

REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

This Annual Report reviews Overview and Scrutiny activities in 2018/19.

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 2018/19 the advance questioning procedure was utilised for a number of the Committee's activities, to the benefit of both the Committee and those attending at its request. 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 them to present their objectives, recent achievements, current challenges and future priorities to the Committee.
- 1.5. The eMembers Room (Members' extranet) continued to provide 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;
 - Advance questions and responses
- 1.6. The Membership, Terms of Reference of the Committee and attendance at the Committee and its Panels are given in Annex 1.

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 Executive Members at the Committee or its Panels to explain how the Executive proposed to deliver its plans and strategies; and
 - Executive Members 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 Mr. M.A. Brunt, Leader of the Council, and Mr. T. Schofield, Executive Member 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 Mr. J.E. Durrant, Executive Member for Community Safety, attended the Committee's annual 'Crime and Disorder' meeting to support the scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership.
- 2.5. The Committee reviewed developing Council strategy areas, including the Council's developing Investment Strategy and a review of the Council's governance of commercial endeavours. It also received updates on the Council's forthcoming Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy as part of briefings from members of the Executive.
- 2.8. The Committee considered its work plan for 2019/20, 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.
- 2.9. The Committee conducted pre-scrutiny of the Council's planned expansion of recycling services to flats within the borough, along with the required service commitments.

3. Executive Member Objectives

- 3.1. The following Executive Members presented their objectives to the Committee (in chronological order):
 - Councillor Mr. E. Humphreys, Executive Member for Business and the Economy, who 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;
 - Councillor Mrs. N. Bramhall, Executive Member for Property and Acquisitions, who provided a briefing on the Council's property activities, including information on the Council's current properties, investment acquisition and developments, and community facilities and regeneration projects;

- Councillor Mr. M. Brunt, Leader of the Council, who provided a briefing on the work of the Council, including leadership priorities, Council initiatives and projects, future challenges facing the Council, and engagement between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Councillor Mr. J. Durrant, Executive Member for Community Safety, who provided a briefing 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.
- Councillor Mr. G. Knight, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits, provided a briefing on the Council's Housing Services, Intervention Team and Revenues, Benefits & Fraud services, including information on work to address homelessness, the developing housing strategy, and support for residents.
- Councillor A. Horwood, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services, provided a briefing on the Council's Neighbourhood Services, including information on the structure of neighbourhood services, an overview of services provided, current focusses and future challenges.
- Councillor K. Foreman, Executive Member for Planning Policy, is providing an update to the Committee at its April meeting, on the Council's work within the Planning Policy portfolio.

3.2. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to examine in detail the work of 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 'Scrutiny' Committee"

- 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 2018/19.
- 4.2. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey, and the Police Borough Commander for Reigate and Banstead were invited to attend the meeting as key community safety partners, 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. Work with Housing Partners: Housing Associations

- 5.1. An overview of the Council's Housing work was provided to the Committee in February, which included information on the Council's current work with Raven Housing Trust, along with potential future work with both Raven and other housing associations. It was identified that additional information on the Council's housing activities and work with housing associations as part of the development of the Council's new Housing Strategy in the coming year. There was an opportunity for the Committee to ask questions regarding the Council's work in this area. It is expected that the Committee will continue to monitor the Council's work on housing and with housing associations in future.

6. Performance Monitoring

- 6.1. 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);
 - wider economic indicators and issues that affect public services (quarterly);
 - performance against the 5 Year Plan 2015-20 (annually).
- 6.2. The detailed information on performance variances and responses to Member questions was provided in the e-Members Room in support of this activity. More detailed information on service performance was also available from the e-Members Room.
- 6.3. The advance questioning procedure was utilised to support each quarterly performance report, 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.
- 6.4. 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.

7. Audit

A Internal Audit

- 7.1. There were 14 Internal Audit reviews undertaken by RSM (the Council's Internal Audit contractor for 2018/19) in the 2018/19 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 Members were invited to submit advance questions to Committee meetings on a quarterly basis. Exception reports are provided to the Committee where an audit identifies significant concerns. There were no exception reports required in 2018/19 as no major issues were identified by the audits. In June 2018 the Committee considered RSM's Annual Internal Audit Report for the year ended 31 March 2018, which provided a positive opinion on the overall adequacy of and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes.
- 7.2. The Committee considered and provided observations on a proposed new internal audit partnership agreement arrangements, to support the Council's internal audit activities from 2019/20 onwards.
- 7.3. As delegated in the Council's Constitution, the Committee considered the proposed Internal Audit Strategy and Audit Plan for 2019/20 at the March 2019 meeting of the Committee. The Internal Audit Strategy and Audit Plan identify key risks facing the Authority, and the risks identified for 2018/19 were monitored throughout the year via the Internal Audit reviews.
- 7.4. In March 2019, the Committee considered the strategic risk register for 2019/20, which underpins the Council's internal audit approach, and had the opportunity to make any comments to the Executive.

B External Audit

- 7.5. The Committee received the annual report for the 2017/18 financial year from the External Auditors (KPMG) in September 2018.
- 7.6. The Committee were pleased to note that KPMG 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. Joint Scrutiny Arrangements in Surrey

- 8.1. Though the Committee has the facility to undertake joint scrutiny, no such reviews took place in 2018/19. The facility will be utilised in the future should a topic be identified that meets the criteria for collaborative scrutiny.

9. Strategy and Policy Development

- 9.1. The Committee commented on the following draft strategies and policies:
 - Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20;
 - The expansion of recycling services in the borough;
 - Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20-23/24 (through the budget scrutiny process).
 - The Council's outline Capital Investment Strategy 2019/20.
- 9.2. The Committee also received information on the developing Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy as part of briefings provided by Executive Members.
- 9.3. The Committee also received and considered the Schedule of Meetings for 2019/20.

10. Operational arrangements

- 10.1. As the Chairman of the Committee, I had regular meetings with the Chief Executive which focussed 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.
- 10.2. 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 2019/20 was discussed with the Leader.

11. Review Panels

- 11.1. The Committee had one Review Panel this year, as detailed below.

Budget Scrutiny Review Panel (Chairman: Cllr. Mr. N. Harrison)

- 11.2. The Budget Scrutiny Review Panel reviewed the Service & Financial Planning (Provisional Budget) 2019/20 report.
- 11.3. 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.
- 11.4. The Panel recognised and appreciated the significant amount of work that had gone into preparing the service and financial plans for 2018/19 and concluded that the budget proposals were sound, balanced and achievable. This also applied to the updated Capital Programme and Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 11.5. The Committee supported the conclusions of the Panel and provided its comments to the Executive for their final consideration of the Budget.

12. 'Call-in' of Executive Decisions

- 12.1. No 'Call-In's were received during 2018/19.

13. Community Call for Action

- 13.1 No Community Calls for Action were recorded during 2018/19.

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 2018/19 and in developing its work programme for 2019/20 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 of 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 previous concerns of the Committee. I was pleased to welcome the Leader to the December meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the overall work of the Committee, and hope that this arrangement will continue in future.
- 14.4. In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference, the Council is requested to note this Annual Report.

**COUNCILLOR B.A. STEAD
CHAIRMAN,
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**