

Draft Annual Scrutiny Report

2021/22

Chairs



Cllr Harjinder Gahir
Overview & Scrutiny
Committee



Cllr Ruqayah Begum
Customer &
Community Scrutiny
Panel



Cllr Naveeda Qaseem
People Scrutiny
Panel



Cllr Maroof Mohammad
Place Scrutiny Panel

Contents

Chair's Introduction	4
Overview & Scrutiny Committee	6
People Scrutiny Panel	8
Place Scrutiny Panel	10
Customer & Community Scrutiny Panel	12
Priorities for Improvement	16

4. Chair's Introduction



Cllr Harjinder Gahir
Chair

Overview & Scrutiny
Committee 2021/22

I am pleased to present the Annual Scrutiny Report for the 2021/22 municipal year which summarises the work of my committee and its panels over the past year. It outlines our work, particularly on budget scrutiny.

It has been a very challenging year for the Council and for scrutiny itself with the removal of dedicated scrutiny resource in Our Futures, which has limited the scope of work we were able to carry out. Scrutiny needs to be properly valued and resourced to be effective and I hope this issue will be addressed for 2022/23.

Our focus this year has been to carry out the most extensive scrutiny of budget and savings proposals Slough has ever undertaken. This was achieved by dedicating eight of our eighteen meetings through the year to reviewing every directorate savings proposal to ensure they were deliverable and proportionate.

Other highlights included our constructive meeting with Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable and extensive pre-decision scrutiny of key issues such as the A4 bus lane, closure of day centres and library services, as well as prioritising performance reviews of services such as revenues and benefits and housing repairs.

I have sought to ensure our meetings are positive and forward looking which give Members the opportunity to ask the key questions and hopefully contribute to better decision making. By regularly attended Cabinet meetings I've sought to strengthen the links between scrutiny and the Executive to make sure our voice has been heard.

I would like to thank all the members of the Committee and scrutiny panels for their work. There is much still to do and I hope we have laid a platform during this transitional year to build the much needed effective scrutiny function this Council needs in the future.

5. 2021/22 Scrutiny Summary and Highlights

May 2021

- Council agrees a new scrutiny panel structure to reflect the new directorates of People, Place and Customer & Community.
- New chairs were elected for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and all three scrutiny panels.

June/July 2021

- Scrutiny training and chairing skills training was held.
- First scheduled scrutiny meetings of the year were cancelled in the run up to and during the issuing of the Section 114 notice.

September 2021

- Scrutiny meetings return to business as usual with a busy programme of meetings. In the period to the end of the year pre-decision scrutiny was carried out on the Adult Social Care provider services review, housing repairs contract, library service review and A4 bus lane.

November/ December 2021

- The O&S Committee and all panels were refocused on the most detailed scrutiny of the budget and directorate savings proposals ever carried out by Slough Borough Council.

January 2022

- Annual meeting to scrutinise the work of the Police & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable was held in January 2021.
- Further round of budget scrutiny of directorate savings proposals.
- Centre for Governance and Scrutiny commence Scrutiny Improvement Review.

March 2022

- Overview & Scrutiny scrutinise the final budget reports.
- Annual scrutiny survey and review commences.

April 2022

- Total of 18 formal and panel meetings held through the year, plus a series of pre-meetings, training and workshops.

6. Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Highlight – budget consultation

Meeting: Thursday 4th November 2021:

- The early opportunity to scrutinise the budget position and savings proposals was welcomed. There were a total of 8 meetings dedicated to scrutinising the budget proposals across the Council and individual directorates.
- The Committee reviewed corporate services and raised concerns about issues including: the contract procedures and costs of the externalised procurement function; the weaknesses in subsidiary company governance; and the robustness of plans for debt recovery.

- The Committee generally agreed the corporate savings proposed for 2022/23, but also emphasised the importance of ensuring adequate resources to bring key corporate services, including finance, IT and HR to the required standard to support the Council to deliver its services and wider strategic plans.

Meeting: Tuesday 8th March 2022

- The Committee scrutinised all the budget reports prior to Cabinet and Council approval. The Lead Member and Director of Finance were questioned on the overall budget strategy and robustness of the savings plans.

7. Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Areas scrutinised in 2021/22 by the committee:

- Joint scrutiny with Customer & Community Panel on the housing repairs contract
- Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring
- The work of the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner & Chief Constable
- The Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, and Treasury Management Strategy
- ICT Improvement Programme
- Nova House Update
- Petitions received and the annual petitions report

8. People Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – budget scrutiny

Meeting: Thursday 11th November 2021

- The Panel reviewed the People directorate savings proposals and large parts of the discussion focused on the risk of the Council not meeting its statutory duties with respect to some adults and children's services.
- The SEND inspection was raised and Members emphasised the importance of ensuring robust action was taken to address the weaknesses identified.
- Members highlighted the risk that some service reductions, e.g. children's centres, could lead to pressures elsewhere in the system. A comprehensive plan was needed to manage these risks so that sustainable savings could be delivered.

Meeting: Monday 31st January 2022

- An update was provided on the Provider Services Review and Members were assured that the service users had all been reassessed and the planned savings had been achieved.
- The response to the SEND inspection report would require adequate resources to be put in place and this was supported by the Panel.
- The Panel also discussed demand pressures, placement costs and the work taking place on the permanent recruitment of social workers to seek to reduce agency spend.

9. People Scrutiny Panel

Areas scrutinised in 2021/22 by the panel:

- Adult Social Care provider services review including the closure of day centres
- Draft Health and Care Plan for Slough
- Directorate budget proposals from the adults and children's People directorates and Slough Children First
- Slough Children First in year performance update
- Annual safeguarding report
- SEND written statement of action
- Procurement of ASC domiciliary care contracts

10. Place Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – budget scrutiny

Meeting: Wednesday 1st December 2021

- The savings proposals in the former Place directorate were reviewed and Members focused on two key themes – generating additional income and service reductions in some areas.
- The Panel considered how savings to street cleansing and grass/hedge cutting could be achieved whilst maintaining acceptable service levels.
- Members agreed with the proposal to generate income through renting space in buildings and broadly accepted the increased waste charges on the basis it was not expected this would increase fly-tipping.

Meeting: Wednesday 12th January 2022

- Consideration was given to the emerging Place directorate restructure and the Panel requested a further update report to a future meeting.
- The Panel raised some concern about the proposed changes to bulky waste discount charges, although it was recognised that this would bring Slough more into line with other nearby local authorities. The Panel requested that the Director give further consideration to the eligibility criteria for discounted collections prior to any final charging structure being adopted.

11. Place Scrutiny Panel

Further areas scrutinised in 2021/22 by the panel:

- Air quality and health
- Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report
- The Adult Social Care Local Account
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Disability Task and Finish Group
- The future plans for the East Berkshire CCG
- GP provision
- Immunisations and screening
- Mental health
- The Frimley Health and Care System Annual Plan
- The Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Annual Plan
- The Adult Social Care Strategy & Budget
- The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service

12. Customer & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Highlight – Budget scrutiny

Meeting: Tuesday 9th November 2021

- The Panel reviewed the initial savings proposals in what was the former Customer & Community Directorate, particularly the details of the proposed £400,000 library savings. A full report on the public consultation results was considered by the Panel.
- Members expressed significant concern about the proposal to stop the community development and youth work services and asked that the alternative funding be vigorously pursued to seek to continue these services.
- Members also raised concern about the proposal to cease free leisure passes for looked after children in 2021/22 and swimming for over 65s.

Meeting: Tuesday 25th January 2022

- The Panel was updated on the proposed savings for community development services and welcomed the £90,000 funding secured for health related community development work but was concerned that funding had not been identified for the youth work team and youth voice. Members asked that continued efforts be made to try to seek alternative funding sources.
- Members commented on a number of other specific savings proposals including the leisure contract management fee, addressing problems in customer services and rough sleepers.

13. Customer & Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Areas scrutinised in 2021/22 by the panel:

- Library Service consultation results and service plan
- Repairs, Maintenance & Investment contract, jointly with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Performance update of the Revenues & Benefits Service
- Budget proposals for the Customer & Community Directorate
- HRA Rents and Service Charges
- Strong, Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods progress report
- Learning, Skills and Employment Ofsted report
- Council call centre performance

14. 2021/22 Attendance and Training Summary

Members attendance record

Overview & Scrutiny		
Councillor	Expected	Attended
Gahir	6	6
Matloob	6	6
Bal	1	1
Basra	6	2
Dhaliwal	6	4
Hussain	6	0
Kaur	6	6
Malik	6	6
Sharif	5	5
Smith	6	6

People		
Councillor	Expected	Attended
Qaseem	5	5
Kelly	5	5
Ajaib	5	4
Basra	5	5
Begum	5	5
Brooker	5	3
Matloob	5	4
Mohammad	5	4
Sandhu	5	4

Place		
Councillor	Expected	Attended
Mohammad	3	3
Strutton	3	3
Bal	3	2
A Cheema	3	2
H Cheema	3	2
R Davis	3	2
Gill	3	3
Grewal	3	2
Minhas	3	2

Customer & Community		
Councillor	Expected	Attended
Begum	5	4
Muvvala	5	5
Ajaib	5	5
Ali	5	4
Hussain	5	0
Kaur	5	4
Minhas	5	4
Mohammad	5	5
Sandhu	5	4

15. 2021/22 Attendance and Training Summary

Training Record

- **Annual scrutiny training held on 17th June 2021.** The session was delivered by an industry recognised external provider and 16 councillors from the Committee and Panels attended.
- **Committee chairing skills training was held on 14th June 2021.** All 4 scrutiny chairs were present and 3 of the 4 vice-chairs attended the training.
- **Scrutiny chairs training session was held in January 2022.** This session was facilitated by the LGA.
- Individual support has included an LGA mentor for the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

16. Priorities for 2022/23

The Council recognises the importance of developing an effective scrutiny function and will be producing an action plan in accordance with Directions to the Authority. This will draw upon the recommendations of the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny review expected shortly.

This work, and the annual members scrutiny survey, highlight a number of areas for improvement:

- Improved work programming which is aligned to the Council's recovery and improvement plans and the Cabinet forward plan.
- Building on the enhanced scrutiny training delivered in 2021/22.
- Continuing the good practice of full and detailed budget scrutiny including monitoring the delivery of 2022/23 savings and proposals for 2023/24.
- More pre-meetings and preparation by restoring dedicated officer support for the scrutiny function.