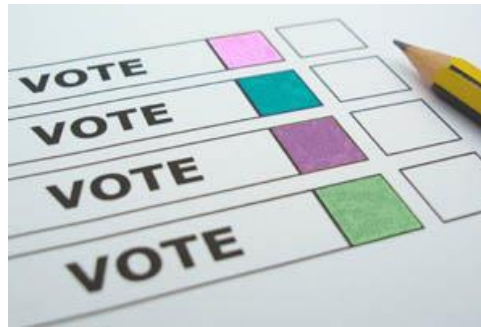


Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23



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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 2022/23.

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, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Cllrs. Joy and Nelson to the committee and express my sincere thanks to Cllrs. Holliday and Savage, whose places they took.

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 2022, 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

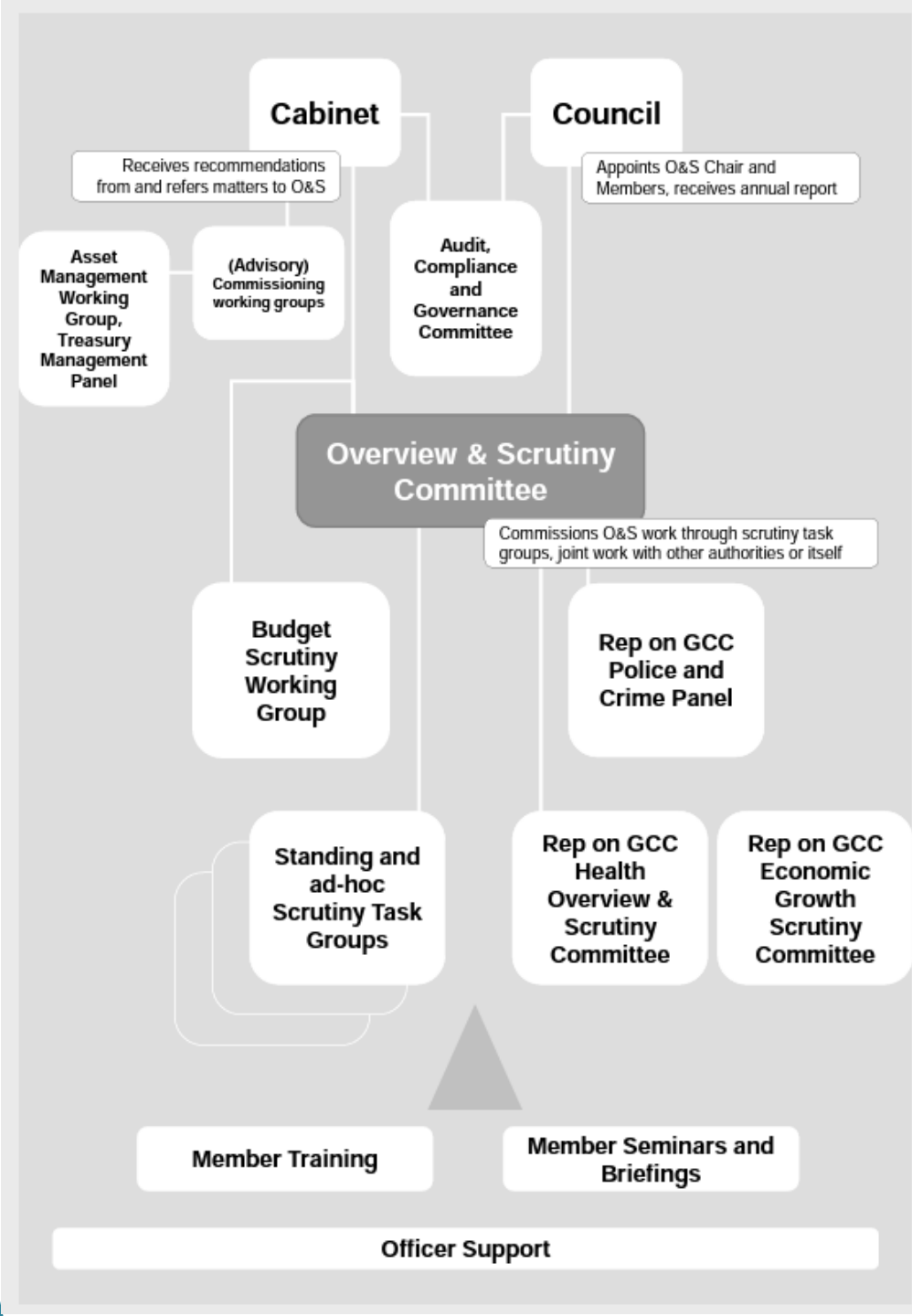
The role that the committee plays in local democracy in holding to account both members and officers is greater than ever, as the authority, the town and the whole country continue to experience a period of significant change.

O&S has seen new members join the committee and a new Chair. The committee has explored a broad range of subjects and the standard of reports to the committee has been consistently good.

On a personal note, I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Chair's Group and wider committee to support its effectiveness and profile within the council.

As I'm soon to depart Cheltenham Borough Council, I wish the committee well. It is well placed for the future following the improvements it has implemented.

Structure of O&S



Task groups

BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Councillor Matt Babbage, Chair (2022/23)

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 2022/23, 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 2022/23, and the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget proposals for 2023/24. Throughout, members agreed that the impact from the pandemic and the changing economic environment needed to be taken into account in order to maintain financial stability and continue to deliver high quality services.

Gemma Bell (Director of Finance and Assets) commented that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group represents *'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 recovery strategy and then preparing a budget for 2023/24 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 (now complete)

Following a scrutiny topic request submitted by Cllr. Dr. David Willingham, the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) committee set up a task group on the topic of Tackling Multiple Deprivation in July 2022. It was agreed that due to the breadth of the issue at hand, it would be split into five broad topic areas : Community Outreach, Health, Education, Housing, and Economic Growth and Employment.

The group was supported by a wide range of officers depending on the topic area, with Richard Gibson (Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships) as the sponsoring officer and Harry Mayo (Democracy Officer) as the facilitator. Each meeting sought to hear from a variety of perspectives in order to build a comprehensive picture of deprivation in Cheltenham and how it could be alleviated in both the short and long term.

Cllr Dr David Willingham, chair of the scrutiny task group, said: “I would like to thank all the members of the task group, and the witnesses who provided us with first-hand testimony about the various challenges and hardships experienced by some of our residents. The evidence we heard highlighted some stark differences in the quality of life between different communities across our town. As a town with a vision for growth, I hope the recommendations from this report can be incorporated into that vision so as our town grows, we try our utmost not to leave anyone or any community behind.”

The group presented its draft report to the [June 2023](#) meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following this it was sent to Cabinet in July 2023 for consideration and a report on progress would be brought back to O&S in a year’s time.

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 2022/23 included:

Asset Management

Planning and Liaison

Housing Supply (now known as Cabinet Member Housing Working Group (CMHWG))

Members' ICT

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.

Annual Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Chris Nelson Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner, presented his annual report and responded to questions from Members about the policing of major events, road safety, 101 wait times, hare coursing, fly-tipping, Safer Streets funding and antisocial behaviour.

CBH responsive repairs service

The CBH Executive Director Property and Communities presented a paper on the responsive repairs service, which focused on achieving resident satisfaction and value for money. Lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on the delivery of repairs, but their satisfaction rates still compared favourably to other housing organisations. Members discussed the way feedback was recorded and what CBH was doing to increase employee retention.

Social Housing White Paper

The CBH Executive Director Property and Communities presented a paper on the organisation's response to the government's 2020 Social Housing White Paper, which arose out of the Grenfell Tower disaster. CBH were working with ward members to address residents' concerns about the standard of social housing in mixed residential areas in the Benhall and the Reddings ward, and focusing on taking an empathetic approach that listened to residents.

Air Quality Management Plan

The Head of Public Protection and DEPLO introduced a paper on the borough's Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) prior to the relevant plan going out for consultation. Members highlighted with the importance of working closely with the highways authority (the county council) and keeping a close eye on major projects like the airport, Arle Court Transport Hub and Golden Valley.

Other successes

Counter Fraud Unit Partnership

Emma Cathcart (Head of Service, Counter-Fraud and Enforcement Unit) presented an exempt report on the services provided by the CFEU and responded to Member questions. The committee discussed the value of preventative measures and deterrents in order to minimise fraud and prevent financial loss.

Publica

The Managing Director of Publica introduced their annual report, which covered Publica's contributions to IT, cybersecurity,, HR and financial processing. Members queried the lack of specific performance indicators and highlighted the importance of collegiate working relationships between the different councils Publica provided services to.

Biodiversity

Following a request from Cllr. Tooke, the Director of Climate Change and Place Services brought a report to O&S concerning the council's work to protect and promote biodiversity. It was huge topic with significant implications across many different policy areas, including green spaces, planning and flood risk management. Members highlighted the particular importance of biodiversity in the most deprived areas of the town, and the conflict between biodiversity concerns and the tidiness which residents tended to prioritise.

UNICEF child-friendly status and No Child Left Behind

Following a referral from Council, the Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnership compiled a report comparing the council's current offer under No Child Left Behind to the possibility of pursuing UNICEF child-friendly city status. Members discussed the options in detail and resolved to recommend to Council that NCLB be ring-fenced and not diluted in any way by pursuit of the UNICEF approach, and to strengthen cross-county co-operation.

High Street defects

The Executive Director of Place and Communities introduced a report in exempt session summarising progress on the High Street defects. Members discussed the complex situation and the council's options.

Other successes

South West Audit Partnership (SWAP)

The SWAP Chief Executive outlined his organisation's role within the local government and charitable sectors and emphasised their focus on the council's core objectives and use of new technology to innovate in a fast-moving field. Members discussed staff recruitment, training and retention and the SWAP's broader strategic focus.

Corporate Plan

The Executive Director of Place and Communities presented the draft Corporate Plan for 2023-27, which set the framework for the council's initiatives over the next few years. Members praised the plan and the level of public consultation, and highlighted issues including night-time safety and affordable housing.

Golden Valley – impact on residents

Senior officers from the Golden Valley project, led by the Director of Major Developments and Regeneration, presented a paper outlining how the impact of the development on local residents was being mitigated. Members advocated continuous assessment of dynamic risks and regular O&S oversight as it was one of the council's most significant and impactful projects.

Race week

The Head of Public Protection and a representative from Cheltenham Racecourse attended successive O&S meetings prior to the festival to discuss how they were planning to cope with more than 250,000 expected racegoers. Members highlighted the importance of street lighting and CCTV to night-time safety, as well as safeguarding processes for workers at the racecourse, and were reassured by the flexible approach that would be able to adapt to different circumstances.

2023/24 budget proposals

The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group presented the group's response to the budget proposals for 2023/24, which highlighted a number of key aspects like the proposed rent rise on CBH properties, the local government funding settlement and the context of high energy costs and inflation.

Other successes

Residents' survey

The Executive Director of Place and Communities gave a presentation on the results and implications of the borough-wide residents' survey. Members praised the focus on empirical data, highlighted key issues including accessibility for disabled residents and prospects for young people, and advised that the results be shared with the county council.

Information governance

The Monitoring Officer presented a report in her role as the council's data protection officer, having undertaken a review of its internal processes and system data and identified a number of areas for improvement. Members discussed both the legal requirements on the authority and the need for a robust approach in a fast-moving environment, and highlighted the important role of the Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee on this topic.

Cheltenham Trust

The Cheltenham Trust's Chief Executive and Chair of the Board gave a presentation on the Trust's financial situation and responded to Member questions in exempt session. Members noted the uniqueness of the Trust's venues and their value to the community, and advocated communication and consultation with local residents.

Gloucestershire Airport

Following on from a Gloucester City Council O&S meeting in 2022, the airport's Chair and Head of Finance attended to discuss GAL's financial sustainability, both in relation to recent improvements and in the long term, and respond to Member questions.

Golden Valley – risk review

Key officers from the Golden Valley development, led by the Director of Major Developments and Regeneration, presented a discussion paper and the project's Clearview risk register, to show how they were assessing key areas of risk and the mitigating measures in place.

What's next?

Culture Strategy – CBC officers and the Chair of the Culture Board will explain the final version of the new strategy, how it will be implemented and how success will be measured.

Climate change pathway - climate officers and the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency will discuss the progress of the pathway to Net Zero, achievements thus far and the next set of initiatives.

Minster Exchange – CBC officers and the Managing Director of the Workshop Group will report back to the committee on the progress of the project and lessons learned.

CBH emissions – following the publication of the council's own carbon footprint figures for 2022/23, the committee will consider Cheltenham Borough Homes' equivalent report.

Tourism – following a Member request, the committee will consider the council's current tourism provision, how effective it is and what plans there are for future development.

Accessibility – following a Member request, the committee will consider how the council ensures that accessibility is always carefully considered in its decision-making.

Golden Valley – the committee will continue to scrutinise the Golden Valley development as it progresses in 2023/24, with regular updates from key officers focusing on areas of risk and their mitigating measures.

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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