



Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2023/2024

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to give this short introduction to the summary of the Board's work during the 2023-2024 municipal year. Details are given below of elements of the Board's work this year including call-ins and budget scrutiny.

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 this year. 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 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 Board 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 who served on the Overview and Scrutiny Board during the year were:

Councillor Gerry O'Sullivan (Chairman)

Councillor Laurance Garrard (Chairman)

Councillor Phil Ruck (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mandy Anderson

Councillor Martin Goode

Councillor Dilip Patel

Councillor Keith Prince

Councillor Tim Ryan

Councillor Matt Stanton

Councillor Natasha Summers

Councillor David Taylor

Councillor Katharine Tumilty

Councillor Bryan Vincent

Councillor Damian White

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD – REVIEW OF ACTIVITY, 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR

1. Council Risk Registers

At its July 2023 meeting, the Board scrutinised the risk registers available across Council departments. This focussed on potential areas of risk in housing such as recruitment and retention of staff, IT systems failure and adult safeguarding issues. Risks in the regeneration area included costs of climate change, lower potential sales values of properties and the need to maintain levels of private rented income.

The Board scrutinised how levels of risk were assessed and recorded and mitigations put in place.

2. Requisitions (Call-Ins) of Executive Decision

In November, the Board considered a call-in concerning proposed loans to Mercury Land Holdings (MLH) for development at re the former St Bernard's Day Centre, Peel Way. Although the call-in was not upheld, the Board did ask

Cabinet to consider several issues including the viability of the Council taking on the project itself, adding social housing development and the possibility of involving Group Leaders when discussing future investment strategy decisions.

At its May meeting, the Board discussed two further call-ins relating to the development by MLH of sites including several car parks. Discussions centred on the rationale for these decisions and if the business case as presented was robust enough. Members of the Board felt that there remained a number of areas of concern about the proposals and therefore upheld both requisitions. The Board made a number of comments about its concerns over the proposals that were considered at a subsequent Cabinet meeting.

3. Exemptions from Call-In

The Board reviewed those occasions where the Chairman had granted an exemption from the call-in process where decisions were particularly urgent. Many of the 11 exemptions granted in the municipal year at the point of review related to the need to claim grant funding which was often released at short notice. The Board made several recommendations in this area including that more robust planning be introduced to reduce the number of exemptions requested and that the exemptions to call-in report also be presented to full Council.

4. Finance Issues including the Council's Budget

The Board has sought, given the financial challenges facing the Council, to scrutinise as closely as possible the Council's budget and progress with projected cost savings. In November, Members met with senior Council officers and the Cabinet portfolio holder to scrutinise progress in containing the Council's projected overspend. Areas discussed included the level of parking revenue collected and the cost of social care provision. The Board made a number of recommendations including that the Strategic Director meet on a monthly basis with the directors of overspending departments and that targets be set for reducing the cost of agency staff.

In January, the Board undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the Council's budget proposals for the new financial year. A number of recommendations were made to Cabinet regarding the Bridge Close Regeneration LLP and Housing Revenue Account Business Plans. These covered areas including the potential costs of telecare around the digital switchover and that an update be given on work undertaken to increase the number of bedrooms in homes.

As regards the budget itself, the Board scrutinised the likely impact of the Council's capitalisation order and noted the difficult circumstances in which

officers were operating. Proposed savings such as stopping the Christmas lights programme and increasing the cost of visitor parking permits were also discussed. Concern was also raised over the proposed introduction of parking charges in parks.

The Board made a number of recommendations including that more emphasis be placed on the future cost of capitalisation requests and that details of progress with meeting savings targets be brought to the Board on a regular basis. The Board was pleased to note that its recommendation that the introduction of parking charges in parks not be proceeded with was accepted by Cabinet.

5. IT Service Repatriation

The Board also scrutinised progress with repatriating the Council's IT service back to Havering. It was hoped that this would result in a safer, more robust and legally compliant IT service. Members discussed future proofing of the IT plans and arrangements for business continuity. The Board made recommendations that future Cabinet reports should include more detail of costings and allocated budgets as well as fuller reasoning for decisions.

6. Customer Relationship Management Digital Programme

In May, the Board scrutinised work on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programme. This covered the delivery of services to residents both digitally and via the Council's contact centre. Members discussed issues such as how reports of flytipping were dealt with and security issues relating to the systems. The Board was pleased that services now using the new system such as registrars and green waste collection had received good feedback from the public.

7. Parking Enforcement Task and Finish Group

Throughout much of the period under review, members of the Board were engaged in a review of the operation of parking enforcement in Havering. Members undertook a number of activities including observing daily staff briefings and having a valuable opportunity to join Civil Enforcement Officers on their daily rounds.

The Task and Finish Group formulated a total of 22 recommendations which were due to be considered by Cabinet in June 2024.

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.