



Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

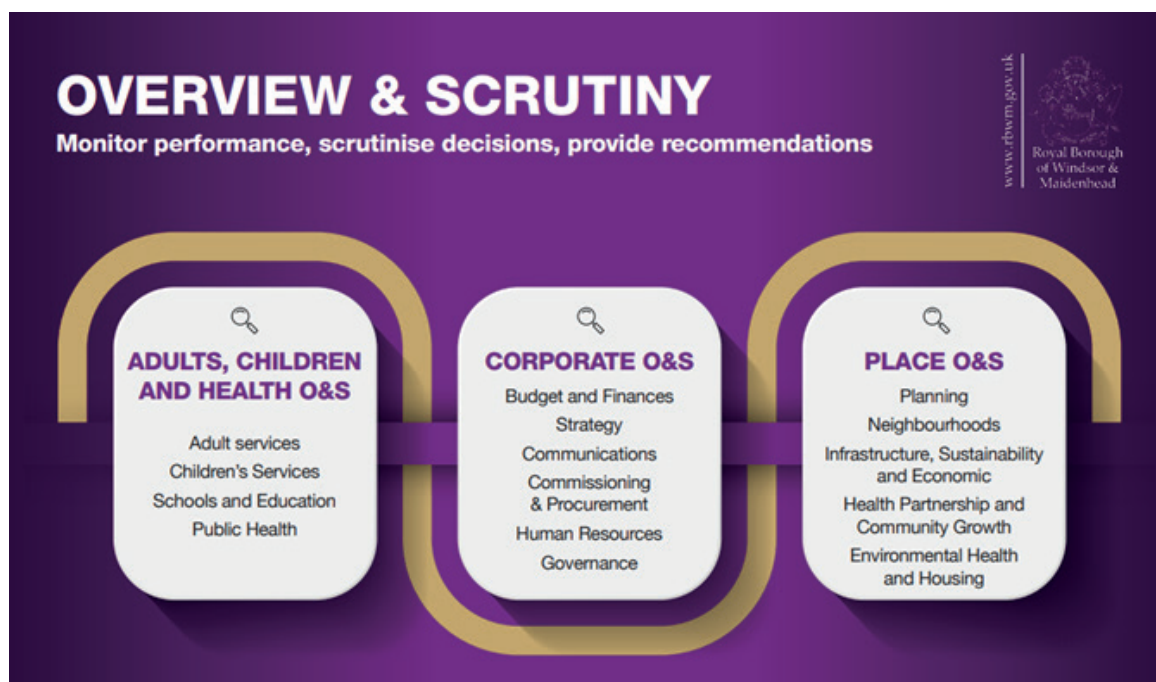
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Overview and Scrutiny at RBWM consists of three main panels; Corporate, Place, and Adults, Children & Health. Adults, Children & Health and Place have four scheduled meetings a year, with Corporate having six meetings a year due to its wider responsibility and overarching scrutiny role. Each Panel is closely aligned to a key council theme and directorate area, which allows each Panel to focus on specific objectives. Items of consideration can vary from one-off reports, regular performance monitoring and deep dive reviews into a specific topic area.

The graphic below provides an illustrative summary of each Panel's remit:



There is a requirement for Overview and Scrutiny to submit an annual report each year to a meeting of Full Council, highlighting the work of each Panel and what topics have been scrutinised. This report gives a brief summary of the work and findings of each Panel while looking to pick out some key areas of positive scrutiny, along with some commentary on what was achieved by the Panel.

The report concludes with some figures of Overview and Scrutiny across the municipal year and further information on how residents can become more involved in the scrutiny process.

Consideration also needs to be given to the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) 'good scrutiny guide' which provides a framework for ensuring that scrutiny plays a key and effective role in the governance of a council. The guide shows that weak scrutiny leads to weak governance processes, with three core principles underpinning this:

- **Accountability** – an environment where responsibility for services and decisions is clear and where those holding responsibility can and are answerable for success and failure.
- **Transparency** – the publication, proactively, of information relating to services and decisions to allow local people, and others, to hold policymakers and decision-makers to account.
- **Involvement** – rules, principles and processes whereby a wide range of stakeholders, including elected representatives, can play active roles in holding to account, and influencing and directing the development of policy.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Councillors sitting on scrutiny are encouraged to consider good practise resources from organisations like the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) and the [Local Government Association](#) as part of their ongoing work to ensure that there is continued progress on good governance and positive working relationships across the council.

Changes and improvements made to further improve scrutiny this year include:

- An in-house training session delivered by Democratic Services was held in October 2025 to further improve the skills and knowledge of Councillors sitting on scrutiny panels. Over 15 Councillors attended this session.
- There has been regular and welcomed attendance at scrutiny meetings from relevant Cabinet Members for new strategies and policies being brought forward. This normally includes the report being introduced by the Cabinet Member and questions on policy being answered at the meeting.
- Clear recommendations are being included in the minutes for each meeting which are then considered and responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member at Cabinet.
- Suggested timings for each item have been added to the agenda to help with time management and ensuring all items are given adequate space for discussion.
- Discussions have been held with officers from all directorates about involving scrutiny as a key part in the decision-making process, including attending the internal officer Performance and Resources Board.
- Encouraging Panel Members to think about areas of concern or interest and ensuring that this is scoped effectively to hold effective scrutiny reviews.
- Continuing to encourage further collaboration between the Chairs of each Panel, to encourage scrutiny symmetry whilst avoiding duplication or repetition.



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Membership May 2025 – April 2026



Councillor Simon Bond
Chair



Councillor Helen Price
Vice Chair



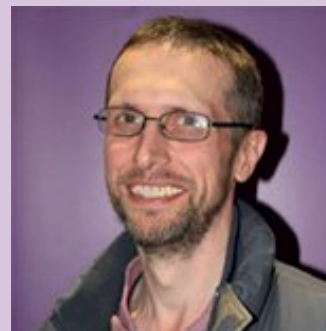
Councillor
Sally Coneron



Councillor
Suzanne Cross



Councillor
Mark Howard



Councillor
Jack Douglas



Councillor
Julian Tisi



Councillor
Chris Moriarty
(Chair) until January 2026



Councillor
W Da Costa
until March 2026

Introduction by the Chair of the Panel – Councillor Simon Bond

A year ago, my predecessor reported that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny was sharpening its focus, becoming more proactive rather than reactive, involved with corporate policy at an earlier stage, and engaging with the Cabinet Member for each area.

This has indeed been the case, with engagement routinely taking place before a draft policy goes to Cabinet rather than afterwards. Indeed, in the case of the Social Value Procurement Policy, the Panel was grateful for the opportunity to discuss the topic at the outset, before a policy was drafted.

We are also seeing some policies in context as part of suites of policies: the Advertising and Sponsorship Policy is linked to Social Value Procurement and Corporate Social Value. These enable the council to do more and improve outcomes for our residents, within the limits of its challenging financial position, by working with others for the benefit of the community. These financial limits and the council's capacity constraints mean progress on policy development may have taken longer to finish than the Council Plan's target completion date. Nevertheless, we are grateful for all the work on emerging policy areas and that capacity is expanding where feasible.

When finalised, it is hoped that all Councillors will make themselves familiar with the benefits of policies on advertising & sponsorship and corporate social value.

Advertising and Sponsorship Policy



The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the draft Advertising and Sponsorship Policy prior to its submission to Cabinet for approval. The policy set out the council's approach to developing advertising and sponsorship opportunities across the borough, with the aim of generating additional income and supporting the delivery of key services. It was also intended to align with wider corporate priorities, including the Council Plan and the emerging Social Value Policy.

A significant part of the Panel's discussion focused on governance, transparency, and accountability. Panel Members raised concerns about the clarity of the board's role, its membership, and how decisions would be made, particularly with an emphasis on the importance of clearly defined terms of reference and greater visibility of decision-making processes.

The Panel also explored potential risks associated with advertising and sponsorship arrangements, particularly in relation to conflicts of interest and reputational considerations. Councillors highlighted the need for robust safeguards to ensure that the council would not be brought into disrepute,

including careful consideration of links between sponsorship arrangements and planning decisions. The Panel recommended that explicit reference to perceived conflicts of interest be included within the policy. It was also noted that while the policy referred to maximising opportunities, it was less clear how this would be achieved in practice and suggested stronger links to corporate priorities and financial sustainability.

Councillors on the Panel recommended strengthening the policy's wording to ensure that it explicitly referenced all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, alongside the inclusion of a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment prior to adoption.

Overall, the Panel recognised the policy as a positive step towards a more coordinated and strategic approach to commercial opportunities.

Cabinet considered all of the recommendations put forward by scrutiny and agreed to delegate the final strategy to be confirmed between the Cabinet Member, officers and the Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel. It is anticipated that the final version of the strategy will be published shortly, taking into account the recommendations made by scrutiny.

Budget Challenge Session



In January 2026, the Panel had an opportunity to scrutinise the draft budget proposals in a dedicated challenge session. The Adults, Children & Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel held offline meetings in advance of the challenge session, with comments and concerns highlighted to Panel Members. The Panel were also able to consider the initial emerging themes coming through as part of the public consultation. Councillors scrutinised various areas of the budget, with the meeting being split into various sections,

looking at the general approach to the creation of the budget, before deep diving into each area of council operation (Place, Adults, Children's, Resources) and finally looking at the revenue approach.

The Panel acknowledged the continuing financial pressures facing the council, including rising demand across key service areas, the need to deliver substantial savings, and the ongoing requirement to ensure long-term financial sustainability. A significant element of the Panel's discussion focused on the assumptions built into the budget. Challenge was made on the robustness of projections relating to inflation, income generation and demand-led services, emphasising the need for realistic financial planning. The Panel also explored the achievability of proposed savings, seeking reassurance that these were deliverable without adversely impacting service quality or outcomes for residents.

The Panel raised concerns about the potential impact of budget proposals on residents, especially on the potential increase in council tax. Emphasis was placed on the importance of protecting vulnerable residents and ensuring that the council's approach remained fair and proportionate.

In relation to income generation and asset management, the Panel considered how the council could maximise the value of its assets and explore opportunities to increase revenue. This included discussion on the use of council-owned property, as well as more general approaches to strengthening the council's financial resilience.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel also considered the approach and outcomes of the council's budget consultation as part of the wider budget-setting process. This provided the Panel with an opportunity to reflect on how the council engaged with residents and stakeholders and how feedback was used to inform financial decision-making.

A key focus of the Panel's discussion was the approach taken to consultation and how this compared with good practice in other local authorities. The Panel also explored the balance between the resources required to carry out consultation activity and the value of the insights gained. The Panel suggested that lessons could be learned from benchmarking against other councils to understand how consultation processes might be refined and improved.

Cabinet formally acknowledged and welcomed the input of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels as part of the budget-setting process, with the comments and concerns acknowledged by Cabinet Members. Discussion at the Cabinet meeting demonstrated that scrutiny had played a constructive role in strengthening the credibility of the budget, particularly in testing assumptions and highlighting key risks. However, given the scale of the financial challenge, Cabinet also made clear that many of the issues raised were structural and could not be fully mitigated through the budget alone.

Devolution Expression of Interest



The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered proposals to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to government to explore the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley. The EOI represented an early stage in discussions with government and did not commit the council to any final decision on devolution arrangements.

The Panel noted that the primary purpose of the EOI was to open dialogue with government and to position the borough to access potential future funding opportunities. Councillors were advised that significant national funding streams for infrastructure,

transport and housing were increasingly being directed through mayoral strategic authorities, and that participation would be essential to ensure that the borough was not disadvantaged.

A key theme of the discussion was the strategic rationale for engaging with devolution proposals. Councillors broadly recognised that, while there were uncertainties and potential risks, there was a strong financial and strategic case for ensuring that the borough had “a seat at the table” in future funding and governance arrangements. There was acknowledgement that failure to engage at this stage could limit the council’s ability to influence outcomes and secure investment.

The Panel also explored issues relating to governance, accountability and local influence. Clarity was sought on the relationship between the proposed strategic authority and existing local governance structures. A significant part of the discussion focused on the need for clarity and transparency, particularly given the early stage of the process. Councillors highlighted that the EOI document would benefit from clearer articulation of:

- The potential structure and responsibilities of an MSA.
- The implications for local authorities and residents, including any financial impacts.
- The process and timeline for future decision-making.

The Panel also raised the importance of communication and engagement, emphasising that residents and stakeholders would need to be fully informed and engaged as proposals developed. There was currently limited public awareness of devolution proposals and that clear, accessible messaging would be required to build understanding and support.

Discussion also considered the geography and partnership arrangements underpinning the proposal, including the relationship with neighbouring authorities and the rationale for the Thames Valley footprint.

Overall, the Panel supported the submission of the Expression of Interest as a pragmatic and necessary step to enable further discussion with government. However, this should be clearly presented as the

beginning of a process, with a full business case, detailed proposals and public consultation to follow before any final decisions were taken. The EOI was approved by Full Council in December 2025 and put forward for consideration by government at the end of the year.

Council Plan Refresh



The refresh was presented as a light-touch update, maintaining continuity with the existing plan while reflecting changes in the council's operating environment, including ongoing financial pressures and evolving service demands. The Panel noted that the refreshed plan streamlined the number of deliverables, with a focus on prioritising those most aligned with residents' priorities and the council's financial position. This included a continued emphasis on financial sustainability, service delivery, and place-based improvements such as investment in green spaces and council-owned assets. It was also acknowledged the inclusion of new deliverables

alongside existing commitments, including areas linked to business engagement, income generation and workforce development.

A key element of the Panel's discussion focused on the presentation and transparency of the refreshed plan. Concerns were raised about the difficulty in identifying changes between the previous and updated versions, including which deliverables had been amended, removed, or delayed. The Panel highlighted that greater clarity would support effective scrutiny and improve understanding for both Councillors and residents. The absence of version control within the document was also raised, with a recommendation that this be addressed in future iterations.

The Panel considered the tone and messaging of the foreword, particularly in relation to the council's financial position. Councillors emphasised the importance of ensuring that the narrative accurately reflected the scale of the financial challenges facing the authority, including external funding pressures and increasing demand for services. It was suggested that the wording should be carefully reviewed to provide a clear and realistic picture to residents.

The Panel explored the level of detail included within the plan, particularly in relation to deliverables, performance measures and outcomes. It was highlighted that some areas lacked clear measures of success, which could make it more difficult to track progress and hold the council to account. While recognising the need to keep the document accessible and high-level, the Panel encouraged stronger links to supporting strategies and performance reporting mechanisms.

Overall, the Panel recognised the refresh as an important step in maintaining a relevant and focused Council Plan during a period of significant financial and service pressure. The discussion highlighted the importance of clarity, transparency and alignment with the Council's priorities, to ensure that the plan remains a meaningful tool for both delivery and accountability.

The Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel and agreed to accept a range of proposed amendments to the Council Plan. These included strengthening performance measures, improving transparency around changes to the Plan, and ensuring clearer alignment with scrutiny, governance and delivery. This demonstrated the positive impact of scrutiny in shaping the final document prior to its adoption.

Social Value Procurement Policy



The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the development of a Social Value Procurement Policy, providing early input into the council's approach and priorities prior to the policy being formally drafted. This enabled the Panel to explore the scope of social value, its practical application and the opportunities to embed it more effectively across council activity.

The Panel recognised that social value extended beyond procurement and contracting, encompassing the broader contribution that organisations operating in the borough could make to local communities. The significant presence of businesses and organisations locally that already delivered social value through their existing activities was highlighted and emphasised the importance of harnessing and coordinating this contribution more strategically.

At subsequent meetings, the Panel expressed concern about the pace of progress, noting that development appeared to remain focused primarily on procurement, with limited advancement of the wider corporate social responsibility aspect which had previously identified.

The Panel later considered the final version of the Social Value Procurement Policy in March 2026. The progress made was welcomed with the policy looking to establish a framework for securing wider economic, social and environmental benefits through council contracts, with an emphasis on ensuring that commitments made at tender stage would be monitored and delivered in practice.

While supportive of the overall direction, the Panel continued to provide constructive challenge on key aspects of the policy. There was a focus on the need to strengthen accountability, ensure effective monitoring of delivery, and maintain an appropriate balance between cost and quality in procurement decisions. Concerns were also raised about ensuring that local businesses were not disadvantaged and that social value commitments translated into tangible benefits for residents within the borough.

The Panel made a set of formal recommendations to Cabinet to strengthen the policy, particularly in relation to performance management, clarity of weighting within procurement and ensuring that outcomes were locally focused.

Cabinet subsequently approved the Social Value Procurement Policy, noting that amendments had been made in response to scrutiny input and incorporating key changes to strengthen delivery, proportionality and accountability. Cabinet highlighted several areas where scrutiny had influenced the final policy to be adopted:

- Concerns had been addressed that smaller local businesses could be disadvantaged, with the policy confirming that requirements would be proportionate and deliverable.
- The policy framework had been strengthened to ensure there was clear guidance on how social value was assessed, weighted and monitored.
- Commitments made at tender stage would be tracked and enforced through contract management.

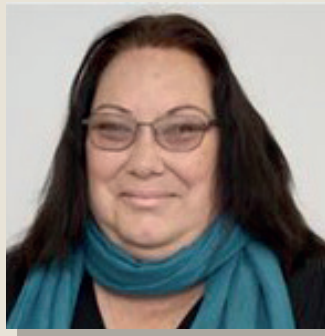
Key scrutiny concerns had been incorporated into the final policy and the overall direction aligned with the issues raised during scrutiny.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel Membership May 2025 – April 2026



Councillor Gary Reeves
Chair



Councillor Helen Taylor
Vice Chair



Councillor
George Blundell



Councillor
Alison Carpenter



Councillor
Sian Martin



Councillor
Asghar Majeed



Councillor
George Shaw

Panel Membership Changes:



Councillor G Singh until January 2026

Co-opted Members: Louvaine Kneen (Bray Parish Council) and Roly Latif (Wraysbury Parish Council)

Introduction by Chair of the Panel – Councillor Gary Reeves

Over the course of the 2025/26 municipal year, the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel has undertaken a demanding and highly productive programme of work, holding significantly more meetings than the four ordinarily scheduled each year, including additional meetings and call-ins where required, demonstrating the Panel's commitment to robust scrutiny and accountability. We considered a wide range of important issues affecting residents across the borough, including the Draft Environment and Climate Strategy, the Parking Supplementary Planning Document, Temporary Accommodation, Thames Valley Police's annual presentation, matters relating to John West House, and a number of call-in requests, reflecting the breadth and diversity of services delivered by the council. Throughout the year, Panel Members worked collaboratively across party lines, with constructive challenge, thoughtful questioning and a shared determination to improve outcomes for residents always taking precedence over party politics. The Panel's work has helped shape policy development, strengthened decision-making and ensured that key issues received detailed public scrutiny.

As Chair, I would personally like to place on record my sincere thanks to all Panel Members, substitute Members, Cabinet Members and officers who attended our meetings and devoted considerable time and effort to supporting another successful year of scrutiny. I would especially like to thank the members of the public who took the time to speak at our meetings. Their contributions, local knowledge and lived experience have added real value to our discussions and helped ensure that residents' voices remain at the heart of the scrutiny process. Effective scrutiny depends on openness, transparency and engagement, and I am proud that the Panel has continued to provide a forum where residents can be heard and represented to improve the decisions made on behalf of our communities. The professionalism, dedication and mutual respect, during our robust discussions, has been instrumental in delivering meaningful and effective scrutiny for the borough.

Vicus Way Car Park Scrutiny Review



The Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel undertook a detailed scrutiny review of the Vicus Way car park and the wider management of council-owned car parks, following the approval of a scoping document submitted by Councillor G Singh. The review provided an opportunity for Councillors to examine both the operational performance of the asset and the broader approach to asset management across the borough.

The review consisted of a comprehensive officer report, which set out the background to the development of the car park, its business case, usage data, financial performance and ongoing operational issues. Detailed information was provided on the delivery of the car park including delays resulting from the pandemic, subsequent usage trends and the impact of the contractor entering administration after completion.

The Panel considered how the car park was currently performing, including patterns of usage and revenue generation. It was noted that usage and income at Vicus Way had increased since opening, supported by factors such as competitive pricing and the introduction of electric vehicle charging points. However, the Panel also raised concerns about declining usage at other car parks and the longer-term impact of changing travel patterns, including increased levels of remote working.

A significant focus of the review was on maintenance, governance and asset management arrangements. A number of ongoing issues were highlighted, including defects, delays in repairs and concerns around safety and upkeep. Through the review, the Panel questioned whether sufficient resources and capacity were in place to effectively manage the council's car park estate. Some Panel Members expressed concern that under resourcing could impact both safety and revenue generation and emphasised the importance of ensuring that asset management was adequately supported going forward.

In addition to operational and financial considerations, the Panel explored opportunities to improve the effectiveness and perception of car parks across the borough. This included suggestions around improved wayfinding, better utilisation of space and ensuring that assets were aligned with town centre priorities and regeneration activity.

As an outcome of the review, Councillors on the Panel proposed the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to explore improvements in more detail, including layout changes, maintenance planning and wider strategic use of car park assets. So far, the Group has undertaken a site visit of the various car parks which were part of the original review to consider how best to take this piece of work forward.

Home Park Public



Home Park Public was brought to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration following proposals to transfer the management of the site back to the Crown Estate. The Panel reviewed the background to the arrangement and considered the rationale for the proposed transfer, including the impact on local users and community groups.

Through the discussion, the Panel explored how the proposed transfer would operate in practice, particularly in relation to maintenance responsibilities, governance arrangements and the protection of public access rights.

Comments made focused around ensuring that residents continued to benefit from the space and that any future arrangements provided clarity on standards of maintenance and stewardship.

The Panel also considered the broader financial and operational implications for the council, including the removal of ongoing maintenance responsibilities from the authority and the potential risks associated with transferring control of a well-used public asset. Councillors emphasised the need for clear assurances that the Crown Estate would continue to manage the site to an appropriate standard and maintain its accessibility.

In reviewing the proposals, the Panel raised questions about the level of detail available at this stage, noting that further clarity would be required on the terms of the arrangement and how the interests of residents would be protected over the long term. There was also some reflection on the historic nature of the current agreements and the opportunity to establish a more modern and transparent framework for the future management of the site.

The Panel's discussion provided a constructive challenge to the proposals ahead of Cabinet consideration. Cabinet considered the matter in January 2026 and, having taken into account the issues raised through Overview & Scrutiny and stakeholder engagement, approved the transfer of management of Home Park Public to the Crown Estate. The decision included agreement to a new management arrangement, a programme of investment in the site and a one-off financial payment to the council.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) – Ascot Placemaking and Parking



The Panel considered the draft Ascot Placemaking SPD which set out a long-term vision and planning framework to support the regeneration and enhancement of Ascot, including its high street and wider infrastructure. This SPD would act as a material consideration in planning decisions, strengthening the council's ability to secure high-quality development and infrastructure improvements.

The Panel heard from local stakeholders, who broadly supported the ambition of the SPD but raised concerns in relation to infrastructure, particularly parking provision, traffic management and ongoing maintenance. Issues were also raised regarding the accessibility of consultation and engagement with certain groups of residents.

In scrutinising the proposals, Councillors focused on the deliverability and viability of key elements, including the proposed village square and community building. Questions were raised about funding mechanisms, developer contributions, and the balance between securing community benefits and maintaining scheme viability. The Panel also discussed whether greater specificity should be included in the SPD, particularly in relation to building design and the potential for additional parking provision.

Cabinet considered the draft Supplementary Planning Document in July 2025 and agreed a targeted amendment to strengthen the approach to the proposed community building, reflecting issues raised through scrutiny and engagement. Other recommendations from the Panel were noted but not incorporated on the basis that they were either already addressed within the document, were more appropriately dealt with through the development management process or risked reducing the flexibility of the SPD and impacting development viability.



The Panel also considered the draft Parking Supplementary Planning Document which aimed to update parking standards across the borough for the first time in over twenty years and provide a clearer, more consistent framework for residential, commercial and mixed-use development.

In scrutinising the proposals, the Panel considered the introduction of a zoning approach to parking standards and the extent to which this could remain responsive to changing local circumstances. Councillors discussed the balance between

providing clarity for developers and retaining sufficient flexibility within the planning system. Questions were also raised in relation to the evidence base underpinning assumptions within the standards, particularly around public transport accessibility and travel behaviours.

The Panel explored a number of practical considerations, including the effectiveness and enforceability of parking management plans, the provision and clarity of visitor parking and the treatment of specific issues such as parking around schools and on unadopted roads.

The Panel welcomed the development of an updated framework and recognised its importance in shaping future development across the borough. Councillors emphasised the need to ensure that the final document provides sufficient clarity to developers and residents, while maintaining the flexibility required to respond to local conditions and support sustainable transport objectives.

The Cabinet considered the draft Parking Supplementary Planning Document in September 2025 and approved it for public consultation, with the final version returning in April 2026 for adoption following engagement with residents, stakeholders and the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel. Cabinet accepted a number of refinements to improve clarity, usability and alignment with local evidence. A number of recommendations from the Panel were not incorporated in full, including proposals to reduce flexibility in the application of parking standards, strengthen requirements for visitor parking, formalise the review of parking zones, and address specific localised parking issues such as school-related pressures. These were not taken forward on the basis that they were either already addressed or could reduce the flexibility of the SPD.

Temporary Accommodation Strategy



The Panel considered the proposed Temporary Accommodation Strategy 2025–2028, which set out a framework to address rising demand, improve outcomes for homeless households and reduce the significant financial pressures associated with temporary accommodation provision.

The Panel heard that the strategy placed a strong emphasis on prevention, with the aim of reducing the number of households entering temporary accommodation. This included earlier intervention

and support for residents at risk of homelessness.

In its scrutiny, the Panel explored the deliverability of the strategy and the extent to which it would reduce reliance on expensive provision. Councillors discussed the balance between prevention and supply and the need to ensure that the council maximised the use of available funding and assets. The importance of reducing out-of-area placements and improving stability for households was also recognised.

The Panel welcomed the development of a structured strategy and the increased focus on prevention, whilst noting the scale of the financial and operational challenges involved. The Panel emphasised the importance of robust monitoring to track progress against the strategy's objectives and to ensure that the intended reductions in cost and reliance on temporary accommodation were achieved.

Cabinet considered the Temporary Accommodation Strategy in July 2025 and, taking into account the comments of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel, approved the Strategy. Cabinet noted that the Panel's recommendations had informed the development of the document, with officers confirming that these were either already reflected within the Strategy or incorporated within the published addendum. As a result, no specific amendments were required at Cabinet stage. Recommendations were not taken forward as separate changes where they duplicated existing content, related to operational delivery rather than strategic direction, or were better addressed through the ongoing implementation and review of the Strategy. Cabinet also emphasised that the Strategy would operate as a "living document", enabling it to be updated in response to changing demand, performance and funding pressures.

Imperial Road, Windsor (Call-in)



The Panel considered a call-in of the Cabinet decision relating to Imperial Road, Windsor, which approved the progression of a scheme to deliver supported accommodation for adults with learning disabilities on the former Oakbridge site.

The call-in raised concerns regarding the decision-making process, including transparency, the consideration of alternative options, and the treatment of a community-led proposal from the Windsor Muslim Association. Members heard representations from the call-in signatories and public

speakers, who questioned whether the Association's bid had been fully assessed, whether viability criteria had been clearly communicated and whether sufficient engagement and consultation had taken place. Concerns were also raised in relation to the extent of financial analysis presented to Cabinet and the scope of the Equality Impact Assessment.

In response, the Cabinet Member and officers outlined the strategic and statutory context underpinning the decision, emphasising the council's duty to provide suitable accommodation for residents with learning disabilities and the identified shortfall in supported housing provision.

The proposed development of 22 units was described as critical to meeting current and future demand, while delivering improved outcomes for vulnerable residents. Officers advised that the community bid had been subject to due diligence but was not considered financially viable due to its structure, reliance on deferred payments and insufficient evidence of financial capacity.

The Panel explored a range of issues in detail, including the application of the Asset of Community Value process, the extent of engagement with interested parties, the availability of alternative sites, and the balance between competing uses of the site. Councillors on the Panel also considered the level of information presented to Cabinet and the implications for transparency and public confidence.

Following debate, a motion to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration was not supported. The Panel subsequently resolved to take no further action, having concluded that the Cabinet decision had been taken in line with the council's strategic priorities and based on the information available at the time.

Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2026–2035



The Panel considered the Environment and Climate Change Strategy 2026–2035 across two meetings, reviewing both the initial draft and the final version following public consultation. The Strategy sets out the council's long-term vision and framework for addressing climate change, structured around key themes including energy, transport, natural environment, waste, and governance.

At the initial meeting, Councillors reviewed the draft Strategy at an early stage and welcomed the opportunity to provide

input ahead of wider engagement. The Panel explored the overall ambition, clarity, and deliverability of the document, with particular focus on governance, communication, and the need for effective public engagement. The importance of integrating sustainable transport was highlighted, along with strengthening the role of partnerships and ensuring that progress could be effectively monitored and reported over time.

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The Panel emphasised that clear communication and community involvement would be critical to the success of the Strategy.

Following public consultation, the Strategy returned to the Panel with updates reflecting feedback from residents, community groups and stakeholders. The Panel noted broad support for the Strategy's overall direction and ambition, alongside feedback that improvements were needed in terms of clarity, accessibility and the presentation of data. In response, officers outlined revisions including simplified language, strengthened policy areas and an increased emphasis on behaviour change as a cross-cutting theme.

In scrutinising the final Strategy, the Panel focused on deliverability, funding, and accountability. Councillors raised concerns regarding the absence of a detailed Climate Action Plan at this stage, noting the importance of clear milestones, measurable outcomes and defined responsibilities. Officers confirmed that supporting Action Plans would provide the operational detail required and would be subject to future scrutiny. The Panel also explored how the council would influence emissions beyond its direct control, particularly in relation to transport, and discussed the balance between ambition and financial sustainability.

The Panel further considered governance and monitoring arrangements, emphasising the need for ongoing oversight to ensure delivery against the Strategy's objectives. Particular attention was given to the importance of clear targets, transparent reporting and the role of partnerships in supporting implementation.

The Panel welcomed the development of a comprehensive, borough-wide Strategy and recognised the significance of continued engagement and partnership working in delivering its aims. The Panel recommended that progress against the Strategy and its associated Action Plans be reported annually to Overview and Scrutiny, and that commitments relating to biodiversity be strengthened to better reflect the importance of protecting land with the greatest potential for nature recovery.

The Cabinet considered the Environment and Climate Strategy 2026–2035 in April 2026 and agreed to recommend the Strategy to Full Council for approval.

Cabinet noted that the Strategy had been shaped by extensive consultation and scrutiny input, with a number of issues raised by the Panel reflected in the final document and supporting framework. In particular, the inclusion of strengthened governance arrangements and the commitment to delivery through phased Climate Action Plans responded to themes identified through scrutiny.

A number of recommendations from the Panel were not incorporated as specific amendments, particularly where these related to detailed delivery measures, additional targets or operational actions. These were not taken forward on the basis that they would be more appropriately addressed through the forthcoming Climate Action Plans, which will provide the detailed, costed and regularly updated actions required to deliver the Strategy. Cabinet also emphasised the importance of maintaining flexibility over the ten-year period to respond to changing national policy, funding and local circumstances.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Adults, Children & Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Membership May 2025 – April 2026



Councillor Jodie Grove
Chair



Councillor Devon Davies
Vice Chair



Councillor
Simon Bond



Councillor
Genevieve Gosling



Councillor
Carole Da Costa



Councillor
Clive Baskerville



Councillor
George Shaw

Co-opted Members: Tony Wilson (Church of England), Catherine Hobbs (Roman Catholic), Poornima Karunacadacharan and David Hicks (Primary Parent Governors), and Mark Jervis (additional co-optee)

Introduction by Chair of the Panel – Councillor Jodie Grove

It is my pleasure to introduce the Adults, Children & Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel's contribution to this year's Annual Scrutiny Report.

Over the course of the municipal year, the Panel has focused its work on some of the most significant issues affecting residents across the borough, with scrutiny covering the full breadth of the directorate's responsibilities. Our four meetings collectively considered eight substantive agenda items, resulting in 21 formal recommendations to Cabinet, with four Cabinet Member attendances reflecting the constructive working relationship that scrutiny has maintained with the executive throughout the year.

A substantial part of the Panel's work centred on Adult Social Care, where we gave careful consideration to both performance outcomes and the council's readiness for Care Quality Commission assurance. This has been an area of genuine progress. The Panel recognised the positive steps taken since the council's previous CQC rating, including the successful implementation of the Mosaic case management system, renewed investment in workforce stability, and a proactive approach to evidence gathering and self-assessment. Scrutiny played a direct role in strengthening the final report presented to Cabinet, particularly in ensuring that the experiences of a wider range of service users were more clearly reflected in both the documentation and the forward plan.

The Panel also gave meaningful scrutiny to the council's responsibilities as a corporate parent. In considering the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Panel focused on outcomes for children in care and care leavers, the importance of participation and lived experience, and the need for a whole-council approach to corporate parenting. Scrutiny helped to reinforce these priorities in the final strategy adopted by Cabinet.

Kinship care was another area of focus, with the Panel welcoming the introduction of a local kinship care offer and emphasising the importance of accessible support, early identification, and strong partnership working to enable children to remain within their family network where appropriate.

On education, the Panel was pleased to note the continued high standards across schools in the borough, with attainment at all key stages exceeding national averages. Scrutiny focused on ensuring that this strong performance is accompanied by a continued and determined effort to address the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, improve SEND provision, and respond to the emerging challenge of rising exclusions.

Finally, the Panel contributed to the early development of a Supported Accommodation Strategy, supporting the establishment of a task and finish group and emphasising the importance of a needs-led, partnership-focused approach that prioritises prevention, quality, and value for money.

I am proud of the constructive and rigorous approach taken by Panel Members throughout the year, and I am grateful to officers, Cabinet Members, and co-opted members for their engagement with the scrutiny process. The work highlighted in the pages that follow reflects the Panel's commitment to improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable residents in our borough.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance and Adult Social Care Performance 2024/25



The Panel considered a comprehensive overview of Adult Social Care performance for 2024/25, which highlighted strong performance in a number of areas alongside key challenges requiring ongoing improvement. The Panel noted the successful implementation of the Mosaic case management system, which has improved the quality and accuracy of data and strengthened financial reporting. The Panel examined reported performance indicators, including user and carer satisfaction. While satisfaction levels remained broadly positive, a decline was noted and explored in detail. Councillors discussed the underlying causes, with officers highlighting communication issues and workforce instability as key contributing factors. In response, a renewed focus on

workforce development and retention was outlined, supported by the transfer of staff back into the council and the alignment of terms and conditions to improve recruitment and stability.

In scrutinising the report, Councillors discussed readiness for future CQC inspections and the ongoing improvement journey following previous feedback. The Panel recognised progress made to date and the importance of maintaining momentum, particularly in relation to workforce stability, communication and resident experience. The Panel noted the report and welcomed the continued focus on service improvement, emphasising the importance of monitoring user satisfaction and workforce outcomes to ensure continued progress in delivering high-quality adult social care.

The Panel also considered the council's preparedness for the new CQC assurance framework for Adult Social Care, which introduces a more formalised approach to assessing local authority performance. This also marked a progress reporting opportunity, around one year after the council had been rated as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted. The Panel heard that officers had undertaken a comprehensive self-assessment, supported by a programme of evidence gathering and internal review, to ensure readiness for inspection.

The Panel welcomed the proactive approach being taken to preparing for CQC assurance and recognised the progress made to date. Councillors emphasised the importance of maintaining focus on continuous improvement, strong governance and clear evidence of impact to ensure a positive outcome under the new framework.

Cabinet considered the update on Adult Social Care performance and improvement following CQC assurance in March 2026 and, in doing so, took into account the comments and recommendations of the Adults, Children & Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

Cabinet noted that scrutiny had contributed to strengthening the report, particularly in ensuring that the experience of a wider range of service users, including adults with physical disabilities and younger adults, was more clearly reflected throughout the documentation and forward plan. These amendments were incorporated into the final report presented to Cabinet. A number of broader recommendations from the Panel were not presented as specific amendments at this stage, as they were considered to form part of the continuing improvement programme. Cabinet confirmed that these areas would be addressed through the forward plan for 2026/27, including further work on direct payments, social connection and resident choice and control.

Kinship Care



The Panel considered a report on kinship care, developed in response to recent national guidance, which assessed current provision and identified areas for further development within the borough. The report highlighted strengths in the existing approach alongside a series of priority actions to strengthen support for kinship carers and the children in their care.

Councillors noted the introduction of a local kinship care offer, designed to provide clearer information and support for carers and welcomed planned improvements including the reintroduction of post-special guardianship

support and a greater focus on early identification of kinship arrangements. The Panel recognised the importance of enabling children to remain within their wider family network where appropriate, reducing the need for mainstream fostering placements.

The Panel explored the range of support available to kinship carers, including emotional support provision, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that information is accessible and comprehensive. Councillors also discussed practical challenges faced by carers, such as housing constraints, and the need for effective partnership working to address these barriers. Councillors emphasised the importance of raising awareness of the support available and ensuring that carers are able to access it easily.

The Panel welcomed the direction of travel set out in the report and emphasised the importance of continuing to develop the local offer, improve communication and strengthen support for kinship carers to ensure positive outcomes for children and families.

Corporate Parenting Strategy



The Panel considered the Corporate Parenting Strategy, which sets out the council's approach to supporting children in care and care leavers and its responsibilities as a corporate parent.

Councillors noted that the Strategy aimed to improve outcomes for children and young people by strengthening support across key areas including education, health, independence and participation. The Panel welcomed the emphasis on listening to the voices of children in care and ensuring that their experiences shape service delivery.

In scrutinising the Strategy, the Panel explored how effectively the council was fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities and the extent to which outcomes for children and care leavers were improving. Councillors discussed areas such as educational attainment, placement stability and the transition to adulthood, highlighting the importance of consistent support and positive relationships.

The Panel also considered the role of partners in delivering the Strategy, recognising that effective corporate parenting required a whole-council and multi-agency approach. The Panel emphasised the need for clear accountability, strong governance and effective performance monitoring to ensure that the Strategy delivered meaningful improvements.

Cabinet considered the Corporate Parenting Strategy in February 2026 and noted that scrutiny had helped to strengthen the Strategy, particularly in reinforcing the focus on outcomes for children in care and care leavers and the importance of ensuring that services reflect their lived experience. This included greater emphasis on participation, partnership working and the council's role as a corporate parent across all services.

A number of the Panel's recommendations were not incorporated as specific amendments within the Strategy as they were considered more appropriately addressed through the ongoing delivery of the Strategy and associated action plans, rather than within the high-level strategic framework.

Standards and Quality of Education



The Panel considered the annual review of Standards and Quality of Education Report for the 2024/25 academic year, which highlighted strong overall performance across schools in the borough. Councillors noted that the majority of schools were judged good or outstanding and that attainment across all key stages continued to exceed national averages.

The Panel examined performance data in detail, including Early Years, phonics, Key Stage 2 and

GCSE outcomes, as well as attendance and post-16 destinations. Councillors welcomed the positive trends, particularly improvements in writing outcomes and sustained high levels of progression into education or employment. The Panel also noted progress in meeting statutory requirements for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with performance significantly above national averages.

In scrutinising the report, the Panel focused on areas for further improvement, particularly the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. While recognising recent progress, there was an identified need for continued focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring that support was effectively targeted. The Panel also explored SEND provision, including the financial pressures associated with demand and the reliance on independent placements and highlighted the importance of increasing local capacity.

Councillors further considered emerging challenges, including rising levels of permanent exclusions and the need for robust alternative provision and early intervention. The importance of clear data, improved transparency and deeper analysis of disadvantage, including links with attendance and exclusion, was also highlighted.

The Panel welcomed the overall high standard of education within the borough and endorsed the key priorities set out in the report, emphasising the importance of maintaining strong performance while continuing to address areas of inequality and system pressure.

Supported Accommodation Strategy



The Panel held a strategic discussion on the development of a supported accommodation strategy, in response to new statutory requirements and the need to strengthen provision for vulnerable residents across the borough.

Councillors noted that supported accommodation encompassed a wide range of housing and support models, including provision for older people, adults with learning disabilities, individuals with mental health needs and those requiring short-term or transitional support.

The Panel heard that existing needs assessments identified significant future demand, particularly for extra care housing, supported housing for people with learning disabilities, and mental health provision.

The Panel explored the proposed approach to developing the Strategy, which would include a comprehensive needs assessment, mapping of existing provision and forecasting of future demand. In scrutinising the proposals, the Panel focused on the importance of ensuring that the Strategy drives improvements in quality, oversight, and value for money. Councillors emphasised the preventative role of supported accommodation in reducing reliance on more intensive and costly care, while improving outcomes for residents.

The Panel also discussed opportunities to expand innovative models of provision, including shared lives arrangements and other community-based approaches, and highlighted the need to raise awareness and encourage greater uptake. The importance of effective engagement with residents, service users, and partners in shaping the Strategy was also emphasised.

The Panel welcomed the development of a dedicated supported accommodation strategy and supported proposals to establish a task and finish group to contribute to its development. Councillors highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Strategy delivered sufficient capacity, improved quality and a sustainable, partnership-led approach to meeting future need.

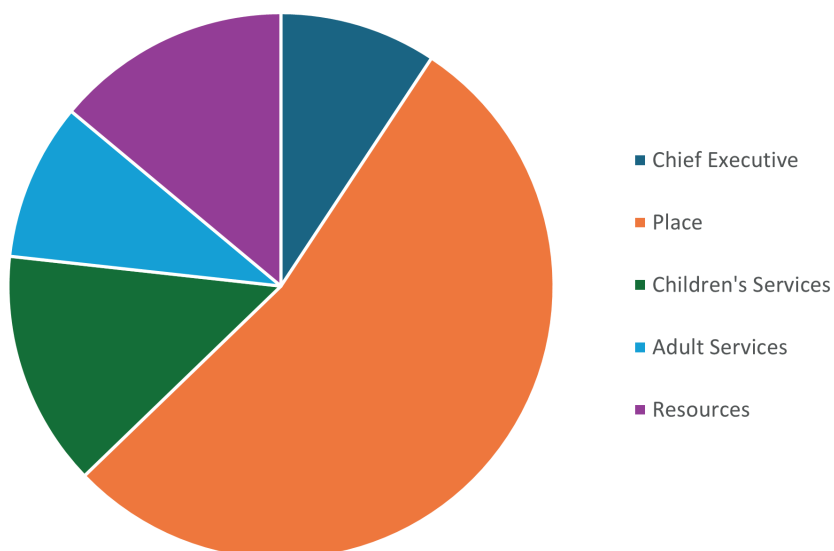
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Overview and Scrutiny in Figures

		Corporate	Place	Adults, Children & Health
Number of meetings held	2024/25	7	5	5
	2025/26	6	8	4
Number of call ins considered	2024/25	0	0	0
	2025/26	0	1	0
Total meeting time	2024/25	19 hours	12 hours	8 hours
	2025/26	15 hours	21 hours	6 hours
Number of substantive agenda items	2024/25	14	9	11
	2025/26	12	16	8
Number of Cabinet Member attendances at meetings	2024/25	-	-	-
	2025/26	6	12	4
Number of individual recommendations made to Cabinet	2024/25	9	8	10
	2025/26	44	38	21
Total number of YouTube views	2024/25	962	1,799	302
	2025/26	1,360	667	366

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

A total of 43 different officers have been involved in Overview and Scrutiny meetings this year, split by the following directorates:



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- Attend a public meeting, either in person or via [YouTube](#), for any of our Panels.
- Register to speak at a scrutiny meeting.
- Contact your local [Councillor](#) to share your views and questions.
- Suggest a topic for consideration by scrutiny on our [website](#).