



**REPORT of  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

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to  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**23 MARCH 2022**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the basis of the annual report to Council on the activities of the Committee over the past year.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee endorses the proposed annual report for 2021/2022 for submission to the Council.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 Under its remit the Committee is required to report to the Council annually, and the Council agreed in May 2021 that this should be received at its statutory annual meeting. Although the Committee also acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, its scrutiny remit in this respect is quite specific and relates to outside bodies and agencies involved with crime and disorder. The Committee's annual report to Council will therefore be confined to its scrutiny role rather than in relation to crime and disorder.

- 3.2 At the time of the last annual report the Committee had two actual scrutiny items in its programme of work:-

3.2.1 The Council's Transformation Programme – learning from what has been done

This item was developed out of regular reports the Committee had previously been receiving while the Programme was being implemented and reviewing progress against expected outcomes. A full and final report was received by the Committee at its August 2021 meeting when, subject to the following items, it was agreed that the scrutiny item be closed and removed from its workplan:

- (a) that staff satisfaction surveys be carried out half yearly – with a target of 90%+ to improve staff retention as well as appointments;
- (b) that resident's satisfaction surveys be carried out yearly – with a target of 75%+ (using a variety of methods not just online) to improve service delivery of the Council;
- (c) that an overhaul and revamp of the website be undertaken to make navigation easier for public, members and staff; including relevance of information provided (Use of plain English);

- (d) that areas of organisational deficiency be identified including where there are already staff shortages;
- (e) that balanced customer journey be promoted incorporating digital and face-to-face experience;
- (f) that the Council ensures agile working is always focused on customer need, balanced with the health and wellbeing of staff.

An update on these points is given in the table below

### 3.2.2 A review of the Council's Debt Recovery Process and its impact on local residents

A wide remit and set of outcomes were agreed by the Committee in January 2021. An interim report by way of response to these was considered by the Committee in April. While the Committee noted that the existence of a corporate policy and related processes, it wished to see more detailed information in relation to the enforcement stages of debt recovery, supported with relevant and analysed data. Given the resource pressure on the Revenues and Benefits Team, an extension of time to the end of August was granted for this further information to be provided, and with a view to a redefinition of this scrutiny item.

At its August 2021 meeting the Committee received a further report and presentation and agreed that subject to the following items this scrutiny item be closed and removed from its workplan.

- the Council's website is updated to make it easier to find information regarding debt (with perhaps a button from the home screen);
- the feasibility of an additional step as part of the review of the Corporate Debt Strategy be considered to ensure that the Council was doing everything it could for vulnerable persons.

An update on these points is given in table below

3.4 Councillor V J Bell was elected Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year, with Councillor C Mayes elected as Vice-Chairman. Those two Councillors together with Councillors B B Heubner and N J Skeens were appointed to serve on the Committee's Working Group.

3.5 Over the past year the Committee has dealt with the following requests:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Status/Learning outcomes and actions</b>	<b>Update</b>
Decision-making processes associated with proposed conversion of seating shelter at Promenade Park, Maldon (Councillor K Lagan).	Included in workplan and full report addressing agreed scrutiny questions received at January 2022 meeting, and item closed. This scrutiny highlighted the need for a Management Plan for Promenade Park/Parks, Member involvement/awareness relating to actions involving sensitive assets, and greater openness and transparency on delegated decisions.	The identified need for a Parks Management Plan has been included as a priority objective for a proposal to be brought forward and reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee.  Delegated decisions published on the website as of 4 March 2022 and updated quarterly
Flood risk in Heybridge –	At October 2021 meeting dealt with as	Not applicable.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Status/Learning outcomes and actions</b>	<b>Update</b>
assessment of assets and maintenance responsibilities (Councillor C Swain).	request for information/greater understanding for assurance. Not included in workplan.	
Inaccurate record keeping for statutory registers for self-build (Councillor S White).	As at January 2022 no actual area of scrutiny defined and therefore not included in workplan.	Not applicable.
Parks Team Culture and Health and Safety Concerns (Councillor V Bell).	As at January 2022 no further scrutiny required at this stage and on the basis of information submitted to be kept under review by the Working Group and a further report submitted in six months. Watching brief to include: Qualitative data around staff satisfaction What opportunities staff are given for feedback.	HR supported one to ones, with a set template to raise concerns took place in January. Action plan was developed from this meeting feedback and fortnightly meetings to go through progress now take place.  Full report on watching brief to come back to the Committee.
Learning from a recent Employment Tribunal decision (Councillor V Bell).	At January 2022 meeting assurance received without the need for further scrutiny, and the item was closed.	Not applicable.
Planning Enforcement, lack of action and backlog of unresolved items (Councillor M Bassenger).	At January 2022 agreed little merit in scrutinising this process while steps are being taken to increase the resourcing of Planning Enforcement in line with a Policy review undertaken last year.	Not applicable.
Follow up/compliance with planning conditions (former Councillor K Jarvis).	At January 2022 received mainly as a request for further information/clarification linked to a planning decision. Agreed that the process for the following up of planning conditions can be linked to any future scrutiny of the wider planning enforcement issue.	Not applicable .
Five-year land supply – lack of resilience and robustness of process (Councillor W Stamp).	Request supported and further defined by the Working Group for consideration by the Committee at its March meeting.	Awaiting decision of the Committee at its March meeting.
Transformation (2021 item)	a) that staff satisfaction surveys be carried out half yearly – with a target of 90%+ to improve staff retention as well as appointments;  b) that residents' satisfaction surveys be carried out yearly – with a target of 75%+ (using a variety of methods not just online) to improve service delivery of the Council;	Staff survey results being analysed Proposal to add 6 month 'pulse' survey  Resident survey results being analysed

Subject	Status/Learning outcomes and actions	Update
	<p>c) that an overhaul and revamp of website be undertaken to make navigation easier for public, members and staff; including relevance of information provided (Use of plain English);</p> <p>d) that areas of organisational deficiency be identified including where there are already staff shortages;</p> <p>e) that balanced customer journey be promoted incorporating digital and face to face experience;</p> <p>f) that the Council ensures agile working is always focused on customer need, balanced with the health and wellbeing of staff.</p>	<p>Web improvements and web redesign projects have been initiated. Members have appointed four testers to feed into this process and first changes to be seen from May 2022</p> <p>Balance scorecard exceptions has highlighted operational pressures and these have been accounted for in 22/23 budget setting and post requests</p> <p>Customer access strategy in development and will take account of this</p> <p>Future ways of working staff group have accounted for this and HR are doing a review of all posts and whether they are suitable for hybrid working</p>
Debt recovery (2021 item).	<p>the Council's website is updated to make it easier to find information regarding debt (with perhaps a button from the home screen);</p> <p>the feasibility of an additional step as part of the review of the Corporate Debt Strategy be considered to ensure that the Council was doing everything it could for vulnerable persons.</p>	<p>Review of website undertaken to make it easier for residents and businesses to use and include a comprehensive list of organisations who are able to provide help and advice. Good progress has been made, and further work is planned.</p> <p>An additional step was introduced for all customers facing enforcement action as a result of arrears that accrued during Covid. Payment arrangements continue to be offered and customers are encouraged to make contact at the earliest opportunity to avoid debts accruing.</p> <p>We continue to provide funding to and work closely with the Maldon Citizens Advice (MCA) to ensure that all residents and businesses have access to free impartial advice and support. This includes support for the most vulnerable</p>

Subject	Status/Learning outcomes and actions	Update
		<p>residents through a range of specialist and professional advice. In particular it is possible to agree payment arrangements and a way forward which can include temporary suspension of action.</p> <p>The Corporate Debt Strategy is due for review during 2022/23 and any proposed changes to the current Strategy will to Members for consideration.</p>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council has established a sound basis for the operation of its Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the annual reporting arrangements ensure a degree of accountability of the Committee to Council.

#### 5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 Thorough scrutiny processes underpin the Performance and Efficiency Corporate Goal.

#### 6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – None directly, but individual scrutiny reviews will enable the impact on customers to be assessed.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Equalities are considered as part of the reporting on review work undertaken by Officers.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Scrutiny reviews enable potential Corporate Risks to the organisation and their mitigation to be identified.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Scrutiny reviews offer the potential for an assessment of financial impact to the organisation.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Scrutiny reviews offer the potential for an assessment of any resource impact to the organisation.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – None.

Enquiries to: The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group.