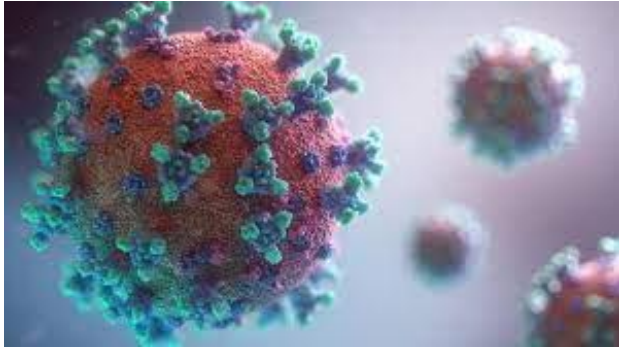


Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22





**CHELTENHAM
BID** Local businesses
improving
our town 



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Foreword

Councillor John Payne, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

It is my pleasure to introduce the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Annual Report for 2021/22.

In keeping with tradition, I would first like to thank all those who have made a positive contribution to O&S. This year has seen a change in the membership of the committee. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Cllrs. Flynn, Lewis and Sankey, who have gone on to fields anew within the council, and to Cllrs. Barrell, Hegenbarth, Mason and Stafford, who either did not stand for re-election or were not re-elected in May.

In particular, I would like to highlight Cllr. Mason's outstanding contribution to O&S in his four years as Chair. For any committee to function efficiently it needs a solid support base, and I would especially like to thank Darren Knight for his input as lead officer, and Democratic Services for their work before, during and after each meeting.

Since the last Annual Report went before Council in October 2021, the committee has considered a wide range of issues and policies. These include the council's housing delivery and asset management strategies, the future of the Town Centre, the pressures facing the NHS Trust, the renewal of the Business Improvement District (BID), the performance of service providers like Ubico, Solace and Publica, cyber security, upcoming climate change initiatives and the council's response to the Covid crisis. In the coming months, it will continue to scrutinise important topics like the Golden Valley development, Gloucestershire Airport and the future of the Municipal Offices.

Throughout, the committee has sought to provide constructive challenge to the executive as a critical friend, to amplify the voices and concerns of the public, and to drive improvement in public services in Cheltenham. It is in this spirit that those addressing the committee can discuss what is going well and where improvements could be made. An effective O&S committee should provide challenge and make constructive comments and suggestions, and that is what we have done over the past 12 months.

I trust members find the report informative and following its presentation to Council would welcome questions.

Darren Knight

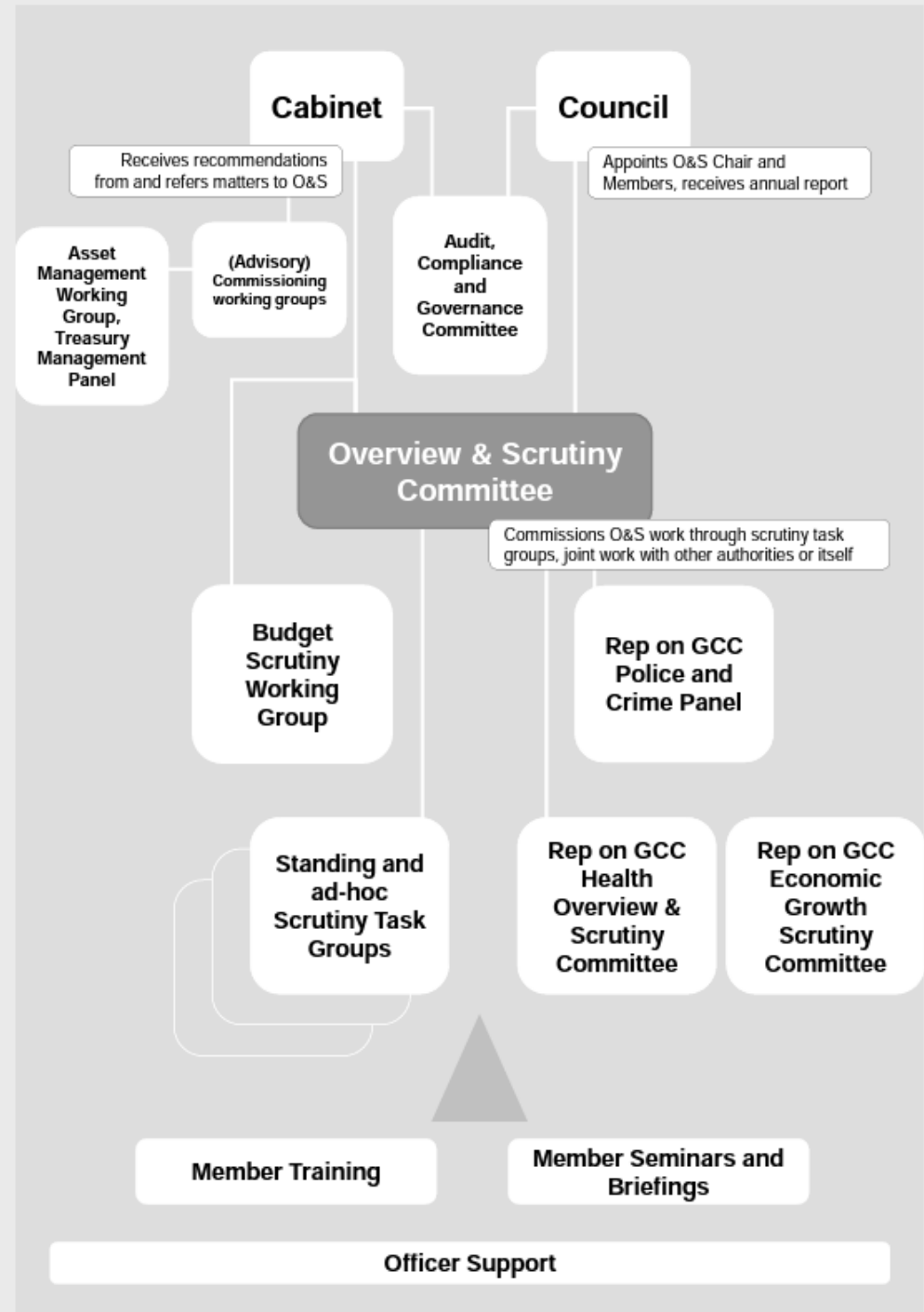
Executive Director of Place and Communities

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

Major projects such as the Golden Valley Development and the £180m housing investment plan continue to progress, and O&S has an important job in reviewing the progress of these initiatives and other ambitions being taken forward. Key future frameworks like the council's updated Asset Management Strategy have also been closely scrutinised to ensure all relevant interests and viewpoints are taken into account.

On a personal note, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Chair's Group and wider committee to support this vital part of the Council's wider governance arrangements.

Structure of O&S



Task groups

BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Councillor Matt Babbage, Chair

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 as the council seeks to diversify the way in which it raises income to support service provision in light of its various financial challenges.

In 2021/22, BSWG continued to focus on the pressures caused by the Covid crisis and ongoing recovery. Members acknowledged particular pressures on areas like car parking income, although the council's significant property portfolio and cash reserves ensured it was in a relatively strong position compared to other local authorities. The group also considered budget monitoring reports, the financial outturn report for 2021/22 and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2022/23. Throughout, members agreed that the recovery from the pandemic was far from over, and that the difficult economic situation needed to be taken into account in order to maintain financial stability and continue delivering high quality services.

Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets) commented that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group is *'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. This has been particularly significant this year where focus has been on the implementation of the COVID-19 recovery strategy and then preparing a budget for 2022/23 under the current cost of living pressures. The group has provided an opportunity for wider member influence over this but also a space for members to ask specific questions on how the council are prepared to respond in the current economic environment.'*

Task groups

TACKLING MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION (ongoing)

O&S set up a Scrutiny Task Group on Tackling Multiple Deprivation in February 2022 following a scrutiny topic request submitted by Cllrs. Willingham and Lewis.

This request was based on the fact that, while Cheltenham is predominantly an affluent town, the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for England shows several areas with high levels of multiple deprivation, including St Marks and St Pauls. Multiple deprivation refers to seven distinct domains, namely income deprivation; employment deprivation; education, skills and training deprivation; health deprivation and disability; crime; barriers to housing and services; and living environment deprivation – all of which are likely to lead to worse outcomes for individuals, communities and subsequent generations.

The request acknowledged that while the task group would not solve these issues on its own, it could seek to identify their causes and higher differentials of causation, and the areas that the council could directly influence to help tackle multiple deprivation. The task group could also identify stakeholders with the ability and expertise to help alleviate multiple deprivation, and the outcomes they would like to achieve.

The group's first meeting took place in July, and it is due to report back to O&S after six months, recommending a plan of action for the next twelve.

Other successes

The following slides provide more detail on the committee's scrutiny of key topics throughout the year. This was in addition to standard items including briefings from the Leader of the Council on key issues and regular updates from task groups and from representatives on county-wide scrutiny groups.

Housing delivery

The Senior Development Manager briefed the committee on the council's ambitious development agenda, including Golden Valley, increased housing delivery and raising environmental and sustainability standards. Members highlighted the importance of affordable housing and carbon neutrality.

Town Centre

The Director of Community & Economic Development and the Townscape Manager gave a strategic overview of how the Cheltenham Development Task Force, Place Vision and Connecting Cheltenham fit together. Members emphasised the need to take residents' concerns into account, and their hope that the benefits of the town centre redevelopment would be borough-wide.

Municipal Offices

The Director of Projects gave a presentation regarding options for the future of the Municipal Offices. This was delivered in exempt session to allow Members to ask questions openly without compromising commercial sensitivity. Members acknowledged that it was a long-running issue which had been made more complicated by the impact of the pandemic, and highlighted its importance within the council's broader economic recovery.

Integrated Care System

Following a Council motion agreed in October 2021 concerning the NHS Trust, key officers from the Trust and its partners gave a presentation on the pressures they were facing and how these were being addressed. Members submitted questions in advance which the officers were able to respond to in detail, and highlighted the importance of effective communication.

Other successes

Business Improvement District

The Chief Executive of the BID updated O&S following its renewal for a second five-year term, outlining their founding principles and key ongoing and upcoming projects. Members highlighted the need to contribute to CBC's climate change goals by reducing energy use, and the potential benefits of BID members interacting with one another.

Budget proposals

Cllr. Babbage, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, circulated a report on the group's response to the 2022-23 budget proposals. They had found it to be a sound and satisfactory budget, with the only major area of debate being the topic of payment provision. The group would continue to scrutinise budgetary matters throughout the year (see page 6).

Asset Management Strategy

The Director of Finance and Assets introduced the updated Asset Management Strategy. The previous strategy had been agreed in 2016 and was in need of significant revisions to adapt to a very different economic situation. Members were pleased with the new strategy, especially the focus on maximising the social value of assets for the benefit of the town and its communities.

The council's response to the Covid crisis

The Executive Director of Place and Communities presented an in-depth report on how the council had maintained essential services and kept Members informed throughout the pandemic. Key achievements included the rapid payment of business support grants and the success of the Gloucestershire Community Help Hub. Members praised the quick reaction to radical changes and felt it compared favourably to other authorities across the country.

Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 funding

The Interim Head of Planning gave a detailed overview of CIL and S106 obligations and their uses in funding infrastructure. Members acknowledged the strict rules regarding what a lot of the money could be spent on, discussed the merits of a Parish Plan and advocated a greater level of ward member engagement in the process.

Other successes

Publica

Publica's Managing Director gave an overview of the organisation's role and structure and introduced their business plan for 2022-25, before responding to questions. Members were keen to ensure a focus on staff wellbeing, and advocated a customer satisfaction survey as one had not taken place since 2019.

Local elections

The Electoral Services Manager informed Members of the steps taken by her team to keep the electoral register up to date, and responded to questions about security, voter ID and increasing participation. Members were pleased to hear that 100% of eligible residents were registered in some areas, and considered ways to maintain the high level of turnout seen in 2021.

Cyber security

Publica's Chief Technology Officer presented a discussion paper on the council's prevention and monitoring measures to mitigate a possible cyber incident, and responded to Member questions. The committee was reassured by the measures in place and advised that member training on the topic could ensure all councillors were aware of how to deal with suspicious emails and websites.

Key Performance Indicators and risk management

Officers demonstrated how the Clearview system could be used to keep track of the council's KPIs and break down the risks involved in key projects, with particular regard to the Golden Valley development. Members were pleased with the potential of the system and looked forward to future updates on its implementation and progress.

Climate change

Lead officers and the new Cabinet Member Climate Emergency outlined the council's plans to tackle the climate crisis and deliver Net Zero by 2030, and how the assorted challenges were being addressed. Members agreed with the need to take climate issues into account at every level of decision-making, and their close links to areas like planning, transport and green space.

Other successes

Follow-up to 2020 O&S Review

The Executive Director of Place and Communities presented a paper following up on the recommendations of Campbell Tickell after their review in 2020 to ensure effective scrutiny. Members were satisfied that they had been implemented, with the only exception being the tracking of actions agreed, which would form part of the upcoming Clearview rollout.

Digital platform implementation and customer access

The Executive Director of Place and Communities and the Programme Manager discussed how the council used process-mapping analysis and the resulting data to improve customer service, allow more flexibility and ensure efficiency. Members were pleased with the innovative and forward-thinking approach, and stressed the importance of testing proposed changes using a residents' group to ensure any issues were flagged up before implementation.

End of year performance review

The Executive Director of Place and Communities presented a report demonstrating the breadth of activities undertaken by the council. Members discussed how best to scrutinise the information presented going forward, for example with reports every six months or automatically whenever a particular KPIs fell below a certain level. It was agreed that regular reports would be the most effective way of keeping the committee informed.

Solace

The Senior Environmental Health Officer brought a discussion paper summarising the structure and objectives of Solace (a multi-agency team which aims to reduce repeat instances of anti-social behaviour), and its performance over the last year. Members discussed the different enforcement powers open to Solace, the importance of building relationships with difficult individuals, and the challenges of reducing the number of unreported incidents.

Ubico

The Environmental Partnerships Manager and Ubico's Head of Operations gave a presentation on its progress over the last year, highlighting challenges including the national driver shortage and the effects of self-isolation rules on day-to-day operational planning. Members praised Ubico staff for doing unpleasant and vital work, and highlighted the need to increase recycling rates through education and public engagement.

Cabinet Member Working Groups

Cabinet Member working groups are different to scrutiny task groups in that they are set up and chaired by the Cabinet Member, with their aim being 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, Council or another body.

What they have in common is that Cabinet Member working groups help to formulate new policy and offer challenge, which are key parts of the overview and scrutiny function. Both involve non-executive Members.

The working groups for 2021/22 included:

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

What's next?

Golden Valley – key officers from the project will give a detailed overview of the possible impact of the site on local residents, and how risks relating to this are being addressed.

No Child Left Behind – in response to a referral from Council in July, the committee will consider the work done by NCLB and compare and contrast it with the option of UNICEF 'child friendly' status.

Gloucestershire Airport – key officers from the airport will bring a paper looking at its financial sustainability, both in relation to recent improvements and looking at its long-term future.

Tackling Multiple Deprivation STG – the task group will present their final report and a set of recommendations to O&S, which may decide to take them to Council.

Minster Exchange – after the completion of the MX project, the committee will look at lessons learned and benefits realised, and consider whether it is generating the occupancy and income expected.

This is in addition to annual reports from **Publica, Ubico, the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner** and more, and is in no way an exhaustive list. To find out what exactly the committee plans to scrutinise in the coming months, you can view the regularly updated [O&S workplan](#).

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