

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
COUNCIL – 26 JULY 2022  
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE)

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 In accordance with Part 3a of the Constitution, the Council will receive an Annual Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to its work. This report illustrates the work of the Committee and its Task and Finish Panels during the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Council note the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 Following agreement by Council on 6 May 2020 to introduce revised scrutiny arrangements, an Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 13 Members, politically proportionate, with a Chairperson (Administration Member) and a Vice Chairperson (Opposition Members), is appointed annually. The Committee may mobilise time limited task and finish panels as and when required. These arrangements replaced three scrutiny committees, operating prior to May 2020.
- 3.2 Part 4g, section 4.0, of the Constitution sets out the powers of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.3 This report reports on the effective discharge of the Overview and Scrutiny Function by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/22.

**4 Membership and Work Programme 2021/22**

- 4.1 The Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2021/22 was Councillors Fitzsimon (Chairperson), Quenet (Vice-chairperson), Chesterman (Vice-chairperson), Elam, Hayes, Hellyer, Kasumu, Marsh, Michaelides, Smith, Stanbury, Travell and Trigg.
- 4.2 An Annual Work Programme was agreed at the start of the municipal year in liaison with Members and relevant Officers. The work programme was then reviewed at each meeting of the Committee, which met four times during the municipal year: 5 July 2021, 1 November 2021, 6 January 2022 and 14 March 2022.
- 4.3 **Committee Work Programme** – The business considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee included:
- a) Community Safety Partnership Review: The scheduling of the work programme enabled the Committee to review the work of the partnership twice during the municipal year. The July meeting focussed on engaging with the community; and the March meeting focussed on the successes of 2021 and priorities for 2022.

- b) Affordable Housing: The Committee considered the Council's objective to maintain the Council's stock of 9,000 affordable housing within the Borough, recommending to Cabinet that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and associated Strategic Plan be reviewed in order to understand the financial capacity to increase the Council's current housing stock and directly deliver more affordable homes, whilst also continuing to invest appropriately in the existing housing stock.
- c) Anti-social behaviour, noise nuisance and pest control: Members noted the complexity of dealing with individual incidents reported to officers in terms of; the overlapping legislation and powers that may be applicable to a particular case; the number of internal teams who may need to be involved; and the involvement of external partners who had a role to play, not least in resolving particular underlying issues.
- d) Annual Budget Setting: the Committee received the report of the task and finish panel it had established.
- e) Public Health Update: The Committee considered a report on the work undertaken by the Council in partnership with colleagues in the wider health system to protect and improve health and wellbeing, with a particular emphasis on plans for living with Covid-19.

4.4 **Task and Finish Panels:** Two Task and Finish Panels operated during the year, and reported their findings to the January meeting of the Committee:

- a) Housing Maintenance and Repairs Task and Finish Panel: The Panel met on three occasions during the municipal year 2021/22 (having been first established in the previous year) and considered a summary of how the service should run and what residents should expect from it. This was followed by a series of questions and answers, which led to a recommendation to Cabinet regarding a revision of the Council's Window Repairs and Replacement Policy.
- b) Budget Setting Task and Finish Panel: The Panel met on four occasions between October 2021 and January 2022 as part of the budget setting process. The Panel found the budget proposals to be financially sound, however, there remained cause for concern when looking ahead over the next few years. There remained ongoing uncertainty over the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit.

4.5 **Cabinet Response to Recommendations:** Three recommendations were made by the Committee to Cabinet:

- a) At its meeting on 4 January 2022, Cabinet agreed the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the current Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and associated Strategic Plan be reviewed, to understand the financial capacity to increase the Council's current housing stock and directly deliver more affordable homes, whilst also continuing to invest appropriately in the existing housing stock; and that the review take place in good time to allow any revision to policy and plans to be incorporated into the 2023-24 budget.
- b) At its meeting on 18 January 2022, Cabinet noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had, upon considering the report of the task and finish panel, found the budget proposals to be financially sound.
- c) At its meeting on 1 February 2022, Cabinet agreed the proposed amendments to the Window Repairs and Replacement Policy recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **5 Work programme 2022/23**

- 5.1 Prioritisation is necessary to ensure that the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority.
- 5.2 Members of the Committee can, during the course of the year, add items within the remit of the Committee that they wished to be considered, and discussed.
- 5.3 Once the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2022/23 has been appointed at Annual Council in May, Officers will liaise with the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Committee to organise a work-programming workshop for Committee Members prior to the first formal meeting of the Committee. In addition to standing or cyclical items of business, the workshop will consider the following topics recommended by the 21/22 OSC panel:
- a) Review of waste and recycling contract performance
  - b) Example comparative case reviews of anti-social behaviour, noise nuisance and pest control (Part II)
  - c) Design of organisational values and behaviours that are expected of our staff and members

## **Implications**

### **6 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The requirement for local authorities in England to establish Overview and Scrutiny Committees is set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Council itself cannot undertake the Overview and Scrutiny function and must establish a committee to do so.

### **7 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications. Officer support for the Overview and Scrutiny function is met from existing resources.

### **8 Human Resources Implications**

- 8.1 Officer support for the Overview and Scrutiny function is met from existing resources.

### **9 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 9.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee discharges the function of Health Scrutiny.

### **10 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority of a well-run council which puts our customers first, and specifically to the achievement of delivering modern, efficient and transparent services for everyone.

Name of author     Alison Marston  
Title                 Governance Services Manager  
Date                  July 2022

## **Background papers**

Report to Council, 17 March 2021 *Review of Operation of Scrutiny Arrangements*  
(minute ref.109)