

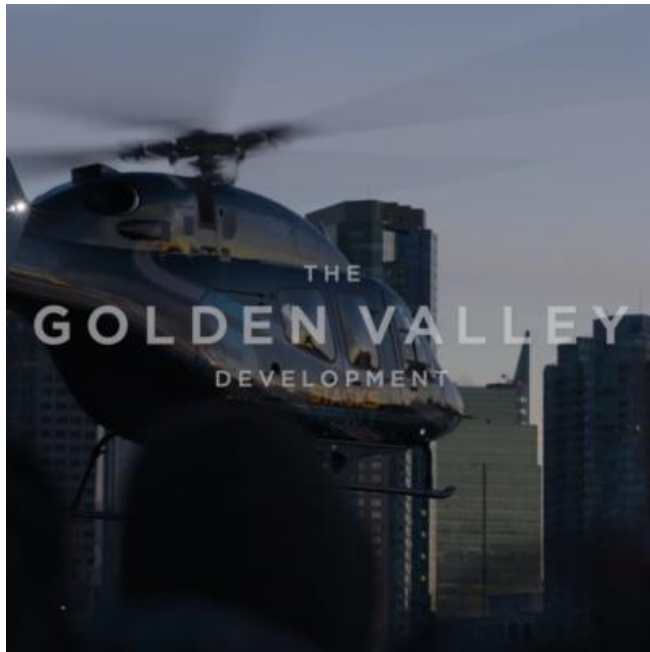
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SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2019-20



Marketing
Cheltenham



FOREWORD

COUNCILLOR CHRIS MASON, CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

As Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I am pleased to present the Annual report for 2019/20.

Before starting I would like to thank Councillor Klara Sudbury, Councillor John Payne, Daren Knight and Saira Malin for their invaluable support.

In essence the work of the committee is to be a “critical friend” to the Cabinet, Council and external partners. Naturally this requires asking challenging and searching questions. As to be expected, those presenting to the committee have addressed its concerns in an open manner.

For me the key piece of work during 2019/20 was the commissioning of the Campbell Tickell report. The company was asked to review the work of the committee, how it operated and the range of issues it considered. I would recommend reading the report to any Member of the Council. The report made a number of recommendations but perhaps the two most important are the need to focus on what the Council can influence, and review how the meetings are conducted. With regard to the latter, the expectation is that members now have all reports coming to the committee seven days in advance. Thus providing an opportunity to forward questions to those presenting in advance of the meeting itself. The adoption of this practice means that more time can be spent on discussing the heart of the matter, and where relevant make justified recommendations. All of Campbell Tickell’s recommendations were accepted by the O&S Committee.

As can be seen in the annual report below, the committee has considered a number of relevant issues. Some such as unauthorised encampments, Police & Crime Commissioner’s annual report and NHS – Fit for the Future, involved input from partner organisations, for which I thank them for their openness and candour. Other issues considered included high street improvements, public conveniences, climate change, the North Place site, strategic waste and marketing Cheltenham.

I hope Members find the annual report of interest and would be pleased to answer any questions when it is presented to the Council.

DARREN KNIGHT

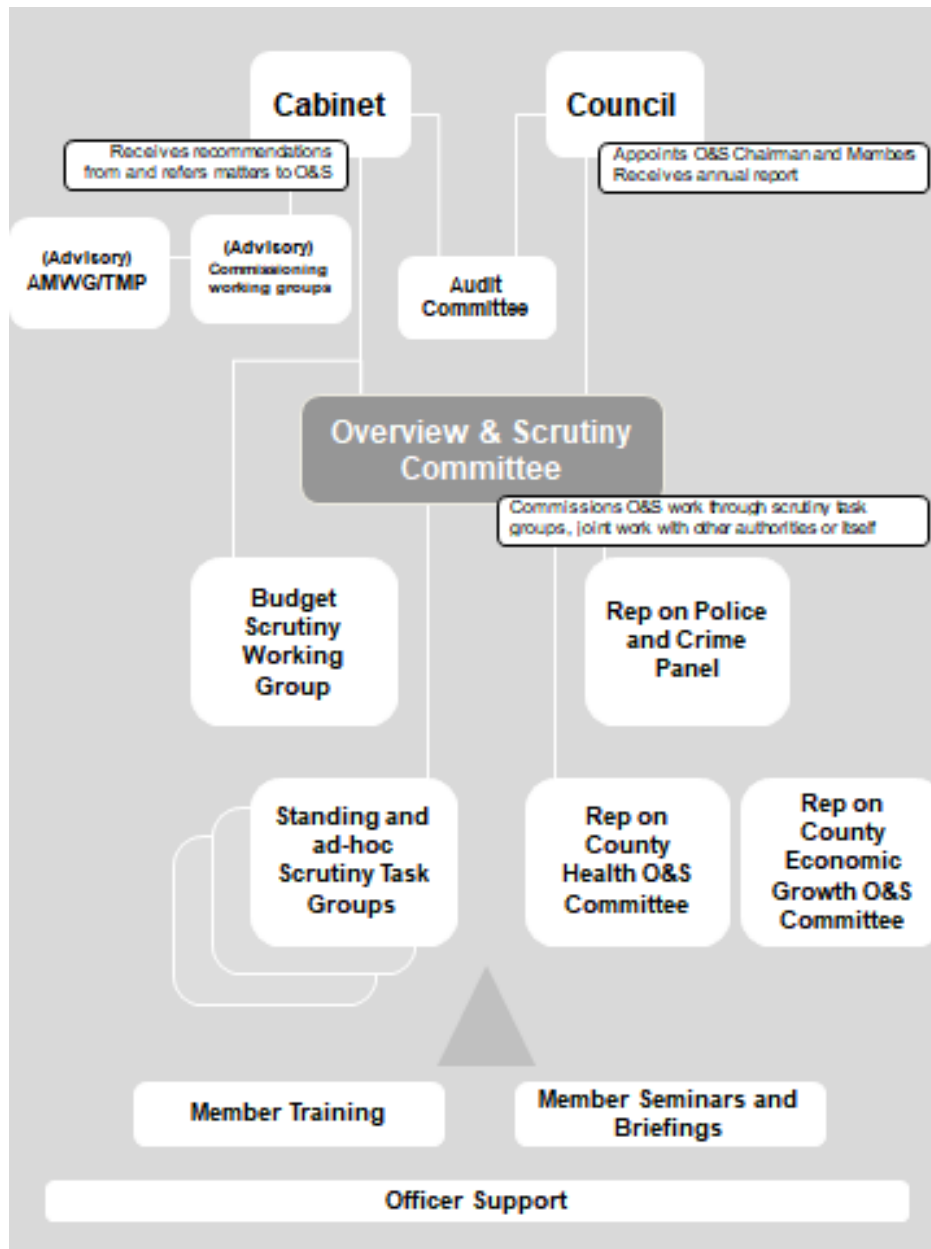
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE & CHANGE

The role that the committee plays in local democracy in holding to account both members and officers is as important as ever, as the authority, the town, and in fact the whole country, continues to experience a period of significant change.

With the Council progressing major projects such as the Golden Valley Development and the £100m housing investment plan, it was good to see the Committee commission an independent review to help identify ways to further improve their effectiveness, as they will have a key role reviewing the progress of these initiatives and as well as other ambitions the Council is taking forward.

The findings from the review have been positively welcomed by the committee and put into an action plan to take forward with a dedicated task and finish group established.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY STRUCTURE



TASK GROUPS

BUDGET SCRUTINY

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group (BSWG) is a small but effective group that keeps a careful watch on in-year spend and the developing budget for the following year. Input from the group is particularly important since the council is now diversifying the way in which it raises income to support services it provides in light of the financial challenges it is facing.

During the year we took an active interest in all budget areas. We had our usual opportunities to consider the quarterly budget monitoring reports and the financial outturn report and to scrutinise the General Fund and HRA budget proposals for 2020/21. We acknowledged the difficult economic conditions the council was operating in and looked ahead to the challenges that the council may face as a result of the Covid pandemic. Achieving a balanced budget continues to be a challenge for this Council and therefore there remains an important role for the budget scrutiny working group throughout the year.

I would like to put on record my thanks to Andrew Knott for all his support to this group going forward, and we all wish him well with his new role as Section 151 officer at Forest of Dean District Council.

The Executive Director – Finance and Assets commented that “ this has been a valuable process which has given members an opportunity to input into the development of the budget proposals and key initiatives which has added value to the process. BSWG have also provided an independent review of the financial performance of the council during the year, as well as considering the final outturn position and our approach to commercialisation. The financial position remains challenging and it is both helpful and important to have a forum for deeper consideration of the issues facing the council and wider member influence over the strategy for dealing with it.”

TASK GROUPS

EVENTS TASK GROUP

A review of events management was initiated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2019, with a task group being asked to **identify strengths and weaknesses of the increased commercialisation strategy, and to identify possible improvements to the process of events application, approval and management.**

The Task Group made a total of 19 recommendations having heard evidence from relevant officers, community groups and event organisers. These were categorised under 5 key themes:

1. Community/engagement
2. Process
3. Events strategy
4. Commercial
5. Enforcement

The group considered that their recommendations would:

Improve transparency and efficiency with the events process;
Improve engagement with community impacted by events in their locality;
Guide the drafting of the events strategy;
Strengthen Land Use Agreements and the consequently the council's approach to enforcement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee fully endorsed the report for consideration by Cabinet, as well as a minority report which was produced by one of the members of the task group.

The recommendations within both reports were noted and the Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles committed to fully considering the recommendations and formally responding by taking a report to Cabinet. This was in March 2020 and in May 2020 the Interim Events Strategy was agreed by Cabinet and a commitment made to review the minority report post Covid-19, when time could be dedicated to reviewing the options and engaging with officers.

SCRUTINY REVIEW

In July 2019, Campbell Tickell were commissioned to undertake a review of the council's Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee. The key aim of the review was to make recommendations as to how the O&S Committee could be more effective and what changes could be made to ensure it made a tangible difference to the work of the council, and also consider whether existing resources were sufficient to support effective scrutiny.

The review was conducted through a combination of a desk-top review of governance and constitutional documentation; interviews with council officers, committee members and the leader of the council; and observation of a committee meeting.

Campbell Tickell presented their findings to the committee in January 2020 and then reported their recommendations, unchanged, in February. The committee resolved to establish a task group to look at the recommendations, how best they could be implemented and devising an action plan.

The ambitions and outcomes for this task group were agreed in September 2020, after a number of committee meetings were cancelled due to Covid-19.

OTHER SUCCESSES

In addition to standard items, including reviewing Council performance, briefings from the Leader on key issues and regular updates from representatives on county-wide scrutiny groups, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

High Street Improvements

Reviewed plans for public realm improvements, since the focus had moved from Boots Corner, to the Strand and Cambray Place. Members were able to discuss the scope of the work and achieve a better understanding of who had responsibility for future repairs.

Call-in

Dealt with the call-in of a decision relating to the proposed removal of four CBC bring bank sites. Ultimately, the committee supported the cabinet decision without qualification or comment, given that the decision was simply to undertake further consultation.

Unauthorised encampments

A representative of Gloucestershire Constabulary provided the committee with a better understanding of the Police powers when dealing with unauthorised camping, as well as commenting on proposed legislative amendments aimed at improving the effectiveness of enforcement against unauthorised encampments.

Public conveniences

Considered a report which identified a number of options for the future provision of public conveniences in the town; with the aim of providing access to a greater number of well-maintained and more accessible facilities. The committee supported the preferred option within the report, for a community partnership scheme initiative.

OTHER SUCCESSES

Police & Crime Commissioner

Gloucestershire's Police and Crime Commissioner, Martin Surl, attended a meeting of the committee to discuss his annual report and answer questions. Members of the committee questioned the value of such updates and whether these should continue in the future.

NHS – Fit for the Future

Members felt that the public would find it as difficult to comment, as they had, given the lack of any proposals. The request was that they come back once the consultation phase had begun, and well in advance of any decisions being taken, so that members of this council would have the opportunity to comment on actual proposals.

Climate Change

Having declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019, the committee heard from Simon Graham, a consultant who had assisted with the development of an action plan. He talked through some potential concepts which would result in greater carbon reduction, including reduction; generation; engagement of the wider community, and; connecting with other organisations.

Crematorium project

The committee had monitored the project closely throughout delivery and felt it would be useful to hear about any lessons learned, given the scale of the project.

North Place

Members were provided with an update on the current situation and future plans for this site. This was commercially sensitive and as such was held in exempt session, but the committee welcomed the opportunity to understand more about it.

OTHER SUCCESSES

Town Hall redevelopment

Given the conclusions of the work that had been done, there were 5 redevelopment options and having discussed the merits and limitations of each option, the committee ultimately supported the continued preservation of the building and the need to modernise.

Strategic waste

Officers and the Cabinet Member explained the drivers behind consideration into the future waste site relocation and some of the possible options that could be considered. The committee asked that they be given the opportunity to consider any future proposals.

Air quality

A detailed assessment confirmed the need to re-define the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). By law the council had to revoke the existing borough-wide AQMA and simultaneously declare a new, smaller one. The committee considered the new AQMA and asked for further updates specific to schools.

Social Value policy

The council sought to use legislation, to secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits when commissioning or procuring services and tabled an initial draft social value policy. Members supported the proposal, given the substantial procurement activities that would be undertaken as part of the cyber central project and the housing investment plan.

Marketing Cheltenham

The committee was introduced to Marketing Cheltenham which was officially launched in 2017 as the town's official 'in-house' Destination Marketing Organisation. It's principal purpose was to lead delivery of Cheltenham's Visitor Economy Strategy, which sought to grow the town's visitor economy by 5% p/a from 2019 to 2021 and they outlined the 4 priorities which underpinned the work programme.

CABINET MEMBER WORKING GROUPS

Cabinet member working groups are fundamentally different to scrutiny task groups in that they are set up and chaired by the Cabinet Member and their aim is to assist the Cabinet Member in formulating their final report to Cabinet. By contrast scrutiny task groups are scrutiny led and can only make recommendations to Cabinet or Council or another body.

However, what they do have in common is that very often Cabinet Member working groups are helping to formulate new policy and offer challenge which are both key parts of the overview and scrutiny function. Both involve non-Executive Members.

The working groups for 2019/20 included:

- Asset Management Working Group
- Planning and Liaison Member Working Group
- Housing Supply
- Members' ICT
- Waste and Recycling

WHAT'S NEXT?

Please note that this report looks back over the work undertaken by the committee between April 2019 and March 2020 and as such, this section may refer to events which have already taken place and which will be covered in more detail in the 2020/21 Annual Report. Also, the work of the committee is in no way limited to the items listed below.

Covid-19 – this will be a major focus for the committee in 2020/21, with them looking at a range of things including performance, lessons learned and the Recovery Plan. The committee will also look at how the pandemic has impacted shared services and organisations including The Cheltenham Trust.

Golden Valley Development – the committee have requested updates, at appropriate junctures of this project, which represents the biggest project ever undertaken by the council.

Outside Bodies Special Responsibility Allowance STG – the task group will understand the options and restrictions relating to such payments, look at what other authorities do, consider the budget implications of any payments and then make recommendations to the Independent Remuneration Panel regarding payments of SRAs to members who are appointed to outside bodies as non-executive directors or trustees.

O&S Review STG – the task group will review the recommendations made by Campbell Tickell, decide how best they can be implemented and devise an action plan, which once approved will be monitored by the O&S Committee.

(NHS) Fit for the Future – the council will consider proposals put forward as part of the 'Fit for the Future' consultation and this may or may not be undertaken by the committee, or full Council.

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