

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2023 / 24**

1.0 Councillor S Morgan was elected Chairman of the Committee for the 2023 / 24 municipal year, with Councillor P L Spenceley elected as Vice-Chairman. All members of the Committee were appointed to serve on the Committee's Working Group. Councillor P L Spenceley was appointed as the Council's District Representative on the County Council's Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

2.0 Over the past year the Committee has dealt with the following scrutiny items:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Status / Learning outcomes and actions</b>	<b>Update</b>
<p>Notice of Motion relating to a successful planning appeal and award of costs against the Council – site at Burnham-on-Crouch (Councillor A S Fluker)</p> <p>Planning decision-making</p>	<p>This motion having been referred by the Council was accepted by the Committee at its meeting in July 2022 and added to its scrutiny workplan.</p> <p>Added to this scrutiny item is the reference from the July 2022 meeting of the Council. This arose from another appeal decision and an award of costs in relation to site at Burnham-on-Crouch. The Council having emphasised the need for more objective and evidence-based decision-making in the future.</p>	<p>The Committee and its Working Group have continued to look at two other matters. The first involves the concept of a constitutional 'brake' – the invoking of an automatic deferment when a Planning Committee reaches a position of being minded to refuse an application contrary to the recommendation of Officers.</p> <p>The second involves the proposed introduction of technical briefings / presentations to Members, outside of the formality of the Planning Committee setting, on certain complex applications.</p> <p><b>At a meeting of the Committee on 5 March 2024 it was decided:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<p>Planning Enforcement – performance and processes</p>	<p>Scrutiny requests had previously been raised by Councillor M G Bassenger and also former Councillors K W Jarvis and C Swain. After an initial watching brief the Committee decided to add the item to its scrutiny workplan.</p>	<p>The Committee and its Working Group continued to receive information on resourcing, processes, and performance through the year. The number of open cases at the beginning of the year had been halved by mid-June.</p> <p>At its meeting in December 2023 the Committee decided that the matter need no longer be on the scrutiny workplan but should remain under a watching brief. Regular updates continue to be received by the Working Group and the Committee is keen to work with Officers in connection with the pending review of the Planning Enforcement Policy.</p>

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<b>Subject</b>	<b>Status / Learning outcomes and actions</b>	<b>Update</b>
Staff Exit Questionnaires	<p>Reference from the Performance Governance and Audit Committee in September 2022 that the Committee reviews the outcomes from these.</p> <p>The Committee in October 2022 agreed to add this to its scrutiny workplan.</p>	<p>Due to the low take-up of Exit Questionnaires by staff leaving the Council there has been little or no evidence of particular themes that can be scrutinised to date.</p>
Cyber Security Update	<p>Reference from the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee in September 2022 that the Committee reviews the audit and technical reports on this matter.</p> <p>The Committee in October 2022 agreed to add this to its scrutiny workplan.</p>	<p>In the light of the audit and technical reports received at the time, and positive conclusions reached in a subsequent Internal Audit report, the Committee at its December 2023 meeting decided that this item be deleted from its scrutiny workplan.</p>
Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults – corporate risk update	<p>Reference from the Performance, Governance and Audit Committee in January 2023 for review to ensure that the Council is supporting this area of work appropriately together with the Officers undertaking the actual work. This was then added to the Scrutiny Workplan.</p>	<p>At its December 2023 meeting the Committee received a full update on the issues previously giving rise to the increased risk rating, in particular the operation of the Safeguarding Forum. Reporting processes and the Safeguarding Policy, the latter due for review, remain robust. <b>At the March 2024 meeting of the Committee it was decided ...</b></p>
Maldon Citizens' Advice (MCA)	<p>This originated from a scrutiny request by Councillor S J Morgan following a Member visit to MCA. Arising from this, concerns were expressed as to whether the Council was doing enough to assist those customers without on-line access to Council services, or who found on-line access to services difficult to navigate.</p> <p>The Committee's Working Group in October received detailed information on these issues and the work of this organisation and its partnered arrangement to support the work of the Council.</p>	<p>At the December 2023 meeting of the Committee it was decided to endorse the findings of its Working Group and refer to the Council the findings of this scrutiny. In so doing, the Committee wished to draw Members' attention to the financial implications of the contractual arrangement with MCA and the excellent value for money delivered by way of supporting a wide range of services so that this is borne in mind when the contract is reviewed in 2024.</p> <p>At the February 2024 meeting of the Council, the recommendations of the Committee were received and accepted.</p>
Corporate Project – Land acquisition at Heybridge	<p>This originates from a scrutiny request by Councillor A S Fluker.</p>	<p>In line with the process for considering scrutiny requests from Members, this matter received initial consideration by the Working</p>

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	<p>Although this matter was the subject of a report to the Council in November 2023, the request seeks a closer look at the circumstances which led to this project being withdrawn, the Council's valuation, and also whether the management of the project was sufficiently robust.</p>	<p>Group in January 2024. Further information was requested as to the progression of the financial aspects that led to the project being withdrawn.</p> <p>At the February meeting of the Working Group it was agreed that further information including a detailed timeline of events over the course of the project was requested to assist with Members' understanding.</p>
<p>Provision of 3+ bed affordable housing, especially social rented housing</p>	<p>This originates from a scrutiny request by Councillor E L Stephens.</p> <p>The request seeks to establish why there is a greater lack of 3+ bed homes than for smaller properties, to ensure that affordable housing numbers are being calculated correctly, and to reduce the waiting time for 3+ bed homes.</p>	<p>In line with the process for considering scrutiny requests from Members, this matter received initial consideration by the Working Group in February 2024. Additional information and clarification was sought for a future meeting.</p>

3.0 While scrutiny of particular decisions and specific areas of work will form the bulk of the activity, the Committee has quite a wide remit which includes the monitoring and review of the performance of external bodies and stakeholders. At its December 2023 meeting the Committee decided to explore arrangements for a more focused engagement with representatives of local health service providers with a view to themed agenda items on future agendas. **At a meeting of the Committee in March 2024 .....**