



Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2024/2025

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I am pleased to give this short introduction to the summary of the Board's work during the 2024-2025 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 Laurance Garrard (Chairman)

Councillor Julie Wilkes (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mandy Anderson

Councillor Philippa Crowder

Councillor David Godwin

Councillor Martin Goode

Councillor Dilip Patel

Councillor Keith Prince

Councillor Philip Ruck

Councillor Matt Stanton

Councillor David Taylor

Councillor Bryan Vincent

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD – REVIEW OF ACTIVITY, 2024/25 MUNICIPAL YEAR

1. Council Budget

Given the financial challenges facing the Council, the Board has prioritised scrutiny of the Council budget and related issues. The Board scrutinised in December the approach to consultation on the budget although options were limited as the consultation process under way by this point. The Board asked for next year's consultation to be brought before it at an earlier stage in order that suggestions for improvement could be made.

Formal scrutiny of the budget proposals took place in January when officers presented full budget papers including those covering regeneration joint ventures etc. Recommendations and comments made by the Board to Cabinet included for more detail on the social value aspects of Joint Venture work, the use of Mercury Land Holding homes for temporary accommodation and the importance of seeking to ensure further external grant funding for the Council.

2. Savings Delivery

In addition to the budget proposals, the Board has also sought to monitor the achievement of savings planned in the current year. Updates were given to the Board in October covering areas such as the review of parking charges and the likelihood of achieving all planned savings. Further reports and changes to format were requested and the area of scrutiny will continue in the new municipal year.

3. Performance Issues

The Board has also scrutinised the key performance indicators (KPIs) available to monitor performance. The Board requested further detail on the position with red-rated KPIs and next year's set of indicators should be brought before it for pre-decision scrutiny.

4. Improvement and Transformation Plan/Productivity Plan

In July the Board received the Improvement and Transformation Plan which was submitted to central government as part of the Capitalisation Direction process. The Productivity Plan was also reviewed which was required to be produced by all Councils.

The Board discussed areas such as the level of interest on the Capitalisation loan and the impact of the Council's Target Operating Model. The impact on the plans of the lack of affordable housing in the borough was also scrutinised.

5. Customer Services Strategy

Scrutiny of the Council's Customer Services Strategy covered included plans to embed a customer-centric culture, modernise service delivery and improve the customer experience. This included plans to establish a new resident panel and increase on-line take-up of Council services. The Board scrutinised how learning from poor customer service could be improved and suggested that external benchmarking should be included in any updates on this issue.

6. Target Operating Model

The Board received an update in July on progress with implementing the Target Operating Model. This has included a review of the senior management structure and the realignment of a number of a number of services. Staff turnover levels had also been reduced.

7. HR Issues

Throughout the year the Board has scrutinised a number of issues relating to the Council's human resources. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of agency and on sickness levels and Strategic Directors explained how they were addressing each of these areas. The Board scrutinised how levels of sickness were monitored in each area and if expenditure on agency staff could be reduced.

Further updates on HR issues will be given to the Board during the coming year.

8. Organisation receiving Council grants

The Board has scrutinised in detail the services provided by the two organisations to receive Council grant funding – the Citizens Advice Service (CAS) and the Havering Volunteer Centre (HVC).

The Board scrutinised areas of the CAS operations that grant funding was used for including advice on benefits, debt and housing. CAS was the only organisation in Havering providing specific services such as advocacy. Members recommended that, if possible, section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy funding be used to support the CAS.

The work of the HVC was explained to the Board and the cost saving to the borough was noted. The Board made a number of recommendations to Cabinet around assisting the HVC to find suitable new premises and establishing HVC's place in the Council's voluntary sector strategy.

9. Requisitions

In January, the Board heard a call-in of a Cabinet decision to convert offices to residential accommodation to accommodate homeless families at Chesham House. The requisition was upheld unanimously and a number of recommendations were made by the Board requiring further details of the scheme, developers and security arrangements etc.

A similar scheme at Eastgate House in Basildon was also requisitioned and heard by the Board in February. On this occasion the requisition was not upheld by 7 votes to 4 and the Board again made a number of comments to Cabinet covering areas such as flat size, the number of units and information to be provided to tenants on moving in.

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.