

COUNCIL MEETING – 10TH APRIL 2025

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In accordance with the Council's procedures for monitoring the overview and scrutiny process, this report reviews the work that has been undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25. The Committee's focus has been to keep a watching brief on the Council's activities and local facilities, along with service performance and providing comments and ideas. The aim has been to shape the Council's future policy and services. The Report covers the issues discussed, the processes followed, and the outcomes achieved during the year.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES AND WORK PLAN

- 2.1 The Committee was established as part of the review of the decision making structure which took effect from May, 2018. The Committee's breadth of activity includes all Council services and services provided by other organisations which impact on the Borough and its inhabitants.
- 2.2 The progress meeting (consisting of Cllrs. Leola Card, P.J. Cullum, Thomas Day, Nadia Martin, Bill O'Donovan, Stuart Trussler and, myself) has been used for discussion and consideration of processes and priorities. It also monitors the work plan and undertakes agenda planning.

3. COMMITTEE ISSUES

- 3.1 Over the year, the Committee has endeavoured to ensure that it has kept the Council's activities under review. However, some external scrutiny has been undertaken, in particular, around the SERCO contract, Policing and the voluntary sector.
- 3.2 The main areas of focus in 2024/25 were:

Registered Providers – Through the Task and Finish Group (consisting of Cllrs. Cllrs Gaynor Austin, S.J. Masterson, Bill O'Donovan, M.D. Smith and myself) the Committee has continued the review of registered providers during the 2024/25 Municipal Year. The scrutiny of performance and activities has been limited to two registered providers (A2 Dominion and Metropolitan Thames Valley) for 2024/25, as the Group undertook to review and update its Terms of Reference to reflect the Council's new priorities. Other RPs operating in the Borough had Social Housing Regulator and Housing Ombudsman

reports produced and were asked to complete a standard questionnaire used at the review meetings, to keep a watching brief on the wider picture to help identify any emerging issues. The 2024/25 annual report and recommendations to continue with the review programme in 2025/26, will be considered by the Committee at a future meeting.

Council Tax Support Scheme – A Task and Finish Group (consisting of Cllrs. P.J. Cullum, C.P. Grattan, Lisa Greenway, M.J. Roberts and Stuart Trussler (Vice-Chair)) has carried out a review of the Council Tax Support Scheme. Following an in-depth review of the scheme undertaken in 2023/24, resulting in a recommendation to allow 100% of a person's council tax liability to be used to calculate their Council Tax Support award. The Group reviewed the new arrangements and the schemes performance during 2024/25. A report was presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 14th January, setting out the Groups recommendation that the scheme remain unchanged for 2025/26 and was considered and approved by the Council at its meeting on 27th February, 2025.

Farnborough Airport Task and Finish Group – A Group (consisting of Cllrs. Craig Card, A.H. Crawford, P.J. Cullum, Halleh Koohestani (Chair), G.B. Lyon and Bill O'Donovan with Cllr Jules Crossley (Policy, Climate & Sustainability Portfolio Holder) as an invitee as required.) has not met during 2024/25 due to the complexities that have arisen from the pending airport planning application for major revisions to their planning permissions submitted in 2023/24. The future of this Group would be considered prior to any appointments being made in 2025/26.

Housing and Homelessness Prevention Strategy – At the meeting in June 2024, the Committee reviewed the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Strategy following its implementation in October 2023. The Committee reviewed the aims of the strategy and felt that a review was needed of the Strategy to bring it in line with the Council's priorities. A further meeting would be arranged to review any changes during 2025/26.

SERCO – In August 2024, the Committee reviewed the 2023/24 Annual Report from SERCO on their activities during the year. The report covered SERCOs purpose, vision, mission and values, alongside details of performance in the key areas of refuse and recycling and management of street cleansing and grounds maintenance. In reviewing the report the Committee had agreed that environmental factors were important when making decisions on the budget and this had been fed back to the Cabinet for consideration.

Financial Matters (CIPFA, FRP & WG) – At the meetings in September 2024 and January 2025, the Committee considered matters relating to the Council's finances. The Committee had an in-depth discussion with Simon Allsop from CIPFA, in September, who reported on and addressed Members concerns on their independent review into the Council's finances, and in January we met with the Leader of the Council and the Section 151 Officer who addressed matters relating to the Council's Financial Recovery Plan and the working arrangements of the Financial Recovery Work Group.

Police and Community Safety – Also in September 2024, the Committee met with the Police Chief Inspector, Gillian Cox, and representatives of the Council's Community Safety team, to hear about current issues, challenges and positive news stories within the sector. The Committee discussed the matter at length and requested further data on fly tipping, land ownership and CCTV. The Committee was again represented on the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Community Safety (JOSC) with elected Members from both Hart and Basingstoke, the JOSC worked well and had set priorities for the year which had been noted by the Committee.

Voluntary Organisations (RVS & CAR) – In October and December 2024, the Committee met with representatives from both Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS) and Citizens Advice Rushmoor (CAR) who were reporting for the first time on their newly implemented Service Level Agreements. Recommendations were made following both these meetings to the Cabinet asking for consideration to be given to multi year funding from 2025/26 for both organisations. The recommendations had resulted in the Cabinet agreeing to consider financial support as part of the budget setting process.

Leaders Priorities – In November 2024, the Committee met with the Leader of the Council to be apprised of proposals for a Council Delivery Plan and a programme of work to develop a new Council Vision and Plan. The Council's Delivery Plan Priorities and the two step approach to the process had been set out. Members had taken the opportunity to discuss the priorities in-depth with the Leader and the Committee would keep a watching brief on the progress of the Plan.

Risk Management Policy and Risk Register – Also in November 2024, the Committee had reviewed the approach to the Risk Management Policy and Risk Register, and endorsed the work undertaken. A watching brief would be maintained on Risk going forward.

Asset Disposal (Union Yard) – In March 2025, the Committee undertook some pre decision scrutiny on the disposal of assets at Union Yard Aldershot. The Leader of the Council attended the meeting and engaged with the discussions and noted comments, which assisted with the decision-making process by the Cabinet.

Other items considered during the year included a call-in on a Cabinet decision taken relating to the next steps with the development of a revised plan to provide a new Farnborough Leisure Centre. The Committee has also received written reports from the two Cabinet Champions, which set out their work and activities during the year. The Committee noted the achievements and activities of each Champion and endorsed the recommendations and next steps for priorities in 2025/26. In addition, work was underway to strengthen communication with Hampshire County Council on matters affecting our residents.

- 3.3 When appropriate, Cabinet Members have been in attendance at meetings to support items and answer the Committee's questions. Cabinet Members who

have attended include, Cllr Gareth Williams (Leader) Cllr Sophie Porter (Deputy Leader and Healthy Communities and Active Lives Portfolio Holder), Cllr Christine Guinness (Pride in Place and Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder) and Cllr Becky Williams (Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder (previous)).

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Committee has worked well during the year and carried out a range of activities, which have a significant impact on the Borough and the Council. The work of the Committee will be reviewed at the start of the 2025/26 Municipal Year to ensure that the Work Plan is realistic, and the focus is on issues where it can make a difference.
- 4.2 Finally, and importantly, I feel that the Committee has worked effectively during the year, in the depth and breadth of scrutiny achieved. All Members have contributed at meetings, and I would like to express my thanks for their support and especially Cllr Nadia Martin, the Vice-Chairman. In addition, I am also grateful for the support given by the officers to the Committee and myself as Chairman.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The Council is asked to note and endorse the Committee's work.

CLLR. HALLEH KOOHESTANI
CHAIRMAN - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE