

OSCOM: CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

The last twelve months have been professionally very satisfying for the Members and Officers involved with Test Valley Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Several one-day courses were taken up by Members and Officers at the Centre for Public Scrutiny in order to increase their effectiveness. In particular it was pleasing to see that the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge Review was very complimentary about the positive role that OSCOM plays in the work of the Council. These are outlined in some detail below.

Away Day

The OSCOM Away Day was held on 6 July 2018 in the Annexe, Crosfield Hall, Romsey. The day started with an introduction by the Chairman and then the Leader spoke to Members about collaborative working with Cabinet. Sessions were also held on the Corporate Plan Development and the LGA Peer Challenge where Members were asked to consider the Council's strengths and areas for future development.

During the afternoon Members split into groups to help shape the Work Programme for the forthcoming year. Members also looked at how OSCOM worked and how they could continue to develop the way in which they worked.

Round Table discussions and Briefing Notes

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

- Andover Vision
- Corporate Plan
- Future of the High Street
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Review of Community Toilet Scheme

Three Briefing Notes were circulated to OSCOM Members in the last year on Affordable Housing, Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults, and Annual Review and Risk Management

Items and Meetings

There have been 11 meetings held since the last Chairman's Annual Report, and 23 items of business discussed. A number of items have been considered by OSCOM on their way to Cabinet and Council including review of Planning Committees, Drug Intervention Services in Test Valley, Public Involvement, review of Council Tax Support and the new Corporate Plan 2019-23.

The LGA Peer Challenge Feedback Report highlighted the strengths of Test Valley's Scrutiny arrangements and the good working relationships between Members and Officers. The peer team had made specific reference to the effective way in which Overview and Scrutiny developed its work programme and focussed on key issues. The Report also noted that the Task and Finish Groups 'undertook work with purpose', and recognised the proactive and beneficial work OSCOM was undertaking with Cabinet to consider key issues on the Cabinet's forward plan at an earlier stage.

Presentations

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

- Corporate Action Plan – The Leader gave a presentation which reviewed how the Council was delivering on its ambitions as set out in the Corporate Plan 2015-19, *Investing in Test Valley*.
- Councillor Drew, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Tourism gave a presentation on his Portfolio.
- Chief Inspector Thorne briefed the committee on local Policing in Test Valley, supported by Inspector Taylor.

Panels

As well as the permanent OSCOM Panels of the **Budget Panel** (led by Councillor Cockaday) and the **Audit Panel** (led by Councillor Neil), the following temporary Task and Finish Panels have been progressed:

Planning – This Panel was led by Councillor Hibberd. Its aim was to review the role and operation of the Planning Control Committee and the two area Planning Committees, to gain a better understanding of how they operated and produce recommendations for their future role, structure and composition. Recommendations from the Panel were passed on to the Planning Advisory Service for consideration during their review of Planning Committees in October 2018.

Council Tax Support Scheme – This Panel was led by Councillor Baverstock and was set up to review the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20 and beyond. The main area of focus was to consult on working age claimants in the Borough, the level of support in light of the Government programme to introduce Universal Credit, and the financial effects for the Council and residents.

The Panel made recommendations to OSCOM on 21 March 2018 on a number of options. Following consultation three recommendations were agreed at OSCOM and Cabinet and subsequently agreed at Council on 23 January 2019.

Parking (Car Park and Streets) – This Panel was led by Councillor Baverstock. The main areas of focus were parking provision and standards on new developments and public car parks, and regulations/guidance covering parking of commercial vehicles in residential areas. OSCOM considered the Panel's final report on 20 March 2019 which focussed on provision, standards and location, and enforcement. The Panel recommended several actions aimed at improving car parking for residents and visitors to Andover and Romsey.

The Future of Hospitals in Andover and Romsey – A Panel was established to look at the future of hospitals in Andover and Romsey and their survival/development. The Panel has yet to start work.

The Future of the High Street – Councillor Hurst led on a piece of work to look at whether Council policies contained in strategic documents such as the Local Plan enable the future development of High Streets in Test Valley, and what other authorities are doing. A Workshop was held on 5 March 2019 with keynote speaker Professor Christopher Turner, Chairman of the National Association of Business Improvement Districts. Views and evidence were gathered from stakeholders on likely future developments for retail and non-retail, examining good practice from elsewhere and considering what key documents and policies, (such as the new Local Plan, Corporate Plan and Corporate Action Plan), can do to respond.

Armed Forces Covenant and Test Valley Housing Services – Councillor Borg-Neal and Councillor Hamilton led on a Panel to look at the Armed Forces Covenant and how it related to the Housing Services provided by the Council.

Work Programme

The Chairman led a review of the Committee's 4-year Work Programme to see if anything needed to be added, studying the level and periodicity of reporting, and progress of strategic projects. A number of changes were made and Portfolio Holder presentations on the work of their portfolios were scheduled in throughout the period.

Conclusion

It has been a good year for OSCOM, and I wish all those associated with it continued success. My particular thanks are due to Andrew Ferrier and Caroline Lovelock, whose experience and cooperative willingness have been the bedrock of OSCOM's success, and also to the Vice-Chairman and all Panel leaders who have done the 'heavy lifting' in driving forward the Committee's work programme.

Ian Jeffrey
Chairman
Overview and Scrutiny Committee