankful to all of the guests who have been open and clear when responding to questions and providing information for scrutiny.

6.4 Thanks to the cross party support for this important Committee and contributions from all members. Also to portfolio holders who have generously attended to support and add insight into areas within their influence.

6.5 Finally, a particular thanks to Cllr Melanie Whitehand who ably acted as Vice Chair in this Committee and provided invaluable support.

### **7.0 Conclusions**

7.1 The past work of this Committee was challenged in November by the Peer Review, their full report is yet awaited. But it was suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needed to be more robust in its challenge and to be able to demonstrate clear actions and changes which have come from its discussions. This Committee have taken this criticism on

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board and this report attempts to demonstrate where actions and changes have been forthcoming

REPORT ENDS

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Appendix 1

**Attendance at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Committee Members in Attendance</b>	
20 May 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
17 June 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr G Chrystie	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
15 July 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
16 September 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
21 October 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
25 November 2019	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
20 January 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
24 February 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson

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**Reports of the Task Groups**

**Housing Task Group**

Chairman – Cllr Ian Johnson

Purpose	Membership
To review Housing issues as and when identified by the Committee, including Housing Strategy, Housing Business Plan, Housing Service Plans, Housing Revenue Account, Housing Conditions, Housing Needs, Private Sector Housing, Home Improvement Agency, Housing and Council Tax Benefits, and monitor/review progress of the PFI Scheme	Cllrs Aziz, Bridgeman, Harlow, Forster, Johnson, Kemp and Mohammed.

Annual summary from Cllr I Johnson, Chairman of the Housing Task Group:

The delivery of affordable homes continued to be a key challenge during the year with a number of planning applications refused by the Planning Committee. The identification of sites was a problem. On the positive side, a project to provide new temporary homes and existing temporary properties is progressing well.

The housing team were fighting hard against this backdrop to house people displaced through regeneration schemes in Sheerwater and the town centre and those on the housing register but need member support to make things happen.

The Housing Register showed an identified need for 475 one bed (44%), 347 two bed (32%) and 257 three bed (23%). This compared with the council’s stock of 1354 one bed (39%), 851 two bed (25%) and 1193 three bed (35%). With the additional issue of a low turnover of availability it is clear that there is an undersupply of affordable homes to meet the current needs. It has been estimated that 1500 households need more suitable accommodation yet WBC is not meeting even the 102 target set in the Core Strategy so therefore finding it difficult to meet public need.

The Task Group has expressed concern during the year about the use of viability arguments to avoid developers providing affordable housing and were disappointed the Overview and Scrutiny made no comment when put to them as an area for review.

Other issues discussed and reviewed during the year were

- The Licensing Scheme in Canalside is being overseen by new management and a backlog of documentation and inspections is being addressed. A review of the scheme, which was established to improve housing standards, would be undertaken over the coming 18 months to inform whether it would be worthwhile to extend the scheme to other parts of the Borough and/or extend the scheme beyond 2023.
- A new contractor, Breyer, had assumed responsibility for housing repairs and reports to date suggest a real improvement for residents. There had been positive feedback on their proactivity and in resolving backlogs left by the previous contractor.
- Our new Housing Director has been looking to update housing policies which in some cases are long overdue. A good start has been made with updates of the Homelessness

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and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Allocations policy, both of which were discussed by the Task Group and approved by Council.

- The Let's Rent scheme, the private rented sector solution to housing need, achieved some successes in finding new landlords following a campaign, but with the local housing allowance being significantly lower than Woking market rental levels, the job of encouraging new landlords is all the more difficult.
- A new IT system, which supports tenants in bidding for properties and provides improved functionality was introduced at the end of 2019 and is working well.

### Economic Development Task Group

Chairman – Cllr Ian Johnson

Purpose	Membership
To identify and seek the implementation of measures to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn on the residents, community organisations and businesses in the Borough of Woking.	Cllrs Ali, Azad, Barker, Bond, Davis, Elson, and Johnson.

Annual summary from Cllr I Johnson, Chairman of the Economic Development Task Group:

The Task Group meets at least twice a year with the primary purpose of monitoring progress in the Borough's Economic Development Strategy and issues around the economic vitality of the Borough. The Purpose of the Task Group needs to be updated to reflect this, the Chairman also attends ad hoc events to support the PR effort of the Business Liaison team.

The focus of the task group's March meeting was to review the annual update, which was the second year of the 2017-2022 Strategy approved by Council. The Business Liaison team work tirelessly to support both new and existing businesses and the half year report demonstrated the efforts made to encourage start-ups and provide help to them to the next stage of their development. Woking Works had hosted a number of well-attended events and has established new links through the very successful Food and Drink Festival.

Enquiries for conference space had risen and it was noted that some existing bookings would need to be transferred from HG Wells to other venues. The number of empty units in Woking Shopping was lower than the national average though empty units do provide flexibility for new entrants to the Borough. Raw statistics showed an uptick in JSA claimants though these numbers are far from clear with overlaps with Universal Credit. Nevertheless this needed to be carefully watched.

Since the last meeting a group of councillors (Cllrs Ashall, Azad, Cundy, Davis and Johnson), together with Chris Norrington, had visited Bracknell town centre, which had been undergoing investment from City institutions, and on the face of it was well-designed and modern, and Aldershot. Members felt the excursion very useful in terms of ideas as WBC continues to develop. Also since the last meeting some uncertainties surrounding Brexit have been removed and since the Task Group's annual update takes place after the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny I would not wish to pre-judge what is in that report whether any confidence has been generated in the month or so following our exit from the EU.

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I would like to express my thanks to members on the Task Group for being committed to the Economic Development of the Borough and to the Business Liaison team who help keep the Borough's name in lights as the place to do business.

### The Finance Task Group

Chairman – Cllr Kevin Davis

Purpose	Membership
To review Financial issues as and when identified by the Committee. Financial Performance of the Council Management and Administration of Accounts procurement Strategy, Pension fund, Financial Strategy.	Cllrs Ashall, Azad, Aziz, Bond, Davis, Hughes and Sanderson.

Annual summary from Cllr K Davis, Chairman of the Finance Task Group:

The Finance Task Group has had another busy year with an agenda reviewing and scrutinising the key Council financial reports. In particular:

- In July - The Council's financial statements for 2018/19 which were approved by Council by the deadline of 31 July.
- The balance sheet at 31 March demonstrated the Council's positive position with assets exceeding borrowing and a net asset position of over £200m.
- In November and January - The Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget papers including Investment Programme and Fees and Charges. Whilst it has been possible to increase contributions to reserves for 2020/21 the government funding uncertainties concerning 2021/22 onwards have been discussed regularly throughout the year.

The Task Group has expressed severe frustration that the new auditors BDO have been unable to sign off the accounts. This reflects badly on the Council, even though the reason is due to the workload of the auditor rather than with any problems with the accounts. This is an issue that has impacted many Councils around the country.

Each meeting the Task Group also considered the latest Green Book, challenging the performance reported. The Task Group has continued to feed into the improvements of the information published in the Green Book, providing full transparency to all Councillors and residents that are so minded to investigate. The Council's Strategic Property Investments table has been further refined and shows just how beneficial these assets are performing and how they are contributing to both economic development and subsidising Council services.

The detailed rental income at Wolsey Place has been a standing item during the year with updates on changes at every other meeting. Each quarter a summary of debts written off under delegated authorities is also reviewed. Officers have updated the Task Group on the borrowing strategy and new long term loans taken. The Task Group was disappointed when the Government unilaterally raised interest rates on PWLB loans and has pushed for officers to lobby the Government to set a more favourable tariff where loans are for the purpose of directly investing strategically in the borough.

The Task Group has also had the opportunity to interrogate the Chief Executive regarding the finances of Victoria Square in a more in-depth financial presentation than that given during the Victoria Square briefing and the presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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The Finance Task Group is one of the most important task groups and it is disappointing that all Members are unable to attend every meeting. The Task Group is an important part of the Council's governance and meetings should be attended by all Members of the Group. The Chairman requests that as the Committee dates are published up to a year in advance, there should be little reason to not attend except under exceptional circumstances.

The Task Group thanks the Finance team for the sterling work they do for the borough and the help provided by officers in assisting with Committee meetings this year and equally Member Services for looking after us and writing up the minutes.