

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 three 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 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 the report.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be received.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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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 progress on the Sheerwater development.
- 1.2 The past work of the Committee was challenged in November by the Peer Review, their full report was received in June 2020. 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 board and this report attempts to demonstrate where actions and changes have been forthcoming.
- 1.3 The Committee at various points were reminded 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.
- 1.4 Due to the Covid 19 pandemic the committee remained unchanged and its meetings have all been virtual over the year. The usual update of training has not happened, however the Committee membership has been consistent for the majority of the period with only one change of the 9 member committee.

2.0 Summary of Work Undertaken

- 2.1 Areas brought forward from the 2019/20 municipal Year;
 - Freedom leisure – A follow up from the scrutiny work conducted by this committee has not been conducted as the Leisure Centre has been closed for long periods this year. Therefore any repeat survey of residents on use and perceptions of the service would not have been fair or appropriate. This follow up will be taken forwards to the work programme of 2021/22 once the services have had chance to resume normal working.
 - A request was received from the Housing Task Group for this committee to look at the lack of affordable housing in the Borough. As this was deemed to be a major topic it was agreed that it would be the primary focus of the O&S for scrutiny in this year.
 - Safer Working Partnership and the Community Safety plan will come to the next municipal year plan, this again has been impacted due to the pandemic.
 - The outcome and report of the Woking Football Club and Associated Developments.
 - Follow up on the Council's Play area provision/ strategy and renovation framework, the updated refurbishment and renovation programme to come back to the Committee.
 - Follow up on the Joint Waste Solutions and the performance of Amey on the waste contract.
 - Follow up from the change in the children's centres and the formation of the family centres.
- 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.

3.0 Areas identified for Scrutiny

3.1 Woking Football Club and Associated Developments

3.2 This was the major piece of scrutiny work conducted by a task and finish group from O&S, but the report and recommendations were delayed due to the cancellation of the March 2020 committee.

3.3 The rationale for the scrutiny by this committee are as follows; 'The proposed developments at both Kingfield/ Westfield and on the Egley Road are major projects which have been subject to many debates in the Council and in the Executive. They were also subject to a petition submitted by local residents to the Council. This Task Group seeks to assure the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (and therefore the Council and residents) that appropriate due process has been applied'.

3.4 The scrutiny was undertaken in the main by the task group in several ways. It interviewed key witnesses, both internal council officers and external stakeholders; it reviewed the contracts, development agreement; over 100 references relating to the project; it had minuted meetings and concluded with a report of its findings which was taken to the full O&S committee for agreement and consent to take through to Council.

3.5 The Task Group report found gross failings in the governance of the project by the Council.

3.6 The report initially had to be divided into two documents. The Part 1 document consisted of a summary of the findings of the task group and its initial 16 recommendations. The Part 2 of the report was the main body of the report and was kept confidential as it contained some commercially sensitive information. This report in redacted form was released for public scrutiny in November 2020. The O&S committee has asked for these redactions to be removed and this is still pending.

3.7 Actions from this scrutiny; and outputs

- The report in two parts. Discussion by O&S of the findings and recommendations to proceed to Council by O&S.
- Council in June accepted the paper and all of the recommendations which included the final recommendation for a further independent review into the processes and decisions of the council in respect to this development.
- The Independent review was conducted by Dr Gifty Edila in Nov/Dec 2020 and her report was published at Christmas. This report not only endorsed the task group report she went further, for example;
 1. Legal implications for proposals should be included; and the legal powers on which agreements have been reached be included in Council and Executive reports.
 2. All major projects should have a completed risk assessment, which should be supported by contingency plans for the mitigation of those risks.
 3. Legal Services should seek Lexcel accreditation from the Law Society of England and Wales.
 4. Recommendation for the Council to set up a resident panel to facilitate regular consultation with residents.

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5. Part 2 confidential information in reports dealing with development projects should be limited to information that should not be in the public domain at that point in time and should not apply to the entire report.
 6. WBC to consider amending the Ostensible Authority arrangement.
 7. Where a Special Purpose Vehicle company is used to deliver a project a risk template should be produced particularly addressing viability and identifiable risks.
 8. On the purchase of land by the Borough, Dr Edila is clear that a valuation should be sought to assist councillors in making a prudent decision on the purchase.
 9. The Council should avoid appointing statutory officers, especially the Section 151 officers onto external companies or trust with whom the council has or is likely to have an association.
 10. External training for Officers and Councillors on the Nolan Principles.
 11. The O&S committee should have a reasonable budget and also be allocated a part time scrutiny officer to assist with our work.
- This independent report was brought to Special Council for discussion on 7th January. The Council agreed to accept the recommendations in full from the independent reviewer, and rejected an alternative report on the same submitted by the Chief Executive. She praised the work of the task group, stating that the group had 'performed expeditiously with admirable skill in reviewing the project. They identified important matters that needed attention'. She expressed surprise at the 'lack of a business case, project plan and risk template for a project of this size', and the lack of resource made available to support this committee in its function.
 - O&S conducted a review of all aspects in the report which suggested improvements in its function.
 - O&S have submitted suggestions for inclusion into the new scrutiny officer job description to the Chief Executive following the February meeting.
 - This item will need to come back for review post implementation of the recommendations in the next year.
 - Full disclosure of the whole of the task group report following a lifting of the redactions.

3.8 Housing Scrutiny

3.9 This was planned to be the major item for the committee for this municipal year. It was conducted over several meetings;

1. Housing; Current position
2. Housing; Delivery
3. Housing; Future Housing Strategy

3.10 The area which kept coming up in these meetings was the affordable housing provision and the use by developers, including the council of the viability argument. The Committee probed particularly around the issue of affordable housing provision, an area where the council is not meeting its annual targets. It sought to understand the issue, to investigate the perceptions around developers 'getting out of' providing affordables to the number required by the council

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in the core strategy. It transpired that only 19% of affordable were implemented via a section 106. The need to consider alternative ways of providing affordable homes was discussed.

- 3.11 The use of the viability argument turned out to be a major item as this seemed to be the reason why so few affordable homes were being delivered particularly in the town centre as the high cost of land mean that the inclusion of affordable units are deemed not to be financially viable for developers. Concern was raised on what are the implications for future affordable housing on brownfield sites, particularly in the town centre. It was stated to the case study group that the higher the building the more proportionately expensive the building is to build and this will make it difficult to include affordable housing in future high rise developments!
- 3.12 In order to look at this in more detail a small case study group was set up. This looked at 3 different examples of where the viability argument had been used. This met 3 times and had input from WBC Planning Department, the Planning Policy Manager and one of the external companies that are commissioned by the Council to advise on the implementation and relevance of the viability assessments as provided by developers etc it provided a report which was incorporated into the summary scrutiny paper for consideration by council.
- 3.13 The poor provision of affordable units in the town centre is likely to be considered further in the awaited Town Centre Strategy.

3.14 Action and outputs:

Recommendations from this scrutiny were;

- (i) The locally set commuted sum formula to be reviewed when the Affordable Housing SPD is next updated,
- (ii) The Borough should set the example and seek to bring forward more of its own sites for affordable housing developments.
- (iii) Where a viability case results in fewer affordable homes being secured, a S106 agreement in order to provide the option for the actual costs and values to be validated.
- (iv) A town centre strategy to be brought forwards in consultation with residents on the nature of new build in this area to inform future policy.
- (v) Increased vigour and support to the return of empty homes into occupation.
- (vi) That the Planning Committee has a session in viability assessment process in their regular update training.

Outputs and actions were;

- 1. A briefing for members on the viability argument given by Kempton Carr Croft was provided for all councillors following this. This is to be a regular training in future for members of the Planning committee.
- 2. A report from the Case Study Group on the use of the viability argument by developers.
- 3. A report following this scrutiny topic was presented to O&S in February. This focussed on the areas where recommendation can support a forthcoming Housing Strategy, areas for discussion on planning policy and the link toe Health and Wellbeing.

The Committee determined that the Housing paper go back to the Housing Task Group prior to going to Council.

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3.15 Joint Waste Solutions; Performance update.

- 3.16 This was a follow up from the presentation and discussions last year where issues of an underlying dip in performance was not visible to members in the KPIs submitted in the Green Book.
- 3.17 The Covid 19 pandemic has had huge impact on this service over the past year, but the service has been successful in maintaining an effective refuse collection service, and indeed one in which there have been less residents' concerns identified.
- 3.18 Areas of concern identified last year have been addressed, namely the availability of vehicles due to a more proactive maintenance process and reciprocal agreements with other similar organisations. The issues of staffing also appears to have been improved.
- 3.19 The service has continued in its education and identification of areas of poor recycling around the Borough and has worked locally with residents, particularly those in flats with shared waste facilities. This has been shown to be effective and beneficial.
- 3.20 Areas where progress has not been made have been in the utilisation of new technologies to enable the increased recycling of waste that is not recycled at present.
- 3.21 Opportunities were identified for the inclusion of commercial waste from the town centre. This is apparently included within their contract but is not being utilised at present. Another opportunity area is the recycling of food waste from the councils own community centres.

3.22 Play Area Maintenance

- 3.23 This has naturally been adversely impacted over the pandemic with play areas and MUGA's closed for long periods. The team has continued to make its inspections and routine maintenance.
- 3.24 A play strategy and a planned framework for refurbishment of our 42 play areas which was anticipated last year has not been forthcoming. However some play areas have had new equipment and replacement of worn out features. The committee continue to be concerned at the 25 year cycle of refurbishment as being too long and not being responsive to changes in need and climate change.
- 3.25 The committee was pleased to see the plans for a complete planned refurbishment of a play areas in Loop Road which will take on the concerns of residents who petitioned for a disabled accessible and friendly play area. This is out for public consultation.
- 3.26 Concern was raised that due to the council's financial position the future funding for further improvements is unclear.

3.27 Joint Waste Solutions and Amey

- 3.28 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.

3.29 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

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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.

3.30 Community Infra Structure Levy. (CIL)

3.31 This item was scheduled for scrutiny on 23rd of March as this meeting was cancelled it was discussed in this year.

3.32 The concern was that the CIL monies available to communities was not being utilised and the suggestion was that the process was not clear and cumbersome.

3.33 We had a robust discussion on the issues with Ernest Amoako our Planning Strategy Manager and worked with him on suggestions for improving clarity and stimulating increased use of these funds in future.

3.34 At the time of the meeting there was £4,543,832 CIL monies available for use in the local communities.

Actions;

1. Paper written by O&S to the Woking Joint Committee where decisions on the application of CIL are addressed. This included recommendations for a more streamlined process including the setting up of a sub group to consider consent to CIL proposals on a more regular basis.
2. Chair of O&S spoke to this paper at the Joint Committee.
3. Virtually all the recommendations of O&S were accepted and have now been implemented, including a more streamlined flow chart of the process.

3.35 Serco, Performance review

3.36 This looked at the performance of Serco who are contracted to undertake planned work works in the Borough under environmental contracts of grounds and trees. They demonstrated a flexible approach over the pandemic. Stated that their staff capacity was adequate to meet the needs of the contract.

3.37 The committee asked questions and were assured via the responses.

3.38 Items not included in this report but on the March agenda are the follow up from the Family Centre review and a piece on Climate Change, asking the question of what progress the council has made on this since declaring a climate change emergency.

4.0 For Overview;

4.1 Celebrate Woking; this was deferred this year as all municipal events were cancelled due to the pandemic.

4.2 Complaints, consideration of trends. This saw a large increase of 17.5% in the number of complaints under the heading of 'other'. It was felt that the committee could not evaluate any

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trends within this such large category which was responsible for 50% of the complaints. A request was made for a more defined breakdown if possible.

- 4.3 FOI requests. The report showed a drop in requests being submitted by 17%. The numbers of FOIs that breached the recommended time frame had increased to 11% from 3% the previous year. This was attributed to staff being diverted to cope with the challenges of the Covid pandemic. The numbers of FOI requests that were refused had dramatically reduced from 9% to only 2% in the period. Again it was difficult to evaluate any trends and a request that the report should at least mention those FOI's in summary form that had gone onto the Ombudsman should be included next year for completeness of the report.
- 4.4 Update on the progress of the Sheerwater project. Building has now commenced and the recreation facilities are due to be opened in the summer. 46% of the new homes in this development are due to be at affordable/social rents.
- 4.5 Surrey Police and Youth Support. Detective Inspector Dave Bentley presented and took questions from the committee. He covered 5 main points in the public health approach; 1. Population 2. Partnership 3. Prevention 4. Data and evidence bases 5. Cause of causes. It was explained that there is an emphasis on early intervention, and increase in partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders. The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences was also highlighted. A preventative and proactive approach is being followed in addressing issues in this area.
- 4.6 Youth Service Provision. WBC Youth Development Manager, Sandie Bolger presented on this and highlighted the impact of Covid 19 on this. The impact on the mental health of young people and the inability for groups to meet has been damaging. The Youth team has continued to do as much as possible working remotely with young people and has worked with other stakeholders such as the ROC (Redeeming Our Communities) who also presented to O&S. The impact on youth employment was explored, and an expanded youth provision focussing on supporting 18-24 year olds back to employment is anticipated. An increased provision for the 'Friday night project' with an additional evening is also anticipated once the Leisure centre is able to reopen.
- 4.7 Anti-Social Behaviour. Detective Inspector Dave Bentley presented an update to the committee on incidents throughout the borough. He asked that residents should continue to report incidents. He announced that there was to be an uplift in Neighbourhood resources, and demonstrated the close links that the team have with the Community Safety Team at WBC. He emphasised the Public Health Approach to Policing Document, which highlights the need to identify and work on the root causes, such as poor mental health and deprivation. WBC have updated their ASB policy in line with recent legislation, with an updated guide to support residents providing a clear path for their concerns.
- 4.8 Outstanding actions
 1. A list of empty homes by ward was agreed for sharing confidentially to ward councillors.
 2. The publication of the full part 2 WFC&AD task group report.
 3. Safer Working Partnership and the Community Safety
 4. Update of the Joint Waste Solutions KPIs in the Green Book
 5. Job Description for the new scrutiny officer to come back to committee for information.
 6. A section on the Victoria Square to be included in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, the 'green book' was agreed in the previous year, in the same

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way as Sheerwater is reported. This has not been forthcoming. Details of the Victoria Square development are discussed regularly in the Victoria Square Oversight Group.

5.0 Financial Scrutiny and Overview

- 5.1 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.

6.0 Pre scrutiny

6.1 Corporate Peer Challenge

- 6.2 This was put on the agenda following the verbal feedback from the LGA team in November 2019 which indicated areas in which the O&S committee could improve.
- 6.3 The O&S committee had been concerned that this report was produced in December 2019 and not seen by all members until June. The CE apologised for the delay in the release of this document.
- 6.4 The Committee was asked by the Chief Executive (CE) to pre scrutinise a paper that he planned to present to the Executive on the LGA report following their Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2019.
- 6.5 This pre scrutiny was conducted at a few days' notice for submission to the Executive and was contributed to by the committee within the meeting and afterwards.
- 6.6 The O&S pre-scrutiny paper highlighted significant differences in the LGA recommendations and those of the CE to be presented to the Executive for decision. Both the O&S pre scrutiny paper and the CE paper were submitted to the Executive for discussion and decision.
- 6.7 It is of grave concern that the requested pre scrutiny paper was not presented, nor discussed in the Executive as is the statutory right of papers from this committee.

Actions.

1. The pre scrutiny paper was attached to the minutes of the next O&S for reference
2. A decision was made that no pre scrutiny request would be accepted at such short notice in future. Not only did this create a huge amount of work for O&S, but the Executive members also did not have chance to read the document.
3. Representations were submitted following the Executive committee citing the concern at how this item was managed, and the failure to permit the presentation or discussion on the O&S paper.
4. A request that the LGA team revisit and attend O&S one year post their original visit was declined by officers.

7.0 Membership

- 7.1 The Constitution permits membership of 10 councillors. The membership this year has been 9: 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.

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- 7.2 Following a change of Council Leader, Cllr Rana was moved and Cllr Bittleston joined the Committee in December.
- 7.3 Subjects for the agenda have arisen from the Chairman and Vice Chairman, from resident concern, plus from fellow members and Committee members. The attendance record for the Members of the Committee is set out at Appendix 1.
- 7.4 As last year an additional meeting was included from the original advance dates, this was held in December so the committee will have met formally 9 times this year.

8.0 Task Groups

- 8.1 Scrutiny of the Council's activities often takes place in task groups. There are three standing task groups which come under the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- Economic Development Task Group (Chairman Councillor I Johnson)
 - Finance Task Group, (Chairman Councillor K Davis)
 - Housing Task Group and Economic Development Task Group (Councillor I Johnson)
- 8.2 The fourth was an ad hoc task and finish group, this completed its work in March 2020, but is included in this paper as its report and recommendations were not considered until this municipal year;
- Woking Football Club & Associated Developments Task Group (Chairman Councillor D Hughes)
- 8.3 Appendix 2 contains the makeup of the task groups, recently updated remits and summary reports on the task groups activities and discussions throughout the year that have been regularly reported to the Committee.
- 8.4 A Case Study group met three times to support the work of the O&S committee on the Housing Scrutiny topic. They looked specifically at the use of the viability argument in the delivery of affordable homes. This was led by Cllr Whitehand and produced a report which contributed to the housing scrutiny paper which summarised the committee's findings.
- 8.5 A group was also formed led by Cllr Sanderson following up on a request from the Executive for O&S to consider the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership and the role of WBC. This has reported back to the committee, and its conclusions are due to come to the July 2021 meeting.

9.0 Further Areas of Scrutiny

- 9.1 The main subjects are shown in 2 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. Over the year it was discussed as to how effective the O&S committee meetings were in monitoring the financial performance. It was decided that the emphasis of this would be within the Finance Task Group. Whilst the O&S committee would focus on the monitoring and review of the non-financial performance.
- 9.2 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 (appendix 3). This includes area where a review of implementation and actions are required for assurance. It is also recommended that the next committee ensure that areas of scrutiny already conducted are followed up to ensure that implementation of recommendations are robust and fit for purpose, providing the openness and transparency that all expect.

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- 9.3 It has not been possible to include all the topics referred for Overview and Scrutiny in the year due to pressure of time. However these are included in the suggested forward plan.

10 Acknowledgements

- 10.1 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. The review of the terms of reference of the three task groups was a piece of good housekeeping, ensuring that the value of these groups was being appropriately picked up in O&S. The question was raised as to whether the reporting to O&S was still relevant. Taking national guidance into account the three task groups now have a defined scrutiny function within their TOR and hence O&S is still the most relevant report to committee. The role of the task groups will be to take areas from O&S and look at them in more detail, reporting back, in a cycle of scrutiny and review.
- 10.2 Support from Officers to the Committee has been outstanding, particular thanks to Hanna Taylor, Gareth John and Joanne McIntosh.
- 10.3 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 grateful to all of the guests who have been open and clear when responding to questions and providing information for scrutiny and information.
- 10.4 Thanks to the cross party support for this important Committee and contributions from all members. The committee is small and the additional work of the task groups, the case study group and the group who looked into the SLLP were all conducted by committee members. There have also been several examples of reports and work that continued beyond the committee where members were asked to contribute opinion and subject matter to reports.
- 10.5 Also to those portfolio holders who have generously attended to support and add insight into areas within their influence.
- 10.6 Finally, a particular thanks to Cllr Melanie Whitehand who ably supported the Chair and the committee as Vice Chair over this year.

11 Conclusions

- 11.1 This Committee has made a huge contribution to the enhancement of governance of the Council in its processes and actions going forwards. It has not shied away from asking the difficult questions and investigating detail. The Committee has provided robust scrutiny and challenge in areas which will result in permanent change in Council processes particularly in project management, due diligence and providing a documented audit trail of decision making in the future.

REPORT ENDS

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Attendance at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21

Date	Committee Members in Attendance	
15 June 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
13 July 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr R Mohammed Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
14 September 2020	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
19 October 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
23 November 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie Cllr S Hussain	Cllr M I Raja Cllr C Rana Cllr Sanderson
21 December 2020	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr D Bittleston Cllr G Chrystie	Cllr S Hussain Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr Sanderson
25 January 2021	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr G Chrystie	Cllr S Hussain Cllr M I Raja Cllr Sanderson
22 February 2021	Cllr D Hughes (Ch) Cllr M Whitehand (V-Ch) Cllr J Bond Cllr D Bittleston Cllr G Chrystie	Cllr S Hussain Cllr R Mohammed Cllr M I Raja Cllr Sanderson

Reports of the Task Groups

Housing Task Group

Chairman – Cllr Ian Johnson

Purpose	Membership
<p>The Task Group covers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steer development, and monitor implementation, of strategies and policies to provide, in particular, affordable housing availability (based on housing needs), reduction of homelessness, improving housing conditions, management and maintenance of Council homes and linkages with social care provision.• Monitor performance and the delivery of key housing projects.• Any other topics are to be considered as suggested by the task group, officers or other council bodies. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may refer matters to the task group for further scrutiny and consideration and vice versa. <p>This is a standing task group.</p>	<p>Councillor Tahir Aziz Councillor Mary Bridgeman Councillor Will Forster Councillor Debbie Harlow Councillor Ian Johnson Councillor Rashid Mohammed Councillor Melanie Whitehand</p>

Annual summary of the Housing Task Group:

Covid-19

Following the knock-on effects of Covid-19, the first meeting of the task group was cancelled. Once able to meet again the group received an update on the arrangements made and the activities undertaken by the Housing Service in light of the pandemic. It had been a challenging time for the service, with government directions on the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers coinciding with the closure of most hotels in the UK. Working with York Road Project the Council secured space at Woking Hotel and Travelodge, along with the conversion of the HG Wells centre with bedroom pods. At the time of the meeting there were 33 rough sleepers in these spaces.

Housing Policies / Strategy

The Housing policies were under review and the team had focused on the Housing Strategy which was last produced in 2011. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had undertaken a large piece of scrutiny on Housing in the 2020/21 municipal year. The group noted the paper relating to the comments by Overview and Scrutiny on the working draft of the Housing Strategy. Where appropriate housing related matters were being taken into account, such as dealing with empty homes as quickly as possible, while others, such as town centre strategy were more appropriate for consideration by the planning team. The planning department would have sight of all the recommendations. In due course the Housing Strategy would be going to Full Council for approval.

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New Vision Homes

The annual report of New Vision Homes showed they had clearly gone to great lengths to support tenants despite changes in management and a high turnover of staff. Overall performance had been maintained, including estate inspections and property repairs. There had been calls to vulnerable tenants which had generated excellent feedback and tenant engagement continued. The sustainment of tenancies remains a key objective. NVH noted the significant collaborative and flexible work with WBC especially with the challenges faced in recent months.

NVH were working well in the final year of their contract while TSG (gas contractor) had struggled with staff illnesses and had only been able to carry out emergency repairs. An independent consultant had been engaged to review the 20+ contracts of NVH in anticipation of migration of the housing management service to WBC in 2022.

Affordable Housing

The task group had consistently reviewed the progress on the provision of affordable housing throughout the year. Sheerwater and Broadoaks would start to come on stream in the coming year along with other schemes scheduled further into the future.

The task group was pleased to note the successful bid for funding under the government's Next Steps Accommodation programme and congratulated colleagues for their work.

Selective Licensing

Covid-19 had impacted the inspection of properties within the Selective Licensing scheme. Nevertheless, a number of properties had been visited and improvements made. Questionnaires to tenants were being issued to better assess performance of the scheme.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the task group were due for update. A draft was reviewed and it was agreed that subject to a few points it would be passed to CMG and then on to O/S in accordance with the usual procedure.

Moving Forward

In the coming municipal year, the group will continue to review work on the Housing Strategy, monitor the tendering process for NVH contracts and begin to assess the performance and future of the Licensing Scheme. The task group recognised the enormous contribution by the housing team to support residents at these most difficult of times.

Economic Development Task Group

Chairman – Cllr Ian Johnson

Purpose	Membership
To promote a thriving and growing local economy in Woking, while ensuring that residents, community groups and businesses feature in a high quality environment that continues to be an attractive and healthy place to live in, work in and visit.	Councillor Mohammad Ali Councillor Ayesha Azad Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Councillor John Bond Councillor Kevin Davis

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To review and monitor the current Economic Strategy of the Council.• The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may refer matters to the task group for further scrutiny and consideration and vice versa.	Councillor Gary Elson Councillor Ian Johnson
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Annual summary of the Economic Development Task Group:

The Task Group first reviewed the Framework for Recovery document, the purpose of which was to identify the issues and challenges presented by Covid-19 to the Borough's commercial centres as lockdown is relaxed by Government and to prioritise objectives. The Framework had been drafted with the assistance of Simon Matthews Associates who had been involved in the preparation of the Council's Economic Development Strategy and had been submitted to the Executive.

The Framework identified the following main objectives:

1. Introduction of measures to create a safe environment and ensuring through marketing and PR that people are made aware
2. Restoration of consumer/customer foot-flow to the commercial centres as soon as possible
3. Encourage Borough-based employees to transition back to pre-Covid workplaces
4. Identification and support to the business community, with particular focus on SME's at risk
5. Engage and build capacity across key internal and external stakeholders
6. Planning for the stages of crisis through to recovery.

The physical state, involving cleanliness and signage of the town centre public realm, had been a key aspect of work by the Neighbourhood Services team and Serco, while Environmental Services had been advising businesses on safe restarts. The Finance and Business Rates departments have worked miracles in getting government grants to firms in a timely fashion.

By linking all the aspects of the aims of the different stages of the Framework through from Crisis to Recovery, Woking's investment in the town centre provides an opportunity to look beyond Covid-19 to how the town might need to adjust the offer in light of the enormous increase in online shopping and the impact on traditional high streets.

The staff have been extremely busy supporting business in difficult circumstances and as they recover from the immediate crisis, thought needs to be targeted towards the future, to maintain resilience and at the same time create a destination where people want to live and work.

The task group reviewed the updated version of the Framework for Recover again in October, prior to the latest restrictions. The Business Liaison team's activity was focused on the action plan to reopen the economy following lockdown, providing good communications with business and the public and managing the public realm to enable the local economy to open successfully and safely.

Messaging campaigns through "Love Local" as an extension to #WeAreWoking "we are open" to encourage people back into Woking, along with a re-enforcing health message were all designed to promote a post-lockdown Woking. This marketing material was used on social media and in public spaces, car parks, Woking Magazine and Woking News & Mail.

Help was provided to business via the Woking Works website, which gave guidance on reopening, with support from a number of local firms, one to one business support and promotion of services provided by Surrey Chambers and Woking Chamber of Commerce. A number of webinars were produced with guest presenter, including Cllr Kevin Davis as portfolio holder in one case, which were well attended. Other Council teams who were busy providing advice included Environmental Health who had advised 130 businesses, particularly in respect of social distancing such as at supermarkets.

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These efforts were showing some signs of success as footfall slowly improved though judging by car park ticketing was still nearly 50% down in September over 2019. A great deal of effort had been put into creating a positive and safe environment throughout the town centre, including in privately controlled premises.

In these challenging times these firms have done Woking, and themselves, proud and deserve congratulations on their successes.

The Finance Task Group

Chairman – Cllr Kevin Davis

Purpose	Membership
<p>The Task Group has been established as a Standing Task Group to review financial issues as identified either by itself or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Task Group will receive financial information, including reports to the Executive, to enable it to undertake effective scrutiny of the financial performance of the Council.</p> <p>The Task Group will receive reports on areas such as Treasury Management, Budget Process and Financial Forecast, Statement of Accounts, Investment Programme, Review of Fees and Charges, General Fund Budget, Update on Commercial Rents, Update on Irrecoverable Debt, and matters arising from the Green Book. Its Work Programme will be received at each Task Group meeting.</p>	<p>Councillor Simon Ashall Councillor Ayesha Azad Councillor Tahir Aziz Councillor John Bond Councillor Kevin Davis Councillor Deborah Hughes Councillor James Sanderson</p>

Annual summary of the Finance Task Group:

Throughout the year the task group had discussed and reviewed the following items:

The sale of Midas House sale to SCC had fallen through, but the group were pleased to note that existing tenants were still engaged and paying rents.

The auditors had taken a very long time to approve last years' accounts, and whilst the group had expressed its disappointment at the delay, it's pleased that progress is being made.

The Victoria Square financial modelling, which would be effected by Covid-19 and was suggested that a new model is developed and was followed by a member briefing and report to Council.

The Finance Task Group had considered the 2020/21 financial position, and the approach to budget setting for 2021/22. The financial impact in 2020/21 has been across a number of areas of the Council's budgets:

- Revenue expenditure in dealing with the response
- Some savings as activities have slowed down
- Income loss from fees and charges and commercial rents
- Government support grants
- Cost and timing of capital projects

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Even with the known current situation it remained very difficult to forecast for rest of the year as position continues to change. The task group had shared a summary note on the Council's financial position due to the concerns raised from the Covid-19 pandemic. The note covered the following topics:

- Additional costs in the Housing and Leisure sectors, as well as equipment for employees to work from home and also provision of PPE.
- Savings as some activities have slowed down eg Celebrate Woking, the extent of this is currently being established to ensure cost variations are savings and not a rescheduling of costs.
- Income Loss – such as commercial rents and on/off street parking.
- Government Support provided.
- Financial Forecasting.
- Management Action - The Council has reviewed staffing costs and has taken a number of posts out of the establishment, therefore securing savings for 2020/21 as reported in the Green Book, and will be incorporated in the 2021/22 budget.

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Appendix 3

Work Programme for 2021/22

Decision to be Taken	Proposed by	Officer Comment
Safer Woking Partnership – Community Safety Plan. The Police and Justice Act 2006 gave local authorities responsibility for considering crime and disorder matters. In 2010 the Committee agreed that the Safer Woking Partnership Plan would be brought forward annually for scrutiny.	Chairman and Vice-Chairman	It was scheduled to be viewed at the meeting on 23 March 2020, which was cancelled due to the Covid outbreak.
Investment Strategy. To understand the Council's position on funding for projects and schemes such as the Flood Alleviation Plan, due to Covid-19.	Chairman and Vice-Chairman	This item will be carried over into the 2021/22 municipal year.
Freedom Leisure. For the Committee to receive an annual review and an update since the 2019/20 review.	Chairman and Vice-Chairman	This item will be carried over into the 2021/22 municipal year.
Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership. For the Committee to receive an update on the planned projects and activates at the Lakeview Community Centre in June 2021.	Chairman and Vice-Chairman	This item will be review at a meeting near in June 2021.

Annual Items of the Committee

Item	Month Scheduled	Reporting Officer
JWS Management Performance	January	Sarah Beck
Annual FOI report Annual Overview of Complaints Report	February	Hanna Taylor Jo McIntosh
Safer Working Partnership – Community Plan Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	March	Camilla Edmiston Chairman of the OS Cttee
Celebrate Woking Review and Forward Plan Treasury Management Mid-Year Review	November	Chris Norrington / Riette Thomas Leigh Clarke