



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Annual Reports 2021/22

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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 2021/22.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to hold decision makers to account, both inside and outside the Council. The Committees provide independent "critical friend" challenge to the Council and other public service providers across the Borough. 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. Effective scrutiny is an important element of the successful functioning of local democracy.

Previous Annual Reports highlighted the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic alongside a number of major challenges facing the Borough. These included financial uncertainty, demand and cost pressures, the funding of social care, provision of school places, housing numbers, traffic congestion and the Climate Emergency. These challenges have not gone away. The Council has spent much of the past year in continuing to respond to the pandemic. The response has continued to be positive and has once again demonstrated the dedication and commitment of Council and school staff, partner organisations and the hundreds of community volunteers across the Borough. During the year Members scrutinised the Council's Covid Recovery Strategy and welcomed the strengthening of partnerships with the voluntary and community sector, culminating in the opening of the Wokingham Charity and Community Hub in Erfstadt Court.

Members recognise that the impact of Covid-19 will continue for the next few years as it moves from pandemic to endemic. 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. Members scrutinised the Council's continuous improvement programme alongside its plans for developing customer excellence. These are ambitious plans which will benefit from ongoing scrutiny as the Council seeks to become a high performing authority.

The Annual Reports for 2021/22 demonstrate the wide range of 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 Overview and Scrutiny function.

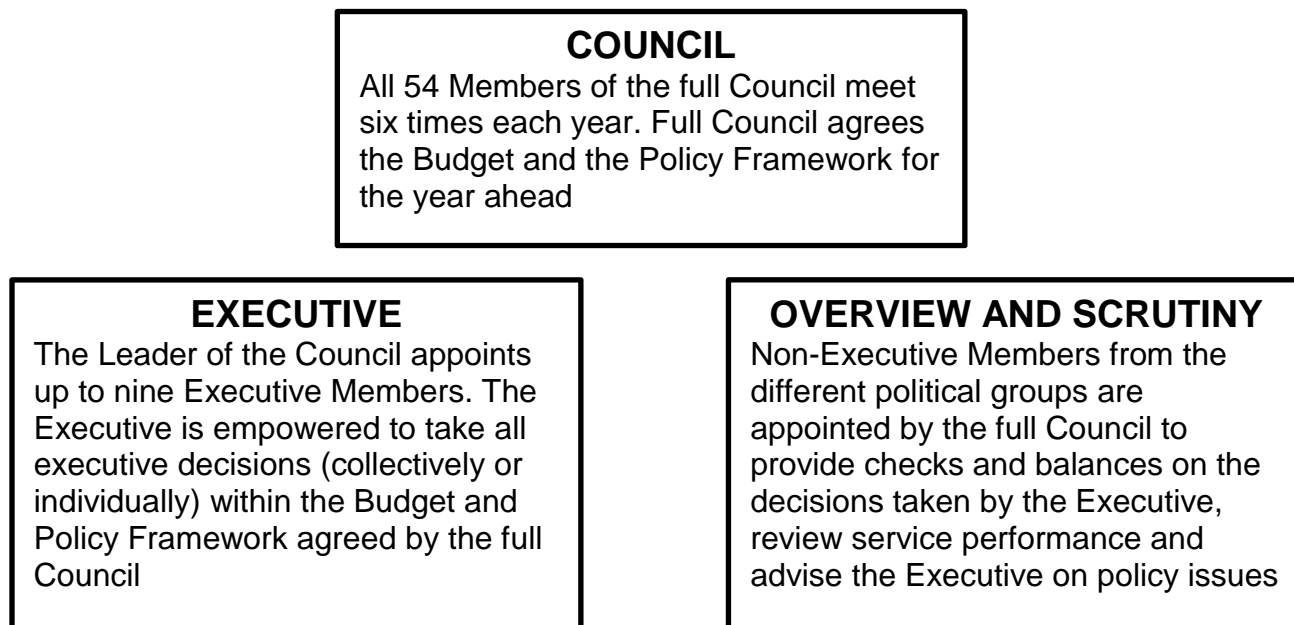
**Pauline Helliars-Symons,
February 2022**

SECTION 1 – WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

Wokingham Borough Council is a large, complex organisation with over a thousand employees and an annual budget of £145m. 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:

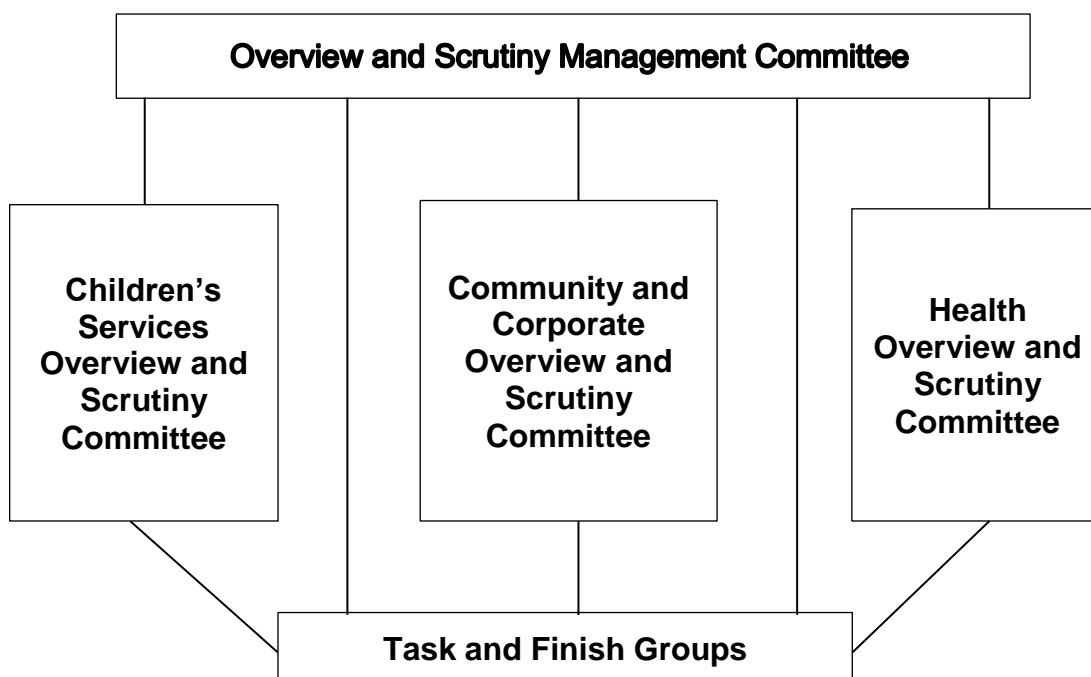


In order to deliver the Overview and Scrutiny function the Council has established the following Committees:

- 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 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 Helliar-Symons, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has three important roles. Firstly, to develop and oversee the annual work programmes of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Secondly to investigate specific issues within its own work programme. Thirdly, to ensure that Scrutiny Members have the relevant skills, training and support.

During 2021/22, the Council continued its wide-ranging response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee scrutinised a number of related issues including the Council's Covid Recovery Strategy and the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable residents through, for example, scrutiny of the Council's emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Committee met with the Council Leader and Chief Executive to discuss priorities over the year ahead and considered a number of other issues including the quarterly performance management report on key services, unauthorised encampments, the Council's website and the emerging Domestic Abuse, Waste and Tree Strategies. We also held a "Call-In" meeting to review an Executive Member decision relating to an Off Street Car Parks Order.

The Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group submitted its second report in June 2021. The report made further recommendations aimed at strengthening the Climate Emergency Action Plan in areas such as transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The majority of the Group's recommendations were accepted by the Executive. A second Task and Finish Group was established during the year to consider Tree Protection and Biodiversity.

The Committee also requested an annual report, to each November meeting, on progress made on Motions passed at full Council as Members, even those proposing and seconding them, often did not know what action had been taken and with what results. This year the report will come to the March meeting when it will contain information from the last three years since it is the first report, and thereafter annually in November.

Looking ahead, the Management Committee will continue to focus on initiatives to strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny process. This will include further emphasis on pre-decision scrutiny and policy development, additional training and support for Members, greater involvement from residents and community groups and closer liaison with the Council's Executive. Finally, I would like to thank the Members, officers, residents and community groups who contributed their time, effort and insights during another challenging year.

Pauline Helliar-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 Helliard-Symons (Chairman).

Councillors Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Rachel Burgess, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Norman Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey.

Substitute Members: Councillors Keith Baker, Chris Bowring, Anne Chadwick, Jenny Cheng, Stephen Conway, Peter Dennis, Gary Cowan, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Barrie Patman and Simon Weeks.

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Highlights from the Year

Covid-19 Pandemic

Following the Committee's earlier review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21, Members scrutinised the Council's Covid Recovery Strategy. The Strategy set out a number of key areas of focus including physical and emotional health and wellbeing, resilient communities, supporting the local economy and developing the Council's staff and its operating systems. Members welcomed the increased focus on mental health and wellbeing and the improved transparency, communication and engagement arising out of the response to the pandemic.

Anti-Poverty Strategy

The Committee considered an update on the emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy, being developed in partnership with partners in the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Members were informed that the Strategy would focus on challenging the stigma of poverty and delivering more joined up solutions which impacted positively on those in most need. Members welcomed progress on the Strategy but were keen to ensure that it was co-produced with VCS partners. To this end, VCS representatives were invited to attend a meeting of the Committee to give their feedback on the process.

Performance Management

The Committee received quarterly Performance Management reports setting out details of the Council's performance against a number of financial and operational indicators. Members used the quarterly data to probe on areas of underperformance and select issues for more in-depth scrutiny. The importance of genuinely SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) was stressed. Members welcomed proposals to introduce a more effective performance management system in 2022/23, which would help to generate reports which were more focussed and timely. This would enable the Committee to invite specific Executive

Members and officers to provide evidence on recent service issues based on accurate, recent and relevant data.

Climate Emergency

The Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group met again and produced its second report in June 2021. The Task and Finish Group comprised Councillors Swaddle (Chairman), Croy, Helliar-Symons, Kerr and Richards. The Group's report focussed on transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The Group received evidence from WBC officers, the Executive Member, Reading Buses, Giki Zero and a range of external academics and policy experts. The Group's report was submitted to the Executive in September 2021. The majority of its recommendations were accepted. The Committee subsequently scrutinised the Council's proposals for establishing community deliberative processes in order to engage effectively with residents on the key themes in the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Tree Protection and Biodiversity

The Committee established a second Task and Finish Group with a remit relating to Tree Protection and Biodiversity. The Group comprised Councillors Bowring (Chairman), Cowan, Firmager, Fishwick and Rance. The Group scrutinised the Council's existing policies, the impact of the Environment Act and the effectiveness of partnership working with Town and Parish Councils and local groups such as the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. The Task and Finish Group was also asked to advise on a Council Motion which proposed the declaration of an Ecological Emergency alongside the Climate Emergency declaration already in place. The Group's report is expected in March 2022.

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. Specific sessions were also held on Budget Scrutiny and Scrutiny of Health and Adult Social Care. We will deliver further training for Members in 2022/23 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

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 highlighted the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups and the importance of developing strong partnerships in order to ensure that everyone received the necessary help and support.
- Climate Emergency – the Task and Finish Group highlighted the importance of training for Members and staff and the embedding of Climate Emergency awareness into every service and every key decision.
- Unauthorised Encampments – the Committee requested improved information on the Council website and additional support for private landowners.

SECTION 3

REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Norman Jorgensen, 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 been carried out is outlined below. This keeps the Committee in touch with how the Service and schools, especially in the context of the current challenges brought in by the pandemic, are performing.

This year there was a continuous focus on the local authority's response to the pandemic in relation to children's social care and education.

The Committee was pleased to note the dedication and hard work which was displayed by the Service under the additional pressures brought on by the pandemic, with particular praise to the work undertaken by the Covid Task Force.

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.

Norman Jorgensen

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: Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), Rebecca Margetts (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Anne Chadwick, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Morag Malvern, Andrew Mickleburgh and Jackie Rance.

Parent Governor: two vacancies

Substitute Members:

Councillors: Sam Akhtar, Phil Cunnington, Guy Grandison, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Barrie Patman and Alison Swaddle.

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

Children's Services response to Covid-19

The Service adapted in order to continue delivering its statutory duties throughout the pandemic. The Early Help service, which is not statutory, also continued to provide support to families via telephone and online. Support continued to be provided to schools and early years settings. Help with interpreting legislation and updates on new government guidance was provided at weekly meetings with senior school leaders, as well as assistance with dealing with local outbreaks and advising on mitigating measures.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS), which is normally a traded service, was provided for free during the pandemic and school attendance remained good in the Borough. The Committee asked that the EWS continue to be offered beyond the pandemic.

There was a holistic approach to provide mental health and emotional wellbeing support to children and young people. The service worked with Social Care, Health and other professionals to provide a joined up offer. The Committee asked that the offer of Kooth (digital mental health care) be extended to 25 year olds.

Performance Indicators

The Committee took the decision to scrutinise performance indicators at certain times during the year, when this is most relevant. The Committee challenged the information contained in the reports, suggesting areas of improvement. It was noted that there had been an

improvement in the timeliness of completion of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), as compared to previous years. However, the total number of EHCPs was increasing and this was challenging. This was a complex situation, and the service was developing a number of strands of work to tackle this challenge.

Unicef application

The Committee was pleased to be informed of the successful bid by the Council to join the Unicef's programme Child Friendly Cities and Communities Programme. The aim of this programme is to give all children a chance to have their voice heard, and Wokingham is very proud to take part in this project. The Committee will continue to follow with interest the progress of this initiative.

Education, Schools Performance Indicators, Ofsted Reports and Schools Causing Concern

Education in the Borough continued to be one of the main focus of the Committee and this was monitored at every meeting.

Ofsted suspended inspections at the beginning of the pandemic and were undertaking Section 8 survey visits which did not produce a rating. The School Improvement Team continued to monitor schools by visiting schools virtually and asking the same questions that Ofsted used to ask during research visits. Ofsted inspections have now been reinstated, although there is a delay of approximately six months. It was pleasing to note that the Forest School was awarded a 'Good' rating, which was an improvement since its last inspection. The Committee will continue to monitor the outcomes of inspections.

Due to the suspension of Ofsted inspections, the Committee temporarily ceased to receive the Schools Causing Concern report, this is now being reinstated.

Additionally, there were no performance tables available for two years running, as formal tests have not taken place, with no national or local data available. The service is continuing to give advice to schools in preparing to use the Teacher Assessment grades system. This process is new and has added to teachers' workload.

The Committee was pleased to be informed of the work being undertaken with schools in relation to equality and diversity, learning that a wide range of offer is in place.

Secondary School Sufficiency

The Committee was informed that additional places were created in agreement with some schools, and this agreement had secured places for all Year 7 applicants. Most children were allocated one of their preferences. It was noted that parental preference had not been sufficiently taken into account at an early planning stage and this was a learning opportunity for future planning of school places.

A bulge was being projected until 2027 and the Committee urged officers to make plans for this, including considerations of where (geographically) surplus places might be needed.

Children Missing Education

The EWS provided assistance to schools in respect of school attendance and helping children re-engage with education. It was noted that in order to improve school attendance it was

important to be able to offer suitable places to meet the children's needs. It was of concern that there was a disproportionate number of permanent exclusions of Special Educational Needs (SEN) children. The Committee requested to continue to review the data on permanent exclusions and added a review of EWS in its forward programme.

Children's Services Strategy

A Children's Services Strategy is being developed to cover a period of three years, it is being designed to align the service delivery of the priorities. The Committee thoroughly scrutinised the strategy and made comments and suggestions to improve it, including strengthening the voice of children.

It is of concern that the new SEND school will not open in September 2022 as anticipated. However, the Committee was re-assured that places were being secured for children in alternative provisions. Negotiations are ongoing with the DfE to establish when the school would open.

Review of Home to School Transport Processes

The Committee challenged the service about the processes which had been undertaken that had resulted in some residents being dissatisfied with service. There had been lessons learnt during the review of home to school transport, and the Committee would continue to monitor the development and delivery of this service, which involved Children's Services and Corporate Transport.

Wokingham Education Partnership

The Committee was informed of the newly formed Wokingham Education Partnership. The partnership sought to enable collaboration and co-production to find solutions to strategic issues in relation to education in the Borough. The Committee was in support of this initiative and will receive regular updates on its development.

Children's Services Covid Task Force

Much work had been undertaken to support schools during the pandemic, including coordinating additional resources, disseminating and signposting information, working with local and other partners, supporting schools with local outbreaks, helping to interpreting national guidance from central government and health agencies.

The Committee commended the work undertaken by the Task Force.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Improved transparency and accountability across all services.
- Response to the Coronavirus pandemic – challenging the Service to achieve the best outcomes in the current context and to extend best practices beyond the 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 hybrid format has allowed greater access and convenience for the public to engage with the Overview and Scrutiny process.

This year marked the third 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 2022 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 receiving regular progress updates regarding bringing the functions of the Public Protection Partnership back in-house, receiving the annual update from the Community Safety partnership, and overviewing aspects of the Council’s vegetation maintenance strategy.

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 the 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 Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick and Clive Jones.

Substitute Members: Councillors Rachel Burgess, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Norman Jorgensen, Rebecca Margetts, Barrie Patman, Jackie Rance, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Caroline Smith

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Highlights from the Year

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2022-25

The Committee undertook a detailed overview of the proposed 2022-25 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 continued 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 a demand management strategy within Children's Services, a new dementia care home within Adult's Social Care, income generation projects within Resources and Assets, substantial capital bids for example highways infrastructure within Place and Growth, 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 to 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.

Bringing the Public Protection Partnership Back in-House

The Committee have received a series of updates detailing progress in bringing the functions of the Public Protection Partnership back in-house. Delivery of this project forms a key part of the Council's strategy to deliver more localised services to residents, backed up by increased local knowledge and involvement from residents, Town and Parish Councils and Ward Councillors. Members received assurances regarding the engagement and consultation process with staff, and were given updates on the experienced senior management who would be joining the new in-house service. Members were pleased to be able to review and question this key process throughout the 2021/22 municipal year.

Review of Library Service Provision

The Committee received an update regarding the provision of library services across the Borough. Officers explained that the three larger town libraries were well used by a variety of residents, however the smaller libraries and 'micro libraries' across the Borough also served as key community hubs for activities and groups. Members were pleased to hear committed support for libraries in a variety of localities which would become gateways for cultural events, art exhibitions, and learning opportunities in addition to their core function of providing literature to residents. The Committee thanked officers within the Library Service for their tireless work to innovate and improve on existing offerings.

Vegetation Maintenance Strategy

An update was provided on the three primary maintenance contracts: the grounds maintenance contract with Tivoli Group Ltd, the highways reactive maintenance contract with Volker Highways, and the street cleansing contract with Volker Highways, which was sub-contracted to Urbaser Ltd. Members probed issues including the different service level agreements for each contract, how highways inspectors picked up on issues related to vegetation, and how issues could be raised by the public. The Committee reiterated a previous suggestion for officers to explore the possibility of developing a WBC app for reporting vegetation and street cleansing issues directly to the relevant team.

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. Agreement was reached to assess the mid-year financial position during the 2022/23 municipal year, to ensure that assumptions made within the proposed MTFP were being met within the backdrop of a number of uncertainties including inflation, future funding arrangements, and the high cost of construction.
- 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 demonstrated continued resilience in delivering vital services during periods of national restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic.
- Ensured that the process of bringing the functions of the Public Protection Partnership back in-house was being monitored in a public setting. Policy directives of such importance and impact on our residents should be monitored by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where appropriate and possible.

SECTION 5

REPORT OF THE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Alison Swaddle, Chairman of the
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This year the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has focused on health and social care matters that affect local residents.

The Committee has received updates on a range of issues, including NHS Dental provision, GP practices and GP services, the Covid and flu vaccination programmes, public toilet availability and how the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust has been operating during the pandemic.

Throughout the year we have monitored performance against the Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators.

We continue to work well with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, the independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of residents, and have been kept informed of their work and issues of resident concern, at most meetings.

All members of the Committee and their substitutes are invited to attend training to keep up to date with any new legislation and service developments. Training is also arranged during the year should a specific need arise.

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

Alison Swaddle

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 Alison Swaddle (Chairman).

Councillors Jackie Rance (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Jenny Cheng, Carl Doran, Michael Firmager, Tahir Maher, Adrian Mather, and Barrie Patman.

Substitute Members: Chris Bowring, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Guy Grandison. David Hare, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, 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

Adult Social Care Priorities

At its meeting in July 2021 the Committee was briefed on the Adult Social Care priorities for 2021-22, in addition to responding to the pandemic. Priorities included the launch of the first voluntary sector hub, a review of the voluntary care sector contracts procurement exercise, the launch of new Voluntary sector Mental Health Service, and the Care and support Procurement Framework.

Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators

Throughout the year the Committee has monitored performance against the Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

The Committee received an update on the operation of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust at its November 2021 meeting, from Raghuv Bhasin, Director of Systems Partnerships. Members scrutinised issues such as how service provision had been impacted by Covid, how backlogs in services were being addressed, current key areas of focus, impact of Covid on finances, staff morale during the pandemic, retention and recruitment and how the Trust communicated with the wider community, including local authorities.

Winter Plan - The Committee received a presentation on the delivery of the Winter Plan at an extraordinary meeting in February 2022. Members heard about the different approaches

taken to get messages out into the community, such as use of different social media platforms, printed materials, videos and a bus campaign. Areas which had been particularly successful had been those of very small focus such as encouraging people to sort out their repeat prescriptions prior to Christmas.

Maternity Services – Members sought an update on maternity services at an extraordinary meeting in February 2022, following a survey of residents by Healthwatch Wokingham of services used by residents during the pandemic, in which Maternity Services had scored less well. The update covered what issues the service had faced particularly during the pandemic, such as staffing levels, the service’s response to Healthwatch’s report Experiences of Perinatal Mental Health Support in Wokingham Borough, and action being taken in response to the 2020 inspection by the CQC. Members were pleased to note the work undertaken with regards to recruitment.

Response to Covid – Vaccinations

The Committee sought an update on the Covid vaccination programme at an extraordinary meeting in September 2021. Information regarding the different phases of the programme was provided. The Committee also received an update on the seasonal influenza vaccination programme. Members asked questions around matters such as locations of vaccine sites, how information was communicated successfully to the community, take up amongst particular groups, and pressure on the services delivering the vaccinations.

GP Provision and GP services

This year access to GP services has continued to be a national and local issue, and has worsened during the pandemic. Healthwatch regularly raised this as an issue of concern to residents to the Committee. In November 2021, the Committee received a presentation on GP Provision and GP services. The Committee was provided information on the pressures that Primary Care were facing during the pandemic. Members sought information on and asked questions about, what action was being taken to increase access, particularly face-to-face appointments. They learned that many patients, particularly those who worked, preferred a hybrid approach to appointments. Members agreed that the system had to fit patient need. The Committee was informed that funding was being provided to improve access and availability.

The Committee expressed concern that four GP practices in the Borough continued to score less well in the national GP Patient Survey.

Health Scrutiny Arrangements across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System

In July 2021, the Committee considered and recommended to Council, a proposal to form a new, mandatory, joint committee with health scrutiny powers to consider matters affecting patient flows across the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System geography. This would help to improve the planning, development, operation and integration of health and care services, and in turn would improve health outcomes for local residents.

NHS Dentistry

At the Committee’s September 2021 meeting, Hugh O’Keeffe, Senior Commissioning Manager Dental, NHS England and NHS Improvement – South East, provided a briefing on

access to NHS dentists during the pandemic. The Committee sought information on issues such as waiting lists, action being taken to increase appointment availability, funding, and service resilience.

Optalis

David Birch, Chief Executive Officer Optalis, and Matt Pope, Director Adult Services, provided a presentation on the performance of Optalis to the Committee's September 2021 meeting, and advised that whilst maintaining operational standards through the pandemic had been a challenge, staff had met it well. Members were pleased to note the success of schemes such as the Out & About service and the Ability Travel Scheme.

Health Integration

In February 2022, the Committee received a presentation on an annual project review of the work of the Wokingham Integrated Partnership. Members were informed of the progress and success of the various projects such as the implementation of the MIND Service, and Moving with Confidence.

Public Toilet Provision

The Committee sought to understand the toilet facility provision available to the public across the Borough, to establish whether it was sufficient in number and location. Members received information regarding the Local Loo scheme and also information from Crohn's and Colitis UK about difficulties that sufferers could face. The Committee recommended that the Council lead the undertaking of a review of signage and publicity of the Local Loo Scheme and other toilets publicly available within Wokingham Borough, facilitating information from businesses and the Town and Parish Councils.

Healthwatch

The Committee have continued to work well with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough and receive frequent updates on their work and issues of resident concern such as:

- Residents' views on services accessed during the pandemic;
- Accessing GP and NHS dentist appointments;
- Caring during Covid;
- Ageing Well;
- Continence service.

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 residents.
- Gaining an overview of key health and social care services that serve the Borough.
- Championed the undertaking of a review into the accessibility and publicity of toilets available for public use, in 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 were held virtually using Microsoft Teams. These meetings are accessed via a You Tube link set out on the meeting Agenda. Residents are now able to attend in person or view the meetings on line.

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

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting 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 2022/23 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.