

**Annual Report
of the
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 28th January 2014

1. Background

- 1.1 This report sets out a summary of the activities and work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the 2013 calendar year. Full details of all of the reviews undertaken and other matters considered by the Committee over this period are set out in the relevant agenda papers and minutes.
- 1.2 During 2013, there were three programmed meetings of the Committee held on the following dates: 29th January; 11th June and the 10th September. In addition to these formal meetings, a number of informal scrutiny review group meetings were arranged under the chairmanship of the Committee's two Vice-Chairmen. These met outside of the normal meeting calendar to look at specific issues in more detail prior to the matter under consideration being dealt with by the full Committee. This form of working has enabled the Committee to undertake a wider range of review work over the year and has enabled Members to investigate relevant issues in greater detail. It is expected that this style of working will be carried forward into 2014.
- 1.3 Set out below are details of each of the Committee's main meetings and a brief description of the work undertaken.

2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 29th January 2013

- 2.1 The agenda of this meeting was dominated by 'overview' items ie matters of Council policy and budgetary matters that required review and endorsement prior to their formal consideration by the Cabinet. The following matters were discussed:
 - Revenue Estimates 2013/14
 - Capital Plan Review 2012/13
 - The Kent Joint Municipal Waste Strategy
 - The Food and Safety Team Service Plan 2012-2016
 - The Council's Housing Strategy 2013-2016
 - The Housing and Council Tax Benefits Anti-Fraud Policy
 - The Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy.
- 2.2 A further report to the Committee was submitted in relation to the work of the two on-going scrutiny review groups which were established at the previous meeting of the Committee in September 2012. These reviews were focused on parking management issues and value for money issues in relation to council printing and mileage rates. As further work on the parking review was required, it was agreed that the final report on this issue would be made to the June meeting of the Committee. The review group on value for money issues concluded that any review of staff mileage rates should be deferred pending the outcome of Joint National Council negotiations on this matter and that this should be a matter for the General Purposes Committee to consider. Issues

related to Council printing were taken forward by a new review group focusing on Here and Now and the Council's Leisure Guide.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 11th June 2013

- 3.1 This meeting received the final report of the review group investigating parking management issues and a number of recommendations were considered and endorsed. It was agreed that such matters would be taken forward by the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board.
- 3.2 A further report on the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Anti-Fraud Policy was submitted drawing attention to additional amendments suggested by the Audit Committee. The Policy, with these amendments, was endorsed and was referred to Council for formal adoption.
- 3.3 The Committee also considered a draft of the Council's Corporate Performance Plan 2012/15. The Plan included a review of progress after the first year of its three year term, with further progress expected in the second and third years. It was reported that the updated Plan showed extremely good progress during its first year based against the improvement themes, assessment of performance indicator results against targets and comparison of year on year indicator results. The Committee noted that the Corporate Performance Plan was a principal means of driving performance improvement and delivery for money. It communicated clearly to Members, staff, stakeholders and residents the Borough Council's key priorities and targets, how the priorities and targets were achieved and where the Borough Council was looking to improve and was also an important tool to measure, assess and challenge performance, priorities and objectives. The Plan was endorsed and commended to the Cabinet for further consideration and adoption.
- 3.4 A report was submitted by the Management Team which suggested a different approach to the future Scrutiny review process. This was driven by the necessity for the Borough Council to identify and implement considerable financial savings to achieve targets set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy over the next six years. It was intended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have a key and influential role in the evaluation of a range of potential future financial savings.
- 3.5 It was agreed that two review groups would be established to look in detail at media and communications (including Here and Now) and alternatives to printed council agenda papers and the increased use of IT.

4. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 10th September 2013

- 4.1 Meetings of the two review groups had taken place prior to the September Committee meeting and final reports of these groups were submitted to the Committee for further consideration.
- 4.2 The review group looking at Media and Communications recommended that Here and Now be discontinued from April 2014 given the substantial annual savings that could be achieved which were estimated to be in the order of £60,000 pa. It was further recommended that an exit strategy be prepared focusing on the need to develop more innovative forms of communication with local residents and businesses and developing closer working relationships with local media teams. The recommendations were endorsed and commended to the Cabinet.
- 4.3 The review group looking at the printing of council agendas recommended that tablets should be introduced for Members and senior staff and that the printing of Council agendas and their distribution by courier should cease. It was found that such a change could result in annual savings in the order of £25,000. The recommendations were endorsed and commended to the Cabinet.
- 4.4 A report setting out further value for money issues for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider was also made. This recommended that two new review groups should be established to investigate concessionary fees and charges for those on benefit, and budgets in the Council's capital plan for disabled facilities grants and other forms of housing assistance.
- 4.5 By the end of the calendar year, both review groups had met and recommendations from each were due to be considered at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28th January 2014.