

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the meeting held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024 at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## Voting Members

Cllr Halleh Koohestani (Chairman)  
Cllr Nadia Martin (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr S. Trussler (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Leola Card  
Cllr A.H. Crawford  
Cllr P.J. Cullum  
Cllr Thomas Day  
Cllr C.P. Grattan  
Cllr G.B. Lyon  
Cllr Bill O'Donovan

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

Cllr Jacqui Vosper attended the meeting virtually as Standing Deputy.

## 19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 24th October, 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

## 20. LEADERS PRIORITIES

The Committee welcomed Cllr Gareth Williams, Leader of the Council who was in attendance to present the proposals for a Council Delivery Plan and a programme of work to develop a new Council Vision and Plan.

The Leader set out the Council Delivery Plan Priorities, which had been approved by the Cabinet on 26 November, 2024. It was noted that the new administration were keen to put their stamp on the Council's activities and would be approaching this via a two-step process. This process allowed for the Delivery Plan to be developed between December 2024 and February 2025, this process would be followed but the development of the Council's Vision and Plan between February 2025 and December 2025.

The priorities, approved by the Cabinet, were as set out below;

- **Skills, Economy and Business** – the priority would aim to help promote access to skills development and training, enable working with businesses to attract and retain jobs and promote the development of our towns to meet the needs of businesses and residents.

- **Homes for All: Quality Living, Affordable Housing** – the priority was aimed at improving social housing performance, would allow for intervention to improve the quality of private sector rented accommodation, provide quality temporary accommodation, raise awareness of the allocation of social housing, help to progress a new Local Plan and enable the regeneration of Council owned brownfield land.
- **Community and Wellbeing: Active Lives, Healthier and Stronger Communities** – the priority was aimed at ensuring all residents had access to opportunities for physical exercise through a new leisure centre in Farnborough, enabled a programme of community and cultural activities, addressed health inequalities and allowed for partner working to improve access to mental health support.
- **Pride in Place: Clean, Safe and Vibrant Neighbourhoods** – the priority was aimed at providing cleaner streets through fly tipping initiatives, the work of the Cabinet Pride of Place Champion and initiatives with partners to address long term issues of anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- **Vision for the Future and Financial Sustainability** – the priority aimed to agree a collective vision for the Borough, create an outcome led plan to deliver the vision, implement processes and monitoring to ensure accountability, achieve financial sustainability and embed a culture of continuous improvement.

The Committee made a number of queries relating to the Plan, these included:

- **Homes for All** – it was noted that some guidance had now been received from central Government, which would help with the development of the new Local Plan. It was proposed that evidence gathering would commence in 2025.

In response to a question on population density, it was noted that homes were needed for residents already living in the Borough in overcrowded accommodation, the needs of the residents needed to be considered when developing the Local Plan.

In response to a query regarding the improvement of private sector rented housing, it was noted that a Private Registration Scheme was being assessed for its viability and work was underway to determine the best way forward.

Registered Providers – in response to a query regarding how the work of Registered Providers was monitored, it was noted that consideration was being given to a channel that would allow for more active engagement on a regular basis which would run alongside the current Registered Providers Task and Finish Group (RPT&F). However, it was important to ensure that the work of the new channel and the RPT&F did not crossover.

During a discussion regarding the use of brownfield sites for development to achieve the Local Plan requirement of 600 new homes per year, a list on brownfield sites for resident development was requested.

#### ACTION

What	Whom	By When
Follow up on the recommendations from the Committee following the annual review report of the Registered Providers Task and Finish Group in June 2024.	The Leader	January 2025
To provide a list of brownfield sites for residential development across the borough.	Planning Team – Katie Herrington	December 2024

- **Pride in Place** – it was expressed that, as drafted, the priority for Pride of Place seemed negative and more emphasis could be put on the positive activities which took place in the Borough and activities around community cohesion.

When questioned on the safety element of the priority, the Leader advised that work was underway to understand the issues around ASB, in particular in the town centres, and measures were being taken to tackle the causes.

In regard to the “walk your waste” initiative (formally Mega Skips), it was noted that the trial would be evaluated, once completed, to assess its performance.

It was asked if a budget had been allocated to support the role of the Pride of Place Champion. In response, it was advised that the role had been established to encourage community engagement and fundraising initiatives so would therefore cost very little financially.

In response to a query regarding concern over the look and feel of the Borough’s streets, it was noted that the SERCO contract was currently being considered and this process would include the longer term service requirements of the Council, part of which would incorporate the level of street cleansing.

- **Vision for the Future and Financial Sustainability -**

The Committee considered the residents survey and how it could be made simpler to enable translation to encourage wider engagement. It was noted that engagement had been made with schools and community groups to encourage response rates and officers had utilised the numbers of attendees at events, such as Victoria day, to gather responses from the wider community. In response to a query regarding how residents feedback was used to inform the Plan, the Committee were referred to para 3.3 of Report No. ACE2416, which set out the important issues identified by residents.

The Leader advised on the differences between the new Plan and the existing Plan. The new Plan included a wider scope on the Skills, Economy and Business priority, a stronger line and crackdown on private landlords as part of the Homes for All priority and an increase in CCTV and a crackdown on ASB as part of the Pride in Place priority.

In response to a query regarding the cost of the new plan and whether it was coming in at cost neutral, it was advised that the plan was not yet fully costed, but outline costs had been identified and it was advised that there would be a small uplift in cost. The aim was to work with partners to facilitate some of the activity to reduce costs, to allow the Council to provide a low cost co-ordination role.

In response to a query regarding the reputation of the Council and how it would be protected, the Leader advised that the reputation would be protected by presenting a grounded plan that offered sustainability and acknowledged the current financial position.

With regard to the Environmental Impact Assessments that were agreed at the Council meeting on 7 November, 2024 it was asked if the cost of these would become a financial burden, it was noted that they would be appropriate to the level of investments being made.

In relation to the Climate Change Action Plan refresh, it was noted that the refresh of the Plan could incorporate viability assessments and potentially look at influencing the wider areas carbon footprint, not just the Council's. The Policy and Project Advisory Board had considered proposals for the refresh at its meeting on 19 November 2024.

- **Skills, Economy and Business** – in response to a query regarding the breadth of skills training to be encouraged, it was noted that a variety of skills would be encouraged from technical skills to creative arts.

It was noted that any further questions for the Leader of the Council on this matter should be shared with the administrator to be collated for response.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his contribution.

## 21. **RISK REGISTER**

The Committee welcomed Roger Sanders, Risk, Performance and Procurement Service Manager and Rachel Barker, Assistant Chief Executive who were in attendance, with the Leader of the Council, to provide a presentation on the Risk Management Policy and Risk Register.

The Committee noted a summary timeline, since 2018/19, on how the management of risk had developed. In 2024 the Council underwent a Corporate Peer Challenge, the outcomes of which included recommendations relating to governance and clarity of Members' roles and responsibilities. In the Autumn of 2024, officers undertook a review and update of the risk management policy, which took account of emerging

Delivery Plan priorities, feedback from the Corporate Peer Challenge and recommendations from an internal audit. Following engagement on the revised policy with the Committee and other Members, it was proposed that the Cabinet would consider it at its meeting in January 2025.

The two levels of risk registered were noted, these include a Corporate Risk Register and individual Service Risk Registers. Within the Corporate Risk Register sat the Strategic Risks, Standing Corporate Risks and escalated Service Risks. The Committee were apprised of the key risks, these included:

- Strategic Risks - including economic conditions, poor health outcomes and the financial sustainability of public sector bodies
- Standing Corporate Risks – including data breaches, insufficient funding to proceed with projects and financial sustainability
- Escalated Service Risks – including failure to provide temporary accommodation and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP absorption into Hampshire County Council (HCC))

The upcoming changes to the reviewed Policy were set out, these included, processes to map opportunities and threats, formalisation of the process for quarterly reporting, development of trend monitoring, development arrangements to identify risks that were an issue and development of a strategic level risk appetite in line with the Council Plan.

During discussions the Committee queried who was responsible for risk in the organisation, it was noted that the revised Policy would make this clearer. However, the Cabinet played a central role in the monitoring of risk and Portfolio Holders were tasked with discussing risk and mitigation regularly within their areas of responsibility.

In response to a query relating to identifying gaps in the Council's Risk Registers, it was noted that services had a responsibility to incorporate any new legislation within their Service Risk Registers as appropriate. More generally cross references were carried out against global reporting and horizon scanning.

With regard to the level of risk that was considered acceptable, it was advised that currently risk appetite was determined line by line within each service area, these are then considered by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and reported to Cabinet to agree the level of appetite. The development of a Strategic Risk Appetite would provide an overall view on risk going forward assisting the process.

A request was made for Member training on cyber security, this would be pulled together and provided on an ongoing basis. It was also noted that the Cabinet Office provide some useful information to elected Members.

In response to a query on how often risk was looked at by senior officers and Portfolio Holders, it was reported that the full Corporate Risk Register was reviewed by the ELT once a quarter and Portfolio Holders would meet with Executive Heads of Service and Service Managers to discuss risk on a monthly basis. Officers

considered risk routinely as part of business as usual. Any emerging risks would be identified and brought to the attention of the ELT as appropriate.

In the case of a risk presenting that could have a larger impact than would be considered possible, the Council would ensure that a reasonable worst case scenario was applied. In the case of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Council had flu pandemic plans in place that were adapted to meet the needs of the local authority.

The Committee ENDORSED the approach to the Risk Management Policy and the Risk Register.

The Chairman thanked Ms Barker and Mr Sanders for the presentation.

## 22. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current Work Plan and the items for the meeting on 12 December, which included the Citizens' Advice Service Level Agreement Annual Report.

The meeting closed at 8.57 pm.

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the meeting held on Thursday, 12th December, 2024 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## **Voting Members**

Cllr Halleh Koohestani (Chairman)  
Cllr S. Trussler (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Leola Card  
Cllr A.H. Crawford  
Cllr P.J. Cullum  
Cllr Thomas Day  
Cllr G.B. Lyon  
Cllr M.J. Tennant

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr C.P. Grattan and Cllr Bill O'Donovan.

Cllr Nadia Martin joined the meeting online and was therefore unable to vote on any recommendations taken.

Cllr Sarah Spall attended the meeting as a Standing Deputy.

## **23. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meetings held on 28th November, 2024 were agreed as a correct record, subject to two minor amendments on page 3.

## **24. CITIZENS ADVICE RUSHMOOR - SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT - ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee welcomed Calum Stewart, Chief Executive Officer, Sue Dowell, Head of Service and Quality and Andrew Levey, Board of Trustees Chair, at Citizens Advice Rushmoor (CAR), who were in attendance to report on their 2023/24 Annual Report, in line with the Service Level Agreement with the Council. In addition, Emma Lamb, Community and Partnership Service Manager was also in attendance to support the item on behalf of the Council.

It was advised that Citizens Advice Rushmoor (CAR) were a local charity who had been providing free, confidential, and impartial advice, in the Borough, since 1940. Part of the Citizens Advice network, CAR were one of over 200 independent charities operating across the country. The volunteer-led charity, with a Board of Trustees and over 50 volunteers, helped deliver services to Rushmoor's residents, ensuring clients were at the heart of what their work.

Mr Stewart, provided an overview of a case which had presented to the team. The case involved a vulnerable adult with learning difficulties who struggled to live independently. The client had received a letter threatening action from bailiffs, if an energy bill wasn't settled. The CAR adviser contacted the energy company and was able to ensure the debt was written off. During the period of contact with the client, the adviser established that the individual was eligible for benefits, which resulted in them being £1,000 better off per month. This was an example of work carried out by CAR, and showed how one issue could result in additional work being undertaken to enhance clients lives and wellbeing. It was noted that 8 out of 10 issues presented, were solved through the advice and intervention provided by CAR advisers. In 2023/24, 5,000 individuals had been supported on over 16,000 issues.

CAR aimed to provide the advice clients needed for the problems they faced, and worked to improve the policies and practices that affected people's lives. Advisers helped clients with a range of problems, through face to face contact, telephone, email and webchat or through outreach activities in the local community. Problems/issues dealt with, included, benefits, debt and money matters, housing, consumer issues, work, family and immigration.

It was noted that, more people were contacting CAR with multiple or complex issues. Most concerns could be dealt with by the team, but sometimes signposting to other services was required. The support provided ranged from brief one off intervention, to in-depth casework, with services tailored to meet individual needs. The high quality, complex and detailed service provided by CAR allowed for a unique insight into the challenges people face in today's society. CAR provided a service that made a difference to people's lives and in addition, generated savings for the government to a value of at least £1.67 for every £1 invested in CAR, alongside, economic and social benefits (£24.22 for every £1 invested in CAR), and value to clients (£7.10 for every £1 invested in CAR). Through partnership working with the Council on the Council Tax Support Scheme it was estimated that 4,800 households in Rushmoor would be better off by over £760,000 in total, in 2024/25. Other partners, which CAR has worked with, and been provided funding from, for specific projects to provide benefits to residents include, the Brain Tumour Charity, the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Hampshire, the Community Grub Hub and Farnborough Food Bank.

It was noted that the Council's funding contributed, in part, to eight posts within CAR's organisational structure. In 2022/23, the Council reduced its funding to CAR by 10%, this was cut by a further 5% in 2023/24. Taking account of inflation, these reductions equated to a 30% loss in spending power since 2021, compared to a year on year increase of 44% in levels of crisis support being provided. It was advised that, CAR had undergone a restructure as a result of these reductions and other increased costs, which had included a number of redundancies, causing a further strain on the services provided. A team of volunteers supported the paid service, and it was noted that they had given an average of 270 hours per week, which equated to £363,877 worth of volunteering hours in 2023/24.

The Committee reviewed CAR's strategic priorities and were apprised of projects and activities for 2024/25, which included work with asylum seekers and refugees, mental health projects and meeting the needs of young people.



During discussions, the Committee requested that the information provided in the SLA report going forward, clearly stated where the need was coming from and key concerns identified on a ward basis. What the Council's grant funded, was also raised, and a request was made for more detail on this and engagement with the Council on how, and on which, projects the funds were used for.

In response to a query regarding the use of English, it was advised that the position had worsened and fewer people were using English as their first language. It was noted that, fortunately CAR had Nepali speakers and advisers but other organisations did not. Language Line was used as a resource to assist with enquiries when English wasn't the first language, but this extended the time of appointments further impacting resources.

In response to a query regarding alternative funding streams, it was noted that funding was sought from other sources, but often was for specific projects/support with limitations on what it could be used for.

Following a discussion on premises costs, it was noted that the lease on the spaces occupied by CAR, owned by the Council, had not been reviewed for four years. The Committee felt it appropriate that a recommendation be made to review the current arrangements with regard to rent and service charges.

With regard to average waiting times on the helpline, it was advised that a new arrangement had been entered into to pool resources across other Citizens Advice offices, to spread the load across volunteers over a wider geographical area. Current waiting times could be up to 30-45 minutes. In addition, it was noted that, in Rushmoor, 12-15% of contact was made via face to face meetings.

During a discussion on funding and how the Council could assist CAR moving forward, it was suggested that a multi-year funding agreement would assist with planning for the future and offer a greater level of certainty for the organisation. In addition, stronger partnership working with the Council would add additional value to the relationship beyond monetary contributions.

In relation to volunteers, it was advised that the process to become a volunteer for CAR was not simple. Volunteers needed to undergo an 11 week training programme, which required commitment from the individual and support from trained supervisors. Working with the local higher education establishments to reach potential volunteers at an early stage was suggested, and CAR would welcome any offers to work with the colleges.

In response to a query regarding Pension Credits, it was advised that should the resources and information be available, a targeted approach could be taken to assist those in need, however data sharing protocols made this difficult.

Whilst discussing the recommendation to the Cabinet, the Committee acknowledged the Council's current financial position and the fact that the funding provided was not a statutory requirement of the Council. The Committee also appreciated that if organisations such as CAR and Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS) did not exist,

the Council could feel the impacts of additional support to residents from lost services.

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet:

- consider a multi-year funding agreement, taking account of inflationary increases, from 2025/26 alongside a clear set of KPIs to measure performance
- review the rental and service charges associated with the places occupied by Citizens Advice Rushmoor in both Aldershot and Farnborough.

The Chairman thanked, Mr Stewart and Mr Levey and Ms Dowell for their presentation.

## 25. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current Work Plan and the items for the meeting on 30th January, 2025 which included, updates on the Financial Recovery Plan progress and Cultural Compacts. Also, on 8th January a remote meeting would be held to discuss the issues that would be raised in a letter to Hampshire County Council.

The meeting closed at 9.19 pm.

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the meeting held on Thursday, 30th January, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## Voting Members

Cllr Halleh Koohestani (Chairman)  
Cllr Nadia Martin (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr S. Trussler (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Leola Card  
Cllr P.J. Cullum  
Cllr Thomas Day  
Cllr C.P. Grattan  
Cllr G.B. Lyon  
Cllr Bill O'Donovan  
Cllr M.J. Tennant

Cllr A.H. Crawford joined the meeting online and was therefore unable to vote on any recommendations taken.

## 26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 12th December, 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

## 27. FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN - UPDATE

The Committee welcomed, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Gareth Williams, who was in attendance with the Executive Head of Finance, Peter Vickers, to provide an update on the current position with the Financial Recovery Plan and the operational arrangements of the Financial Recovery Working Group.

The Committee received a presentation which set out the background to the Financial Recovery Plan with a summary of its aims and targets, and the makeup, working and reporting arrangements of the Financial Recovery Working Group (FRWG). The presentation also set out what had been achieved and the current position.

Members discussed the presentation and raised the following matters:

- **Terms of Reference** – Clarity was requested on what was meant by “To oversee the delivery of the Financial Recovery Plan...” and the definition of “oversee”, as set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR). The opposition questioned whether the operation of the FRWG reflected the ToR and stated that they believed there was an issue with the operation not meeting the ToR. It was noted that it was important to understand if Members attended the

FRWG as observers or to influence the work. In response, the Leader advised that opinions would differ on the level of oversight undertaken and whether the FRWG went into enough detail when overseeing, however, it was important to go with the majority opinion when carrying out the work.

- **Lines of enquiry** – The Committee were advised that around 40 lines of enquiry had been identified, eight had been closed down as would not contribute to savings at this time, 11 larger value items had been assessed and built into the budget, five had been held over to be considered as part of wider service reviews and 17 had been identified as being of smaller value and would be progressed to contribute to future savings. The FRWG had overseen this process, and it was noted that some savings had been achieved.
- **Progress to date** – The Committee reviewed the progress to date on increasing financial capacity. A number of actions had been completed or were underway, these included:
  - A definition of the Minimum Revenue Position, which had been included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Treasury Management Strategy
  - Revision of a regular timetable for financial reporting and budget setting and review, including a monthly review process of the Council's balance sheet. Alongside these revisions, improvements had been made to the quality of working papers, documents, and reconciliations through the establishment of new standards for these materials
  - Reviews of treasury operations, capital planning methodology and the management of insurance
  - Spending controls – “No Purchase Order No Spend” and controls on procurement card expenditure
  - Development of financial skills within the Council and a design and consultation process on the structure of the Financial Service through a phased approach. It was noted that Phase 1 had covered the appointment of two senior accountants, and Phase 2 would look at aligning the work with what was required, allowing for some of the technical ownership to be taken away from the Executive Head of Finance. In turn, this would result in a wider knowledge base within the Team.

Mr Vickers had reviewed the progress to date and advised that issues raised around the Treasury Policy being “too loose”, as identified by the CIPFA Report, were being addressed. It was also noted that the financial reporting system had been upgraded to support the work of the Team and to provide improved reporting.

- **Current Position for 2025/26** – The Committee discussed the external audits on the Statements of Accounts between 2020/21 and 2022/23, which had been subject to a national delay and the provisions in place for 2023/24. Legislation had been passed to address the delays through the process of a disclaimer and all outstanding accounts, including 2023/24 had now been signed off. However, as a result, levels of certainty in the Council’s accounting would need to be built back up and the next Statement of Account to be fully signed off by the auditors would be the 2028/29 Statement.

In response to a query regarding the Council’s governance arrangements around financial matters, it was advised that an independent governance review had been undertaken towards the end of 2024 and a report of the findings and recommendations was expected imminently. It was advised that a workshop session would be held with members of the Corporate Governance, Audit and Standards Committee (CGAS) and others, as appropriate, before any recommendations to full Council were made for implementation.

Responding to a question regarding independent representation on the FRWG and CGAS, it was considered that the roles were too different, one to provide an independent opinion on audit, and the other on finance. Therefore, the Council had felt it appropriate to appoint a representative from CIPFA to sit on the FRWG.

The Committee discussed the differences between the previous Budget Strategy Work Group (BSWG) and the FRWG. It was noted that the FRWG had a much tighter schedule dealing with current issues, whereas the BSWG remit had been to oversee the development of the forthcoming budget. It was felt that the current model was more effective and relevant.

In relation to a query regarding risk and the processes in place for capturing risks before they became an issue, it was noted that the budget, once set, would be translated into the Risk Register. Risks remained the responsibility of the owner and were updated and reviewed monthly. The risks relating to financial matters in particular were also reported to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and the Cabinet.

The Committee NOTED the update and the Chairman thanked the Leader and Mr Vickers for their presentation and valuable contributions.

## 28. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current Work Plan.

It was advised that an additional meeting had been arranged on 4th March, 2025 to undertake some pre decision scrutiny on disposals at Union Yard. Items for the meeting on 27th March would be agreed at the next Progress Group on 6th March.

The meeting closed at 8.49 pm.

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