

OSCOM CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL BRIEFING 2015/16

Over the last three years, as Chairman of OSCOM, I have endeavoured to let the committee make all decisions without interference from me. This has worked exceptionally well with decisions regarding round table discussions, the work programme and other ideas such as training coming from the members.

This year we have had an influx of several 'new' councillors and others that have great experience, not necessarily within Test Valley and this has proved very beneficial. We asked each member to fill in a survey giving us their experience and interests and more importantly their expertise. This has proved invaluable in choosing panel members etc.

The position of the Chairman appointing the Lead Members has again worked well with Phil Bundy, Kath Tilling, Brian Page, Karen Hamilton and Dorothy Baverstock.

Since May 2015 the Committee has met 11 times only missing June 2015 as an official Committee however the evening was utilised as an informal meeting for OSCOM members to put forward suggestions and ideas for future discussion. There have been 44 items discussed including presentations by external partners by/on

- Andover Town Centre Manager,
- Community and Leisure Portfolio Holder
- Housing and Environment Portfolio Holder
- Local policing in Test Valley
- Hampshire Fire & Rescue

With further presentations for the rest of 2016 from the West Hants CCG and the Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Police and Crime Commissioner and the Andover Town Centre Manager.

This year has seen a busy time with panels with the usual panels of Audit and Budget looked after by the Vice Chairman. On top of these the Council Tax support panel was chaired by Dorothy Baverstock, Jim Neal took over a panel looking at Planning Control and Nick Adams King has a panel on the plans panel and planning in general. Jim and Nick decided that the two panels were getting closer in their deliberations and it would be better if Nick took over the two panels and did a report on overall planning including planning control. Phil had taken on the panel looking at the Wardens and when Phil was promoted to Portfolio Holder the panel was taken over by Dorothy.

Panels

Community Safety Panel

Set up on 18 February 2015 to review the responsibilities of TVBC Community Safety. The first phase of the review was completed and the report considered by OSCOM on 20 January 2016 where a number of recommendations were agreed and further work would be undertaken. OSCOM would also add an annual update on Community Safety to their 6 year work programme.

Council Tax Support Panel

Set up to review the current scheme and make recommendations for options to consult on changes to the scheme for 2017/18 in light of the welfare reforms and in particular the introduction of Universal Credit. The Panel concluded that the current level of support for 2017/18 continue and was reviewed in 12 months time once more claims for Universal Credit were in payment and the impact of the April 2016 Housing Benefit and Tax Credit changes were known.

Planning Control Panel/Planning Advisory and Planning Process Panel

Set up on 9 September 2015 to review the operation of the Planning Advisory Panel and Planning Committees and the role and operation of the Planning Control Committee.

Public Involvement Panel

Set up on 20 January 2016 to review public participation at OSCOM, the Borough Council more widely and its service delivery (in the sense of gathering public views).

The five-year plan has now been highly tuned and is working well. The round table discussion regarding Outside Bodies produced a new panel under David Drew, to look at whether we require outside participation and if so how much, when and who. Interestingly the panel had a split in whether there should be added third party items and what good they did other than informing members about what is going on. We have also had training on 'introduction to Overview & Scrutiny' and a training session in recent weeks run by INLOGOV on Questioning and Listening skills.

This year we intend to reinstate the successful OSCOM Away Day format to generate ideas for the future work programme and undertake further training. There was little discussion and we ended up with 5 round table discussions instead. Next year the Away Day has already been booked and the agenda will be discussed with the lead members, Chairman, Vice Chairman and Andy Ferrier and Caroline Lovelock. This should reduce the number of round table discussions.

Round Table discussions were designed to give members and officers time to discuss items outside the public view before deciding if they should be full items on the agenda giving officers more work in producing extensive paperwork. These have proved very interesting and reducing paperwork considerably.

Reviews

A Competitive Local Economy – Councillor Hamilton

As part of phase 2 of the review consideration would be given to the schemes we already provide to support business projects and initiatives in the community. All members are asked to provide information about schemes that work well in other areas that could be considered.

Members Role in Planning (part 2) – Councillor Tilling

The key issues raised would be picked up by the two newly established OSCOM Planning Panels

Animal Welfare Pilot Project – Councillor Tilling

Borough Council led workshops were held in September for Parish Councils to promote the approach developed by Councillor Tilling and endorsed by OSCOM.

The Committee have been extremely busy and seem to be getting busier, but we are looking at the various items to a much deeper extent albeit smaller chunks. This has proved to be more effective than the ‘scatter gun’ approach.

I hope the committee appreciate the ‘light touch’ of the chairman and the chance to add items for discussion without having to go through the usual grilling as to why etc. I believe that every idea brought to the work programme has been accepted by the committee and is now part of our work programme, or has been completed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for their interest. I believe almost everyone has turned up for meetings and participated in the questioning of our various officers, speakers, and portfolio holders. I really believe we are now in the position of being a ‘critical friend’ rather than trying to ‘catch out’ officers in their reports and in doing this we are getting far more co-operation.