

Annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023–24

Folkestone & Hythe District Council



Foreword by Overview & Scrutiny Chair Cllr Laura Davison

It's been a pleasure to chair the Overview and Scrutiny committee for the council year 2023/24. With elections taking place in May 2023, it has been a largely new group of councillors who have taken on the critical role of sitting on this committee, with valued help and support from returning experienced members including Vice Chair John Wing.

Together we have held regular pre-meetings of the committee to ensure we have proper time to think ahead and make sure we put our formal committee time with officers and guests to the most productive use. We have grown and developed as a committee across the year and I'd like to thank all members for the time, work and thought they have put into their contributions during this time.

The role of the committee under the current Cabinet system of the council is a crucial one. It acts as a critical counterbalance, offering different perspectives on projects and proposals, giving feedback through the vital connection to residents that comes with being a local councillor, and asking good questions! We have tried to take a practical approach to suggesting improvements to council proposals.

A new initiative this year where Cabinet members have taken it in turns to come in front of the committee to speak about their portfolios and answer questions has also been a positive development.

This year we have collectively considered topics including the Folkestone Levelling Up Fund delivery, the future of Folca, the district wide Carbon Action Plan, the re-procurement of the council's housing repairs and maintenance contract, Otterpool Park, council tenant satisfaction and the

Community Infrastructure Levy. We have had a significant role in scrutinising budget proposals in the run up to the setting of the 2024/25 budget via both the committee and its Finance and Performance sub-committee and were instrumental in questioning plans for metered parking charges on our high streets, which were not then pursued by cabinet. Also, in removing a specific target for reducing the number of litter bins.

In October the committee sat in its function as the Crime and Disorder scrutiny panel, overseeing community safety work across the district. The committee has also considered resolutions and public petitions referred to us by full council, for example in relation to setting up a youth council (a great initiative) and the hoardings on Princes Parade. We have also continued to press for updates on issues scrutinised by the previous committee - for Southern Water and Operation Brock.

In the remaining months of this financial year, we have important work to do looking at the impact of biometric border checks due to be implemented in October 2024. Given full council's decision to retain a Cabinet system for next year we will also be drawing together the Scrutiny work plan for 2024/5 based on suggestions made by residents, councillors and officers in the recent consultation process.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important process and to all the officers and guests who have been involved with the work of the committee during the year, particularly Jake in Committee services for his organisation, help and support.

Councillor Laura Davison

Chair of the Folkestone and Hythe Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

F&HDC decisions are largely made by the council leader and cabinet under a scheme of delegation set out in the council's constitution. The OSC is made up of non-cabinet members and its membership is politically balanced, drawing on the input from all parties that make up the council. Members scrutinise and review the council's decisions, considers how it makes policy to shape the resulting policy framework, examines how the council performs against key targets and indicators in deploying its budget, and investigates specific issues affecting the district.

The committee can:

- Question cabinet's decisions
- Make its own recommendations to Cabinet
- Ask the cabinet and other decision-makers to reconsider decisions
- Refer a decision to the Full Council (known as a call-in)

Call-in usually refers to key decisions, i.e. those with a significant impact on finance or local communities, it is a powerful tool in supporting local democracy.

O&S has met nine times during the 2023/24 year and considered 27 items. A summary is given below:

27 June 2023

- Levelling Up Fund Delivery - Members received a presentation on the Council's successful bid to secure a £20m levelling up bid to regenerate Folkestone Town centre called 'Folkestone - a Brighter Future'. The presentation gave an overview of the Folkestone a Brighter future project
- Folca 2 proposed works and Civic Centre Relocation - Members received a presentation on the council's purchase of the old Debenhams (now called Folca) in Folkestone town centre in 2020, the aim was to secure control on a key anchor site within the town centre to ensure the future use had a positive outcome for the town centre. The building was also used as a key outlet for the vaccination delivery during the pandemic. The presentation gave an overview of the background and progress to date.
- Draft District-Wide Carbon Plan - The Strategy, Policy & Performance Lead Specialist introduced the report which presented the draft District-wide Carbon Plan. Following the comments of the Committee, it is intended to take the draft plan to Cabinet in July to seek approval to hold a public consultation on the plan.
- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillor Stephen Scoffham, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Biodiversity will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a general update on decisions made within his portfolio.

- Housing Repairs & Maintenance Options Appraisal - The Housing Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) current contract with Mears Ltd is due to expire 1st April 2025. In addition to the responsive repairs service and planned maintenance i.e. the replacement kitchen and bathrooms capital programme, the contract also covers void repairs and some compliance related services.
- Folca LUF update and Civic Centre Relocations - The presentation provided an update on the redevelopment proposals for Folca 2. Including, progress to date in relation to Phase 1 and Phase 2, architects commission, design development, business case preparation and overall programme.
- Otterpool Park: Strategic Direction, Funding and Delivery - The report, presentation and appendix covered the outcome of a review of key issues that the Council requires to consider in relation to the strategic direction, funding and delivery of Otterpool Park. The presentation included detail on delivery and financial risks for the Council and emerging recommendations for Cabinet. Following the item, the committee resolved to:
 - Receive and note report OS/23/03; and,
 - To Formulate a Task and Finish Group to support and scrutinise any potential joint venture proposal following Cabinet decision to explore the matter. Terms of Reference to be drawn up.
- Princes Parade Petitions - The report responded to the 2 petitions referred to Overview and Scrutiny committee following the Council meetings on 22nd February (Petition A) and 29th March 2023 (Petition B). Council has asked the following of OSC in respect of the 2 petitions:
 - Petition A - That the Petition be referred to OSC for their observations before deciding whether to examine the issues raised by the petition.
 - Petition B - To examine the issues raised by the petition as part of a future scrutiny programme.
- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillors, Rich Holgate the Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy and Polly Blakemore the Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a general update on decisions made within their portfolio.

31 October 2023 – 18:00

Budget Update 2024/25 - The committee received a presentation which covered the following areas:

- The budget setting process overview for 2024/25
- Medium Term Financial Strategy ('MTFS') and Projected Gap
- General Fund Revenue Budget Gap Solutions and Strategic Approach:
 - Priority Based Budgeting (PBB)
 - Cashable Savings – 12%
- The Star Chamber discussion re the 2024/25 Budget
- Other critical/potential savings for consideration
- Forward look (draft timetable)

31 October 2023 – 19:00

- Folkestone and Hythe Community Safety Partnership Plan Update - The report/presentation provided the committee with an update on the Folkestone and Hythe Community Safety Partnership (CSP), its priorities, activities, CSP action plan, PREVENT and statistical data including, Crime within the District, deprivation, Fire and Hospital Alcohol Data.
- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillors, Rich Holgate the Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy and Polly Blakemore the Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a general update on decisions made within their portfolio.

14 November 2023

- Proposed On-Street Parking - The report sought the views of the Overview Scrutiny Committee on recommendations of Cabinet for parking charges to be introduced in and around shopping streets in Folkestone, Sandgate, Hythe and New Romney.
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2023-2053 - The report set out the parameters of the work and spend that is undertaken by the Council's housing team, underpinning every decision taken in the HRA. The Business Plan (BP) model aligns with the direction and objectives of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), alongside the commitments of the HRA capital programme and acquisitions and new build ambitions for HRA led housing. The HRA BP ensures that the Council continues to provide a financially balanced housing management service that meets legislation and delivers excellent customer service to our tenants and leaseholders across the district. Once approved by Members, a summary version of the HRA BP will be published in 2024.

Following the item, the committee resolved to:

- Receive and note report C/23/57; and,
- To consider the presentation and provide feedback in order to inform a report to Cabinet.
- Refresh of the Council's Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy 2023 and general update - The Council is part of the statutory safeguarding role within the wider public sector, with responsibilities to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The children, young people and vulnerable adults safeguarding policy of the Council has been updated and is attached at Appendix 1. OSC were advised of the changes made to the 2021 policy as the refresh takes place every two years. OSC were also advised of the wide range of activity that has taken place over the last year with updates on safeguarding practice.
- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillors Tim Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance and Jeremy Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a update in relation to the portfolio.

30 January 2024

- FABF phase two public engagement feedback - An overview of the feedback from the public engagement activities in November 2023 in relation to phase two of the project, and the responses to the main themes from the project team.
- 2023 Tenant Satisfaction Survey Action Plan - This report presents the findings from the 2023 tenant satisfaction survey, and the resulting draft Action Plan which has been developed in partnership with the Strategic Tenant Advisory Panel.
- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillor Jim Martin Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy will be attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide a general update in relation to their portfolio.

27 February 2024

- Cabinet Member Update - In accordance with the Constitution Councillor Gary Fuller the Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Accountability provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update in relation to his portfolio. This included several key areas including Customer Services, Information Technology (IT), Information Governance, Elections and Audit.
- Update from Community Safety Partnership and the new 3 year plan: Councillor Mike Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration introduced the item, Scott Butler, Community Safety Specialist outlined the report which updated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Folkestone & Hythe Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the draft new 3 year plan.

Following the update members resolved to:

- To receive and note report OS/23/10; and,
 - To provide feedback on the 3-year plan ahead of it being considered by Cabinet and Council.
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): The report outlined the background to the Community Infrastructure Levy, which came into effect in August 2016 and the Governance Arrangements that were adopted by Cabinet in June 2020. It also explained what projects the district council will seek to deliver using CIL receipts it controls, as well as a summary of those projects that Kent County Council (KCC) will deliver using their proportionate share of CIL receipts as set out in the approved Governance Framework.

Following the update members resolved to:

- To receive and note report OS/23/07; and,
 - To offer reflections on future allocation of CIL receipts related to the Infrastructure Funding Statement and supporting Infrastructure Schedule.
- 2023 Full Council Resolution – Folkestone & Hythe Youth District Council: Full Council of 29 March 2023 resolved to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) a report on the benefit of establishing a Folkestone & Hythe Youth District Council, referencing the Kent Youth County Council. The report described the youth councils and youth forum that are run by Kent County Council, Dartford Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Thanet District Council to highlight to OSC the different approaches that could be taken to establishing a youth council and the likely resource implications.

Following the update members resolved to:

- To receive and note report OS/23/09.
- To note and comment on the different approaches to youth councils and youth forums set out in section 2 of the report.
- To note the key issues and resource implications outlined in section 3 of the report.
- To note the responses to the three parts of the 2023 resolution, outlined in section 4 of the report, and provide recommendations as to the next steps.
- That the item return to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the delivery and results of a survey to schools, colleges, and other organisations (resource permitted), so that the committee may formulate a recommendation to council on a direction forward; and,
- That a representative(s) of the Kent County Council (KCC) Youth Council attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when the above recommendation/item returns to the committee.

- KFR Planning – EU Entry / Exit System (ESS)
 - Toby Howe, H&T Strategic Resilience Manager and Andy Jeffery, Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning at Kent County Council (KCC) will be in attendance to provide members with a presentation on the EU Entry / Exit System which is due to be implemented later this year.
- Motion from Council (29/11/2023)
 - This report will update on the potential impact for district, of the Kent County Council decision to end its accommodation provision for care leavers over the age of 19, from April 2024.
- Overview and Scrutiny work programme 24-25
 - This report sets out a proposed work programme for Overview and Scrutiny for the municipal year 2024/25.
- Overview and Scrutiny Annual report
 - This report sets out the work that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance and Performance Sub-Committee have completed during 2023/2024.

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. It makes recommendations to the main committee, where appropriate, which is also reported to Cabinet in support of their decision-making.

The sub-committee comprises five councillors who are drawn from the OSC membership, currently there is one vacant position.

Review of the year from Chairman, Cllr Connor McConville

It has been a privilege to continue to chair the Finance and Performance Committee and welcome the new members to the committee. We have had five very productive meetings throughout the municipal year and discussed a number of important agenda items.

The Sub-Committee gives councillors the time to consider and analyse often sizable financial and performance-based reports and provides the opportunity to ask probing questions. Just like OSC, the sub-committee does not exist to make decisions, instead it holds the council to account with regards to its budget process and overall performance.

The Sub-Committee had very positive meetings with regards to setting the budget for 2024/25, looking at quite impactful proposals regarding street cleaning, litter bins, grass cutting and garden waste and provided important feedback to cabinet to aid their decision making.

I would like to thank Tim, cabinet member for finance for attending the meetings to support his officer team. All the finance team for their comprehensive reports. Gavin for presenting the quarterly performance updates and to all the committee services team for their continuous hard work.

06 July 2023

- General Fund Capital Programme Provisional Outturn 2022/23 - This report provided the provisional outturn of the current financial position for the General Fund capital programme in 2022/23, based on expenditure to 31 March 2023, and identifies variances compared to the latest approved budget.
- General Fund Revenue 2022/23 Provisional Outturn - This report summarised the 2022/23 provisional outturn position (subject to external audit) for the General Fund revenue expenditure compared to the approved budget for the council.
- Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Provisional Outturn 2022/23 - This report summarised the 2022/23 provisional outturn position (subject to audit) for the HRA revenue expenditure and HRA capital programme compared to both the latest approved budget and quarter 3 projections.
- Annual Performance Report 2022/23 and Draft KPI's 2023/24 - This report set out how the Council has delivered for local people in the district in 2022-23 in relation to the priorities documented within its Corporate Plan 'Creating Tomorrow Together' (2021-30) and presents amendments to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will be used to monitor progress during the 2023-24 year. The Committee agreed to recommend to cabinet, that a further KPI be included within the housing section, which looks to measure how many houses the Council can get to EPP C either through the decarbonisation fund or the Councils own Housing Revenue Account.

10 October 2023

- Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23 - The report reviewed the Council's treasury management activities for 2022/23, including the actual treasury management indicators. The report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. The Council is required to comply with both Codes through Regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003.
- Quarter 1 Performance Report 2023/24 - The report provided an update on the Council's performance for the first quarter of the year covering 1st April – 30th June 2023. The report enables the Council to assess progress against the approved key performance indicators arising from the Council's new Corporate Action Plan.

05 December 2023

- Quarter 2 Performance Report 2023/24 - The report provided an update on the Council's performance for the second quarter of the year covering 1st July - 30th September 2023. The report enables the Council to assess progress against the approved key performance indicators arising from the Council's Corporate Action Plan.
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 - The Medium Term Financial Strategy ('MTFS') is the Council's key financial planning document. It puts the financial perspective on the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, expressing the aims and objectives of the various plans and strategies in financial terms over the four year period ending 31st March 2028. It covers both revenue and revenue implications for capital spend for the General Fund. Also included are the Council's reserves policies. The MTFS is a key element of sound corporate governance and financial management.
- Budget Strategy 2024/25 - The Budget Strategy sets out the guidelines for preparing the 2024/25 Budget. It supports the Corporate Plan and aligns with the direction and objectives of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- Options Report on whether to continue to maintain Kent County Council (KCC) owned grass in the district, which is subsidised by Folkestone & Hythe District Council (FHDC) - The report outlined the current arrangement with Kent County Council (KCC) to maintain rural and urban verges and the financial implications of this for Folkestone & Hythe District Council (FHDC). Various options were outlined in the report for consideration to reduce budgets in line with the Star Chamber exercise.
- Waste & Street Cleansing Savings Proposals – Members representation outlining proposed savings to the waste and street cleansing contract.
- Overview of Community Grants - The report presented an overview of grants made by the Council to external community based organisations.

23 January 2024

- General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring (Q3) 2023/24 - This report sets out the financial monitoring information for the Council as at 1 December 2023, i.e., Q3 of 2023/24. The report provides Members with an overview of budget performance, including an overview of reserves and balances, to enable the Committee to take ownership of the budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to Officers on the performance of those budgets. At the end of Quarter 3, there is a favourable **end of the financial year projected position of £458k** on the Council's revised net revenue expenditure budget, of £22.2m. This position is based on budget activities as at 1 December 2023, projected trends in income and expenditure and changes to Council funding.
- General Fund Capital Programme (Q3) Budget Monitoring 2023/24 - This monitoring report provides an initial projection of the current financial position for the General Fund capital

programme profiled for 2023/24, based on expenditure to 1 December 2023, and identifies variances compared to the latest approved budget.

- HRA Budget Monitoring (Q3) - This monitoring report provides a projection of the end of year financial position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue expenditure and HRA capital programme based on net expenditure to 1 December 2023.
- Draft General Fund Budget 2024/25 - This report sets out the Council's Draft General Fund budget for 2024/25 and the updated MTFs. Following this item, members resolved to:
 - Receive and note report C/23/84; and,
 - To recommend to Cabinet that they approve, any recommendation brought for the relinquishment of both the Leader and Deputy Leaders SRA's in order for the money saved to be reintroduced to the members ward grants.
- Draft Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Original Budget 2024/25 - This report sets out the Housing Revenue Account ('HRA') Revenue and Capital Budget for 2024/25 for approval and proposes an increase in weekly rents and an increase in service charges for 2024/25 both for approval.
- Update to the General Fund Medium Capital Programme - This report updates the General Fund Medium Term Capital Programme for the five-year period ending 31 March 2029. The General Fund Medium Term Capital Programme is required to be submitted to full Council for consideration and approval as part of the budget process.

12 March 2024

- Quarter 3 Performance Report 2023-24 (amended from Q3 KPI report)
 - The report provided an update on the Council's performance for the third quarter of the year covering 1 October – 31 December 2023. The report enables the Council to assess progress against the approved key performance indicators arising from the Council's new Corporate Action Plan.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) update
 - The report outlined the activity to date regarding the UKSPF and REPF programme, giving an overview of the programme, activities being implemented, and outputs being achieved. Members were asked to take note of the report.

