

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the 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.

POLICY AND PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

Report of the meeting held on Tuesday, 18th November, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Abe Allen (Chair)
Cllr Lisa Greenway (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steve Harden
Cllr Rhian Jones
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr S.J. Masterson
Cllr M.J. Roberts
Cllr Dhan Sarki
Cllr Ivan Whitmee

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllrs A. Adeola and T.W. Mitchell.

Cllr Leola Card attended the meeting as a Standing Deputy.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th September, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

19. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED: That Cllr S.J. Masterson be appointed as Chair for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

20. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRS

RESOLVED: That Cllrs Abe Allen and Lisa Greenway be appointed as Vice-Chairs for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

21. RUSHMOOR CULTURAL STRATEGY - REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS

The Board welcomed Mr Lee McQuade, Economy and Growth Service Manager, who provided an update on work towards reviewing the Council's Rushmoor Cultural Strategy.

The Board was advised that the Rushmoor Cultural Strategy had been adopted in 2022/23 and had set out six shared priorities:

- Communities – Support Rushmoor’s varied communities (especially the least culturally engaged) to express and develop their cultural identity and celebrate these together
- Town centres – Ensure that culture plays an important role in the regeneration of Aldershot and Farnborough town centres
- Heritage – Build on the rich military and aviation heritage of Aldershot and Farnborough to increase both community pride and the visitor economy
- Creative industries – Work with artists and the Createch sector to establish Rushmoor as a centre for innovation and excellence in creative media
- Young people – Give more young people in Rushmoor the opportunity of developing a sustainable career in the Creative Industries
- Build capacity – Establish new arts team, the Cultural Compact and key partnerships

Mr McQuade ran through a number of initiatives that had contributed towards these priorities including:

- Rushmoor Heritage Festival
- Aldershot and Farnborough Heritage trails
- Town centre banners and graphics
- Makers’ Yard in Union Yard in Aldershot town centre
- The Landing in Farnborough town centre
- Temporary artworks and installations, including murals at Aldershot Station and North Camp toilets
- Delivery of free Council events
- Supporting arts projects and initiatives, such as Bula Festival
- Surrey+ Creative Constellation, alongside key partners such as University of Creative Arts, Farnham
- Farnborough Film Studios
- Employment, skills and training promoting pathways in film, media and digital arts
- Strengthened partnerships with Hampshire Cultural Trust, Arts Council England and other partners

- New Cultural Programming Group
- Cultural Places project

It was explained that the Cultural Strategy would not be rewritten but that a document would be produced that would set out a direction of travel for the Council and its partners. Members were asked to suggest what activities should be included in any future plans and what the future focus should be on.

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- Important to engage with Nepali community but also to remember that there are many other ethnic groups in the Borough that are hard to reach
- Must ensure that people know that they are welcome to host their own event(s)
- Could the Council run training/workshops to assist people in organising their own event(s)?
- Councillors to assist with this training?
- Can further assistance be sought from Hampshire Cultural Trust?
- Important to engage with young people to establish their wants
- West End Centre (WEC) has had a pioneering approach – important facility
- Could more flag raising be done – e.g. all four Saints' days?
- Could we buy staging etc. and then market an 'events package' to individuals considering hosting an event at The Landing?
- It is not felt that current events are marketed sufficiently – Arena magazine, website and Facebook not enough – need to consider younger persons' technology such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat
- Council should consider joining up platforms to provide an online Rushmoor events calendar
- How can more funding for events be obtained from partners?
- Could the Council consider allowing free parking for volunteers assisting at events? Otherwise this can be a barrier
- The 'Aldershot Mixtape' event and events at the WEC bring in many people from outside the Borough, including as far away as London

The Chairman thanked Mr McQuade for his input.

22. REVIEW OF EVENTS PROGRAMME

The Board welcomed Mr Lee McQuade, Economy and Growth Service Manager and Mr Alex Stone, Business Analyst, who provided details of the Council's events programme, which was being reviewed as a result of the withdrawal of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Community Response Fund (CRF).

The Board was advised that the current plans for the 2026/27 Council events programme included 24 events with a forecasted cost of £135,300. To aid the relative assessment of events, the report analysis assigned a 'value rating' to each event based on a relative assessment of:

- The event's contribution to the Council's Delivery Plan priorities
- The event's contribution to adopted Strategies and Strategic Plans
- The event's value to partners seeking outcomes that aligned with those of the Council
- The public expectation around the event

The scope of the 'events programme' did not include:

- Events that were considered part of service delivery or statutory activity, such as committee meetings
- Economic Development Service's markets, craft fayres and car boot sales, as these were focussed on economic opportunities for traders and small businesses rather than an event offered directly to the public
- Events that were not organised by the Council but that the Council participated in, promoted or otherwise supported

The event cost vs value rating plotted each of the 24 events in a table and suggested whether the event was considered to be high cost and high value, low cost but high value, low cost and low value or high cost but low value. The Board was invited to consider the assessment of the relative value of the events and, given the current financial situation, whether there were any recommendations they wished to make to the Cabinet as to how events might be prioritised. In response to these specific considerations, the Board requested the report's analysis of events should incorporate the ratio of event cost to attendance and an Officer based assessment of the value-for-money achieved in the delivery of the event. No specific recommendation on prioritisation was made by the Board.

In discussing the content of the presentation and the table, the Board raised the following points:

- Friends of the Earth are a key partner in terms of the Eco Festival

- Should 'Men's Health Day' be redesigned as 'Family Health Day'?
- Cost of Annual Council Meeting seems high – can the cost of this be reduced in terms of buffet etc? - would be good to know the cost of a normal Council meeting for comparison purposes
- Should consider doing more flag-raising – low cost and high impact
- Civic Banquet and Ball – need to understand where the cost is over and above the cost of the ticket to the event – not clear how much this event raised the profile of the Mayor's chosen charities
- Could 'Carols at The Landing' be a new event for Farnborough?
- Need to consider these events in the context of the Council not existing in this form from 2028 – part of our heritage?
- There needs to be very good reason to hold an event that the table shows as being high cost but low value – otherwise should be stopped or changed
- 'Cost per head' column should be included in the analysis
- Some of the events, such as the Easter and Halloween events, feel 'tired' now – should they be replaced with something new?
- Could Eco Explorers Clubs be held less often to save money?
- Could Council buy own staging equipment for use at The Landing with a view of using for Council events and hiring out to people organising other events at venue?

The Chairman thanked Mr McQuade and Mr Stone for their input.

23. **WORK PLAN**

The Board noted the current Work Plan.

It was agreed that the work plan would be updated following the inaugural meeting of the Programme Management Working Group on 1st December, 2025.

The meeting closed at 8.19 pm.
