

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (“the Committee”) is to ensure that decisions taken by the Council are appropriately reviewed and considered.
- 1.2 The report sets out the work undertaken by the Committee and its Task Groups over the last year.

2 Summary of Work Undertaken

- 2.1 The Committee undertook overview and scrutiny of many varied topics throughout the year. The work of the Committee aided the decision-making of both the Council and Executive to ensure key decisions taken, even if not actively scrutinised by the Committee, benefitted from a critical eye not connected from those making the decision.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny

- 2.2 As part of the improvements introduced to Overview and Scrutiny at the Council several years ago, the Executive—Overview and Scrutiny Protocol has encouraged the Chairman to meet at regular intervals with the Leader to discuss upcoming decisions of the Executive. The meetings have brought a number of items of Pre-Scrutiny to the Committee, as laid out below.
- 2.3 The advantage of performing scrutiny before a decision is made allows time for cogent argument and proper, robust consideration of any proposal, while working in a collaborative manner.

Governance & Scrutiny

- 2.4 Throughout the year, the Committee received several items on the theme of scrutinising Council activity.
- 2.5 Members were keen to ensure that guidance on scrutinising commercial risk and company governance was utilised by both Officer and Member.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Company Governance

- 2.6 Joanne McIntosh presented to Members proposed changes to the Company Governance structure in place between the Council and its wholly- or partially- owned companies.
- 2.7 Members scrutinised the proposals and raised concern that only the Leader would be appointed to the Shareholder Advisory Groups. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be able to attend as an observer.
- 2.8 Following the Committee’s pre-scrutiny, at the following meeting of the Executive it was clarified that the new arrangement followed best practice and under the new arrangement, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be able to call matters for scrutiny.

Scrutiny Topic Proposal: Arrangements for Grants

- 2.9 The Committee scrutinised the proposed changes to the Arrangements for Grants and raised concern that involvement of Members would be restricted to only the Portfolio Holder by way of appointment to the panel overseeing grants.

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- 2.10 The Committee requested that further consideration be given to increasing the number of Members on the Panel.
- 2.11 The Committee also requested that consideration be given to introducing a cap to the amount of funding the Council would match to that donated by the community and businesses.

Noise Complaints Update

- 2.12 The Committee raised the prospect of receiving a regular report on noise complaints so that it could have oversight of any trends.
- 2.13 The Committee suggested that reporting on noise complaints could happen regularly through report in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information.

Overview and Scrutiny Training

- 2.14 To provide all Members of the Committee with the greatest degree of confidence in undertaken their role as scrutineers, formal training was provided to accompany the guides and toolkit provided by Democratic Services.

Guide to Scrutiny of Risk and Commercialisation

- 2.15 The Committee received a report from Kevin Foster, the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources to complement the Guide to Scrutiny of Risk and Commercialisation. The purpose was to equip all Councillors with the skills necessary to scrutinise the commercial interests of the Council.
- 2.16 The Committee shared concerns that the Council had not always managed its risk well and encouraged the promotion of the Strategic Risk Register, which the Committee agreed to receive at a future juncture.

Freedom Leisure Performance Review and Survey of Users

- 2.17 The Committee scrutinised the contract held by Freedom Leisure to manage the Council's leisure centres, which was presented by Steve May, Leisure Services Manager.
- 2.18 Members wished to ensure that the contract was providing the Council with appropriate remuneration, particularly following the financial support that had been provided during the pandemic.
- 2.19 Members also scrutinised the accident rate across the facilities to ensure there were no common themes or trends that should be acted upon.
- 2.20 The Committee also analysed the business model, to ensure there was incentive on Freedom Leisure to deliver business improvements.

Performance and Financial Monitoring Review

- 2.21 The Committee had previously received an interim report on the intended changes to the Performance and Financial Monitoring Review. It had been recommended by the Committee to reduce the number of reports to quarterly, rather than the current monthly.
- 2.22 The Committee recommended that reference to Council loans be retained in some form in future reports.

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Review of the Constitution

- 2.23 Jo McIntosh, Director of Legal Services, informed the Committee that the Constitution would be rewritten and made more user-friendly.
- 2.24 The Committee welcomed the proposal and offer to work collaboratively on improving the Constitution.
- 2.25 Members recommended that the introduction of a revised Constitution should not be held to a strict timetable, but that sufficient time given to ensure success.
- 2.26 The Chairman requested that sufficient time be provided to allow input from all Members, should they so wish.

Community Lottery Proposal

- 2.27 Following a report received by the Committee several years ago, the proposal was again received for consideration.
- 2.28 Although Members appreciated the possibility of raising additional funds for charity, a commitment of the scheme should it be set up, the Committee considered it inappropriate given the additional pressures of household budgets to introduce a scheme at the time.
- 2.29 Members especially considered the potential negative impact a new lottery would have on extant local schemes, namely that of Woking Hospice.

Centres for the Community

- 2.30 Adam Thomas was welcomed to the Committee and provided a presentation on the various community centres in the Borough.
- 2.31 Members scrutinised the new model of social entrepreneurship that was being used to run the cafés and kitchens within the Centres.
- 2.32 Members also scrutinised the evolving partnerships between the Council and healthcare providers that aimed to bring healthcare services within the Community Centres.
- 2.33 The Committee requested that consideration be given for an online booking service for all the Centres and that KPIs be developed to aid oversight of performance.

Partnership Landscape

- 2.34 Giorgio Framalico provided the Committee with the proposed system to replace the Woking Joint Committee when it ended.
- 2.35 The Committee requested that any replacement included clear and direct engagement with the community and would allow residents to petition their representatives and stakeholders.
- 2.36 Members also scrutinised the Council's planned approach to Surrey County Council's County Deal proposal.
- 2.37 The Committee raised concern with a County Deal that would absorb Local Enterprise Partnership and wished to ensure that future LEP work not focus on the Town Centre but look at growth throughout the Borough.
- 2.38 The Committee stated an intention to maintain oversight of how the County Deal could impact infrastructure and planning in the Borough.

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Celebrate Woking Review of the Year 2022 and Forward Plan for 2023

- 2.39 The Committee reviewed the events that comprised the Celebrate Woking calendar in 2022. Concerns were raised about occasions of anti-social behaviour and what steps could be taken in future to mitigate against reoccurrences.
- 2.40 Members raised recommendations of events and sectors of the community that deserved inclusion in future plans. It was recommended that a food festival be considered and that local clubs be provisioned for in the calendar, particularly as Party in the Park was not to run in 2023.
- 2.41 Members also requested that local dance schools be included in the programme for 2023.

Energy Efficiency

- 2.42 Following a Scrutiny Topic Proposal, Officers of the Council and partners at ThamesWey, provided information on energy efficiency, efforts being made with Council housing stock, and also options available for the wider borough.
- 2.43 The Committee scrutinised the Council's application to central government funding and wished to see all opportunities available taken.
- 2.44 Members were particularly concerned with fuel poverty and wanted to ensure that the Council was actively targeting those most in need.
- 2.45 The Committee wished to ensure support was also available for park homes.
- 2.46 ThamesWey and Action Surrey had continued to provide grants and access funding.
- 2.47 ThamesWey was continuing to make improvements to its infrastructure to be more energy efficient.
- 2.48 The Council had recently run a project to identify homes in the Borough with EPC ratings below E. Legislation allowed the Council to require owners of private rented properties to make improvements, where possible, to increase the rating to E. Members wished to ensure that this was continued beyond the project.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Risk Management

- 2.49 To ensure Members were most equipped to manage risks facing the Council training had been conducted for Members.
- 2.50 The Council planned to publish its Strategic Risk Register regularly.
- 2.51 The Committee provided recommendations to improve the clarity and usability of the report so that it can be better understood by residents.
- 2.52 The Committee also requested that risks around Climate Change be move overtly articulated to reflect the priorities of the Council.

Thames Water: Waste Overspill and Woking Waterways

- 2.53 Following a Scrutiny Topic Proposal, Thames Water was invited to make a presentation to the Committee on the overspill of sewage into waterways, generally and those that flow through the Borough.
- 2.54 Members conducted an exhaustive scrutiny of Thames Water representatives and committed to maintaining a watchful overview of Thames Water's performance.

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- 2.55 To further understand the issues and extent, Members conducted a visit to a local sewage treatment works.
- 2.56 Once works had been made to local sewage treatment works Members would be keen to invite Thames Water back.

Joint Waste Solutions Performance Review, Forward Plan, and Interim Strategy

- 2.57 Representatives of Joint Waste Solutions (JWS) provided the Committee with a presentation on the performance of Amey and JWS in the past year.
- 2.58 Due to the incoming enactment of a new national policy, the presentation also included information on how the policy would impact delivery of waste services.
- 2.59 The Committee scrutinised the performance of Amey, particularly focusing on missed bin collections, the reporting thereof, areas where improvements were being targeted and the impact of recently introduced software upgrades.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Play Area Provision

- 2.60 Members scrutinised the report due to go to the Executive on play area provision.
- 2.61 A programme of works was being developed to work within available budgets and the Committee supported keeping such funding available.
- 2.62 Members were concerned that, given the Council's financial pressures, it would see a reduction or complete removal, of such funding in future years.
- 2.63 The Committee scrutinised the equipment that had been, or was being, installed, to understand its expected lifespan.
- 2.64 The Committee was keen to hear of the strategy being developed to maintain play areas once it had been developed.

Affinity Water: Water Resources Management Plan

- 2.65 Affinity Water contacted the Council in November 2022 offering to attend a meeting of the Committee to report on their proposed Water Resources Management Plan.
- 2.66 The Committee offered some time at its January meeting for Affinity Water to make a presentation, but the company was unable to attend.
- 2.67 The Committee agreed to offer some time at its February meeting for Affinity Water, but the company again did not attend.
- 2.68 Members are still keen to host representatives of Affinity Water and hope that the company is able to attend at the third invitation.

WEAct

- 2.69 The Committee received a presentation from representatives of WEAct covering their activities and what they hoped the Council could lead the community on.
- 2.70 Members accepted a challenge from WEAct to consider for scrutiny elements of the Council's climate action agenda where identified.

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- 2.71 The Committee committed to provide recommendations to the Executive on furthering the climate agenda.

Annual Update on Climate Change

- 2.72 Officers of Green Infrastructure provided the annual update on Climate Change to the Committee.
- 2.73 Members heard of the progress made on the Climate Emergency Action Plan and work with partners.
- 2.74 The Committee scrutinised the results of the assessment produced by Anthesis on the Council's carbon footprint.

Freedom of Information Requests Annual Report

- 2.75 The Committee scrutinised the annual summary of Freedom of Information Requests.

Review of the Amended Constitution

- 2.76 Members scrutinised the amended constitution.
- 2.77 Several recommendations for improvement were made by Committee Members to the reporting officer.
- 2.78 The Committee recognised the effort made by Officers to enact changes to the Constitution following the original scrutiny topic review submission agreed by the Committee.

3 Financial Scrutiny

- 3.1 The Committee maintained regular oversight of financial matters through regular receipt of the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, commonly referred to as the Green Book.
- 3.2 The Committee also received the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review, as per the Code of Practice for Treasury Management released by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.
- 3.3 Members raised query with the loan facility and how Officers were balancing, or taking advantage of, short- and long-term loans.

4 Other Scrutiny

- 4.1 Throughout the year, the Committee maintained an overview of KPIs as reported in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (commonly referred to as the Green Book).

5 Thames Water Woking Treatment Works

- 5.1 At the beginning of March, several Members of the Committee took the opportunity for a guided tour of the Sewage Treatment Works operated by Thames Water in Old Woking.
- 5.2 The tour provided an opportunity to understand the complexity of waste processing and efforts being taken by Thames Water to reduce overspills into our rivers. The tour also contextualised the scale of the issue and what was still necessary to achieve.
- 5.3 The dialogue shared between Thames Water and the Council since the former attended the Committee in January has been very positive and we thank Thames Water for being so open with us. It is hoped that dialogue continues.

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6 Membership

- 6.1 The membership of the Committee this year has been Councillor A Azad (Chair), Councillor J Sanderson (Vice-Chair), Councillor H Akberali, Councillor A Caulfield, Councillor K Davis, Councillor P Graves, Councillor C Kemp, Councillor A Kirby, Councillor R Leach, Councillor J Morley, and Councillor M Raja.
- 6.2 During the Municipal Year, Councillor Leach stepped down from the Executive as Portfolio Holder for Greener Woking and Councillor Graves assumed responsibility. Accordingly, Councillor Graves stepped down from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as per the Constitution, and Councillor Leach joined.
- 6.3 Attendance at the Committees was good, a record may be seen at Appendix 1.

7 Task Groups

- 7.1 Summaries of the activities of the Task Groups may be seen at Appendix 2.

8 Future Scrutiny

- 8.1 By necessity, the report has been written to be received at the March meeting of the Committee. The report, therefore, does not include the items to be scrutinised at that meeting.
- 8.2 The items that will be scrutinised are:
- Safer Woking Partnership: Community Safety Plan
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Communications Plan
 - Noise Complaints Update
 - Overview of Complaints Received Annual Report
 - Review of Updated Working Group Terms of Reference.

9 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 I would like to thank the Vice-Chair, Cllr James Sanderson, and all Members of the Committee for their excellent contributions and scrutiny throughout the year.
- 9.2 The contribution and attendance of third parties throughout the year has contributed to the Committee's ability to scrutinise and I would like to thank those representatives that attended meetings and contributed to Items.
- 9.3 The continued work of the Economic Development, Finance, Housing Infrastructure Fund, and Housing Task Groups is appreciated by me and the whole Committee.
- 9.4 I would also like to thank all Officers that have provided their support and expertise both at and outside of meetings of the Committee and its Task Groups.
- 9.5 Finally, I would like to thank the Portfolio Holders for attending meetings of the Committee and for providing their contributions so readily.

10 Conclusions

- 10.1 The Committee has continued to make useful contributions to the good governance of the Council by ensuring:

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- (i) Key decisions made throughout the year are held accountable and allow for input from all Members and residents.
- (ii) Council contracts are reviewed, and we maintain oversight of our partners throughout the term of the contract.
- (iii) Day-to-day operations of the Council are scrutinised to ensure effective performance.
- (iv) Issues that affect residents are considered by the Council.

10.2 The continued support for Overview and Scrutiny by the whole Council adds credence to its activities by facilitating self-criticism.

REPORT ENDS