

Overview and Scrutiny Chairman's Annual Report 2024

Introduction

Welcome to this summary of the main activities that have been undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023/24.

Over the course of the year, the committee has contributed to policy development and has engaged with external partners on key issues affecting communities in Test Valley. It has also undertaken key scrutiny activities such as being a critical friend to cabinet, playing an active role in the development of the council's budget and monitoring the delivery of the Corporate Action Plan.

The Committee sets its focus for the year through the development and management of its work programme. Each year an away day is held which provides the opportunity for members to identify the issues and topics for the committee for the year ahead. This year the committee held its annual Away Day on Saturday 16 July 2023 at Broughton Village Hall.

The topics detailed below formed the basis of the work programme for the year following a process of prioritisation.

Topic	Corporate priority link(s)
Water pollution	Environment
Regeneration: Progress on Andover Vision and Romsey Masterplan	Prosperity, Sustainability, Connection
Anti-social Behaviour	Connection, inclusion
Supporting improvement and sustainability for listed buildings	Environment
Youth Services and amenities	Inclusion, Connection
Cost of Living	Inclusion, Connection
Participation and engagement of communities	Connection
Climate Action in the Community	Connection, Environment
Economic Development	Prosperity

Overview and Scrutiny undertakes its work in a number of different ways which includes:

- Reports and presentations to the main meeting of the committee
- Task and Finish Panels to undertake detailed reviews of topics.
- Roundtables which provide an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the issues relating to a topic and engage with relevant experts.
- Scrutiny of Cabinet portfolios

In addition to the nine public meetings of the committee, there were also nine roundtable sessions and three task and finish panels. During the year, three members of the Cabinet took part in scrutiny sessions with the committee.

Review of the work of the committee

Cabinet Portfolio Reviews

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed three portfolio areas during 2023/24. The committee has sought to focus in on specific aspects of each portfolio with questions towards future strategic issues, including priorities and actions to mitigate future risks.

Community, Leisure and Tourism, Cllr Swain: This portfolio review focused on Tourism and provided an overview of the current position within Test Valley. It explored the strategic approach being taken by the council to support this important aspect of the Test Valley economy and how the council works with partners through the use of physical assets such as the Tourist Information Centre and promotion of the borough's offer through marketing and communication.

The Committee reflected on the strategic landscape for tourism both within the borough and beyond as part of the wider Hampshire offer. Members explored how the council could continue to play its part through its strategic commitments which will be delivered through the new Economic Development Strategy, making use of new investment such as the Rural Prosperity Fund and through proposed review of tourism that was due to commence.

Recycling and Environmental Services, Cllr Drew: This review focused on the current and future waste collection services within the borough of which there are proposed changes as a result of the Environment Act. In June 2022 plans were approved by the council to roll out a new waste and recycling system, however, in October 2023 the Government position changed towards implementing a 'simpler recycling' strategy. The Committee explored the implications of this and how that would align with the commitments set out within the corporate plan.

The Committee also reflected on the wider benefits the Council gains as a result of having an in-house service which means it can be reactive, dynamic, adaptable and resilient. It also provides resilience in responding to change and helping to support other services within the Council during emergencies such as flooding.

Leader's Annual review of the Corporate Action Plan, Cllr P North. Each year the committee undertakes a review of the Corporate Action Plan which sits within the Leader of the Council's portfolio. The Corporate Action Plan (CAP) is the delivery document of the Council's Corporate Plan and sets out in detail the programmes and projects the council will deliver against its strategic priorities. The review covered each of the projects that form the CAP and focused on key issues such as:

- The timings and delivery of regeneration projects
- Progress against the council's climate commitments

- Opportunities to strengthen partnership working with health.
- Ongoing work to address housing needs and preventing homelessness.

Task and Finish Panels

Budget Panel, Cllr Neal - The Budget Panel met three times during 2023/24 reviewing the revenue outturn position for 2022/23 and considered the budget setting process for 2024/25. The Panel also considered the revenue budget position for the first six months of the 2023/24 financial year, a review of proposed fees and charges and a summary of the main assumptions included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, including potential options for closing the budget gap. Members of the Panel worked alongside the Portfolio Holder and the Council's Head of Finance and Revenues during this period and endorsed the budget forecast and the fees and charges proposed for 2024/25.

Regeneration Panel, Cllr Gwynne – Realising the ambitions of the Masterplans for Andover and Romsey form a key part of the Council's strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Plan. The Committee established the Regeneration Panel to enable Councillors to further develop their understanding of the approach being taken to delivering regeneration, the shared learning from Andover and Romsey and for it to be an opportunity for the panel to offer feedback that will support the council in delivering these key strategic programmes of work. The Panel continues its work and is anticipated to deliver its conclusions in 2024.

Council Tax Support Panel, Cllr MacDonald – A panel was established to undertake a review of the council's current Council Tax Support Scheme which it is required to have in place to assist residents with their liability to pay Council Tax. The Panel is currently working with the Head of Finance and Revenues and with the Portfolio Holder for Finance to develop options for a new scheme which would be implemented for 2024/25. The Panel is due to report its initial findings in July 2024 and will make recommendations to Cabinet for a draft scheme which will then be consulted on.

Roundtables

Roundtables are a way in which members of Overview and Scrutiny are able to get into a more of a detailed discussion on key issues. This year the committee held nine of these sessions which focused on the following topics:

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| • Andover Vision | July 2023 |
| • Corporate Action Plan Year one proposals | August 2023 |
| • Tourism Review | November 2023 |
| • Planning Enforcement | January 2024 |
| • Anti-Social Behaviour | February 2024 |
| • Economic Development Strategy | March 2024 |
| • Youth Services/Amenities | April 2024 |
| • Corporate Action Plan Year two proposals | March 2024 |
| • Water Pollution in Test Valley | April 2024 |

Engaging with Partner organisations

During the year the committee engaged with a number of partner organisations on issues aligned to the corporate priorities. This included:

Local Policing - The Chief Inspector for Test Valley gave an overview of local policing within communities across the borough and advised of changes that were being made as part of implementing a new geographical area model that would include a renewed focus on Neighbourhood Policing.

Cost of Living – The Chief Executive of the Citizens Advice for Test Valley contributed to a joint presentation with the TVBC Community Manager to provide the Committee with an update on the partnership approach that had been taken through the Test Valley Partnership to address the cost-of-living crisis. This included targeted support that had been provided to organisations who are vital in supporting vulnerable households alongside providing easier to access help and support through an information hub.

Water Pollution – Representatives from the Environment Agency, Southern Water and the two Pan-Parish partnerships joined the committee to explore the issues relating to water pollution in rivers and to address issues of water capacity that impact on communities in Test Valley. This enabled the committee to gain a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies and provided an opportunity for discussion around proposed investment plans, local monitoring of pollution levels and how communities could work with both the Environment Agency and Southern Water.

Conclusion

With this being the first year of the new council following the elections in 2023, it has been an opportunity for the new members of the committee to learn about the work of overview and scrutiny and be able to make some important contributions to the work of the council.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my second experience of chairing Overview and Scrutiny and I look forward to seeing how the committee continues to progress over the coming year and I wish the new Chairman every success.

Ian Jeffrey
TVBC Councillor for Mid-Test Ward
TVBC Member Champion for the Armed Forces
Chairman Overview and Scrutiny Committee