

WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Annual Reports 2020/21

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**Foreword by Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symons,
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee**

Welcome to the Annual Reports of Wokingham Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2020/21.

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees is to hold decision makers to account, both inside and outside the Council. The Committees also play a role in developing and reviewing policy and ensuring that the Council and its partners are working effectively to improve services for residents, businesses and visitors to the Borough.

The 2019/20 Annual Reports highlighted a number of major challenges facing the Borough including financial uncertainty, demand and cost pressures, the funding of social care, housing numbers, traffic congestion and the Climate Emergency. Since then, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed everything. The Council has spent much of the past year in responding to the pandemic. The response, to date, has been very positive and has demonstrated the dedication and commitment of Council staff, partner organisations and the hundreds of community volunteers across the Borough.

In carrying out the role of "critical friend" the Overview and Scrutiny Committees carried out a major review of the Council's response to the pandemic. This covered a wide range of issues including support to care homes, schools and early years' settings, health partnerships, communications and engagement with "at risk" groups in the community. We also looked at the impact of the pandemic on the poorest residents of the Borough and its effect on mental health. We noted that the Council's financial stability had enabled it to respond quickly and effectively, in contrast to many other local authorities. Our overall findings were reported to the Executive in February 2021.

We recognise that the impact of Covid-19 will continue for the next few years, at least. Its financial impact will force the Council to seek new ways of working and new ways of delivering services. To date the signs are positive that the Council will be able to maintain key front-line services allied to innovation and continuous improvement. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to ensure that decisions are effective and transparent and that public services deliver value for money for Council Tax payers.

The Annual Reports also demonstrate the wide range of other issues considered during the year. They reflect the hard work and commitment of residents, community stakeholders, Members and officers who contributed to the work of the Committees.

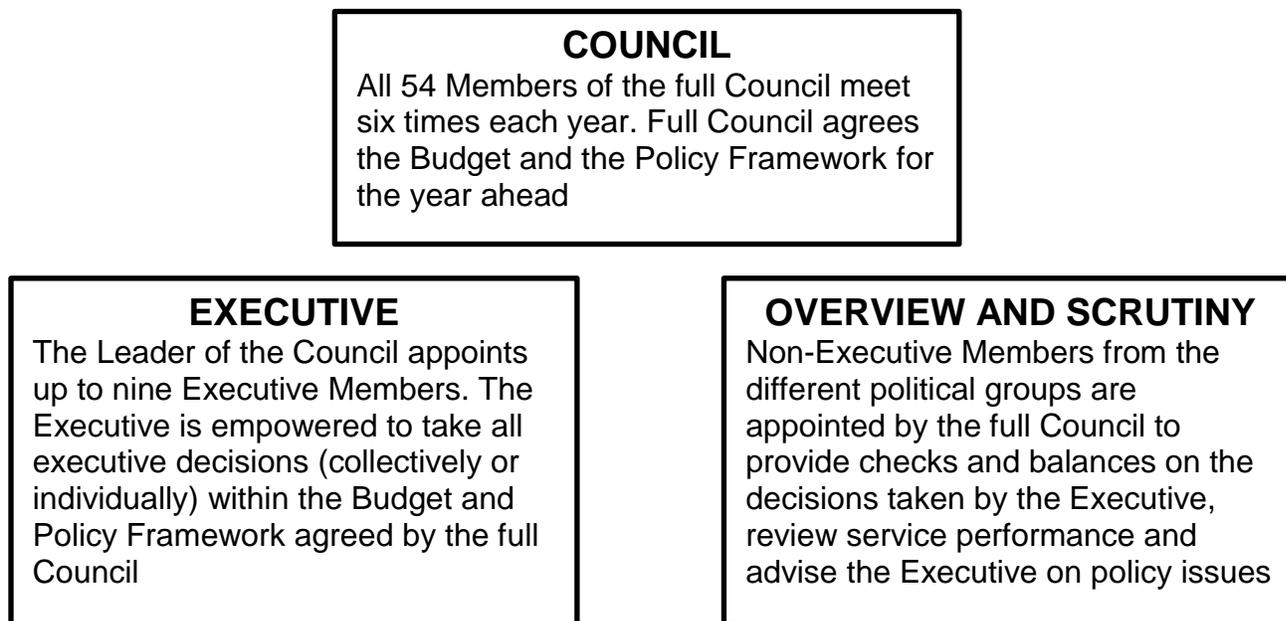
**Pauline Helliars-Symons,
February 2021**

SECTION 1 – WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

Wokingham Borough Council is a large, complex organisation with a thousand employees and an annual budget in excess of £130m. The Borough’s Community Vision (February 2020) is to make the Borough “a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business”. The Council makes major strategic decisions which affect the long-term future of the area and its communities. It also makes decisions on a daily basis which affect the lives of some of the Borough’s most vulnerable residents. Other public service providers such as the NHS, Thames Valley Police and the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service also make key decisions which affect the residents of the Borough. In order to ensure that the Council and other service providers spend public money wisely and make well informed decisions about key services it is essential that an effective system of checks and balances is in place.

A distinction is drawn between “Overview” which focuses on the development of policy and “Scrutiny” which looks at decisions that have been made, or are about to be made, to ensure that they are fit for purpose. In this document “Scrutiny” refers to both Overview and Scrutiny.

The Council’s Executive takes decisions within the financial and policy framework set by the full Council. Non-Executive Members of the Council (representing each of the political groups) are appointed to the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review those decisions and the performance of key services. The relationship between Council, Executive and Overview and Scrutiny is illustrated in the diagram below:

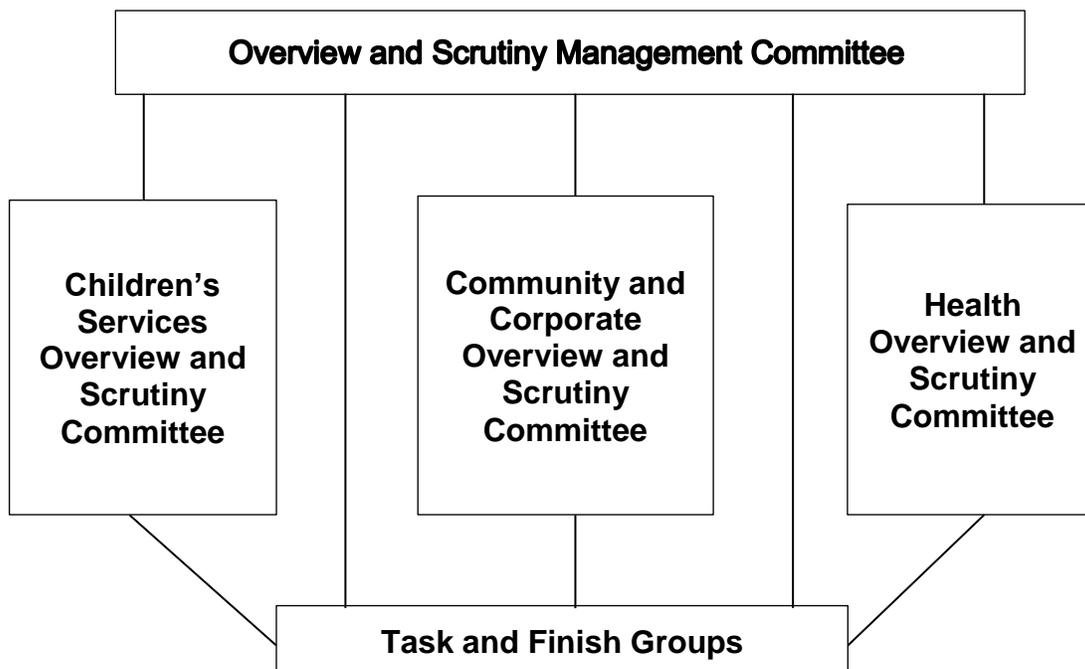


In order to deliver the Overview and Scrutiny function the Council has established the following Committees:

- Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee – responsible for overseeing the Scrutiny function and developing an annual work programme for each of the Committees.

- Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – responsible for scrutiny of services relating to schools, safeguarding and child protection, looked after children and children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - responsible for scrutiny of Council services, crime reduction and community safety and flood risk management.
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – responsible for scrutiny of local NHS bodies, public health arrangements and the work of the Local Healthwatch service.

The Committees consider issues at their regular meetings or by setting up time-limited Task and Finish Groups. The Council’s Overview and Scrutiny structure is illustrated below:



Four Principles of Effective Scrutiny

- Constructive “critical friend” challenge to the Executive and external service providers;
- Channelling the “voice” of the public and representing all the Borough’s residents;
- Members reaching bipartisan conclusions based on the weight of evidence;
- Driving continuous improvement which promotes community wellbeing and quality of life.

Limitations

Overview and Scrutiny is not about the investigation of minor matters or individual complaints. The Council has a separate corporate complaints procedure which is used to investigate individual complaints about services. Similarly, Overview and Scrutiny does not look at quasi-judicial matters such as planning or licensing issues. Finally, Overview and Scrutiny is not used for raising issues of a party political nature as these matters can be addressed through debate at full Council meetings.

SECTION 2

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



**Pauline Helliard-Symons, Chairman of the
Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has three principal roles. Firstly, to develop and oversee the work programmes of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Secondly to investigate specific issues of concern raised by local residents and community stakeholders. Thirdly, to ensure that Scrutiny Members receive training and support to enable them to carry out their work effectively.

As mentioned above, a significant part of the Committee's focus over the past year was on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We scrutinised (virtually) a number of issues including the Borough's Outbreak Management Plan, changes to the organisational structure, the local Test and Trace programme and the impact of the pandemic on the poorest residents, the unemployed and the homeless.

The Committee considered a number of other issues during the year including the quarterly performance management report on key services, unauthorised encampments, waste and recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. We also held a "Call-In" meeting to review the decision making process relating to the purchase of reusable dry sacks for dry recycling, to replace the existing black boxes.

The Committee also established a Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group which met seven times between May and September 2020. The Group reviewed the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, heard from expert witnesses and made a number of recommendations for improvement to the Executive. The Group will continue its work in 2021/22.

The Management Committee will continue to focus on initiatives to strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny process. This will include greater emphasis on pre-decision scrutiny, additional training and support for Members, greater involvement from residents and community groups and closer liaison with the Executive and the Council's Corporate Leadership Team.

Finally, I would like to thank the Members, officers, residents and partner organisations who contributed their time, effort and insights during this challenging period.

Pauline Helliard-Symons

Remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee oversees the Council's Scrutiny function and is responsible for developing and co-ordinating the work programmes and support for the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Membership

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman).
Councillors Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Jenny Cheng (part year), Andy Croy, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Emma Hobbs (part year), Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh, Malcolm Richards (part year), Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey and Oliver Whittle (part year).

Substitute Members: Councillors Laura Blumenthal, Shirley Boyt, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, Jenny Cheng, Stephen Conway, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Barrie Patman and Simon Weeks.

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Highlights from the Year

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Committee coordinated a major review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The review considered a wide range of issues including maintenance of key Council services, coordination of the community response through the "One Front Door", effectiveness of emergency plans and the impact of Covid-19 on the most vulnerable groups in the community. The other Overview and Scrutiny Committees reviewed key issues relating to their remit. The Management Committee's final report was submitted to the Executive in February 2021. The report's recommendations highlighted the outstanding response delivered by the Council and its partners. They also focussed on the importance of issues such as domestic violence, poverty, health inequalities, partnership working, continuous organisational improvement and effective communication and engagement with "at risk" groups in the community.

Performance Management

The Committee received quarterly Performance Management reports setting out details of the Council's performance against a number of financial, staffing and operational indicators. Members used the quarterly data to probe on areas of underperformance and select issues for more in-depth scrutiny. This included requesting that relevant officers attend future meetings in order to provide more information and context on specific indicators.

Climate Emergency

The Committee established the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group involving Councillors Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Keith Baker (to be replaced by Pauline Helliar-Symons in 2021/22), Andy Croy, Andrew Mickleburgh and Malcolm Richards. The Group met virtually during the summer of 2020. The Group received evidence from WBC officers, the Executive Member, the Local Enterprise Partnership and Professor Paul Chatterton from the University

of Leeds. The Group's report was submitted to the Executive in November 2020. It concluded that the Climate Emergency Action Plan was an ambitious document, in line with best practice. However, more work was required in a number of areas to strengthen the Action Plan and to ensure that the governance structure delivered rigorous challenge and effective public scrutiny.

Unauthorised Encampments

The Committee considered a report on the Council's powers, policies and procedures relating to unauthorised encampments. The report outlined the measures being taken to minimise any detrimental impact on local communities and the measures being taken to protect potentially vulnerable sites across the Borough. It also considered proposals to meet future needs of the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller communities through additional site provision. Members asked about the ways in which information and support was provided to residents, landowners, elected Members and travellers. We welcomed the provision of additional information for residents, improvements to the information on the Council website and the introduction of annual Member training sessions.

Member Training

The Committee recognises the importance of ongoing training and development to ensure that Members' skills and knowledge are constantly upgraded. Training sessions have been held on key elements of effective Overview and Scrutiny including preparing for meetings, questioning techniques and the development of key lines of enquiry. We will deliver further training for Members in 2021 and will work with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to ensure that our policies and procedures are in line with best practice.

Scrutiny Impacts

Assessing the impact of Overview and Scrutiny is not easy. An effective Scrutiny function influences decision making and policy development in a variety of ways. The development of robust challenge, questioning and examination of the issues helps to drive better decision making with greater transparency and accountability. Effective Scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the Committees making recommendations that make a tangible difference to the work of the Council and other public service providers.

Over the past year the following impacts are highlighted:

- Covid-19 Pandemic – the Committee received evidence from a number of partner organisations and considered the findings from a Residents' Survey. The Committee's recommendations increased the level of focus on vulnerable groups in the local community.
- Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group – the Task and Finish Group highlighted the importance of working with schools, businesses and community stakeholders to develop a Vision for Net Zero. It also stressed the importance of SMART targets to enable effective monitoring of progress against the priorities in the Council's Action Plan.
- Unauthorised Encampments – the Committee recognised that this was a serious and emotive issue for residents. Members stressed the importance of clear, timely information for residents and landowners. We welcomed the proposals to review future site provision and to deliver training for Members which would enable them to inform and support residents more effectively.

SECTION 3 REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Alison Swaddle, Chairman of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee's work is split almost equally between children's social work and educational attainment. As well as monitoring all the recommendations put in place by earlier Committees and Task and Finish Groups, the new work that has come its way is outlined below. This is in addition to the normal performance monitoring that we do at each meeting. This keeps the Committee in touch with how the Service and schools, especially the ones that have had Ofsted inspections, are performing.

We also monitor what the Service is doing to help schools requiring improvement, or schools causing concern, to improve. This year there was a particular focus on the local authority's response to the pandemic in supporting our schools and school leaders.

The Committee invites the Regional Schools Commissioner to attend once a year to scrutinise the performance of academy schools in the Borough.

All members of the Committee and their substitutes are invited to attend training at the start of the first meeting each year as Children's Services is an area that is constantly changing and we are keen to keep up-to-date with new legislation and service developments. Training is also arranged during the year if specific needs arise.

I would like to thank all members of the Committee, and the substitutes for their commitment to and interest in the work that we do, and for all the positive and genuinely useful contributions that they have made.

Alison Swaddle

Remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutiny and policy development in relation to services for children and young people. This includes schools, early years' settings and children's centres, safeguarding and child protection, children in care and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Membership:

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Jenny Cheng (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Andy Croy, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh, Malcolm Richards. In December 2020 the membership changed to Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Malcolm Richards (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Andy Croy, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Ken Miall, Laura Blumenthal and Andrew Mickleburgh.

Parent Governor: two vacancies.

Substitute Members:

Councillors: Michael Firmager, Emma Hobbs, Abdul Loyes Barrie Patman, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Shirley Boyt and Carl Doran.

Representatives of the Church of England Diocese and the Roman Catholic Diocese are also able to attend meetings of the Committee when Education issues are being considered. At the moment these posts are vacant.

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Highlights from the Year

Performance Management

At each meeting the Committee reviewed the performance of Children's Services in relation to Key Performance Indicators. Members challenged the Service, asking for relevant information and context in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). The report format continues to evolve in response to the Committee's requests. Of particular interest is the improvement in the timeliness and quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

Schools' Performance/ Coronavirus Response

The Committee received regular updates in relation to how the local authority has been supporting schools during the Coronavirus pandemic. Ofsted inspections were suspended and the national exams did not take place. Therefore, it has not been possible to assess schools' performance against national indicators for the 2020 year. The Committee scrutinised the 2019 results. This situation is being monitored and the Committee will seek to continue to receive schools' performance indicators once inspections and exams start again. The Committee also challenged the service to demonstrate efforts to address the educational gap which will result from the disturbed learning during this difficult year.

Virtual School

The Committee received a comprehensive report from the Virtual School and was pleased to note that the Virtual School service is being extended from 5-16 year olds to 0-25 year olds.

The Committee was informed that all Children In Care (CIC) are being offered online tutoring to help with their learning during the pandemic. The Committee challenged the service to provide evidence of the impact of the online tutoring programme to CIC's education. This will continue to be monitored.

Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)

The Committee received a representative from the RSC to review academy schools' performance. It was reassuring that the RSC did not raise any concerns over the Borough's academy schools. The RSC's relationship with the local authority is strong and it was strengthened during the pandemic. The Committee was also updated on the process of choosing a trust for the Northern House School, now the Chiltern Way Academy (part of the Chiltern Trust).

CAMHS Review

The Committee received an update about mental health services being provided for children and young people in the Borough. The Committee asked for more information around various issues which caused concern during discussions of this item and, as a result, a joint meeting of the Children's Services and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees is being organised to continue the scrutiny of the offer of mental health services in the Borough.

Children's Services Response to Covid-19

The Committee received a review of how the service has been operating since the lockdown in March 2020 and how services have been able to adapt and continue to be delivered. It was reassuring to learn that the service was able to carry on offering sustained respite care during this time, undertake a children's social care audit for quality assurance, as well as the usual activities.

School Placements Sufficiency

The Committee considered the offer of school places and the planning of future provision for each phase of education, as well as SEND provision. The Committee recommended the retention of sixth form provision at schools in the Borough and encouraged broadening of the offer of subjects and apprenticeship opportunities.

SEND Strategy

The Committee received a comprehensive review of the new SEND Strategy. The new strategy is much more ambitious than the previous one and was co-produced with all stakeholders. The Committee will continue to review its development and implementation.

The Committee also reviewed the following items: Child Exploitation, the development of the Compass Team and measures taken to reduce the need for children to return to a child protection plan.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Performance management – improved layout and content to provide more up-to-date information, trends and service narratives. Improved transparency and accountability.
- Response to the Coronavirus pandemic – encouraging the service to help schools and school leaders to deal with the challenges arising as a result of the current pandemic.

SECTION 4

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Guy Grandison, Chairman of the
Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

During the past year, the Committee has continued its focus on the delivery of Council services to ensure that they provide value for money for the Borough's Council Tax payers. Executive Members and Officers were invited to attend meetings of the Committee to give evidence and answer questions on priorities and performance. Conducting Committee meetings in a virtual environment has allowed greater access and convenience for the public to engage with the Overview and Scrutiny process, in addition to reducing travelling requirements for Members, officers, and participating members of the public.

This year marked the second consecutive year that Overview and Scrutiny have looked at the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in detail, prior to its journey through the February 2021 Executive and Budget Council meetings. This exercise has continued to add value to the Budget setting process by challenging Executive Members and Directors to explain the rationale for spending proposals in a clear and understandable way.

The Committee considered a range of other issues during the year including flood prevention, burial ground provision, and the Highways Maintenance Strategy. The Committee also undertook a detailed review of the Council's business, community, and charity response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Both the Committee and I wish to thank all those individuals who came together to meet the needs of the community during these very difficult times.

In developing its work programme the Committee is keen to ensure that the "voice" of local residents and community groups plays a bigger part in its deliberations. The Committee recognises that involving residents, community groups and local "experts" in Overview and Scrutiny reduces the risk of a partisan approach as Members are able to hear directly from those stakeholders whose interests they are representing. The Committee will continue to promote greater public involvement in Overview and Scrutiny over the coming year and will share any relevant learning with the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

I thank the Members of the Committee, Officers, residents and other stakeholders who took part in our meetings for their valuable contributions during what has been a difficult year.

Guy Grandison

Remit of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of internal Council operations and partnership working across the Borough. It also has responsibilities under the Police and Justice Act 2006 which involves oversight of the operation of the Borough's Community Safety Partnership. The Committee is also responsible for the scrutiny of flood risk management.

Membership

Councillor Guy Grandison (Chairman).

Councillors Emma Hobbs (Vice-Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Clive Jones, Graham Howe, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle.

Substitute Members: Councillors Chris Bowring, Andy Croy, Carl Doran, Michael Firmager, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Ken Miall, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Malcolm Richards and Caroline Smith.

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Highlights from the Year

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021-24

The Committee undertook a detailed overview of the proposed 2021-24 MTFP. Executive Members and Directors were invited to attend the meetings to present their bids and explain in detail how the requested funding would be used to deliver key services. Members welcomed the inclusion of 'plain English' detailed bid sheets which provided key figures and descriptive narratives in a format that Members and members of the public could understand and interpret. The Committee probed bids within key service areas, including agency worker staffing within Children's Services, care and support within Adult Social Care, income generation within Resources and Assets, substantial capital bids within Customer and Localities, and the Continuous Improvement Programme within Communities, Insight and Change. The role of the Committee was to challenge assumptions within the budget setting process and to encourage key decision makers think about their proposals from a different perspective. The Committee appreciated this continued level of transparency on the proposed MTFP and budget setting process, and looked forward to this process continuing and improving in future years.

Business, Community and Charity Initial Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Committee engaged with Council officers and staff from within the voluntary sector in order to assess how Wokingham Borough Council had helped to manage the initial business, community and charity response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Members received presentations from Directors and senior staff from various Council departments, in addition to hearing from the Chief Executive of Wokingham Citizen's Advice. A selection of topics considered by the Committee included the community and voluntary sector response (including the Wokingham 'one front door' approach), the housing response (including offering accommodation to all those who were considered as homeless within the Borough), the community safety response, and communications and engagement response. Members were grateful for the hard work and effort that went into enabling every aspect of the initial response to the pandemic, and thanked

officers for giving up their time to present examples of the outstanding work that had been going on across the Borough.

Burial Ground Capacity

The Committee considered an update on burial ground capacity within the Borough. The Committee initially had concerns regarding the overall capacity across the Borough, and capacity for specific religious burials such as Muslim burial plots. The Committee considered several updates, and during this period Council officers and staff at sites across the Borough undertook research to calculate the total amount of available plots, and identify areas of possible expansion. The Committee was pleased to hear that there was currently provision for between 17 and 20 years of burials within Wokingham Borough. A number of sites across the Borough were identified as potential areas for expansion, including Earley Town Council's plans to expand their existing provision at May's Lane. Members were pleased that burials of specific faith were being provided for within the Borough, including burials for followers of the Baha'i faith. The Committee were delighted that many, if not all, of the concerns originally raised had been mitigated. The Committee praised all involved for doing a sterling job. The Committee identified this as an example of Overview and Scrutiny working particularly well.

Highways Maintenance Strategy

The Committee reviewed WBC's Highways Maintenance Strategy. Members were advised how roads were selected for maintenance, and the different processes that were carried out in order to maintain roads and highways. The Committee asked that Highways officers and the Executive Member for Highways and Transport seek to formally engage with Town and Parish Council's when developing the three year programme for surface maintenance.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Budget and Budget setting process transparency – information regarding the Budget and the Budget setting process has been thoroughly reviewed by the Committee, and made publically available in an easy to read 'plain English' format. Transparency around crucial issues such as the Budget forms an essential part of the checks and balances that Overview and Scrutiny provides.
- Close working relationship with Executive Members and Directors – Executive Members and Directors were invited to, and attended, a number of Committee meetings. Answers to Member queries were frank and detailed, providing a solid foundation for transparent Overview and Scrutiny.
- Oversight of delivery of key Council Services – continued monitoring of key Council Services to ensure that they are delivering value for money for residents. Probing Services to think about service delivery and value for money is key in delivering cost effective services for residents. Services showed their resilience and expertise via their initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Proposed that Highways officers and the Executive Member for Highways and Transport seek to formally engage with Town and Parish Council's when developing the three year programme for highways surface maintenance.

SECTION 5

REPORT OF THE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Ken Miall, Chairman of the
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has concentrated on health and social care matters that affect residents.

Throughout the year the Committee has heard from the Council's Adult Social Care team and the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust regarding the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Briefings were also received from a number of other bodies including the Thames Valley Local Pharmacy Committee and NHS Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Committee has kept informed of significant developments within the local health and care system, such as the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation's Building Berkshire Together development programme.

Members continue to work with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, the independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of Wokingham Borough residents, receiving updates on their work at most meetings.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Committee, Officers, residents and other stakeholders who took part in meetings for their contribution throughout the year.

Ken Miall

Remit of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) scrutinises issues relating to the planning, provision and operation of health and wellbeing services in the Borough. This includes acute and community health services, adult social care services, family and public health services and health related services commissioned jointly by the Council, health bodies and the voluntary sector. The Committee exercises powers conferred to it through the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013.

Membership

Councillor Ken Miall (Chairman).

Councillors Abdul Loyes (Vice Chairman), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Jenny Cheng, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Clive Jones, Adrian Mather, Bill Soane and Michael Firmager (from October 2020), Alison Swaddle (until October 2020).

Substitute Members: Chris Bowring, Gary Cowan, David Hare, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Graham Howe, Tahir Maher, Malcolm Richards, Caroline Smith and Simon Weeks.

All attendees at HOSC meetings, including members of the public, may ask questions after each report or presentation is presented.

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Highlights from the Year

Council's Response to Covid-19 – Care Homes

The Committee scrutinised the Council's response to the pandemic with regards to care homes, thus far, receiving a briefing in July 2020. They noted that Adult Social Care had proactively supported the care sector and had worked with the care homes to facilitate mutual aid across the sector. Support provided included, an improved funding deal for care homes the Council contracted with, helping to source Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the provision of advice and guidance. Members commended the decision taken to refuse to take residents back into care homes from hospital, unless they had been tested for Covid-19, prior to Government guidance on this matter being issued.

The Committee received a further briefing with regards to the provision of PPE and financial support. The Committee concluded that the Council's response to the pandemic in relation to care homes had ultimately been very positive, based on strong partnership working, effective decision-making and communications.

Pharmacy Services

The Committee was updated on pharmacy services in the Borough at the Committee's September meeting, by Kevin Barnes and David Dean, Thames Valley Local Pharmacy Committee. Members sought information regarding pharmacy service provision during the pandemic and were pleased to note that 95% of pharmacies had been open consistently

throughout the pandemic. Whilst there had initially been some issues around staffing and ensuring staff safety and that customers queued safely, these had mostly been addressed.

Building Berkshire Together

The Committee was briefed on the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust's Building Berkshire Together development programme at its September meeting. Under the Government Health Infrastructure Plan, funding would be provided for 40 new hospital projects over the next ten years. It was a major opportunity for the Trust, the local communities, and staff to improve services, patient experience and the environment. The Trust was one of 21 NHS Trusts to receive seed funding of £2million to develop ideas. All possibilities would be considered including refurbishment and rebuilding the existing site, substantial refurbishment and rebuild, completely new hospital on the current site and completely new hospital on a new greenfield or brownfield site.

Members received a further briefing on the progress of the development programme and the different possible options available, at the January 2021 Committee meeting.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

The Committee received an update from the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust at its November 2020 meeting. Members sought information on issues such as whether the Trust would be able to maintain stroke, heart attack and cancer services during the pandemic, escalation plans, testing of staff and clearing any backlog in service provision.

Future commissioning of NHS hydrotherapy services in Berkshire West

The Committee monitored the NHS Berkshire West CCG consultation on the future commissioning of NHS hydrotherapy services in Berkshire West and received a briefing on the outcome of this consultation, in January 2021. Based on the clinical effectiveness, value for money and analysis of the consultation, the CCG had agreed to not routinely fund NHS hydrotherapy services apart from on an exceptional basis via an Individual Funding Request. Members were pleased that the service would remain available for those with a particular clinical need.

Healthwatch

The Committee have continued to receive frequent updates on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, including on the following:

- GP surgery website accessibility;
- Accessing health services during the pandemic and in particular, dental services;
- Perinatal services;
- Deaf or hard of hearing patients accessing virtual GP appointments.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Ensuring that residents' needs are considered as part of the commissioning and delivery of local health services and continuing to work with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough to raise the profile of matters raised by local service users.
- Developing an overview of key health and social care services that served the Borough.

SECTION 6

GETTING INVOLVED IN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Council is committed to making Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings accessible to all residents of the Borough. A key aim is to increase public involvement in the process and to remove barriers to participation.

Residents can get involved in Overview and Scrutiny by attending meetings - all Overview and Scrutiny meetings are open to the public and are held in the early evening to make attendance easier. In addition, copies of Agendas including reports to be considered are published five working days before each meeting and can be accessed on the Council's website:

www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings

During the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings have been held virtually using Microsoft Teams. These meetings are accessed via a You Tube link set out on the meeting Agenda.

Residents can also elect to receive automatic notification when new Overview and Scrutiny Agenda and Minutes are published.

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting (including virtual meetings) includes a Public Question Time session which allows residents to raise issues of general interest and/or specific issues relating to the items under consideration.

Members of the public are also able to contribute to Scrutiny reviews by giving evidence either as an individual or as part of a community group. Residents can also request that a specific item is considered by Overview and Scrutiny as a review item. Residents can complete an online Scrutiny review suggestion form at:

www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/decisions/ask-for-a-scrutiny-review

During 2021/22 the Council will continue to use local and social media to raise awareness of issues coming before the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and to allow residents to provide comments and feedback.

The Council's Twitter feed is accessible here: [WokinghamBorough@WokinghamBC](https://twitter.com/WokinghamBC)

If you want to learn more about Overview and Scrutiny or want to discuss a specific issue, please contact Neil Carr, the Council's Scrutiny Officer:

by telephone: 0118 974 6000, or

by email: neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk or by post:

Democratic Services, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN.