

OSCOM: CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

The last twelve months has been a very difficult and challenging chapter, as members and officers have had to adjust to full time remote working.

We all know how important climate change is, TVBC appointed a climate change champion and OSCOM receive updates every six months.

Even though COVID-19 slowed us down, OSCOM has achieved many objectives. Throughout the various phases of the pandemic the Council has supported businesses, the town centre and our most vulnerable people in Test Valley.

Away Day

The OSCOM Away Day in 2020 was held in two parts. The first was a virtual meeting on 27 July 2020 where members discussed potential areas for review which could form part of the coming year's Work Programme. The aim of the session was to identify potential areas of interest and understand why they were important. Following prioritisation of potential review areas, a further away day session was held on 5 October 2020 to consider with lead officers the more detailed scoping of the prioritised areas that could form reviews for the year ahead. The session also included consideration of timetabling for the selected reviews, a review of current overview & scrutiny statutory guidance and training and development opportunities that the committee would like to pursue. The top 8 areas of review considered were;

- Covid-19 Recovery – regular reports to Committee meetings beginning on 21 January 2021.
- Local Plan –Members were invited to attend a series of seminars.
- Housing Provision – The HOS provides an annual briefing note in the summer of each year which updates members on the housing strategy and associated key issues. There is an opportunity to have a roundtable following the briefing note being circulated should any key issues emanating from the note require further discussion.
- Community Engagement and Communication – A member session on the role of the Community Councillor was held on Monday 16 November.
- Mental Health provision – A case study seminar was held on 9 December 2020
- Diversity in Employment and Skills – A round table discussion was held on Tuesday 10 November.
- Planning Enforcement – Training was held on Tuesday 24 November.
- Disability, Equality and Inclusion – An annual report would be presented to the Committee at its meeting in July.

Round Table discussions and Briefing Notes

4 Round Table discussions have been held during the year including:

Andover Vision
Climate Emergency Workshop
Mental Health
Corporate Action Plan Year 3

Briefing Notes continue to be circulated to OSCOM.

Items and Meetings

There have been 10 meetings held since the last Chairman's Annual Report. A number of items have been considered by OSCOM on their way to Cabinet and Council including Climate Emergency Action Plan, Review of Armed Forces Covenant and the Budget Strategy Update.

Outcomes:

- Climate Emergency Action Plan – OSCOM co-ordinated the preparation of the Climate Emergency Action Plan through seven cross-party member and officer work streams. The Action Plan was subsequently approved by Council on 10 June 2020. It identifies OSCOM as the main monitoring board, with six-monthly reports to be presented. Two such reports have been considered (September 2020 and March 2021) since the Council approval. These have enabled discussion on the delivery of the actions and implications of changing circumstances, such as arising through the Covid-19 pandemic. It is recognised that the Climate Emergency Action Plan is a living document that will need to be kept under review. The reports to OSCOM will help inform this process.
- Review of Armed Forces Covenant (**covered under panels**)

Further items discussed by the Committee included Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults, Annual Audit Report, Annual Report on Complaints, Work of the Test Valley Community Safety Group, Authority Monitoring Report and Voluntary Sector Grant Funding.

The Committee had received regular updates on the Covid-19 community response and recovery process.

Presentations

A number of presentations were received during the year from both internal and external presenters, including:

- **Local Policing** – Cl Thorne attended to explain the comparisons for offences from April 2019 to March 2020 and took questions from members on fines, responses to 101 calls, numbers and funding of PCs and PCSOs, Street Rangers, Speed Limits, Travellers, Drug Use, Recruitment of Police Officers and County Lines.
- **Finance Portfolio Holder**, Councillor Flood presented an overview of the portfolio which included Property and Asset Management, Revenues, Finance and Project Enterprise. The presentation also covered key issues and challenges for each service, impact of Covid-19 on the Council's budget, impact on the Leisure contract, work done to support our communities, Government support and reserves position.
- **Corporate Portfolio Holder Presentation**, Councillor Tasker gave an overview of her portfolio which comprises of Legal and Democratic Services, IT and the Customer Service Unit. The presentation highlighted areas of work undertaken during the past year and highlighted project and focus in the coming year.
- **Community and Leisure Portfolio Holder**, Councillor Jeffrey presented an overview of his portfolio which comprises parks, countryside, sport and play, cemeteries, arts and culture, communities and volunteers.
- **Economic Development Portfolio Holder**, Councillor Drew presented an interim update of the Economic Development Strategy which went to Cabinet in January 2021. This reflected the economic emergency relating to the pandemic.
- **Planning Portfolio Holder**, Councillor Adams King gave a presentation on nutrient neutrality including its impact on determining planning applications and managing the process of them being considered at committee once the nutrient neutrality issue has been resolved.
- **Environment Portfolio Holder: Councillor Johnston gave a presentation on** specific areas requested by the Committee on recycling and garden waste collections, an understanding of the pending changes in national policy on waste collections and a broad outline of any changes.

Panels

Budget Panel - The panel, led by Cllr Lodge, met three times during the course of the year.

In addition to its usual role of reviewing the Medium Term Financial Strategy and other budget development matters, this year the Budget Panel also focused on the impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on the Council's finances. This focus included scrutiny of the additional costs the Council has had to meet, the income that it has lost and how that compared to the government support that has been provided. It also considered the proposals for how the Council might meet the expected deficit.

The outcomes of these Panel meetings were recommendations to OSCOM that enabled the committee to make its own recommendations to Cabinet, helping to deliver a robust and balanced budget for the Council in the 2021/22 financial year.

Future of Health Provision in Andover and Romsey The panel was led by Councillor Baverstock. The findings from the review focused on the role that the Council and specifically the Planning process had in supporting health provision and identifying where improvements could be made. The panel made a number of recommendations to encourage proactive and effective communication with the local Clinical Commissioning Group and support through the planning process and the provision of health and leisure facilities. The panel also welcomed the development of shared evidence and justification for the requirements for health facilities and their delivery. The local health forum and health and social care committee should be monitored regularly through six monthly feedback reports from Members supported by officers and communication with Hampshire Together and engagement in the consultation process in its running of the surrounding areas and in particular in respect of new hospital provision.

The panel also recommended undertaking a review of parking standards at and transport to hospital and health centres to inform the revised Local Plan.

Responding to the pandemic has been the primary focus for colleagues in the health sector. As the Council moves forward with drafting the next local plan and delivering housing allocations the importance of continuing good communication will help ensure that health facilities are delivered that our communities need.

Review of Armed Forces Covenant The panel was led by Councillor Matthews which reviewed the Armed Forces Covenant with particular reference to Test Valley's obligations, commitment and identifying best practice. The review found that TVBC are currently meeting their promise made under the Armed Forces Community Covenant however there were opportunities identified to improve communication with partner organisations and to lead on a more inclusive approach to supporting the Armed Forces communities within Test Valley. The recommendations made by OSCOM were to support these findings and propose ways to start engaging in the opportunities identified. Two recommendations were made to and agreed by Cabinet on 10 February 2021.

The first Civilian Military Forum (CMF) was held on Friday 19 March which saw fourteen partners attend from a range of groups supporting Armed Forces communities across the borough. Partners discussed what the CMF should look to achieve for the military community, veterans and the groups they represent. Focussed discussions were initiated on 'health' and 'business & transition' for the Armed Forces community.

The first stages of a single point of contact webpage are in progress, the initial webpage will be established to outline key contacts and sign posting. The longer term ambition is to develop a programme of user led research and testing to establish a future proof webpage, led by user insights.

The work of OSCOM has ensured that the background work in launching the CMF and webpage have been, and will be delivered in an evidence led way. This in turn has supported meaningful discussions and action planning for the group.

A clear onward path has been established with good partnership links that will continue to strengthen over time and support the delivery of tangible outcomes for the Armed Forces community. Ensuring they are not disadvantaged when accessing services & support in Test Valley.

Review of the informal process for selection of OSCOM Chairman The panel was led by Councillor C Dowden. The purpose of the review was to identify if there were opportunities to refine the current informal process to select the proposed candidate for Chair of OSCOM for consideration at Annual Council. The review had focused on how the informal process can enable members to learn more about prospective candidates and how they will meet the qualities of the role description and what they will bring to the role of Chair if selected.

Following OSCOM's recommendation, an enhanced process will now take place ahead of Annual Council in May 2021. This also include a roundtable session in which all councillors are invited to attend where candidates will be able to make a short presentation on why they would like to be considered for the role ahead of the secret ballot.

Review of Outside Bodies The panel was led by Councillor C Dowden. The purpose of the review was to undertake a review of the arrangements in place for member's representation on outside bodies. This review was seeking to understand the added value that having members as representatives on these bodies brings to ensure that these organisations and council gain mutual benefit from this.

The Panel is due to report to OSCOM in April with a focus on how members of outside bodies can report back on the work of the organisations they are supporting in a more effective and meaningful way.

Conclusion

With the challenging financial environment for local government continuing, the scrutiny of performance and financial information will continue to be a core aspect of the committee work.

This report gives a flavour of the varied work undertaken by the members of OSCOM and reflects the diligence and hard work over this very stressful times.

Of course none of this would be possible without the dedication and commitment of members and officers throughout the year with particular thanks to my Vice Chairman, Councillor Lodge and Andy Ferrier, James Moody and Caroline Lovelock.

Zilliah Brooks
Chairman
Overview and Scrutiny Committee