

REPORT TITLE: Draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21

19 JULY 2021

REPORT OF CHAIRPERSON: Councillor Caroline Brook

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WARD(S): ALL

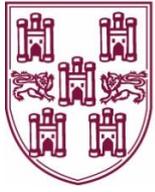
PURPOSE

At the end of each Municipal Year, the Chairperson of The Scrutiny Committee for that year reviews the work of all overview and scrutiny bodies and provides a report back to Council.

The draft report for the 2020/21 Municipal Year is attached at Appendix 1 in order that The Scrutiny Committee can add its comments before it is finalised for presentation to Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the committee consider and make any necessary comment on the content of the report prior to its submission to full council.



Winchester

City Council

Annual Scrutiny Report

2020/21



What is Scrutiny?

Rather than making decisions, the role of scrutiny is to improve decision-making by reviewing decisions taken and suggesting improvements that could be made.

It is important that decisions taken are monitored in this way to ensure that the council's services are of high quality and that the decision-making process is transparent and that the council's various programmes of work remain on track. It also provides an opportunity for the views of the public, businesses, community groups and others to be considered when reviewing the council's activities.

To achieve this, the council has established three Policy and Scrutiny committees, which are the:

- Business and Housing Policy Committee
- Health and Environment Policy Committee
- The Scrutiny Committee

One of the key roles of scrutiny is to hold decision-makers to account for their decisions. Scrutiny committees have the power to require Cabinet Members to attend their meetings and explain the decisions they have taken. Having heard from decision-makers and gathered any other evidence, policy and scrutiny committees can make recommendations on how things could be improved.

A key part of the role of the two policy committees is also to consider proposals for new policy and recommend new ways forward as well as to review existing policies and strategies.

In addition to reviewing decisions and performance, the policy and scrutiny committees can look at topics in more detail. Establishing a 'task and finish' group is a way to undertake more detailed work, gather evidence on the topic and develop recommendations that can make a difference and add value.

By focusing on a particular topic, a task and finish group can gather evidence from a number of sources, including customers, other people affected by the issue and experts from outside the Council. This provides the opportunity for the public to influence the policy-making process.

The Committees

The Council has the following policy and scrutiny committees, which, as specified in the council's constitution, carry out the overview and scrutiny function with the following remits:

Business and Housing Policy Committee

To maintain a strategic overview of the progress towards the achievement of the first two priorities in the Council strategy namely:

- a) Making the District a premier business location
- b) Delivering quality housing options

The broad terms of reference are as follows:

- a) It will hold the Cabinet to account by reviewing and scrutinising executive decisions.
- b) Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives and performance targets

Health and Environment Policy Committee

To maintain a strategic overview of the following priorities:

- a) Improving the quality of the District's environment
- b) Improving the health and happiness of the community

The broad terms of reference are as follows:

- a) It will hold the Cabinet to account by reviewing and scrutinising executive decisions.
- b) Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives and performance targets

Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee reviews and/or scrutinises decisions made, or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions, apart from regulatory functions (decisions made in respect of permissions, licences and other similar consents).

It can monitor the implementation of decisions, service performance, and make reports and/or recommendations to the Cabinet. More generally, the Scrutiny Committee can select topics for closer enquiry in the interest of improving the council. It can further review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them and/or invite them to address the Committee about their activities and performance. They can ask questions and gather evidence from any person or body (with their consent) and exercise the right to call in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by the Leader, Cabinet, or officers.

During the 2020/21 year, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the performance panel to undertake the detailed review of the quarterly performance and financial information. Further information regarding the work of the performance panel is set out later in this report.

Membership and Meetings

Business and Housing Policy Committee

Councillors: Weir (Chairperson), Rutter, Bell, Brook, Craske, Hiscock, Horrill, Lumby, Power, Scott

Health and Environment Policy Committee

Councillors: Clear (Chairperson), Laming, Achwal, Bell, Hutchison, McLean, Pearson, Read, Scott, Williams

Scrutiny Committee

Councillors: Brook (Chairperson), Lumby, Becker, Bronk, Craske, Hiscock, Horrill, Power, Weir, Gemmell, Scott

Dates and times of meetings 2020/21

Business and Housing Policy Committee	Health and Environment Policy Committee	The Scrutiny Committee	The Performance Panel
22/06/20 18:00	07/07/20 18:00	02/07/20 18:00	14/09/20 14:00
22/09/20 18:00	30/09/20 18:00	07/09/20 18:00	09/11/20 16:00
01/12/20 18:00	08/12/20 18:00	25/11/20 18:00	22/02/21 16:00
09/02/21 18:00	03/03/21 18:00	02/02/21 18:00	
		11/03/21 18:00	

Public participation.

The policy and scrutiny committee welcomes and encourages engagement with residents and other community representatives during its public participation session. During 2020/21 all meetings of the council were recorded and made available on the councils YouTube site which has improved the visibility and transparency of meetings.

The agenda, minutes, audio and video recordings for all Policy and Scrutiny meetings can be found on [our website](#)

Review of 2020/21

Business and Housing Policy Committee.

Chairperson of the committee, Cllr Anne Weir.

Given its remit covering the local economy and housing, in particular for vulnerable people, the programme of work this year has been heavily slanted towards monitoring and feeding back on measures taken to protect business across the district and ensure those most at risk are supported through the pandemic. Council staff have risen to new challenges and both economy and housing teams have delivered an outstanding service under great pressure over the past year, and they are thanked for their efforts and commitment.

The opening meeting in June 2020 considered the future of the Bar End Depot where it was noted that a new cross-party consultation group would be established to engage and consult with local residents in respect of the options for the future use of the site. This meeting also considered options for the decommissioning of the River Park Leisure Centre where it supported decommissioning, soft strip and retain (Option 3) and support was also given to the efforts being made to secure the amenities for as many people and clubs using the North Walls during the interim period.

At the June meeting two Informal Scrutiny Groups (Task and Finish Groups) were also to be established – (i) Housing for Younger People and (ii) A digital economy for Winchester. The work of these groups is ongoing and is due for completion in the next municipal year.

In September the Policy Committee received a presentation on the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy, which included the Empty Homes Strategy and the economy team set the council's strategy for welcoming visitors back to its high streets. At the December meeting the Housing Revenue Account and housing budgets were considered and also the Housing Development Strategy where the officers were asked to give consideration to the reporting of items from the scrutiny performance panel on development sites and new homes to the policy committee, or an alternative reporting route and the holding of a member briefing on the issues.

In common with all of the meetings of the policy committee held during the course of the municipal year, the final meeting in February 2021 considered the Council's response to the Covid-19 situation with presentations on the restoration of the economy and housing.

The Health and Environment Policy Committee

Chairperson of the committee, Cllr Angela Clear

This committee covered a range of issues, including the District's environment and improving the health and happiness of our communities. I appreciated the professional input from both officers and guests in helping to address some of the issues we face today.

The opening meeting in June 2020 considered the Council's response to the Covid-19 situation with presentations on the restoration work for Community, Open Spaces and Transport Impacts'. This meeting also received a presentation on the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan one year on. The committee also commented on the proposals for the new Garden Waste Service prior to its determination by Cabinet on 9 July 2020.

In September the Policy Committee received two climate change updates regarding Property and Energy and Reducing the Environmental Impacts (Carbon) in Council Housing Stock. In addition, it also received a presentation on the Biodiversity Action Plan.

During the December meeting the committee welcomed a petition submitted by Extinction Rebellion Winchester which was considered by Council at its meeting on 8 July 2020 and was referred to the committee for further consideration and response. In response, Members asked questions and raised comments regarding travel safety for all, with the increased use of electric scooters and electric bikes as well as those walking and cycling, and the Head of Programme was asked to provide a full response to the points raised within the petition.

Furthermore, in December the committee received a presentation regarding health partnerships arrangements in response to the key strategic and policy issues facing the Council.

Lastly, at the March meeting, the committee received a presentation in respect of the annual overview and update on the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), the Council's compliance and the monitoring and analysis processes of nitrogen dioxide and particulates, specifically in the town centre. In addition to this, the committee also received a further update regarding the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan which set out the progress achieved over the year and provided key points and targets for transport and behavioural change to be explored.

The Scrutiny Committee

Chairperson of the Committee. Councillor Caroline Brook.

The Scrutiny Committee has a wide remit in its role of reviewing and scrutinising decisions made, or actions taken, related to the discharge of the Council's functions. Over the year the Committee has dealt with the following topics which are either contained in its terms of reference as annual responsibilities or were referred to the Committee from other Committees or Council. The committee met virtually five times during the 2020/21 municipal year, attendance was high throughout the year with just three apologies from members received.

At the July 2020 meeting of the scrutiny committee, members discussed options for an effective method to scrutinise the quarterly performance reports and tasked officers to produce a proposal for how the quarterly performance reports could be scrutinised in greater detail, potentially involving a members sub-panel that would report its findings through to the committee. The Terms of Reference, membership and operating processes were agreed at the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and the performance Panel has met three times to undertake its role. Since meeting the operating and reporting processes have been enhanced to ensure greater involvement and transparency of the work undertaken.

Members of the cabinet attended meetings of the committee which allowed for discussion and questions concerning policy and progress during the year, some examples of this were:

- July 2020, the leader of the council introduced the cabinet report "Responding to the Corona Virus Outbreak"
- September 2020, the deputy leader and cabinet member for finance and risk introduced the cabinet reports concerning "Consultation on changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme"
- February 2021, the deputy leader and cabinet member for finance and risk introduced the cabinet reports concerning the "General Budget Fund"
- March 2021, the cabinet member for the built environment and wellbeing introduced the "Community Safety Partnership Performance Review"

At the November 2020 meeting, the committee agreed to establish a task and finish panel to undertake a review into the current provision of mental health services across the district, including those related to the city council's policies and services. It was hoped that the review would ultimately identify opportunities to work with partners to tackle inequalities and build a stronger infrastructure for mental health provision. It is hoped that the panel will be able to commence its work in 2021. All members of the Committee contributed to the issues put before them in a constructive manner and I am grateful for their support. My thanks also go to the Vice Chair for their help and advice during the past 12 months.

All items considered in 2020/21

Business and Housing Policy Committee

Meeting Date	Title
22/06/20	Bar End Depot - Presentation
22/06/20	Briefing on Restoration Work - Economy, Housing and Financial Impacts - Presentation
22/06/20	River Park Leisure Centre decommissioning
22/09/20	Briefing on Economy and Housing Restoration Work - presentation
22/09/20	Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy - presentation
22/09/20	Update on A Digital Winchester District and Housing for Younger People Task and Finish Groups
01/12/20	Briefing on Economy and Housing Restoration Work - presentation
01/12/20	Housing Development Strategy - presentation
01/12/20	Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Budget Options - presentation
09/02/21	Briefing on Economy and Housing Restoration Work - presentation

Health and Environment Policy Committee

Meeting Date	Title
07/07/20	Briefing on Restoration Work - Community, Open Spaces and Transport Impacts (Presentation)
07/07/20	Health & Environment Policy Committee Work Programme for 2020/21 (HEP009)
07/07/20	Proposals for new Garden Waste service (CAB3234)
07/07/20	Update on the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan (one year on) - Presentation
30/09/20	Biodiversity Action Plan - Presentation
30/09/20	Climate Change Update:
30/09/20	Property and Energy Update (Presentation)
30/09/20	Reducing the Environmental Impacts (Carbon) in Council Housing Stock (Presentation)
08/12/20	AQMA Annual Update (Presentation)
08/12/20	Health Partnership Arrangements (Presentation)
08/12/20	Petition - Extinction Rebellion Winchester (Safer Streets, Post COVID 19) (Presentation)
08/12/20	Update on the Winchester Movement Strategy (Presentation)
03/03/21	AQMA Annual Update (Presentation)
03/03/21	Carbon Neutrality Action Plan Update (Presentation)

The Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date	Title
02/07/20	Annual Scrutiny Report - Draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2019/20
02/07/20	Annual Scrutiny Report - Exceptions to Forward Plan
02/07/20	Appointments of external bodies related to scrutiny
02/07/20	Housing Revenue Account 2019/20 Outturn Budget
02/07/20	Q4 Financial and Performance Monitoring Report
02/07/20	Responding to the Coronavirus outbreak
07/09/20	Annual appointment to the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Scrutiny Committee
07/09/20	Consultation on changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme
07/09/20	General Fund Budget 2020/21 Update
07/09/20	Proposal to establish a Performance Panel
07/09/20	Quarter 1 Finance & Performance Monitoring
25/11/20	Verbal update from the Chair of the Performance Panel
25/11/20	Work Programme Suggestion: mental health options in the Winchester district
02/02/21	Annual Council Plan Refresh 2021/22
02/02/21	Capital Investment Strategy 2021-2031
02/02/21	General Fund Budget 2021/22
02/02/21	Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2021/22 and Procurement of Term Maintenance Contracts
02/02/21	Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22
11/03/21	Community Safety Partnership Performance Review
11/03/21	Q3 Finance & Performance Report including a verbal update from the Chair of Performance Panel