

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2024 / 25

1.0 Councillor S J N Morgan was elected Chairman of the Committee for the 2024 / 25 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:

Subject	Status / Learning outcomes and actions	Update
Corporate Project – Land acquisition at Heybridge	<p>This originated from a scrutiny request by Councillor A S Fluker.</p> <p>Although this matter was the subject of a report to the Council in November 2023, the request sought a closer look at the circumstances which led to this project being withdrawn, the Council's valuation, and also whether the management of the project was sufficiently robust.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>In line with the process for considering scrutiny requests from Members, this matter received initial consideration by the Working Group in January 2024. Further information was requested as to the progression of the financial aspects that led to the project being withdrawn, and this was reviewed at the February and March meetings of the Working Group.</p> <p>An interim report was made to the Committee at its April meeting, where it was decided not only to add the item to the scrutiny workplan but also refer it back to the Working Group to look at further and report in the light of the completion and availability of a 'lessons learned' report compiled by the project team.</p> <p>The Working Group has continued to look at this at subsequent meetings and at its December 2024 meeting endorsed its draft final report back to the Committee for consideration on 6 February 2025. The Committee accepted the Working Group's recommendation broadly to endorse the 'lessons learned' report conclusions and commend them to the Council for wider use and to be borne in mind for future similar projects. This was reported to Council on 3 April 2025.</p>

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Non-provision of improved facilities / adventure playground at Sensory Garden, Promenade Park, Maldon	<p>This originated from a scrutiny request from Councillor P L Spenceley.</p> <p>The request sought to establish why there this project had not progressed or been delivered following earlier public consultation. Various learning outcomes potentially applicable to the future similar projects were identified, including the need for improved communication with Members and the public.</p>	<p>At the April 2024 meeting of the Working Group and Officer response was received. In the light of this and the Working Group's recommendation, the Committee at its September 2024 meeting agreed that sufficient information and assurance had been received and that no further scrutiny was required. The item would however be kept on a 'watching brief' for review by the Working Group.</p>
Cemeteries Maintenance	<p>This originated from a scrutiny request by Councillor W Stamp. Concern had been raised over the standards of maintenance at cemeteries in the Maldon District having regard to the operation of the new grounds maintenance contract.</p>	<p>In line with the process for considering scrutiny requests from Members, this matter received initial consideration by the Working Group in June 2024 with a briefing paper from Officers.</p> <p>At its September 2024 meeting the Committee agreed to accept the Working Group's conclusions that this item did not need to be added to the scrutiny workplan but that it be kept on a 'watching brief' with two reports to be made to the Working Group over a period of twelve months, the first to its April 2025 meeting.</p>
Planning Appeal re Land at Woodham Mortimer	<p>This originated from a scrutiny request by Councillor S J N Morgan.</p> <p>Issues raised were based on concerns expressed locally as to the Council's conduct in relation to the appeal and also its failure to secure compliance with a condition attached to the permission granted on appeal which may have affected the status of that permission.</p>	<p>In line with the process for considering scrutiny requests from Members, this matter received initial consideration by the Working Group in July 2024 with initial briefing information from Officers.</p> <p>The Working Group has continued to look at this at subsequent meetings given the on-going development management issues associated with this site. The Working Group's response to the issues raised in the initial scrutiny request was reported to the Committee on 6 February 2025 where it was decided that the matter should be added to the scrutiny workplan for more detailed consideration. This has been looked at by the Working Group for report back to a future meeting of</p>

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		the Committee.
Splash Park, Promenade Park, Maldon – opening times	This was a reference from the Corporate Leadership Team on the apparent failure by Officers to interpret and implement the wishes of Members in relation to the opening of this facility earlier in the year.	The Committee at its September 2024 meeting received a report from its Working Group on this. In the knowledge that Officers had put in place robust steps around the recording of Council Minutes of meetings held in private session, and the communication and implementation of decisions arising from such sessions, the Committee was greatly reassured and saw no reason for any further action.

- 3.0 In addition to the above matters dealt with by the Committee, its Working Group has continued to receive updates on Planning Enforcement staffing and performance, a 'watching brief' item, and will be reporting back to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 4.0 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 October special meeting a follow-up presentation was received from the Alliance Director of the Mid Essex NHS. The Committee will be looking to receive presentations from other key stakeholders and service providers in the District, including the areas of water, drainage/sewerage, and highways.