

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Folkestone & Hythe District Council



## **Forward by Overview & Scrutiny Chairman, Cllr Michelle Keutenius**

It has been a busy year with the committee covering important areas, with more to come. Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains transparent, accountable and open, resulting in improved public policies and services.

Over the course of the last year, Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) has focused on numerous policies, strategies, updates and plans. The largest was the Task and Finish Sub Group, looking into the aftermath of the waste contract. Bin collections should be something very normal and this was our opportunity to find out the causes of what went wrong, causing residents and council staff throughout the district substantial issues for a period of time.

O&S has discussed vital topics such as community safety, safeguarding and licensing policies. It has received updates on Prevent and Budget Strategy.

One of the most recent subjects was fixed-term tenancies. This gave the committee the ability to see the council working to implement changes which would support social housing tenants with the security of long-term housing, cessation, and conversation with those on existing fixed term tenancies.

During the year we have also been looking at the Housing Asset Management Strategy. This provided us with the opportunity of seeing plans for the council's housing stock, including plans on carbon-reduction initiatives and how tenants will be at the heart of things going forward.

These committees are a way for councillors to come together and ensure we are working in the best way possible for everyone.

O&S might not cover everything that is important to our residents, so I would encourage for subjects to be submitted for the committee to look at.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Folkestone & Hythe District Council decisions are made by the council leader and cabinet. There are also non-executive councillors who form the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This reviews decisions of the council, looks at how the council performs and investigates issues affecting the district.

The committee can:

- question the cabinet's decisions;
- make its own recommendations to the cabinet;
- ask the cabinet and other decision-makers to reconsider; or
- refer a decision to the full council.

The fourth 'call-in' power usually refers to key decisions, ie those with a significant impact on finances or local communities.

O&S has met five times during the year, and considered sixteen items.

### 1 June 2021

- The Committee had input and shaped proposals for setting up a Customer Access Point.
- Place Plan – advice was given on the proposed consultation and ways to encourage residents to respond.
- Performance Management Framework – ensuring reporting cycles coincided with planned Finance & Performance Scrutiny Sub Committee meetings that scrutinised performance data.
- Budget – Members commented on issues such as simplifying finance and budget figures, the importance of staff training and transparency.

### 7 September 2021

- Formed a Task and Finish Group to review waste and street cleansing – made recommendations on service improvements which were considered by the Cabinet Member and Corporate Leadership Team.

- Reviewed the draft Licensing Policy statement and gave feedback – comments from the Committee were included in the formal consultation responses that shaped the final policy.
- Corporate Action Plan – considered how the council will deliver priorities along with the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to monitor progress. The comments of the Committee were considered by the Director of Corporate Services in finalising the plan.
- Folkestone & Hythe District Council Community Safety Partnership – Members received a presentation on the Community Safety Partnership, in line with the council’s statutory annual duty to monitor its effectiveness.

## 9 November 2021

- Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding policy refresh. Members’ comments influenced the policy framework.
- Budget 2022/23 presentation – ideas were given on how best to promote consultation and encourage residents to respond.

## 29 November 2021

This was a co-located scrutiny meeting with Dover District Council to discuss the shared waste contract – discussions took place on the schedule of improvements with DDC, Veolia and relevant portfolio holders.

## 07 December 2021

- Housing Asset Management Strategy – this was recommended for approval to cabinet.
- Budget Strategy 2022/23 – feedback was provided ahead of consideration by Cabinet.
- Otterpool Business Plan Update – feedback prior to Cabinet’s consideration in January 2022.

## 15 February 2022

- The Committee Members supported amendments to the FHDC Housing Services Tenancy Policy, and authorising officers to investigate and implement an effective way to convert existing fixed term tenancies to secure.

- The Committee received a presentation on proposals for a Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) and Community Safety Anti-social Behaviour PSPO

## Scrutiny outcomes 2021/22

In November 2021, O&S received a presentation setting out proposals for the 2022/23 budget. The comments of committee members resulted in the following changes being made to the budget consultation process:

- Members engaging with the public – members acted as a conduit, approaching constituents for their views on the budget process.
- Printed posters and flyers were produced to promote the budget consultation.
- [YouTube videos](#) were created to explain council tax setting.

On 7 September 2021, O&S commented on the proposed KPIs for Folkestone and Hythe and, as a result, a further eight KPIs were added including:

- The inclusion of a KPI for the number of community safety events held and projects delivered.
- The reintroduction of the KPI for the number of days to remove fly-tipped waste on public land once reported, due to public interest in the matter.
- The addition of percentage of successful fly-tipping prosecutions.
- The reintroduction of KPIs relating to households within bed & breakfast and temporary accommodation.
- The addition of two KPIs relating to data breaches.
- The addition of reference to the joint work on the Kent & Medway Low Emissions Strategy.

## **Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

This sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was created in October 2020 to scrutinise the council's performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and financial monitoring data against the budget, making recommendations to the main committee where appropriate. The sub-committee meets four times a year and comprises five members who are drawn from the main O&S.

## **Review of the year from Chairman, Cllr Connor McConville**

The formation of the Finance and Performance Sub-Committee has been a welcome change to the way the council conducts its scrutiny responsibilities.

In the past, financial papers formed the tail end of long Overview and Scrutiny meetings and were often hurried through with little or no questioning. Giving councillors the time to look over these often sizable financial and performance-based reports within the sub-committee has provided the opportunity for more probing questions and analysis.

Just like the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the sub-group does not exist to make decisions but to hold the council to account with regards to its budget process and overall performance. I believe the creation of the sub-committee has proven beneficial to council operations.

I would like to thank those councillors who have sat on the committee this year and all the officers who have provided both well-written reports and attended in person to answer questions and provide insight and information.

The sub-committee has met three times and considered 14 items.

### **15 June 2021**

- General Fund Capital Programme Outturn 2020/2021.
- General Fund Revenue 2020/21 Provisional Outturn.
- Housing Revenue Account Revenue & Capital Financial Outturn 2020/21.
- Annual Performance Report 2020/21.

### **16 November 2021**

- Half Year Performance Report (Q1 & Q2) 2021/22.
- General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2 2021/22.
- General Fund Capital Programme Budget Monitoring 2021/22.
- HRA Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2 2021/22.

### **18 January 2022**

- General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3 2021/22.
- General Fund Capital Programme Budget Monitoring 2021/22.
- HRA Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3 2021/22.
- Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022/23 and Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2021/22.
- Draft General Fund Budget 2022/23.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Original Budget 2022/23.

### **18 January 2022**

- The committee members noted the Quarter 3 Performance Report 2021/22.

## **Waste Task and Finish Group**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has powers to create Task and Finish Groups (T&F) on specific topics, giving members an in-depth look at the specific issues involved. At the meeting of O&S on 15 June 2021, it was agreed to create a Task and Finish Group in order to look at a number of issues around the council's waste and street-cleansing contract.

## **Review of the year from Chairman, Cllr Rebecca Shoob**

In July 2021, the Waste Contract Task & Finish Group met with Veolia and council officers to establish what had gone wrong with the service and what lessons could be learned to ensure a swift return to the expected level of service.

Members challenged Veolia on a wide range of issues, including the extent to which IT systems had been piloted prior to full deployment, whether frontline staff had had sufficient input to route changes, the impact on assisted collections and, crucially, plans for restoring the service.

The group reported its findings back to full committee, along with its recommendations, one of which was to invite Veolia back to a co-located meeting with Dover District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This was held in November for members to further scrutinise Veolia's recovery plans and to satisfy themselves that the promised improvements were both deliverable and sustainable.

The T&F group met on three occasions. On 26 July 2021 senior officers from Veolia, officers from Folkestone & Hythe District Council and Dover District Council and FH&DC union representatives attended. The committee asked various questions. Using the information gained in that session, a series of recommendations were formulated. All eight recommendations were presented to and approved by O&S at its meeting on 7 September 2021.



The T&F group made several recommendations in relation to the service problems experience with the Veolia Route Optimisation Project. The recommendations were agreed and implemented. The waste collection service has greatly improved since the T&F group first met and is now operating at the expected service levels. Highlighted actions include:

- CLT reviewing the management and risk processes for the award and delivery of new contracts.
- The recommendations made by the T&F Group in relation to future route changes are agreed. These include the thorough testing of IT systems before implementation and the need for proactive communication to residents.
- The councils met regularly throughout the disrupted period with Veolia's senior management to impress upon them the need for proactive action to recover the service.
- Additional contact centre staff were engaged to provide additional capacity in managing customer issues. Veolia established its own call centre to handle missed bins from July to September which took calls directly. Focus groups with staff from all affected council services teams were held with the Chief Executive and senior managers. These sessions allowed staff to discuss concerns and put forward ideas for ways in which they could be supported further.
- The recommended joint O&S meeting with Dover District Council took place on 29 November 2021. Veolia management made a presentation which included updates on the recovery plan for the waste collection service. Veolia workforce representatives were also present and contributed their experiences of the route optimisation project and the recovery plan.
- The councils are using the measures available within the contract to seek compensation and the reimbursement of costs for the service problems experienced from the route optimisation project.

