



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Annual Reports 2022/23

Produced: February 2023
Received by Council: March 2023

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**Foreword by Councillor Jim Frewin,
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee**

Welcome to the Annual Reports of Wokingham Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2022/23.

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.

In addition to the usual scrutiny of key services and new policy initiatives, an important aspect of the past year has been a thorough review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. At the core of this work was an external review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, a nationally recognised team of experts. The review found that the Council had the foundations for an effective scrutiny function with a number of areas that could be strengthened. These included closer working with the Council's Executive and management team and a more focused approach – fewer issues scrutinised in greater detail. Following the review we have implemented a number of changes and are confident that, moving forwards, Overview and Scrutiny will provide more effective challenge and support to the decision making process at the Council.

As we move into 2023/24, we can all see the serious challenges facing the Council and the Borough. The cost of living crisis, high inflation, increasing demand for key services, recruitment and retention of key staff, climate emergency and pressure for new development have created significant challenges for the organisation. It is vital, therefore, that Overview and Scrutiny provides constructive challenge to ensure that public money is spent wisely, the Council continues to innovate and work in effective partnerships and our most vulnerable residents receive the services they need.

The Annual Reports for 2022/23 demonstrate the wide range of issues considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. They reflect the hard work and commitment of residents, community groups, Members and officers who contributed during the year.

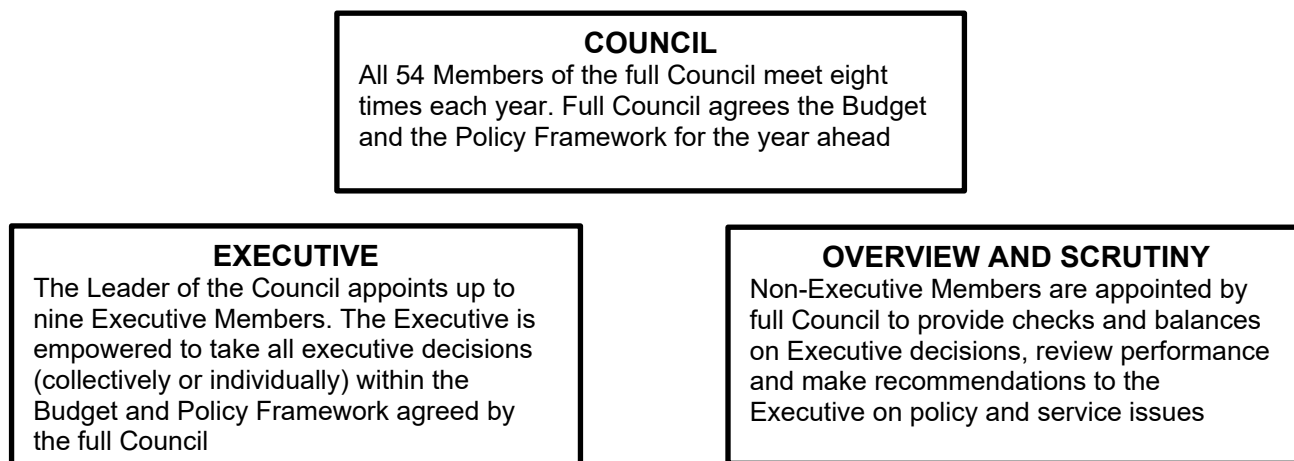
Jim Frewin

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 £154m. 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. Scrutiny is based on the Parliamentary select committee model of governance where MPs, who are not part of the Government, hold inquiries into issues of public interest and make recommendations for change. In the Council model, the Scrutiny Committees make recommendations for change to the Executive. Scrutiny meetings are held in public. Residents and community groups are encouraged to participate by asking questions and raising issues of community interest for investigation and debate.

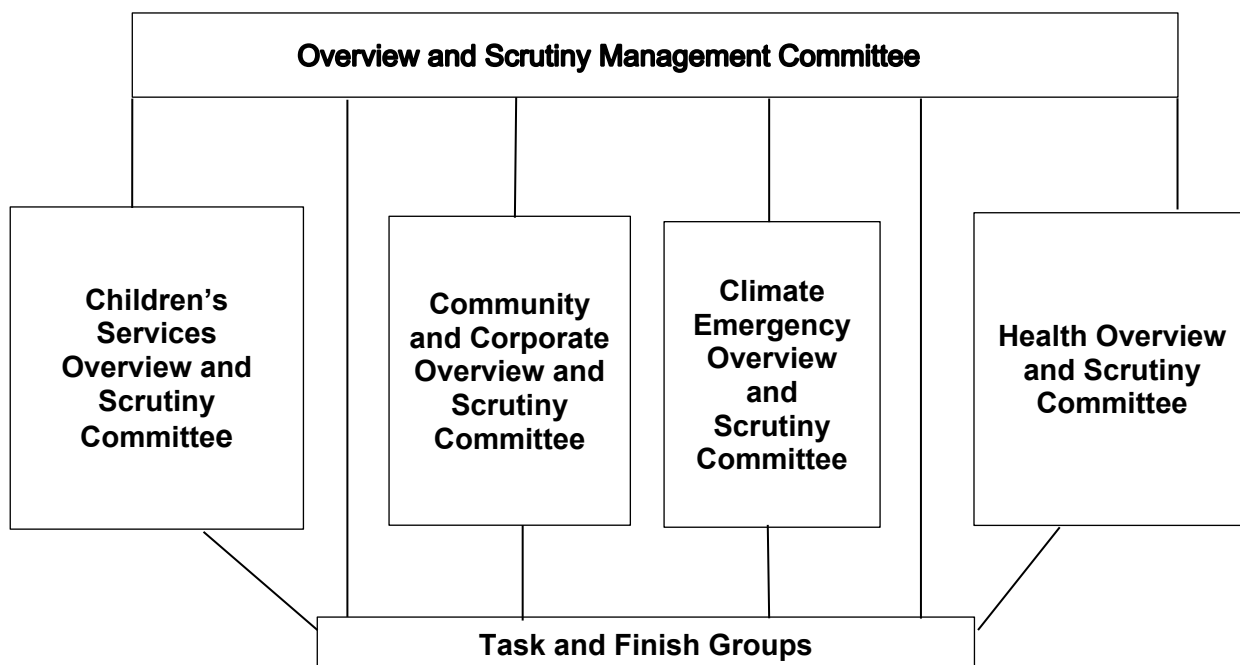
The Council’s Executive takes decisions within the financial and policy framework set by the full Council. Non-Executive Members of the Council (representing each of the political groups) are appointed to the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review those decisions and the performance of 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.
- Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee – responsible for scrutiny of the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan and the ambition to achieve “net zero” by 2030.
- 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

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, 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. These matters can be addressed through debate at full Council meetings.

SECTION 2

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



**Jim Frewin, Chair of the
Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee has three important roles. Firstly, to develop, oversee and monitor 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 2022/23, the Committee scrutinised a number of important issues affecting residents of the Borough. 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, the Council's approach to business change and customer excellence, the proposed Barkham Solar Farm, changes to the waste service, consultation and engagement and the implementation of Motions approved by Council.

The Committee held two "Call-In" meetings in October 2022, to review decisions relating to the removal of green food waste caddy liners and the proposed changes to off-street car park charges. These meetings provided robust challenge to decision makers and included the consideration of evidence provided by residents and local groups.

The Committee also established a new Overview and Scrutiny Committee relating to Climate Emergency. The Committee met for the first time in January 2023. It will scrutinise the implementation of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and progress towards the achievement of "net zero".

Looking ahead, the Management Committee will continue to focus on initiatives to strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny process. This will build on the outcomes of the review carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, including 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. In relation to the latter, regular informal meetings have been diarised with the Chair, Vice-Chair, Leader and Chief Executive in order to ensure that the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny are working together effectively.

Further initiatives to strengthen the Overview and Scrutiny function include:

- Seeking to gain earlier sight of strategic initiatives and issues to better enable early Scrutiny.
- Initiating a review of how to improve Overview opportunities to all Members.
- Seeking to better align forward plans to strategic initiatives and issues.
- Undertaking a review of the culture of meetings to better meet the four principles of effective Scrutiny.
- Actively seeking review and feedback across multiple internal and external sources to assist improved Overview and Scrutiny.

Finally, I would like to thank the Members, officers, residents and community groups who contributed their time, effort and insights during the year.

Jim Frewin

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 four Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Membership

Councillor Jim Frewin (Chair).

Councillors Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Andy Croy, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro and Alison Swaddle.

Substitute Members: Gary Cowan, Michael Firmager, Chris Johnson, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Alistair Neal, Beth Rowland, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Wayne Smith.

Officer contact: Neil Carr neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk

Highlights from the Year

Scrutiny Improvement Review

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny carried out a review of the Council's Scrutiny function in the summer of 2022. This involved observation of Scrutiny meetings together with on-site interviews with Members and officers. The review concluded that "the conditions for successful Scrutiny are clearly present at Wokingham BC. There is a shared understanding from Members and officers that good governance involves Scrutiny and, when used effectively, Scrutiny can add value to decision making".

Leader and Chief Executive

It was agreed that the Council Leader and Chief Executive would attend the meeting every six months in order to provide an update on the challenges facing the Council, service and cross-cutting priorities. The challenges identified included increasing budget pressures, ongoing recovery from the Covid pandemic, inflation and the cost of living crisis and the impact of increasing demand for services, often with an increased level of complexity and cost. Members sought details on issues such as the number of new houses being built in the Borough, transparency relating to financial decisions and the impact of potential changes to the delivery and funding of Adult Social Care.

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. Executive Members were invited to attend the meetings in order to provide evidence on recent service issues based on the most up-to-date information.

Barkham Solar Farm

The Committee scrutinised the business case for the proposed Barkham Solar Farm which was a specific project within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. Members examined the latest forecasts of income and expenditure for the 25 year life of the project and reviewed the process for procuring a contractor to construct the solar farm. The Committee supported the proposal in principle whilst raising a number of detailed issues with the Executive. These included a recommendation that the Council lobby the Government and energy companies over the cost of grid connection, in order to ensure that charges were realistic and viable.

Consultation and Engagement

The Committee scrutinised the Council's approach to consultation and engagement with residents and stakeholders. Consultation took place in order to inform effective decision making. There were issues on which the Council was statutorily required to consult and issues upon which the Council could choose to consult. Members emphasised the importance of a consistent approach and supported the development of a Consultation Protocol setting out key principles and procedures in order to ensure transparency and better decisions.

Customer Excellence

The Committee received updates on the Council's Customer Excellence Programme. The Council had agreed and reported on Key Performance Indicators, but there were few indicators which measured how residents received services and how they felt about the quality of services. The Customer Excellence Programme had been established to address these issues and was working on issues such as language and clarity of written communications. The Committee highlighted the need for measurement of the resident experience to supplement existing financial and operational performance indicators. This has resulted in an initiative to deliver such measures across all services during 2023/24.

Member Training

The Committee recognises the importance of ongoing training and development to ensure that Members' skills and knowledge are constantly upgraded. Training sessions were held during the year on key elements of effective Overview and Scrutiny including preparing for meetings, whilst a specific session was held on Budget Scrutiny which assisted Members involved in Scrutiny of the Council's Budget process and procedures. Specific training and development was also provided for Scrutiny Chairs.

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:

- Leader and Chief Executive – regular attendance at the Committee (supported by increased informal contact) in order to identify opportunities and threats facing the Borough and to ensure that the Executive and Scrutiny are working in a complementary way.
- Climate Emergency – establishing a new Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will provide detailed Scrutiny of progress towards the achievement of “net zero”, including communication and engagement with residents and local stakeholders.

SECTION 3

REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Andrew Mickleburgh, Chair 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, the new work that has been carried out is outlined below. This keeps the Committee in touch with how the Service and schools are performing.

This year the Service has had to deal with significant financial pressure due to the rise in demand for services and inflation. The Committee was keen to monitor and support the Council's efforts to help the community during the current cost of living crisis.

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.

Andrew Mickleburgh

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: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chairman), Shirley Boyt (Vice-Chairman), Morag Malvern, Beth Rowland, Anne Chadwick, Graham Howe and Pauline Helliard-Symons

Substitute Members:

Councillors: Alistair Neal, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Gary Cowan, Chris Johnson, Alison Swaddle, Laura Blumenthal and Rebecca Margetts

Church of England Representative

Fr Richard Lamey

Community Representative

Sarah Clarke – Wokingham SEND Voices

Roman Catholic Representative – one vacancy

Parent Governor - two vacancies

Officer contact: Luciane Bowker

luciane.bowker@wokingham.gov.uk

Highlights from the Year

Co-opted Members

The Committee was pleased to welcome two new members to join its membership: Fr Richard Lamey joined representing the Church of England Diocese and Sarah Clarke joined as a community representative from Wokingham SEND Voices.

Key Performance Indicators

The Committee received reports outlining the KPI’s for the Service and regularly monitored their performance. Wokingham has high aspirations and Members have challenged the Service to achieve a high level of performance in all areas of work. Where improvement was needed, the Committee sought to monitor the implementation and development of improvement plans.

Education Updates

The Committee continued to closely monitor the performance of schools and children’s educational attainment. The new Borough Education Partnership (BEP) is a welcome development. The BEP aims to provide a place for strategic leaders from the education sector, the local authority and others involved in the delivery of education, to get together to develop strategic plans for the future of education in the Borough.

The Committee is keen to support the Council in its participation in the Safety Valve Programme. It is positive that action is being undertaken to find a solution to the deficit in the DSG. The Committee was informed of the many strands of work being developed to deliver savings and efficiencies through the SEND Innovation and Improvement Plan (IIP) and the new SEND Strategy.

The Committee re-established the Part 2 Schools Causing Concern standing item. The purpose of this item is to inform local ward Members, at an early stage, of schools within their ward that are at the risk of underperforming, Local ward Members are invited to attend this session and take part in the discussions about improvement plans.

The Committee received a comprehensive Education Update, outlining all the key strands of work which fall within the remit of Children's Services.

Updates from the Executive Member for Children's Services

The Executive Members for Children's Services, Councillor Prue Bray, was invited and in attendance at most meetings. This gave the Committee an opportunity to be informed of the new trends of work and current priorities. The Committee was therefore able to express its views, early on, in the development of strategies and policies.

Update on Children's Strategy Delivery

The progress in delivering the strategy was welcomed. Some challenges were highlighted, such as the growing demand for services, increased complexity of cases and ongoing issues related to staff retention.

Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis

The Committee welcomed a presentation from members of the Hardship Alliance, outlining the work which was being undertaken to help children and families in the borough who were struggling with the increased cost of living. The Committee developed a set of recommendations to strengthen the local authority's bid to lobby the government for more funding to help those people in the community who were struggling in this difficult time.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report, Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report and Child Protection Annual Report

The Committee received with much interest the reports listed above in relation to children's social care. Although Wokingham has one of the lowest levels of Children in Care, it remains vital that the performance of services relating to children's social care is monitored closely; high performance in this area of work is expected.

Accommodation Issues Linked to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The number of UASC has been increasing, therefore more accommodation is needed. The Committee will continue to monitor the plans to continue to provide suitable accommodation within the Borough.

Youth Council

The Committee received the Youth MP and was keen to learn the priorities and aspirations of the Youth Council. It was agreed that the work of the Youth Council would be promoted at Council meetings.

Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Committee received the chairman of the BWSCP and was very interested in the work that has been carried out by the partnership. The Committee will continue to support and promote its work.

Surveys by Wokingham SEND Voices

The Committee held robust discussions about the results of surveys undertaken by Wokingham SEND Voices, namely the annual survey and the travel survey. The Committee challenged the service to continue the improvement of services to SEND children in the Borough.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Improved transparency and accountability across all services.
- Strengthened the Council's lobbying efforts to bid for better funding.
- Supported the Council in its efforts to help the community during the current cost of living crisis.
- Challenge and support the service to continue improving the outcomes for children and young people in the Borough.

SECTION 4

REPORT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Andy Croy, Chair of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency. The Council committed to “playing as full a role as possible in achieving a net carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030”. The Council pledged to develop a Climate Emergency Action Plan and to submit annual updates showing progress on individual carbon reduction targets.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan (published in January 2020) focussed on eight priority areas for carbon emission reductions, including transport, homes, businesses and waste. The Action Plan also set out proposals to generate renewable energy, increase carbon sequestration and strengthen the planning process to deliver carbon neutral construction and infrastructure. Finally, the Action Plan set out proposals for engagement with residents, schools, businesses and local stakeholders as well as ideas to promote positive behaviour changes.

In February 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee established the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group to scrutinise the Council’s Climate Emergency Action Plan and to assess the level of carbon reduction to be delivered by the Action Plan in light of the Council’s 2030 “net zero” target. The Task and Finish Group delivered two reports (2020 and 2021) with a number of recommendations, the majority of which were accepted by the Executive.

In recognition of the ongoing importance of achieving the targets in the Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee decided to establish a stand-alone Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee which met for the first time in January 2023. The aim of the Committee is to act as a “critical friend” to scrutinise and support the delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan. In so doing, the Committee will draw upon the knowledge and experience of Members, officers and external experts in order to develop recommendations which strengthen the Council’s response to the climate emergency and ensure progress towards the “net zero” ambition.

Andy Croy

Remit of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The role of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to scrutinise and assist with policy development relating to the Council's commitment to play as full a role as possible to reduce the Borough's carbon footprint to be Net Zero by 2030. This involves monitoring the implementation of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan including the examples of Climate Emergency "best practice" from other public or private sector organisations.

Membership

Councillor Andy Croy (Chair).

Councillors Chris Johnson (Vice-Chair), David Cornish, Michael Firmager, Norman Jorgensen, Gregor Murray and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey.

Substitute Members: Councillors Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Pauline Jorgensen, Andrew Mickleburgh, Alistair Neal and Beth Rowland.

Officer contact: Neil Carr neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk

Priorities for 2023/24

As the Committee only met for the first time in January 2023, this section highlights some of the areas of the Climate Emergency Action Plan to be scrutinised in the year ahead:

- Ensuring that the Borough Tree Strategy and tree planting projects are progressing;
- Scrutinising plans to manage traffic, congestion, and car emissions within the Borough;
- Exploring what local electricity providers are doing to improve the local network;
- Scrutinising the home decarbonisation service;
- Monitoring the delivery and operation of WBC's solar farms;
- Ensuring that updated planning guidance made provisions for suitable environmentally friendly requirements, which were enforceable wherever possible;
- Reviewing recommendations from the 'Let's talk Climate' event;
- Understanding the impacts of behavioural change programmes;
- Understanding how WBC could work better in partnership with the business community in order to achieve the net-zero ambition;
- Reviewing the need for and delivery of an energy strategy;
- Reviewing what changes have been made to the CEAP following the recommendations from the two Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group reports.

SECTION 5

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Peter Dennis, Chair 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 Taxpayers. 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 fourth 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 2023 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. Due to unprecedented pressure on Council finances, the Scrutiny input has been more critical than ever this year.

The Committee considered a range of other issues during the year including receiving the annual update from the Community Safety Partnership, consideration of the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan, and receiving details of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The Committee successfully established two Task and Finish Groups, and produced two sets of Recommendations to the Executive. The first Task and Finish Group considered how WBC worked with our preferred registered partners (social housing providers), whilst the second reviewed the draft Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan document.

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.

Peter Dennis

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 Peter Dennis (Chair).

Councillors David Cornish (Vice-Chair), Laura Blumenthal, Shirley Boyt, Chris Johnson, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Gregor Murray and Alistair Neal

Substitute Members: Councillors Chris Bowring, Anne Chadwick, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Michael Firmager, Abdul Loyes, Adrian Mather, Beth Rowland and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Officer contact: Callum Wernham: callum.wernham@wokingham.gov.uk

Highlights from the Year

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023-26

The Committee undertook a detailed overview of the proposed 2023-26 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 delivery of a new website for WBC. 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.

Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group

The Committee established a Task and Finish Group to review how tenants of housing associations on WBC's preferred list (preferred registered providers (PRPs)) might see improvements in the services they received in future. The selection process for WBC's new list of PRPs was underway, which would require them to enter into an agreement with WBC about how, as partners, services would be delivered for tenants. The Task and Finish Group sought evidence from a range of stakeholders, including tenants and professional bodies, and provided a set of Recommendations for improvement for consideration by the Executive. The Committee hopes that this will improve tenant engagement, ensure that tenants had a voice, and provided tenants with maintained contact details of local housing officers employed by their PRP.

Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Task and Finish Group

The Committee established a Task and Finish Group to review the draft LCWIP document, prior to consideration at the Executive. The Group made a number of Recommendations for improvement to the Executive, including questioning the age and validity of some of the datasets referenced within the report, and suggesting additions including information relating to safe cycle storage. The Committee hopes to continue this Task and Finish Group going forwards, to review the LCWIP document on a 6-monthly basis and to review schemes, alongside relevant Ward Councillors and Town and Parish Council representatives, prior to public consultation as they progressed through to the detailed design stage

Cost of Living Crisis Response

An update was provided on the joint response between WBC and the Hardship Alliance to the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Committee considered representations from Citizens Advice Wokingham and First Days on the ongoing partnership working between the Alliance and WBC. The Committee requested that officers continued to explore any opportunities for additional grant funding from Central Government, and recommended that a cross-party letter be written (including a policy statement from Citizens Advice) which raised concern about how defaulting customers were being treated, including by being placed on prepayment meters.

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 publicly 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. A number of suggestions for savings were provided by the Committee, including the review of self-insurance opportunities exploration of increased advertisement revenue.
- The Committee will review the detail regarding the approximate £100m held in earmarked reserves during the next municipal year. The Committee felt it important for Members to have a better understanding of the different reserves maintained by WBC, their purpose, the risks they mitigated against, and the potential to utilise them if necessary.
- Two sets of recommendations have been submitted to the Executive for consideration. These recommendations seek to improve how WBC works with our Preferred Registered Providers, and improve the core LCWIP document and provide ongoing Overview and Scrutiny of the document and individual schemes as they developed.
- 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.

SECTION 6

REPORT OF THE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Adrian Mather, Chair of the
Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

This year, significant change in the healthcare setup and delivery has started. The joining together of Berkshire West, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire into a much larger Integrated Care System (ICS), with its board (ICB) and partners (ICP). The Wokingham Borough Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reaching out to all parties to understand the changes and the effects on the delivery of health services to our residents in Wokingham Borough.

During the year we have focused on our primary responsibility of scrutinising local health service delivery, including the delivery of social care to our residents, NHS Dental provision, GP practices and GP services.

In addition, the Committee wants to be forward looking. We are engaging with our Health scrutiny colleagues in Berkshire West, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to initiate scrutiny at the larger Integrated Care System (ICS) and all associated responsible partners. We also want to engage and where possible, support the initiatives from the ICS with its objectives, e.g. to improve outcomes in the population health, tackle inequalities in health outcomes, experience and patient access.

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.

Adrian Mather

Remit of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) scrutinises matters 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. HOSC 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 Adrian Mather (Chairman).

Councillors Beth Rowland (Vice-Chairman), Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, Rebecca Margetts, Alistair Neal, Jackie Rance, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Alison Swaddle

Substitute Members: Sam Akhtar, David Cornish, Michael Firmager, Jim Frewin, Chris Johnson, Pauline Jorgensen, Morag Malvern, Andrew Mickleburgh and Shahid Younis

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

Officer contact: Madeleine Shopland madeleine.shopland@wokingham.gov.uk

Highlights from the Year

Adult Social Care Priorities

In July 2022 the Committee was briefed on one of the main current Adult Social Care priorities, the possible impact of the Adult Social Care Reforms. Members questioned how the Council could think outside of the box to lessen the impact and referred in particular to the recruitment and retention of social workers.

Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators

The Committee continued to monitor performance against the Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators, seeking further information on any areas of underperformance.

Response to Covid – Vaccination Plan September-December

The Committee reviewed the Covid Vaccination Plan September-December, at its September meeting. Members sought information around take up in various age groups and communities. The Committee also highlighted issues around using the national booking website, the location of vaccination sites and the difficulties that health and social care workers had experienced in booking a booster.

Primary Care Networks

Access to GP services has remained an area of resident concern. Members invited representatives from the Primary Care Networks to their November meeting, to discuss challenges that the different areas and surgeries faced, and how the Council could assist. The Committee were informed of difficulties with recruitment and retention, high caseloads, the impact of Covid on wait lists and new ways of working. The Committee was advised of

the importance of encouraging patients to embrace new ways of working, and the promotion of the self-care message to increase resilience in the system.

Dental Services

Access to dental services has remained a key issue of national and local concern. The Committee held an extraordinary meeting in January 2023 to examine this topic in detail. The Committee asked questions on accessibility, potential for increased provision as the population increased, service recovery following Covid and workforce. Information was also provided on action that was being taken to improve access.

Healthwatch

The Committee works well with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough and receive updates on their work. Issues on their 'local watch list' include * Asylum seekers' physical and mental health * Accessing GP and NHS dentist appointments; * Maternal mental health; and * Cost of living crisis.

MIND in Berkshire and an Overview of Community Mental Health Services

The pandemic had seen a decrease in many people's mental health and wellbeing. Members invited MIND in Berkshire to their September meeting to hear of the specific service it provided to residents with a particular level of mental health need. Members were pleased to hear of the service's success. In November, the Committee received a presentation on the different community mental health services provided in order to further their knowledge of the available provision for residents requiring community mental health services.

NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC)

In January 2023, the Members were updated on the Transformation Programme - All Age NHS Continuing Healthcare. A Local Government Association review across BOB in July 2022 had identified many areas for improvement particularly in Berkshire West. Members noted the action being taken to make improvements, and sought a further update in 2023.

Integrated Care Partnership Strategy

At its November meeting, the Committee considered an update on the developing ICP Strategy and commented on the key emerging themes that had been identified for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West (BOB) footprint. Members questioned what the Strategy would mean for the priorities of Wokingham and the other areas.

Optalis

David Birch, Chief Executive Officer Optalis, provided a presentation on the performance of Optalis to the Committee's July meeting. Members sought information on how recruitment and retention were being addressed, and new services that would be offered.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Gaining an overview of key health and social care services that serve the Borough.
- 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.

SECTION 7

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 2023/24 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:

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