

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.

The LGA Peer Challenge and the way we do business

OSCOM played an important and proactive role throughout the Peer Challenge. Members of the Committee supported the development of the Position Statement as part of a dedicated roundtable and met with members of the peer team during their site visit in October.

The feedback report from the LGA highlighted the strengths of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements and the good working relationships between members. The peer team made specific reference to the effective way in which OSCOM develops its work programme through an annual away day and by focusing on key priority issues for the area. In particular, issues such as economic development and affordable housing were notable examples

The feedback report also noted that OSCOM's task and finish groups "undertake work with purpose" and drew on recent examples such as the work of the Communications and Procurement Panel and the Public Involvement Panel.

There was also recognition of the proactive and beneficial work OSCOM is undertaking with Cabinet to consider key issues on the Cabinet's forward plan such as the Corporate Plan and budget at an earlier stage.

OSCOM has continued to build upon the positive remarks made by the LGA and a new work tracking process has recently been adopted. Additionally, the recent reviews covering the Future of the High Street and Disabilities have piloted new scrutiny methods. This has included involving experts and members of the public in focus group type work, as originally contemplated by the Public Involvement Panel. Additionally the disability review process used a form of “action learning” in the formulation of its recommendations.

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.

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, in so far as they related to the function and structure of the area planning committees, were referred to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) for consideration as part of its review of the Council's Planning Committees in October 2018. These recommendations were that the Planning Control Committee comprise 14 Members (The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of each of the two Area Committees plus the Portfolio Holder and nine members to balance of northern and southern members as far as possible) as from Annual Council in May 2019.

It was also proposed that the area planning committees continue as currently. The Planning Advisory Service disregarded recommendations from OSCOM's Panel and put forward contrary recommendations. The Cabinet considered the PAS review and agreed their recommendations, which were presented to Council and supported by a majority vote at the full Council, in April 2019.

The recommendations were, to abolish the existing Development Management Committee system of Northern Area Planning Committee, Southern Area Planning Committee and Planning Control Committee.

To replace those committees by two politically balanced Development Management Committees; Northern Area and Southern Area, with each Committee comprising thirteen Members. It will be reviewed after a year of operation.

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 started work, however due to staffing changes at Romsey Hospital there has been some delay in undertaking the scoping for the Panel.

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. The Panel's recommendations were submitted to Cabinet on 22 May 2019.

Disability Review - Councillor Hamilton led a programme of work that sought to explore how the Council can further develop appropriate mechanisms for reviewing equality issues, as part of an evidence-led approach to decision making. The primary focus of the review was to consider issues relating to disability. As part of the process, two disability focus groups, in the north and south of the Borough, were held as part of the community engagement programme for developing the Council's new Corporate Plan in summer 2018. The purpose of these sessions was to gain an insight from people with disabilities on the broad range of issues that groups and residents from across the Borough were being consulted on during this period. This was not a targeted survey; it was about creating an appropriate inclusive mechanism in which people with a range of disabilities could take part. Although the primary focus for the review was disability matters, many of the lessons learned will be utilised when seeking to review a wide range of equality issues.

Armed Forces Covenant and Test Valley Housing Services – Councillor Borg-Neal and Councillor Hamilton will lead on a Panel to look at the Armed Forces Covenant and how it related to the Housing Services provided by the Council. Scoping for the panel commenced following the Local Elections.

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