

Chair's Introduction

I'd like to start by thanking the members of the Committee who have worked so hard this year to make the Scrutiny Committee effective. Whilst the first year of the new administration was a year of learning for many, this year feels like the new Committee is establishing a rhythm.

I'd also like to thank officers and Portfolio Holders who have supported our work, both by attending Committee meetings but also providing answers to Members' questions in advance. These are an essential part of the scrutiny process.

Over the past 12 months we have continued to ensure the right focus between scrutinising the cabinet agenda as well as developing our own work programme. This has helped us to become more proactive as a Committee and I'm pleased that we have had a number of items where we have examined items prior to them appearing on the cabinet agenda. This has enabled us to have input earlier in the process, improving our impact and reducing the need for later intervention.

As a group we have dealt with significant issues including the South Warwickshire Local Plan, West Midlands Investment Zone and challenges with the financial performance of the housing portfolio. Despite being highly technical issues these sessions have been helpful and constructive. The creation of the Housing Scrutiny Committee has had a positive impact on allowing the Committee to manage its workload effectively and focus on the right things. We have also had more input from external partners including Everyone Active, Milverton Homes and Sherbourne Recycling Ltd. These are a welcome addition to our discussions and in my view have made us more effective in our impact.

One important development this year that will make our work more effective is the development of the Performance Management Framework. Early indications are that this will help us to focus on key issues in an extremely broad and complex area.

There are a number of areas of further focus for the year ahead:

- The effectiveness of scrutiny is often influenced by the quality of the report that that we see. Shorter, more targeted reports often get to the heart of the matter more quickly and we welcome the invitation to explore particular issues and areas.
- The Budget Review Group has been more effective in its discussions this year but still suffers from low attendance. It would be helpful if the group was enabled to accommodate substitutes in future.
- Over the next 12 months I anticipate that much of the Committee's workload will be in supporting the scrutiny of the proposals related to devolution and the creation of a unitary authority. During the project to create a single district across South Warwickshire, the Scrutiny Committee played an important role in shaping these discussions and giving visibility to Members. I hope that we will be able to play a similar role here.

Most of all, I hope that next year we will continue to be seen as a supportive and constructive voice in how the council operates.

I'd like to end by thanking the Deputy Chief Executive, the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer, and the Committee Services team who are so integral to ensuring that our meetings run effectively. Their support before, during and after our sessions is invaluable.

Councillor Andrew Milton
Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Items considered by Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2024/25

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Items

2024:

- Annual Performance Update from the South Warwickshire Community Safety
- Housing Revenue Account Budget and the risks associated with it
- Appointments to the Budget Review Group
- Appointment of Children's and Adults' Safeguarding Champion
- Leisure Services Provider
- Climate Change and Biodiversity Reporting
- Change Programme update: April 2024 – July 2024
- Quarterly Budget Update
- Climate Change and Low Cost, Low Carbon Energy Reporting
- Annual Update on the Corporate Strategy
- The Royal Pump Rooms Customer Service Centre – Six Months On
- 2024/25 Quarter 1 Performance Report
- Tachbrook Country Park
- Park Exercise Permit
- LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Progress

2025:

- Quarter 2 Performance Report
- Change and Biodiversity Engagement and Communication Activity Report
- Milverton Homes
- English Devolution White Paper
- MRF Update
- I.D Verde Maintenance Contract Review
- Quarter 3 Performance Report
- Change Programme – Case for Change
- Future High Street Fund Update

Routine Items:

Work Programme, Forward Plan & Comments from Cabinet

Cabinet / Joint Cabinet reports scrutinised by the Committee and the Budget Review Group:

(Where Overview & Scrutiny Committee (O&S) has made a recommendation(s) to Cabinet on reports being considered at Cabinet, Cabinet's decision to approve or refuse that recommendation is detailed below.)

O&S meeting 13 May 2024:

Newbold Comyn Cycle Trails

The Committee had asked for Cabinet to consider the following points:

- the procurement process should include how resident feedback would be integrated and looking at measurables within the contract e.g. promoting courses and how often they are open;
- learning from previous procurement exercises should be included;
- the social value element should be a factor to be considered in determining the successful tender;
- at paragraph 1.6.7 in the report the first bullet point should stop after "reputational damage"; and
- the Committee asked to ensure that the tender is well publicised, particularly amongst local businesses, to maximalise opportunity to respond.

O&S meeting 4 June 2024:

West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ)

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee explored questions around Governance and were reassured that the transparency required was present.

The Committee were keen for the Council to retain the right to define what constituted a "Local Growth Initiative".

The Committee supported the proposal as set out in the report and thanked officers for their hard work.

Recommendation

The Committee recommended that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (for the municipal year 2024/2025, Councillor Andrew Milton) be added to the List of Consultees at LCG and Cabinet.

The Cabinet is required to vote on this because it forms a recommendation to it.

O&S meeting 8 July 2024:

Low Cost, Low Carbon Energy Programme

The Committee noted the report and thanked the Cabinet members for attendance and their response to the questions.

Parking Services Development – Strategy and NPP

The Committee noted the report and asked the Portfolio Holder to be mindful of the potential impact on users by passing on the convenience charge to them; and how

this can be communicated clearly to all parties. They also asked that card payment at machine continues to remain available so that there are alternative ways to pay rather than online.

The Committee asked that the proposed Parking Strategy also looks at the potential to provide high quality secure cycle parking storage as a way of encouraging modal shift.

O&S meeting 30 July 2024:

Meeting Housing Growth Needs through the South Warwickshire Local Plan

The Committee noted that earlier during the day of the meeting, the Government had laid out its plans on planning reform and housebuilding. This came late in the day and officers and the Leaders of Warwick District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council had not had a chance to consider its implications in depth, but the Committee noted this intervention of Government was likely to lead to a change of policy.

The Committee also recognised the anxiety around the South Warwickshire Local Plans and the number of houses amongst local residents, and the potential impact of this.

Recommendation

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommends to Joint Cabinet that, given the uncertainty introduced by the Government announcement, the numbers referred to in recommendation (2) should be "noted" rather than "agreed", and the report be amended accordingly in order to reflect this.

The Joint Cabinet is required to vote on this because it forms a recommendation to it.

The Committee was confident that the working methodology as it stands provides a good basis to proceed with the proposals.

Proposed Changes to the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) Part A Methodology for the South Warwickshire Local Plan

The Committee thanked officers for their work on producing the report.

In relation to the Financial Implications paragraph in both reports, the Committee notes the figures and asks Cabinet to provide assurance to Stratford-on-Avon District Council with regards to Warwick District Council meeting its financial obligations, noting that further funding will need to be agreed as part of future budget-setting.

O&S meeting 3 September 2024:

Q1 Budget Update 2024/25

The Committee was concerned about the financial performance of the Housing Portfolio as a whole, and in particular, that the Council did not seem to have a complete explanation for the variances within the Housing Finance area. The Committee requests a Finance update to be brought forward at its next meeting on 24 September 2024, to help Members understand why the figures were so far adverse at this stage of the year.

The Committee thanked officers for the detailed updates on reserves, including the appendix, and felt that whilst this had been greatly improved from previous reporting, Members would like a more detailed explanation to draw out the use of the reserves, and for those no longer needed to be marked accordingly in the future.

Members also considered the Royal Spa Centre and Parking.

In relation to the Materials Recycling Facility, the Committee asked the Deputy Chief Executive to provide a briefing as a member of the Board, being aware that this might need to be done in confidential session.

In consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, the Committee would like to open up an invitation to the Managing Director, to come and brief the Committee at an appropriate time. Members also asked if independent scrutiny might be needed, given that insufficient scrutiny was identified by officers.

O&S meeting 15 October 2024:

Local Growth Initiatives Plan – West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ)

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the report and reminded Cabinet of the indicative nature of the list of projects. Members welcomed and supported Abbey Fields being the first scheme being funded and recognised the potential benefits this could bring. The Committee also explored some of the wider risks presented by the political change and was satisfied that everything was done to mitigate those risks as much as it possibly could.

Leamington Town Centre Transformation Proposals

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee explored the need for a single, coherent approach to prioritisation and to the wider town centre and welcomed the appointment of a programme director in the future. The Committee recognised that the approach to transport needed to be holistic and Cabinet needed to think quite widely about the needs of different groups of people, including those travelling from rural areas and didn't have access to regular and reliable public transport. In addition, when potentially moving location of bus stops, the Committee emphasised that those most vulnerable would still be able to easily access essential facilities.

Members were concerned that there was a risk around managing the project going forward, and it was important to recognise what the priorities were, to make sure the desired outcomes were achieved. Members emphasised the importance of engaging local partners such as Warwickshire County Council early on and ensure they are on board with the project.

Kenilworth Wardens Sports Club Property Matter (Confidential)

Appendix B

O&S meeting 3 November 2024:

South Warwickshire Local Plan – Preferred Options

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) thanked officers for their work to date on the Local Plan and for facilitating the recent Member briefings for all Councillors at both Stratford District and Warwick District;

- (2) sought assurance on the transparency and communication around the consultation, particularly with residents and Parish Councils;
- (3) asked officers to review future reports on the Local Plan to provide them in smaller and more focussed sections clearly for residents so they can see 'how does this affect me?';
- (4) welcomed there would be an interactive map available online and asked for the information this would provide; and
- (5) asked officers to review various infrastructure delays relating to previous developments and lessons learned to see if similar challenges could be avoided within the proposed local plan.

Recommendation

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to Joint Cabinet there be a significant amount of face-to-face consultation that creates dialogue with residents.

The Cabinet is required to vote on this because it forms a recommendation to it.

O&S meeting 3 December 2024:

HRA Repairs and Maintenance Procurement

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were comfortable that the approach had taken on board the comments from the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee and welcomed that the final specification of the contract will be put to the Housing Scrutiny Committee, to provide assurance for the Council prior to recommendation 2 of the report being enacted.

O&S meeting 4 February 2025:

Q2 Budget Monitoring and updated MTFS

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the report and advise Cabinet that the MRF is a confidential agenda item at O&S Committee on 18 February 2025.

The Committee thanked officers for their work to make the report more digestible and asked officers:

- to look at recovering the leisure centre consultancy costs from the developer; and
- to provide clarity in relation to the increased mowing costs (whether this was from No Mow May, or not).

2025-2026 Service Area Plans

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested officers to provide information as to how the Performance Management Framework will be better communicated to residents and visible to the public. The Committee requests Cabinet

to consider ways to measure how the Council's services are valued by residents in line with the Council's Corporate Strategy priorities.

Update of Destination Management Organisation arrangements to include Shakespeare's England and emerging Local Visitor Economy Partnership

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the report and will invite Shakespeare's England to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2025, for a performance review of the last two years, to establish the value being delivered to our residents and businesses.

Leisure Contract Extension (Confidential Appendix)

Appendix B