

# OSCOM ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15



## **1.0 Welcome**

- 1.1 Welcome to the 2014/15 Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Test Valley Borough Council. This report provides the opportunity to review last year's activity and to highlight some of the key achievements.
- 1.2 If you would like to know more about the work of scrutiny at Test Valley then please get in touch. The Council actively encourages public participation and invites suggestions for future reviews. Contact details can be found on the web page [www.testvalley.gov.uk](http://www.testvalley.gov.uk)

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.0 In Test Valley Borough Council, overview and scrutiny is carried out by a single Committee of seventeen Councillors, whose membership is proportionate to the political party representation in the Council.
- 2.2 The role of OSCOM is necessarily flexible and wide-ranging, as the committee comments on most of the draft policy and strategic documents generated by the Council. The Committee may also review Cabinet decisions.
- 2.3 A key role for the Committee is the overview of the Council's governance arrangements, with reports on audit, risk management, complaints handling, budgetary control, safeguarding and equality featuring regularly in the OSCOM business calendar.
- 2.4 OSCOM reviews the performance of Council departments and makes recommendations to Cabinet on how efficiency and effectiveness can be enhanced as well as commenting on reports from external agencies, including the Hampshire Constabulary, Project Integra and the Andover Vision Board.
- 2.5 OSCOM initiates member-led reviews of the four corporate objectives. Lead Members are appointed annually to coordinate reviews for each objective. The Lead Members and their objectives are:  
  
Councillor Karen Hamilton – “a competitive local economy”  
Councillor Kath Tilling – “enhancing and preserving our natural and built environment”  
Councillor Brian Page – “improving access to a decent home”  
Councillor Phil Bundy – “encouraging all of our communities to reach their full potential”
- 2.6 In addition to the Lead Member reviews, Task and Finish Panels remain an option for OSCOM to perform scrutiny as and when required. In addition there are two standing panels; the Audit Panel and the Budget Panel, which meet regularly throughout the year, by virtue of the volume of information and statistics to be monitored. These panels act as subgroups of OSCOM, bringing any issues of concern to the attention of the parent committee.
- 2.7 OSCOM has a suggestion scheme to encourage members of the public to bring forward ideas for future reviews. The suggestion form is available on the Council's web site.

### **3.0 2014/2015 Report – Chairman’s View**

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to review and evaluate the work undertaken by the Test Valley Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny function in 2014/2015.
- 3.2 In my third year as OSCOM Chairman the Committee has met 10 times. The programme has been a full one, with a broad variety of topics covered. Some 20 agenda items have been reported in this period and all were debated thoroughly. Examples of the subjects covered are in Appendix 2.
- 3.3 This year the Committee was particularly active in external scrutiny and received briefings from the Hampshire Constabulary on staffing arrangements, Hampshire County Council on the roll out of rural broadband and the Head of Project Integra on the waste and recycling function.
- 3.4 The recent introduction of the informal round table discussions has been particularly effective when the Committee wanted to focus on a particular subject in detail but did not require a full report. These discussions have removed a large amount of paperwork from officers and even more time from the committee at the same time getting a better insight into the various topics.
- 3.5 The round table discussions have been open to all Members to attend and each meeting was publicised in the weekly members’ information bulletin. Topics for round table discussions over the last 12 months were the Housing Strategy, housing allocations policy, the role of the Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Safety.
- 3.6 The number of topics per year has been reduced by a third but still kept the same control over the items by looking at them regularly but not always annually.
- 3.7 A great deal of officer time has been saved by having written reports only and no officers in attendance. This is a trial and hopefully the Committee will approve the continued employment of this method for some items.
- 3.8 The system of Lead Members has developed over the year with Members asking to look at a much more focused view and not trying to cover a too wide a subject area, which did happen initially.

### **4.0 Lead Member Reports**

From May 2014 to May 2015, there have been 6 reports of Lead Member reviews, details of which follow.

#### **4.1 Environment Issues – Cllr Tilling**

##### **4.1.1 Recycling Stars campaign**

A review of the campaign, which had commenced in 2013, was conducted in January 2015. The focus of the campaign had been to increase public awareness of, and participation in, recycling in 9 targeted areas where recycling rates were medium-to-low. Initiatives had included the provision of information about recyclable and non-recyclable products and their disposal methods, public awareness sessions at schools and community events and the use of the Recycling Stars mascot,

competitions and social media to promote the campaign. The review demonstrated that in the 9 target areas, recycling rates had increased by up to 1.5%, whereas the overall recycling rate in Test Valley had fallen by a similar amount. On the basis of this very positive result, it was recommended that the campaign be rolled out across the Borough and its activities become part of the daily work programme of the Environmental Services Department. A temporary officer post would be created to assist with the roll-out process.

#### **4.1.2 Animal Welfare Policy and Responsible Dog Ownership**

A review of progress was undertaken in November 2014. The project was progressing slowly, as volunteer Parish Councils were being sought as partners in the project.

Valley Park Parish Council, which had become an early champion, was able to report good progress with raising public awareness of responsible dog ownership. Local initiatives had included:

- promoting public awareness at community events
- talks by the Animal Welfare Officer at local primary schools
- the provision of advice and information on the Parish Council website
- a competition for local school children to design posters to promote responsible dog ownership. The winning designs will be used for signage and bin stickers around the Parish
- a review of the provision of public litter bins and dog waste bins within the Parish

Future evaluation will include a community satisfaction survey and a review of the number of Parish-related incidents recorded by the Animal Welfare Service.

#### **4.1.3 The Role of the Member in Planning**

The report was approved by Cabinet in May 2014 and follow up action agreed. In December 2014, the Head of Planning Policy and Transport, the Head of Building and Development Control and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported back to Cabinet that 28 of the 32 recommendations of the OSCOM Panel report were to be implemented before the next Council term (i.e. May 2015). Many of the recommendations were associated with member training and these would be incorporated into the induction programme for new members and/or update sessions for existing members as appropriate. The Head of Planning Policy and Transport would report at a later date on the preferred mechanism for involving all members in planning policy development.

#### **4.1.4 Waste and Recycling: Review of Operational Policies**

As a consequence of the highly successful Recycling Stars campaign and the changes to the arrangements for bin collections introduced in 2013, the Head of Environmental Services undertook a review of the Council's operational policies for the management of waste and recycling in September 2014. These had been

reviewed last in 2007. Many of the policies were still valid but some updating was required and a new policy for the collection of waste from fetes was introduced.

## **4.2 Communities Issues – Cllr Bundy**

### **4.2.1 Review of Community Safety**

An OSCOM approved a review of the Council's responsibilities for Community Safety commenced in autumn 2014. A Task and Finish Panel was formed.

The review focused on the key areas of:

- The organisation of the Community Safety Team and their roles.
- The role of the Neighbourhood Wardens
- Public expectations of the Council in providing Community Safety.

The Panel is nearing its conclusion and is due to report back to Committee in June 2015.

### **4.2.2 Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults**

A follow up report was considered by OSCOM on the subject of Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults. The Committee decided that as much progress had been made to develop a robust policy the subject would be reviewed every 2 years. Regular training sessions would continue to be held as and when required and it would form part of the new Member induction process.

## **4.3 Housing Issues – Cllr Page**

### **4.3.1 Resourcing Affordable Housing**

The Committee reviewed the progress that had been made relating to the *Resourcing Affordable Housing* report in March 2014. A further update was requested in March 2015 but due to agenda pressures, this matter will be reported in the form of a briefing paper in April 2015. The key aspects included in the briefing paper are the Council's achievement in exceeding its target for the provision of new affordable homes, investigations carried out under the auspices of Project Enterprise, affordable housing policy changes in respect of the National Planning Policy Guidance, the integration of Eastleigh Borough Council into the Hampshire Home Choice Partnership, responding to the Welfare Reform changes and a community led approach in seeking to enable village affordable housing at Broughton. Information was also provided on the performance of Hampshire Home Choice, drawn from the quarterly report presented to the Hampshire Home Choice Board and subsequently included in the Members Bulletin.

During 2015 a new Housing Strategy will be compiled, together with an updated Homelessness Strategy and Home Energy Conservation Act action plan. These draft strategies and action plan will be considered by OSCOM Members during the latter half of this calendar year. Member final approval will be sought in December 2015.

## **4.4 Economy Issues – Councillors North/Hamilton**

### **4.4.1 Budget**

The Budget Panel played its part in the budget setting process by scrutinising the budget and fees & charges proposals and making recommendations to OSCOM to endorse.

It identified that as the Corporate Challenge process was finding less and less savings and as the revenue support grant continued to decrease there was a need to look at different ways of saving/generating money for quality services. The panel made recommendations to Oscom that it endorse the key aim set out in the MTFS that the Council works towards a position where it is not reliant on the Revenue Support Grant and to this end also endorse the introduction of the Enterprise and Innovation project.

The panel made strong recommendations to Oscom that it also endorse proposals to freeze both council tax and car parking charges for 2015/16. Oscom made these recommendations to the Cabinet.

### **4.4.2 A Competitive Local Economy**

A review of a competitive local economy was approved by OSCOM in April 2015. As the current Corporate Plan draws to a close, this review will look back over the last four years to understand the impact the Council has made in being able to support the local economy across Test Valley. It will review what has worked well and whether there are things we could do differently within the context of the new corporate plan once it has been approved by Council.

The key areas of focus of the review were:

- Practical initiatives that have been taken to support local businesses
- How the Council is working with stakeholders to increase the skills of local people
- How the council has been working with local stakeholders to support our town centres

## **5.0 Constitution Task & Finish Panel – Councillor Andersen**

5.1 A Task & Finish Panel was convened in August 2014 to undertake a thorough review of the Council's Constitution. The review focused on the Code of Conduct and arrangements for dealing with complaints.

The results of the review were reported to OSCOM where Members were able to make further comments prior to recommending the report to Cabinet. The revised Code of Conduct was approved by full Council on 15 May 2015.

## **6.0 Recognition and Thanks**

The work of the Committee is only feasible with the full support of the Officers and in particular Christine Hastings, the Senior Committee Officer, and the two Corporate Directors, Andrew Ferrier and Carol Moore. Special thanks to Councillor North who has also done an excellent job in supporting me as Vice-Chairman.

Thanks also to the Corporate Priority Lead Members in 2014/2015 - Councillors Bundy, Hamilton, Page and Tilling - for their continued support.

There are also some Members, including Portfolio Holders, who attend OSCOM regularly on a voluntary basis and often make a valuable contribution to the debates. In this respect, I would like to acknowledge the particular contributions of Councillors Giddings, Hawke and Stallard and my appreciation goes also to Councillors Giddings and Cooper who served as co-opted Members of the Audit Panel.

Finally I would like to thank all the Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their hard work throughout the year.

**Councillor Chris Lynn**  
**Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
**2015**