Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

Overview and Scrutiny Board
Annual Report 2021/2022

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am delighted to give this short introduction to the summary of the Board's work during the 2021-2022 municipal year.

The Board has been pleased this year to formalise its role in pre-decision scrutiny and further details of this are given below. The selective use of the call-in powers have also been used effectively and the Board's budget scrutiny and topic group work are also detailed below.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the other members of the Board and all the Council officers, who have supported the Board's work during such a challenging time. The annual reports of the respective Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committees are attached to this report for information.

I commend this annual report and am pleased to submit it to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval to refer on to full Council.

REMIT AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Board has responsibility for hearing all requisitions ('call-ins') of Council decisions. The Board also leads on the pre-decision scrutiny of forthcoming Council plans and decisions.

The Overview and Scrutiny is also responsible for scrutiny of the following areas:

- Strategy and commissioning
- Partnerships with Business
- Customer access
- E-government and ICT
- Finance
- Human resources
- Asset Management
- Property resources
- Facilities Management
- Communications

- Democratic Services
- Social inclusion
- Councillor Call for Action

The Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Board during the year were:

Councillor Darren Wise (Chairman)

Councillor Michael White (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Ray Best

Councillor Judith Holt

Councillor Sally Miller

Councillor Philippa Crowder

Councillor Nisha Patel

Councillor Christine Smith

Councillor Maggie Themistocli

Councillor Ray Morgon

Councillor Barry Mugglestone

Councillor Linda Hawthorn

Councillor Christopher Wilkins

Councillor Graham Williamson

Councillor Natasha Summers

Councillor Keith Darvill

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD – REVIEW OF ACTIVITY, 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

1. Call-ins of Executive Decisions

   During the period under review, the Board exercised its power of requisition or call-in of the following Executive decisions:

   Reactive & Planned Maintenance & Construction Improvement Schemes Contract – May 2021
   Public Realm Transformation – New Operating Model – August 2021
   Climate Change Action Plan – December 2021
   Award of Contract for Housing Repairs and Voids – January 2021

Whilst the Board did not uphold any of the requisitions, each issue was scrutinised at length with relevant officers and, where appropriate, the Cabinet Member. Further details of each requisition and the issues discussed can be found in the minutes of the relevant meeting.

2. Pre-decision Scrutiny

In October 2022, the Board used its powers of pre-decision scrutiny to examine the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme, before any final decision was taken on the matter. The Board held detailed discussions regarding the structure of the new scheme and the likely impact on housing applicants in Havering.

The Board agreed a number of comments on the proposed scheme for consideration by the Cabinet Member in making their decision. These included the need for more information on housing supply, that the proposed Opportunities Register was very positive and should be promoted widely and that the scheme should offer more support to single mothers with children.

3. Budget Issues

The Board received in November a mid-year update on the budget situation covering for example overspends in Adult Social Care caused by Covid-19 and proposed savings via staff reduction and new modes of delivery such as the introduction of community hubs.

In February, the Board conducted scrutiny of the Council budget papers, prior to their consideration by Cabinet and Council. The Board agreed a number of comments to be passed back to Cabinet covering areas such as the impact on staff morale and Council services of planned reductions in staffing numbers, challenges around plans to increase the level of the Council's reserves and uncertainty over the impact of central Government's Social Care Plan.

4. Race, Equality, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion (READI) Review

The Board was briefed on the findings of the READI review and felt that Members should be given more details of the experiences covered in the report. It was agreed compliance with the review action plan should be scrutinised on a six-monthly basis.

5. Organisational Change Policy and Voluntary Release Scheme

    In March the Board reviewed plans to allow around 400 staff to leave under the voluntary release scheme as part of efforts to close the anticipated budget gap. This was linked to the Council's organisational change policy which sought to ensure fair, transparent and consistent management of change. The timetable for the voluntary release scheme was detailed and Members remained concerned about the impact the loss of this number of jobs could have on the delivery of public services.

6. Transformation Programme

    The Board also scrutinised the Council's Transformation Programme which sought to use remote working effectively and maximise income rather than cut services. The Council's investment in digital provision was outlined and the Board requested to have further details of the Transformation Programme once these had been finalised by the relevant Director.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Legal implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Human Resources implications and risks:

None – narrative report only.

Equalities implications and risks:

While the work of the Board can impact on all members of the community, there are no implications arising from this specific report which is a narrative of the Board's work over the past year.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications and Risks

None – narrative report only.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.