

# REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

**This Annual Report reviews Overview and Scrutiny activities in 2019/20.**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has a number of roles in its terms of reference:
  - scrutiny of the decision-making process;
  - monitoring the Council's performance;
  - operating as the "Audit Committee" of the Council;
  - operating as the "Crime and Disorder 'Scrutiny' Committee";
  - supporting the strategic development of policy proposed by the Executive;
  - reviewing issues of concern to local people through Councillor calls for Action;
  - "Call in" of Executive decisions;
  - participating in Joint Scrutiny arrangements in Surrey;
  - monitoring and scrutinising the activities of other organisations that impact on residents and businesses in the borough;
- 1.2. The Committee consists of 15 Members and establishes Review Panels, where required, to undertake detailed work on a 'task and finish' basis. These Panels mostly consist of five members. Panel recommendations are presented to the Committee, the Executive and/or Council.
- 1.3. In 2019/20 the advance questioning procedure was used in advance of each Committee meeting. This procedure provides Members with more time to research issues and prepare questions. It also enables Officers, Members and external guests to prepare more detailed responses.
- 1.4. The Committee continued the arrangement of holding Executive Members to account for their responsibility areas by inviting three Executive Members responsible for the service areas of Organisation, Place and People to present their objectives, recent achievements, current challenges and future priorities to the Committee.
- 1.5. The ModGov website and Web Library provided Members with access to information to support their role and includes:
  - performance information including Internal Audit review reports;
  - presentations received at its meetings;
  - Scrutiny Panel reports;
- 1.6. The Membership, Terms of Reference of the Committee and attendance at the Committee and its Panels are given in Annex 2. The March and April meetings of the Committee were cancelled due to the Council's emergency response to Covid-19 but virtual meetings started in June 2020.

## **2. Holding the Executive to Account**

- 2.1. The Executive Members and/or Management Team representatives supported the Committee's scrutiny activities and attended meetings of the Committee and Scrutiny Panels throughout the year.
- 2.2. The Committee held the Leader and Executive Members to account through:
  - the attendance of the Leader, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders at the Committee or its Panels to explain how the Executive proposed to deliver its plans and strategies; and
  - Portfolio Holders presenting their objectives to the Committee.
  - Reviewing a number of proposed Executive decisions and providing commentary to the Executive where judged appropriate.
- 2.3. Councillors M. Brunt, Leader of the Council, and T. Schofield, Portfolio Holder for Finance, attended the Budget Scrutiny Panel, to support the Panel's scrutiny. These councillors also attended the Committee meeting at which the report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel was received and considered, to further support this process and respond to questions from the Committee.
- 2.4. Councillor R. Ashford, Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships, attended the Committee's annual 'Crime and Disorder' meeting in January to support the scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership.
- 2.5. The Committee reviewed developing Council strategy areas, including the Council's developing Housing Strategy.
- 2.6. It also received updates on the Council's forthcoming Corporate Plan 2020-25 and Housing Strategy as part of briefings from members of the Executive.
- 2.7. The Committee considered its work plan for 2020/21, supported by discussion between the Chair of the Committee, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive of the Council. This was supported by the Committee at its meeting in February and recommended to the Executive and Council.

## **3. Executive Member Objectives**

- 3.1. The following Executive Members reviewed their objectives and service areas to the Committee (in chronological order).
- 3.2. In October, the Committee received a briefing from two of the three Organisation Portfolio Holders about their Organisation service areas and their portfolios.
- 3.3. Councillor T. Schofield, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance gave an overview of Finance and Investment and Companies. This included Service and Financial Planning, Treasury Management, Capital Investment Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2020-25 and asset management review. He also gave an oversight of the investments and companies such as Horley Business Park investment approach and other work overseen by the Commercial Ventures Executive Sub-Committee.
- 3.4. Councillor V. Lewanski, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Direction and Governance, provided a briefing on Council's Corporate and Governance areas including Legal, performance and project reporting, HR and organisational development, ICT and customer contact.
- 3.5. Councillor M. Brunt, Leader of the Council, provided a briefing on the work of the Council in July 2019 and January 2020, including leadership priorities, Council

initiatives and projects, future challenges facing the Council, and engagement between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.6. In January, Councillor Mr. R. Ashford, Executive Member for Community Partnerships, who gave an update on the community safety work of the Council, including its work with the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership and to address matters such as anti-social behaviour, modern slavery, and domestic abuse.
- 3.7. In January, the Committee received a briefing from the People Portfolio Holders on the People service areas.
- 3.8. Councillor G. Knight, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits, gave an overview of the work on housing services and revenue, benefits and fraud. This included work on the housing strategy, homelessness prevention, affordable homes, Cromwell Road and Pitwood Park, collecting Council Tax revenue and business rates in the Borough.
- 3.9. Councillor A. Horwood, Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing and Intervention gave an overview of work on the Family Support Programme, the Refugee Resettlement Programme and the Money Support Team. In the Wellbeing area, he reported on the increase in visitor numbers to the three leisure centres and the refurbished cinema at the Harlequin theatre.
- 3.10. Councillor R. Ashford, Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships, gave an update of the voluntary and community safety services, community development work and an update on the three Community Centres in Banstead, Woodhatch and Horley that were being brought in-house.
- 3.11. In February, the Committee received a briefing from the Place Portfolio Holders on the Place service areas.
- 3.12. Councillor R. Biggs, Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy, provided an update to the Committee, on the Council's work within the Planning Policy portfolio which included the adoption of the Development Management Plan (DMP) in September 2019, updates on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and the Core Strategy Review.
- 3.13. Councillor E. Humphreys, Portfolio Holder for Place and Economic Prosperity, provided a briefing on the Council's work to support economic prosperity, including an overview of business trends in the borough and the work of the business prosperity team to support business and the delivery of social value in the borough. He gave an update on Horley Business Park, Gatwick/Heathrow Airports, local business support, Marketfield Way, Horley Master Plan and Preston regeneration. He also updated Members on the Reigate and Banstead Business Awards and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Local Industrial Strategy.
- 3.14. Councillor N. Bramhall, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, provided a briefing on her portfolio areas which included services provided such as refuse, recycling and cleansing, regulatory services, fleet management and greenspaces. She set out current focus and future challenges including the environmental sustainability strategy.
- 3.15. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to examine in detail the work of Executive Portfolio Holders, to test the relationship of this work to the Council's corporate objectives and to scrutinise the performance of the Council's services.

#### **4. Crime and Disorder**

- 4.1. The Committee again held an annual meeting as part of its Crime and Disorder responsibility. The Committee scrutinised the activities of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership (ESCSP) in 2019/20.
- 4.2. The Surrey Police Borough Commander for Reigate and Banstead was invited to attend the meeting as a key community safety partner and supported the Committee in its scrutiny activity.
- 4.3. The Committee investigated in questioning a wide range of community safety issues and explored the current activity areas and priority concerns of the ESCSP, the work of the Police in the borough, and areas in which the Council, ESCSP and Police could best work together. The discussion considered the importance of cooperation and information sharing among a range of matters.

## **5. Performance Monitoring**

- 5.1. The Committee continued to monitor the Council's performance. This included reviewing the following information:
  - Service Performance Management (quarterly);
  - Revenue and Capital Management (quarterly);
  - Risk Management (six monthly updates);
  - performance against the Five Year Plan 2015-20 (annually).
- 5.2. The detailed information on performance variances and responses to Member questions was provided in the e-Members Room and on the Modern Gov website in support of this activity. More detailed information on service performance was also available from the e-Members Room and on the Modern Gov website.
- 5.3. The advance questioning procedure was used to support quarterly performance reports, and the Chief Executive, in regularly supporting meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was able to answer additional questions on performance. Where the Chief Executive was unable to attend, an appropriate Management Team representative attended to provide continuity of support to the Committee.
- 5.4. The quarterly reports showed that the Council continued to perform well. Any comments from the Committee on performance were reported to the Executive for their consideration.

## **6. Key Performance Indicators 2020/21**

- 6.1 The Committee set up a cross-party Member working group to ensure that the Council's performance measures remained robust and fit for purpose for 2020/21.
- 6.2 An updated reporting template ensured the indicators included enhanced narrative about each indicator. Members received the draft Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2020/21 at their meeting in February.

## **7. Audit**

## **Internal Audit**

- 7.1. There were 15 Internal Audit reviews undertaken by the Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP) (the Council's Internal Auditors) in the 2019/20 period up to the end of March, and final reports for all of these audits have been issued. Each final report is provided in full on the e-Members Room and on the Modern Gov website. Members were invited to submit advance questions to Committee meetings on a quarterly basis. Quarterly internal audit progress reports were provided to the Committee which provided assurance that the audit plan was being delivered and management actions completed. In June 2020, the Committee is due to consider SIAP's Annual Internal Audit Report for the year ended 31 March 2020, which provided a positive opinion on the overall adequacy of and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes.
- 7.2. As delegated in the Council's Constitution, the Committee considered the proposed Internal Audit Charter and Audit Plan for 2019/20 at the March 2019 meeting of the Committee.
- 7.3. In March 2019, the Committee considered the strategic risks for 2019/20, which underpins the Council's internal audit approach, and had the opportunity to make any comments to the Executive.

## **External Audit**

- 7.4. The Committee received the annual report for the 2019/20 financial year from the External Auditors (Deloitte) in September 2019.
- 7.5. The Committee were pleased to note that Deloitte had been generally positive and that no major issues had been identified by the auditors. This confirmed that the Council had proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The minor issues identified were noted to be being monitored and addressed.

## **8. Strategy and Policy Development**

- 8.1. The Committee commented on the following draft strategies and policies:
  - Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20;
  - Housing Delivery Strategy 2020-25;
  - Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20-23/24 (through the budget scrutiny process);
  - The Council's outline Capital Investment Strategy 2019/20;
  - Companies Performance Update reports.
- 8.2. The Committee also received information on the Corporate Plan 2020-25 and Housing Strategy 2020-25 as part of briefings provided by Executive Members.
- 8.3. The Committee also received and considered the Calendar of Meetings for 2020/21.

## **9. Review Panels**

- 9.1. The Committee had two Review Panels this year, as detailed below.

**Budget Scrutiny Review Panel** (Chair: Councillor N. Harrison)

- 9.2. The Budget Scrutiny Review Panel reviewed the Service & Financial Planning (Provisional Budget) 2020/21 report.
- 9.3. The Panel undertook a very robust review and considered over 100 advance questions along with further questions and comments that were raised within the meeting.
- 9.4. The Panel recognised and appreciated the significant amount of work that had gone into preparing the service and financial plans for 2020/21 and concluded that the budget proposals were sound, balanced and achievable. However, concern was expressed that the overall increase in the Revenue budget is unsustainable in the long term, unless additional revenue income sources are brought on stream.
- 9.5. The Committee supported the conclusions of the Panel on the provisional budget and provided its comments to the Executive for their final consideration of the Budget. The Committee considered the final budget proposals of the Executive for 2020/21 and the capital programme 2020 to 2025. There was a call on reserves to balance the budget, but it was anticipated that the forecast underspend from 2019/20 would fund the majority of this. On this basis, the Committee was supportive of this realistic approach to budget planning.

**LDF Scrutiny Review Panel** (Chair: Councillor P. Harp)

- 9.6 Following the adoption of the Development Management Plan (DMP) in September 2019, a public consultation was undertaken from 6 January to 8 February 2020 on three Supplementary Planning Documents. These were: Draft Affordable Housing, Barn Supplementary and Farm Conversions, Historic Parks and Gardens and Reigate Shop Front Design. The LDF Scrutiny Review Panel was set up to consider the public consultation responses.

**10. 'Call-in' of Executive Decisions**

- 10.1. No 'Call-In's were received during 2019/20.

**11. Joint Scrutiny Arrangements in Surrey**

- 11.1. Though the Committee has the facility to undertake joint scrutiny, no such reviews took place in 2019/20. The facility will be utilised in the future should a topic be identified that meets the criteria for collaborative scrutiny.

**12. Community Call for Action**

- 12.1 No Community Calls for Action were recorded during 2019/20.

**13. Operational arrangements**

- 13.1. As the Chair of the Committee, I had regular meetings with the Chief Executive which focused on delivering the Committee's work programme. I am particularly appreciative of this involvement and for the support of the Chief Executive at our meetings.
- 13.2. I am equally grateful for the support provided by the Leader of the Council, with whom I met to discuss the work of the Executive and the work of the Committee, and how these could continue to support and complement each other. In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Procedure Rules, the Committee's work programme for 2020/21 was discussed with the Leader.

#### **14. Conclusion**

- 14.1. The Committee recognises that the Council continues to focus on outcomes for residents and businesses and is responding well to continuing financial pressures and managing its processes in an efficient manner. The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has maintained a streamlined approach in 2019/20 and in developing its work programme for 2020/21 has sought to continue this.
- 14.2. Nevertheless, the Committee has worked hard on behalf of the Council and community in scrutinising the Council's decision-making process, holding Executive Members to account, and monitoring the Council's performance, as well as contributing to strategic policy development. All this activity adds great value to the Council's processes and assists the Council to uphold a consistently high level of service.
- 14.3. Throughout this year, effort has been made to enhance the relationship between the Committee and the Executive, and thus to increase the effectiveness of the Committee's activities in support the Council. I am appreciative of the approach of the Leader and the Executive in supporting this improvement, and in working to address any concerns of the Committee.
- 14.4. In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference, the Council is requested to note this Annual Report.

**COUNCILLOR N. HARRISON**

**CHAIR  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**