

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 16 APRIL 2024

TITLE OF REPORT: REVIEW OF THE WORK OF OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023/24

Report of: Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the work of Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the past year 2023/24.

2. CHAIRMAN'S RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee endorses the report prepared by the chairman on its behalf and recommends that the report's recommendations for the Committee's future work programme be accepted by full council.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023-24 has been another very busy year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Hart District Council. Following training from an outside body specialising in O&S, early in the municipal year, greater use has been made of Task and Finish Groups (T&FGs) to examine issues in more detail and make more targeted recommendations to Cabinet.

The Committee has been extremely diligent in reviewing key papers prior to them being considered by Cabinet and has often provided detailed and significant comments to help improve the inherent quality of policy before adoption.

This year, we have welcomed presentations from Hart's core grant holders to help the Committee better understand the impact that Hart's funding is making to the vibrant voluntary sector.

In addition to the regular reports, Section 6 highlights 16 core areas that the committee has focussed on through the year. Some issues have been reviewed multiple times, as issues and details continue to emerge, and the clarity of scrutiny is needed.

Members are thanked for their positive and generally collaborative approach, even when disagreeing.

4. WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

Every local authority operating a Cabinet and Scrutiny model has a Cabinet made up of the Leader of the Council and up to nine other members. All executive decisions (i.e., those needed to implement the Policy Framework and Budget approved by the Council) are taken by the Cabinet.

Overview and Scrutiny bodies are not "decision making" bodies but are bodies which monitor and influence those that are. The Overview and Scrutiny role, carried out by non-Cabinet members, is designed to support the work of the Council in the following ways:

- Reviewing and scrutinising decisions taken by the Cabinet (acting as a "critical friend")
- Considering aspects of the Council's performance
- Assisting in research, policy review and development

- Involving itself with external organisations operating in the district to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
- Providing a means of involving the communities in the Council's work.

The Committee also reviews and scrutinises decisions made, or actions proposed in connection with the Council functions, including that of budget monitoring and service delivery.

5. REVIEW OF 2023/24 AND THE ACTIONS TAKEN

5.1. Regular Reports

The Committee received quarterly or bi-annual monitoring reports and raised comments on the following:-

- Service performance relative to Service Plan and Key Performance Indicators on a quarterly basis (once the Service Panels had been formalised).
- The lack of staffing resources, leading to and exacerbating performance output issues within the Place service were noted with concern by O&S during the year via the feedback from the Service Panels.
- Outturn Position, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) along with Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Asset Management Plan Budget monitoring to ensure that the Council in on track to meet and stay within Council agreed budget parameters
- Hart Flood Forum – twice a year (including details of Parish Flood Forum)
- Corporate Risk Register update – bi-annually, Members review the Corporate Risk Register which is also reviewed by Hart management on a regular basis to provide assurance that appropriate arrangements are in place to mitigate identified risks. Specific comments made as necessary.
- Analysis of complaints received by the Council (reduced from quarterly to bi-annual due to the success and confidence in its operation).
- Cabinet Work Programme and O&S Work Programme are reviewed each month with updates and changes to the O&S work programme agreed by the committee.

5.2. Regular Annual One-Off Reports

The Committee also received and commented (or “noted” – as appropriate) on:-

- Prior to consideration by Cabinet the draft Treasury Management Strategy
- Draft Budget
- Draft Service Plans
- Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review Letter was noted
- Crime and Disorder Joint Committee update was noted

5.3. Service Managers and Executive Directors

Service Managers and Executive Directors attended relevant meetings and answered questions about their Service Plans.

5.4. Presentation by Core Grant Recipients

This year, O&S had presentations from the recipients of core grants to highlight how Hart's contributions to various organisations was being used and the difference it was making to the organisations. This included: Fleet Pheonix, Citizens Advice Hart, Hart Voluntary Action (HVA), Inclusion Education.

6. INDIVIDUAL ITEMS OF NOTE

6.1. Climate Change

June: Members reviewed the Climate Change Action Plan and provided comments to Cabinet. While the overall intent was supported and the improvement from a previous version was noted, work was requested in the correct use of terminology.

December: Members received an update on projects. Several questions were raised about: de-carbonisation projects, EV charging point costs, Solar Power costs, delays to the roll-out of the thermal camera loan project.

6.2. CCTV Issues

6.2.1. Feedback from Visit to CCTV Centre (June)

The visit was a great success. The feedback highlighted many positive aspects of the new centre, however there were some concerns with the arrangements and these points were highlighted.

6.2.2. Portfolio Holder Update (July)

At the Committee's request the Portfolio holder gave an update on the CCTV service since the transition to the new provider. Several issues were raised and from that discussion a T&FG was proposed to look at these in more detail.

6.2.3. CCTV T&FG

Terms of Reference (ToRs) agreed in August, the T&FG reported in December. The report made several recommendations to Cabinet to improve the use, coverage and process surrounding the CCTV system. Concerns were noted about the serviceability and performance of the previous system.

6.3. Conservation Area Approach T&FG

June: The Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was formed to examine the various experiences of Parish Councils in updating their Conservation Area documents. 16 specific recommendations were made to improve the process going forward.

October: The progress against the recommendations was reviewed and concerns raised about progress on some items. A further recommendation was to re-review in early 2024.

February: The committee further reviewed progress on the T&FG recommendations. The committee agreed that the recommendations had been addressed but concerns remained about the timescales for processing and the "them & us" approach.

6.4. Review of Reserves (including SANGS) (July)

An initial review of reserves had been conducted and reported to O&S. Several specific points were noted and passed to Cabinet.

6.5. Update on Flood Alleviation Schemes (August)

Provided an update on the progress (or lack of) on 3 major schemes across the District. The O&S committee expressed concerns to Cabinet about the timing of the review of the project, communications with residents, timelines and KPIs for the retained projects. Concerns were also raised about the lack of alternative plans or work schemes for high-risk communities.

6.6. UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Resources and Programme Update

September: an update was presented on the progress of the fund.

January: members reviewed the outcome of the recent proposal marking activity to allocate the funds. Many Members of the committee had concerns about the scoring criteria, the way it had been applied, the rejection of matched funding in the marking scheme and therefore the outcomes of the process. Additionally, significant concerns were voiced about the shift in the financial boundary between the two work streams after the marking process was concluded. The committee was unable to recommend the paper to Cabinet.

6.7. Review Progress on the Shapley Heath Actions (September)

The actions followed on from previous investigations into Shapley Heath and the various external reports that had been drawn together by Audit Committee into a coherent set of actions. Several issues and concerns were highlighted to Cabinet and Audit Committee.

6.8. Fly Tipping T&FG

The Fly Tipping T&FG was proposed in July, ToRs agreed in September and reported in February. The T&FG made a wide-ranging series of suggestions and recommended that the report should be updated and then passed to Cabinet with a proposal that they carry out a review and options appraisal for the service.

6.9. Viability Appraisals for New Development Supplementary Planning Document (October)

This was well-received by O&S, with some additional recommendations and suggestion provided to strengthen the documents prior to consideration by Cabinet.

6.10. Parking Enforcement and Machines

October: Concerns were raised to Hampshire County Council about the effectiveness of parking enforcement following the transfer of the service. HCC were invited to attend O&S to answer questions but decline to do so, some information was provided, but was not what the committee wanted. HCC Officers were most helpful in providing guidance for District Cllrs to focus enforcement services where and when needed.

November: the review of the trial of a new parking payment machine (within Hart's car parks) was positively received. However, some concerns were expressed about the need for an equalities assessment to include suitability for the visually impaired.

6.11. SPD Cycle and Car Parking in New Developments (November)

The draft documents were well received and some comments provided prior to them going to Cabinet.

6.12. Annual Planning Policy Monitoring Report

The report shows how Hart is progressing against its Local Plan targets, which was generally seen to be positive.

6.13. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)

November: Overview & Scrutiny Committee had concerns about the detailed design sections of LCWIP report in version presented to the meeting and encouraged a significant review of the document in conjunction with feedback, prior to it going to Cabinet.

Cabinet agreed, that as a result of discussion at O&S, members could revisit with officers the proposals outlined in the document on a ward basis. This was taken up by some councillors in January and suggestions/discussions were noted by officers into a revised version, along with revised inputs from HCC officers.

6.14. Butterwood homes (Hart Housing Company) update by scrutiny panel

The sub-committee providing oversight of Butterwood homes provided feedback to O&S. The Panel had issues obtaining the expected details for review around October. More directed requests yielded the necessary information that showed the company was solvent, but a revised corporate structure was also supported at the March meeting.

6.15. Gypsy Traveller Temporary Pitches T&FG

January: Following a briefing from the CEO on the issues, a new T&FG was proposed for the following municipal year and an initial set of ToRs agreed in February.

6.16. Local Enforcement Plan (February)

Members reviewed the Local Enforcement Plan and were broadly supportive. Several comments were raised to be considered before submission to Cabinet.

7. Recommendations

The new O&S committee will be appointed following the elections and while this committee cannot define future O&S work, it is recommended that next municipal year the work programme should include:-

1. Closely monitor the development, performance and use of the CCTV system.
2. Monitor the delivery of the UKSPF for value, quality and timeliness.
3. Encourage improved actions to reduce fly tipping.
4. Monitor the efficacy of parking enforcement.
5. Develop and run the Gypsy Traveller Temporary Pitches T&FG
6. Continue the Multi Agency Flood Forum and further develop the Parish Flood Forum.
7. Encourage and scrutinise the Local Plan assessment

In addition to the standing items that the committee has outlined in the future work programme.

Contact Details: Councillor Chris Dorn