

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

1. Background

- 1.1 This report sets out a summary of the activities and work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the 2014 calendar year. Full details of all 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 2014, two programmed meetings of the Committee took place on 28 January and 11 June. 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-Chairman. These met outside the normal meeting calendar to look at specific issues in more detail prior to the matter 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 2015.
- 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 – 28 January 2014

- 2.1 The agenda for this meeting included the budgetary matters that required review and endorsement prior to their formal consideration by the Cabinet. The following matters were discussed:
- Revenue Estimates 2014/15
 - Capital Plan Review 2013/14
- 2.2 Two further reports were submitted in relation to the work of the two review groups, looking into Concessionary Fees and Charges and the review of Disabled Facilities Grant Contributions and Housing Assistance Funding.
- 2.3 The review group looking at Fees and Charges concluded that all concessions operated by the Council should, in future, be linked to recipients of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It recommended that the following be approved:
1. The current 100% concession for pest control services should be retained;
 2. The current 100% concession for bulky goods collection should be retained and additional marketing of the service and of the Saturday Household Waste Service should be undertaken;
 3. A review of the discounts for leisure services/activities by undertaken by the Leisure and Arts Advisory Board to simplify the rates which apply;
 4. The criteria which govern access to the Council's concessions be made consistent across services and in the future be based primarily on those eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme;

5. To reflect the finding of the equalities impact assessment disability/incapacity be added to the qualifying criteria for all concessions, should a single card be introduced;
6. Eligibility for access to concessions should be assessed and reviewed on an annual basis only in order to streamline administrations of the concessions scheme;
7. The introduction of a single discount card be supported in principle but should be subject to further investigation taking into account examples of best practice; and
8. Additional marketing and promotion of the discount card scheme should be considered to encourage greater take up by those eligible.

2.4 The review of Disabled Facilities Grant contributions and Housing Assistance Funding, recommended:

1. The existing level of capital plan funding for Disabled Facilities Grants should be retained for the time being but reviewed again when changes to the funding regime take place in 2015; and
2. The capital plan budget for discretionary housing assistance be set at £90,000 and part funded by way of grant repayments as detailed in paragraph 1.6 of the report.

2.5 All of the above recommendations were subsequently considered and endorsed by the Cabinet.

2.6 A report setting out the future review work programme was also presented and it was resolved that review groups would be established to investigate Memberships / subscriptions and Postage/ courier costs.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 11 June 2014

3.1 This meeting received the Corporate Performance Plan – Review and Update report. It was noted that the Corporate Performance Plan was a principal means of driving performance improvement and value for money and it was recommended that the Corporate Performance Plan be adopted.

3.2 In accordance with the Borough Council's constitution a report of the Chief Executive sought retrospective approval to the addition of a new Capital Plan scheme to purchase hardware for the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER), it was recommended that this be endorsed and the grant funded scheme be added to the Capital Plan.

3.3 A future review programme was also endorsed at this meeting, it was resolved that Review Groups would be established to investigate the Capital Plan Renewals Provisions and another to review the Empty Homes process.

3.4 The recommendations from the review of Postage and Courier Costs were also brought to this meeting, with the following recommendations endorsed:

- (1) the Borough Council use Royal Mail accredited accounts for the majority of its postal needs, pursue all possible options for savings with Royal Mail and the use of the franking machine be discontinued;
- (2) the guaranteed early delivery postal service be discontinued;
- (3) any cheaper and appropriate alternatives to the use of Royal Mail be investigated in the longer term;
- (4) that the current courier service be discontinued; and
- (5) that, in the interim, a reduced courier service be introduced using existing caretaker staff until all such information is able to be delivered via electronic means, in line with the business transformation agenda

3.5 By the end of the calendar year, review groups for Empty Homes and the Capital Renewals Provisions had met and recommendations for each were due to be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 January 2015.