

Draft Annual Scrutiny Report

2020/21

Chairs



Cllr Arvind Dhaliwal
Overview & Scrutiny
Committee



Cllr Jina Basra
Education and
Children's Services
Scrutiny Panel



Cllr Atiq Sandhu
Health Scrutiny
Panel



Cllr Christine Hulme
Neighbourhoods and
Community Services
Scrutiny Panel

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Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Task & Finish Group

Members

Cllr Zaffar Ajaib (Chair)

Cllr Christine Hulme

Cllr Harjinder Minhas

Cllr Waqas Sabah

Terms of Reference

To investigate and make recommendations in relation to SBC's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention strategies, with specific reference to:

- Identification and reporting
- Support provision
- Engagement and communication

From October to December the Task & Finish Group investigated the issue of homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough.

This was mainly driven by concerns over the persistent nature of the problem in Slough and the potential increase in numbers that was anticipated - with more people are expected to lose their jobs because of COVID and the anticipated winding down of the furlough scheme.

During its investigations the group spoke to 42 individuals from 18 different organisations, including multiple different SBC teams and a broad range of partners in the public, voluntary and housing sectors.

The task and finish group also interviewed a number of former rough sleepers, whose views helped them to form their recommendations.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Task & Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group made identified a number of key areas that the council and its partners should prioritise in the coming months:

- Partnerships & Collaboration
- Communications
- Commissioning and complex needs
- Health and Mental Heal
- Skills and strengths
- Localities and customer services
- Safety

The work of the Task and Finish group was welcomed by officers and the Cabinet. The recommendations were all accepted and are now being implemented.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Highlight – public transport and bus lanes

The council's transport strategies and plans were a key area of enquiry for the Committee in 2020/21.

In September, while scrutinising the council's regeneration framework masterplan, members identified potential challenges around the relationship between regeneration, public transport and traffic management.

The Committee made several recommendations to Cabinet, including on the importance of bus lanes and some challenges relating to them.

Building on this line of enquiry, and in response to a public petition, the Committee held an extraordinary session to examine the impact of the introduction of experimental bus lanes, alongside members of the Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

As well as interviewing the Lead Member and SBC officers, the committee sought to take evidence from a number of different stakeholders, including: local residents, local taxi and private hire drivers, Slough Youth Parliament and further SBC councillors.

Following its deliberations, members made a set of extensive recommendations to the Cabinet covering a wide range of areas, including the use of the bus lanes by alternative vehicles, low emission vehicles, the electric bus service, bus frequency and fares, cycling provision and traffic flow.

Later in the year, the Committee also scrutinised the draft Slough Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan – focussing their scrutiny in particular on parking provision and proposals relating to a cycle super highway.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Further areas scrutinised in 2020/21 by the committee:

- COVID-19 Recovery & Renewal Planning and Strategy
- The work of the Slough Violence Taskforce
- The Slough Inclusive Growth Strategy
- The Slough Regeneration Framework Master Plan
- The Slough Local Plan and Proposed Spatial Strategy
- The priorities of the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner & Chief Constable
- The Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Strategy, and Treasury Management Strategy
- The Slough 2040 Vision
- The Our Future's Programme – including progress with transformation, the council's restructure and the localities strategy
- The future delivery model for Slough Children's Services

Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – Youth Offer, skills and employment

In December 2020, the panel received an update on plans to create a refreshed youth offer for Slough's young people. The session was timed to allow the panel to contribute towards the youth offer at an early stage, before it was finalised and presented to Cabinet.

The session covered a number of topics, including:

- The project's engagement with young people so far
- The potential design of a new youth centre
- The age groups that the centre would serve
- The services which would be delivered
- Opportunities for collaboration with other services
- Timelines for finalising and delivering the youth offer

The panel felt that it was important to ensure that the youth offer and new youth centre contributed towards identifying and addressing gaps and setbacks caused by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Members agreed that it was important that the youth offer works with local businesses to support young people in accessing career support and creating opportunities to gain skills and employment.

These themes will be explored in greater detail by the Employment, Skills and COVID task and finish group, which will present more detailed proposals in the next municipal year.

Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

Further areas scrutinised in 2020/21 by the panel:

- School standards
- The impact of COVID 19 on the Early Years Service and Slough Children's Services Trust
- Community learning and skills
- Apprenticeships – including the work of the Slough Academy
- The Creative Academy
- Elective Home Education
- The performance of Slough Children's Services Trust
- Safeguarding thresholds for children
- Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Slough's multi-agency parenting strategy

Health Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – COVID 19 Response

Over the last 12 months, the Health Scrutiny Panel has focused heavily on scrutinising the response of Slough Borough Council and our NHS partners to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The panel has received regular reports on the COVID-19 situation in Slough from the Public Health team, as well as scrutinising some of the key projects taking place in Slough to respond to the pandemic, including the Local Outbreak Plan, the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) project, and the Winter Plans of the East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group and the Frimley Health and Care System.

The panel has focused on engaging in effective scrutiny of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Slough.

The panel have ensured that they have received a wide range of reports, focusing on different elements of the response to the pandemic from different partners in the town.

Members have provided valuable local insight and challenge, such as discussions with officers and partners on the most effective ways to communicate with different groups of the local community.

Throughout this scrutiny, the panel has also placed clear emphasis on their role in the community as councillors, and has regularly requested key actions and messages for them to undertake to help support the COVID-19 response.

Health Scrutiny Panel

Further areas scrutinised in 2020/21 by the panel:

- Air quality and health
- Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report
- The Adult Social Care Local Account
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Disability Task and Finish Group East Berkshire CCG Future Plans
- The future plans for the East Berkshire CCG
- GP provision
- Immunisations and screening
- Mental health
- The Frimley Health and Care System Annual Plan
- The Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Annual Plan
- The Adult Social Care Strategy & Budget
- The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service

Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – Repairs, Maintenance and Investment

Throughout the year the panel has held several sessions to examine the performance of the Repairs, Maintenance and Investment (RMI) Contract, which is delivered by Osborne.

The panel developed a number of important lines of enquiry to build on concerns raised by residents, and a desire to establish the extent to which the contract was delivering value for money for the council and our residents. These included:

- The impact of COVID 19
- Plans to reduce the outstanding repairs backlog
- Response times
- Resident satisfaction
- Customer service and complaints
- Social Return on Investment

These sessions included extensive interrogation of performance data, interviews with officers from both Osborne and the Council, and also sought to gain the views of the residents' board.

As a result of its inquiries, the panel made a recommendation for the Council's internal auditors to conduct a comprehensive and wide ranging review of the contract with Osborne, which the Cabinet agreed to incorporate into plans for 2021/22.

The sessions have highlighted the importance of accurate and timely performance data, and as a result arrangements are now being put in place from February 2021 to provide more meaningful data. The scrutiny has also identified further opportunities for social return on investment, to help the council reduce rough sleeping.

Neighbourhoods & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Further areas scrutinised in 2020/21 by the panel:

- Rough sleeping and the Homeless Prevention Strategy (see pages 4-5)
- Feedback from the Residents Board
- Plans to transform Langley High Street, and the adjacent infrastructure
- Safer Public Spaces
- The Council's Property Licensing schemes
- The decant from the Customer Service Centre at Landmark Place into three local Council Access Points
- The Low Emissions Strategy
- The Housing Allocation Policy
- Housing Rents and Service Charges
- The work of the Home Improvement Agency

Cabinet-Scrutiny Working Group

Throughout the year the Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and three scrutiny panels having been meeting with officers and members of the Cabinet to consider how to best drive improvements in Overview & Scrutiny at SBC.

In their work they have drawn on the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review and feedback from the members training session held in July 2020.

The joint working group looked at examples of how scrutiny is structured and delivered at other local authorities. A proposal to re-balance the scrutiny panels and link them to the council's new organisational structure was discussed with scrutiny members at a workshop on 24th February 2021.

The workshop was also an opportunity to work with members to develop proposals for a new scrutiny protocol, which will lay out how effective scrutiny will be embedded in Slough for the 2021/22 municipal year. The protocol will seek to deliver improvements in a number of areas, including:

- Training
- Scrutiny Champions
- The voice of the community
- Work programming
- Delineation of work
- Pre-meetings
- Presenter expectations
- Task and Finish Groups