

THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT TITLE: DRAFT ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2024/25

5 JUNE 2025

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 reviews the work of all overview and scrutiny bodies and reports to the council.

Appendix 1 contains the draft report for the 2024/25 municipal year so that the Scrutiny Committee can add its comments before it is finalised for presentation to the full council.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the committee consider and makes any necessary comments on the content of the report before its submission to full council.

Annual Scrutiny Report

2024/25

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny improves decision-making by reviewing and suggesting improvements to decisions.

Decisions taken must be 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:

1. The Economy and Housing Policy (EHP) Committee
2. The Health and Environment Policy (HEP) Committee
3. 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 several 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:

Economy and Housing Policy Committee

To maintain a strategic overview of the progress towards the achievement of the relevant priorities in the Council Plan, to include:

Thriving Places - making our district a place where residents want to live, visitors come and visit and attractive for sustainable business investment and growth that provides opportunities for young people to live and work in the district.

Good Homes for All - Focussing on increasing the number of affordable homes across the district while taking action to ensure our tenants live in council homes that are decent, safe and energy efficient and resilient to the effects of climate change.

Health and Environment Policy Committee

To maintain a strategic overview of the progress towards the achievement of the relevant priorities in the Council Plan, to include:

Greener Faster - working with and enabling businesses, organisations, and residents to reduce carbon emissions and achieve the council's net zero carbon commitment for the district by 2030.

Healthy Communities - providing safe and attractive public facilities and open spaces to enable our residents to improve their health and wellbeing. Working collaboratively with voluntary and community sector partners to tackle social isolation, build community cohesion and support those most in need including targeted support for residents affected by the increased cost of living

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).

The broad terms of reference are as follows:

To review and scrutinise any decisions made or to be made or actions to be taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's functions, including holding the Cabinet to account by reviewing and scrutinising executive decisions.

Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives and performance targets

Exercise the right to Call-In for reconsideration of decisions made but not yet implemented by the Leader, the Cabinet and Cabinet Members and Officers.

It can monitor the implementation of decisions, and 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.

For Section 19 of the Police & Justice Act 2006, the Committee acts as the Council's Crime & Disorder Committee and as such is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the decisions and work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

This report from the Committee Chairperson which is found later in this report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year. The committee held seven formal meetings with high attendance and increased public participation. Key topics discussed included waste and recycling, the Local Plan, financial performance, housing, and community safety. The committee made several recommendations to the Cabinet and engaged in constructive discussions with public participants and Councillors.

Membership and Meetings

Economy and Housing Policy Committee: The following Councillors have attended the committee during the year: Councillor Batho, Councillor Chamberlain, Councillor Achwal, Councillor Eve, Councillor Morris, Councillor Murphy, Councillor White, Councillor Horrill, Councillor Aron, and Councillor Miller.

The following cabinet members attended the committee to address the meeting: Councillor Thompson (Cabinet Member for Business and Culture), Councillor Westwood (Cabinet Member for Housing), and Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management).

Health and Environment Policy Committee: The following Councillors have attended as committee members during the year: Cramoysan, Bennett, Bolton, Brophy, Latham, Lee, Power, Aron, Batho,

The following cabinet members attended the committee to address the meeting: Becker (Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement), Learney (Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency), Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan), and Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management).

Scrutiny Committee: The following Councillors have attended the committee during the year: Councillor Brook, Councillor Wallace, Councillor V Achwal, Councillor Batho, Councillor Laming, Councillor Pett, Councillor Reach, Councillor Bolton, Councillor Clear, Councillor Horrill, Councillor Godfrey, Councillor Cramoysan, Councillor Achwal, Councillor Warwick, Councillor Lee, and Councillor Cook

The following cabinet members attended the committee to address the meeting:

Councillor Cutler (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance), Councillor Tod (Leader and Cabinet Member for Asset Management), Councillor Westwood (Cabinet Member for Housing), Councillor Becker (Cabinet Member for Community and Engagement), Councillor Learney (Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency), Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan), and Councillor Thompson (Cabinet Member for Business and Culture).

Items considered during 2024/25

The following specifies the substantial agenda items for each meeting of the three Committees.

Scrutiny Committee.

06/06/24

1. Procurement Of Waste & Recycling Collection Vehicles / Update On Waste And Recycling. (Presentation)
2. Appointments Of External Bodies Related To Scrutiny
3. Annual Scrutiny Report 2023/24
4. Annual Report - Exceptions To Forward Plan 2023/24

29/07/24

1. Local Plan - Regulation 19.

04/09/24

1. Q1 Finance & Performance Monitoring
2. Housing Revenue Account Outturn 23/24
3. General Fund Outturn 23/24

14/10/24

1. Bar End Depot, Bar End Road, Winchester – Disposal
2. Council Plan 2025-30 (Presentation)

12/11/24

1. General Fund Budget Options & Medium-Term Financial Strategy
2. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan & Budget Options
3. Procurement Of HRA Repairs And Maintenance Term Contract
4. Acquisition Of Affordable Homes At Kings Barton
5. Future Of Waste And Recycling; New Food Waste Collections And Recycling Service.

04/02/25

1. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2025 - 2026
2. General Fund Budget 2025- 2026
3. Capital Investment Strategy 2025 - 2035
4. Treasury Management Strategy 2025 - 2026

05/03/25

1. Annual Community Safety Performance Update
2. Development Delivery Plans - Central Winchester Regeneration
3. Q3 Finance & Performance Monitoring

Health and Environment Policy Committee

19/09/24

1. Council Health Priorities (Presentation)
2. Air Quality Strategy (Presentation)
3. Council Plan 2025-30 (Presentation)

03/12/24

1. Update On Performance Of The Council's Leisure Facilities Managed Under Contract By Everyone Active (HEP042)
2. Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030 (Presentation)

26/02/25

1. Sports Facilities Assessment and Playing Pitch Strategy 2025 (Presentation)
2. Waste Update (Verbal Update)

Economy and Housing Policy Committee

17/09/24

1. Review Of Economy And Housing Policy Committee Resolutions
2. Winchester District Economy Review (Presentation)
3. Housing, Repairs And Maintenance Contract Procurement (Presentation)
4. Council Plan 2025-30 (Presentation)

26/11/24

1. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG): Policy Review (Presentation)
2. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan & Budget Options

11/02/2025

1. Summary Of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund And Rural England Fund Programmes 2022-2025
2. Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policies

Public participation.

The policy and scrutiny committee welcomes and encourages engagement with residents and other community representatives during its public participation session. During 2024/25 all public meetings of the council were live-streamed, recorded and made available on the council's YouTube channel 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 2024/25

Economy and Housing Policy Committee.

Report of the chairperson of the committee, Cllr James Batho.

The start of the year saw a General Election which resulted in an extended hold on Council meetings. The first EHP meeting was cancelled leaving three meetings to be held in the municipal year.

Economy

At the September meeting the Business and Culture team brought forward a review of the Winchester District Economy. The committee were pleased to see the range of activity and wanted to continue supporting skills development, particularly in retrofitting and digital support, ensure that rural areas remain a focus, continue and expand work in the solar energy sector and to prioritise efforts that align with the 'Greener Faster' initiative, recognising its importance in improving the district's performance.

At the final meeting in February the Summary of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Fund Programmes 2022-2025 was presented. The committee raised concerns regarding the equitable distribution of funding across wards, particularly between rural and urban areas, members agreed they would communicate with their respective wards, encouraging parishes and organisations to apply for grants in the upcoming year. The Cabinet Member was asked to consider whether maintaining some level of contribution from businesses, as beneficiaries of the funding, should be pursued, acknowledging the reduction in match funding requirements to encourage business engagement. Officers were asked to explore avenues to support more community involvement and funding applications, alongside business-related projects and continue to emphasise learning from both successful and unsuccessful projects, maintaining dialogue and providing feedback to applicants ensuring a steady stream of potential projects for the future.

Housing

During the year changes were made to the involvement of tenants, and the committee looks forward to contributions from these revised forums. The work of all involved is greatly appreciated.

At the first meeting in September the Housing team presented the Housing, Repairs and Maintenance Contract Procurement which aims to consolidate many of the repair, maintenance and retrofit contracts into a partnership led relationship with a selected supplier. The committee made several recommendations, the main points being to ensure that clear and detailed KPIs were developed and to focus on defining and maximising the social value aspects within the contract, acknowledging that this significant contract presented an opportunity to improve the social aspects of the local communities.

In November the committee looked at the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). Recently applications and approved grants had risen, and the average cost of works increased, while the grant allocations had remained the same. The committee were presented with 3 options for policy change, each with its advantages, disadvantages, and potential impacts on the Council's ability to fulfil its duties and manage the DFG budget effectively. The committee agreed that a change to the policy regarding means testing was appropriate to ensure that the funding was targeted to those most in need and noted that option three had the potential downside of providing support to those who could contribute a significant amount themselves whilst option two, allowed "boundary" cases to be considered and so enabled funds to be used more beneficially.

The committee also considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and Budget Options. The main cost pressures on the HRA are continuing inflationary pressures on building supplies, increased capital costs for maintaining existing housing stock, high capital financing interest rates and challenges in new homes viability due to high public works loan board interest rates. The budget options presented support the Council's commitment to increasing investment in customers' homes, delivering 1,000 new homes by 2032/33, and improving customer service for repairs and maintenance. The committee highlighted the importance of policy reviews, particularly in areas such as the repairs recharge, voids, and the repair process.

At the final meeting in February the committee was asked to review and comment upon four Policies: Disabled Adaptations, Housing Repairs and Maintenance, Housing Repairs Recharge and Managing Damp and Mould. The committee raised the importance of a robust appeals process, particularly for the recharge policy, anticipating potential challenges from tenants due to its new implementation. The committee welcomed the regular review of the policies and suggested stating the implementation date and review date on the policy itself. The committee requested a review of the policies at this committee in one year, following implementation, to assess the actual situation.

The Health and Environment Policy Committee

Report of the chairperson of the committee, Cllr Steve Cramoyson

Introduction

The Health and Environment Policy Committee (HEP) met three times during the council year, in September, December and February. The planned July meeting was cancelled due to the General election. HEP considered and contributed to papers covering a range of issues affecting both the district's environment and the health/wellbeing of the district's residents and communities.

September 2024 Meeting

Members of the public addressed the committee on: EV charging for taxis, Air quality and Council Health priorities.

The committee contributed to three Policy papers.

Health priorities:

The first was a paper delivered by Mike Newman from the Public Health Team at Hampshire County Council who explained how HCC operated with a wide range of partners - agencies, institutions and stakeholders, setting out high level data to understand performance, and proposals for health priorities to test against existing and emerging strategies, policies and plans and map against the work of the council to continue to generate health benefits, both directly and indirectly. The committee asked questions, challenged some of the data presented and provided informed opinion on a many of the points covered in the presentation including:

- the levels of anxiety reported and the role of social prescribing
- the adequacy of pharmacies and food insecurity, particularly access to reasonably priced, good quality fresh produce locally.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of switching off the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) landline in rural areas and the associated stress for residents with poor mobile network coverage.

For a full list of the points raised refer to the minutes. The committee welcomed visibility of the strategy, and the process described and would welcome future updates.

Air Quality Strategy:

A presentation outlining how the City Council is evolving its Air Quality Strategy from an Air Quality Management area (AQMA) for a specific area of Winchester to an Air Quality Strategy (AQS) for the whole district. The council is leading Hampshire in the development of an Air Quality Strategy (AQS) for the whole district, with the area of works led by both the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and the Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan. An AQS had been commissioned following meetings of the cross-party steering group, comprising of members from all parties and stakeholders from WinACC, the Business Improvement District (BID), a representative from the Director of Public Health and relevant officers. The committee asked an extensive range of questions about the processes and other authorities that are contributing to the AQS. Questions about the sources of pollution

in the district, and about the availability of EV charging points, among many others. The committee was pleased to endorse the strategy and looks forward to a future update.

The Council Plan

Members were pleased to be asked to review and comment on the direction of the council plan, including the vision, themes and priorities, focussing on the responsibilities of the committee in respect of health and environment, namely: Living Well, Cost of Living, Climate Emergency/Greener Faster.

The committee raised many questions and provided opinions on around 20 areas of policy around the council plan. These fed into the Council plan published in January 2025.

December 2024 Meeting

This meeting focused on the Performance of the Councils Leisure Facilities managed by Everyone Active, and Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030.

Performance of the Councils Leisure Facilities managed by Everyone Active

The presentation highlighted that Winchester Sports and Leisure Park (WSLP) had received an 'Outstanding' rating achievement in the Quest accreditation in May 2024 one of only four facilities in England to achieve this rating, the National Operator of the Year award given to Everyone Active at the UK Active awards in October 2024.

Membership numbers at both centres were on an upward trajectory. Usage in nearly all categories was also up, except dry side usage at Meadowside which was attributed to flooding which took the dry side facilities out of action for several months. Strategies are in place to address this.

As with other reports HEP proceeded to question and challenge the report which stood up well.

Winchester District Nature Improvement Plan 2025-2030

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency introduced the item which provided proposals to refresh the council's strategic approach to nature improvement in the district, as a result of local and national policy changes. It was recognised that there were limited resources available and the need to make considerable savings over coming years was emphasised. The Service Lead: Sustainability and Natural Environment and Principal Ecologist/Biodiversity Officer gave a presentation which set out the current position, changes since the creation of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the proposed way forward.

The committee emphasised the need to maximise assets and leverage strategies like BNG, local network recovery, ecosystem services, and local groups. Concerns were expressed regarding the resource implications of BNG in planning conditions, including monitoring, quantification, and resource allocation. The committee outlined the importance of effective use of resources, along with the valuable role of citizen scientists in collecting data and providing credibility. There was a call for clear Key

Performance Indicators (KPI's), measurable outcomes, and cost-benefit analysis and the importance of creating a legacy for the district and future cycles was highlighted.

February 2025 meeting

Sports Facilities Assessment and Playing Pitch Strategy 2025

A representative of Sport Winchester addressed the Committee on this item, speaking in support of the strategy. A number of points were raised, including: Two areas where participation was rapidly increasing are women and girls' sports and accessibility for people with disabilities or mental health challenges, but current facilities did not adequately meet these needs.

Introduced by the Service Lead for Communities & Wellbeing, Continuum Sport and Leisure provided a presentation and answered questions thereon.

The committee reviewed, questioned and debated the process by which the strategy was evolving before going through an assessment of the findings on a sport-by-sport basis. In total there were 25 points of question or debate raised, including the following:

How will the strategy enable funding to be accessed? The strategy will inform both council and all the relevant potential funding bodies of key priorities for the district.

- How are the needs in terms of facilities and sports for people with disabilities assessed? Clubs were asked about their provision in place already or had identified a need for growth in the future and where national governing bodies were aware of the activity. The accessibility of pavilions were also checked.
- How were Parish Councils engaged? Every parish council received communication with surveys and offers to meet and discuss facilities. Where sites were owned, parishes were invited to attend site visits.

In summary, HEP supported the process and the direction that the strategy was taking.

Waste & Recycling update

Committee noted the verbal update. The primary new news was that £50.5 million investment in new recycling infrastructure was approved by Hampshire County Council. This would enable the collection of pots, tubs, trays, and cartons going forward, with this project expected to take around 2 ½ years to build, and a potential completion around October 2027. Hampshire had informed DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) that they are likely to be delayed in meeting the Government's April 2026 deadline for collecting pots, tubs, trays, and cartons on this basis. In addition, the Government was still planning to implement a deposit return scheme by October 2027. In total these new recycling options could improve recycling levels by approximately 10%.

From the debate:

- the final decision on co-mingling versus twin stream had not been formally made, but that the likely direction would be twin stream collections.
- the initial extra costs of twin stream were, £72 million less over 10 years comparing a twin stream rather than co-mingled collections.

- supported the council's approach to move the MRF project forward and encourage all other authorities to adopt twin stream collections.

Finally, I'd like to thank all officers & portfolio holders for bringing policy papers to the committee for policy development. Thanks to Democratic services, especially Claire Buchanan, ensuring the meetings ran smoothly. Thanks also to fellow councillors who sit on the committee for constructively engaging with each paper and subject and in sharing their expertise and knowledge on these. And members of the public who attended to speak on several of the agenda items across the year. Together this ensures that Council policies are scrutinised in a public forum with the opportunity for the public to have their say on the policies that council implements.

The Scrutiny Committee

Report of the chairperson of the committee. Councillor Caroline Brook.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year in fulfilling our role to review and scrutinise decisions made, and actions taken.

Throughout the year, the committee held seven formal meetings, with high attendance at each. Public participation increased significantly, and we received deputations from members of the public or non-committee members at all meetings. Notably, 17 members of the public addressed the committee in July regarding the Local Plan.

The year began with a learning and training session in June 2024, facilitated by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS). This session was well attended and well received by committee members.

At our June meeting, we discussed the procurement of waste and recycling collection vehicles and recommended that the Cabinet implement education programmes to encourage composting and food waste reduction.

At our July meeting, we considered the Local Plan Regulation 19, focusing on whether the policy responses were suitable and met tests of soundness. Members of the public and Councillors raised numerous concerns regarding settlement boundaries, late inclusion of sites, planning guidance for developments, consultation processes, housing numbers, infrastructure, and alignment with national policies. We asked the Cabinet to consider the points raised during public participation and members' debate.

In September we received an update on Q1 Finance & Performance Monitoring, and members raised several questions about invasive plant species, the carbon neutrality action plan, waste and recycling, housing performance, energy efficiency, and data security. We asked the Cabinet Member to provide updates and clarifications on several of these points. We scrutinised the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn 2023/24, and questioned inflation underpayments, fire safety provisions, external income, and vacant staff posts. We also reviewed the General Fund Outturn for 2023/24 and asked for clarification on unusable reserves, asset management, one-off budgets, and underspends in climate emergency and transformation programme budgets. We recommended that the Cabinet Member benchmark asset management performance and provide a Member Briefing on council assets, which was later undertaken with five members of the committee.

At our October meeting we discussed the proposed disposal of Bar End Depot, hearing from members of the public and raising questions about the proposal's alignment with planning policies, the mix of uses, safeguards for developers altering terms, the size of the convenience store, and community needs. We recommended

that the Cabinet consider issues related to consultation responses, parking access, climate commitments in the development, and the description of healthcare provision.

We also received a presentation on the Council Plan 2025-30 and provided feedback on topics such as KPIs, community centres, allotments, rural support, digital connectivity, recycling, website usability, cultural strategy, housing, and energy efficiency.

In November we considered the General Fund Budget Options & Medium-Term Financial Strategy and raised questions about the food waste service costs, the garden waste service, property assets, reserves, and the TC-25 programme. We scrutinised the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan & Budget Options, raising questions about the tenant involvement budget, the savings targets, revenue pressures, service charges, new homes in rural areas, and the increase in reported repairs. We requested that tenant service charge information be made available.

We reviewed the proposals for the Procurement of HRA Repairs and Maintenance Term Contract, questioning the risks of a long-term contract, environmental considerations, the quality-to-price ratio, and opportunities for SMEs. We requested a breakdown of current repairs. We considered the Acquisition of Affordable Homes at Kings Barton and asked about staged payments, energy efficiency standards, and the speed of delivery. Finally, for this meeting we discussed the "Future of Waste and Recycling; New Food Waste Collections and Recycling Service," and sought clarification on increased costs, HVO costs, government funding assumptions, and the use of depot sites.

At our February meeting, we scrutinised the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2025-2026, raising questions on business cases for property purchases, the forecast underspend, tenant feedback, rent increases, and service charges. We noted the report and requested various updates and clarifications. We also considered the General Fund Budget 2025-2026, with questions on topics such as the property portfolio, parking reserve, the cost of the Guildhall, food waste service financing, the TC-25 programme, and CIL funding. We requested that asset and parking information be more accessible. We reviewed the Capital Investment Strategy for 2025-2035 and the Treasury Management Strategy 2025-2026 and raised questions about the tailing off of general fund capital expenditure, plans to sell council assets and the management of shared undertakings.

At our final meeting in March 2025, we received the Annual Community Safety Performance Update and heard from Chief Inspector Korine Bishop. The Committee raised many questions about reporting criminal activity, rural crime statistics, contact with police services, broadband resilience for emergencies, and support for domestic violence initiatives. We agreed on actions regarding the Local Resilience Forum and providing a breakdown of crime statistics. We also discussed the "Development Delivery Plans - Central Winchester Regeneration", and raised questions about the

commencement of development, economic vibrancy, ownership of the site, Kings Walk development, CIL funding, inclusion of council homes, and the Bus Station Redevelopment. We agreed on actions including a member briefing and website updates. We scrutinised the Q3 Finance & Performance Monitoring report, raising concerns about progress towards carbon neutrality, waste and recycling, homelessness, and KPIs for a vibrant economy. We resolved to arrange follow-up meetings on KPIs and public toilets.

Members of the cabinet attended all our meetings, allowing for discussion and questions concerning policy and progress. No call-in of key decisions was initiated in the year.

All committee members contributed constructively to the issues put before them, and I am grateful to them and the officer team for their support. My thanks also go to the Committee Vice-Chair for their help and advice during the past 12 months.