



# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

## WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL



June 2022

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## Forward by Cllrs Kevin Deanus (Chair, Services Overview and Scrutiny) and Stephen Mulliner (Chair, Resources Overview and Scrutiny)

We are pleased to introduce this report into the continuing work of Overview and Scrutiny at Waverley Borough Council. It covers the activities of the committees from May 2021 till April 2022. This has been a period of adjustment. After over a year of meeting remotely to maintain social distance during the Covid-19 pandemic, in June 2021 the committees returned to meeting in-person in the Council Chamber. Then in September, Waverley saw the largest change to its scrutiny arrangements since 2016 when the number of Committees was reduced from four to two, now titled Resources and Services.

As a result, the second half of the Council year was a very busy period for scrutiny. In addition to very full agendas for regular meetings, there have also been five special meetings outside the normal meeting cycle. These have enabled the committees to scrutinise urgent matters and proposals and provide post-decision scrutiny of particularly consequential decisions. The abolition of the Housing O&S Committee led to the transfer of responsibility for housing scrutiny to the Resources O&S Committee and, in view of the significance of the Housing Revenue Account within Waverley's overall operations, to the formation of a Housing Working Group with representation from both O&S committees. This working group has already received detailed briefings on housing maintenance and the decarbonisation project and will focus in particular on scrutinising the Housing Development Strategy in an era of high-cost inflation.

Scrutiny activity has continued to yield a large number of constructive recommendations. We are pleased to report that of the recommendations to the Executive, 100% of those from Resources and 73% from Services Overview and Scrutiny have been fully or partially accepted. However, as in previous years, the most valuable scrutiny has often been conducted in small Task and Finish groups which are able to take an in-depth look at a topic. We welcome the successful delivery of reports on housing design standards and funding for the third sector by our colleagues, and we look forward to further reports coming this year. This demonstrates that Waverley's Overview and Scrutiny continues to add value to the Council's decision-making.

## Structural changes to Overview and Scrutiny

The format and remits of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) committees have shifted during 2021/22.

Initially, there were four committees: Community Wellbeing, Environment, Housing and Value for Money & Customer Services. On 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021, Full Council approved a transition to two committees with the following remits:

<b>Committee name</b>	<b>Remit (Service Areas)</b>
Policy	Business Transformation Finance and Property Policy and Governance
Services	Commercial Services Environmental and Regulatory Services Housing Operations Housing Delivery and Communities Planning and Economic Development  This Committee will act as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee for the purposes of Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006.

In March 2022, Policy O&S was renamed Resources O&S. For consistency, the latter name will be used throughout the remainder of this report.

In April 2022, the remits of the two committees were amended to better balance their workloads. Housing Operations and the housing-related aspects of Housing Delivery and Communities were transferred from Services to Resources. This will affect future meetings, but the previous remits apply for the meetings covered by this report.

## 2021/22 meeting dates

Date	Meeting
22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2022	Resources
21 <sup>st</sup> March 2022	Services
25 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	Resources
24 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	Services
13 <sup>th</sup> December 2021	Services (special)
24 <sup>th</sup> November 2021	Services
23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2021	Resources
3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2021	Services (special)
29 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	Environment
21 <sup>st</sup> September 2021	Housing
20 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	Environment (Special)
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	Community Wellbeing
13 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	Value for Money
12 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Value for Money (special)
29 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	Value for Money (special)
8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	Housing
7 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	Environment
25 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	Community Wellbeing
24 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	Value for Money

## Cross cutting issues

**Corporate Performance:** The Committees continued to receive quarterly updates on the Council's key performance indicators. In March 2022, they conducted their annual review of these indicators.

**Corporate Strategy 2020-25 – Year 1 progress report:** The Committees considered the relevant section of this report in November 2021. A number of comments were passed to the Executive as a result.

**Service Plans:** In the January 2022 meeting cycle, Resources and Services Committees reviewed the Service Plans relevant to their remit. Both committees expressed an interest in engaging with the processes of formulating and monitoring them at an earlier stage.

## Legacy committees

### Community Wellbeing

**Chair:** Cllr Kevin Deanus

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Sally Dickson

A key concern for this committee was a potential new build Cranleigh Leisure Centre which it covered at both of its meetings during this municipal year. The Committee also continued to receive regular updates on Covid and community action from the Head of Communities. Finally, the Committee scrutinised and ultimately endorsed the incorporation of health and wellbeing into the Safer Waverley Partnership.

## Environment

**Chair:** Cllr Carole Cockburn

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Martin D’Arcy

In addition to its regular items, in June 2021, the Committee carried out a wide-ranging review of ‘priorities and vision for the next two years’ with the Portfolio Holders for the Environment and Sustainability and Planning Policy, Services and Brightwells. This touched on biodiversity, ‘No Mow May’, and the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan. This surfaced a diversity of views on No Mow May and an agreement to schedule a future discussion on balancing biodiversity and the amenity values of green spaces. This took place in September. This meeting also featured a detailed discussion on the annual air quality report.

A special meeting was also held in September to handle two urgent items which could not wait for the regular meeting. The Committee considered proposed modifications to the Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2), a key planning document, The debate focused especially on the relative merits of two sites for housing in Haslemere. The Committee then examined the Car Parking Strategy. Members of the Committee raised concerns about proposals for electric vehicles to receive a 50% discount on charges, which were ultimately taken up by Full Council.

## Housing

**Chair:** Cllr Richard Seaborne

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Peter Marriott

In addition to several task and finish groups, the Committee took a particular interest in asset management and the Council’s house building programme. Given their central role in both the housing revenue and capital position of the Council, the Resources O&S Committee has taken up these themes. It also explored with the Housing Manager how the services support the mental health of tenants. The Committee was impressed with the work the housing team has done on this matter.

## Value for Money & Customer Services

**Chair:** Cllr Peter Martin

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Joan Heagin

The Committee considered a range of items that included the contingency budget, the Medium-Term Financial Plan, business transformation and investment and asset management. The Committee also held a special meeting to scrutinise an exempt property matter under the call-in arrangements.

The most significant item that came before the Committee was the proposal that Waverley and Guildford Borough Councils should engage in extensive collaboration to achieve cost savings. The Council was informed in February 2021 that the concept was being explored and an all-member briefing was held on 16 June 2021. Owing to the very short interval between the briefing and the Council meeting on 6 July 2021 at which the substantive decision to proceed was to be taken, it was only possible to hold one special meeting of the Committee to consider the matter. This was held

on 29 June 2021 and focussed mainly on an external consultant's report that gave an overview of local authority mergers and estimates of possible cost savings from the proposed collaboration. Given the strategic significance of the proposal, the Committee expressed some concern at the speed at which the matter was being progressed and regretted that the scrutiny process was not engaged at an earlier stage so that adequate time could be available to examine such an important subject in appropriate depth.

## Resources Overview and Scrutiny

**Chair:** Cllr Stephen Mulliner

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Joan Heagin

Given its remit, the Committee naturally devoted significant time to scrutinising the development of the 2022/23 budget and the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy. The work in formal meetings was supplemented by deep dives organised by the Council's finance team to enable councillors to refine their questioning. As a result of the changes to the committee structure, for the first time, the same committee looked at the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets together. The Committee ultimately endorsed the broad contours of the proposed budgets. However, it highlighted some inconsistencies with the proposed planning fees and green waste charges. These were rectified before the papers were presented to Council. The Committee also recommended that a proposed delegation of authority to enable the Chief Executive and Strategic Director to bid, negotiate and complete on property acquisitions and investments up to £10 million be subject to annual renewal. Full Council accepted this recommendation.

At each meeting of this Committee, as with Value for Money before, a report was presented on the work of the Property Investment Advisory Board (PIAB), which advises the Executive on property investment matters, as well as quarterly updates on the performance of the Council's portfolio of investment properties. By their nature, these reports deal with commercially sensitive matters and, therefore, are taken in exempt session.

The Committee continued to explore the allocations of funds from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Committee members identified a concern that the County Council and local NHS were not making bids and, hence, there might be an under provision of new highways and GP surgeries for new housing developments. Representatives from County and the NHS have been invited to a discussion at the June meeting.

In March 2022, the Committee began what is intended to be an ongoing review of each stage of the proposed development project relating to the Council's offices in the Burys, Godalming.

## Services Overview and Scrutiny

**Chair:** Cllr Kevin Deanus

**Vice-chair:** Cllr Peter Marriott

This committee began its life with a special meeting in early November 2021 to consider the Dunsfold Park SPD. Following a very full discussion, the Committee supported a recommendation that the Executive proceed with a consultation on the document. It also made sixteen separate additional observations which were fed into the consultation.

The Committee considered and supported the following policy proposals:

- Tree and Woodland policy

- First Homes Approach policy
- Cranleigh Leisure Centre New Build
- Climate Change and Sustainability SPD

As a result of the latter discussion, the Committee recommended that the Council adopt a single format for SPDs, regardless of whether they are written in-house by Council staff or by external consultants. The Committee was also broadly supportive of the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan but asked for additional details including a costed business plan. The Committee also reviewed the proposed amendments to LPP2 following the conclusion of the consultation. It recommended a set of questions the Executive could use to evaluate the proposals.

## Task and Finish groups

### Funding for the Voluntary Sector

**Chair: Cllr Jenny Else**

The Working Group on Service Level Agreements for the voluntary and community sector resumed its deliberations in January 2021 after a break in meetings due to Covid-19. In March 2021, a revised scoping document was approved to reflect changing circumstances, notably the setting up of an Executive Working Group to consider the issue of future funding pressures in this area. The Working Group produced an interim report designed to provide principles which could inform the Executive Working Group's more detailed deliberations. These were accepted by Community Wellbeing O&S and Executive in June 2021.

The Group reconvened in August 2021 to consider the Executive's proposals. Its members welcomed the proposals, which they considered a significant improvement on the Council's previous arrangement for funding the not-for-profit and voluntary sector, and that they took on board the interim recommendations from the Working Group. They were also pleased to see a shift towards supporting young people and those with mental health challenges.

### Housing Allocations

**Chair: Cllr George Wilson**

In 2019, the Housing O&S scrutiny review 'Attitudes to Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice' recommended that a review was undertaken of the Council's Allocation policy, to ensure an easy application process for all eligible residents, including local workers. It also recommended that more representative demand data is collected and that the Council should expand and develop its communication on allocation criteria to better educate members of the public on who is eligible for social housing.

In 2020, the Housing Strategy and Enabling Team completed an affordability study and have commissioned a Housing Needs Survey which will provide up to date local information to inform the allocation scheme. In September 2021, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee adopted a scoping document and agreed the membership for the group conducting the present review.

The Group reviewed the existing allocations policy and decided to focus on the following topics:

1. The annual gross income and savings/assets thresholds above which a household does not qualify for inclusion on the housing register
2. How to allocate homes in cases where a child is part of more than one household (e.g. if their parents have separated or divorced and are co-parenting in separate households)

3. Applicants who currently have an outstanding Council Tax, Housing Benefit, rent arrears, deposit bond or rent in advance debt to Waverley

In addition to advice from the Council's Housing Needs team, the group members drew on the affordability study and housing needs surveys conducted for the Council by external consultants. In subsequent meetings, the group was advised by representatives from local third sector groups which work with council tenants and potential tenants. These representatives spoke on a 'Chatham House Rule' basis<sup>1</sup>.

### Housing Revenue Account

**Chair: TBD**

In March 2022, Resources O&S agreed to set up a new working group to examine the Housing Revenue Account. The Group is currently in a research and education stage prior to the formal start of its work. This is expected to officially launch latter this year (2022).

### Housing Design Standards

**Chair: Cllr David Else**

This group considered the standards that new council properties should be built to. It weighed written evidence and heard from witnesses from the Council, a developer and an energy assessor. The review had a strong focus on the means of improving energy efficiency and reducing operational CO2 emissions. It produced recommendations which were accepted with minor modifications by the main committee in June 2021. These included retaining the space standards suggested by a previous report on the same topic from 2018, whilst adopting a SAP rating of 100 in preference to Passivhaus as the Council's default zero-carbon standard.

Its recommendations were accepted by the Executive in full in September 2021 with an amendment to strengthen the recommendation on on-site renewable generation.

### Leisure Contract

**Chair: Cllr Mary Forszewski**

The current leisure management contract, for the Council's five leisure centres, expires on 30 June 2023 and the Council needs a new contractual arrangement to be in place from the 1 July 2023. In March 2022, Services O&S agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to monitor progress, agreed its membership and delegated authority to those members to agree a provisional scoping document. This was done at its initial meeting. There will be a report back to the next Services O&S meeting in June 2022.

## Responses to Overview and Scrutiny recommendations

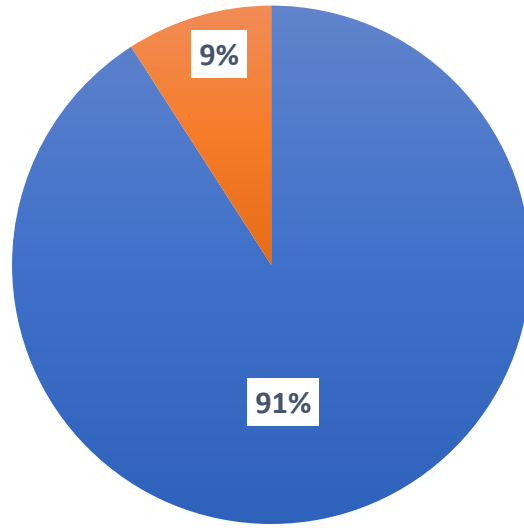
More details of the Executive's responses to recommendations from O&S can be found in annexe 2: "2021-22 Master Tracker Recommendations to the Executive from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees". However, in summary recommendations have been positively received. Since November 2021, 91% of recommendations from Resources O&S and 68% from Services O&S have been accepted by the Executive.

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<sup>1</sup> "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed." <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

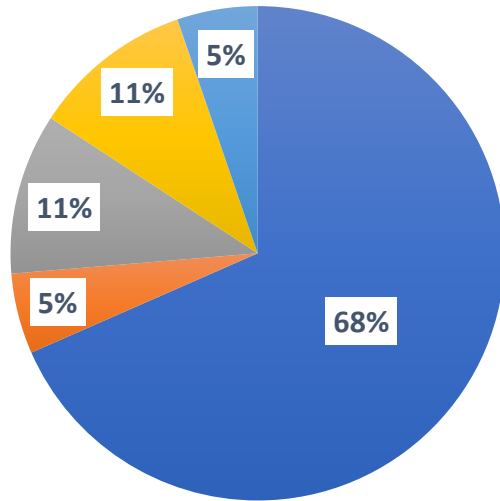


### Executive responses to recommendations from Resources O&S



■ Agreed ■ Partially agreed ■ Rejected ■ Noted ■ Will revisit

### Executive responses to recommendations from Services O&S



■ Agreed ■ Partially agreed ■ Rejected ■ Noted ■ Will revisit