



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Annual Reports 2023/24

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**Foreword by Councillor Al Neal,
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee**

Welcome to the Annual Reports of Wokingham Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees for 2023/24. The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to hold both internal and external decision makers to account. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees provide independent "critical friend" challenge to the Council and other public service providers. 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.

When thinking of the impact of Overview and Scrutiny I am reminded of those Manc legends, The Smiths, specifically their third single: What Difference Does It Make? In my view, effective Scrutiny has to make a difference and add value to the Council's decision making process by challenging in a constructive way and ensuring that the voice of residents is heard. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny identifies a number of factors which underpin effective Scrutiny, factors we have focused on over the past year, viz:

- A positive relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive;
- Timely access to proportionate, high quality information;
- High quality Member training which is incorporated into ongoing Member roles;
- Cross-party chairing or, at least, good cross-party relationships;
- Dedicated officer resourcing.

As we move into 2024/25, we can all see the serious challenges facing the Council and the Borough. The cost of living crisis, high inflation, increasing (often complex) demand for key services, recruitment and retention of key staff, climate emergency and pressure for new development in the Borough have created significant challenges. Across the country, a growing number of councils are struggling to set safe budgets. It is vital, therefore, that Overview and Scrutiny provides effective challenge to ensure that public money is spent wisely on key priorities, that the Council continues to innovate and develop strong partnerships and that our most vulnerable residents receive the support and quality services they need.

The Annual Reports for 2023/24 demonstrate the wide range of issues considered during the year, the range of Scrutiny recommendations made to the Executive and the outcomes for residents across the Borough. The reports reflect the hard work and commitment of residents, community groups, partners, Members and officers who contributed during the year. My thanks go to everyone who made a contribution.

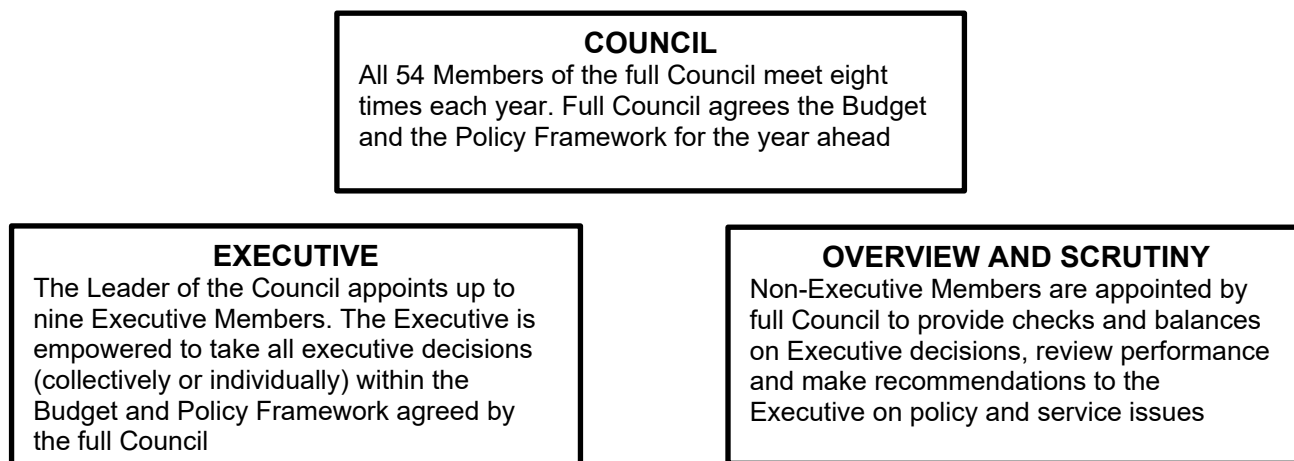
Al Neal

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 (due to be updated in 2024) 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.

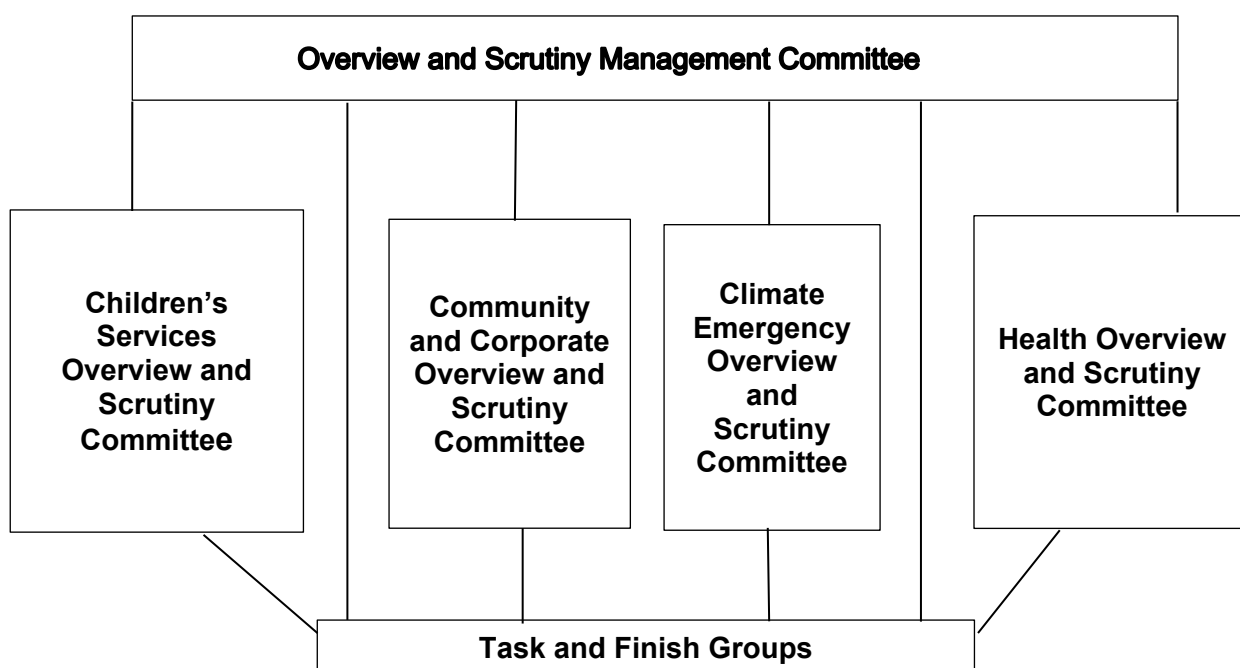
The Council’s Executive takes decisions within the financial and policy framework set by the full Council. Non-Executive Members of the Council (representing each of the political groups) are appointed to the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees to review those decisions and the performance of 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 (SEND).
- 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 (HOSC) – 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



**Al Neal, 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 scrutinise a range of issues within its own work programme. Thirdly, to ensure that Scrutiny Members have the relevant skills, training and support to enable them to carry out their important role as scrutineers.

During 2023/24, the Committee scrutinised a number of important issues and emerging policies affecting residents of the Borough. The Committee has now established bi-annual discussions with the Council Leader and Chief Executive to discuss priorities and challenges facing the Council. The Committee also considered the quarterly corporate performance management report on key services, the Council's approach to business change and customer excellence changes to the waste service, consultation and engagement and the implementation and monitoring of Motions approved by Council. In light of significant public concern, the Committee held two sessions with Thames Water representatives, supplemented by a site visit to the treatment plant in Wargrave. The Committee will seek to develop and extend the scrutiny of key external service providers, such as energy providers, in the year ahead.

Looking ahead, the Management Committee will continue to focus on strengthening the Overview and Scrutiny process with further emphasis on work programming, pre-decision scrutiny and policy development. The Committee has recognised the importance of training for Members to enable them to carry out their Scrutiny roles and will seek to ensure that the Member training budget is sufficient, especially as the Council may be inducting a raft of new Members following the all-out elections in May 2024. Members have also recognised the importance of engagement with residents and community groups and will be seeking to generate greater public involvement in Scrutiny. Finally, regular meetings have been set up between the Scrutiny Chairs, Executive Members and Directors in order to ensure that the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny are working together effectively.

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

Al Neal

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. The Committee also has its own extensive work programme, focussing on key strategic issues and the work of key partners.

Membership

Councillor Al Neal (Chair).

Councillors Andrew Mickleburgh (Vice-Chair), Andy Croy, Catherine Glover, Chris Johnson, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Adrian Mather, Stuart Munro, Caroline Smith and Alison Swaddle.

Substitute Members: Jane Ainslie, Phil Cunnington, Peter Dennis, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Ian Pittock, Rachele Shepherd-DuBey, Bill Soane and Marie-Louise Weighill.

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

Highlights from the Year

Leader and Chief Executive

The Committee has established six-monthly discussions with the Council Leader and Chief Executive. The discussions allow scrutiny of key challenges facing the Council and an opportunity to "horizon scan" in order to identify emerging issues which would benefit from early scrutiny. Issues discussed included the ongoing financial challenges (exacerbated by inflation and the cost of living crisis), increasing levels of demand and complexity in key service areas (especially children's, adults and housing) and inconsistency in partnership working which led to missed opportunities for collaboration and joint funding. Members scrutinised issues such as the new strategic partnership with Reading University, ideas for better partnership working with Town and Parish Councils and the development of an evidence-based approach to lobbying for a fairer funding settlement from the Government.

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. Performance indicators relating to children's services, health and social care were considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Thames Water

The Committee held two sessions with Thames Water representatives during the year. Thames Water outlined the challenges facing the company in light of public criticism about the discharge of sewage into rivers and waterways, water leakage, the handling of customer

complaints and future investment plans. A number of action points were agreed including the sharing of information on leakages, investment plans and the roll-out of smart meters in the Borough. Opportunities for joint working were also agreed such as lobbying on the implementation of the section of the Flood and Water Management Act relating to the responsibility of developers to implement sustainable drainage systems in new housing developments. Members also attended a site visit at the Wargrave sewage treatment plant which provided an insight into some of the challenges facing the company.

Affordable Housing

The Committee scrutinised the draft Affordable Housing Strategy prior to its submission to the Executive. The strategy focussed on identifying need, providing suitable accommodation for vulnerable residents, delivering healthy and safe homes and promoting the development of thriving communities. The aim was to improve housing outcomes whilst helping to address the significant financial challenges facing the Council. Member comments and feedback, including support for changes for key workers in allocations, were fed into the final version.

Waste Collection

The Committee scrutinised proposed changes to waste collection service in the Borough. From the summer of 2024, most households would put out waste in 180 litre black wheeled bins which would be emptied every two weeks. Changes to the service were projected to boost recycling rates from 54% to 64% whilst delivering a revenue saving of c£1m. Members asked a range of questions on issues such as limited access properties, glass recycling, communication with residents and key stakeholders, lost or damaged bins, fly tipping and the factors underpinning the estimated £1m savings. The Committee requested a further briefing in early summer 2024, as the project was nearing full implementation (August 2024).

Member Training

In line with best practice across the country, the Committee recognises the importance of ongoing training and development to ensure that Members' skills and knowledge are constantly upgraded. Members need a sound understanding of key services such as children's, adults, housing and highways in order to carry out effective scrutiny. Due to Budget constraints, only one Member training session was held during the year (Budget Scrutiny) which assisted Members involved in Scrutiny of the Council's Budget process and procedures. Member training will be especially important in the year ahead as it is likely that a number of new Members will be joining the Council following the all-out elections in May 2024.

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 – discussion on key challenges identified opportunities for scrutiny involvement on issues of public interest and helped to ensure that the Executive and Scrutiny are working together in a complementary way.
- Input into service changes – scrutiny of service/policy changes, e.g. waste and affordable housing – the Scrutiny process challenged emerging thinking, leading to better outcomes.
- Thames Water – Scrutiny of an external service provider – an opportunity to provide feedback from residents and explore opportunities for joint working for community benefit.

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.

During March 2023 the Service received an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). The Committee was keen to monitor and support the Council's Improvement Plan. The Committee was also involved in the development of policies prior to their adoption by the Executive.

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, care leavers and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Membership:

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chairman), Ian Pittock (Vice-Chairman), Jane Ainslie, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Graham Howe and Andrew Gray.

Substitute Members:

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons, Morag Malvern, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Johnson, Alison Swaddle, Tony Skuse and Michael Firmager.

Church of England Representative

Fr Richard Lamey

Community Representative

Sarah Clarke – Wokingham SEND Voices

Roman Catholic Representative – one vacancy

Parent Governor - two vacancies

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Highlights from the Year

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 Committee has been closely monitoring the development of the Safety Valve Programme. The programme has evolved, and many strands of work are underway. The programme is currently on track to deliver a balanced budget by 2028/29.

The Committee receives regular updates on schools causing concern. Local Ward Members are invited to attend these sessions and take part in the discussions about improvement plans.

The Committee received information about the Ofsted school inspections that took place during the year. The Borough continues to provide an excellent level of education for children and young people attending schools in the Borough. Of particular note is the 'outstanding' Ofsted result achieved by Chiltern Way School. The Committee also closely monitors school places sufficiency across the Borough.

Updates from the Executive Member for Children's Services

The Executive Member 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.

Youth Council and SEND Youth Council

The Committee received the SEND Youth Council, who were able to tell the Committee directly about their aspirations and challenges. The Committee valued their representations and invited them to attend on an annual basis.

Overview and Scrutiny of Policies and Strategies

The Committee had an early overview of the following policies: Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Strategy (UASC); Home to School Transport Policy; Young People Housing Strategy and SEND Strategy. Robust, constructive discussions took place, with many recommendations being produced for the Executive's consideration. This approach to overview has been encouraged and supported by the Executive, in recognition of the value that it adds to the work of the Executive.

The Committee reviewed and challenged the following items: Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Strategy; Complaints Review, Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis, and the Holidays, Activities and Food Programme.

Action Tracker

The introduction of a regular Action Tracker item to monitor actions arising from discussions has provided much more clarity and accountability.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Improved transparency and accountability across all services.
- Strengthened the Council's lobbying efforts to bid for better funding.
- Helped to shape and influence policies.
- 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, the Council declared a Climate Emergency. The amended Motion to declare the Emergency was passed unanimously by the Members present. 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 (CEAP) and to submit annual updates showing progress on individual carbon reduction targets.

The CEAP (published in January 2020) focussed on priority areas for carbon emission reductions, including transport, homes, businesses, waste and behaviour change. The CEAP 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 CEAP included proposals for engagement with residents, schools, businesses and local stakeholders.

After some unnecessary delay which limited the work of the Committee in 2022/23, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee finally 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 CEAP. In so doing, the Committee draws 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. A summary of the Committee’s work in 2023/24 is set out below.

The CEAP is clear that there is a massive gap between where we are now and achieving carbon neutrality in Wokingham by 2030. This remains true even if every action in the CEAP were actioned this year. It is also clear that the Borough’s limited resources make achieving all the aims of the plan by 2030 highly unlikely, but this has always been the case. However, the Borough is certainly more likely to deliver on some of the promise of the CEAP than it has been in the past.

I would like to thank the Members, officers, partners and other stakeholders who contributed their time, effort and insights during the year.

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 (CEAP) 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), Michael Firmager, Catherine Glover, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Al Neal and Ian Pittock,

Substitute Members: Councillors Jane Ainslie, Laura Blumenthal, Anne Chadwick, Andrew Gray, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Clive Jones, Andrew Mickleburgh, Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey and Shahid Younis

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Highlights from the Year

CEAP 4th Progress Report

The Committee scrutinised the fourth update of the Council's CEAP, reviewing the 10 key priority areas for carbon reduction together with the 100+ actions in the plan. The latest assessment stated that the Borough's carbon footprint was 505 ktCO₂e, with a current projected shortfall in 2030 (after all the actions had been delivered) of 240ktCO₂e.

Consequently, in order to meet the 2030 carbon neutral goal, further actions and resources, as well as strategic embedding of Climate Emergency considerations, would be needed. The Executive Member attended the meeting and informed Members that, for the first time, an action plan had been included in the CEAP to support the development of an Adaptation Plan for the Borough. The CEAP would also be improved to make it more accessible for residents with visual impairments. Members commended the significant progress made on the CEAP whilst noting the challenges ahead.

Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group

The Committee reviewed progress against the recommendations of the Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group which produced reports, with recommendations, to the Executive in 2020 and 2021. In July 2020, the Group proposed 14 recommendations to strengthen the CEAP and make the reporting process more transparent. The 2021 review focused on four key elements of the CEAP: transport, homes, renewable energy and behaviour change. The Group received evidence from internal and external individuals representing the Council, Imperial College London, University of Leeds, National Grid, Giki Zero, University of Reading, Reading Buses, and the Executive Member for Climate Emergency. The results of the 2021 review, including 25 recommendations, were presented to the O&S Management Committee in July 2021. The Committee concluded that all of the Task and Finish Group recommendations were still relevant to the delivery of the current CEAP. The Committee

recommended that the Council work with partners to lobby the Government on issues such as “green skills” shortages and the appropriate strategies and funding needed to address them.

CEAP and the Local Plan Update

The Committee scrutinised progress on the update to the Council’s Local Plan. The update was being prepared in the context of existing national planning policy, guidance and legislation. Its principal aim was to set out the strategy and associated policies for managing future development in the Borough. Members noted that the emerging spatial strategy had been influenced by the CEAP. Officers from the Planning Policy and Climate Emergency teams collaborated to share best practice and monitor progress towards achievement of the CEAP’s goals. The Committee recommended that training be provided for all Members on the links between the Local Plan Update and the CEAP and that the new Local Plan include provisions relating to the delivery of high speed broadband as this would help to reduce travel across the Borough with consequent reductions in carbon emissions.

Barkham Solar Farm

The Committee received regular updates on progress in delivering the Barkham Solar Farm Project. In March of 2023, SSEN had advised that the connection date for the Barkham Solar Farm had been pushed back from 2026 to 2037. Following intense negotiations, SSEN subsequently agreed to a connection date of August 2026. The revised connection offer represented a significant and positive step in the delivery of the solar farm project. An updated business case for the solar farm project was due to be reported to the Committee in February 2024. Members congratulated the Executive Members and officers for the achievement of a 2026 connection date as the solar farm was an important part of achieving the CEAP targets.

CEAP Communications Plan

The Committee scrutinised the draft Climate Emergency Engagement and Communications Plan. The Plan would sit alongside the CEAP and would be used as a guide to work with stakeholders, share ideas and collaborate on communication and engagement initiatives. The plan would also help WBC to consider and develop actions for inclusion in the CEAP that would have the most impact in shifting behavioural change. The Plan aimed to raise the profile of the CEAP, promote dialogue with stakeholders, empower residents and businesses and promote engagement with under-represented groups. Officers confirmed that the Committee’s comments and suggestions would be fed into the final version of the Engagement and Communications Plan.

Scrutiny Impacts

- CEAP – following on from the work of the Climate Emergency Task & Finish Group, the Committee scrutinised key elements of the CEAP (including procurement, planning and highways) testing assumptions and progress against the targets in the key priority areas.
- Communications and Engagement – the Committee emphasised the importance of engagement with all sectors of the community in order to promote understanding and behaviour change which was crucial to the success of the CEAP.
- Solar Farm – constructive challenge and support for the delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm as an important step in the generation of renewable energy in the Borough and an additional income stream for the Council.

SECTION 5

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Chris Johnson, Chair of the
Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

During the past year, the Committee has continued its focus on the effective 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.

This year marked the fifth consecutive year that the Committee had looked at the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in detail, prior to its submission to the 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 backdrop to this year's Budget Scrutiny process was the enormous financial challenges facing the Council along with many other councils across the country. Members echoed calls for Government reform to core funding mechanisms to ensure that the levels of demand and cost pressures facing local authorities are considered adequately in determining their levels of funding.

The Committee considered a range of other issues during the year including the annual update from the Community Safety Partnership, proposals to close and repurpose the St. Crispin's leisure centre and progress against the Violence against Women and Girls Action Plan. The Committee established a Task and Finish Group relating to the provision and management of litter bins and noted progress made by the Active Travel Task and Finish Group.

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.

My thanks go to the Members, officers, residents and other stakeholders who took part in our meetings and made valuable contributions during the year.

Chris Johnson

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 (including the Budget setting process) 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 Chris Johnson (Chair).

Councillors Peter Dennis (Vice-Chair), Laura Blumenthal, David Cornish (part year), Catherine Glover, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Alistair Neal and Marie-Louise Weighill.

Substitute Members: Councillors Jane Ainslie, Andy Croy, Phil Cunnington, Clive Jones, Stuart Munro, Caroline Smith and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

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Highlights from the Year

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/27

The Committee undertook a detailed review of the Budget process and the emerging 2024/27 MTFP. Executive Members and Directors were invited to attend the meetings to present their Revenue and Capital bids and to explain in detail how the requested funding would be used to support key services. 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 scrutinised key risks, the modelling of future demand patterns, the achievability of income and savings targets and the evidence supporting key assumptions in the MTFP. The Committee produced a report on its findings which was submitted to the Budget Executive and Council meetings in February 2024. Members also requested an in-year update on the various financial reserves held by the Council.

St Crispin's Leisure Centre

The Committee scrutinised the business case for the proposal to close the St Crispin's Leisure Centre and transfer the asset to the school (the Circle Trust) in order to support the delivery of additional school places. Members asked for greater assurance in relation to protection of the Council's assets, future demand for school places, clarity on operating arrangements and protection for community use in the future. After detailed scrutiny at two meetings, the Committee recommended that the proposals be accepted. The Committee also requested a follow-up report on arrangements at St Crispin's and all other agreements involving schools and leisure facilities in the Borough.

Local Transport Plan 4

The Committee scrutinised the emerging Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4). Members noted that the key drivers in the plan were to reduce environmental impacts from transport, grow the local economy and create healthy and safe places across the Borough. The Committee also

noted the concerns raised by residents as part of the consultation on the plan. These included the safety of children walking to school, maintenance of roads and footpaths, a lack of travel options and the perception that highways infrastructure was not cycle-friendly. The Committee raised a number of questions and comments which were fed into the development of the LTP4 prior to its submission to the Executive.

Arts and Culture Strategy

The Committee scrutinised the Council's emerging Arts and Culture Strategy. Members noted the priorities in the strategy, including enhancing cultural identity and sense of 'place', developing opportunities for children and young people, supporting economic growth and maximising partnerships and collaboration. The Committee commended officers on developing the strategy and requested that future reports identify which funding bids were in progress, finished, delayed or cancelled. Members also suggested that additional effort be made to advertise ongoing and future engagement with young adults.

Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The Committee considered an update on the Council's VAWG Strategy and the supporting action plan. Members noted the key priorities in the strategy including putting victims at the centre of the process, holding perpetrators to account, safeguarding and supporting victims at every stage and raising local awareness of the issues. Members emphasised the importance of timely data and benchmarking showing progress and requested the inclusion of smart outcomes in the next iteration of the VAWG update. The next update should also provide details of progress against the Anti-Abuse Charter.

Council Housing Companies

The Committee considered a review of the Council's housing companies – Berry Brook Homes, Loddon Homes and Wokingham Housing Ltd. Members scrutinised strategic options for the future development of the companies including the proposal that a Shareholder Committee be established. Members requested a further report giving further details of the structure and timeline for the Shareholder Committee.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Budget setting and the MTFP – the Budget setting process was scrutinised by the Committee in the context of the huge financial challenges facing the Council. Transparency around crucial issues such as the emerging Budget forms an essential part of the checks and balances that Overview and Scrutiny provides. The Committee noted the significant growth pressures in Children's Services and committed to ongoing scrutiny of the service during 2024/25, in conjunction with the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Developing positive working relationships with Executive Members and Directors – Executive Members and Directors were invited to attend the Committee's meetings. Answers to Member queries were frank and detailed, providing a solid foundation for transparent Overview and Scrutiny.
- Oversight of key Council services – continued scrutiny and monitoring of key Council services, such as highways, grounds maintenance and the Council's housing companies, to ensure that they are delivering value for money and engaging with residents.

SECTION 6

REPORT OF THE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



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

The new setup of the joint Berkshire West, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire (BOB) Integrated Care System (ICS), with its board (ICB) and partners (ICP) is now in place. Through a joint BOB HOSC, we are participating in the review of the Strategy created by the BOB ICB. Whilst the BOB ICB is still maturing, we want to continue to review its Strategy and the implications for the delivery of health services to our residents in Wokingham Borough.

In addition, the Committee wants to be forward looking. 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's health, tackle inequalities in health outcomes, experience and patient access.

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, GP services and Pharmacy services. There is significant stress on all services, however, we must continue to scrutinize these services.

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. We have engaged with one GP Practice Patient Participation Group (PPG) and we would like to engage with more PPG's.

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 issues which relate to the planning, provision and operation of health and wellbeing services in the Wokingham 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.

Membership

Councillor Adrian Mather (Chairman).

Councillors Rachelle Shepherd Dubey, (Vice Chairman), Phil Cunnington, Rebecca Margetts, Alistair Neal, Jackie Rance, Beth Rowland, Tony Skuse, and Shahid Younis

Substitute Members: Jane Ainslie, Andy Croy, Graham Howe, Chris Johnson, Pauline Jorgensen, Morag Malvern, Caroline Smith, Bill Soane, and Alison Swaddle

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

Healthwatch

The Committee are updated at each meeting on the work of the consumer champions, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough. Issues on their 'local watch list' include * Asylum seekers * Accessing GP and NHS dentist appointments; * Dentistry and patients with learning disabilities * Mental health support for children and young people; and * Cost of living crisis.

Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators

The Committee monitored performance achieved against the Adult Social Care Key Performance Indicators and sought further information about areas of underperformance.

Dental Services

The Committee scrutinised dental services, which continued to be a key concern to residents. At its September meeting, the Committee was updated on dental services in the Borough and in particular, progress being made to improve access to dental services. The Committee asked about access challenges, flexible commissioning and budgets, and workforce.

Building Berkshire Together

Since 2019 the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT) has been placed on the New Hospital Programme as part of the Government commitment to deliver 40 new hospitals by 2030. The Committee has been kept updated on the progress of the Building Berkshire Together project, the options under consideration and the potential challenges and opportunities.

Seasonal vaccinations

At its November meeting the Committee received an update on flu and Covid vaccinations take up. Members sought to better understand the variation in uptake amongst different areas of the community and highlighted the Borough's large Hong Kong population. Members were updated on the communication and engagement work being undertaken to improve take up, particularly amongst harder to reach groups. The Committee requested a breakdown of information at a Borough level to give a clearer picture of vaccination take up amongst Borough residents.

GP contracts

Residents continue to be concerned about access to GP services. Sarah Webster, Executive Director for Berkshire West Place, Abid Irfan, Director of Primary Care, ICB, and Helen Clark, Head of Primary Care, BOB ICB, updated the Committee on the GP 2023/24 contracts and what this meant for Wokingham Borough residents. The Committee was informed of action being taken to improve workforce recruitment and retention, and increased access to appointments. Members expressed concern about access to health facilities for residents in new estates.

Pharmaceutical Services

In July the Committee were briefed by Karen Buckley, Consultant in Public Health, and David Dean, Chief Officer, Community Pharmacy Thames Valley, on local pharmacy services and the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. Members probed a number of issues including medication supply and demand, the criteria used to assess the level of need, and enhanced services.

Adult Social Care specialist accommodation

The Committee received a briefing about the successful Adult Social Care Specialist Accommodation project, one of the aims of which was to reduce residential care placements, especially for those with learning disabilities.

Domiciliary care

The Council has a duty to maintain the domiciliary care market and to ensure that care provided is safe and affordable and that there is sufficient choice in the local area. The Committee received an update about domiciliary care services within the Borough at its September meeting.

Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy

The Committee scrutinised the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy at its November meeting. Members sought information on how recruitment and retention were being addressed, different ways of working and apprenticeships.

Social Care Futures

At its November meeting the Committee received a presentation from social care users regarding how the Council was working with service users to rethink, redesign and reorientate care by adopting the Social Care Futures Charter. Members supported the Council's adoption of the Charter.

Berkshire Coroners Service

The Council contributes financially to the Berkshire Coroner Service. The Committee received a presentation at its January meeting on the service provided and future initiatives.

BOB ICS Transforming Primary Care Executive Summary.

At its January meeting, the Committee engaged with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System and considered its draft Transforming Primary Care Executive Summary. The Committee highlighted the need for different ways of engaging with the community, and for the document to be easily accessible. It was suggested that reference be made to the Council's Marmot ambitions.

Scrutiny Impacts

- Gaining an insight into the 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.
- 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 Agenda 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. Public questioners are allowed to ask a supplementary question to develop the theme of the original question or react to the initial answer given.

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.

During 2024/25 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: 07889 669359, or
- by email: neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk or by post:

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