

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 13 May 2024

By the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

INFORMATION REPORT

Not Exempt



Horsham
District
Council

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to refer the report together with the Overview and Scrutiny work programme to Full Council for noting.

Reasons for Recommendations

The Council's Constitution requires the Committee to report to Full Council on an annual basis with regard to the discharge of the overview and scrutiny function and its future work programme.

Background Papers

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from June 2023 to March 2024

Notes of the Fair Space Task and Finish Group from November 2023 to March 2024

Notes of the Lease Contracts Task and Finish Group from March 2024

Wards affected: None

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Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Councils operating executive governance arrangements are required under the Local Government Act 2000 to have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides a check on the actions of the executive (the Cabinet) and has powers to examine and report on policy and areas of concern.
- 1.3 The Council's Constitution requires the Committee to report to Full Council on an annual basis with regard to the discharge of the overview and scrutiny function and its future work programme.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 Overview and scrutiny contributes to all Council policies.

3 Details

3.1 Role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1.1 The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in paragraph 6.2.1 of Article 6 of the Council's Constitution, is as follows:
 - a) Assist in the strategic development of policy.
 - b) Review issues of local concern.
 - c) Review the policy of others within and outside the Council.
 - d) Call-in Cabinet decisions.
 - e) Scrutinise the Council's decision-making processes.
 - f) Monitor the internal and external delivery of services.
 - g) Review specific services.
 - h) Monitor and scrutinise the activities of outside bodies.

3.2 Committee membership

- 3.2.1 The following Members were appointed to the Committee at the May 2023 meeting of Full Council: Councillors Sam Bateman, Tony Bevis, Philip Circus, Paul Clarke, Mike Croker, Malcolm Eastwood, Len Ellis-Brown, Nigel Emery, Anthony Frankland, Alexander Jeffery, Liz Kitchen, Dennis Livingstone, Jonathan Taylor, Belinda Walters and Mike Wood.
- 3.2.2 Councillor Paul Clarke was elected as Chairman of the Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year at the May 2023 meeting of the Committee. Councillor Anthony Frankland was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year at the same meeting.
- 3.2.3 Councillor Malcolm Eastwood ceased to be a member of the Committee during the municipal year, having sadly passed away.

3.2.4 Councillor Mike Wood also ceased to be a member of the Committee during the municipal year, having resigned as a councillor.

3.3 Summary of work undertaken by the Committee

3.3.1 The Council's Finance and Performance

The Committee received and asked questions on reports from the Director of Resources throughout the year on the Council's finance and performance. There had been an improvement in capital programme performance compared to the previous year, albeit this had been helped by the Local Authority Housing Fund spend. Key performance indicators had also improved, with nine 'red' indicators at the end of year 2022/23 reducing to three 'red' indicators in the third quarter of 2023/24.

3.3.2 Local Authority Housing Fund

The Committee received updates from the Director of Resources throughout the year on the Local Authority Housing Fund. The Committee considered a number of factors including the financial costs and benefits of the scheme and the impact it had on the Council's housing waiting list.

3.3.3 Housing Grants

The Committee received an update from the Director of Resources at its July meeting on a Homelessness Prevention Grant and a Home Office Asylum Dispersal Grant that the Council had been offered by the government.

3.3.4 Land Charges Fees

The Committee received an update from the Director of Resources at its July meeting on a proposed Land Charges fee increase.

3.3.5 Annual Crime and Disorder Update

The Committee received a report of the Head of Housing and Community Services on crime and disorder in the Horsham district at its September meeting. The report noted that Horsham was the second safest district in West Sussex in the reporting period.

3.3.6 Review of the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The Committee received an update from the Director of Resources on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy at its November meeting and asked questions of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources who had been in attendance.

The Committee also received an update from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources on the proposed Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy at its January meeting.

3.3.7 Swan Walk Car Park

The Committee received an update from the Property Management Team Leader at its November meeting on the works to the Swan Walk car park, and asked questions on the works and on maintenance of the Council's facilities generally.

3.3.8 Parking Policy

The Committee received an update from the Head of Strategic Planning on parking policy at its January meeting. A study that had been undertaken as a result of the recommendations of the Off Street Parking Task and Finish Group had been due to be progressed into further guidance but this had not happened. It was agreed that a timetable as to the possible next steps would be prepared and the Chairman would look to bring the item back to the Committee in June 2024.

3.3.9 Climate Action Strategy

The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery on the proposed Climate Action Strategy at its January meeting and asked questions thereon. The Committee is scheduled to consider the Strategy in more detail in September 2024.

3.3.10 Capitol Theatre Refurbishment

The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Green Spaces on the proposed Capitol Theatre refurbishment at its January meeting and asked questions thereon.

3.3.11 Annual Plan 2024/25

The Committee heard from the Head of Finance and Performance on the proposed Annual Plan 2024/25 at its January meeting and asked questions in relation to key performance indicators.

3.3.12 Drill Hall

The Committee heard from the Director of Communities on the proposal for the Drill Hill at its March meeting and asked questions thereon.

3.3.13 An Additional Service for the Isolated Property Rounds

The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Environmental Health, Recycling and Waste on the proposed additional service for the isolated property rounds at its March meeting and asked questions thereon.

3.3.14 One-Off Cost of Living Supplement

The Committee heard from the Head of HR and OD on the proposed one-off cost of living supplement at its March meeting and asked questions thereon.

3.4 Summary of work undertaken by Task and Finish Groups

3.4.1 Fair Space Task and Finish Group

The Committee agreed at its July meeting to set up this Task and Finish Group, as suggested by Councillor Bateman. The Group is looking at outdoor sports and leisure provision in the Horsham district for older girls and teenagers aged 12 to 17.

The current members of the Group are Councillors Bateman, Beard, Emery, Frankland and Vickers. The Group is chaired by Councillor Bateman.

The Group's Terms of Reference are as follows:

- 1. Identify policies that will be subject to detailed review on the basis of sex-based equality and inclusivity.*
- 2. Gather data to determine public perceptions and impacts of current public space provision in terms of sex-based inclusivity.*
- 3. Identify the needs and wants of older girls and teenagers (aged 12 to 17) in terms of outside space and leisure provision.*
- 4. Create new policy to sit alongside existing policies. New policy will help shape the provision of outdoor space and leisure facilities going forward. Where prudent, existing policies (from 1) due for renewal will be updated to incorporate the new policy.*

The Group has held three meetings so far and has heard from a number of officers including the Director of Communities, the Head of Strategic Planning, a Senior Planning Officer, the Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces, the Parks and Countryside Development Manager and the Digital Communications Manager.

The Group has considered existing policies and a draft survey has been prepared. The Group is seeking to hold focus groups at Collyer's, Steyning Grammar School, The Weald and Horsham Youth Forum.

3.4.2 Lease Contracts Task and Finish Group

The Committee agreed at its January meeting to set up this Task and Finish Group, as suggested by Councillor Walters. The Group is looking at arrangements relating to the leasing of the Council's assets.

The current members of the Group are Councillors Bevis, Ellis-Brown, Hogben, Jeffery, Landeryou and Walters. The Group is chaired by Councillor Walters.

The Group's Terms of Reference are as follows:

- 1. To review a sample of Horsham District Council's existing lease contracts and to evaluate the outcome of each contract in terms of cost effectiveness, potential profit and benefit of existing and acquired assets to the Council and the community.*
- 2. To recommend a revised and/or new governance structure to be put in place to ensure that decisions made by the Head of Property and Facilities to enter into or renew lease contracts meet the needs of the Council and its residents.*

The Group has held two meetings so far and has heard from the Head of Property and Facilities, the Head of Leisure and Culture and the Head of Housing and Communities.

3.4.3 s106 (Non-Financial) Task and Finish Group

The Committee agreed at its January meeting to set up this Task and Finish Group, as suggested by Councillor Clarke. The Group will look at the delivery of the non-financial aspects of s106 agreements and will be set up in 2024/25 municipal year.

3.5 **Summary of training provided to the Committee**

3.5.1 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny delivered a training session to members of the Committee on 'How can we make a difference through scrutiny?' on 31 May 2023.

3.5.2 The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended a training programme by the Local Government Association (LGA) on 'Leadership Essentials: Effective Scrutiny' on 15 and 16 February 2024.

3.5.3 Members of the Committee were notified of the following LGA webinars which took place throughout the year:

- 'An introduction to scrutiny for councillors' - 19 January 2024
- 'Data and managing council performance' - 1 February 2024 and 1 March 2024
- 'Leading good governance and assurance' - 11 March 2024

4 **Next steps**

4.1 The Committee is recommended to refer the report together with the Overview and Scrutiny work programme to Full Council for noting.

5 **Other courses of action considered but rejected**

5.1 The Council's Constitution requires the Committee to report to Full Council on an annual basis. No other course of action is considered appropriate.

6 **Resource consequences**

6.1 There are no resource consequences.

7 **Legal considerations and implications**

7.1 The Council is required to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee under the Local Government Act 2000, as it has a Leader and Cabinet (executive) model of governance.

7.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required by the Council's Constitution to report annually to Full Council.

8 **Risk assessment**

8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides a check on the actions of the Cabinet.

9 **Procurement implications**

9.1 There are no procurement implications.

10. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

10.1 There are no equalities or human rights implications.

11 Environmental implications

11.1 There are no environmental implications.

12 Other considerations

12.1 There are no apparent GDPR or data protection consequences.

12.2 The Committee receives an annual crime and disorder update as part of its work programme.