

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 23rd October, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Halleh Koohestani (Chair)
Cllr Thomas Day (Vice-Chair)

Cllr C.P. Grattan
Cllr Steve Harden
Cllr G.B. Lyon
Cllr Bill O'Donovan
Cllr M.J. Roberts
Cllr S. Trussler

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr M.J. Tennant and Cllr Nadia Martin.

Cllr Leola Card joined the meeting online and was therefore unable to vote.

Cllrs Mara Makunura and Becky Williams attended the meeting as Standing Deputies.

16. APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Cllr Halleh Koohestani be appointed as Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

17. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Cllrs Thomas Day and M.J. Tennant be appointed as Vice-Chairmen of the Committee for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 4th and 18th September, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

19. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Committee welcomed Service Manager – Policy, Strategy and Transformation, Alex Shiell and Policy Officer, Sharon Sullivan who attended the meeting to report on community engagement and how the Council consulted with and understood the views of residents. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Gareth Williams, was also in attendance as the Cabinet Member responsible for this area.

It was noted that the majority of Rushmoor's consultations and surveys were carried out in house using the SurveyMonkey platform, this allowed for consultation on a wide range of issues from service delivery, structural changes and understanding residents' views and priorities at a considerably reduced cost. However, online platforms, such as SurveyMonkey, were often self-selecting, allowing anyone to fill in a survey. This raised concerns around whether responses were representative of our residents.

The Committee were advised that the cost of using external companies to undertake surveys on the Council's behalf, varied depending on the type, survey and sample size, method and analysis required. For example, a face-to-face residents' survey of 500 people could cost in the region of £15,000 - £25,000. However, by using a company to carry out a face-to-face survey, measures could be taken to ensure results were more representative of the community. For example, a population of 106,000 would require a response rate of 383 with a 5% margin for error and 1,067 with a 3% margin for error.

It was advised that at the end of each survey a series of questions were asked to help understand if the responses were representative of the community. This was done through cross referencing the information with the most recent Census data. This exercise helped identify groups that were underrepresented, such as the Nepali community, those under 34 years of age, residents of Aldershot and the male population (dependent of the topic). It was advised that options were being considered to increase the total numbers responding to surveys in general and those underrepresented groups. Options included, a prize draw, attendance at events/colleges, translation of surveys into Nepalese and working with partners to widen the reach.

The Committee were apprised of the budget available to carry out surveys and consultations. It was noted that some consultations had their own budget, such as the Leisure Centre, however, others had to be funded from the £600 annual budget, which included the cost for the license to use SurveyMonkey. It was noted that this budget had been increased for 2025/26 to £4,200 to account for the additional need around Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the Community Governance Review (CGR) but was expected to reduce back to £600 in 2026/27.

In summary, it was noted that twelve consultations and surveys had been carried out in the past twelve months, aimed at informing decisions made on Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Area Committees (CGR), LGR, Farnborough Leisure Centre, polling places, planning policies, community safety and the Council's Delivery Plan.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that the topic of community engagement was much wider than surveys and consultations but appreciated that that was the steer officers had been given for this meeting. Other areas included social media and the Council's Arena Magazine, engagement with forums and partnership working with the Belong Network who had been tasked to work with hard-to-reach groups across the community to ensure all voices were heard.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raised the following matters:

- Use of AI – it was noted that it was early days with co-pilot and officers were cautiously investigating the platform. AI offered free text options and could be used as a tool to explore/categorise responses.
- Lack of access in some areas across the Borough, in particular in areas of deprivation, to digital services, making access to online consultations/surveys restrictive and unrepresentative.
- Consultation fatigue – it was noted that a face-to-face survey had been commissioned, for the forthcoming residents survey, of 500 people, this would run alongside the self-selecting survey via SurveyMonkey and provided a different way of responding for residents.
- Consideration to be given to other platforms as an alternative to SurveyMonkey – it was advised that better and cheaper options were available.
- Foster creativity through partnerships with the local colleges to explore options for better engagement.
- Length of surveys too long, consider shorter more frequent surveys – a conscious effort was being made to shorten the length of the Council's surveys especially those in paper format for use at events.
- Important to analyse respondent data to check representation of the demographic and highlight the results to decision makers. All demographic data to be collected at the end of a consultation/survey, as important to hear residents' thoughts first.
- Nepali Community – it was noted that in the past the team had engaged with Nepali Leaders and advertised in Nepali language local press; to encourage responses from the Nepali community, this approach had not resulted in many additional responses. It was noted that any Nepali translation would need to be checked carefully due to the idioms within the language to ensure the translation was reflective of the English version. In addition, it was suggested that the Nepali student cohorts at the colleges could be utilised to access parents/extended family.
- Under representation - It was important to appreciate that outreach to underrepresented groups could result in a change in representation in the opposite direction – it was important to ensure a good balance.
- Be more visual – work with partners to share the survey links through their networks allowing for a wider variety of access points.
- Incentives – the Committee showed a general consensus for support in offering incentives when completing surveys/consultations, suggestions included Pantomime ticket prize draws and vouchers.
- Staff training – it was noted that there were resourcing implications around training, but it was important to ask questions in the right way.
- Consideration be given to how the Council show residents that they are listening to and taking account of responses to consultations/surveys – if residents were shown that the Council were listening, they could be more inclined to respond to future consultations/surveys. It was noted that the results of surveys were reported on the Council's website and work was underway to develop this further. Promoting both consultations/surveys and the results through the Communications Team would be considered further.

- Respondents' data by ward – it was noted that this was not always possible and was dependent of the response rate. Members could request this data from the team in specific cases.
- Quick polls on social media – could be a good way of gathering specific information but would probably not change the representation.
- Quick wins – a suggestion was made on ways of gathering a quick general view from the public. For example, the Council could pose a question with two responses and residents could vote by placing a token in a receptacle in the town centres for their preferred option.
- Capturing personal data for focus groups – it was noted that a list was held of those who had signed up as part of a consultation group to allow the sharing of information and direct consultation, incentives could be used to engage more to join.
- Detecting suspicious activity – AI could be used to help detect suspiciously similar content, however the response rates achieved were of a level where anything suspicious would most likely be picked up when responses were analysed.

The Committee were asked to share any good practice examples of surveys/consultations that they came across with the team for reference.

The Chair thanks Mr Shiell and Ms Sullivan for their presentation and Cllr Williams for attending the meeting.

20. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current Work Plan and the changes to the arrangements going forward with the introduction of the Programme Management Group, which would consider the work plans of the Audit and Governance, Licensing and Corporate Business, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Policy and Project Advisory Board.

For future meetings, it was advised that SERCO would be attending the December meeting to provide a report on their Annual Report 2024/25, and a report would be made on the Walk this Waste pilot that had taken place earlier in the year. It was also noted that the date of the January 2026 meeting had been moved to 5 February, 2026, and the meeting would be dedicated to pre decision scrutiny on the Farnborough Leisure Centre.

In response to a query on the progress of the Council Tax Support Group, it was noted that a meeting was scheduled between the Managing Director, Executive Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer and the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager to discuss the proposals. Members were advised that, as things stood, it was thought that no changes would be made to the current scheme.

The meeting closed at 8.39 pm.

CLLR HALLEH KOOHESTANI (CHAIR)
