

Notice of Special Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: Tuesday, 1 October 2024 at 6.00 pm

Venue: HMS Phoebe, BCP Civic Centre, Bournemouth BH2 6DY



Membership:

Chairman:

Cllr S Bartlett

Vice Chairman:

Cllr S Aitkenhead

Cllr P Broadhead
Cllr J Beesley
Cllr L Dedman
Cllr C Goodall

Cllr S Mackrow
Cllr L Northover
Cllr Dr F Rice
Cllr K Salmon

Cllr T Trent
Cllr O Walters
Cllr C Weight

All Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board are summoned to attend this meeting to consider the items of business set out on the agenda below.

The press and public are welcome to view the live stream of this meeting at the following link:

<https://democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=6242>

If you would like any further information on the items to be considered at the meeting please contact: Claire Johnston or email democratic.services@bcpCouncil.gov.uk

Press enquiries should be directed to the Press Office: Tel: 01202 454668 or email press.office@bcpCouncil.gov.uk

This notice and all the papers mentioned within it are available at democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk

GRAHAM FARRANT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

23 September 2024

**DEBATE
NOT HATE**



Available online and
on the Mod.gov app



Maintaining and promoting high standards of conduct

Declaring interests at meetings

Familiarise yourself with the Councillor Code of Conduct which can be found in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution.

Before the meeting, read the agenda and reports to see if the matters to be discussed at the meeting concern your interests



What are the principles of bias and pre-determination and how do they affect my participation in the meeting?

Bias and predetermination are common law concepts. If they affect you, your participation in the meeting may call into question the decision arrived at on the item.

Bias Test

In all the circumstances, would it lead a fair minded and informed observer to conclude that there was a real possibility or a real danger that the decision maker was biased?

Predetermination Test

At the time of making the decision, did the decision maker have a closed mind?

If a councillor appears to be biased or to have predetermined their decision, they must NOT participate in the meeting.

For more information or advice please contact the Monitoring Officer
(janie.berry@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

Selflessness

Councillors should act solely in terms of the public interest

Integrity

Councillors must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships

Objectivity

Councillors must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias

Accountability

Councillors are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this

Openness

Councillors should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing

Honesty & Integrity

Councillors should act with honesty and integrity and should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned

Leadership

Councillors should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs

AGENDA

Items to be considered while the meeting is open to the public

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence from Councillors.

2. Substitute Members

To receive information on any changes in the membership of the Committee.

Note – When a member of a Committee is unable to attend a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee, the relevant Political Group Leader (or their nominated representative) may, by notice to the Monitoring Officer (or their nominated representative) prior to the meeting, appoint a substitute member from within the same Political Group. The contact details on the front of this agenda should be used for notifications.

3. Declarations of Interests

Councillors are requested to declare any interests on items included in this agenda. Please refer to the workflow on the preceding page for guidance.

Declarations received will be reported at the meeting.

4. Public Items

To receive any public questions, statements or petitions submitted in accordance with the Constitution. Further information on the requirements for submitting these is available to view at the following link:-

<https://democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeID=151&Info=1&bcr=1>

The deadline for the submission of public questions is midday 3 clear working days before the meeting.

The deadline for the submission of a statement is midday the working day before the meeting.

The deadline for the submission of a petition is 10 working days before the meeting.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

5. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

This report:

- Aims to ensure the council continues to maintain a balanced 2025/26 budget forecast by considering the impact that changes to the previous assumptions will have on the underlying approved position and taking mitigating action where necessary.
- Present an update on the 22 May 2024 letter submitted by the Director of Finance to Department Levelling Up Housing and

Communities (DLUHC) and Department for Education (DfE) outlining concerns regarding the impact the deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is having on the financial sustainability of the Council.

Provides details of the council's responses to the government's consultation supporting the 30 October 2024 national Budget.

6. Directorate Budget Presentations

The Overview and Scrutiny Board will receive Budget Awareness presentations as part of the enhanced scrutiny engagement for the 2025/26 budget. The presentations will cover budget, pressures, assumed savings for those areas within the remit of the Board. The Board will have the opportunity to ask questions around the budget and is also asked to consider how it wishes to engage further with the development of the 2025/26 budget.

7. O&S Budget working group - scoping report

39 - 48

The O&S Board/ Committee is asked to confirm the establishment of a budget working group, including membership and key lines of enquiry, to undertake detailed scrutiny work to contribute to the developing 2025/26 council budget during September – November 2024.

8. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

49 - 138

This is the annual report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer on Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) activity within BCP Council. There is a requirement to report on the work of O&S to Council, to ensure good visibility of the function and Council ownership of activity and any improvements required.

The annual report contains a summary and analysis of O&S activity during 2023-24, reflections on working practices and an action plan identifying strategic improvements to the O&S function.

All O&S committees will receive the annual report for consideration, providing opportunity for comment prior to the supply of the final report to Council.

9. Work Plan

139 - 184

The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Board is asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan.

No other items of business can be considered unless the Chairman decides the matter is urgent for reasons that must be specified and recorded in the Minutes.

CABINET



Report subject	Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update
Meeting date	2 October 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to ensure the council continues to maintain a balanced 2025/26 budget forecast by considering the impact that changes to the previous assumptions will have on the underlying approved position and taking mitigating action where necessary. • Present an update on the 22 May 2024 letter submitted by the Director of Finance to Department Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Department for Education (DfE) outlining concerns regarding the impact the deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is having on the financial sustainability of the Council. • Provides details of the council's responses to the government's consultation supporting the 30 October 2024 national Budget.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Acknowledges the ongoing progress being made to maintain a balanced budget position for 2025/26 and MTFP. b) Endorses the latest position regarding the developing 2025/26 Budget and MTFP position. c) Approve the implementation of a targeted voluntary redundancy process to enable the delivery of 2025/26 savings with delegation to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to develop an appropriate policy. d) Notes the update on the conversation with government around the impact that the DSG deficit is having on the financial sustainability of the council. e) With local MP support, continue to express concern to government at the existential challenge to the

	Councils ability to set a legally balanced budget for 2025/26 posed by having the lack of cash to fund the special educational needs and disability service (SEND).
Reason for recommendations	<p>To comply with accounting codes of practice and best practice which requires councils to have a rolling multi-year medium term financial plan.</p> <p>To provide Cabinet with the latest high-level overview of the development of the 2025/26 Budget and 3-year medium-term financial plan.</p> <p>To provide an update on the 22 May 2024 letter submitted to DLUHC and CIPFA regarding the difficulties presented by the accumulating DSG deficit.</p>
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr. Mike Cox, Portfolio Holder for Finance
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Adam Richens, Director of Finance and Chief Finance Officer adam.richens@bcpcouncil.gov.uk
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. Cabinet on the 17 July 2024 received an MTFP Update report which set out the framework in support of the delivery of the 2025/26 budget including the proposed.
 - a) Budget planning process.
 - b) Budget timeline.
 - c) Financial strategy
2. In addition, the council's constitution has been updated in 2024 by way of new Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules which enhance governance and safeguard arrangements around any proposed alternative budget proposals.
3. Budget Overview and Scrutiny arrangements have also been developed in support of the 2025/26 Budget by way of a Budget Skills Training for Councillors session which was held on 29 July 2024. In addition, Directorate Budget Awareness sessions are being held in September and Task & Finish Groups which will explore key lines of enquiry relating to specific budget matters within their area of responsibility, are being held during October. Financial management training is also being provided for

budget holders and all directors to ensure maximum efficiency in managing our budgets and clear financial understanding amongst our senior managers.

4. The February 2024 council approved budget for 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan has the following key features.
 - a) A balanced MTFP over the 4-year period to 31 March 2028 based on conventional local government financial management processes and revenue sources.
 - b) Addressed the inherited £30m structural deficit due to the previous use of reserves in balancing the 2023/24 budget.
 - c) Addressed issues associated with the level of savings assumed in building the 2023/24 budget, particularly those associated with the transformation investment programme.
 - d) Recognised financial challenges from the ongoing cost-of-living and service demand pressures not dissimilar to those faced by all other local authorities.
 - e) A 4.99% council tax increase for 2024/25 with a financial planning assumption of the same increase in each of the following years consistent with the projections from the Office for Budget Responsibility.
 - f) Assumed delivery of £38m in annual savings, efficiencies, and additional resources to balance the 2024/25 budget as itemised and supported with individual delivery plans.
 - g) Utilised a one-off business rates collection fund surplus to improve the council's financial resilience.
 - h) Adopted a revised approach regarding the mandatory statutory provision required for the annual repayment of debt with flexibility for voluntary provision.
 - i) A target of £30m in capital receipts from the disposal of assets to fund the council's transformation investment programme over the 2-year period 2023/24 and 2024/25.
5. The approved budget for 2024/25 also contained numerous risks the principle amongst which is the continual threat to the council's ongoing financial health and sustainability caused by the accumulated deficit on the DSG. The assumption being that government funding would be forthcoming to support the 31 March 2024 £64m deficit on the DSG and the current statutory override, that allows the council to ignore the deficit in respect of an assessment of its overall solvency, would continue beyond its current end date of the 31 March 2026.

Statement on Public Spending Inheritance

6. On the 29 July 2024, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves delivered a statement to Parliament accompanied by a policy paper on £22 billion public spending pressures. This covered an assessment of immediate public spending pressures facing the Government, immediate actions being taken and the medium and longer-term approach to public finances.
7. HM Treasury's £22 billion estimate of pressures related to the governments day-to-day spending in 2024/25 and included resources to cover new policy commitments, pay awards, health, and asylum & illegal migration. Included in the £5.5 billion of measures announced to help manage these pressures was.

- Cancellation of the adult social care charging reforms (care cost cap and associated measures) which were due to be implemented in October 2025.
 - £3.2 billion of departmental savings including reduction in administration spend and stopping non-essential spend on consultancy and communications.
 - Winter Fuel Payments will be targeted at recipients of Pension Credit and certain other means-tested benefits from the winter of 2024/25.
 - Other changes including the cancellation of several transport projects.
8. The paper also confirmed that the date of the next national Budget would be 30 October 2024 and that the next Spending Review would be a multi-year review, covering at least three financial years, would conclude in the spring of 2025. The implication is that Local Government is again likely to receive a one-year financial settlement for 2025/26. Provision of a one-year financial settlement gives no confidence in long term expenditure plans and prevents effective medium-term planning of financial commitments and services. Nationally councils are lobbying hard for a longer-term financial settlement, which has been missing for some years
9. Attached at **Appendix A** is the council's response to the government's call for representations to support the October Budget announcement, which focuses on the key issues of funding for the special educational needs and disability service, reform of the framework for council tax, the ability to increase fees and charges set by government in line with cost increases and providing support for the principle of Accommodation Business Improvement Districts.

Latest draft 2025/26 budget and MTFP position

10. The budget for 2025/26 and the MTFP should be seen in the context of a rolling, evolving process structured to enable the ongoing proactive management and prioritisation of the council's resources. It should also be seen in relation to the Best Value Review requirement to draft proposals for a sustainable three-year MTFP.
11. In support of the process the July Cabinet MTFP Update report considered the level of uncertainty and therefore risk that will apply to the key assumptions underpinning the MTFP. In line with good practice these assumptions were then tested via a process of sensitivity analysis and several different models developed that highlight their impact. At the extremes they indicated there could be an improvement in the position or alternatively a deterioration which would lead to a funding gap of up to £24m for 2025/26.
12. As part of a dynamic, agile approach to financial management Portfolio Holders have been working with Corporate Directors, Service Directors, and Budget Holders to prepare potential additional proposals for balancing the 2025/26 budget should they be required. These will be considered at the bi-weekly Cabinet/Corporate Management Board meeting before being brought forward should they be required.
13. Figure 1 below sets out the current MTFP to 2028. As a reminder, the table sets out changes in the revenue budgets, on an annual basis, either positive numbers which represent additional costs to be met, or negative numbers which represent forecast cost reductions or additional income. The variances are shown in the year in which

they are expected to be first seen and are then assumed to recur on an ongoing basis in each of the following years. One-off changes will be seen as an entry in one year and will then be reversed out in a following year. For example, there is currently a £4.2m pressure in 2025/26 in respect of one-off savings that were approved for 2024/25.

14. **Figure 1: Latest MTFP**

	Revised Budget 2024/25 £m	Sept MTFP Position (updated from February 2024)			
		25/26 £m	26/27 £m	27/28 £m	Total £m
Service Pressures (net of any specific grant changes)					
Wellbeing Directorate	126.0	6.8	5.8	6.1	18.7
Children's Directorate	91.0	4.5	5.3	5.3	15.1
Operations Directorate	58.2	4.1	(0.9)	1.5	4.7
Resources Directorate	40.4	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.4
Service Pressures (net of any specific grant changes)	315.6	15.6	10.5	12.9	38.9
Savings, Efficiencies, Fees & Charges					
Wellbeing Directorate		(2.6)	(0.9)	(0.8)	(4.4)
Children's Directorate		(0.6)	0.0	0.0	(0.6)
Operations Directorate		(3.8)	(2.2)	(2.0)	(8.0)
Resources Directorate		(0.5)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(0.8)
Transformation		(4.0)	(1.6)	(1.1)	(6.8)
Reversal of one off savings in 2024/25		4.2	0.0	0.0	4.2
		(7.4)	(4.9)	(4.0)	(16.3)
Corporate Items - Cost Pressures	27.4	3.4	5.9	5.9	15.2
Funding - Changes	(339.6)	(10.0)	(13.8)	(16.7)	(40.6)
Annual – Net Funding Gap	3.4	1.5	(2.5)	(1.9)	(2.8)
Application of one-off business rates resources to MTFP	(3.4)	(1.5)	4.0	0.9	3.4
Annual – Net Funding Gap	0.0	0.0	1.6	(1.0)	0.6
Cumulative MTFP – Net Funding Gap		0.0	1.6	0.6	

15. The position as set out above continues to be underpinned by numerous key assumptions which have been informed by many factors such as government announcements, economic forecasts or targets, and professional judgements. The key assumptions currently being used in building the 2025/26 Budget and MTFP are summarised in Figure 2 below and explained in further detail in **Appendix B**.

16. **Figure 2: Latest Key assumptions**

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Council Tax: Core	2.99%	2.99%	2.99%
Council Tax: Social Care Precept	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
Pay Award	2%	2%	2%
Increase in Fees and Charges	2%	2%	2%
National Living Wage (NLW) <i>% Increase in the National Living Wage</i>	3.9%	2%	2%
	Dec-24	Dec-25	Dec-26
Bank of England - Base Rate	4.50%	3.25%	3.00%

Please note:

The increase in fees and charges should be regarded as a minimum increase to those not set by statute. The principle of full cost recovery may mean increases above these levels for example were costs are likely to rise by the National Living Wage which is currently being estimated at £11.89 in 2025/26 which is an increase of 3.9%.

Financial Strategy to support maintaining a balance budget for 2025/26.

17. The main changes to the council approved February 2024 budget for 2024/25 and MTFP position are as set out below.

Removal of the assumed Social Care Reforms Resources

- a) As set out earlier in this report the government have cancelled the social care charging reforms. These reforms which were due to be implemented in October 2025 included an extended means test and a lifetime cap on care costs. The previous MTFP assumed an extra £5.8m of cost in 2026/27 and further £10.2m in 2027/28, both of which fully funded from additional government funding. These entries have now been reversed, but there is no net impact.

National Living Wage (NLW) uplift

- b) The latest MTFP position assumes that the National Living Wage will be increased by 3.9% in 2025/26 (from £11.44 per hour in 2024/25 to £11.89). This is a further 1.9% increase over the inflation based 2% assumption included in the MTFP approved in February 2024. This forecast increase is based on the growing expectation of an announcement of an above inflation move as part of the 30 October 2024 national budget announcement.

Quarter One 2024/25 Budget Monitoring Virement

- c) Cabinet in September received the quarter one budget monitoring report for 2024/25. This report recommended that Council approved a £5.1m redirection of resources from adults to children's social care. This virement takes account of the ongoing adult social care savings identified in quarter four of 2023/24 which was after the budget had been set for 2024/25 and recognises the pressure emerging in the first quarter of 2024/25 in children's social care. The virement has been

assumed for financial planning purposes but is subject to Council endorsement at its meeting on the 15 October 2024.

Adult Social Care – Transformation Business Case

- d) Following Council approval on the 23 July 2024 recognition of the detailed savings identified as part of the Adult Social Care Transformation Business Case.

Pay and Reward Project

- e) Cabinet in September 2024 received an update on the Pay and Reward project designed to create a single new pay and grading structure for the council. The MTFP now reflects the final offer being made to staff as set out in report, the ultimate £1.641m increase in the pay bill, can be compared to the £1.060m included in the 2024/25 budget, and annual fluctuations during the period of implementation.

Ongoing review of growth pressures

- f) Combinations of the outcome of a fundamental review of previous growth assumptions alongside consideration of any new emerging pressures.

Savings, efficiencies and additional income

- g) Ongoing challenge to ensure the robustness of the financial planning assumptions behind the deliverability of any saving proposals to be put forward for formal approval as part of the 2025/26 final budget proposal.
18. Other than those referenced for Children's Services above, the MTFP has not been amended for any emerging 2024/25 in-year pressures that were detailed in the quarter 1 budget monitoring report to Cabinet on 2 September, on the basis that they will be addressed by the Corporate Director and budget holders via the proposed mitigation strategies.
19. Clearly there is still work to be done to ensure that the council can continue its strategy of maintaining the financial health of the authority through a balanced MTFP. In support of this process, it is being recommended that, in line with the approach adopted in 2023, a targeted voluntary redundancy process is established with delegation to the Chief Executive to agree the final criteria. It is likely that this scheme will not be applied to certain elements of the workforce such as social workers but will focus on areas of the Council where future savings are forecast or can be made.
20. Work will now focus on further refining the MTFP as presented and as the current financial planning assumptions are tested further. Any changes will be reviewed alongside the potential for bringing forward additional proposals for balancing the 2025/26 budget. As previously stated, Portfolio Holders and budget holders have been preparing these potential savings in response to the July Cabinet MTFP Update report scenario planning and sensitivity analysis exercise.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Deficit - Update

21. As set out in the July MTFP Update Report there is growing concern about the accumulating deficit in the DSG budget, caused by expenditure to provide the statutory service which exceeds the budget available. The Director of Finance wrote to DLUHC and DfE on the 22 May 2024 outlining concerns regarding the impact the deficit on the DSG is having on the financial sustainability of the Council. This recognises that due to the forecast £92m accumulated deficit on the 31 March 2025 the council will be

technically insolvent (a situation where the deficit on the DSG is greater than the total reserves held by the council with a negative overall general fund position) when the current statutory override finishes on 31 March 2026.

22. This letter also highlighted the difficulties the council will have in setting a legally balanced budget for 2025/26 when it is forecast that it will no longer have the cash to cover the cost of the DSG deficit. This could make it impossible for the Council to set a balanced budget for 2025/26 without massive cuts in services, unless this problem can be resolved, which will need government intervention.
23. As an update senior officers of the council met with representatives of the DfE and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the 21 August 2024. The outcome was that DfE have commissioned a detailed review by an independent local authority financial specialist to provide them with a report on BCP Councils budget and cash position. They will then consider next steps and the support they can provide the Council and any advice & guidance they can give to the Director of Finance once they have received the requested report.
24. The council's leadership have also met with the new local MPs to brief them on the urgency of the issue and requested their assistance. They have all expressed support for our position and are working hard to influence government to find a solution for us.

Financial Benchmarking

Unearmarked Reserves

25. Council generally holds two main forms of reserves. The focus of this benchmarking is on unearmarked reserves. Unearmarked reserves are set aside to help manage the risk to the council's financial standing in the event of extraordinary or otherwise unforeseen events and to mitigate the underlying operational risk associated with the operation of the council and the management of service expenditure, income, and the council's funding.
26. The latest analysis of the council's unearmarked reserves level as at March 2024 in comparison with other Unitary Authorities is set out as **Appendix C1** and **C2**. They are shown on both an absolute (C1) and a net revenue expenditure (NRE) (C2) basis. The NRE basis is a common approach to factor in the different size of each of the unitary authorities.
27. As a reminder the council took proactive steps to improve its financial health and sustainability in 2023/24 and increased the unearmarked reserves to £26.1m which represents 7.6% on a net revenue expenditure basis. The minimum recommended level suggested by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) is 5%. This benchmarking demonstrates the steps taken have moved the council into the mid-range compared to other unitary councils.
28. As highlighted earlier in this report the total reserves (earmarked and unearmarked) are insufficient to cover for the DSG deficit referenced earlier in this report.

Council Tax

29. BCP Council is highly geared toward Council Tax financing, and this is demonstrated with the analysis in **Appendix C3** which compares the councils tax base (the number of properties a council can levy council tax on) compared to other unitary authorities.

30. Council tax increased in 2024/25 by 4.99%. This increase was broken down into a 2.99% increase in relation to general inflationary pressures and an additional 2% relating to the social care precept. It is government policy to fund cost pressure in local government principally through the ability to raise council tax, including the social care precept. Recognition should therefore be made of the need to ensure that every step is being taken to align the council's expenditure with the resources at its disposal.
31. The BCP Band D council tax for 2024/25 is £1,767.22. The equivalent of our nearest neighbour Dorset Council is over 12% higher at £2,001.15. This equates to approximately £34m per annum in additional resource BCP Council could be generating based on the BCP 2023/24 tax base if it had Dorset Council's level of Council Tax. **Appendix C4** shows a comparison of 2024/25 council tax level to other unitary authorities. This demonstrates that the council tax for BCP Council continues to be below the unitary average. For 2024/25 it is 2.6% below the average which in resources terms is equivalent to £7m per annum.

Debt

32. The benchmarking analysis intended to also consider the councils debt levels. However, the national actuals for 2023/24 have not yet been released. Subject to its availability, the proposal will be to include debt benchmarking in the next MTFP update to Cabinet in December.

Options Appraisal

33. Ultimately the budget process results in a consideration of alternative savings, efficiency, income generation and service rationalisation proposals. This may include consideration of alternative council tax strategies.

Summary of financial implications

34. Any financial implications of the report's recommendations are considered, alongside alternative options, elsewhere within this report.

Summary of legal implications

35. The council has a fiduciary duty to its taxpayers to be prudent in the administration of the funds on their behalf and an equal duty to consider the interests of the community which benefit from the services it provides.
36. It is the responsibility of councillors to ensure the council sets a balanced budget for the forthcoming year. In setting, such a budget councillors and officers of the council have a legal requirement to ensure it is balanced in a manner which reflects the needs of both current and future taxpayers in discharging these responsibilities, which will include the need to ensure there is sufficient cash to fund the commitments at the time they fall due. In essence, this is a direct reference to ensure that Council sets a financially sustainable budget which is mindful of the long-term consequences of any short-term decisions.
37. As a billing authority, failure to set a legal budget by 11 March each year may lead to intervention from the Secretary of State under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999. It should however be noted that the deadline is, in reality, 1 March each year to allow sufficient time for the council tax direct debit process to be adhered to.

Summary of human resources implications

38. The establishment of a voluntary redundancy process will have direct human resources implications on the authority. In turn it is likely to have a direct impact on the level of services delivered by the council, the mechanism by which those services are delivered and the associated staffing establishment.

Summary of sustainability impact

39. The 2024/25 approved budget protected the staffing resources associated with climate change and ecological emergency activity. In respect of support to projects £1.239m was available in an earmarked reserve on 31 March 2024.

Summary of public health implications

40. The Department of Health and Social Care allocated BCP Council £21.77m, a 2.3% increase from 2023/24, to deliver its public health service in 2024/25. This will be combined with the £15.44m allocated to Dorset Council as part of the joint pan Dorset service.
41. There is an additional package of investment nationally from 2024/25 of £70 million per year to support local authority led smoking services in support of delivering smoke free generation. (BCP allocation for 2024/25 is £422,313)

Summary of equality implications

42. Officers are expected to deliver the services they are responsible for with due regard to the equality's implications. A full equalities impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the final February 2025 report to members as part of the annual budget process.

Summary of risk assessment

43. The risks inherent in the financial position of the council include.
- **Uncertainty.** High levels of financial planning uncertainty at this time caused principally by the ongoing implications of cost-of-living crisis and the potential policy and resource allocation impact of the recent change in national government.
 - **Accumulating DSG Deficit.** Expenditure by BCP Council of c£30m more annually than the government grant available to fund the Special Educational Needs and Disability service is not sustainable. The accumulating deficit is predicted to mean the council will technically be insolvent as of 31 March 2025.
 - **Intervention.** Children Services is on a journey of improvement since the inadequate Ofsted judgement in February 2022. Additionally, the external auditor concluded as part of their latest annual report (Audit & Governance Committee July 2024) that despite good progress against previous recommendations especially governance, a more robust financial strategy covering the MTFP period, and the administrations clear focus on financial rigour the council still has significant weaknesses due to the assessment of Children's Services and the DSG deficit.

- **Children's Services.** Ongoing costs and demands on the service including the delivery of approved savings at a time when they are focused on their improvement journey.
- **Wellbeing Services.** Ongoing costs and demands on the service including the capacity in the care market at affordable rates and the sharp rise in homelessness.
- **Delivering savings, efficiencies, and additional income generation.** Combination of delivering the £38m of additional savings, efficiencies and additional assumed in approving the 2024/25 with the relentless requirement to identify further potential proposals to support the ongoing need to balance the 2025/26 Budget and MTFP.
- **Pay award.** A 4.5% provision for the pay award was made as part of the approved budget for 2024/25. Unison sought views from its members in respect of a 2024 pay claim of 10% or £3,000 whichever is greater. Every 1% variation is estimated to cost the council £1.9m. On 16 May 2024 the National Employers Organisation (NEO) offered £1,290 on all grades up to spinal column point 43 and 2.5% over this amount. This would mean a 5.77% increase for the lowest paid within the council. The NEO offer was not accepted by the trade unions, and they are currently balloting their members for industrial action. The MTFP makes provision for annual pay awards of 2% from 2025/26 onwards and this assumption will need to be kept under constant review considering ongoing levels of pay inflation.
- **New Pay and Grading Structure.** Including ongoing negotiations with the Trade Unions seeking to agree the arrangements for a new single pay and grading structure and terms and conditions.
- **Realisation of capital receipts to fund the council's transformation programme.** £16.8m of capital receipts from the disposal of assets need to be delivered in 2024/25 to fund the estimated spend on the transformation programme. Receipts to this value have been approved and are in the process of being delivered via work on a pipeline of asset disposals. Further work on the pipeline will enable funding of future years transformation expenditure, any backlog investment in assets, and potentially towards helping to create community hubs.
- **Carters Quay.** Payments of £15.3m have been made towards the development of the agreed 161 new homes with ancillary ground floor amenity and commercial space scheme. Inland Partnership the contractor entered administration late in 2023. Officers continue to work with the administrator on the way forward and to try to ensure the council's investment is protected.
- **New Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System.** A new Microsoft Enterprise Resource Planning system was implemented as part of the transformation programme in April 2023. This is leading to demonstrable improvements in the financial management and human resource information systems but there will always be glitches and a period of learning before the council is making best use of such technology.

- **Legal Claims.** Covering various matters such as planning, highway, car parking, social care, or staffing, numerous legal claims have been logged against the council.
- **Loss or disruption to IT systems and Networks from a cyber-attack.** Such actions can incapacitate essential networks by encrypting or destroying data on which vital service depend. Financial loss is common through both direct loss of funds as well as recovery costs and reputational damage. Recent ransomware attacks are reported to have cost councils between £10m and £12m in damage. The industry adage is when, not if, an attack will happen.
- **Companies.** BCP operates several companies and third-party arrangements with these organisations are exposed to their own set of financial and operational risks. As such the council would only provide for its share of such risks in circumstances where the risk is likely to materialise

Background papers

44. February 2024 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 2024

<https://democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=284&MId=5386&Ver=4>

45. July 2024 MTFP Update Report

<https://democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=285&MId=5901&Ver=4>

46. September 2024 Quarter One Budget Monitoring Report

<https://democracy.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=285&MId=5902&Ver=4>

Appendices

Appendix A BCP Council response – Fixing the foundations

Appendix B Detailed MTFP Summary and key budget assumptions.

Appendix C1 Absolute unearmarked reserves compared to all unitary authorities

Appendix C2 Unearmarked reserves as a percentage of net revenue expenditure

Appendix C3 Council Tax Base levels 2024/25

Appendix C4 Council Tax levels 2024/25

Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council

Autumn Budget 2024

Stakeholder Representation

By way of context BCP Council is the tenth largest urban local authority, the thirteenth largest unitary council by population and the largest urban authority without an upper tier of combined or regional governance above it. Over 400,000 people reside across our three coastal towns of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, home to some of the most affluent and some of the most deprived areas in the country.

When BCP Council was formed on 1 April 2019, it was the result of the most complex local government reorganisation seen in the country for over forty years, bringing together district and county level services, each from three different sources, across four preceding councils. It was an opportunity to transform public services, remove duplication and inefficiencies and leverage economies of scale.

Not all the preceding councils supported the decision and so there were delays in decision-making, with the resulting restructure being completed in ten months from the final statutory instrument being laid, a year faster than other local government reorganisations.

We appointed KPMG as a strategic implementation partner for our transformation programme in 2019 and worked with them to develop and implement a new council-wide operating model, along with new platforms for customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning and a new data platform. This enabled us to create the fundamentals of a more connected, less siloed and more financially sustainable organisation and provide the foundations for further transformation in future years to deliver new efficiencies and productivity gains.

We have worked relentlessly to overcome challenges, from the covid-19 pandemic, which occurred less than a year into our new council forming, to responding to increasing demand on services, inflationary cost pressures and reestablishing a financial baseline after political aspirations in a complex political environment led to a depletion of reserves.

It should be clear that the journey has not been a smooth one by any means. The then Conservative Administration set the 2022/23 Budget based on an innovative financial model that tested the boundaries of Treasury orthodoxy. The budget assumption was that the council would sell its beach huts to a wholly owned company, a proposal that led to the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to change the rules which prevented the council using the

capital receipt as it had intended. Consequentially the BCP council did not proceed with the beach hut sale process and applied under the Exceptional Financial Support process for a £20m capitalisation direction which due to the eventual sale of commercial assets it managed to avoid. Another outcome was that DLUHC issued the council with a Best Value Notice, which has now expired and been complied with, to obtain external assurance of our governance processes and the steps being taken to ensure compliance with the best value duty.

The process of setting the 2023/24 budget was no less problematic as again the Conservative Administration considered including a different innovative financial model which eventually was dropped following intervention by the External Auditor. It was also the catalysis for the then Leader's resignation.

Although the finally approved budget for 2023/24 was more conventional in its approach it included a considerable level of inherent risk. It was balanced based on the assumption of a £30m drawdown in reserves and the delivery of £34m in savings, efficiencies, and additional resources including £9m in respect of transformation which was un-itemised and was not supported by a specific, detailed delivery plan.

A new Three Towns Alliance Administration from May 2023 have attempted to improve the financial health and sustainability of the authority. The financial outturn for 2023/24 was a reduction in the planned use of reserves to £23m. The budget for 2024/25 included £38m of identified savings to address the 2023/24 structural deficit, caused using reserves, and established a balanced budget plan for the next four years; achieved through making tough decisions, some service cuts and a council-wide voluntary redundancy scheme

We have also utilised regional and national peer networks, to continue to improve and deliver better services for our residents. As part of this we have embraced peer challenge and acted as catalysts in the sector. Our local system transformations have been used to build regional equivalents, from our integrated neighbourhoods to creating family hubs.

All of this contributes to our ability to achieve our vision, of **a place where people, nature, coast and towns come together in sustainable safe and healthy communities**, through our key objectives of focusing on our place and environment and our people and communities and ensuring that we are an open, transparent and accountable council, putting our people at the heart of our services.

That introduction is intended to set the context of a newly formed, large unitary council where the consistent challenge has been to balance the budget which is under increasing pressure particularly from social care and SEND costs. Even in

circumstances where we have delivered significant efficiencies and productivity gains, the impact of these pressures has been that we have had to make significant savings in front-line services and the social and environmental infrastructure has been damaged and downgraded. In that context BCP Council would like to make the following representations for HM Government to consider as part of their upcoming budget in the Autumn of 2024.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

Arguably the biggest threat to the financial stability of upper tier local authorities is the rising cost of support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As summarised recently by the local government ombudsman (LGO) the system is in “utter disarray” and requires a complete overhaul. The financial resources being made available annually is insufficient to provide the services that children are entitled to under the Children and Families Act 2014.

The position locally is that by April 2025 our cumulative expenditure on SEND will be circa £92m more than the government has made available via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) arrangement, with this deficit predicted to continue to rise by approximately £30m per annum.

Currently we are in conversation with representatives of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Department for Education (DfE) as we will run out of cash available to fund this growing deficit during 2025 and therefore without a solution or some form of government support, we will be unable to set a legally balanced budget for 2025/26.

Even if a solution to this grave cashflow deficit can be found by April 2025 the outstanding cumulative deficit will be more than the total reserves of the council which will leave the council as technically insolvent from that point onwards.

This issue was created nationally by a combination of the resources to meet the requirements of the 2014 Act and the decision by Department for Education (DfE) in 2017/18 not to provide resources via the DSG to cover the previous year’s SEND expenditure by local authorities. Therefore, our recommendation is that this deficit, and any future deficit in funding for this service, is nationalised and managed centrally and in doing so avoiding the looming disaster and avoiding disadvantaging those authorities who have not previously been given specific government grant support under the DfE safety valve system.

Council Tax: Framework Reform

Reform of the Council Tax framework to permit freedom to agree on the level of council tax locally without a referendum limit and greater freedom to agree on the

level of discounts provided. This provides the opportunity to increase the council's revenue and consequentially its ability to fulfil its role and support the financial headwinds local authorities are facing.

Restricting councils' ability to decide on the level of Council Tax erodes local democracy. Even with the realism that a greater and greater percentage of local council tax revenue must be devoted to the funding of statutory services, local citizens should be given the ability to decide whether to protect the level of truly local services which have such a significant impact on their community. In line with this approach, we would advocate giving local authorities the power to vary all council tax discounts and exemptions including the single person discount. Councils are given the ability to decide on the level of council tax support so why are they not given the ability to decide of the level of tax itself?

In respect of the impact on government policy, as Council Tax is not included in the consumer price index (cpi) calculation it will not have an impact on the framework for ensuring the national cpi inflationary measure is within the 2% target. Reducing or removing the single person discount would support the governments housing policy by encouraging single adults not to occur larger homes than they need. It will also increase an authority's tax base and in doing so increase resources available to other preceptors such as Police and Fire Authorities.

Government set - Statutory Fees and Charges

As the government has recently itself demonstrated with planning fees, if you break the link between the cost of delivering services and the amount the recipient of those services pays by way of a fee or charge, it will inevitably lead to a deterioration in the quality of the service being provided.

Therefore, it is recommended that the government increases all statutory fees and charges annually in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the September prior to the financial year in question. There should also be a one one-off adjustment to take account of inflation between now and when the current charge was original introduced.

An example of where this approach should be taken include Car Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) where in many instances the cost of the days parking is now very close to the amount that would be generated by a PCN.

Other examples include licensing fees, environmental health inspections and certificates, land registry fees, court fees, and adoption places etc.

Please note this proposal will have no direct impact on the national exchequer other than creating an environment which is more likely to help local government thrive and helping to prevent situations which leads to a deterioration of service standards.

Support for Accommodation Business Improvement Districts (ABIDs)

The visitor economy is vitally important to destinations such as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. Leading local tourism and business organisations have recognised the need for the destination to maintain its competitiveness and encourage more high value staying visitors throughout the year. With public sector finances coming under significant pressure, it is recognised that the council cannot continue to support destination promotion activities in the longer term. Local Hoteliers have come together with the Destination Management Board, which is the local tourism industry liaison group, along with four local Business Improvement Districts and the council to establish an Accommodation BID to raise investment via a levy charge per room night to guests staying in local hotels, to fund destination activities and inject new growth into high value areas of the local visitor economy.

It is anticipated that through the national budget process the government will formalise its support for such arrangements. This proposal will have no direct impact on the national exchequer other than supporting vibrant local economies.

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Key Assumptions

Service Pressures, Corporate Cost Pressures & Additional Resources, Savings, and Efficiencies

	Revised Budget 2024/25 £m	Sept MTFP Position (updated from February 2024)			
Service Pressures (net of any specific grant changes)		25/26 £m	26/27 £m	27/28 £m	Total £m
Wellbeing Directorate	126.0	6.8	5.8	6.1	18.7
Children's Directorate	91.0	4.5	5.3	5.3	15.1
Operations Directorate	58.2	4.1	(0.9)	1.5	4.7
Resources Directorate	40.4	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.4
Service Pressures (net of any specific grant changes)	315.6	15.6	10.5	12.9	38.9
Savings, Efficiencies, Fees & Charges					
Wellbeing Directorate		(2.6)	(0.9)	(0.8)	(4.4)
Children's Directorate		(0.6)	0.0	0.0	(0.6)
Operations Directorate		(3.8)	(2.2)	(2.0)	(8.0)
Resources Directorate		(0.5)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(0.8)
Transformation		(4.0)	(1.6)	(1.1)	(6.8)
Reversal of one off savings in 2024/25		4.2	0.0	0.0	4.2
		(7.4)	(4.9)	(4.0)	(16.3)
Corporate Items - Cost Pressures					
Transformation Base Revenue Cost	3.7	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.8
Debt Capital Repayment - Minimum Revenue Provision	7.0	0.5	0.4	0.4	1.2
Debt Interest on Borrowings	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Treasury Management Income	(1.9)	1.9	1.7	1.7	5.4
Pension - Back funding	3.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2
Provision for the Pay Award	8.0	3.8	3.8	3.8	11.4
Pay and Grading Project	1.3	1.7	(0.6)	(0.5)	0.6
Benefits	(1.6)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Investment Properties Income	(5.0)	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(0.1)
Redundancy costs that can no longer be charged to Transformation	0.1	(0.1)	0.0	0.0	(0.1)
Miscellaneous including levies	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.6	1.6
Contingency	7.9	(5.7)	(0.0)	(0.0)	(5.8)
Corporate Items - Cost Pressures	27.4	3.4	5.9	5.9	15.2
Council Tax	(261.6)	(16.9)	(15.3)	(15.5)	(47.8)
Business Rates	(91.2)	24.7	(1.2)	(1.2)	22.3
Unringfenced Government Funding	(4.6)	0.5	(0.0)	(0.0)	0.4
Reserve Movements	17.8	(18.2)	2.7	0.0	(15.5)
Funding - Changes	(339.6)	(10.0)	(13.8)	(16.7)	(40.6)
Annual – Net Funding Gap	3.4	1.5	(2.5)	(1.9)	(2.8)
Application of one-off business rates resources to MTFP	(3.4)	(1.5)	4.0	0.9	3.4
Annual – Net Funding Gap	0.0	0.0	1.6	(1.0)	0.6
Cumulative MTFP – Net Funding Gap		0.0	1.6	0.6	

The developing 2025/26 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as presented is based on numerous key assumptions that although they have been informed by many factors such as government announcements, economic forecasts, and trend analysis, are also based on professional judgement. These can be listed as follows.

1. Wellbeing

Service Pressures £6.8m (5.4% increase over the 2024/25 revised budget for demand and inflationary increases excluding those related to council pay)

Adult Social Care and Commissioning

The MTFP makes provision for an additional gross £24.5m investment in adult social care services over the 3-year period to March 2028 (£8.5m in 2025/26). Grant support towards these pressures has been assumed with £2m of growth each year. The pressures exclude the impact of the pay award on the services staff and arise from a combination of:

- 1) Assumptions around inflationary pressures within the care market. These pressures relate mainly to increases for providers in staffing costs where a significant driver is the consequential impact of changes in the National Living Wage (NLW) with this estimated at £10.8m over the 3 years.
- 2) The funding allocation for the Market Sustainability and Improvement fund is being used to assist moving towards achieving the 'Fair Cost of Care'. The Discharge Fund will be used to meet the increased care costs and speed up hospital discharges.
- 3) Demographic growth for all client groups is provided for at £10.5m over the 3-year period.

The NLW remains a key driver for the cost of care services affecting 70% of the cost of providing home care and 65% for residential fees. The rate from April 2024 was confirmed at £11.44 per hour and the cost of care in the MTFP has been taken forward from this base.

The remaining 30%-35% of the cost of providing care is driven by other cost of living factors assumed to increase in 2025/26 in line with CPI as estimated by the Office of National Statistics in November 2023 with approximately £1m additional cost included in the plan annually.

The NLW is assumed at 3.9% increase in 2025/26 and then 2% each year thereafter, and for CPI the assumptions are 1.6%, 1.5% and 1.8% for each year respectively.

It should also be noted that a Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill has replaced the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) with a scheme known as the Liberty Protection Safeguards. These arrangements describe the procedures necessary to deprive people of their liberty because of lack of capacity to consent to their care arrangements. The implementation of the new scheme was delayed last year, and when introduced the council will commit spending on this activity up to any amount funded by the government.

The new government is not taking forward the social care reforms with the previously estimated costs and income no longer included in the MTFP. The planned reforms had been delayed by the previous government to October 2025 with the earmarked funding for 2024/25 used instead to support core adult social care budget pressures nationally. The reforms as previously set out included the implementation of the extended means test, the lifetime cap on personal care costs and the extension of Section 18(3) to enable self-funders in residential care to access local authority contracting arrangements.

Housing

The cost of homelessness continues to rise due to the significant increase in demand and the rising costs of accommodation. The annual homelessness prevention grant (HPG) has been supplemented in recent years by earmarked reserves designated to support homelessness, but

this reserve is depleting and estimated to be fully utilised by the end of 2025/26. It has been assumed that the housing acquisition programme will deliver the expected benefits, and that housing accommodation and B&B costs will reduce and be managed within the in-year HPG received and base budget provision from 2026/27.

Annual budget growth has been provided for unavoidable inflation in housing support and CCTV contracts at £0.3m in 2025/26 and £0.2m annually thereafter.

2. Children's Services

Service Pressures £4.5m (4.9% increase over 2024/25 revised budget for demand and inflationary increases excluding those related to council pay costs)

The MTFP makes provision for an additional gross £17.7m investment in children's services over the 3-year period to March 2028 (before additional specific grants). This pressure, which excludes the impact of the pay award on the services staff, is a combination of:

1) Care:

a. The service has seen a rise in the costs of children in care since the budget was set for 2024/25 with resources released from other budgets, primarily adult social care, and redirected to children's services with the MTFP growth in addition to this permanent base budget increase. There continues to be increasing complexity of children needing placements with a limited supply of good quality places nationally and providers have been able to increase their fees beyond our expectations.

b. The requirement for providers of supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 to be Ofsted registered and inspected has also led to an increase in placement fees as higher costs are passed on.

c. Local social care market purchasing has been reliant on framework contracts which previously worked well in managing placement costs, however in recent years this has significantly deteriorated. This change has impacted on price and a range of market options is being explored.

2) School Transport:

a. The cost of special educational needs and disability (SEND) transport is directly linked with the increasing number of education, health, and care plans (EHCPs) and the pressure that continues in the high needs block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG).

b. SEND transport is however not funded by the DSG and instead the responsibility falls to the general fund budget of the council.

The social care grant provided since 2020/21 is assumed to continue along with all other children's social care funding throughout the 3 years of the plan.

3. Operations

Service Pressures £4.1m (7% increase over 2024/25 revised budget largely driven by inflationary increases and changes to service provision)

The MTFP provides for additional investment over the 3-year period to March 2028 of £7m across operations services. In addition, there is a one off investment of £2.3m in 2025/26 for the Russell Cotes museum to support its move to become independent of the council.

The on-going pressures over the 3 years are a combination of:

1) Inflationary pressures for waste disposal and recycling services linked to contracts and market movements of £1.5m (£0.6m allowed for in 2025/26).

- 2) In the bereavement service, a budget increase of £0.2m has been provided from 2025/26 to allow for relocation of the coroner's service. In the crematorium service it has been assumed that there are no further income reductions with stabilisation at the 2024/25 base budget level.
- 3) Fuel inflation of £0.26m annually has been allowed for along with reprofiled prudential borrowing repayments of £0.7m from 2025/26 to ensure that the rolling capital programme for fleet vehicles is maintained.
- 4) There are investments in the seafront IT system and beach huts, with these additional costs expected to be recovered through additional income.
- 5) Inflationary pressures allowed for within sustainable transport for concessionary fares increases following the recent rebase to reflect the current trend of journeys undertaken.
- 6) Additional 3-year maintenance programme for the Twin Sales bridge to replace further bearings has been established at £0.25m per annum.
- 7) The business support budget has been restored by £0.4m to reflect on-going needs across the council.

4. Pay Award

Local government agreed pay awards for 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 were 2%, 2%, 2.75% and 1.75% respectively. The National Employers organisation took a different approach in agreeing the pay awards for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

For 2022/23 a flat rate increase of £1.925 on every spinal column point was agreed. For 2023/24 agreement with the Trade Unions was reached on a flat rate increase of £1,925 on every grade up to SCP43 and 3.88% above this level.

A 4.5% provision for the pay award has been made as part of the approved budget for 2024/25. Unison sought views from its members in respect of a 2024 pay claim of 10% or £3,000 whichever is greater. Every 1% variation is estimated to require a £1.9m provision in the general fund once allowance is made for recharges (for example to capital) and external contributions (such as adjusted fees & charges etc.) On the 16 May 2024 the National Employers Organisation (NEO) offered £1,290 on all grades up to spinal column point 43 and 2.5% over this amount. This would mean a 5.77% increase for the lowest paid within the council. The NEO offer was not accepted by the trade unions, and they are currently balloting their members for industrial action.

The MTFP makes provision for annual pay awards of 2% from 2025/26 onwards.

In addition, as part of the savings and efficiencies proposals underpinning the 2023/24 budget, provision was made for only 95% of each service's employee establishment to allow for the impact of turnover and other matters on the actual cost of the service. Previously the assumption varied between services, of between 95% and 98%. Monitoring of the 95% assumption is continuing however monitoring indicates some areas are finding it difficult to achieve the target. In addition, services are also expected to manage the impact of any incremental drift in their pay base.

5. New Pay and Grading Structure

A key requirement following the establishment of BCP Council was to create a single new pay and grading structure. The proposed 2024/25 budget made provision for a £1.060m uplift is the cost of the pay bill following the implement of pay and reward.

The latest position reflects the final offer being made to staff as set out in a report to Cabinet on 4 September 2024. This sets out that the ultimate additional increase in the pay bill will be

£1.641m, as compared to the £1.060m included in the 2024/25 budget with annual fluctuations during the period of implementation in reflection of the pay protection arrangements.

For financial planning purposes, the proposed implementation is now assumed to be 1 April 2025. The council will however endeavour to deliver at the earliest date achievable. In line with the normal annual protocols put in place the assumption continues to be that budget holders will manage within their budgets any additional incremental drift associated with the new arrangements, as with the current arrangements. An amount of £269k in one-off resources has been set aside to fund the cost of the implementation team in 2024/25.

6. Pension Fund

BCP Council is a member of the Dorset Local Government Pension Scheme administered by Dorset Council. The funds actuary Barnett Waddingham is required to revalue the fund every three years (tri-annual revaluation) to determine both the value of its assets and liabilities and the contributions rates for each employer in the fund.

The fund was last revalued as of April 2022 and the impact was agreed with the pension fund actuary in November 2022. The March 2022 position for BCP Council was a funding deficit of £53.2m with a resulting funding level of 95.9% as outlined below, compared to a funding deficit of £86.6m on 31 March 2019 relating to a funding level of 91.9%.

Figure 1: BCP Pension Fund – funding levels

Local Authority	31 March 2016 Funding Level	31 March 2019 Funding level	31 March 2022 Funding Level
Bournemouth Council	79%		
Christchurch Council	88%		
Dorset Council	80%		
Poole	86%		
BCP Council	82%	92%	96%

BCP Council contribution rates are as set out below. In respect of the 2022 revaluation, the increase on the ongoing rate was offset by the reduction in the back-funding element. Key variables that impacted on the valuation were the impact on liabilities of inflation, salary increases and the assumed discount rate, and the level of investment returns on the assets of the fund.

Figure 2: BCP Pension Fund contributions agreed with the actuary:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Ongoing <i>Primary Rate</i>	15.6%	16.2%	16.8%	17.4%	19%	19%	19%
Backfunding <i>Secondary Rate</i>	£9.43m	£5.89m	£6.10m	£6.32m	£3.97m	£4.13m	£4.29m

In comparing pay rates with those of other employers, it is important to recognise that the council has a total contribution rate of more than 22%. Many private sector companies will be making only a 3% minimum pension fund contribution.

7. Inflationary Costs

Inflation is only provided for in service directorate budgets where it can be demonstrated that it will be needed due to either market or contract conditions. Inflation as of September 2023, which is applied or factored into several 2024/25 contractual uplifts, was 6.7% as measured by the (CPI) Consumer Price Index.

The government's inflation target remains at 2% on an annual basis.

CPI Inflation as July 2024 is 2.2%.

8. Transformation

The 2024/25 Budget and MTFP assumes that the council will apportion £835k of general staff costs against the transformation programme in 2024/25 and that this will be reduced to zero from 2025/26 onwards as the formal central programme reaches its conclusion.

In line with the approved financial strategy, and in support of the delivery of the potential additional savings proposals the work to deliver the transformation business case will continue with a particular focus on the underlying need to resize the authority with the resultant reduction in its head count. The recommendation of the October report is, in line with the approach adopted in 2023, to establish a targeted voluntary redundancy process during the autumn of 2024 to ensure delivery for the saving for 1 April 2025 onwards. In support of this process, it is proposed to use the following updated value for money criteria.

- a. No individual will be made redundant unless the payback in savings from their post is less than 3 years.
- b. Exceptions to these principles will be permitted due to operational and service delivery needs however any such proposals will need the approval of the following Senior Officers, Chief Executive, Director of Finance, and the Head of Human Resources. The authorisation of these three officers will also be required for any proposal in which the total exit cost is more than £95,000.
- c. The expectation is that individuals will be required to work their notice periods and take any outstanding annual leave entitlements.

9. Treasury Management Income

The MTFP assumes a £1.9m pressure on the treasury management function recognising the council continued need to borrow cash and decreasing level of balances available to invest. The Council continues to employ an internal borrowing policy which has avoided taking out additional external long-term debt and the associated highest interest rates payable. However, this policy is finite and is under significant pressure from the impact of the DSG deficit. The DSG deficit is cash that could have been retained in the Council cash balances and earned a return. As an example, the forecast deficit of £109.9m by the end of 2024/25 costs the council on average 4.85% to temporarily borrow costing the council £5.385m annually.

10. Debt Capital Repayment – Minimum Revenue Provision

The Treasury Management Strategy is presented annually to Council alongside the budget after first having been considered in detail by Audit & Governance Committee. As part of this process the Council is required to periodically review the approach taken to the annual minimum revenue provision (MRP) for the repayment of debt.

The overriding requirement is to set a prudent provision which ensures that debt is repaid over a period reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefit.

The approach is on an annuity basis, as per most household mortgages, rather than either a straight line or reducing balance method.

Ongoing consideration will be given to whether it would be appropriate to provide a voluntary revenue provision (VRP) to enhance the level of prudence around the MRP provision. As part of the outturn for 2023/24 £7.1m was set aside as VRP. VRP allows a degree of flexibility in later years by allowing reduction in MRP payments. The council will consider the setting aside of further VRP when the financial position allows across the MTFP.

11. One-Off Resources

As part of the normal annual budget process the council is required to review the brought forward and forecast position on each of its collection funds (business rates and council tax) and make provision for the forecast year end surplus or deficit as part of the following years budget.

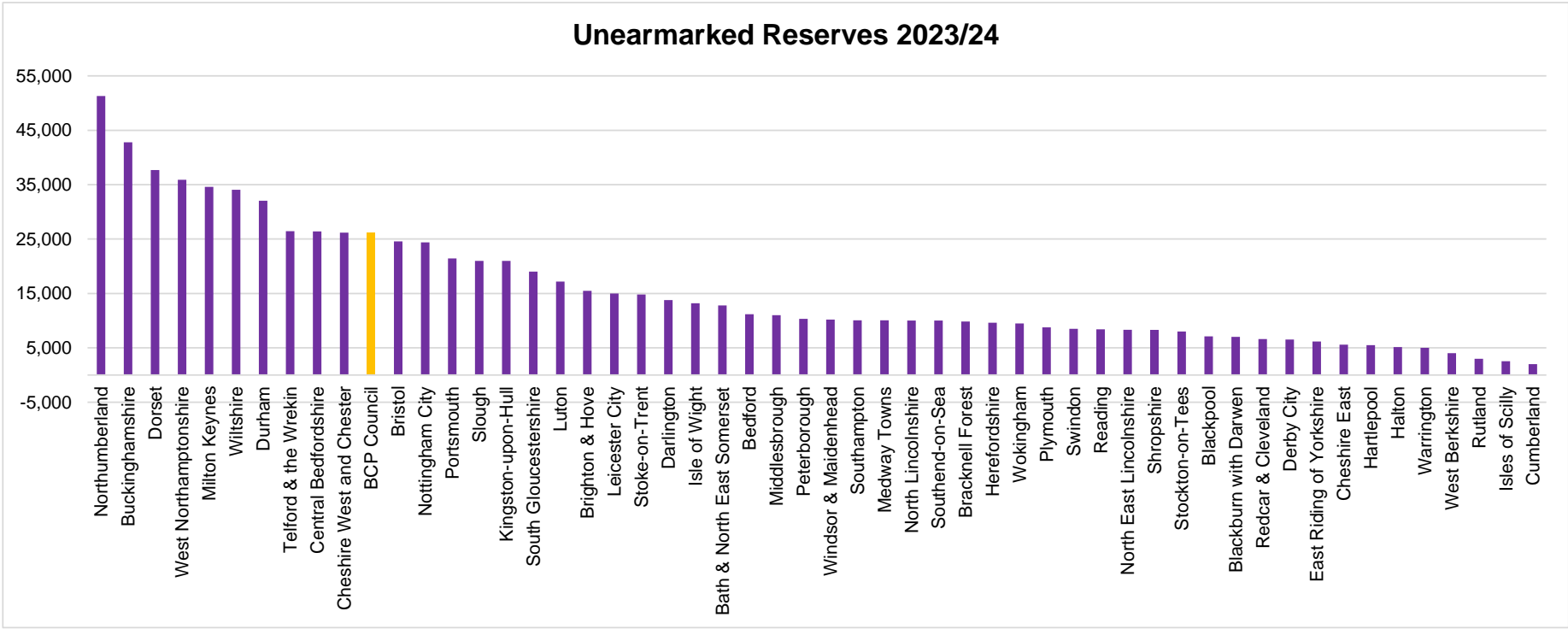
Based on a 2023 fundamental review undertaken in respect of the business rates collection fund a forecast surplus was treated as an exceptional one-off resource rather than as just as part of the standard budget setting arrangements for 2024/25.

A schedule of how these resources is being applied is set out in figure 3 below. In summary it continues to be applied to the delivery of outcomes in support of the financial sustainability of the council and enabling the phasing of savings over a defined time periods.

Figure 3: Application of one-off business resources

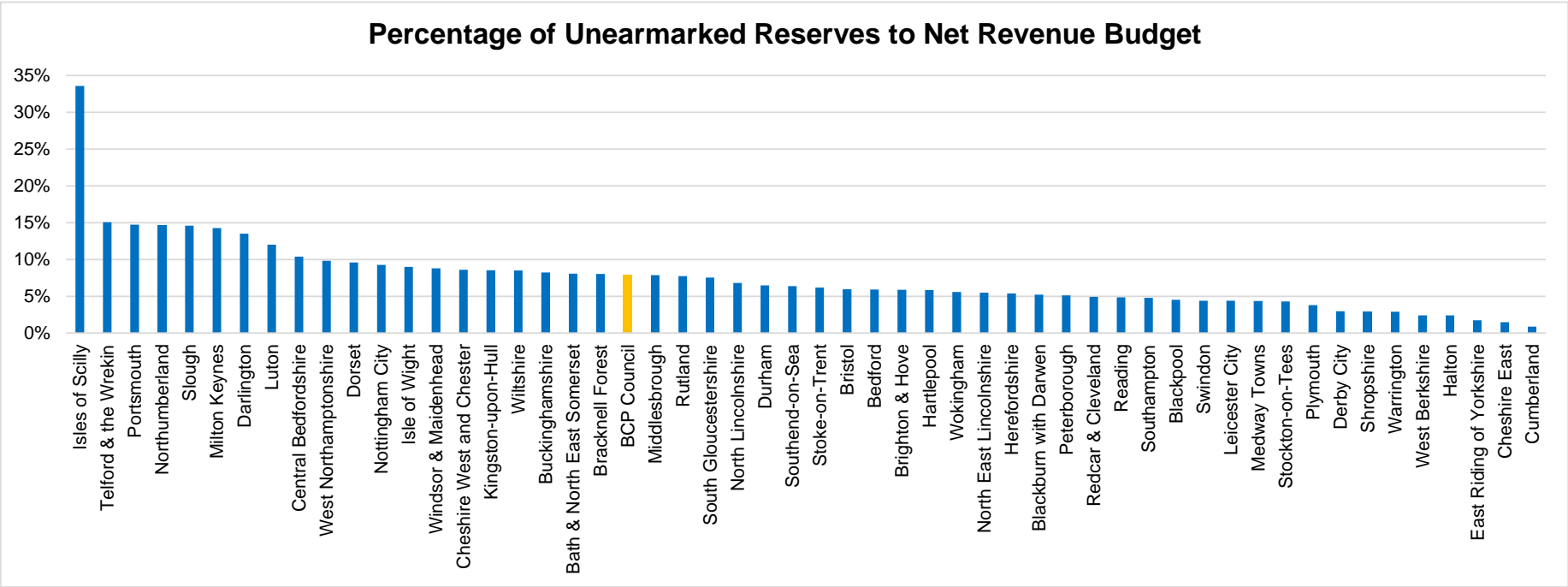
	Latest Application £000s	Profiled Application of Resources			
		2024/25 £000s	2025/26 £000s	2026/27 £000s	2027/28 £000s
Resources Available - Business Rates Collection Fund (Surplus)	(25,281)				
Application of Resources					
a) Resources set aside to support regeneration ambitions Includes resources to fund the staff transferred by BCP FuturePlaces Ltd over a 4-year period.	4,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
b) Russell Cotes Museum <i>(separate 7 February 2024 Cabinet report)</i> £2m One-off dowry payment + £250k one-off maintenance dowry payment.	2,250		2,250		
£626k Base budget removed from 1 April 2024 but do not become self sufficient until 1 October 2025.	939	626	313		
£50k Base budget for corporate maintenance removed from 1 April 2024 therefore £75k provision 1/10/25.	75	50	25		
c) Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Resources to top up the project budget, via an Earmarked Reserve, to £1m.	452	452			
d) Children's Services - Improvement Expenditure One-off investment in the Children's Services, Building Stronger Foundations Programme, December Cabinet.	522	522			
e) Bournemouth Air Festival £200k One-off funding for 2024/25 only.	200	200			
£100k as a further one-off contingency to underwrite the 2024/25 event	100	100			
f) Pay and Reward One-off implementation costs for 2024/25.	269	269			
g) Christmas Events £200k One-off funding for 2024/25 only.	200	200			
h) Transitional implementation of specified savings proposals Resources to enable specific savings proposals to be implemented over a transitional period.	2,773	1,705	1,068		
i) Contingency Resources set aside in support of the potential for optimism bias in the £38m of 2024/25 proposed savings. Based on Q1 Budget Monitoring for 2024/25 evidences that at least £4.302m of the original £5.654m will be required	4,302	4,302			
j) Resources to support the balancing of the 2024/25 Budget & MTFP Original £7.847m of resources to support the balancing of MTFP increased by £1.352m from original item (i)	9,199	3,375	4,917	907	
Balance Carried Forward	25,281	12,801	9,573	1,907	1,000

Appendix C1 - Unitary authorities absolute unearmarked reserves as at 31 March 2024



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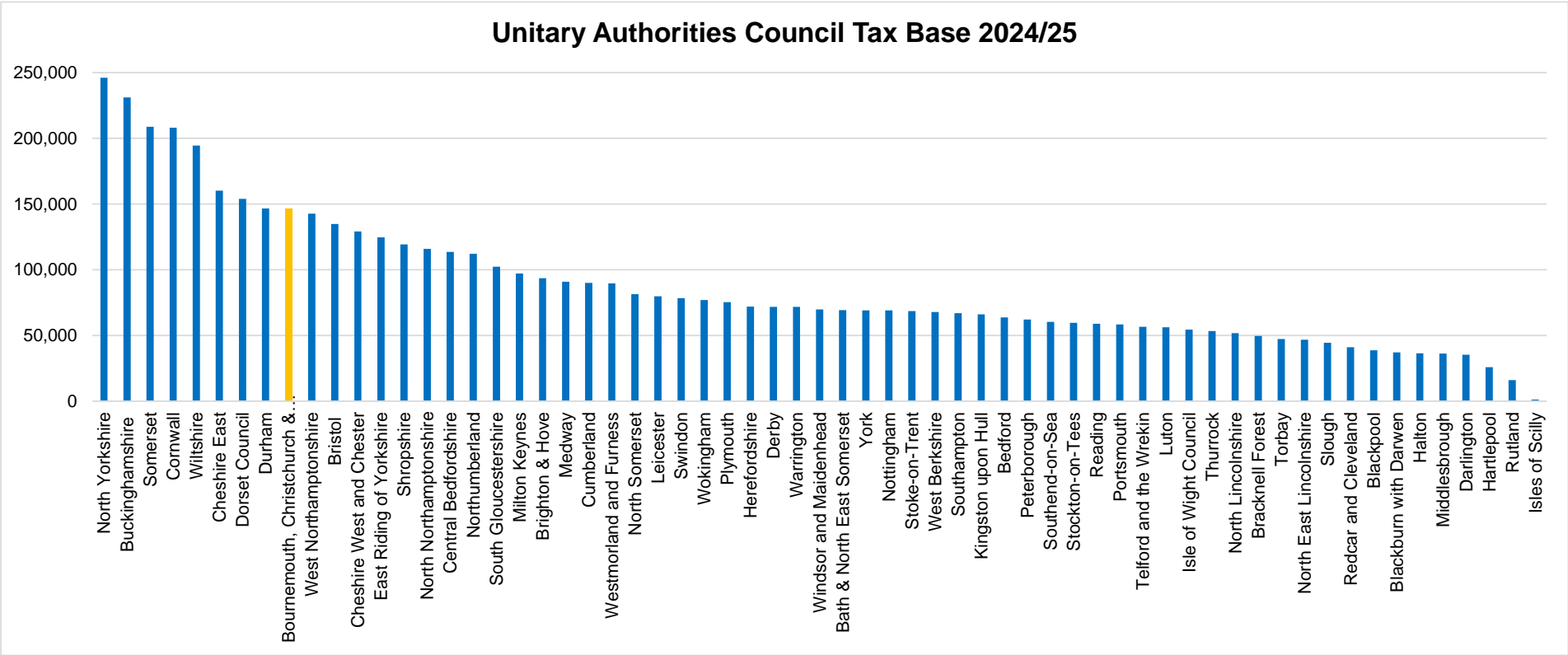
Appendix C2 - Unitary authorities percentage of unearmarked reserves to net revenue budget as at 31 March 2024



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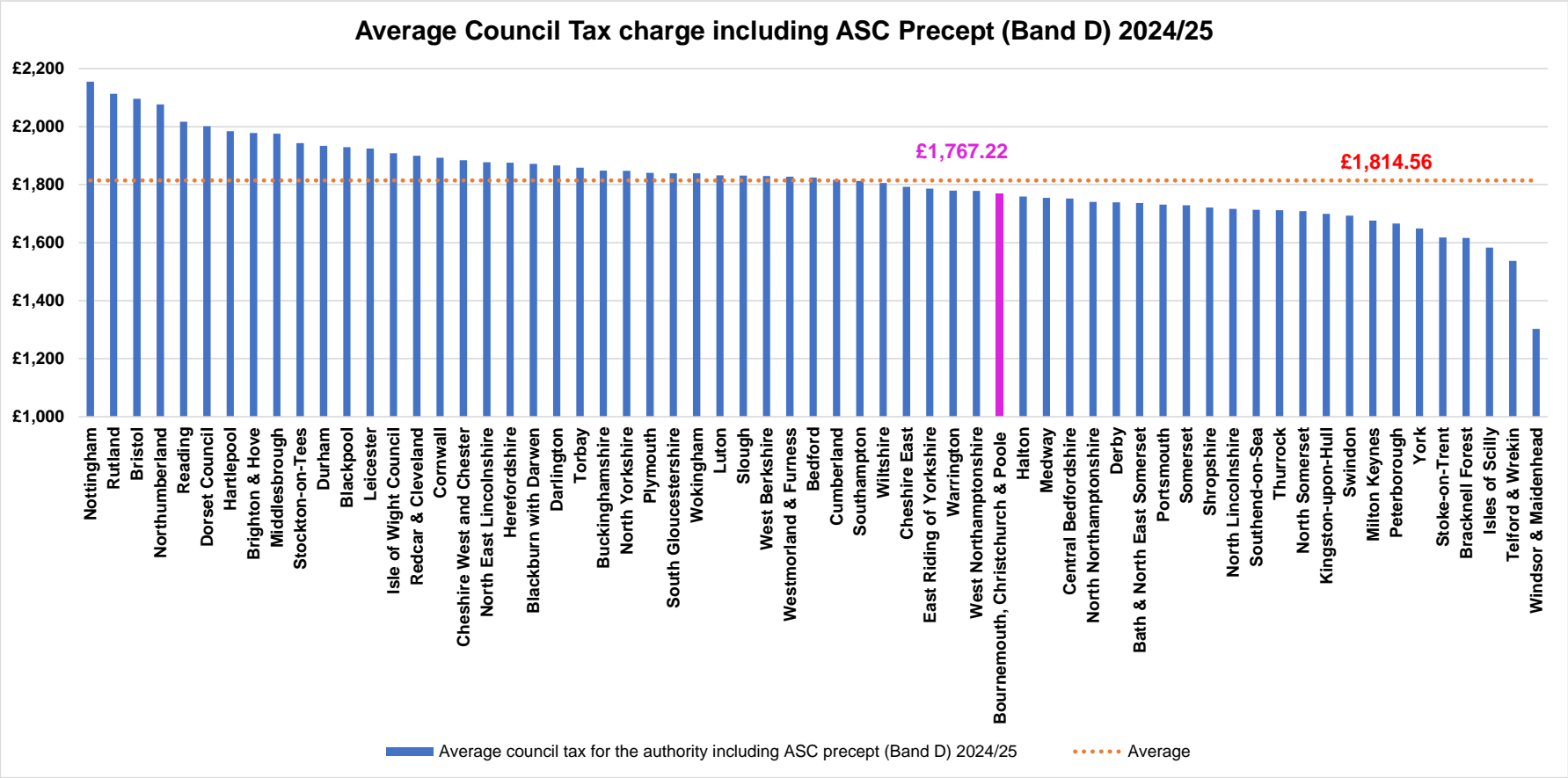
Appendix C3 - Comparison of unitary authorities council tax base 2024/25

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Appendix C4 - Comparison of unitary authorities average council tax charges 2024/25



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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD AND COMMITTEES



Report subject	O&S Budget working group - scoping report
Meeting date	To be provided to the following Overview and Scrutiny meetings: Environment & Place O&S Committee - 11 September 2024 Children's Services O&S Committee – 19 September 2024 Overview and Scrutiny Board – 23 September 2024 Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee – 24 September 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The O&S Board/ Committee is asked to confirm the establishment of a budget working group, including membership and key lines of enquiry, to undertake detailed scrutiny work to contribute to the developing 2025/26 council budget during September – November 2024.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The establishment of a budget working group, including the membership, lead member and lead officer for the group, as detailed at paragraphs 5 to 9 of the report. b. Key lines of enquiry for the working group, as detailed at paragraphs 10-14 of this report. c. The measures of effectiveness for the working group, as set out at paragraph 15 of this report.
Reason for recommendations	<p>To provide opportunity for scrutiny of budget proposals consistent with Procedure Rule 4 'The Formulation of Budget Proposals' within the Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules of the Council's Constitution.</p> <p>To ensure that the arrangements and scope of the working group are clearly established in line with the requirements of the Council's Constitution.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Not appropriate for an O&S Working Group
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Lindsay Marshall, Overview and Scrutiny Specialist
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. In September 2024, all Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) committees will be invited to establish a working group to contribute to the development of the 2025/26 budget. One working group can be established per O&S committee.
2. Through the working groups, each O&S Committee is invited to explore key lines of enquiry relating to budget matters within their areas of responsibility. The working groups form part of a wider programme of budget scrutiny (see Appendix 1) developed in consultation with O&S lead members and executive councillors and officers. O&S engagement in the budget process has been developed to be consistent with good practice.
3. The programme timeline provides a series of opportunities for all councillors to be involved in the development of the 25/26 budget, with public scrutiny and all member sessions built into the process. The aim is to develop a budget that is robust, tested and inclusive of wider councillor views. Channelling work through the O&S committees will also provide opportunity for public test and challenge as the budget develops.
4. The opportunities available for scrutiny of the 2025/26 developing budget have been communicated to all councillors during the summer of 2024.

Membership, Resources and Timetable

5. The Constitution states that O&S working groups may be formed by non-executive councillors (not limited to committee members). By this report, the committee is asked to confirm the membership, lead member of the group and lead officer for the work. A maximum of four working group members is suggested. There is no requirement for this to be politically balanced.
6. The lead member will be responsible for chairing working group meetings, liaising with officers and reporting on findings. The lead officer will provide strategic advice and direction to the group. It is suggested that this be a director or the relevant budget holder within the service area being scrutinised. Democratic Services will provide administrative support to the group.
7. In line with the programme of budget scrutiny, all O&S committees are being invited to establish budget working groups to undertake work during September – November 2024. The timing of working group meetings will ensure that test and challenge can be provided to the budget in its development phase, maximising the impact of scrutiny engagement.

8. To ensure an even spread of resources, one to two meetings will be held per working group with dates to be communicated.
9. In line with standard scrutiny practices, working group meetings will be held on a non-public basis. Transparency will be ensured through the reporting of findings to the O&S Board meeting of 18 November 2024 in a dedicated feedback session.

Methodology and Key Lines of Enquiry

10. Short, sharp O&S working groups with a clear and focussed remit will be able to provide maximum value to the developing 2025/ 26 budget by scrutinising a limited selection of critical budget areas within the remit of each committee.
11. **It is essential that the remit of these groups is targeted and limited to the most pressing areas of importance for councillors.** As all working groups will be stood up concurrently, there is a risk that any working group with too wide a remit will lack sufficient resources to support it, be ineffective in the depth of its enquiries, or unable to complete its work within the specified timescale.
12. Through this report, the committee is asked to confirm a **maximum of two/ three budget areas** that its working group will focus on. This will ensure that a 'deep dive' approach can be taken to the enquiry lines selected, rather than a light touch approach across a wider range of enquiries. To ensure that the working groups are member led, O&S Chairs have consulted their committee members to identify priority areas for scrutiny. O&S Chairs will report on these suggestions at the meeting.
13. **As a guide only**, officers have suggested the following potential areas of focus for the budget working groups aligned to each O&S committee:

O&S Board working group:

- Transformation budget
- Resident Card
- Income forecasts
- Fees and charges
- Licensing costs

Environment & Place O&S Committee working group:

- Bed & breakfast costs
- Climate & ecological emergency budget

Children's Services O&S Committee working group:

- High Needs budget
- School transport costs
- Care growth forecast

Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee working group:

- Learning Disability & Mental Health budget
- Demand pressures

14. Councillors may wish to refer to the division of responsibilities of the O&S Committees (Appendix 2) when selecting relevant areas of enquiry for each O&S committee. The committee may also wish to draw its lines of enquiry from the 'Directorate Budget Awareness' presentations to be delivered to all O&S committee meetings in September.

Measure of Effectiveness

15. The following measures of effectiveness are suggested to assess the benefit of this scrutiny work. The Committee may wish to consider and contribute to these measures, as it sees appropriate.
- A robust and balanced Council budget for 2025/26 is developed, which has been tested and challenged by non-executive members working in their capacity as a critical friend.
 - Opportunity for wider public engagement in the budget is provided through the overview and scrutiny process, under the public engagement provisions within the council's constitution.

Summary of financial implications

16. There are no financial implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of legal implications

17. There are no legal implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of human resources implications

18. There are no human resources implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of sustainability impact

19. There are no sustainability implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of public health implications

20. There are no public health implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of equality implications

21. There are no equality implications arising from this scoping report.

Summary of risk assessment

22. There are no risks arising from this scoping report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Programme of Budget Scrutiny for 2025/26 Council Budget.

Appendix 2 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure (as agreed September 2023)

Background papers

There are none.

2025/26 Budget

Budget Scrutiny Proposals

7 June 2024

Budget Scrutiny (Part 1 of 2)

Enhance engagement in and scrutiny of the 25/26 budget (critical friend approach):

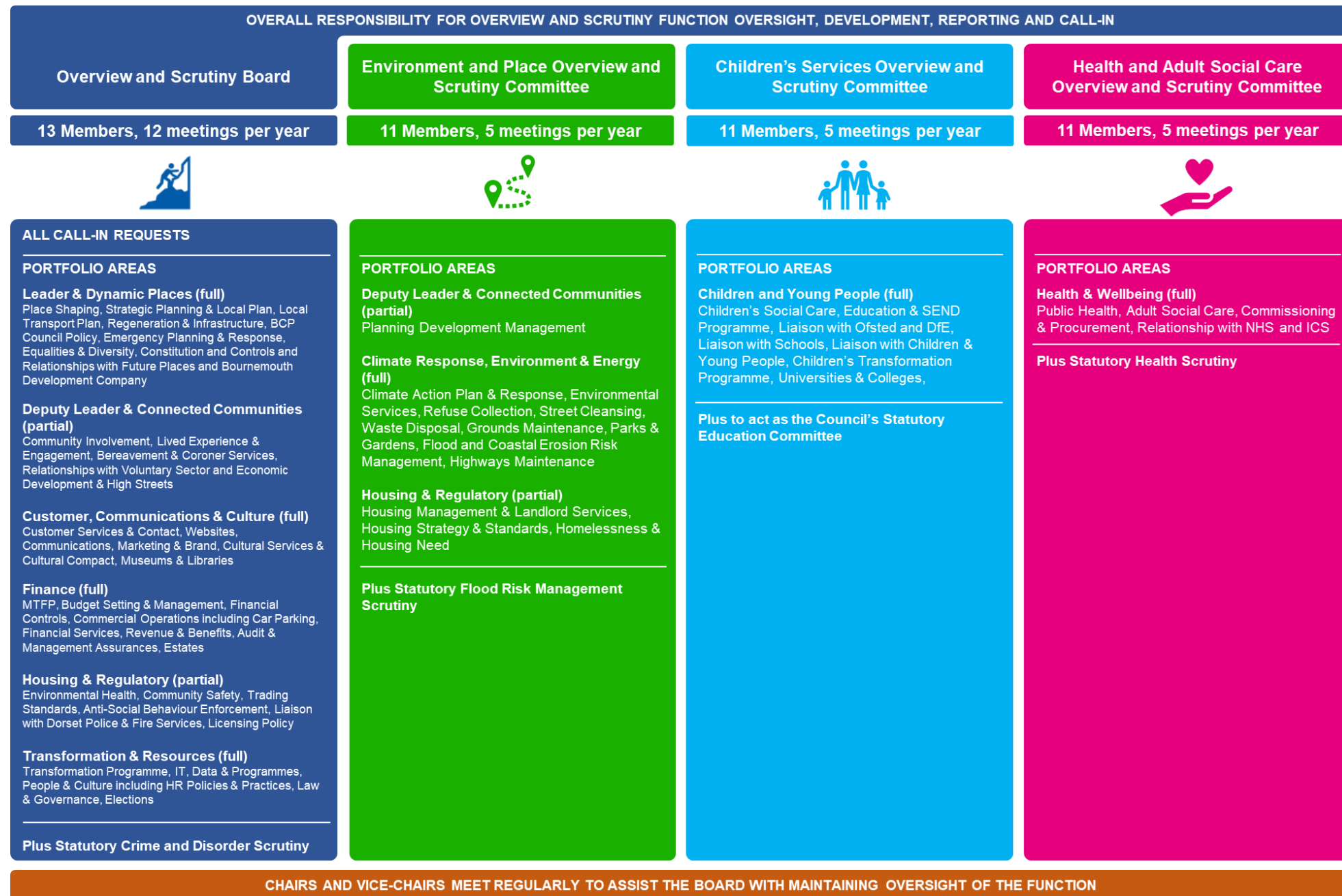
- Step 1. Budget Skills Training for Councillors – Monday 29 July 2024 6pm to 8pm (confirmed)
Independent Training based on approach taken by Dorset Council - Andrew Hardingham (previously Plymouth s151 Officer)
Potential for finance team attend to introduce and participate in a Question-and-Answer session.
- Step 2. Directorate Budget Awareness – September 2024
Each Corporate Director to give a presentation & undertake a Q&A on their budget, pressures, assumed savings etc.
11 September 2024 - Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2024 – Children’s Overview & Scrutiny Committee
23 September 2024 – Overview & Scrutiny Board
24 September 2024 – Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Step 3. Budget Task and Finish Groups – October 2024
Four task and finish groups focusing on issues in each Directorate – 1 group for each directorate (suggested potential topics only)
Wellbeing Directorate: Learning Disability & Mental Health Budget, Bed & Breakfast costs, Demand pressures
Children's Directorate: High Needs Budget, School Transport costs, Care growth forecast
Operations Directorate: Resident Card, Income forecasts, Fees and charges
Resources Directorate: Transformation Budget, Licensing costs, Revenue & Benefits, Climate and ecological emergency budget.

Budget Scrutiny (Part 2 of 2)



- **Step 4. Budget Workshop – All Member - 8 November 2024**
Short presentation to provide the outline of the budget prior to public consultation exercise (subject to review process/timings)
- **Step 5. Feedback**
Each Task and Finish group feedback to the Overview & Scrutiny Board
All member invite
18 November 2024 – Overview & Scrutiny Board
- **Step 6. Budget Workshop – All Member – 22 January 2025**
Short presentation to provide the outline of proposed budget post public consultation & draft 2025/26 LG Finance Settlement
- **Step 7. Scrutiny Committees**
Scrutiny 2025/26 budget proposals and any recommendations to Cabinet
All Member invite
3 February 2025 – Overview & Scrutiny Board
- **Step 8. Cabinet**
Cabinet meets on the 5 February 2025 to agree a 25/26 budget proposal to Council.
- **Step 9. Full Council**
Full Council meets on the 25 February 2025 to set the 25/26 Budget

Figure One - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure



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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD AND COMMITTEES



Report subject	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report
Meeting date	To be provided to the following Overview and Scrutiny meetings: Environment & Place O&S Committee - 11 September 2024 Children's Services O&S Committee – 19 September 2024 Overview and Scrutiny Board – 23 September 2024 Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee – 24 September 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This is the annual report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer on Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) activity within BCP Council. There is a requirement to report on the work of O&S to Council, to ensure good visibility of the function and Council ownership of activity and any improvements required.</p> <p>The annual report contains a summary and analysis of O&S activity during 2023-24, reflections on working practices and an action plan identifying strategic improvements to the O&S function.</p> <p>All O&S committees will receive the annual report for consideration, providing opportunity for comment prior to the supply of the final report to Council.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Board/ Committee consider and comment on the annual report and associated action plan. 2. The Board/ Committee comment on the proposed minor revisions to the O&S committee structure, outlined at paragraphs 8-10 of this report, prior to Council approval of the structure in October.
Reason for recommendations	<p>The Constitution requires the Statutory Scrutiny Officer to report to Council on an annual basis on the work of Overview and Scrutiny, including recommendations for any changes that may be required to ensure the function remains fit for purpose. The report must be informed by consultation with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the O&S Committees and referred to the four O&S Committees for comment. Consideration and comment on the annual report by the O&S Committees and Council upholds principle b) of good scrutiny, as outlined in the Constitution, that O&S shall 'be a Councillor led and owned function that seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development'.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Not applicable – Overview and Scrutiny is a non-executive function.
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant - Chief Executive
Report Authors	Lindsay Marshall – Overview and Scrutiny Specialist
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

1. [‘Overview and Scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities’](#) by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) recommends that councils report annually on their Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) function and activity. The purpose of the report is to outline the activity and output of the O&S function over the previous year, and to identify improvements for the function to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This report is based on the municipal year of May 2023 - April 2024.
2. The report will be received by all O&S Committees and at a meeting of Council but is aimed at all stakeholders of O&S – this includes those within the Council, external partners, and the public and communities served by the council.
3. This is the report of the council's Statutory Scrutiny Officer, who is responsible for supporting and promoting O&S activity. Contribution has been made by other officers who provide support to O&S and Chairs and Vice Chairs of O&S committees.
4. Provision of the report to O&S committees has been delayed by the requirements of the pre-election period of the 2024 Parliamentary election, which necessitated the cancellation of public council meetings.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

5. The purpose of overview and scrutiny, principles of good scrutiny and its role in supporting the ambitions and values of the council is set out in Appendix 1.

Summary - 2023/24 strategic O&S activity

6. During summer 2023, 36 new councillors were inducted into BCP Council following May 2023 local elections. O&S activity focussed on supporting these councillors with training and skills development, along with targeted support to those in chairing positions, many of whom were new to O&S chairing. The administration agreed that all O&S chairs would be drawn from opposition groups in line with good practice, to enhance the independence of O&S.
7. In September 2023, the Council agreed revisions to its O&S committee structure, to remove the Corporate & Community O&S Committee and replace this with the O&S Board, along with some adjustments to the membership, remit and meeting frequency of committees. O&S committee remits were adjusted to align to the revised Cabinet Portfolios which changed following the May 2023 elections. The

O&S Board also took on overall responsibility for all call-in matters and for O&S function oversight, development and reporting, previously the responsibility of O&S Chairs collectively.

8. In July 2024, the Council agreed a new Leader and further changes were made to the number and remit of Cabinet portfolios. Although this occurred after the reporting period for this report, the Council's Constitution makes provision for any changes to the O&S committee structure to be proposed to Council as part of this annual report. As the designation of functions across the four O&S Committees is based on the division of Portfolio Holder responsibilities, adjustments to the wording and remit of O&S Committees are now proposed to maintain an efficient fit and clear lines of accountability between O&S committees and Cabinet portfolios.
9. The changes proposed to the O&S committee functions are minor. All changes within the proposed revised structure reflect amended responsibilities and wording expressed within each Cabinet portfolio. All amended portfolio responsibilities have been included within the same O&S committee as per previous arrangements, with the exception of those items listed under the Environment & Place O&S Committee in red text. These were previously included within the O&S Board responsibilities. These changes are intended to provide a more effective fit with other similar responsibilities within the remit of this committee.
10. Figures 1a and b below illustrate the current O&S committee structure alongside the proposed revised structure. O&S committees are asked to comment on the proposed revisions prior to Council approval of the structure in October 2024.

Figure 1a – Current Overview & Scrutiny Committee Structure

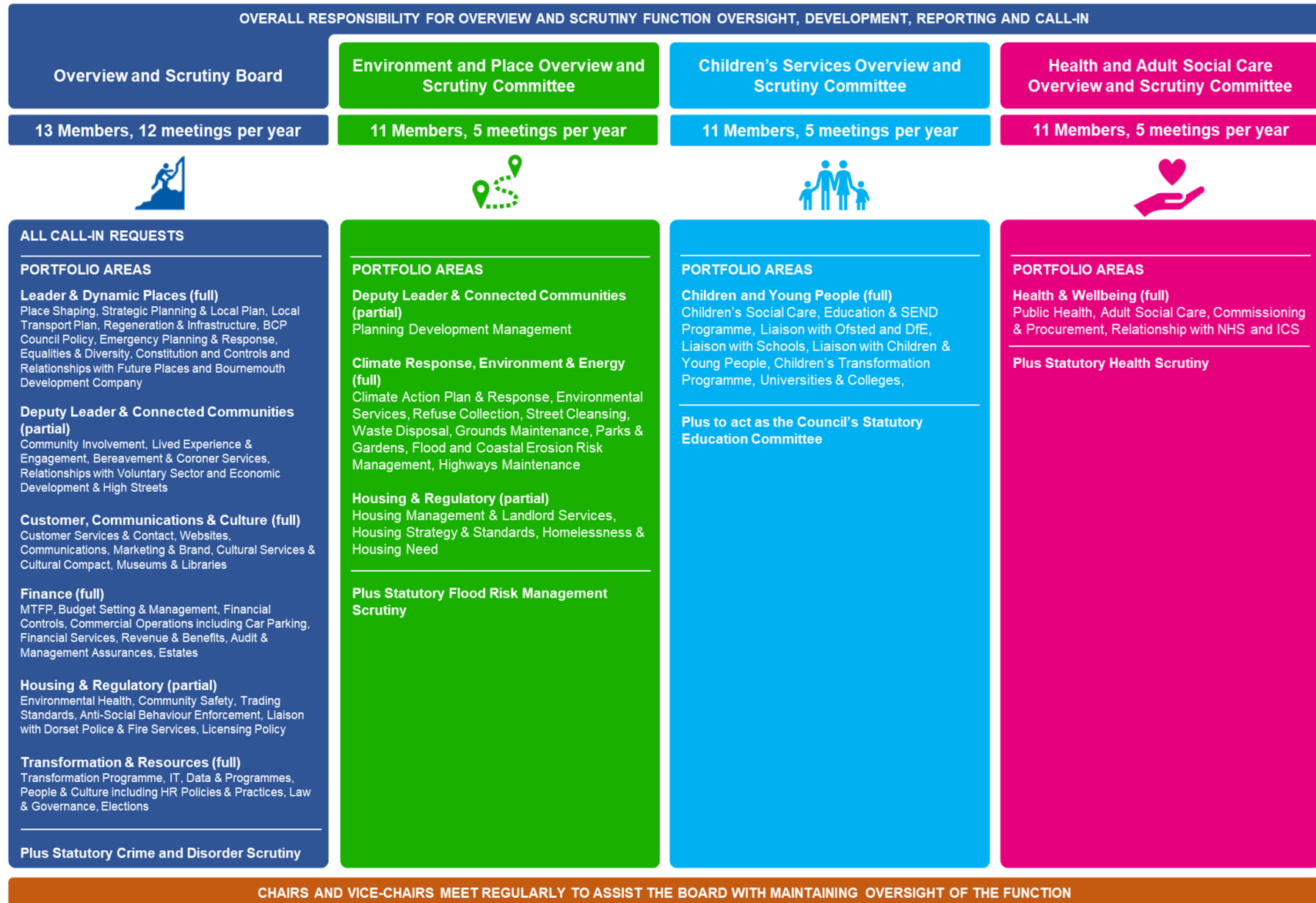
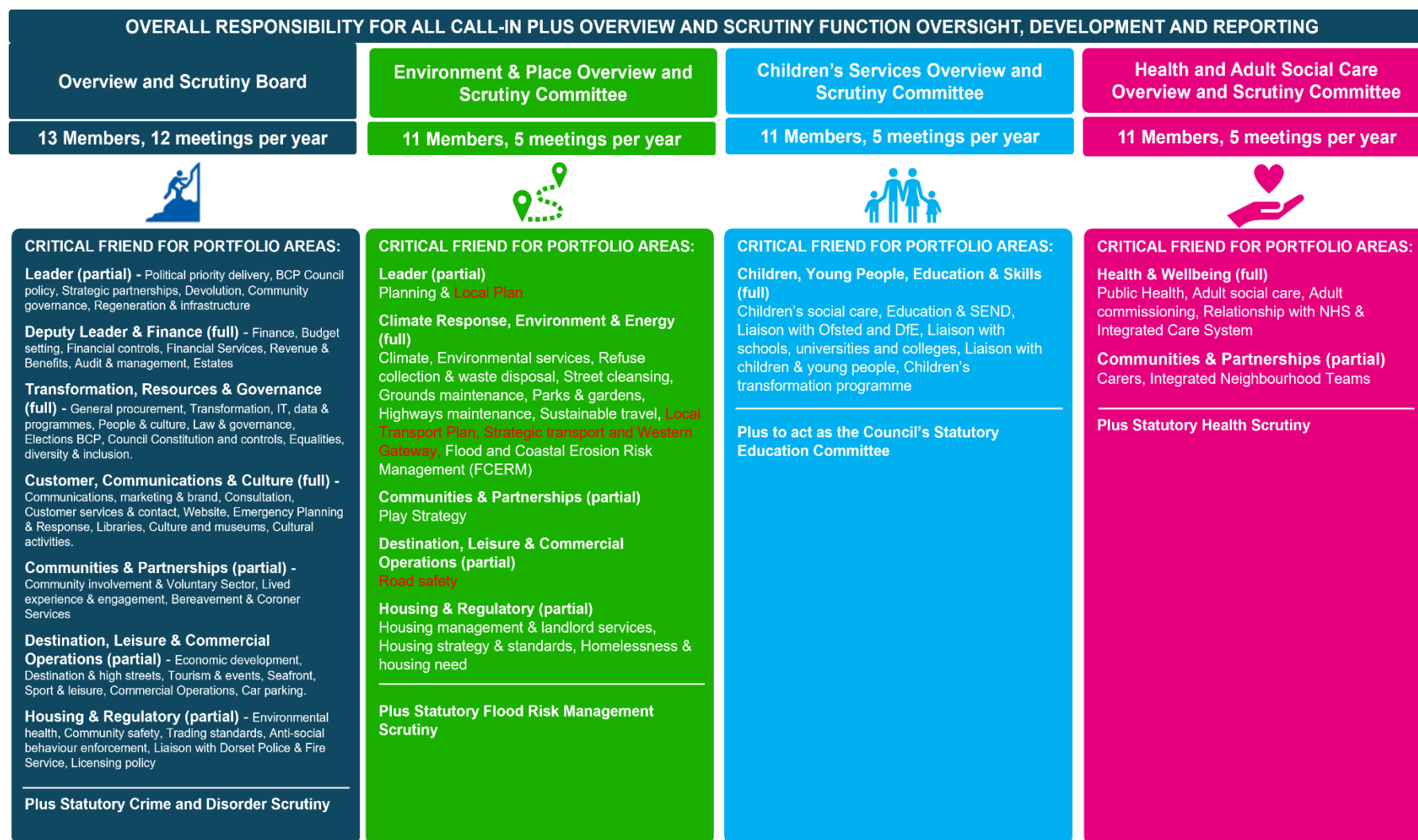


Figure 1b – Proposed Overview & Scrutiny Committee Structure



11. The most significant of the committee revisions in September 2023 was the establishment of monthly meetings for the O&S Board, enabling better opportunity for the tracking of Cabinet activity and recommendations to Cabinet on forthcoming decisions. This change increased the overall scheduled O&S meeting numbers from 20 per year to 27, an uplift of 35%. The resourcing implications associated with this change are outlined in paragraphs 55 to 66 below.
12. All committees undertook annual work programming. Following O&S committee changes, the O&S Board and the newly named Environment and Place O&S Committee benefitted from supported action/learning workshops, led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The aim of this activity was to:
 - Develop O&S members' work programming skills to equip them to create work programmes rooted in good practice.
 - Refine the approach to scrutiny by articulating a more refined role for O&S. This saw the establishment of a 'sustainability lens' and a 'resident impact lens', to be used by the Environment and Place Committee and O&S Board respectively. The committees also developed a framework setting out their approach to topic selection.
 - Specifically address a recommendation arising within the council's Best Value Notice Action Plan to reduce the level of pre-decision scrutiny on O&S work plans and include more policy development work. Work was targeted towards these committees as they previously undertook the highest level of pre-decision scrutiny.
 - Generate a work plan based on the above good practices.

The framework developed through this work is attached at Appendix 2. This provides a mechanism to support future work programming in all O&S committees, and communicate the aims of O&S to the wider council and stakeholders. The learning captured through this work will be applied to the other O&S committees in their next round of work programming.

13. Work was progressed against the O&S Action Plan, agreed by Council in September 2023. The action plan sets out strategic improvements required to bring O&S activity in line with statutory guidance. This work is secondary to the support of core functions for O&S such as supporting committee meetings and working groups in accordance with the constitution. Progress against the action plan is set out in more detail in paragraphs 47-54 below.
14. Chairs and Vice Chairs were supported in their leadership roles through regular meetings to share good practice, challenges and to provide strategic monitoring to the O&S function.

Summary - 2023/24 committee activity, statistics and analysis

15. A summary of work undertaken across all O&S committees is attached to this report at Appendix 3. Highlights included working groups on blue badge waiting times and the use of data to strengthen scrutiny; a focus on the safety valve programme relating to children's services, and a focus on climate change and sustainability.

Committee Statistics

16. Committee activity has been assessed to provide an understanding of the breakdown of work undertaken during 2023/24, the resulting outputs and potential areas for development. The following data is set out below:

- Average number of agenda items per committee, to assess against good practice levels.
- Working groups undertaken.
- Agenda item categories, to provide a breakdown of the type of work undertaken by each committee.
- Outputs – an assessment of the number of agenda items leading to substantive recommendations.

These have been analysed to provide a commentary on areas that align to good practice and those where further development is recommended to enhance the value provided by the O&S function.

17. It should be noted that this data provides an indication of where O&S has directed its resources in 2023/24 and the resulting output, however not all O&S benefit can be assessed in this way and reflected through data. Some O&S outcomes can be 'softer', for example:

- Public demonstration of test and challenge on matters of community importance or concern.
- Comments raised through scrutiny may be reported by O&S Chairs to Cabinet but not formulated into recommendations.
- Actions raised through meetings and tracked by committees may not be captured as formal recommendations. Action tracking is particularly used by the Health and Children's O&S committees who undertake a closer monitoring role with their respective service areas.
- Informal discussions between decision makers and O&S members can influence the early direction of travel for a policy.
- The intention alone of an O&S committee to provide scrutiny to a certain area can trigger further work prior to reporting that can strengthen decision making.

Agenda item levels

18. The average number of agenda items, 'for information' items and working groups for each committee during the period is set out in table 1 below.

Table 1 – Agenda Items per O&S committee, 2023/24			
O&S Committee	Average number of agenda items	'For information' items, circulated outside of committee (annual total)	Working Groups
Overview and Scrutiny Board	2.1	0	1
Environment & Place	1.6	0	0
Children's Services	4.1	8	0
Health and Adult Social Care	4.0	3	1
Corporate & Community	1.5	0	0

Analysis

19. Attempting to scrutinise a large number of items can dilute the benefit of scrutiny. A 'deep dive' approach to a smaller number of items is encouraged over a 'broad brush' approach to a larger number of items. For this reason the recommended maximum number of items per committee agenda is two to three.
20. Prior to the 2023 local elections, legacy O&S Committees in BCP often held lengthy meetings with multiple agenda items, creating unmanageable workloads and in some cases additional monthly meetings as standard to accommodate the O&S work timetabled. This was particularly seen in the area of work covered by the O&S Board, with 33 additional meetings held by the previous O&S Board during 2019-21.
21. It is evident that the approach to scrutiny selection has changed in both the O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee with levels falling into line with good practice. This is a significant improvement against previous years of O&S activity.
22. Children's Services and Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committees would benefit from refining workloads further to keep to the recommended levels and maximise the effectiveness of scrutiny undertaken with a greater focus on 'deep dive' work on a smaller number of topics.
23. Two investigative working groups were undertaken during 2023/24, on the topics of blue badge waiting times and data use in overview and scrutiny work. Both working groups led to a number of recommendations. The constitution allows for one working group to be undertaken per committee at a time, with this form of scrutiny work

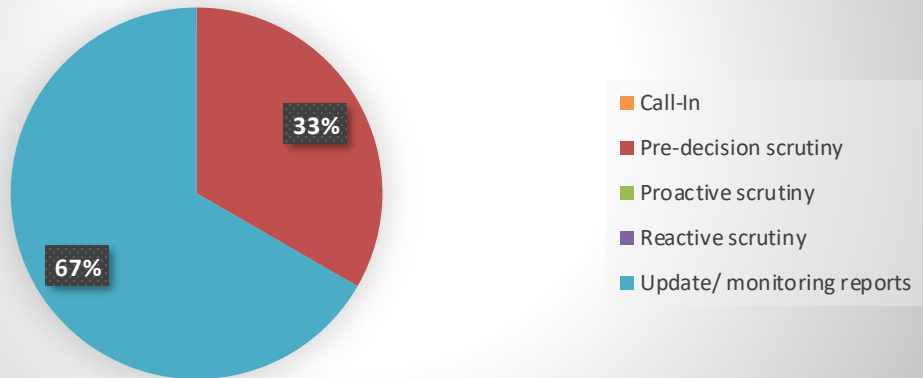
being an ideal approach for proactive work which is likely to lead to the most valuable outcomes. Committee time can be used flexibly, for example as an evidence session to contribute to the scope of a working group, or in the form of an inquiry day, which may condense the inquiry of a working group into a focussed session. Proactive work of this nature is resource intensive and must be balanced against overall resources available to support the O&S function but should be prioritised wherever possible as a form of scrutiny that is likely to lead to more impactful outcomes.

O&S work categories

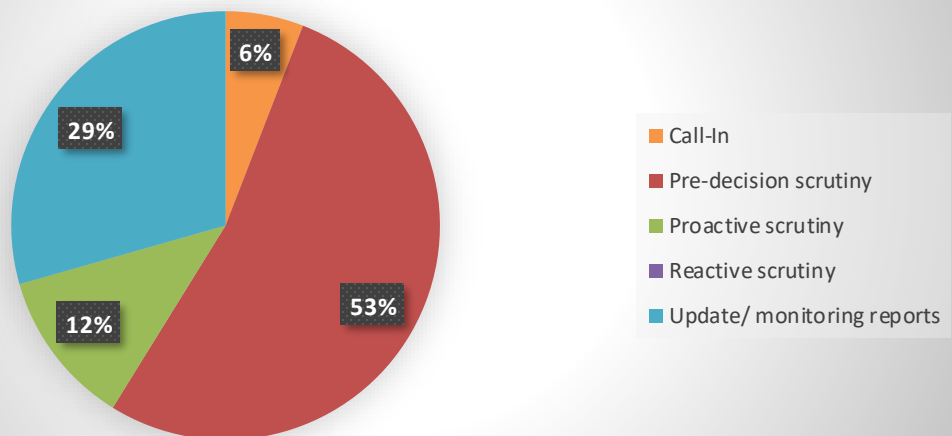
24. A breakdown of the categories of scrutiny items considered by each committee are set out in the diagrams below. These are broken down as follows:

- **Call-in**
Reports relating to the statutory right of O&S to 'call-in' an executive decision that has been made but not yet implemented. Revision to the remit of scrutiny committees placed all call-in responsibility with the O&S Board from September 2023 onwards.
- **Pre-decision scrutiny**
Scrutiny of a report close to the point of decision making – eg. a Cabinet report.
- **Proactive scrutiny**
Early policy development work and exploration of future options for service delivery.
- **Reactive scrutiny**
Scrutiny of emerging issues that arise throughout the year and can't easily be planned for in advance.
- **Update/monitoring reports**
Information giving reports.

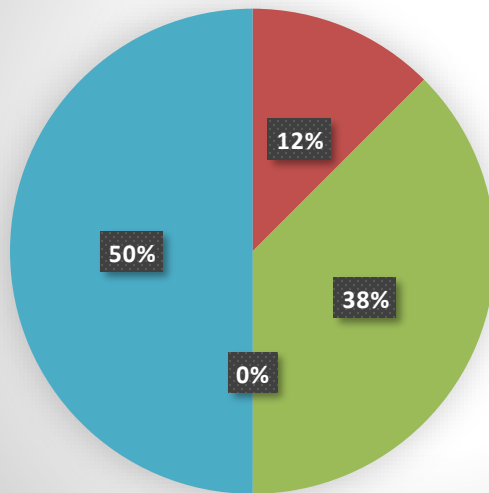
Corporate & Community O&S Agenda Item Categories (decommissioned September 2023)



O&S Board Agenda Item Categories (established September 2023)

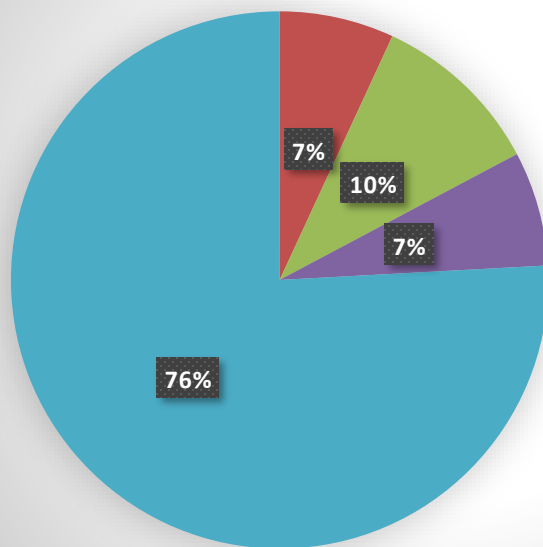


Environment & Place O&S Agenda Item Categories

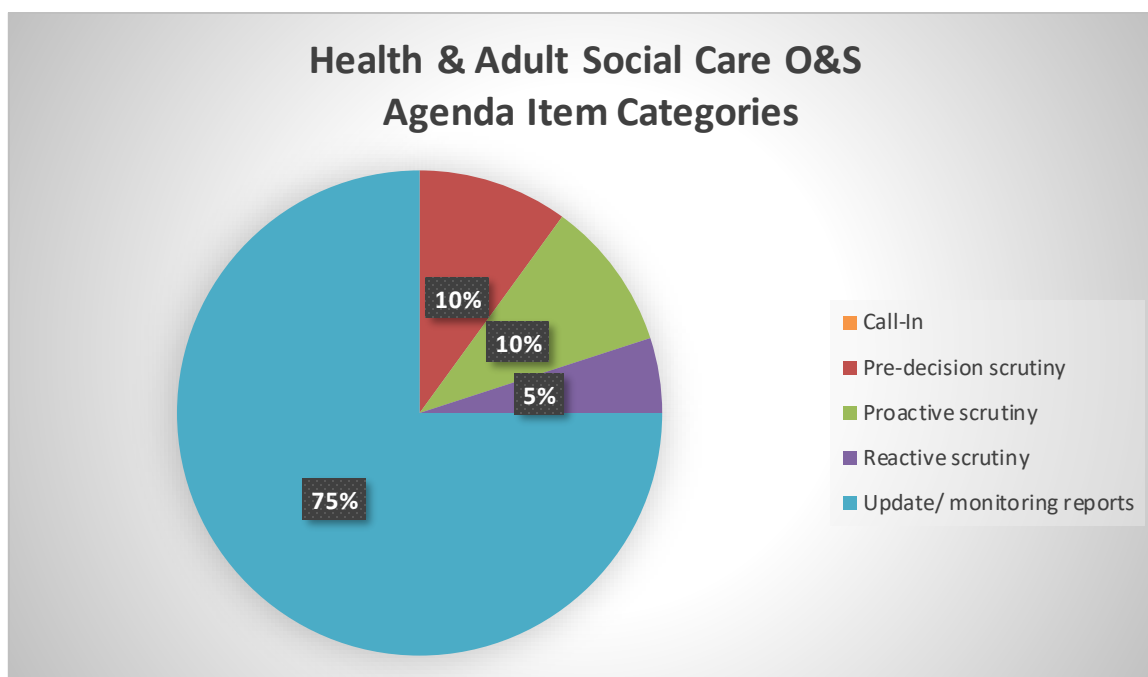


- Call-In
- Pre-decision scrutiny
- Proactive scrutiny
- Reactive scrutiny
- Update/ monitoring reports

Children's Services O&S Agenda Item Categories



- Call-In
- Pre-decision scrutiny
- Proactive scrutiny
- Reactive scrutiny
- Update/ monitoring reports



Analysis

Call-In

25. O&S call-in should be used as a last resort where there is a concern that a decision has not been made in keeping with budget and policy framework of the council or the principles of decision making as set out in the council's constitution.

26. O&S guidance states:

"Scrutiny committees do have the power to 'call in' decisions, i.e. ask the executive to reconsider them before they are implemented, but should not view it as a substitute for early involvement in the decision-making process or as a party-political tool."

27. There was one call-in item considered during 2023/24, in keeping with an average of one call in per year during the 2019-23 period. The level of call-in items in BCP therefore does not of itself indicate a concern with existing governance arrangements, or excessive use of call-in as a party-political tool. Low call-in levels may be an indication that governance arrangements in the council offer appropriate alternative opportunities to test and challenge decision making, such as a suitable level of pre-decision scrutiny opportunities and flexibility for all non- executive councillors to ask questions in O&S meetings and Cabinet meetings.

Pre-decision scrutiny

28. In 2023/24, greater refinement of O&S topics was strongly encouraged through work induction training, work programming activity and through ongoing support to chairs and committees. The aim was to create a more even balance between pre-decision scrutiny items and proactive scrutiny items.

29. The levels of pre-decision scrutiny in 2023/24 are now far lower than in previous years. Although these weren't assessed in the same way during the 2019-23 period it is known that, in some committees, pre-decision scrutiny dominated work programmes. The highest level of pre-decision scrutiny is now just under 50%, for O&S Board work. This is to be expected as the Board remit relates to a higher proportion of service areas and items which generate Cabinet decisions. Board meetings also align to the Cabinet timetable to specifically allow opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny before every Cabinet meeting.
30. A specific action to reduce the level of pre-decision scrutiny was incorporated into the council's Best Value Notice Action Plan and has now been completed as a result of the reduction in levels seen in committees.

Proactive scrutiny

31. Proactive scrutiny levels are limited across all committees and could be increased. Good practice indicates that proactive, 'deep dive' scrutiny is the form of scrutiny activity most likely to provide value-added outcomes. All scrutiny committees should aim to prioritise proactive scrutiny wherever possible.
32. The O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committee focussed heavily on proactive work suggestions during their annual work programming activity, and it is expected that these levels will increase in 2024/25 for these committees. The remaining O&S committees will be encouraged to take a similar approach during their next round of work programming.
33. Effective annual work programming, with minimal changes throughout the year and a reduction in the overall number of items considered by O&S would provide time to scope and undertake proactive work effectively.

Update/ monitoring reports

34. Reducing the level of update/ monitoring reports received by all committees would release capacity for more proactive work.
35. Monitoring reports took up the largest proportion of the work plan for four out of five committees operating during the 23/24 period. However good practice is for all information-based reports to be received outside of a committee setting, reserving committee time for value-added scrutiny that is likely to lead to recommendations. All committees should aim to reduce this level by receiving information items in other ways. Officers are actively encouraging this approach.

Reactive scrutiny

36. Reactive scrutiny is minimal but has occurred in some committees. An example of this is the Children's Services O&S Committee work on the Safety Valve Programme. All committees are encouraged to reserve room within their annual plans to provide flexibility to respond to arising issues throughout the year.

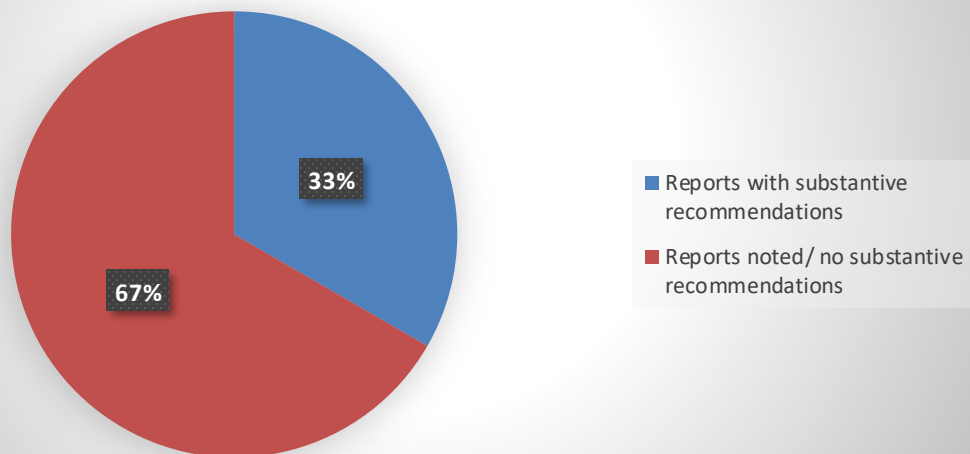
Outputs

37. O&S agenda item outputs are set out in the charts below. These were assessed across all committees to establish:
- reports generating substantive recommendations to Cabinet, portfolio holders, officers or partners of the council;

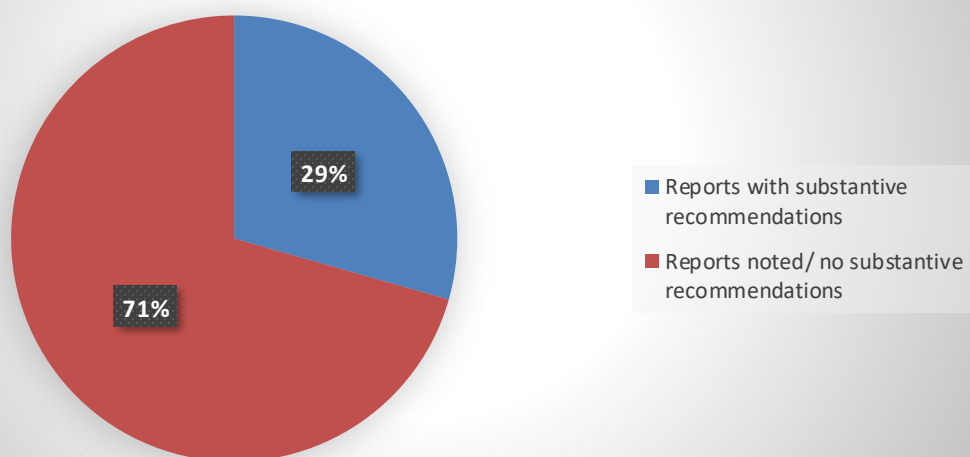
- reports that were noted or led to no substantive recommendations.

It should be noted that actions and comments raised by O&S, rather than formal recommendations, are not captured in the below data.

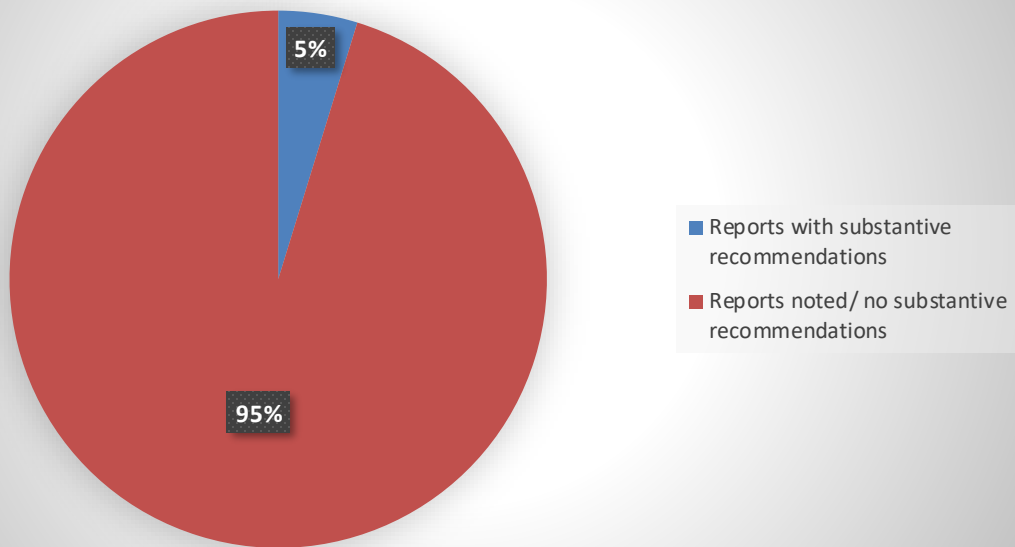
Corporate & Community O&S outputs (decommissioned September 2023)



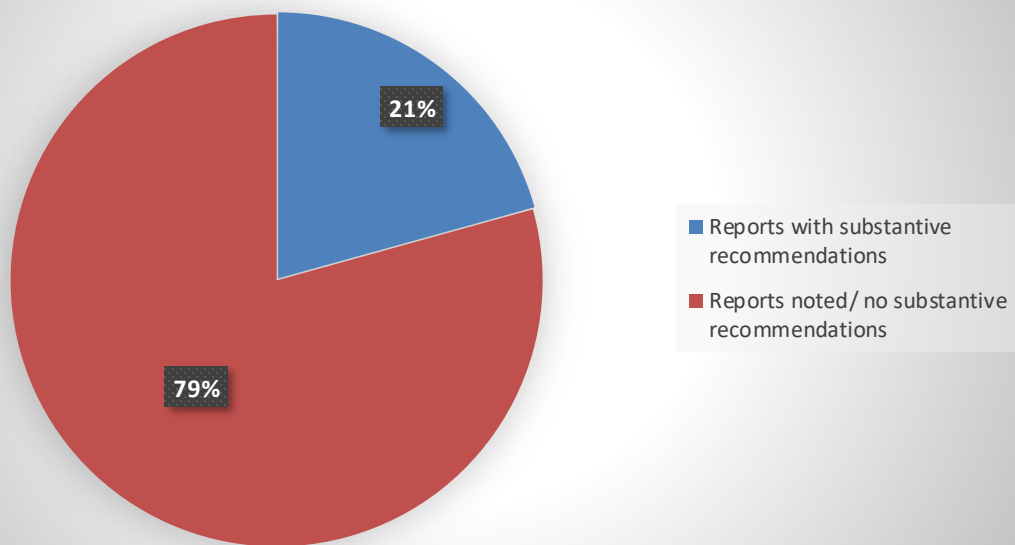
O&S Board outputs (established September 2023)

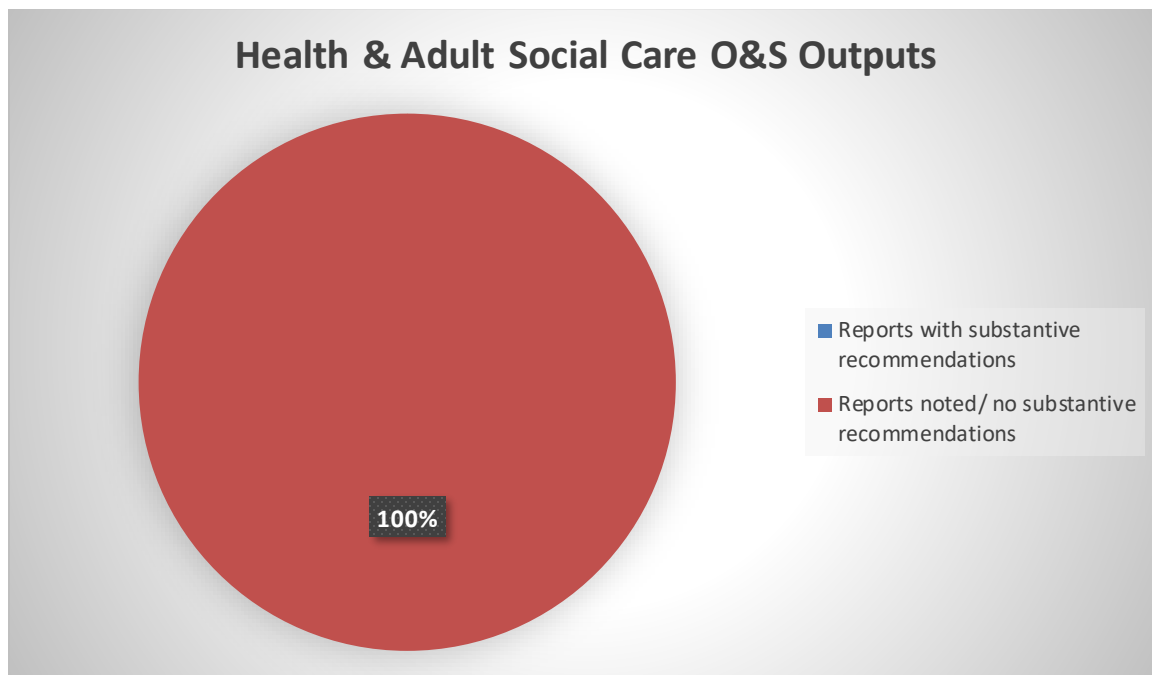


Environment & Place O&S Outputs



Children's Services O&S Outputs





Analysis

38. The highest level of substantive recommendations was generated by Corporate and Community O&S Committee at 33%, with the lowest generated by Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee at 0%. To provide value through the work of O&S, all committees should look to increase the level of agenda items leading to substantive recommendations.
39. O&S comments gathered through pre-decision scrutiny may be reported to Cabinet to give a 'flavour' of councillor views to inform decision making. These may not always be captured by committees as formal recommendations and will not be reflected in the charts provided above. Where possible, committees should seek to strengthen comments into recommendations, to give weight to the view provided to Cabinet and clearer demonstrable output from O&S work. Clarifying the key lines of enquiry for scrutiny of a report can assist with the generation of clearer recommendations. This is explored further in paragraph 44 below.
40. A close alignment of proactive O&S work to the priorities of the council is likely to lead to the most value-added recommendations and outcomes. Substantive recommendations, and the resulting added value provided by the O&S function, could therefore be increased by a strengthened 'whole council' approach towards O&S in BCP Council. Work suggestions from Cabinet and Council to O&S were minimal during 2023/24, with proactive O&S work during this period largely driven by O&S member suggestions. By working more closely with the executive to identify opportunities for contribution to developing policy, O&S can have greater impact through its work, using unique statutory powers to surface issues, bring together stakeholders, explore issues in depth and test and challenge solutions. This approach has the potential to strengthen the decision and policy landscape of the council and support decision makers. Effective communications between O&S leads and executive members are essential for these opportunities to be identified, supported by a proactive approach to O&S engagement from lead officers. This is

in keeping with the strongest message set out in statutory guidance, that the culture of the council is fundamental to the success of the function:

“The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails. While everyone in an authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority.”

41. O&S members have been provided with training and regular guidance on work prioritisation and should continue to bear good practices in mind when considering the likely impact of work selected. Items that are not likely to generate substantive recommendations should wherever possible not be included within work programmes. This approach is encouraged by officers through annual work programming activity and regular support to committees when reviewing work programmes throughout the year. Topic prioritisation can be particularly difficult in a council with a wide range of political views and priorities and requires O&S members to make tough decisions, with Chairs and Vice Chairs leading in this respect. This robust approach to work programming could be strengthened across all committees.
42. Establishing a clear role and focus for O&S can be key to ensuring that work selected will add value to the organisation. O&S has wide ranging powers but guidance states that these are likely to be too wide to be meaningful if not refined to a key focus or set of priorities:

“... authorities should take steps to ensure scrutiny has a clear role and focus within the organisation, i.e. a niche within which it can clearly demonstrate it adds value. Therefore, prioritisation is necessary to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority – this is one of the most challenging parts of scrutiny, and a critical element to get right if it is to be recognised as a strategic function of the authority.”
43. Acting on this good practice, the O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee have now established lenses of ‘resident impact’ and ‘sustainability’ for their work respectively. This narrows the scope through which the committees intend to select and approach work with the aim of establishing a clearer role for the committees. This more refined focus for these committees was developed through action/ learning work supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and targeted specifically at these committees to embed good practices following the change in the O&S committee structure. The learning from this work will now be rolled out to Children’s Services O&S and Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committees and strongly encouraged for all committees going forward to give clarity of purpose to the work of O&S.
44. All committees would benefit from refining the scope for all work items using documentation of Key Lines of Enquiry. This will ensure that the information request from O&S committees is considered, clear and is scoped with a likelihood of generating impactful outputs. This approach is now being encouraged with all committees. Through this process, the angle to be taken by scrutiny, and the possible outcomes of the work should be considered in advance to determine if recommendations will be likely. Even items of apparent high importance should not be prioritised if there is no likelihood of having impact through the scrutiny provided.
45. Pre-meetings, led by O&S Chairs, can encourage a clearer focus on Key Lines of Enquiry during committee debate, and provide another mechanism to clarify in

advance the intended outcome of the scrutiny sessions planned. This approach is regularly discussed with O&S Chairs as a way of strengthening O&S outcomes and has been adopted by the Environment & Place O&S Committee. All committees would benefit from the use of pre-meetings.

46. Some committees undertake a greater monitoring role than others. Whilst committee members may become well informed through monitoring reports, if the level of this is too high there is little work plan capacity remaining for proactive, value-added scrutiny. This is a particular challenge for the Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee which receives information from both within the council and from partners such as the NHS on service design and delivery. Similarly, the Children's Services O&S Committee closely monitors the improvement journey within the children's services area. Establishing a critical set of monitoring areas and incorporating more diverse ways of working will help these O&S members to remain informed in priority areas, whilst reserving committee time for value added scrutiny. Alternative methods for information receipt could include:

- informal briefings,
- independent research and horizon scanning
- receiving 'information reports' outside of meetings
- establishing rapporteurs to maintain an overview of designated areas and report back to committee by exception.

A mix of these information sharing methods have been used across committees, and a more consistent approach to information sharing will be encouraged in 2024/25, with the aim of reducing the overall level of 'for noting' reports across all committees.

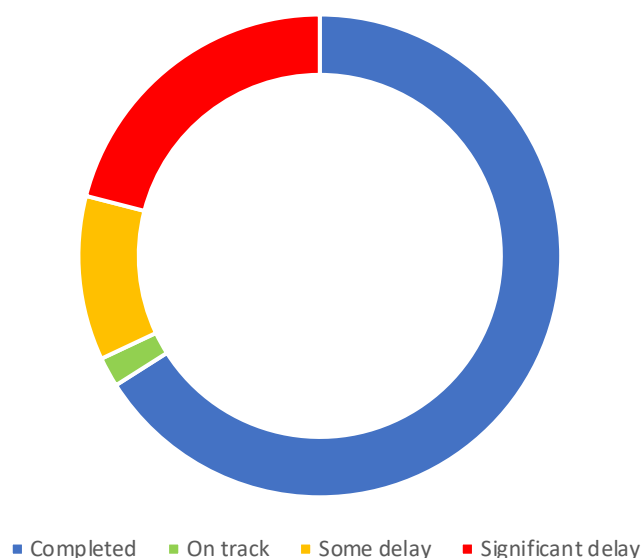
O&S Action Plan

47. An O&S Action Plan was developed in 2023 to provide detail on strategic actions identified to improve O&S activity in BCP Council and bring practices in line with statutory guidance for O&S. The action plan was agreed by Council in September 2023.
48. The action plan also addresses O&S areas for development as identified through work which responds to the 'Best Value Notice' that was issued to the Council by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) in August 2023. This was in response to the completion of an external assurance review carried out by DLUHC. The findings were in line with those of the Chief Executive's internal assurance review and all activity was monitored through the BCP Council Best Value Notice Action Plan. The recommendations have been welcomed in dealing with historical issues and setting a new tone for the Council. All actions relating to O&S within the Best Value Notice Action Plan have now been completed.
49. To establish improvement actions for O&S, all practices within the O&S function were assessed against the standards set out in 'Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities' (2019) in a desktop exercise undertaken by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer in Spring 2023. The guidance provides a benchmark for good working practices in O&S and is statutory, meaning that guidance should be followed unless there is a good reason not to.
50. Much of the statutory guidance relates to ways of working and the council-wide approach to O&S. The clearest message is the need for a strong organisational

culture in which there is a collective ownership of the success of O&S, parity of esteem for O&S and value placed on the challenge that O&S can provide.

51. The O&S action plan follows the themes of the statutory guidance. All relevant paragraphs of the guidance have been included within the action plan, to aid reader's understanding of why actions have been identified, and the resulting plan for improvement is comprehensive. There are a total of **120** actions, some of which overlap. Where actions are similar (e.g. reflecting different aspects of councillor training required) they remain split into separate actions to demonstrate how these will uphold the statutory guidance. It should be noted that for this reason the action plan is highly detailed and serves as an operational tool to progress actions as well as for reporting on progress.
52. The action plan at Appendix 4 provides a detailed update against each of the actions as of June 2024. 66% of the actions have now been completed, a 21% increase since December 2023. Of the remaining actions, there has been an increase to those that are now significantly delayed with 21% now within this category. 11 % have experienced some delay and 2% are on track to complete as planned.

Progress against actions



53. Improvement actions identified within the plan were set over a period of one year for completion. This time frame was ambitious and whilst good progress has been made in many areas, some actions have been impacted upon by other O&S activity taking place concurrently and have not progressed. In particular, the increase in meeting numbers following the changes made to O&S committees in September 2023 has impacted on resources available to progress strategic improvements to the O&S function. Core O&S functions such as support to committee meetings will continue to be prioritised during 2024/25 and work against the action plan will be progressed where resources allow.
54. Responsibility for monitoring the O&S Action Plan sits with the O&S Board, which is supported in this role by regular monitoring in O&S Chairs/ Vice Chairs meetings.

Progress on the Action Plan will also be reported annually to Council through this report.

Resourcing O&S

55. Council agreed revisions to the committee structure in 2023 which formally increased O&S committee meeting numbers. Along with special meetings called by committees to respond to urgent business, a total of 27 meetings were held during 2023/24.
56. Historically, O&S meeting levels have been high as a result of additional special meetings called by committees, however formalised committee meeting numbers are now at the highest level since the start of BCP Council. By the end of the reporting period, planned meetings per year were 35% higher than the level of O&S meetings planned for the same period in 2022/23.
57. Resources to support O&S are stretched. The Democratic Services team provides direct officer support to the O&S function. There has been no increase in officer resource to support the increase in O&S meeting numbers agreed by Council in September 2023.
58. The Democratic Services structure was designed to support the service approved by the Shadow Authority which anticipated 22 O&S meetings per year with a larger Democratic Services team to support this. Since the establishment of BCP Council, the officer support available to O&S has not been adequate for the level of O&S meetings held by the council, which, through many changes to the O&S committee structure, have predominantly been above the level anticipated by the Shadow Authority. In 2021 the service budget was reduced by 14.9% to support the corporate budget pressures. Following the most recent changes to the O&S structure the service is now considered to be operating above maximum capacity. Taking into account the increased meetings and reduction in manpower resources, the ratio of meetings per equivalent officer FTE to provide support has increased by over 28%. This is excluding any additional special meetings called by committees. This has an impact on the level of support that can be provided to the O&S function and the resulting outputs.
59. To illustrate the officer support available to O&S, activity has been broadly split into a range of areas in the following priority order:
 - a. core functions of the service such as the servicing of meetings, agendas, minutes, advice and guidance, ongoing work planning support;
 - b. support to proactive scrutiny such as annual work programming for all committees, scoping and research, working group support, planning and supporting evidence sessions;
 - c. strategic improvements to the function in line with the O&S Action Plan.
60. An increase in meeting numbers without a match in the level of officer resource has required that support is diverted from activities within the 'b' and 'c' categories above, to ensure that core, statutory requirements within category 'a' are met. This will vary throughout the year according to additional pressures upon the team, which supports all decision-making bodies of the council in addition to O&S committees.
61. Additional O&S meetings also have implications council-wide for officer attendance and support to scrutiny activity.
62. Under the constitution, all O&S committees may undertake one working group at a time. These fall under category 'b' of the activity outlined above. In line with good

practice, working groups and other 'deep dive' inquiry mechanisms are encouraged as a means of providing the most effective O&S outcomes, however, it is fortunate that not all committees have chosen to take up this option during 2023/24 as this would have had a further impact on resources.

63. A 'whole council' approach to O&S, with working groups more fully scoped and overseen by service areas across the council rather than Democratic Services, would provide greater resource to support O&S work. It should be noted that service area - led approach to scrutiny carries a risk that the independent approach of scrutiny will be affected, as service areas will have an inherent viewpoint which may impact on the investigations undertaken by O&S.
64. In summary, councillors should note that the overall impact of the O&S function will continue to be limited by the dedicated levels of resource available to support it. Statutory guidance states:

"The resource an authority allocates to the scrutiny function plays a pivotal role in determining how successful that function is and therefore the value it can add to the work of the authority. Ultimately it is up to each authority to decide on the resource it provides, but every authority should recognise that creating and sustaining an effective scrutiny function requires them to allocate resources to it."

65. Councillors can take some action to mitigate the resource pressures upon the O&S function and promote valuable outputs:
- Strong and realistic work planning, with minimal revisions and retained capacity for arising issues, will limit the need for additional meetings over and above the 27 planned per year.
 - Flexibility of approach to O&S resource, with committee meetings used for more deep dive work – such as to support a working group through a public evidence gathering session.
 - Monitoring reports can be received in other ways, outside of committee to free up meeting time for value- added scrutiny.
 - O&S councillors can undertake a higher level of research and horizon scanning independently, to review data and policy sources, maintain an overview of council activity and bring an evidence-led approach to their scrutiny. A [Data Use Toolkit](#) has been developed by the Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee to support councillors in this respect with the aim of rolling out a similar toolkit for all other O&S committees.
 - Informal relationships with executive members and officers can be strengthened and shared across committees through the use of rapporteurs. This will keep O&S councillors informed of developing policy or concerns which may benefit from scrutiny and encourage the regular information sharing that is necessary to understand where the most value-added scrutiny opportunities lie.

These actions are in line with the principle that the O&S function should be member-led.

66. The benefit of effectively resourcing scrutiny is explored in further detail within O&S guidance and set out more fully in the Action Plan at Appendix 4.

Options Appraisal

67. The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report is for information and comment. An options appraisal is not relevant to this report.

Summary of financial implications

68. There are no direct financial implications related with the production of this report. The report explores the implications of resourcing O&S in paragraphs 55 to 66 above.

Summary of legal implications

69. Overview and Scrutiny is a statutory function of all councils operating an executive model of decision making. Improvements to the function, outlined in the report, will ensure that the work of O&S Committees in BCP Council complies with relevant legislation and upholds statutory guidance.

Summary of human resources implications

70. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

71. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Summary of public health implications

72. There are no public health implications arising from this report.

Summary of equality implications

73. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Summary of risk assessment

74. The improvements identified for O&S, as set out in the O&S Action Plan at Appendix 4, will ensure that statutory Government guidance is upheld. There is a risk that the guidance will not be properly upheld by the Council if actions identified are not taken.

Background papers

Published works:

[‘Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities’](#),
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

[Best Value Notice Action Plan 2023/24](#)

[Corporate plan – ‘A Shared Vision for Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, 2024-28’](#)

[O&S Data Use Toolkit](#),

Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee

Appendices

Appendix 1– Overview and Scrutiny statutory powers and BCP context

Appendix 2 – Overview & Scrutiny framework, developed by E&P O&S Committee and O&S Board.

Appendix 3 - Summary of O&S Activity 2023-24.

Appendix 4 – Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

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BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY STATUTORY POWERS AND BCP CONTEXT

WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

1. Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is an integral part of the Council's governance structure and is a statutory requirement for BCP Council. All councils operating executive arrangements must have at least one O&S committee. In BCP Council, O&S activity is carried out by four O&S committees formed of councillors and co-opted members. These are:
 - The Overview and Scrutiny Board
 - Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
 - Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2. The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Committees is to help develop policy, to carry out reviews of Council and other local services, and to hold decision makers to account.
3. O&S committees are not decision-making bodies but can influence decisions through powers to obtain information, require attendance from council officers and members and to make recommendations. Under the [Local Government Act 2000](#), O&S committees have the right to scrutinise '*any matter affecting the local authority area or the inhabitants of the area.*'
4. Additional powers to scrutinise NHS services and review the work of the local community safety partnership mean that O&S committees have an important role in acting as a 'check and balance' to decisions made both within the council and in external organisations.
5. The overall aim of O&S activity is to impact in a tangible way on the council and the residents it serves. The Ministerial foreword of '[Overview and Scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities](#)' by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) states:

"The role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an authority's decision-makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy.

Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the authority itself. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership, and service failure."

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SCRUTINY

6. The majority of councils base their O&S arrangements on commonly held principles of good scrutiny. These are set out in the [BCP Constitution](#), which states that the O&S committees shall:
- a) contribute to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend';
 - b) be a Councillor led and owned function that seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development;
 - c) enable the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process;
 - d) engage in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence;
 - e) contribute to and reflect the vision and priorities of the Council; and
 - f) be agile and be able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.

Through their work, O&S councillors should seek to uphold these principles.

SUPPORTING THE AMBITIONS AND VALUES OF THE COUNCIL

7. O&S can support the high level aims of the council by aligning its work to the priorities identified within the council's corporate plan entitled '[A Shared Vision for Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole, 2024-28](#)'. The plan was refreshed in May 2024. With the remit of O&S committees spanning all service areas of the council, O&S activity has the potential to support the following vision and priorities identified within the corporate plan:

Our vision:

- Where people, nature, coast and towns come together in sustainable, safe and healthy communities.

Our priorities:

- Our place and environment: Vibrant places, where people and nature flourish, with a thriving economy in a healthy, natural environment.
- Our people and communities: Everyone leads a fulfilled life, maximising opportunity for all.

This could be achieved through alignment of O&S work plans to policy areas earmarked for development within the corporate plan. O&S can also provide benefit by monitoring the progress of the council against the ambitions set out in the corporate plan, through engagement with the relevant aspects of performance dashboards.

1. Development of this framework and its application by O&S Committees

Workshops were held with members of O&S committees across December 2023- February 2024, supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The aim of the workshops was to develop an approach to work programming at BCP for 2024/25 and beyond that is based on good practice and addresses improvements already identified for O&S as set out in [Assurance Review Action Plan](#) and the [O&S Action Plan](#). One output of this work is the framework set out below.

During 2024, the O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committee have been following the principles set out in this framework. The same good practices will be rolled out to all O&S committees in 2024 and used to support future annual work programming.

2. Using a lens to select and approach scrutiny topics

O&S statutory guidance recommends that a 'lens' or key set of priorities be established by O&S committees, to clearly communicate their role and how they will add value to the work of the organisation. The statements also clarify the role of the committee to the public.

Established lenses provide a tool to assist O&S members in work programming, to sift suggestions for work into a realistic annual work programme for each committee and should be referred to throughout the year as arising suggestions for work are made.

O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committees agreed lenses in 2024. Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committees have not yet considered the application of lenses to their work. Lenses are set out below. It is suggested that these lenses be reviewed annually to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

The **O&S Board** will approach work through a lens of **RESIDENT IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE**, such as considering:

- benefits that could be brought to residents by **delivering services** in different ways
- how the areas of highest **financial risk** for the council may impact on residents
- the council's **relationship with the public** and work that can be done to strengthen this.

The **Environment & Place O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens of **SUSTAINABILITY**, with a specific focus on the following priorities, drawn from the Corporate Strategy:

- **Climate change** is tackled through sustainable policies and practice
- Our **green spaces flourish** and support the wellbeing of being people and nature
- Our communities have pride in our **streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces**
- **Good quality homes are** accessible, sustainable and affordable for all

The **Children's Services O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens ofTBC

The **Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens ofTBC

3. Using a framework to structure O&S activity:

A framework for supporting different types of scrutiny work is set out in the table below. Scrutiny is split out into **proactive work**, **reactive work** and **pre-decision scrutiny**. When developing this framework, O&S councillors gave a clear steer that they wish to continue to undertake all these elements of scrutiny through their work programmes.

As with the lenses outlined at 2 above, the scrutiny framework will also be used to communicate the role and intentions of the committees to the wider council and the public. It is suggested that the framework be reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Proactive Scrutiny

What is it?

- Early policy work - work focused on policy development and exploring options for the future. Also described as 'overview work' in BCP.
- Framed as a series of questions or 'key lines of enquiry', to which O&S seeks answers. These are found through the gathering of evidence, with a view to informing future policy.
- Driven by the O&S committee itself, or may be in response to a suggestion from councillors, community or decision makers.
- Less likely to directly align to another piece of work already underway in the council, eg. a cabinet report.
- Fulfils BCP principles of good scrutiny:

'O&S engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence'

'O&S is a member led and owned function'

'O&S enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process'

Examples

Cllr suggestions based on their understanding of local needs, eg:

- What more can we do to meet local people's housing needs?
- To what extent do we as a council as a community understand the likely challenges of climate change, and what action do we need to take?

Method for undertaking scrutiny:

- Either "in committee", as a whole-meeting challenge session followed up by agreement of recommendations at the next meeting, or a short and sharp working group with a group meeting two or three times between meetings.
- Outcomes are unlikely to be met by an officer report – proactive scrutiny relies on councillors scoping and directing the work and asking for specific data, information and evidence to be brought by relevant stakeholders.
- Recommendations are made, usually to Cabinet or Portfolio Holders. They must respond to these recommendations.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Potential to add significantly more value than other work by using powers to gather evidence from stakeholders, investigate an issue in depth and find solutions. These may be used to inform policy in a significant and meaningful way.
- ✓ Potential to select and scope topics to have maximum positive impact on the communities of BCP.
- ✓ Can generate a clearer set of recommendations that can be communicated in the council and to the public.
- ✓ Easier for O&S to own the programme of work and not be affected by other factors (eg. movement of decisions on the Cabinet Forward Plan).
- ✗ Resource intensive for officers and councillors.
- ✗ May require committee to work more flexibly to find capacity for the depth of work, eg. swapping committee meetings to undertake working group meetings instead.

Method for selection of proactive scrutiny topics:

- Invite suggestions from councillors annually (through work programming workshops)
- Invite suggestions from decision makers for O&S to contribute to developing policies/ decisions.
- Invite suggestions from the public annually (consider how to incorporate into methodology for 2025 work programming)
- Sift suggestions according to the priorities of lenses as set out above ('resident impact and experience' / 'sustainability')
- Agree, scope and plan topics to add maximum value.
- Plan all proactive work on an annual basis to ensure it can be undertaken by an appropriate time to add value and in within resources available.

Pre-decision Scrutiny

What is it?:

- Scrutiny of a report close to the point of decision making – eg. a Cabinet report.
- Predominantly driven by the Cabinet Forward Plan.
- Sits between 'proactive' and 'reactive' scrutiny. Some councils undertake a minimal level of pre-decision scrutiny in favour of greater levels of deep dive investigations. BCP councillors have said that pre-decision scrutiny is an important part of the scrutiny process which they are keen to see stay in place.
- Fulfils BCP principle of good scrutiny:

'O&S contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend'.

Examples

Scrutiny of Cabinet reports on:

- BCP Local Plan
- BCP 2024/25 budget scrutiny & MTFP update reports
- Various policies prior to Cabinet/ Council decision

Method for undertaking scrutiny:

- In committee, consideration of a report already written for Cabinet. Report considered approximately 10 working days prior to the Cabinet meeting.
- Any recommendations or comments made on the report are formally passed to the next Cabinet meeting.
- The O&S Chairman will attend the Cabinet meeting to report recommendations and/or give a summary of comments made at O&S.
- Cabinet must consider any **formal recommendations** made and respond.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Publicly demonstrates that decision makers are held to account.
- ✓ Less resource intensive – reports already written for Cabinet.
- ✗ Reactive – hard to plan agendas and relies on a well populated Cabinet Forward Plan to timetable work.
- ✗ Limited impact vs time spent. O&S is unlikely to be able to have much influence on fully developed policy and decisions.
- ✗ Potential to establish a ‘shadow cabinet’ and for meetings to become political, which must be managed effectively by O&S Chairs.
- ✗ Potential for Cabinet scrutiny to overwhelm agendas - can lead to additional/ long meetings which can limit effectiveness of scrutiny.
- ✗ Potential to duplicate other scrutiny opportunities – eg. full council debate.

Method for selection of pre-decision scrutiny topics:

- Establish a programme of informal, Teams based briefing sessions at a frequency which can be accommodated by O&S members and support officers. Schedule briefings to provide O&S with information on the key aspects of developing decisions. Aim to hold these as early as possible and at least 3 months prior to the decision to be made. Chairs and Vice Chairs take the lead in this, using the Cabinet Forward Plan and informal discussions with decision makers.
- Using the information provided at briefings and the agreed O&S lenses to determine which forthcoming Cabinet decisions will benefit from a councillor maintaining a watching brief and reporting back (rapporteur) or ultimately pre-decision scrutiny at committee.
- Give notice as early as possible of those items required for pre-decision scrutiny, to enable report authors to work to the relevant O&S timescales.
- Provide regular reporting on out of committee activity into a committee meeting via Chair, to maintain transparency of O&S activity.
- Note – this framework for selecting pre-decision scrutiny is expected to significantly reduce the number of Cabinet reports being considered by O&S committees but will require a commitment from decision makers to share information with O&S in a different way that is both open and timely. The proposed format will also provide decision makers with the opportunity to surface issues with the wider membership of the council prior to decision making and to gather informal input to shape direction of policy.

Reactive Scrutiny

What is it?:

- Emerging issues that arise throughout the year and can't easily be planned for in advance.
- Usually a significant issue of concern or risk to the council, residents or external bodies (eg. Ofsted or Government department)
- Fulfils BCP principles of good scrutiny:

*'O&S contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend';
 'O&S is agile – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods'
 'O&S Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the council';*

Examples

- Targeted scrutiny on council finances at the end of 2022 following concerns about in-year budget
- Safety valve scrutiny at Children's O&S Committee
- Best Value and Assurance Review reports.
- Decisions 'called in' by O&S

Method for undertaking scrutiny

- O&S Councillors review a suite of information regularly outside of the committee space – eg. corporate performance reports, medium term financial plan updates, complaints data or resident surveys.
- 'Red flags' are elevated to committee for more formal scrutiny to take place. Usually, a report is requested from officers.
- Any recommendations or comments made on the report are formally passed to the relevant decision maker, usually Cabinet/ Council.
- Cabinet/ Council must consider the recommendations made and respond.
- O&S may ask to receive regular updates outside of committee, to maintain a closer eye on the matter until it is resolved.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Important governance mechanism to assist the council in resolving issues of concern.
- ✓ Provides public demonstration of scrutiny on issues that may be causing press interest or community concern and gives opportunity for public to engage.
- ✗ Limited impact vs time spent. O&S may ask decision makers to reconsider an issue or make recommendations expressing concerns but cannot change a decision.
- ✗ Can disrupt workplans owing to the need to scrutinise a matter quickly.
- ✗ Potential to duplicate other scrutiny opportunities – eg. full council debate.

Method for selection of reactive scrutiny topics:

- Committee members 'horizon scan' by reviewing a suite of information on a regular basis in their own time. These are provided by email or in a designated webspace. Rapporteurs may be established to monitor designated areas of interest, sharing the load across the committee.
- Emerging trends or red flags are raised by committee members informally to the Chair & Vice Chair.
- Chair and Vice Chair take the lead in raising concerns with relevant decision makers and seeking more information. Using this information and the lenses established by committees, they determine which matters warrant elevating to committee.
- In all cases, O&S will prioritise work where it can have the most value and will avoid duplicating efforts underway elsewhere in the council to resolve arising issues. Priority will therefore be given either to those areas of highest concern and which are generating significant public and media attention; where data trends indicate that concerns are at risk of becoming embedded, or where attempts to find solutions by Cabinet or service areas have not worked.

- For these matters, a report is requested to the next available committee meeting for more formal and forensic scrutiny to take place. Work plans may be adjusted to make room for this arising work within existing resources.
- Following formal scrutiny, O&S may ask to receive regular updates outside of committee, to maintain a closer eye on the matter until it is resolved.
- Nb. 'Call-in' decisions will follow a separate process as outlined in the constitution.

4. Next steps

- The O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committees have adopted this framework and agreed lenses for their work.
- In 2024, all remaining O&S committees will be asked to adopt this framework and establish lenses or a limited set of high-level priorities.
- The framework will accompany all work programme reports to committee and should be referred to as a structure to underpin ongoing work programming activity.
- The framework will be reviewed annually by O&S Chairs, and lenses reviewed annually by O&S Committees in annual work programming, to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

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Corporate & Community O&S Committee

(May-September 2023, then decommissioned)



Chair – Councillor Stephen Bartlett

Vice Chair – Councillor Sue Aitkenhead

- **Meetings:** 2 ordinary, 0 special meetings
- **Membership:** 11 councillors
- **Average number of agenda items** – 1.5
- **Working Groups** - 0
- **'Call-Ins' considered** – 0

In these meetings the committee received an update on the council's Pay and Reward project and provided pre-decision scrutiny to the Cabinet report regarding Future Places Ltd, which undertook regeneration activity on behalf of the council. The committee supported the recommendation to Cabinet that regeneration activity be brought back in house, and also recommended that any decision on the disposal of the previous civic offices at Christchurch and Poole be deferred for further consideration. These recommendations were accepted by Cabinet.

This committee held two final meetings, prior to being disbanded in September 2023 and replaced by the O&S Board.

Overview & Scrutiny Board (established 30 September 2023)



Chair – Councillor Stephen Bartlett

Vice Chair – Councillor Sue Aitkenhead

- **Meetings:** 7 ordinary, 1 special meeting
- **Membership:** 13 councillors
- **Average number of agenda items** – 2.1
- **Working Groups** – 1 (informal, member led working group)
- **'Call-Ins' considered** – 1

Following changes to the O&S committee structure in September 2023, the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Board was established. This took on the previous remit of the Corporate & Community O&S Committee, along with an overarching responsibility for the O&S function and all scrutiny 'call-in' responsibilities. Board meetings were programmed monthly, to track Cabinet and allow for recommendations on pre-decision scrutiny to be reported to Cabinet in a timely way.

The Board began its work with the only Call-In meeting of the municipal year, relating to the detail of a Public Space Protection Order to be applied across beaches, heathland, parks and recreational areas. After consideration of the call-in request, no recommendations were made to Cabinet and the decision was implemented.

Statutory crime and disorder scrutiny responsibilities were fulfilled through the scrutiny of the BCP Community Safety Partnership annual report and the Board fulfilled its new responsibilities to monitor the overall O&S function through update reporting on the O&S Action Plan, agreed by Council in September 2023.

O&S induction training was provided to all councillors in Summer 2023. Mindful of good practices highlighted through this training, Board members made significant efforts to maintain a focus on 2/3 substantive items per agenda, to provide more effective and targeted focus to those topics selected. The average agenda items of 2.1 per meeting demonstrate a significant improvement compared to previous years where the number of agenda items selected by legacy committees were numerous and meetings lengthy. The Board expressed a wish to focus on matters of the highest risk or priority for the council, along with those that may have a significant impact on residents.

The Board was mindful of the significance of the Best Value Notice, issued to the Council in August 2023 and the work being undertaken by the council to make identified improvements. Through test and challenge, the Board supported the Best Value improvement journey by focussing on the following critical areas of council activity:

- Transformation Programme update,
- Medium Term Financial Plan updates,
- Best Value Notice action plan monitoring,

- A Shareholder Governance Review of council owned companies
- Scrutiny of the 2023/24 BCP budget
- Corporate Performance Reporting

Decisions with significant financial implications attached were also scrutinised, such as the disposal of land at Wessex Fields.

Spotlight on... Resident Impact

Along with scrutiny of internal / corporate priority areas, the Board focussed on those matters which it felt would be of highest importance to residents. This included pre-decision scrutiny of proposals for 20mph speed limits in the BCP area; development of a Library Strategy, and the draft BCP Local Plan, scrutiny of which resulted in a number of recommendations to Cabinet.

An informal, member led working group was also undertaken to understand the causes of long waiting times for Blue Badge applications to be processed. Members agreed to progress this work after becoming aware of resident concerns. Mindful of limited resources, three O&S members undertook their own background research, meeting with officers for informal discussions which established that application processes are complex and driven by the strict rules that are set nationally and must be rigorously observed to prevent fraud. The work done by the council to communicate effectively with applicants was examined along with the fees and resources associated with running the service.

The group reported its findings to full committee, which determined that further scrutiny work would not add value to this matter but offered several suggestions to officers for potential improvements to the service. This informal member-led research allowed for quicker progression of the matter and an informed decision to be made on whether the investment of scrutiny resource would be impactful. The Board recognised that this would be a valuable tool for future scrutiny work.

Environment & Place O&S Committee



Chair – Councillor Chris Rigby

Vice Chair – Councillor Richard Herrett

- **Meetings:** 5 ordinary, 0 special meetings
- **Membership:** 11 councillors
- **Average number of agenda items** – 1.6
- **Working Groups** - 0
- **'Call-Ins' considered** – 0

Following changes to the O&S committee structure in September 2023, the Place O&S Committee was renamed 'Environment & Place' to reflect an intended greater focus on environmental and sustainability matters. The committee also agreed to recruit two independent co-opted members to its membership, to provide additional expertise and challenge to this priority area of work. At time of writing, this recruitment is in process.

Work activity included proactive scrutiny on planning reforms, families in B&Bs and the development of the BCP Green Spaces Play and Wheeled Play Strategy. Monitoring reports included an update on the Schools Streets programme, with the committee scrutinising this from an environmental perspective, endorsing further roll out of the scheme to encourage management of traffic around schools in a way that is particularly beneficial for children and their families travelling to schools on foot or by other active modes.

Other activity included monitoring improvements being made to the council's planning service and the committee has indicated a wish to support this improvement journey through further monitoring updates.

Spotlight on...Climate Change and Sustainability

The council made changes to the committee in recognition that addressing climate change and improved sustainability is a central tenet of the council's aims. In addition to enhancing the breadth of challenge and expertise through seeking additional co-opted members, the committee agreed to approach all its work through a lens of sustainability.

The council's annual climate progress report was scrutinised by the committee in early 2024, providing an update on progress towards commitments made in the BCP Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration, made in July 2019.

To support work in this important area, the committee expressed an intention to align its future work plan to those council policies and decisions where it may add value through a sustainability lens. This will be established through an assessment of the sustainability aspects of the revised Corporate Strategy and delivery plans accompanying this.

Children's Services O&S Committee



Chair – Councillor Bobbie Dove

Vice Chair – Councillor Simon Bull

- **Meetings:** 5 ordinary, 2 special meetings
- **Membership:** 11 councillors, plus 4 co-opted members and 4 Youth Parliament reps
- **Average number of agenda items** – 4.1
- **Working Groups** - 0
- **'Call-Ins' considered** – 0

In keeping with the previous year, close monitoring of the improvement journey in children's services remained a priority for the committee, with themed meetings relating to the improvements in Children's Social Care, SEND and Education & Skills. All Ofsted Monitoring Visits were also reported on to the committee. This committee also received portfolio holder updates at each meeting with opportunity for questions and discussion. Two additional meetings of the committee were called to focus on safety valve scrutiny.

Spotlight on... Safety Valve

During winter 2023 the council was invited by the Department for Education's Safety Valve programme which is an initiative focussed on helping local authorities to tackle overspending on SEND services. A proposal was submitted to the DfE to join the initiative and in March 2024 the council was informed that that the DfE could not enter into an agreement with BCP Council on the basis of the proposal made at this time.

Whilst negotiations were taking place between the council and the DfE, the O&S committee undertook three targeted scrutiny sessions on Safety Valve, including two special meetings. Scrutiny included input from residents, families and schools, along with lead officers and the portfolio holder. The committee particularly focussed on the potential impact for families and schools if the council were to join the initiative and received many public questions and statements in relation to this.

Through its work the committee made recommendations to the portfolio holder for there to be as wide as possible member engagement in any final decision relating to Safety Valve. Further, well-timed scrutiny on the matter was welcomed by the portfolio holder and a full council resolution was also made that all members of the council would have the opportunity to consider any potential future decision to join the Safety Valve programme, should this come forward as a formal proposal at a future date.

Health & Adult Social Care O&S Committee



Chair – Councillor Patrick Canavan

Vice Chair – Councillor Jackie Edwards

- **Meetings:** 5 ordinary, 0 special meetings
- **Membership:** 11 councillors, plus regular Healthwatch attendance
- **Average number of agenda items** – 4
- **Working Groups** - 1
- **'Call-Ins' considered** – 0

The committee's work included pre-decision scrutiny on the Adult Day Opportunities Strategy with views raised in committee reported by the Chair into Cabinet. Monitoring reports included the annual report from the Safeguarding Adults Board, the annual report on Adults Social Care Complaints and monitoring of the implementation of the Carer's Strategy, one year on from its approval.

The committee considered local service provision including access to GP practices and NHS Dentistry Provision in the BCP area. Background briefings were also provided into committee to provide a good understanding of policy and issues which may inform future work planning. These included briefings on Health Inequalities, Suicide Prevention and the updated Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This committee also received portfolio holder updates at each meeting with opportunity for questions and discussion.

Spotlight on... Achieving Data Driven Scrutiny

Acknowledging that the data and policy landscape in the health and adult social care arena is extensive and complex, and with many new councillors joining BCP Council in 2023, the committee established a Data Working Group to better understand the various data sources and how these could provide a wider evidence base for the work of scrutiny.

The group was supported by expert officers and data analysts from both within the council and Public Health and the NHS. Data and policy sources were demonstrated and compared. The group was keen to encourage a member led approach to the inclusion of data in scrutiny and isolated those sources suitable for 'self-serve' research compared to those which enhance deeper dive scrutiny work and may require the support of data analysts to access and interpret.

A standard expectation of data provision to accompany committee reports was also agreed with officers during the work of the group. These findings were brought together in a data toolkit, with the aim of providing current and future councillors with a user guide to accessing data, and to ultimately improve the evidence base for scrutiny by the committee. This approach could be mirrored by other O&S committees to improve the overall evidence base underpinning scrutiny activity at BCP.

Introduction

This action plan outlines improvement activity for BCP Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. This activity has been identified as appropriate to bring O&S practices to the level outlined in the Government's [Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities](#)

The actions also address recommendations arising from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities' (DLUHC) [external assurance review](#) and [Best Value Notice](#), issued on the 3 August as well as the Chief Executive's own [internal assurance review](#) conducted in Spring and updated in Summer 2023. The resulting [Assurance Review Action Plan](#) has been established by the Council to respond to these recommendations.

Guidance Note

This action plan follows the themes of the statutory guidance which are categorised as follows:

- Culture • Resourcing • Selecting Committee Members • Power to Access Information • Planning Work • Evidence Sessions

All relevant paragraphs of the guidance have been included within the action plan, to aid reader's understanding of why actions have been identified. Please note that where actions are similar (eg. reflecting different aspects of councillor training required) they remain split into separate actions to demonstrate how these will uphold the statutory guidance. It should be noted that for this reason the action plan is highly detailed and serves as an operational tool to progress actions as well as for reporting on progress.

Actions are grouped and action leads identified as per the coding set out in the key below. Where actions are duplicated, the update is provided against the first arising action. A RAG rating is used to show progress against actions along with a commentary, with the latest updates provided in blue text.

Key		
Code	Description	Action Lead
MT1	Member Training – induction and refresher	Democratic Services Team
MT2	Member Training – Chairs	
MT3	Member Training – ongoing programme of training	
OT1	Officer Training	
RD1	Role Descriptions for O&S leads	
CM1	Chairs’ Meetings	
WS1	Work Selection and Scoping	
CI1	Community Insight	
WP1	Web Presence	
WM1	Working Methods	
TOR1	Terms of Reference for O&S Committees	
CR1	Constitution Review	
L1	Library of O&S Resources	
P1	Protocol and Tool Development	
AR1	Annual Reporting on O&S	
R1	Resourcing	Democratic Services Team
COM1	Communications	
CMT1	Corporate Management Team Action	Corporate Management Team
C1	Cabinet Action	Cabinet
CL1	Chief Executive/ Leader Action	Chief Executive/ Leader
CS1	Supporting Children’s Services O&S	Democratic Services Team
RAG Rating		
Significant delay likely to affect action completion		
Some delay likely to affect action completion		
Action on track to complete as planned		
Action completed		

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Culture				
Scrutiny is Member Led				
<i>The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails. While everyone in an authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority.</i>	1a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – O&S in BCP is Member led	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	1b	Role descriptions to be developed for Councillors in leading O&S roles to clarify expectations for this role Not started. Completion likely to be delayed to Autumn 2024.	Autumn 2023	RD1
	1c	Establish calendar of meeting dates for O&S chairs for collective leadership and oversight of the effectiveness of the O&S function.	Complete	CM1
Scrutiny is understood and recognised across the organisation				
<i>Recognising scrutiny's legal and democratic legitimacy – all members and officers should recognise and appreciate the importance and legitimacy the scrutiny function is afforded by the law. It was created to act as a check and balance on the executive and is a statutory requirement for all authorities operating executive arrangements and for combined authorities.</i>	2a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Background and statutory powers of O&S, to raise the profile and importance of the scrutiny function within the organisation.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	2b	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Background and statutory powers of O&S, to raise the profile and importance of the scrutiny function within the organisation Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
Scrutiny draws on community insight and selects topics of community relevance				
<i>Councillors have a unique legitimacy derived from their being democratically elected. The insights that they can bring by having this close connection to local people are part of what gives scrutiny its value.</i>	3a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Councillors bring community insight to their scrutiny work	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	3b	Strengthen O&S work selection criteria, as set out in the constitution, to include consideration of the impact and value to the public when selecting work programme topics. Review for use in annual work programming for O&S Committees. O&S scrutiny request forms ask councillors to outline the value to be added to BCP Council, the area or its inhabitants of a proposed scrutiny topic. Use of this form is becoming embedded by councillors and is being used as part of annual work programming. O&S work programmes now include more work balanced towards the impact on BCP residents. O&S Board has selected resident impact as a lens by which to plan and approach its work. Officers will continue to encourage selection of O&S topics that have tangible benefit to residents and monitor work programmes.	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
	3c	Use is made of community insight through the selection of work topics that are driven by community need, evidence sessions, use of subject experts and data providing the view of residents and community groups. O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S have now planned annual work programmes based on councillor suggestions generated by issues of significance to communities.	Complete, monitor long-term and revisit in annual work programming for all committees.	CI1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)		Greater use of subject experts and community insight have been included in O&S since May 2023. Examples include a subject expert on the Safety Valve programme, developer input to Local Plan discussions and regular Healthwatch contributions at HASC O&S Committee. The terms of reference of the Environment & Place O&S Committee was amended by Council in September 2023, to include additional insight on sustainability matters in the form of two non-voting member independent members. Recruitment to these positions is in process. Use of community insight and evidence could be developed further still and officers will encourage at the scoping stage of forthcoming work.		
	3d	Develop O&S web pages to clarify public role in O&S, ways to engage and improve ease of access for topic suggestion. Not started.	Autumn 2024	WP1
Scrutiny has a clear role and focus				
<i>Identifying a clear role and focus – authorities should take steps to ensure scrutiny has a clear role and focus within the organisation, i.e. a niche within which it can clearly demonstrate it adds value. Therefore, prioritisation is necessary to ensure the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work that is of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority – this is one of the most challenging parts of scrutiny, and a critical element to get right if it is to be recognised as a strategic function of the authority</i>	4a	Scrutiny committees agree a clear communicable role or focus for the year when planning their work programme in order to assist in topic selection and in ensuring that stakeholders can anticipate which topics are likely to be of interest to scrutiny, and plan accordingly for engagement. This may be in the form of a 'lens' (eg. risk) through which to scrutinise topics, or a key priority or set of priorities for a committee (eg. 'budget' or 'ofsted improvement plan') HASC O&S and Children's Services O&S Committees planned work for the 2023/24 municipal year but did not agree a role or priority focus. These committees would benefit from establishing a more defined lens or communicable focus for the 2024/25 work programmes. The O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee engaged in action/ learning workshops to plan their work programmes for 23/24. These were led by CfGS and based on	Autumn 2023	WS1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)		good practice. Both committees established a lens and a scrutiny framework to more clearly refine and communicate their role and areas of priority. This approach to be rolled and maintained by all O&S committees in future work programming.		
	4b	Committees carefully consider the type and balance of work undertaken to ensure that work aims can be met within the meeting capacity available. This will require a determined focus to undertake work in diverse ways eg. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> receiving information based reports outside of meetings, establishing O&S rapporteurs (topic champions) to maintain oversight of an issue and report back to committee on exceptions reducing the level of Cabinet decision scrutiny to free up capacity for more overview work. O&S Committees have received targeted training and support throughout the year to assist in this aim. There has been significant progress in reducing the level of Cabinet pre-decision scrutiny across committees, which previously dominated some work programmes. Committees are planning more manageable work programmes. Three additional O&S meetings were called during 23/24 to accommodate arising issues. All committees would benefit from reducing update items reported to committee, which usually generate limited substantive recommendations. Analysis of 23/24 work outputs across all committees show an overbalance of this type of work, with this taking up the majority of work for 4 out of 5 committees operating in this period. This is taking up time that could be used for other value-added scrutiny.	Autumn 2023	WM1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:		ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)			Good practice is for all information based reports to be received in other formats. Greater use could be made of other methods, such as rapporteurs, to maintain overview of information otherwise reported into committee. This approach will continue to be encouraged across all committees.		
		4c	Develop user friendly terms of reference documents for each O&S committee based on split of responsibility set out in constitution. Updated terms of reference are now circulated with the forward plan paper for each O&S Committee.	Complete	TOR1
There is a clear distinction between scrutiny and audit					
<i>Authorities should ensure a clear division of responsibilities between the scrutiny function and the audit function. While it is appropriate for scrutiny to pay due regard to the authority's financial position, this will need to happen in the context of the formal audit role. The authority's section 151 officer should advise scrutiny on how to manage this dynamic</i>		5a	Division of responsibility already established within the Articles of the Constitution.	Complete	CR1
		5b	A&G chair invitation to be scheduled into annual programme of O&S Chairs meetings A&G Chair has been invited to attend meetings during 2024/25.	Complete	CM1
<i>While scrutiny has no role in the investigation or oversight of the authority's whistleblowing arrangements, the findings of independent whistleblowing investigations might be of interest to scrutiny committees as they consider their wider implications.</i>		6	Develop a library of O&S oversight information, provided in an online format for Councillors to access independently, to include – The findings of independent whistleblowing investigations HASC O&S has developed a data toolkit, which gathers oversight information in a digestible format for O&S members. This to be rolled out to all committees to include whistleblowing information.	Spring/ Summer 2024	L1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>The relationship between scrutiny and the executive is effective</i>				
<i>Ensuring early and regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny – authorities should ensure early and regular discussion takes place between scrutiny and the executive, especially regarding the latter's future work programme.</i>	7a	Portfolio Holders attend O&S meetings when requested, or send deputies <i>Attendance of Portfolio Holders at O&S when requested is now well established and will continue to be encouraged.</i>	Complete, monitor long-term.	C1
	7b	The Cabinet Forward Plan is regularly updated with sufficient notice of forthcoming priorities to enable O&S to engage effectively at an early stage in policy shaping. <i>Populating the Cabinet Forward Plan is a work in progress, with priorities currently identified approximately 3 months ahead. The Leader has committed to populating the plan 6 months ahead. The O&S Specialist met with CMB in November 2023 to outline the implications on O&S of Forward Planning by the Cabinet.</i> <i>Although the Cabinet Forward Plan is still in development, other activities have taken place which will support O&S/ executive work to be effective:</i> <i>Quarterly meetings between the Leader, Chief Executive, Statutory Scrutiny Officer and O&S Chairs are planned and will allow opportunity for discussion of O&S engagement in forthcoming policy work.</i> <i>Delivery plans attached to the refreshed Corporate Strategy set out the policy and decision making plans for the council for the forthcoming 2 years. This will assist O&S planning and consideration of this document as a horizon scanning tool is being encouraged with all committees.</i>	Immediate and ongoing request to Cabinet	C1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	7c	The Constitution sets out that it is good practice for there to be regular, informal dialogue between O&S leads and Portfolio Holders in order that O&S can understand developing Cabinet priorities, discuss and assess the value that Overview and Scrutiny can provide and contribute in a timely way to policy development (O&S Procedure Rule 8.3). <i>Officers regularly encourage this action.</i>	Complete, monitor long-term.	CR1
	7d	Role descriptions to be developed for Councillors in leading O&S roles to clarify expectation that scrutiny chairs establish informal working arrangements with relevant Portfolio Holders. <i>Development of role descriptions has been delayed, however, lead O&S members are encouraged on a regular basis to develop informal working arrangements with relevant Portfolio Holders.</i> <i>Completion of role descriptions likely to be delayed to Autumn 2024.</i>	Autumn 2023	RD1
	7e	Lines of accountability between scrutiny committees and Portfolio Holders were agreed by Council in April 2022- review after election when any change to Cabinet portfolios are known and document these in a more granular way than is captured within the constitution to aid transparency. <i>Changes were made to O&S Committees by Council in September 2023. New lines of accountability are identified in updated terms of reference documents, providing clarity on lines of accountability. These are circulated with each O&S agenda.</i>	Complete	TOR1
	7f	Maintain a review of the Portfolio/ O&S Committee alignment to ensure that it is fit for purpose, with amendments to be suggested via O&S annual report to Council, as required.	Complete, monitor annually through	AR1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)		Changes were made to O&S committee remits in September 2023. No further changes suggested in 2024 annual report.	annual report process.	
<i>The executive should not try to exercise control over the work of the scrutiny committee. This could be direct, e.g. by purporting to 'order' scrutiny to look at, or not look at, certain issues, or indirect, e.g. through the use of the whip or as a tool of political patronage, and the committee itself should remember its statutory purpose when carrying out its work. All members and officers should consider the role the scrutiny committee plays to be that of a 'critical friend' not a de facto 'opposition'. Scrutiny chairs have a particular role to play in establishing the profile and nature of their committee</i>	8a	O&S considers work requested by Cabinet or Council using the criteria written into the constitution - Criteria already exists in constitution and is used to assess requests.	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
	8b	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – All Political Groups be reminded of the incompatibility of the whip with O&S, and the forms that this may take. The message was reinforced in training and the CEx has had written confirmation from every Group Leader that the party whip, or similar, will not be applied around the Overview and Scrutiny functions.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	8c	O&S chairs to be opposition members, where practicable, to reduce risk of executive control being exercised over O&S – referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration of any appropriate Constitution changes to set out this good practice - prior to May 2024 O&S Chairs elections. Since May 2023 all O&S Committees have appointed a Chair, and in most cases, a Vice-Chair, from outside of the Administration. O&S Board has confirmed a wish to include this advice within the constitution. Package of work to review constitution to strengthen areas around O&S has not yet started and will be progressed as resources allow.	Spring 2024	CR1
	8d	Role descriptions to be developed for Councillors in leading roles to clarify expectation that scrutiny chairs establish informal committee pre-meetings, to assist the committee in working towards its aims and taking a cross-party approach to scrutiny.	Autumn 2023	RD1

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Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
		Development of role descriptions has been delayed, however, some O&S Chairs have established pre-meetings successfully, and officers continue to encourage these. Completion of role descriptions likely to be delayed to Autumn 2024.		
	8e	O&S Chairing skills training to be delivered to include the benefit of pre-meetings, and management of political dynamics in scrutiny to avoid a de facto opposition approach. Chairing skills training provided in Summer 2023 induction. O&S leadership training provided via LGA workshops in Feb 2024. LGA leadership training to be offered to all new O&S chairs, as and when changes in positions occur.	Complete, monitor long-term.	MT2
<i>The chair of the scrutiny committee should determine the nature and extent of an executive member's participation in a scrutiny committee meeting, and in any informal scrutiny task group meeting</i>	9a	Clarity of O&S powers in determining attendees and participation already written into constitution at O&S Procedure Rule 9.1	Complete	CR1
	9b	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Clarity of scrutiny's powers in determining attendees and participation in O&S.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	9c	Scrutiny committees to be asked to consider appropriate invitees when scoping a piece of work and to consider where more value may be added by an officer/ scrutiny session as opposed to a Cabinet member scrutiny Appropriate invitees are considered in the planning stage for all O&S work. Since May 2023 there has been a noticeable shift in emphasis within the Council, with officers being invited to contribute on specific issues at scrutiny as appropriate. The range of inquiry from councillors to both portfolio holders and officers is much improved and this will continue to be encouraged.	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
Managing disagreement				
<i>Effective scrutiny involves looking at issues that can be politically contentious. It is therefore inevitable that, at times, an executive will disagree with the findings or recommendations of a scrutiny committee. It is the job of both the executive and scrutiny to work together to reduce the risk of this happening, and authorities should take steps to predict, identify and act on disagreement. One way in which this can be done is via an 'executive-scrutiny protocol' which can help define the relationship between the two and mitigate any differences of opinion before they manifest themselves in unhelpful and unproductive ways. The benefit of this approach is that it provides a framework for disagreement and debate, and a way to manage it when it happens. Often, the value of such a protocol lies in the dialogue that underpins its preparation. It is important that these protocols are reviewed on a regular basis.</i>	10	Executive members and O&S Chairs group to consider the value for BCP in preparing an executive – scrutiny protocol. <i>O&S Chairs have discussed executive – scrutiny protocol and asked to review further information on the benefits.</i> Agreement in place for quarterly meetings between Leader, Chief Executive and O&S Chairs to share information and address any barriers to effective scrutiny. To be scheduled following Chairmanship elections of Summer 2024. The value of preparing an executive – scrutiny protocol to be raised through this group.	Winter 2023	C1/ CM1
<i>Scrutiny committees do have the power to 'call in' decisions, i.e. ask the executive to reconsider them before they are implemented, but should not view it as a substitute for early involvement in the decision-making process or as a party-political tool.</i>	11	Use of call-in be monitored and reflected within annual report to Council. <i>Call-in use analysed and included in 2024 annual report.</i>	Complete, monitor annually through annual report process.	AR1
Ensuring impartial advice from officers				
<i>Authorities, particularly senior officers, should ensure all officers are free to provide impartial advice to scrutiny committees. This is fundamental to effective scrutiny. Of particular importance is the role played by 'statutory officers' – the monitoring officer, the section 151 officer and the head of paid service, and where relevant the statutory scrutiny officer. These individuals have a</i>	12	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – The importance of impartial advice to O&S <i>Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.</i>	Winter 2023	OT1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>particular role in ensuring that timely, relevant and high-quality advice is provided to scrutiny.</i>				
Communicating scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider authority				
<i>The scrutiny function can often lack support and recognition within an authority because there is a lack of awareness among both members and officers about the specific role it plays, which individuals are involved and its relevance to the authority's wider work. Authorities should, therefore, take steps to ensure all members and officers are made aware of the role the scrutiny committee plays in the organisation, its value and the outcomes it can deliver, the powers it has, its membership and, if appropriate, the identity of those providing officer support.</i>	13	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – The identity of those providing officer support to O&S. Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
Maintaining the interest of full Council in the work of the scrutiny committee				
<i>Part of communicating scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider authority should happen through the formal, public role of full Council – particularly given that scrutiny will undertake valuable work to highlight challenging issues that an authority will be facing and subjects that will be a focus of full Council's work. Authorities should therefore take steps to ensure full Council is informed of the work the scrutiny committee is doing.</i>	14a	Report annually to Council on the work of scrutiny, and progress on actions to improve scrutiny. Annual report to be received by committees in Sep/ Oct 2024 (delayed owing to pre-election period).	Complete, repeat annually.	AR1
<i>One way in which this can be done is by reports and recommendations being submitted to full Council rather than solely to the executive. Scrutiny should decide when it would be appropriate to submit reports for wider debate in this way, taking into account the relevance of reports to full Council business, as well as full Council's capacity to consider and respond in a timely manner. Such reports would supplement the annual report to full Council on scrutiny's activities and raise awareness of ongoing work.</i>	14b	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – The appropriate route for recommendations to full Council or Cabinet	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	14c	Consideration be given to any amendments required to constitution to clarify reporting routes from O&S - referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration. Package of work to review constitution to strengthen areas around O&S has not yet started and will be progressed as resources allow.	Spring 2024	CR1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64) Communicating scrutiny's role to the public				
<i>Authorities should ensure scrutiny has a profile in the wider community. Consideration should be given to how and when to engage the authority's communications officers, and any other relevant channels, to understand how to get that message across. This will usually require engagement early on in the work programming process</i>	15a	Consideration be given to the promotion of outcomes via Communications Team at the scoping stage of O&S work. <i>Some O&S activity relating to high profile decisions is already promoted by the Communications Team. Greater use could be made of promotion opportunities to raise the profile of O&S work. Resources have not been available for a comprehensive approach to this through annual work programming. Consideration of this will instead be encouraged on an ongoing basis at the scoping stage for all O&S work, as resources allow.</i>	In annual work programming for O&S Committees – Autumn 2023	COM1
	15b	O&S webpage development - See action 3d above. <i>Not started</i>	Autumn 2024	WP1
Ensuring scrutiny members are supported in having an independent mindset				
<i>Formal committee meetings provide a vital opportunity for scrutiny members to question the executive and officers. Inevitably, some committee members will come from the same political party as a member they are scrutinising and might well have a long-standing personal, or familial, relationship with them.</i> <i>Scrutiny members should bear in mind, however, that adopting an independent mind-set is fundamental to carrying out their work effectively. In practice, this is likely to require scrutiny chairs working proactively to identify any potentially contentious issues and plan how to manage them.</i>	16a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – The importance of an independent mind-set to O&S	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	16b	O&S Chairs are supported by Officers to identify and plan for contentious issues through Chairs briefings. <i>Chairs are well supported by officers in regular briefings to scope and plan the level of interest anticipated in O&S work and any necessary adjustments. Briefings were held for all meetings in 23/24 municipal year and will be planned for all meetings in 24/25.</i>	Complete, monitor long-term	WS1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
	16c	Establish calendar of meeting dates for O&S chairs to include-monitoring the independence of O&S Calendar of meetings planned for 2024	Complete	CM1
Resourcing scrutiny				
<p><i>The resource an authority allocates to the scrutiny function plays a pivotal role in determining how successful that function is and therefore the value it can add to the work of the authority.</i></p> <p><i>Ultimately it is up to each authority to decide on the resource it provides, but every authority should recognise that creating and sustaining an effective scrutiny function requires them to allocate resources to it.</i></p> <p><i>When deciding on the level of resource to allocate to the scrutiny function, the factors an authority should consider include: • Scrutiny's legal powers and responsibilities; • The particular role and remit scrutiny will play in the authority; • The training requirements of scrutiny members and support officers, particularly the support needed to ask effective questions of the executive and other key partners, and make effective recommendations; • The need for ad hoc external support where expertise does not exist in the council; • Effectively-resourced scrutiny has been shown to add value to the work of authorities, improving their ability to meet the needs of local people; and • Effectively-resourced scrutiny can help policy formulation and so minimise the need for call-in of executive decisions</i></p>	17	<p>Consideration be given to the level of officer resource available to support scrutiny and that this is appropriate to ensure effective outputs that add value to the organisation – discussion with O&S chairs group, with views to be passed to Corporate Management Team.</p> <p>Resources to support O&S are stretched. The Democratic Services team provides direct officer support to the O&S function. There has been no increase in officer resource to support the increase in O&S meeting numbers agreed by Council in September 2023. The Democratic Services structure was designed to support the service approved by the Shadow Authority which anticipated 22 O&S meetings per year with a larger Democratic Services team to support this.</p> <p>Since the establishment of BCP Council, the officer support available to O&S has not been adequate for the level of O&S meetings held by the council, which, through many changes to the O&S committee structure, have predominantly been above the level anticipated by the Shadow Authority. In 2021 the service budget was reduced by 14.9% to support the corporate budget pressures. Following the most recent changes to the O&S structure the service is now considered to be operating above maximum capacity. Taking into account the increased meetings and reduction in manpower resources, the ratio of meetings per equivalent officer FTE to provide</p>	<p>Resource monitoring completed in 23/24.</p> <p>To be continued on same basis, ongoing.</p>	R1/ CMT1

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Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
		<p>support has increased by over 28%. This is excluding any additional special meetings called by committees. This has an impact on the level of support that can be provided to the O&S function and the resulting outputs.</p> <p>Resourcing implications set out above were highlighted to CMB and Council in September 2023 when a decision was taken to increase the overall number of O&S meetings. A bid for additional staff to support the increase in O&S meeting numbers was not approved.</p> <p>Resource pressures caused delay to strategic actions in 2023, such as work programming, and limited the amount of support that could be provided to scoping and supporting effective scrutiny. The highest level of substantive recommendations generated by an O&S committee in 2023/24 was 33%. The lowest level was 0%. These levels should be higher to demonstrate that value is being added by the O&S function.</p> <p>There will continue to be a risk that scrutiny cannot be supported to plan effective work with meaningful outputs without sufficient resources. The level of resources available to support O&S will continue to be monitored through the O&S Chairs group, O&S Board and the annual reporting process to Council.</p>		
<i>Authorities should also recognise that support for scrutiny committees, task groups and other activities is not solely about budgets and provision of officer time, although these are clearly extremely important elements. Effective support is also about the</i>	18a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Use of resource, and effective wider authority engagement in O&S	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1

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Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>ways in which the wider authority engages with those who carry out the scrutiny function (both members and officers).</i>	18b	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Use of resource, and effective wider authority engagement in O&S Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
	18c	As required by the constitution, all requests for O&S committees to undertake work are considered by Committees against the current resource levels available to support the request All committees are asked to take account of resources when considering requests for work, especially commissioned work such as working groups and additional meetings. 2 working groups were held during 23/24 and 3 additional meetings called. It was fortunate that not all committees commissioned working groups during this time as overall resource to support the function was limited by the increase in committee meetings, agreed by council in September 2023. O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee in particular have adapted practices to work within resources available with more manageable committee agendas, meeting duration and greater level of member led work taking place outside of committee. All committees would benefit from retaining clear capacity within their annual work programmes to ensure space exists to respond to arising issues throughout the year without exceeding resource. Mechanisms are in place to monitor resource availability, including through this action plan, and on a regular basis through Chairs and Vice Chairs meetings. Officers will continue to provide guidance to support an O&S function that is as effective as possible within the resources available.	Complete in 23/24 – continue to monitor long-term.	R1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
	18d	Establish calendar of meeting dates for O&S chairs to include-monitoring the total level of resource available across the O&S function Calendar of meetings planned for 2024.	Complete	CM1
Statutory scrutiny officers				
<p><i>Combined authorities, upper and single tier authorities are required to designate a statutory scrutiny officer, someone whose role is to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• promote the role of the authority's scrutiny committee;</i> <i>• provide support to the scrutiny committee and its members; and</i> <i>• provide support and guidance to members and officers relating to the functions of the scrutiny committee.</i> 	19a	Statutory scrutiny officer is appointed and sits within the Democratic Services Team.	Complete	R1
	19b	The Statutory Scrutiny Officer role is set out in the constitution to aid authority wide understanding - referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration. Package of work to review constitution to strengthen areas around O&S has not yet started and will be progressed as resources allow.	Winter 2023	CR1
	19c	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – The role of the statutory scrutiny officer, to increase visibility	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	19d	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – The role of the statutory scrutiny officer, to increase visibility. Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
	19e	Consider the interface of the statutory scrutiny officer role with Corporate Management Team to ensure that planning for engagement with scrutiny can be considered for significant forthcoming decisions.	Complete	CMT1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
		Statutory Scrutiny Officer met with CMB in November 2023 and agreed quarterly reporting of O&S Forward Plans through CMB, and encouraged directorates to consider potential O&S engagement in all significant forthcoming decisions. Quarterly meetings of Council Leader, Chief Executive, Statutory Scrutiny Officer and O&S Chairs has been agreed by all parties. This will also assist with planning for scrutiny engagement in significant forthcoming decisions.		
Officer resource models				
<i>Authorities should ensure that, whatever model they employ, officers tasked with providing scrutiny support are able to provide impartial advice. This might require consideration of the need to build safeguards into the way that support is provided. The nature of these safeguards will differ according to the specific role scrutiny plays in the organisation.</i>	20	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – The importance of impartial advice to O&S. Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
Selecting Committee Members				
<i>Selecting the right members to serve on scrutiny committees is essential if those committees are to function effectively. Where a committee is made up of members who have the necessary skills and commitment, it is far more likely to be taken seriously by the wider authority.</i> <i>When selecting individual members to serve on scrutiny committees, an authority should consider a member's experience, expertise, interests, ability to act impartially, ability to work as part of a group, and capacity to serve.</i>	21a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Appropriate selection of committee members, in order that this can be taken account of by political groups when establishing their committee representation.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p><i>Authorities should not take into account a member's perceived level of support for or opposition to a particular political party (notwithstanding the wider legal requirement for proportionality)</i></p> <p><i>Members invariably have different skill-sets. What an authority must consider when forming a committee is that, as a group, it possesses the requisite expertise, commitment and ability to act impartially to fulfil its functions.</i></p>	21b	<p>A programme of ongoing scrutiny skills training to be developed for delivery to O&S Councillors throughout municipal year 2023/24.</p> <p>Following induction training, a range of development opportunities have been provided to councillors through the LGA, the South West Scrutiny Network and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. This has included skills development around work planning, finance scrutiny, chairing, O&S leadership and scrutinising data & performance. Arising opportunities free training through scrutiny networks will continue to be promoted to O&S councillors and additional bespoke training planned according to need and budget availability.</p> <p>O&S Chairs meetings retain training as a standard item on agendas, to review arising training needs.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term	MT3
<p><i>Authorities are reminded that members of the executive cannot be members of a scrutiny committee. Authorities should take care to ensure that, as a minimum, members holding less formal executive positions, e.g. as Cabinet assistants, do not sit on scrutinising committees looking at portfolios to which those roles relate.</i></p> <p><i>Authorities should articulate in their constitutions how conflicts of interest, including familial links between executive and scrutiny responsibilities should be managed, including where members stand down from the executive and move to a scrutiny role, and vice-versa.</i></p>	22a	<p>Review Constitution rules for clarity on the principle of Executive lead members sitting on O&S referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration.</p> <p>Constitution identifies that Executive lead members cannot sit on O&S.</p>	Complete	CR1
	22b	<p>Review constitution to consider providing further clarity on how to manage conflicts of interest, including when Councillors move between roles - referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration.</p> <p>Package of work to review constitution to strengthen areas around O&S has not yet started and will be progressed as resources allow.</p>	Winter 2023	CR1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
Selecting a chair				
<i>The Chair plays a leadership role on a scrutiny committee as they are largely responsible for establishing its profile, influence and ways of working.</i>	23a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Appropriate selection of committee chairs, in order that this can be taken account of by political groups when establishing their proposed chair nominees	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
<i>The attributes authorities should and should not take into account when selecting individual committee members also apply to the selection of the Chair, but the Chair should also possess the ability to lead and build a sense of teamwork and consensus among committee members.</i>	23b	O&S Chairing skills training to be delivered to include - leadership skills. Chairing skills training provided in Summer 2023 induction. O&S leadership training provided via LGA workshops in Feb 2024. LGA leadership training to be offered to all new O&S chairs, as and when changes in positions occur.	Complete, monitor long-term	MT2
<i>Given their pre-eminent role on the scrutiny committee, it is strongly recommended that the Chair not preside over scrutiny of their relatives</i>	24	Review constitution to consider providing further clarity on the Chair not presiding over scrutiny of relatives- referral to Constitution Review Working Group for consideration. Package of work to review constitution to strengthen areas around O&S has not yet started and will be progressed as resources allow.	Winter 2023	CR1
<i>The method for selecting a Chair is for each authority to decide for itself, however every authority should consider taking a vote by secret ballot.</i>	25a	Secret ballot method vote for Chair and Vice Chair is already in place within constitution at Meeting Procedure Rule 19.	Complete	CR1
	25b	See 8c above 'opposition chairs'	See relevant action above.	CR1
The role of the chair				
<i>Chairs should pay special attention to the need to guard the committee's independence. Importantly, however, they should take</i>	26	O&S Chairing skills training to be delivered to include – independence of O&S, and the need to avoid de facto opposition role.	Complete, monitor long-term	MT2

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>care to avoid the committee being, and being viewed as, a de facto opposition to the executive.</i>		Chairing skills training provided in Summer 2023 induction. O&S leadership training provided via LGA workshops in Feb 2024. LGA leadership training to be offered to all new O&S chairs, as and when changes in positions occur.		
Training for committee members				
<i>Authorities should ensure committee members are offered induction when they take up their role and ongoing training so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively. Authorities should pay attention to the need to ensure committee members are aware of their legal powers, and how to prepare for and ask relevant questions at scrutiny sessions.</i> <i>When deciding on training requirements for committee members, authorities should consider taking advantage of opportunities offered by external providers in the sector.</i>	27a	See action 2a above - new Councillor and refresher training on statutory powers of O&S	See relevant action above.	MT1
	27b	A programme of ongoing scrutiny skills training to be developed for delivery to O&S Councillors throughout municipal year 2023/24, to include – questioning skills training. Some questioning skills training was incorporated into O&S induction training. O&S Chairs meetings retain training as a standard item on agendas, to review arising training needs. Currently, Chairs have not indicated a pressing need for additional questioning skills training. Arising opportunities for free training through scrutiny networks will continue to be promoted to O&S councillors and additional bespoke training planned according to need and budget availability.	Complete, monitor long-term	MT3
	27c	Training to be delivered by external facilitators as appropriate and according to budget available. A mix of in-house support and external facilitators have been used in training and development to date to provide additional O&S expertise and insight to specific training areas as appropriate. This approach will continue to be used according to need and budget availability.	Complete, monitor long-term.	MT3

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p><i>While members and their support officers will often have significant local insight and an understanding of local people and their needs, the provision of outside expertise can be invaluable. There are two principal ways to procure this:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Co-option – formal co-option is provided for in legislation.</i> <p><i>Authorities must establish a co-option scheme to determine how individuals will be co-opted onto committees; and</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Technical advisers – depending on the subject matter, independent local experts might exist who can provide advice and assistance in evaluating evidence</i> 	28a	Facility to use external experts by O&S is already set out in constitution at Article 6, Rule 6.6.	Complete	CR1
	28b	<p>Consideration be given to the appropriate use of external experts at the scoping stage of O&S work.</p> <p>Greater use of subject experts and community insight have been included in O&S since May 2023. Examples include a subject expert on the Safety Valve programme, developer input to Local Plan discussions and regular Healthwatch contributions at HASC O&S Committee. The terms of reference of the Environment & Place O&S Committee was amended by Council in September 2023, to include additional insight on sustainability matters in the form of two non-voting member independent members. Recruitment to these positions is in process.</p> <p>Use of community insight and evidence could be developed further still and officers will continue to encourage at the scoping stage of forthcoming work.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
Powers to Access Information				
<p><i>A scrutiny committee needs access to relevant information the authority holds, and to receive it in good time, if it is to do its job effectively.</i></p> <p><i>This need is recognised in law, with members of scrutiny committees enjoying powers to access information. In particular, regulations give enhanced powers to a scrutiny member to access exempt or confidential information. This is in addition to existing rights for councillors to have access to information to perform their</i></p>	29a	Enhanced rights of O&S in relation to access to information are already set out in Constitution at Access to Information Procedure Rule 24.	Complete	CR1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>duties, including common law rights to request information and rights to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.</i> <i>When considering what information scrutiny needs in order to carry out its work, scrutiny members and the executive should consider scrutiny's role and the legal rights that committees and their individual members have, as well as their need to receive timely and accurate information to carry out their duties effectively.</i>	29b	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – enhanced rights of O&S in relation to access to information	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
<i>Scrutiny members should have access to a regularly available source of key information about the management of the authority – particularly on performance, management and risk. Where this information exists, and scrutiny members are given support to understand it, the potential for what officers might consider unfocused and unproductive requests is reduced as members will be able to frame their requests from a more informed position.</i>	30a	Develop a library of O&S oversight information, provided in an online format for Councillors to access independently, to include - Performance, Management, Finance, Risk, Complaints, Business Cases and Ombudsman information. This will assist in 'horizon scanning' to enhance the effectiveness of O&S work planning. <i>Some committees maintain oversight of key information on a regular basis, but this is determined by committee and not currently available to committees in a standard accessible format.</i> <i>HASC O&S has developed a data toolkit, which gathers oversight information in a digestible format for O&S members. This has been welcomed by O&S members as an effective way to provide horizon scanning information to members allowing 'self-serve' and minimising impact on wider committee resources.</i> <i>This approach to be rolled out to all committees as resources allow.</i>	Spring/ Summer 24	L1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
	30b	<p>A programme of ongoing scrutiny skills training to be developed for delivery to O&S Councillors throughout municipal year 2023/24, to include –</p> <p>Interpretation performance, management and risk information, and its application to O&S work programming.</p> <p>LGA training opportunities in February and March 2024 on 'Data and Managing Council Performance' was promoted to all councillors.</p> <p>Arising opportunities free training through scrutiny networks will continue to be promoted to O&S councillors and additional bespoke training planned according to need and budget availability.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term	MT3
<p><i>Officers should speak to scrutiny members to ensure they understand the reasons why information is needed, thereby making the authority better able to provide information that is relevant and timely, as well as ensuring that the authority complies with legal requirements.</i></p> <p><i>Regulations already stipulate a timeframe for executives to comply with requests from a scrutiny member. When agreeing to such requests, authorities should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• consider whether seeking clarification from the information requester could help better target the request; and</i> <i>• Ensure the information is supplied in a format appropriate to the recipient's needs.</i> 	31	<p>Support scrutiny committees to be clear in identifying information needs and to scope larger pieces of work effectively so that information expectations can be met by officers and executive members.</p> <p>– In annual work programming for O&S Committees and ongoing, during work programming discussions at each meeting.</p> <p>During 23/24, where matters were scrutinised that were not already the subject of a report (eg. Cabinet report), scoping meetings were arranged between Chairs and report authors to clarify requirements. O&S Chairs engaged committee members to seek input into this.</p> <p>This process has been strengthened by the development of a Key Lines of Enquiry proforma, for completion for all new scrutiny items. This captures key questions and data requests and is being rolled out to all committees, providing a clearer audit trail for both committees and information providers.</p> <p>HASC O&S completed a working group on data and produced a Data Toolkit to capture its findings. This includes clear</p>	Complete – monitor long-term	WS1

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		guidance on a standard data request for HASC O&S committee reports - a process that can be mirrored by the other committees.		
<i>While each request for information should be judged on its individual merits, authorities should adopt a default position of sharing the information they hold, on request, with scrutiny committee members.</i>	32	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Default position of sharing information with O&S Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
<i>The law recognises that there might be instances where it is legitimate for an authority to withhold information and places a requirement on the executive to provide the scrutiny committee with a written statement setting out its reasons for that decision. However, members of the executive and senior officers should take particular care to avoid refusing requests, or limiting the information they provide, for reasons of party political or reputational expediency. Before an authority takes a decision not to share information it holds, it should give serious consideration to whether that information could be shared in closed session</i>	33a	Situations where information may be withheld from O&S, and actions to communicate this, are already set out in the Constitution at Access to Information Procedure Rule 24.	Complete	CR1
	33b	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Default position of sharing information with O&S, and situations where information may be withheld.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	33c	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Default position of sharing information with O&S, and situations where information may be withheld. Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.	Winter 2023	OT1
<i>Committees should be aware of their legal power to require members of the executive and officers to attend before them to answer questions. It is the duty of members and officers to comply with such requests.</i>	34a	Requirement for Cabinet members and officers to attend O&S when requested is already set out in constitution at O&S Procedure Rule 9.	Complete	CR1
	34b	Identification of attendees and formal requests to Cabinet and officers to attend is required by the constitution and an embedded practice.	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
	34c	Portfolio Holders attend O&S meetings in response to requests, or send deputies. Attendance of Portfolio Holders at O&S when requested is now well established and will continue to be encouraged.	Complete, monitor long-term.	C1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)					
		34d	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Requirement of Cabinet members and officers to attend scrutiny when requested	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
		34e	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Requirement of Cabinet members and officers to attend scrutiny when requested. <i>Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.</i>	Winter 2023	OT1
Seeking information from external organisations					
<i>Scrutiny members should also consider the need to supplement any authority-held information they receive with information and intelligence that might be available from other sources, and should note in particular their statutory powers to access information from certain external organisations</i>		35	Develop a library of O&S oversight information, provided in an online format for Councillors to access independently, to include - Information from external organisations, as appropriate, to support individual work items and annual work programming <i>Some committees maintain oversight of key information on a regular basis, but this is determined by committee and not currently available to committees in a standard accessible format.</i> HASC O&S has developed a data toolkit, which gathers oversight information in a digestible format for O&S members. This has been welcomed by O&S members as an effective way to provide horizon scanning information to members allowing 'self-serve' and minimising impact on wider committee resources. <i>This approach to be rolled out to all committees as resources allow.</i>	Spring/ Summer 24	L1
<i>When asking an external organisation to provide documentation or appear before it, and where that organisation is not legally obliged to do either, scrutiny committees should consider the following:</i>		36a	Guidelines for scrutinising external organisations is already included within the Council's Constitution at O&S Procedure Rule 10.	Complete	CR1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p><i>a) The need to explain the purpose of scrutiny – the organisation being approached might have little or no awareness of the committee's work, or of an authority's scrutiny function more generally, and so might be reluctant to comply with any request;</i></p> <p><i>b) The benefits of an informal approach – individuals from external organisations can have fixed perceptions of what an evidence session entails and may be unwilling to subject themselves to detailed public scrutiny if they believe it could reflect badly on them or their employer. Making an informal approach can help reassure an organisation of the aims of the committee, the type of information being sought and the manner in which the evidence session would be conducted;</i></p> <p><i>c) How to encourage compliance with the request – scrutiny committees will want to frame their approach on a case by case basis. For contentious issues, committees might want to emphasise the opportunity their request gives the organisation to 'set the record straight' in a public setting; and</i></p> <p><i>d) Who to approach – a committee might instinctively want to ask the Chief Executive or Managing Director of an organisation to appear at an evidence session, however it could be more beneficial to engage front-line staff when seeking operational-level detail rather than senior executives who might only be able to talk in more general terms. When making a request to a specific individual, the committee should consider the type of information it is seeking, the nature of the organisation in question and the authority's pre-existing relationship with it.</i></p>	36b	<p>Develop a user-friendly protocol to assist committees with approaching, preparing for and scrutinising external organisations.</p> <p><i>Not started. To be progressed as resources allow.</i></p>	Summer 2024	P1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
Following 'the Council Pound'				
<p><i>Scrutiny committees will often have a keen interest in 'following the council pound', i.e. scrutinising organisations that receive public funding to deliver goods and services.</i></p> <p><i>Authorities should recognise the legitimacy of this interest and, where relevant, consider the need to provide assistance to scrutiny members and their support staff to obtain information from organisations the council has contracted to deliver services. In particular, when agreeing contracts with these bodies, authorities should consider whether it would be appropriate to include a requirement for them to supply information to or appear before scrutiny committees</i></p>	37	<p>Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Support to scrutiny committees in respect of scrutinising organisations that receive public funding to deliver goods and services</p> <p>Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.</p>	Winter 2023	OT1
Planning Work				
<p><i>Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme, i.e. draw up a long-term agenda and consider making it flexible enough to accommodate any urgent, short-term issues that might arise during the year.</i></p>	38a	<p>O&S committees agree a work programme annually drawing ideas from relevant sources, that enables reports to be prepared and brought to the committee in a timely way.</p> <p>All O&S committees completed annual work programming in 2023/24, basing suggestions on a variety of relevant sources. To be repeated annually.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
	38b	<p>Work programmes are based on realistic assessment of resources available to O&S, also retaining capacity for some arising issues to be accommodated.</p> <p>All committees are asked to take account of resources when considering requests for work, especially commissioned work such as working groups and additional meetings. 2 working groups were held during 23/24 and 3 additional meetings called. It was fortunate that not all committees commissioned working groups during this time as overall resource to support</p>	<p>Complete to varying levels of effectiveness in 23/24.</p> <p>Stronger approach to this to be encouraged in 24/25,</p>	R1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)		<p>the function was limited by the increase in committee meetings, agreed by council in September 2023.</p> <p>O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee in particular have adapted practices to work within resources available with more manageable committee agendas, meeting duration and greater level of member led work taking place outside of committee.</p> <p>All committees would benefit from retaining clear capacity within their annual work programmes to ensure space exists to respond to arising issues without exceeding resource.</p> <p>Mechanisms are in place to monitor resource availability, including through this action plan, and on a regular basis through Chairs and Vice Chairs meetings. Officers will continue to provide guidance to support an O&S function that is as effective as possible within the resources available.</p>	with ongoing monitoring.	
	38c	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Effective O&S Work programming and best use of resources	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	38d	Feedback is gathered on O&S outputs and a tool developed to measure the success of O&S. Not started. To be progressed as resources allow.	Summer 2024	P1
<i>Authorities with multiple scrutiny committees sometimes have a separate work programme for each committee. Where this happens, consideration should be given to how to co-ordinate the various committees' work to make best use of the total resources available.</i>	39a	Each O&S committee may establish separate work plans, with responsibility for monitoring use of resource across all work plans sitting with O&S Board, supported by O&S Chairs. This is set out in the Constitution.	Complete	CR1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
	39b	Establish calendar of meeting dates for O&S chairs to include collective leadership monitoring of O&S resource Calendar of meetings planned for 2024	Autumn 2023	CM1
Being clear about scrutiny's role				
<p><i>Scrutiny works best when it has a clear role and function. This provides focus and direction. While scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects 'the area, or the area's inhabitants', authorities will often find it difficult to support a scrutiny function that carries out generalised oversight across the wide range of issues experienced by local people, particularly in the context of partnership working. Prioritisation is necessary, which means that there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at.</i></p> <p><i>Different overall roles could include having a focus on risk, the authority's finances, or on the way the authority works with its partners.</i></p> <p><i>Applying this focus does not mean that certain subjects are 'off limits'. It is more about looking at topics and deciding whether their relative importance justifies the positive impact scrutiny's further involvement could bring.</i></p>	40	See actions 4a, b and c above – O&S 'focus', working methods and terms of reference.	See relevant actions above	WS1/ WM1/ TOR1
<p><i>When thinking about scrutiny's focus, members should be supported by key senior officers. The statutory scrutiny officer, if an authority has one, will need to take a leading role in supporting members to clarify the role and function of scrutiny, and championing that role once agreed.</i></p>	41a	<p>Senior officers and the statutory scrutiny officer support committees in selecting priorities that are of relevance and can add value to the organisation.</p> <p>– In annual work programming for O&S Committees and ongoing, during work programming discussions at each meeting. Committees are well supported by senior officers in their selection of topics on a meeting-by-meeting basis with potential</p>	Complete, monitor long-term	WS1

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		<p>areas for value-added scrutiny identified by officers through service based training at first meetings of all committees and in annual work programming.</p> <p>The O&S Board and Environment & Place O&S Committee engaged in action/ learning workshops to plan their work programmes in 2023/24. These were led by CfGS and based on good practice. Both committees developed a lens and framework in liaison with the statutory scrutiny officer, which clearly identifies their role and mechanisms for engaging with the wider organisation on policy development and decisions. This will assist with communicating and championing the role of scrutiny to stakeholders. This approach to be used by all committees in future work programming.</p> <p>All committees would benefit from regularly assessing the value that has been added by their work, to inform future work planning.</p>		
	41b	<p>Statutory scrutiny officer to ensure that scrutiny priorities are promoted to Executive members and the wider officer corps via Corporate Management Board and information sharing with Cabinet members.</p> <p>All annual work programmes have been developed and are shared with each O&S committee agenda.</p> <p>Mechanisms are in place for promoting scrutiny priorities within the organisation:</p> <p>CMB has agreed to receive all O&S work programmes on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>The Leader and Chief Executive of the council have agreed to hold quarterly meetings with all O&S chairs to promote effective information sharing between O&S and executive to provide a mechanism for overcoming any barriers to effective working between the two.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
		O&S lead members are regularly encouraged to form effective informal relationships with cabinet members for information sharing purposes.		
Who to speak to				
<p><i>Evidence will need to be gathered to inform the work programming process. This will ensure that it looks at the right topics, in the right way and at the right time. Gathering evidence requires conversations with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The public -</i> <p><i>It is likely that formal 'consultation' with the public on the scrutiny work programme will be ineffective. Asking individual scrutiny members to have conversations with individuals and groups in their own local areas can work better. Insights gained from the public through individual pieces of scrutiny work can be fed back into the work programming process. Listening to and participating in conversations in places where local people come together, including in online forums, can help authorities engage people on their own terms and yield more positive results</i></p> <p><i>Authorities should consider how their communications officers can help scrutiny engage with the public, and how wider internal expertise and local knowledge from both members and officers might make a contribution.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The authority's partners –</i> <p><i>relationships with other partners should not be limited to evidence-gathering to support individual reviews or agenda items. A range of partners are likely to have insights that will prove useful:</i></p>	42a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Sources of input to annual work programming, to include community insight to their scrutiny work, partner information and Cabinet forthcoming priorities	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
	42b	See 3C above – use of community insight in O&S work	See relevant action above.	CI1
	42c	Statutory scrutiny officer to work with communications team to establish how scrutiny can promote its work priorities and gather public insight. To include proactive work with communications team in Spring 2024 to gather public insight to inform future annual work programming in Summer 2024. <i>Not started.</i>	Spring 2024	COM1
	42d	See 35 above: Develop a library of O&S oversight information, provided in an online format for Councillors to access independently, to include – Information from external organisations, as appropriate, to support individual work items and annual work programming	See relevant action above.	L1
	42e	Cabinet is asked to provide input to annual O&S work programming to indicate forthcoming areas of work where O&S can add value.	Complete, encourage greater engagement	C1

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<p><i>o Public sector partners (like the NHS and community safety partners, over which scrutiny has specific legal powers);</i></p> <p><i>o Voluntary sector partners;</i></p> <p><i>o Contractors and commissioning partners (including partners in joint ventures and authority-owned companies);</i></p> <p><i>o In parished areas, town, community and parish councils;</i></p> <p><i>o Neighbouring principal councils (both in two-tier and unitary areas);</i></p> <p><i>o Cross-authority bodies and organisations, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships; and</i></p> <p><i>o Others with a stake and interest in the local area – large local employers, for example.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The executive –</i> <p><i>a principal partner in discussions on the work programme should be the executive (and senior officers). The executive should not direct scrutiny's work, but conversations will help scrutiny members better understand how their work can be designed to align with the best opportunities to influence the authority's wider work.</i></p>		All Portfolio Holders were asked to contribute O&S annual work planning by providing information on forthcoming priorities to enable O&S to plan work that can align and add value. Responses to this request varied and would benefit from becoming a more widely promoted and embedded practice in the next round of annual work programming.	in next round of annual work-programming.	
	42f	See 7b above: The Cabinet Forward Plan is regularly updated with sufficient notice of forthcoming priorities to enable O&S to engage effectively at an early stage in policy shaping	See relevant action above.	C1
	42g	See 7d above: Role descriptions to be developed for Councillors in leading O&S roles to clarify expectation that scrutiny chairs establish informal working arrangements with relevant Portfolio Holders to ensure scrutiny can be informed of Cabinet priorities in a timely way.	See relevant action above.	RD1
Information sources				
<p><i>Scrutiny will need access to relevant information to inform its work programme. The type of information will depend on the specific role and function scrutiny plays within the authority, but might include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Performance information from across the authority and its partners;</i> <i>• Finance and risk information from across the authority and its partners;</i> 	43a	See 30a above: Develop a library of O&S oversight information, provided in an online format for Councillors to access independently, to include - Performance, Management, Finance, Risk, Complaints, Business Cases and Ombudsman information. This will assist in 'horizon scanning' to enhance the effectiveness of O&S work planning.	See relevant action above.	L1

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Corporate complaints information, and aggregated information from political groups about the subject matter of members' surgeries;</i> • <i>Business cases and options appraisals (and other planning information) for forthcoming major decisions. This information will be of particular use for pre -decision scrutiny; and</i> • <i>Reports and recommendations issued by relevant ombudsmen, especially the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.</i> <p><i>As committees can meet in closed session, commercial confidentiality should not preclude the sharing of information. Authorities should note, however, that the default for meetings should be that they are held in public</i></p>	43b	<p>Presumption is made that library of information for O&S Councillors is public, with non- public information shared in appropriate alternative environment to ensure Councillors can remain informed.</p> <p>The presumption for information shared with O&S to be public is already an embedded practice, with appropriate consideration given on an arising basis to O&S requests for non-public information.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	L1
<p>Scrutiny members should consider keeping this information under regular review. It is likely to be easier to do this outside committee, rather than bringing such information to committee 'to note', or to provide an update, as a matter of course.</p>	44	<p>Support committees to work in more diverse ways to maintain oversight of key information, including circulating information outside of meetings and the use of rapporteurs or champions for particular topics. This will free up committee resource for value added scrutiny.</p> <p>O&S Committees have received targeted training and support throughout the year to assist in this aim. O&S Board have made use of the member-led rapporteur model in work on Blue Badge waiting times. Other committees have agreed information which can be circulated outside of meetings to free up committee time and/or have held informal briefings for information only items. This approach could be significantly strengthened further across all committees.</p> <p>Analysis of 23/24 work outputs across all committees show an overbalance of monitoring/update reports, with this taking up the majority of work for 4 out of 5 committees operating in this period. This is taking up time that could be used for other value-added scrutiny.</p>	In annual work programming for O&S Committees – Autumn 2023	WM1

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		<p>Greater use could be made of other methods, such as rapporteurs, to maintain overview of information otherwise reported into committee. This approach will continue to be encouraged across all committees.</p> <p>Being more greatly aligned to a performance and oversight role, Children's Services and HASC O&S Committees would particularly benefit from an ongoing rigorous approach to committee agenda planning, to ensure that all information sharing items are received in other ways. Officers will continue to support this approach.</p>		
Shortlisting topics				
<p><i>Approaches to shortlisting topics should reflect scrutiny's overall role in the authority. This will require the development of bespoke, local solutions, however when considering whether an item should be included in the work programme, the kind of questions a scrutiny committee should consider might include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Do we understand the benefits scrutiny would bring to this issue?</i> <i>• How could we best carry out work on this subject?</i> <i>• What would be the best outcome of this work?</i> <i>• How would this work engage with the activity of the executive and other decision-makers, including partners?</i> 	45a	<p>Extend the use of the 'scrutiny request form' already in place for commissioned items, to encourage consideration of the value to be added by all reports, such as scrutiny's consideration of Cabinet pre-decision items and officer proposed items.</p> <p>– In annual work programming for O&S Committees and ongoing, during work programming discussions at each meeting.</p> <p>The use of the 'scrutiny request form' is embedded for councillor requests. It is not currently used for requests to consider other items such as Cabinet items or officer proposed items. O&S Chairs have confirmed that they do not feel a documented process for officer or cabinet requests is necessary.</p> <p>Careful consideration of the likely benefits of all intended work prior to commencement, regardless of origin, will continue to be encouraged by officers that support O&S.</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p><i>Some authorities use scoring systems to evaluate and rank work programme proposals. If these are used to provoke discussion and debate, based on evidence, about what priorities should be, they can be a useful tool. Others take a looser approach. Whichever method is adopted, a committee should be able to justify how and why a decision has been taken to include certain issues and not others.</i></p> <p><i>Scrutiny members should accept that shortlisting can be difficult; scrutiny committees have finite resources and deciding how these are best allocated is tough. They should understand that, if work programming is robust and effective, there might well be issues that they want to look at that nonetheless are not selected.</i></p>	45b	Review 'scrutiny request form' and update as appropriate to incorporate all suggested areas referenced in O&S guidance. Not started. To be progressed as resources allow.	Autumn 2023	P1
	45c	See 18c above: As required by the constitution, all requests for O&S work are considered by Committees against the current resource levels available to support the request	See relevant action above.	R1
Carrying out work				
<p>Selected topics can be scrutinised in several ways, including:</p> <p>a) As a single item on a committee agenda – this often presents a limited opportunity for effective scrutiny, but may be appropriate for some issues or where the committee wants to maintain a formal watching brief over a given issue;</p> <p>b) At a single meeting – which could be a committee meeting or something less formal. This can provide an opportunity to have a single public meeting about a given subject, or to have a meeting at which evidence is taken from a number of witnesses;</p> <p>c) At a task and finish review of two or three meetings – short, sharp scrutiny review are likely to be most effective even for complex topics. Properly focused, they ensure members can swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations, perhaps over the course of a couple of months or less;</p>	46a	Methods of carrying out O&S work are set out within the Constitution at Article 6, Rule 6.9.	Complete	CR1
	46b	Support committees to actively consider diverse ways of working other than committee reports to secure most effective outputs. O&S ways of working were considered through O&S work planning activity for all committees. Officers also encourage consideration of diverse ways of working on an ongoing basis as work programmes are revised.	Complete, monitor long-term	WM1
	46c	Review and develop task and finish/ working group scoping document, protocol and joint working group protocol Not started. To be progressed as resources allow.	Summer 2024	P1

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Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p>d) Via a longer-term task and finish review – the 'traditional' task and finish model – with perhaps six or seven meetings spread over a number of months – is still appropriate when scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail. However, the resource implications of such work, and its length, can make it unattractive for all but the most complex matters; and</p> <p>e) By establishing a 'standing panel' – this falls short of establishing a whole new committee but may reflect a necessity to keep a watching brief over a critical local issue, especially where members feel they need to convene regularly to carry out that oversight. Again, the resource implications of this approach means that it will be rarely used.</p>				
Evidence sessions				
<p>Evidence sessions are a key way in which scrutiny committees inform their work. They might happen at formal committee, in less formal 'task and finish' groups or at standalone sessions.</p> <p>Good preparation is a vital part of conducting effective evidence sessions. Members should have a clear idea of what the committee hopes to get out of each session and appreciate that success will depend on their ability to work together on the day.</p>	47	<p>Consider the appropriateness of conducting evidence sessions to scrutinise particular topics when planning annual work programmes. These will need proactive planning to ensure that sufficient resource can be made available to support effective sessions.</p> <p>Some committees invited evidence into scrutiny from additional sources during 23/24 but evidence sessions were not widely used. Initial plans are in place for a joint O&S housing related inquiry day to take evidence from a variety of sources, during 24/25.</p> <p>Planning and conducting evidence sessions is resource intensive and support is limited to support this owing to the high volume of committee meetings planned for O&S and associated core work. The approach will therefore continue to be promoted as an effective form of scrutiny to be taken up as resources allow.</p>	Action will progress as resources allow.	WM1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
How to plan <i>Effective planning does not necessarily involve a large number of pre-meetings, the development of complex scopes or the drafting of questioning plans. It is more often about setting overall objectives and then considering what type of questions (and the way in which they are asked) can best elicit the information the committee is seeking. This applies as much to individual agenda items as it does for longer evidence sessions – there should always be consideration in advance of what scrutiny is trying to get out of a particular evidence session.</i>	48	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Evidence led approach to O&S, and how to conduct an effective evidence session	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
<i>Chairs play a vital role in leading discussions on objective-setting and ensuring all members are aware of the specific role each will play during the evidence session.</i> <i>As far as possible there should be consensus among scrutiny members about the objective of an evidence session before it starts. It is important to recognise that members have different perspectives on certain issues, and so might not share the objectives for a session that are ultimately adopted. Where this happens, the Chair will need to be aware of this divergence of views and bear it in mind when planning the evidence session.</i>	49	O&S Chairing skills training to be delivered to include how to plan for and lead evidence sessions, establish aims and manage different objectives from committee members Chairing skills training provided in Summer 2023 induction. O&S leadership training provided via LGA workshops in Feb 2024. LGA leadership training to be offered to all new O&S chairs, as and when changes in positions occur.	Complete, monitor long-term.	MT2
<i>Effective planning should mean that at the end of a session it is relatively straightforward for the chair to draw together themes and highlight the key findings. It is unlikely that the committee will be able to develop and agree recommendations immediately, but, unless the session is part of a wider inquiry, enough evidence should have been gathered to allow the chair to set a clear direction.</i>	50	O&S Chairing skills training to be delivered to include how to draw together themes and highlight key findings at the end of evidence sessions – this approach to be extended to all O&S work items to ensure Chairs can provide transparent summary of discussions. Chairing skills training provided in Summer 2023 induction. O&S leadership training provided via LGA workshops in Feb 2024. LGA leadership training to be offered to all new O&S chairs, as and when changes in positions occur.	Complete, monitor long-term	MT2

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>After an evidence session, the committee might wish to hold a short 'wash-up' meeting to review whether their objectives were met and lessons could be learned for future sessions</i>				
Developing recommendations				
<i>The development and agreement of recommendations is often an iterative process. It will usually be appropriate for this to be done only by members, assisted by co-optees where relevant. When deciding on recommendations, however, members should have due regard to advice received from officers, particularly the Monitoring Officer.</i>	51a	Officer refresher training to be provided to include – Officers to provide timely, transparent advice to committees in all areas of O&S work, as appropriate. <i>Planned for Summer / Autumn 2024.</i>	Winter 2023	OT1
<i>The drafting of reports is usually, but not always, carried out by officers, directed by members.</i>	51b	For longer pieces of O&S work, a lead officer to be identified at the scoping stage who will support report drafting - include this within relevant protocols listed at 46c above. <i>This is included as standard within scoping documents for O&S working groups.</i> <i>Wider piece of work to review protocols (46c) not yet started.</i> <i>To be progressed as resources allow.</i>	Immediate, as arising (WS1/R1) Protocol review Summer 2024 (P1)	WS1/R1/P1
<i>Authorities draft reports and recommendations in a number of ways, but there are normally three stages:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>i. the development of a 'heads of report' – a document setting out general findings that members can then discuss as they consider the overall structure and focus of the report and its recommendations;</i> <i>ii. The development of those findings, which will set out some areas on which recommendations might be made; and</i> <i>iii. the drafting of the full report.</i> <i>Recommendations should be evidence-based and SMART, i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed. Where appropriate, committees may wish to consider sharing them in draft with interested parties.</i>	52	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – Consideration of appropriate recommendations and reporting route for O&S work, to include consideration of what SMART recommendations may look like. Consideration of this to take place at the scoping stage of O&S work, to ensure scope is clear enough and to provide an indication of the value that is likely to be added by the work undertaken.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
<i>Committees should bear in mind that often six to eight recommendations are sufficient to enable the authority to focus its response, although there may be specific circumstances in which more might be appropriate.</i>				
<i>Sharing draft recommendations with executive members should not provide an opportunity for them to revise or block recommendations before they are made. It should, however, provide an opportunity for errors to be identified and corrected, and for a more general sense-check</i>	53	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided to include – The role of executive member consultation during draft reporting stages.	Complete. Monitor the need for refresher training.	MT1
Chief Executive's Assurance Review, June 2023 – recommendations and comments relating to O&S				
<i>In a No Overall Control council it is useful to ensure there is an opportunity to elect a Chair from outside of the administration to each Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to ensure appropriate scrutiny and holding the Executive to account.</i>	54a	Since May 2023 all O&S Committees have appointed a Chair, and in most cases, a Vice-Chair from outside of the Administration.	Complete – monitor long term.	CL1
<i>Opposition councillors have recently been given a majority of positions on the principal Overview and Scrutiny committees as a result of changes in the political balance calculations. Opposition councillors appear to be content to keep Conservative councillors as Chairs for the Committees where they are already in place, for the remainder of this Council term.</i>	54b	Action relating to potential constitutional changes to clarify the good practice of opposition chairs outlined at 8c above.	See relevant action above.	CR1
<i>Overview and scrutiny committees are to be encouraged to take evidence and contributions from officers as well as portfolio holders, to ensure a more informed basis to O&S recommendations.</i> <i>There is still a marked reluctance amongst the broader overview and scrutiny committees to ask questions directly of officers and</i>	55	Multiple actions relating to O&S powers to question, skills training, and planning of evidence sessions are outlined above. These will all assist with encouraging evidence and contributions from officers as well as portfolio holders, to increase the effectiveness of scrutiny sessions. See 9a, 9b, 9c, 27b and 48 above.	See relevant actions above	See relevant actions above

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
<p><i>there are regular comments that leading councillors do not give clear answers to questions, but other councillors do not seek that clarity from officers, which they could.</i></p> <p><i>Since June there has been a noticeable shift in emphasis within the Council, with officers being invited to contribute on specific issues in Cabinet and this need needs to be extended to O&S committees</i></p> <p><i>Continue to encourage full participation and clarity of answers in all meetings, and incorporate into training for Overview and Scrutiny committee members.</i></p>				
<p><i>Overview and scrutiny committees should continue to increase their focus on policy development and engagement rather than pre-Cabinet scrutiny.</i></p>	56a	<p>Update text lifted from Assurance Review Action Plan:</p> <p>Prior to the May 2023 elections there was little movement in the focus of the two new Overview and Scrutiny committees (Place and Corporate & Community) that replaced O&S Board, with an ongoing focus on pre-Cabinet scrutiny. At the end of 23/24 this had changed to a maximum level of 53% of items being within the pre-decision scrutiny category for O&S Board, with all other committees at a lower level.</p> <p>Since the elections the administration sought to restructure Overview and Scrutiny, to establish a closer link to the Cabinet cycle for one O&S Committee but keeping the other 3 committees removed from the Cabinet cycle. This was implemented in September 2023.</p> <p>The policy development role for O&S was incorporated into training for Overview and Scrutiny committee members, to foster a wider role for Overview and Scrutiny committees, underpinned by officer encouragement. O&S forward plans now show a more balanced mix of work, an example of this is a</p>	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
		<p>recent O&S investigation into blue badge waiting times with a view to establishing necessary policy changes.</p> <p>Officers should encourage, raise awareness and provide training on an ongoing basis to ensure that the O&S function focuses on a balance of work including policy development. CMB has agreed to regularly receive O&S work plans to provide opportunity to encourage policy development, and the Scrutiny Officer encourages regular communication with O&S chairs to assist in identifying these opportunities.</p> <p>The changes to the O&S structure introduced ability for the Environment and Place O&S Committee to appoint two independent members establishing an opportunity to scrutinise from a fresh perspective.</p> <p>To give a wider set of input the O&S Board has also taken evidence from other organisations, including two representatives of the private development industry when considering the draft Local Plan.</p> <p>Three workshops were held with CfGS support to develop work programming approaches to include more proactive scrutiny work. The E&P O&S Committee and O&S Board have developed a framework for how they will approach and include a balance of pre-decision, proactive and reactive scrutiny into their work plans.</p>		
	56b	<p>Ongoing support to promote a balance of O&S work is identified through multiple actions above.</p> <p>Encouraging an effective balance of scrutiny work involves many factors including effective engagement with Cabinet and senior officers to ensure O&S understanding of forthcoming</p>	See relevant actions above	See relevant actions above

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from: Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
		<p>priorities; training; work planning actions and monitoring and reporting on scrutiny outputs to ensure Council ownership of the balance of O&S work.</p> <p>These actions will embed a practice of selecting topics which generate meaningful outcomes and balance policy engagement with pre-Cabinet scrutiny.</p> <p>See actions 1c, 4b,7b,7c,7d, 14a, 38c, 38d, 41, 42e, 43a, 45a above.</p>		
<p><i>Overview and scrutiny committees should consider putting more focus into corporate performance reporting, challenging the executive to ensure that improvement plans are having an effect and improving the services that are missing their targets.</i></p> <p><i>There is an opportunity to strengthen the focus of O&S on performance management, through the overview and scrutiny committees.</i></p> <p><i>Incorporate into training for Overview and Scrutiny committee members and monitor agendas, encouraging Overview and Scrutiny Committees to focus on performance management information.</i></p>	57	<p>See 30a and 30b above relating to the provision of performance management information and associated training.</p>	See relevant actions above	See relevant actions above
<p><i>Need to ensure the party whip is not applied to O&S functions. This message needs to be reinforced and the situation monitored.</i></p> <p><i>There has been no recent evidence of the party whip being applied to O&S functions, but this needs to be monitored. A positive statement will be sought from Group Leaders.</i></p>	58	<p>Actions relating to training, chairing and monitoring the independence of O&S are set out above. See 8b, 8d,8e, 16a and 16c and 26 above.</p>	See relevant actions above	See relevant actions above

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
DLUHC External Assurance Review of BCP Council, August 2023 – recommendations and comments relating to O&S				
<i>The Council reviews the Transformation programme and agrees a realistic and deliverable programme by October 2023. The Council sets up effective mechanisms for Member oversight and monitoring of the delivery of the programme by June 2023</i>	59	O&S to consider and establish its role in this member oversight and monitoring. A mechanism for O&S oversight has been established. The O&S Board Chair and Vice Chair are members of the cross-party councillor working group now established to monitor the Transformation Programme. This provides a mechanism for O&S to maintain oversight of assurances or concerns relating to the programme with red flags able to be raised to committee by exception. When available, Cabinet reports monitoring the Transformation Programme are also received by the O&S Board.	Complete, monitor long-term.	WS1
<i>The Council establishes a sound budget setting process and begins preparations for the 2024/25 budget as soon as possible after the local government elections and has proposals drafted for a sustainable MTFP and three-year budget by the end of September 2023</i>	60	O&S to consider and establish its role in the budget setting process The O&S Board monitors any areas of risk and concern within the MTFP through regular reporting at committee. The 2024/25 budget was considered by the O&S Board in January 2024 with invitation to other O&S Chairs to contribute on budget matters relating to services within their committee remit. Early plans are in place for a more active role for O&S in the budget setting process for 2025/26, with input through the year as the budget develops. This is in line with refreshed guidance on good practice from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. This has been discussed with O&S Chairs, relevant portfolio holders and senior officers and there is good support to this approach. This will be advanced throughout 2024/25, as permitted by resources available.	In annual work programming for O&S Committees – Autumn 2023	WS1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<i>The Council, with the active leadership of the respective group leaders, uses the opportunity of a new Council to reset the Member / Member and Member / officer culture and relationships. The new Council must use the support offered by the LGA and set up a comprehensive programme of Member induction and an on-going programme of Member training. The induction programme should be in place by June 2023 and the ongoing programme by July 2023</i>	61a	New Councillor and refresher training to be provided. Complete. See all actions coded MT1 above.	See relevant actions above.	MT1
	61b	See 21b above - A programme of ongoing scrutiny skills training to be developed for delivery to O&S Councillors throughout municipal year 2023/24.	See relevant action above.	MT3
	61c	See 23b above – O&S Chairing and leadership skills support to be provided.	See relevant action above.	MT2
	61d	LGA training opportunities to be taken up. The LGA has been widely engaged to provide support to O&S since May 2023. This includes Leadership Academy training, in-house delivery of support for O&S work programming and promotion of LGA online training courses to councillors.	Complete. Continue to take up opportunities on an ongoing basis.	WS1
<i>The Council puts in place a regular annual cycle for the business plans, mid-year reviews and year end reviews of all its companies to be reported to the appropriate scrutiny and decision-making bodies. This should be in place by June 2023 to begin the 2024/25 process</i>	62	O&S to consider and establish its role in this review process. This has not yet been established. To be revisited with O&S Board Chair.	In annual work programming for O&S Committees – Autumn 2023	WS1
<i>The Council has four scrutiny committees – Corporate and Community; Children's Services; Health and Adult Social Care, and Place. Scrutiny has focused rather heavily on pre scrutiny of Cabinet decisions rather than having a broader focus or looking at policy development. I was told by a range of people that politics has got in the way of effective scrutiny. When scrutiny has looked at wider issues the feedback has been more positive – I was told of</i>	63	See 56a and 56b above.	See relevant actions above	See relevant actions above

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)				
<p><i>a good example of scrutiny inviting the Police and Crime Commissioner and neighbourhood watch representatives to a scrutiny committee. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny summarise scrutiny's role as providing a space to bring critical friend challenge and support to decision making; providing a way of challenging and supporting partner organisations; bringing issues that matter to local people and the local community into decision making; and surface issues that the Council should be engaging with but which are not yet part of formal decision making.</i></p> <p><i>From what I have seen there is an opportunity at BCP – as there is with many other councils – to develop the scrutiny role along the lines above rather than simply to focus on pre-cabinet scrutiny. There is an opportunity with a new Council to ensure that Councillors have training and support to enable them to develop their role in overview and scrutiny. This should be built into the Member induction and ongoing training programme.</i></p>				
<p><i>The DfE Advisor has commented that the Scrutiny Committee [Children's Services O&S] and particularly its Chair (prior to the elections) have been engaged in a proper and appropriate way. The Chair of scrutiny prior to the elections has now been appointed as the Cabinet Member and therefore the Statutory Lead Member for Children's Services. Given the position of children's services the change in both the Cabinet Member and Scrutiny Chair roles will need careful management and both Members will need focussed support to discharge these key roles.</i></p>	64a	<p>Work programming support provided summer 2023. Further support to be provided to complete annual work programming.</p> <p><i>All Children's Services O&S work planning now complete.</i></p>	Complete in 23/24. To be repeated annually on ongoing basis.	CS1
	64b	<p>Focussed support provided by service area lead to identify and provide relevant performance information to support the committee in its role.</p> <p><i>Service area lead for performance and governance has provided support to Children's O&S Chair and committee. This is well established and provided on an ongoing basis.</i></p> <p><i>Offer of regular meetings between Director of Children's Services to the Chair of Children's O&S Committee was made.</i></p>	Offer of support completed in 23/24 – will continue to be offered with take-up monitored on an	CS1

Overview and Scrutiny Action Plan 2023-24

Relevant Extract from:	ID	Action for BCP Council with updates (Latest updates December 2023 in blue text)	RAG and timescales	Code
Statutory Guidance on O&S (ID 1-53) Chief Executive's Assurance Review (ID 54-58) DLUHC Assurance Review (ID 59 – 64)			ongoing basis.	
	64c	Ongoing training plan for the Committee in development. The committee held a training and development session to support work programme priorities and officers have supported ongoing information based training needs as arising. Offer of LGA training and support to full committee has been refreshed in summer 2024 and will be promoted to the committee by officers. A programme of briefing slots will be planned in for 2024/25 to be used as required. Along with other scrutiny network training opportunities, this should be drawn together in a documented package of development to ensure all necessary areas are covered.	Autumn 2023	CS1
	64d	Establish links with O&S Chairs in other authorities that have experience of similar improvement journey. Links established and provided to the Chair summer 2023.	Complete, monitor take-up of opportunities ongoing.	CS1
	64e	LGA development opportunities promoted to Chair. LGA hosted Children's Services Leadership training provided to Chair in Autumn 2023. This is in addition to the Chairing and leadership skills training identified at 61c and 61d above. Attendance at the National Children and Adult Services Conference was also supported in Autumn 2023 to provide learning and networking opportunities to chair. Offer of LGA training and support to full committee, including mentoring support for chair, has been refreshed in summer 2024 and will be promoted to the committee by officers.	Complete. Development opportunities will continue to be promoted and take-up monitored on ongoing basis.	CS1

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD



Report subject	Work Plan
Meeting date	23 September 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Board is asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>the O&S Board review, update and confirm its Work Plan.</p>
Reason for recommendations	The Council's Constitution requires all Overview and Scrutiny Committees to set out proposed work in a Work Plan which will be published with each agenda

Portfolio Holder(s):	N/A – O&S is a non-executive function
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Lindsay Marshall, Overview and Scrutiny Specialist
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background –

1. All Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) bodies are required by the Constitution to consider work priorities and set these out in a Work Plan. When approved, this should be published with each agenda.
2. It is good practice for the Work Plan to be kept under regular review by the Board. Between meetings O&S Chairs and Vice Chairs, in consultation with officers, suggest updates to the work plan to ensure proposed topics remain timely, fit for purpose and allow sufficient time for report preparation as appropriate. The Board is now asked to review, update and/ or confirm the latest work plan update. See the Work Plan attached at Appendix B to this report.
3. The current work plan is based on annual work programming activity undertaken by the Board in Winter 2023. Through this work, which was supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), the Board agreed a [framework](#) which outlines how scrutiny work will be selected and approached. This is based on good practice. The framework outlines that scrutiny work will be divided into three categories of:
 - Proactive scrutiny
 - Reactive scrutiny
 - Pre-decision scrutiny.

Information only items should be received in other ways, reserving committee and working group capacity for value-added scrutiny. The Board's current work plan is structured to reflect this.

4. O&S statutory guidance recommends that a 'lens' or key set of priorities be established by O&S committees, to clearly communicate their role and how they will add value to the work of the organisation. The statements also clarify the role of the committee to the public. Through annual work programming activity, the Board agreed the following lens and supporting statement:

The **O&S Board** will approach work through a lens of **RESIDENT IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE**, such as considering:

- benefits that could be brought to residents by **delivering services** in different ways
- how the areas of highest **financial risk** for the council may impact on residents
- the council's **relationship with the public** and work that can be done to strengthen this.

5. Established lenses provide a tool to assist O&S members in work programming, to sift suggestions for work into a realistic annual work programme for each committee and to provide an angle by which to approach scrutiny topics. The lens should be referred to throughout the year as arising suggestions for work are made. The establishment of a lens does not preclude the Board from using the full extent of its scrutiny powers where appropriate.

Principles of Good Scrutiny

6. The Constitution requires that the Work Plan of O&S committees shall consist of work aligned to the principles of the function. The BCP Council O&S function is based upon six principles:
 - Contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend';
 - A member led and owned function – seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development;
 - Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process;
 - Engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence;
 - Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the Council;
 - Agility – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.

Process for agreeing Work Plan items

7. An O&S committee may take suggestions from a variety of sources to form its Work Plan. This may include suggestions from members of the public, officers of the Council, Portfolio Holders, the Cabinet and Council, members of the O&S Committee, and other Councillors who are not on the Committee.
8. The Constitution requires that all suggestions for O&S work will be accompanied by detail outlining the background to the issue suggested, the proposed method of undertaking the work and likely timescale associated, and the anticipated outcome and value to be added by the work proposed. No item of work shall join the Work Plan of the O&S Committee without an assessment of this information.
9. Any councillor may request that an item of business be considered by an O&S Committee. Councillors are asked to complete a form outlining the request, which is appended to this report at Appendix C. The same process will apply to requests for scrutiny from members of the public.
10. A copy of the most recent Cabinet Forward Plan will be supplied to O&S Committees at each meeting for reference when determining items of pre-decision scrutiny. The latest version is supplied as Appendix D to this report.

Resources to support O&S work

11. The Constitution requires that the O&S Committees take into account the resources available to support their proposals for O&S work. This includes consideration of councillor availability, officer time and financial resources. Careful and regular assessment of resources will ensure that there is appropriate resource available to support work across the whole O&S function, and that any work established can be carried out in sufficient depth and completed in a timely way to enable effective outcomes.

12. It is good practice for O&S Committees to agree a maximum of two/ three substantive agenda items per meeting. This will provide sufficient time for Committees to take a 'deep dive' approach to scrutiny work, which is likely to provide more valuable outcomes. A large amount of agenda items can lead to a 'light touch' approach to all items of business, and also limit the officer and councillor resource available to plan for effective scrutiny of selected items.
13. O&S Committees are advised to carefully select their working methods to ensure that O&S resource is maximised. A variety of methods are available for O&S Committees to undertake work and are not limited to the receipt of reports at Committee meetings. These may include:
- Working Groups;
 - Sub-Committees;
 - Tak and finish groups;
 - Inquiry Days;
 - Rapporteurs (scrutiny member champions);
 - Consideration of information outside of meetings – including report circulation/ briefing workshops/ briefing notes.

Further detail on O&S working methods are set out in the Constitution and in Appendix A – Terms of Reference for O&S Committees.

Options Appraisal

14. The O&S Board is asked to review, update and confirm its Work Plan, taking account of the supporting documents provided and including the determination of any new requests for scrutiny. This will ensure member ownership of the Work Plan and that reports can be prepared in a timely way. Should the Board not confirm its forthcoming priorities, reports may not be able to be prepared in a timely way and best use of the meeting resource may not be made.

Summary of financial implications

15. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The Board should note that when establishing a Work Plan, the Constitution requires that account be taken of the resources available to support proposals for O&S work. Advice on maximising the resource available to O&S Committees is set out in paragraphs 11 to 13 above.

Summary of legal implications

16. The Council's Constitution requires that all O&S bodies set out proposed work in a Work Plan which will be published with each agenda. The recommendation proposed in this report will fulfil this requirement.

Summary of human resources implications

17. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

18. There are no sustainability resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of public health implications

19. There are no public health implications arising from this report.

Summary of equality implications

20. There are no equality implications arising from this report. Any councillor and any member of the public may make suggestions for overview and scrutiny work. Further detail on this process is included within Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

Summary of risk assessment

21. There is a risk of challenge to the Council if the Constitutional requirement to establish and publish a Work Plan is not met.

Background papers

None.

Appendices

Appendix A – Overview and Scrutiny Committees Terms of Reference

Appendix B - Current O&S Board Work Plan

Appendix C – Request for consideration of an issue by Overview and Scrutiny

Appendix D – Current Cabinet Forward Plan

Appendix E – O&S Framework

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BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD / COMMITTEES TERMS OF REFERENCE

Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is a statutory role fulfilled by Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet in an authority operating a Leader and Cabinet model. The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Committees is to help develop policy, to carry out reviews of Council and other local services, and to hold decision makers to account.

PRINCIPLES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Overview and Scrutiny function is based upon six principles:

1. Contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend'.
2. A member led and owned function – seeks to continuously improve through self-reflection and development.
3. Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process.
4. Engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence.
5. Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the Council.
6. Agile – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods.

MEETINGS

There are four Overview and Scrutiny bodies at BCP Council:

- Overview and Scrutiny Board
- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Each Committee meets 5 times during the municipal year, except for the Overview and Scrutiny Board which meets monthly to enable the Board to make recommendations to Cabinet. The date and time of meetings will be set by full Council and may only be changed by the Chairman of the relevant Committee in consultation with the Monitoring Officer. Members will adhere to the agreed principles of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Decisions shall be taken by consensus. Where it is not possible to reach consensus, a decision will be reached by a simple majority of those present at the meeting. Where there are equal votes the Chair of the meeting will have the casting vote.

MEMBERSHIP

The Overview and Scrutiny Board and Committees are appointed by full Council. Each Committee has 11 members and the Board has 13 members. No member of the Cabinet may be a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees or Board, or any group established by them. Lead Members of the Cabinet may not be a member of Overview and Scrutiny Committees or Board. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee may not be a member of any Overview and Scrutiny Committees or Board.

The quorum of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Board shall be one third of the total membership (excluding voting and non-voting co-optees).

No member may be involved in scrutinising a decision in which they been directly involved. If a member is unable to attend a meeting their Group may arrange for a substitute to attend in their place in accordance with the procedures as set out in the Council's Constitution.

Members of the public can be invited to attend and contribute to meetings as required, to provide insight to a matter under discussion. This may include but is not limited to subject experts with relevant specialist knowledge or expertise, representatives of stakeholder groups or service users. Members of the public will not have voting rights.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee - The Committee must statutorily include two church and two parent governor representatives as voting members (on matters related to education) in addition to Councillor members. Parent governor membership shall extend to a maximum period of four years and no less than two years. The Committee may also co-opt one representative from the Academy Trusts within the local authority area, to attend meetings and vote on matters relating to education.

The Committee may also co-opt two representatives of The Youth Parliament and, although they will not be entitled to vote, will ensure that their significant contribution to the work of the Committee is recognised and valued.

Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee - The Committee may co-opt two independent non-voting members. The selection and recruitment process shall be determined by the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

FUNCTIONS OF THE O&S COMMITTEES AND O&S BOARD

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including the Overview and Scrutiny Board) has responsibility for:

- Scrutinising decisions of the Cabinet, offering advice or making recommendations
- Offering any views or advice to the Cabinet or Council in relation to any matter referred to the Committee for consideration
- General policy reviews, and making recommendations to the Council or the Cabinet to assist in the development of future policies and strategies
- Assisting the Council in the development of the Budget and Policy Framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues
- Monitoring the implementation of decisions to examine their effect and outcomes
- Referring to full Council, the Cabinet or appropriate Committee/Sub-Committee any matter which, following scrutiny a Committee determines should be brought to the attention of the Council, Cabinet or other appropriate Committee
- Preparation, review and monitoring of a work programme
- Establishing such commissioned work as appropriate after taking into account the availability of resources, the work programme and the matter under review

In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Board has responsibility for:

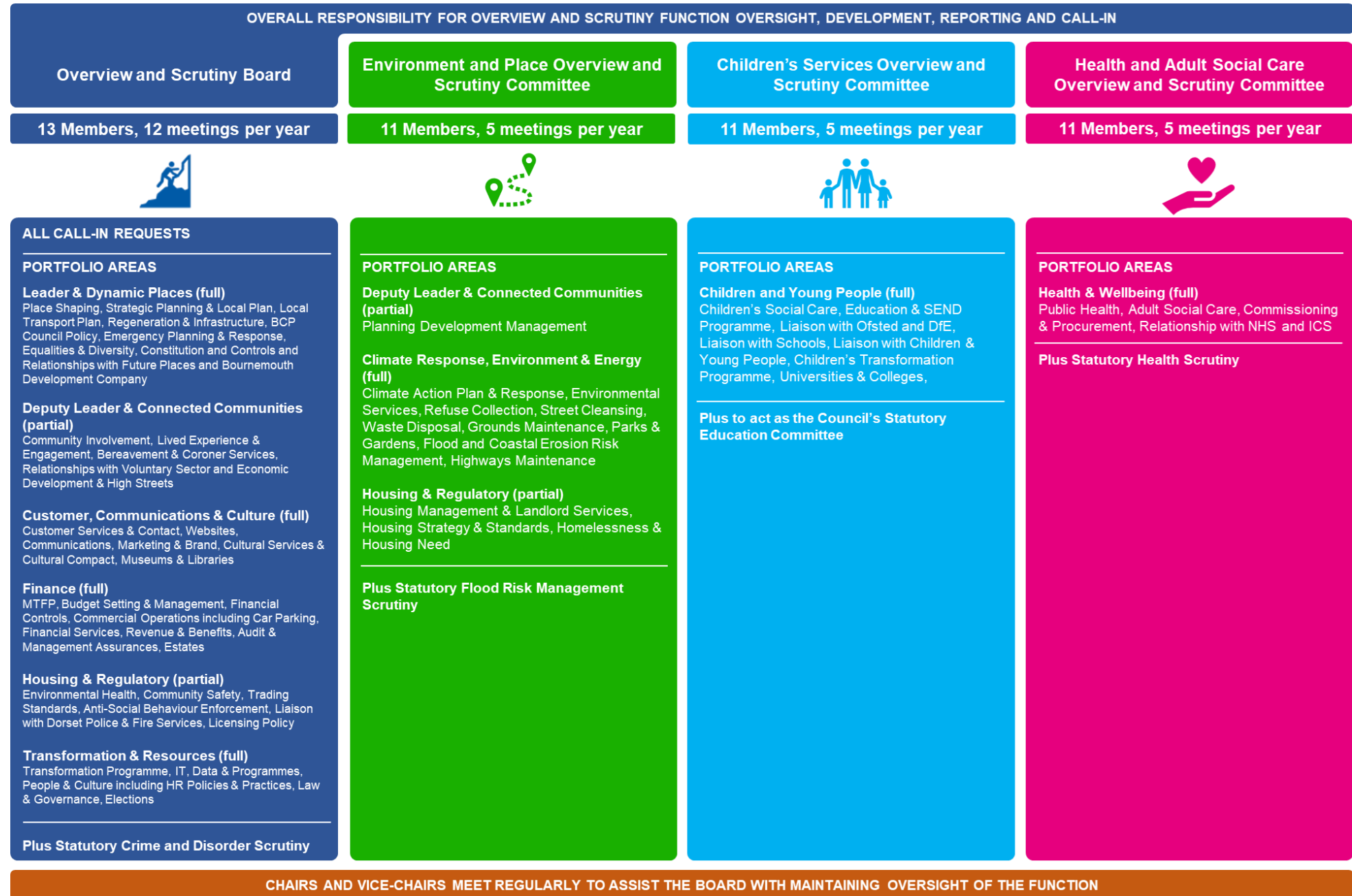
- Considering decisions that have been called-in
- Undertaking scrutiny of the Council's budget processes
- Carrying out the Council's scrutiny functions relating to crime and disorder, and discharging any other statutory duty for which the O&S function is responsible, other than those that relate to Flood Risk Management, Health, Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education
- Overseeing the Council's overall O&S function including oversight of the work plans and use of resource across all O&S bodies
- Keeping the O&S function under review, suggesting changes as appropriate to ensure that it remains fit for purpose
- Reporting annually to Full Council on the output of the O&S function
- Maintaining oversight of the training needs of the whole O&S function.

Figure 1 below provides an outline of the responsibilities of each Committee.

The remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Committees is based on the division of Portfolio Holder responsibilities. Portfolio Holders may report to more than one Overview and Scrutiny body.

Portfolio Holder responsibilities are changeable and from time to time it may be necessary to modify the designation of functions across the four Overview and Scrutiny bodies.

Figure One –Overview and Scrutiny Structure



COMMISSIONED WORK

In addition to Committee meetings, the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Committees may commission work to be undertaken as they consider necessary after taking into account the availability of resources, the work programme and the matter under review.

Each O&S body is limited to one commission at a time to ensure availability of resources.

a) **Working Groups** – a small group of Councillors and Officers gathered to consider a specific issue and report back to the full Board/ Committee, or make recommendations to Cabinet or Council within a limited timescale. Working Groups usually meet once or twice, and are often non-public;

b) **Sub-Committees** – a group of Councillors delegated a specific aspect of the main Board/ Committee's work for ongoing, in-depth monitoring. May be time limited or be required as a long-standing Committee. Sub-Committees are often well suited to considering performance-based matters that require scrutiny oversight. Sub-Committees usually meet in public;

c) **Task and finish groups** – a small group of Councillors tasked with investigating a particular issue and making recommendations on this issue, with the aim of influencing wider Council policy. The area of investigation will be carefully scoped and will culminate in a final report, usually with recommendations to Cabinet or Council. Task and finish groups may work over the course of a number of months and take account of a wide variety of evidence, which can be resource intensive. For this reason, the number of these groups must be carefully prioritised by scrutiny members to ensure the work can progress at an appropriate pace for the final outcome to have influence;

d) **Inquiry Days** – with a similar purpose to task and finish groups, inquiry days seek to understand and make recommendations on an issue by talking to a wide range of stakeholders and considering evidence relating to that issue, within one or two days. Inquiry days have similarities to the work of Government Select Committees. Inquiry days are highly resource intensive but can lead to swift, meaningful outcomes and recommendations that can make a difference to Council policy; and

e) **Rapporteurs or scrutiny member champions** - individual Councillors or pairs of Councillors tasked with investigating or maintaining oversight of a particular issue and reporting back to the main Board/ Committee on its findings. A main Committee can use these reports to facilitate its work prioritisation. Rapporteurs will undertake informal work to understand an issue – such as discussions with Officers and Portfolio Holders, research and data analysis. Rapporteur work enables scrutiny members to collectively stay informed of a wide range of Council activity. This approach to the provision of information to scrutiny members also avoids valuable

Committee time being taken up with briefings in favour of more outcome-based scrutiny taking place at Committee.

These terms of reference should be read in conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules outlined in Part 4C of the Council's Constitution.

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BCP Council Overview and Scrutiny Board – Work Plan. Updated 12.08.24

Guidance notes:

- 2/3 items per committee meeting is the recommended maximum for effective scrutiny.
- The O&S Board will approach work through a lens of **RESIDENT IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE**
- Items requiring further scoping are identified and should be scoped using the Key Lines of Enquiry tool.

	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
	Meeting Date: 23 September 2024			
	Medium Term Financial Plan	Scrutiny of Cabinet report prior to Cabinet consideration	Chief Financial Officer/Portfolio Holder for Finance	Cabinet Report
	Devolution Discussion An opportunity for scrutiny of the suggested proposals to respond to the Deputy Prime Minister/Secretary of State for HCLG proposals for devolution across England.	There will be a verbal update to the Committee and comments sought on suggested proposals	Chief Executive and Leader of the Council	Requested by the Committee at its August meeting.
	Directorate Budget Awareness To receive a presentation on the budget, pressures and assumed savings	Presentation and Question and Answer session	Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer and Chief Executive	To provide the Committee with information prior to the establishment of a budget working group
	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Committee Report	Scrutiny Specialist	Requirement for O&S to produce an annual report to full Council - all O&S

Key: Pre-Decision Scrutiny Pro-active Scrutiny

	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
	The Overview and Scrutiny Specialist is required to report annually on the output of the O&S function.			Committee Chairs to be invited
Meeting Date: 21 October 2024				
	Investment & Development Directorate - Regeneration Programme To provide a bi-annual update on the progress of the Council's regeneration programme.	Scrutiny of Cabinet report prior to Cabinet consideration	Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economy Leader of the Council	Cabinet Report
	Transformation and the centralised handling of complaints Report requested through the work planning workshops	Report to Committee	Director of Customer & Property	This requires further scoping – KLOE document
	Performance of the Council Data, and performance of directorates and staff (25)	Informal investigation report by O&S Board		This requires further scoping – KLOE document Will be suited to a working group.
	Blue Badges For the O&S Board to receive an update on this issue from officers following the work the Board carried out last year	Committee Report	Director of Customer & Property	Officer report requested
Meeting Date: 18 November 2024				
1.	Reserved for pre-decision or reactive scrutiny decision or reactive scrutiny (awaiting Cabinet FP update)			

Key: Pre-Decision Scrutiny Pro-active Scrutiny

	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
2.	Production and Effectiveness of Public Consultations (2)	Committee Report – Initial update on current situation with potential for working group	Director of Marketing, Comms and Policy Portfolio Holder	This issue will be suited to a working group – further scoping required – KLOE document
3.	Budget Working Groups To consider feedback and recommendations from the established budget working groups	Dedicated budget scrutiny – all groups to feedback to O&S Board	TBC	TBC – All O&S members to be invited
Meeting Date: 9 December 2024				
1.	Reserved for pre-decision or reactive scrutiny decision or reactive scrutiny (awaiting Cabinet FP update)			
2.	Crime and Disorder Scrutiny of Community Safety Partnership	Annual Report	Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulatory Director of Housing and Communities	This requires further scoping – KLOE document
3.	Item to be selected from Pro-Active Scrutiny topic list			
Meeting Date: 6 January 2025				
1.	Reserved for pre-decision or reactive scrutiny decision or reactive scrutiny (awaiting Cabinet FP update)			

Key: Pre-Decision Scrutiny Pro-active Scrutiny



	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
2.	Item to be selected from Pro-Active Scrutiny topic list			
3.	Item to be selected from Pro-Active Scrutiny topic list			
Meeting Date: NEW DATE 3 February 2025				
1.	Budget Scrutiny Scrutiny of the 2025/26 budget proposals, consideration of the Cabinet report and any recommendations to be made to Cabinet.	Cabinet Budget report	Adam Richens, Chief Finance Officer Mike Cox, PH Finance	
2		Updates from Budget T&F groups if required	Adam Richens, Chief Finance Officer Mike Cox, PH Finance	
Items with Dates to be allocated				
	Local Transport Plan	Committee Report	Portfolio Holder for	Board have requested to see this at an early stage and not as a pre-decision Scrutiny item.
	Accounting for Social Value in decision making	Committee Report		Item requires further scoping - KLOE document
	Arts, Culture and Leisure Funding Item requested through work planning workshops	Committee Report	Portfolio Holder for Connected Communities and Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communication and Culture	Item from Pro-Active Scrutiny List (including funding for BSO and Lighthouse) This requires

Key: Pre-Decision Scrutiny Pro-active Scrutiny

	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
				further scoping – KLOE document
	Working more collectively across BCP geographical areas / Locality Governance – Substantive item	Committee Report		This requires further scoping – KLOE document
Working Groups				
	Budget Working Group – Suggested areas: Operations Directorate: Resident Card, Income forecasts, Fees and charges Resources Directorate: Transformation Budget, Licensing costs, Revenue & Benefits,	Working group to meet in October	TBC – dependent upon the areas chosen for further scrutiny consideration	It is suggested that the Board consider establishing the working group at its September meeting TBC
	POTENTIAL WORKING GROUP - Public Consultations	TBC	TBC	TBC
	POTENTIAL WORKING GROUP - Performance of the Council	TBC	TBC	TBC
Item suggestions for Briefing Sessions				
	Coastal / Town Centre Business Improvement Districts – Building a Sense of Place	Presentation and Discussion item	Portfolio Holder for Dynamic Places Portfolio Holder for Connected communities	No formal report / item for discussion.

Key: Pre-Decision Scrutiny Pro-active Scrutiny

	Subject and background	How will the scrutiny be done?	Lead Officer/Portfolio Holder	Report Information
	Integration of Dorset Local Enterprise Functions into Council - Jan 2026	Presentation and Discussion item to understand the direction of this work and identify any future scrutiny.		
	ERP System Demonstration	TBC	TBC	TBC

Key:  Pre-Decision Scrutiny  Pro-active Scrutiny

Request for consideration of an issue by Overview and Scrutiny

Guidance on the use of this form:

This form is for use by councillors and members of the public who want to request that an item joins an Overview and Scrutiny agenda. Any issue may be suggested, provided it affects the BCP area or the inhabitants of the area in some way. Scrutiny of the issue can only be requested once in a 12 month period.

The form may also be used for the reporting of a referral item to Overview and Scrutiny by another body of the council, such as Cabinet or Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving the request will make an assessment of the issue using the detail provided in this form and determine whether to add it to its forward plan of work.

They may take a variety of steps to progress the issue, including requesting more information on it from officers of the council, asking for a member of the overview and scrutiny committee to 'champion' the issue and report back, or establishing a small working group of councillors to look at the issue in more detail.

If the Committee does not agree to progress the issue it will set out reasons for this and they will be provided to the person submitting this form.

More information can be found at Part 4.C of the BCP Council Constitution
<https://democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeID=151&Info=1&bcr=1>

Please complete all sections as fully as possible

1. Issue requested for scrutiny

2. Desired outcome resulting from Overview and Scrutiny engagement, including the value to be added to the Council, the BCP area or its inhabitants.

3. Background to the issue

4. Proposed method of scrutiny - (for example, a committee report or a working group investigation)

5. Key dates and anticipated timescale for the scrutiny work

6. Notes/ additional guidance

Document last reviewed – January 2022

Contact – democratic.services@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

CABINET FORWARD PLAN – 1 OCTOBER 2024 TO 31 JANUARY 2025

(PUBLICATION DATE – 03 September 2024)



What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Corporate Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter One	Budget Monitoring information for quarter one.	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	All Wards	n/a	n/a	Adam Richens	Open
Insurance Renewals	To make decisions in relation to key insurance renewal options	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	All Wards			Adam Richens	Fully exempt

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Pay and Reward final position	To update members on the progress of Pay and Reward and to seek approval for the final arrangements.	Yes	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024				Liz Bowman	Open
Monitoring Progress with the Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole - Q1	Setting out how progress will be monitored for the Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole including governance arrangements and an update at Q1	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	All Wards	N/A	N/A	Sophie Bradfield, Vicky Edmonds, Isla Reynolds	Open
Progress update on the 'Best Value Notice'	This report is a progress update a year on from receiving the 'Best Value Notice' on 3 August 2023. The recommendations were welcomed and have been implemented.	No	Overview and Scrutiny Board 27 Aug 2024 Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	All Wards	n/a	n/a	Sophie Bradfield	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Financing Nature	Present options for attracting private finance to fund nature restoration and biodiversity enhancements within BCP.	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	All Wards			Ruth Wharton	Open
Hurn Neighbourhood Plan	To report the findings of a formal public examination by independent examiner and to consider whether any proposed modification to any draft Neighbourhood Plan should be accepted.	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	Commons			Caroline Peach	Open
Commissioning & Procurement Transformation Update	To update members on the history of Strategic Procurement - Current position & future approach	No	Cabinet 4 Sep 2024	All Wards			Jeremy Richardson, Phil Hornsby	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update	To provide progress on delivering a legally balanced budget for 2025/26	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024	All Wards			Adam Richens	Open
Poole Civic Centre	Proposals to dispose of the Poole Civic Centre	Yes	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	Poole Town			Sarah Culwick	Open
Response to letter from Deputy Prime Minister	to agree the response to the letter from the Deputy Prime Minister.	Yes	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024	All Wards			Chris Shephard	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Town Centre Improvement Fund	To recommend to Cabinet the successful grant recipients	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024	Bournemouth Central; Christchurch Town; Poole Town			Chris Shephard	Open
Bournemouth Air Festival	This report provides an update on the work carried out to to invite proposals from external organisations to support and fund the Air Festival and recommends a way forward in relation to the future delivery of the Air Festival	Yes	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024	Boscombe West; Bournemouth Central; East Cliff & Springbourne			Amanda Barrie, Helen Wildman	Open / Exempt

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Christchurch Bay and Harbour FCERM Strategy	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) and New Forest District Council (NFDC) are working together with the Environment Agency to produce a new strategy to protect coastal communities from tidal flooding and erosion risk. It will guide how the frontage from Hengistbury Head to Hurst Spit, encompassing Christchurch Harbour, will be sustainably managed for the next 100 years.	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	Christchurch Town; East Southbourn e & Tuckton; Highcliffe & Walkford; Mudeford, Stanpit & West Highcliffe; Burton & Grange	Landowners, BCP residents, businesses, organisations, BCP services	Several levels of public enegagement and consultation throughout the development of the Strategy between 2021 and 2023.	Catherine Corbin, Alan Frampton, Matt Hosey	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Community Governance Review of BCP Council area	To consider the terms of reference for a Community Governance Review for the whole of the BCP Council area in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007	Yes	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	All Wards			Janie Berry, Richard Jones	Open
Council Owned Companies Shareholder Governance Review	to update Cabinet on the review of Council owned companies and to recommend to Council associated amendments to the Constitution	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	All Wards	Leader of the Council and Members of the Cabinet	Audit and Governance Committee approved the recommendations in January 2024 prior to consideration by Cabinet	Janie Berry	Open
Bournemouth Towns fund - Masterplan (Hawkwood Road)	To approve the commencement of the Community centre as the first part of the Masterplan.	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	Boscombe West			Peter Friend, Jonathan Thornton	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Housing Delivery scheme - Constitution Hill, Poole	Additional funding for demolition and design development.	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	Parkstone			Jonathan Thornton	Open
High Needs Schools Grant Expenditure Forecast	The Council Budget Monitoring report at Quarter One requested the Corporate Director of Children's Services presents a report to Cabinet on the Dedicated Schools Grant expenditure forecast and available mitigation measures in 2024/25.	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024 Council 15 Oct 2024	All Wards			Sharon Muldoon	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership 2023-2024 Annual Report	The production of an annual report is a statutory responsibility. This has been endorsed by the four statutory partners (Dorset Council, BCP Council, NHS Dorset, Dorset Police) and is being shared with cabinet as part of those governance arrangements.	No	Cabinet 2 Oct 2024	All Wards			Tammy Lawrence	Open
Investment & Development Directorate - Regeneration Programme	To provide a bi-annual update on the progress of the Council's regeneration programme	No	Cabinet 30 Oct 2024	All Wards			Rob Dunford	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Housing and Property Compliance Update (Housing Revenue Account)	To provide an update on performance and issues in completing health and safety compliance checks within individual dwellings and communal areas.	No	Cabinet 30 Oct 2024	All Wards	There are no changes to policy. The report will provide an update. The key stakeholders for consultation will be council tenants and leaseholders, BCP Homes Advisory Board and Cabinet Member for Housing and Regulatory Services.	Consultation will be through existing meetings with stakeholders.	Seamus Doran	Open
Aspire Adoption Annual Report 2023-2024	To present the Aspire Adoption Annual Report for 2023-2024.	No	Cabinet 30 Oct 2024	All Wards			Allan Charlton	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Council Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter Two	Budget monitoring at quarter two	No	Cabinet 27 Nov 2024 Council 10 Dec 2024	All Wards	n/a	n/a	Adam Richens	Open
Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update	Present progress in delivering a legally balance budget for 2025/26	No	Cabinet 18 Dec 2024	All Wards			Adam Richens	Open
Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Plan	To set out for Cabinet's consideration and recommendation to Council the proposed 2025/26 budget and council tax.	No	Cabinet 5 Feb 2025	All Wards			Adam Richens	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Council Budget Monitoring 2024/25 Quarter Three	Budget monitoring	No	Cabinet 5 Feb 2025 Council 25 Feb 2025	All Wards	n/a	n/a	Adam Richens	Open
Integration of Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership functions	To seek approval for the integration of functions from the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership into the Council	No	Cabinet 14 Jan 2026	All Wards			Chris Shephard	Open
DfE SEND review next steps	To consider the DfE review next steps	No	Cabinet Date to be confirmed				Rachel Gravett, Shirley McGillick, Sharon Muldoon	Fully exempt

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Our Place and Environment - Strategic Transport Scheme Prioritisation	To present the outputs of public engagement on Strategic Transport Schemes and to seek recommendation from Cabinet to Council relating to the progression of the schemes in consideration of the consultation outputs. Noting: this is likely to include some selected schemes being promoted as a priority at the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body.	Yes	Cabinet Date to be confirmed	All Wards				Open
Affordable Fairer Broadband for all (Award Contract)	In July 2022 Cabinet approved 'Accelerating Gigabit Fibre' and asked the team to return to Cabinet to award the contract. The purpose of this report is contract award.	No	Cabinet Date to be confirmed	All Wards			Ruth Spencer	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Bournemouth Development Company LLP Business Plan	To seek approval for the Bournemouth Development Company Business Plan, extend some contractual "Option Execution Dates" in relation to specific sites and provide an update in relation to the independent Local Partnerships Review.	No	Cabinet Date to be confirmed	Bournemouth Central			Sarah Longthorpe	Open
Children's Services Early Help Offer	Summary of findings and recommendations from an ongoing review of our current Early Help services	No	Cabinet Date to be confirmed	All Wards			Zafer Yilkan	Open

What is the subject?	What is the purpose of the issue?	Is this a Key Decision?	Decision Maker and Due Date	Wards	Who are the key stakeholders to be consulted before the decision is made?	What is the consultation process and period	Officer writing the report	Is the report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)?
Adult Social Care Business Case	Adult Social Care services locally and nationally have faced significant challenges in recent years, and as a result the Council is holding significant risk in relation to the ability of the Council to deliver its statutory responsibilities to adults that require support within the available budget. The nature of these challenges means that long term, sustainable change is needed to ensure that BCP Council Adult Social Care services (ASCS) are modern, fit for the future and affordable. This business case sets out a proposal for initial investment in Adult Social Care transformation that will lead to improved outcomes for adults that draw on support in BCP and support the Council to deliver this within the available financial envelope.	Yes	Cabinet Date to be confirmed	All Wards			Chris McKensie	Open

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1. Development of this framework and its application by O&S Committees

Workshops were held with members of O&S committees across December 2023- February 2024, supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The aim of the workshops was to develop an approach to work programming at BCP for 2024/25 and beyond that is based on good practice and addresses improvements already identified for O&S as set out in [Assurance Review Action Plan](#) and the [O&S Action Plan](#). One output of this work is the framework set out below.

During 2024, the O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committee have been following the principles set out in this framework. The same good practices will be rolled out to all O&S committees in 2024 and used to support future annual work programming.

2. Using a lens to select and approach scrutiny topics

O&S statutory guidance recommends that a 'lens' or key set of priorities be established by O&S committees, to clearly communicate their role and how they will add value to the work of the organisation. The statements also clarify the role of the committee to the public.

Established lenses provide a tool to assist O&S members in work programming, to sift suggestions for work into a realistic annual work programme for each committee and should be referred to throughout the year as arising suggestions for work are made.

O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committees agreed lenses in 2024. Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committees have not yet considered the application of lenses to their work. Lenses are set out below. It is suggested that these lenses be reviewed annually to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

The **O&S Board** will approach work through a lens of **RESIDENT IMPACT AND EXPERIENCE**, such as considering:

- benefits that could be brought to residents by **delivering services** in different ways
- how the areas of highest **financial risk** for the council may impact on residents
- the council's **relationship with the public** and work that can be done to strengthen this.

The **Environment & Place O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens of **SUSTAINABILITY**, with a specific focus on the following priorities, drawn from the Corporate Strategy:

- **Climate change** is tackled through sustainable policies and practice
- Our **green spaces flourish** and support the wellbeing of being people and nature
- Our communities have pride in our **streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces**
- **Good quality homes are** accessible, sustainable and affordable for all

The **Children's Services O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens ofTBC

The **Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee** will approach work through a lens ofTBC

3. Using a framework to structure O&S activity:

A framework for supporting different types of scrutiny work is set out in the table below. Scrutiny is split out into **proactive work**, **reactive work** and **pre-decision scrutiny**. When developing this framework, O&S councillors gave a clear steer that they wish to continue to undertake all these elements of scrutiny through their work programmes.

As with the lenses outlined at 2 above, the scrutiny framework will also be used to communicate the role and intentions of the committees to the wider council and the public. It is suggested that the framework be reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Proactive Scrutiny

What is it?

- Early policy work - work focused on policy development and exploring options for the future. Also described as 'overview work' in BCP.
- Framed as a series of questions or 'key lines of enquiry', to which O&S seeks answers. These are found through the gathering of evidence, with a view to informing future policy.
- Driven by the O&S committee itself, or may be in response to a suggestion from councillors, community or decision makers.
- Less likely to directly align to another piece of work already underway in the council, eg. a cabinet report.
- Fulfils BCP principles of good scrutiny:

'O&S engages in decision making and policy development at an appropriate time to be able to have influence'

'O&S is a member led and owned function'

'O&S enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard and reflected in the Council's decision-making process'

Examples

Cllr suggestions based on their understanding of local needs, eg:

- What more can we do to meet local people's housing needs?
- To what extent do we as a council as a community understand the likely challenges of climate change, and what action do we need to take?

Method for undertaking scrutiny:

- Either "in committee", as a whole-meeting challenge session followed up by agreement of recommendations at the next meeting, or a short and sharp working group with a group meeting two or three times between meetings.
- Outcomes are unlikely to be met by an officer report – proactive scrutiny relies on councillors scoping and directing the work and asking for specific data, information and evidence to be brought by relevant stakeholders.
- Recommendations are made, usually to Cabinet or Portfolio Holders. They must respond to these recommendations.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Potential to add significantly more value than other work by using powers to gather evidence from stakeholders, investigate an issue in depth and find solutions. These may be used to inform policy in a significant and meaningful way.
- ✓ Potential to select and scope topics to have maximum positive impact on the communities of BCP.
- ✓ Can generate a clearer set of recommendations that can be communicated in the council and to the public.
- ✓ Easier for O&S to own the programme of work and not be affected by other factors (eg. movement of decisions on the Cabinet Forward Plan).
- ✗ Resource intensive for officers and councillors.
- ✗ May require committee to work more flexibly to find capacity for the depth of work, eg. swapping committee meetings to undertake working group meetings instead.

Method for selection of proactive scrutiny topics:

- Invite suggestions from councillors annually (through work programming workshops)
- Invite suggestions from decision makers for O&S to contribute to developing policies/ decisions.
- Invite suggestions from the public annually (consider how to incorporate into methodology for 2025 work programming)
- Sift suggestions according to the priorities of lenses as set out above ('resident impact and experience' / 'sustainability')
- Agree, scope and plan topics to add maximum value.
- Plan all proactive work on an annual basis to ensure it can be undertaken by an appropriate time to add value and in within resources available.

Pre-decision Scrutiny

What is it?:

- Scrutiny of a report close to the point of decision making – eg. a Cabinet report.
- Predominantly driven by the Cabinet Forward Plan.
- Sits between 'proactive' and 'reactive' scrutiny. Some councils undertake a minimal level of pre-decision scrutiny in favour of greater levels of deep dive investigations. BCP councillors have said that pre-decision scrutiny is an important part of the scrutiny process which they are keen to see stay in place.
- Fulfils BCP principle of good scrutiny:

'O&S contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend'.

Examples

Scrutiny of Cabinet reports on:

- BCP Local Plan
- BCP 2024/25 budget scrutiny & MTFP update reports
- Various policies prior to Cabinet/ Council decision

Method for undertaking scrutiny:

- In committee, consideration of a report already written for Cabinet. Report considered approximately 10 working days prior to the Cabinet meeting.
- Any recommendations or comments made on the report are formally passed to the next Cabinet meeting.
- The O&S Chairman will attend the Cabinet meeting to report recommendations and/or give a summary of comments made at O&S.
- Cabinet must consider any **formal recommendations** made and respond.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Publicly demonstrates that decision makers are held to account.
- ✓ Less resource intensive – reports already written for Cabinet.
- ✗ Reactive – hard to plan agendas and relies on a well populated Cabinet Forward Plan to timetable work.
- ✗ Limited impact vs time spent. O&S is unlikely to be able to have much influence on fully developed policy and decisions.
- ✗ Potential to establish a ‘shadow cabinet’ and for meetings to become political, which must be managed effectively by O&S Chairs.
- ✗ Potential for Cabinet scrutiny to overwhelm agendas - can lead to additional/ long meetings which can limit effectiveness of scrutiny.
- ✗ Potential to duplicate other scrutiny opportunities – eg. full council debate.

Method for selection of pre-decision scrutiny topics:

- Establish a programme of informal, Teams based briefing sessions at a frequency which can be accommodated by O&S members and support officers. Schedule briefings to provide O&S with information on the key aspects of developing decisions. Aim to hold these as early as possible and at least 3 months prior to the decision to be made. Chairs and Vice Chairs take the lead in this, using the Cabinet Forward Plan and informal discussions with decision makers.
- Using the information provided at briefings and the agreed O&S lenses to determine which forthcoming Cabinet decisions will benefit from a councillor maintaining a watching brief and reporting back (rapporteur) or ultimately pre-decision scrutiny at committee.
- Give notice as early as possible of those items required for pre-decision scrutiny, to enable report authors to work to the relevant O&S timescales.
- Provide regular reporting on out of committee activity into a committee meeting via Chair, to maintain transparency of O&S activity.
- Note – this framework for selecting pre-decision scrutiny is expected to significantly reduce the number of Cabinet reports being considered by O&S committees but will require a commitment from decision makers to share information with O&S in a different way that is both open and timely. The proposed format will also provide decision makers with the opportunity to surface issues with the wider membership of the council prior to decision making and to gather informal input to shape direction of policy.

Reactive Scrutiny

What is it?:

- Emerging issues that arise throughout the year and can't easily be planned for in advance.
- Usually a significant issue of concern or risk to the council, residents or external bodies (eg. Ofsted or Government department)
- Fulfils BCP principles of good scrutiny:

*'O&S contributes to sound decision making in a timely way by holding decision makers to account as a 'critical friend';
 'O&S is agile – able to respond to changing and emerging priorities at the right time with flexible working methods'
 'O&S Contributes to and reflects the vision and priorities of the council';*

Examples

- Targeted scrutiny on council finances at the end of 2022 following concerns about in-year budget
- Safety valve scrutiny at Children's O&S Committee
- Best Value and Assurance Review reports.
- Decisions 'called in' by O&S

Method for undertaking scrutiny

- O&S Councillors review a suite of information regularly outside of the committee space – eg. corporate performance reports, medium term financial plan updates, complaints data or resident surveys.
- 'Red flags' are elevated to committee for more formal scrutiny to take place. Usually, a report is requested from officers.
- Any recommendations or comments made on the report are formally passed to the relevant decision maker, usually Cabinet/ Council.
- Cabinet/ Council must consider the recommendations made and respond.
- O&S may ask to receive regular updates outside of committee, to maintain a closer eye on the matter until it is resolved.

Pros and Cons

- ✓ Important governance mechanism to assist the council in resolving issues of concern.
- ✓ Provides public demonstration of scrutiny on issues that may be causing press interest or community concern and gives opportunity for public to engage.
- ✗ Limited impact vs time spent. O&S may ask decision makers to reconsider an issue or make recommendations expressing concerns but cannot change a decision.
- ✗ Can disrupt workplans owing to the need to scrutinise a matter quickly.
- ✗ Potential to duplicate other scrutiny opportunities – eg. full council debate.

Method for selection of reactive scrutiny topics:

- Committee members 'horizon scan' by reviewing a suite of information on a regular basis in their own time. These are provided by email or in a designated webspace. Rapporteurs may be established to monitor designated areas of interest, sharing the load across the committee.
- Emerging trends or red flags are raised by committee members informally to the Chair & Vice Chair.
- Chair and Vice Chair take the lead in raising concerns with relevant decision makers and seeking more information. Using this information and the lenses established by committees, they determine which matters warrant elevating to committee.
- In all cases, O&S will prioritise work where it can have the most value and will avoid duplicating efforts underway elsewhere in the council to resolve arising issues. Priority will therefore be given either to those areas of highest concern and which are generating significant public and media attention; where data trends indicate that concerns are at risk of becoming embedded, or where attempts to find solutions by Cabinet or service areas have not worked.

- For these matters, a report is requested to the next available committee meeting for more formal and forensic scrutiny to take place. Work plans may be adjusted to make room for this arising work within existing resources.
- Following formal scrutiny, O&S may ask to receive regular updates outside of committee, to maintain a closer eye on the matter until it is resolved.
- Nb. 'Call-in' decisions will follow a separate process as outlined in the constitution.

4. Next steps

- The O&S Board and Environment and Place O&S Committees have adopted this framework and agreed lenses for their work.
- In 2024, all remaining O&S committees will be asked to adopt this framework and establish lenses or a limited set of high-level priorities.
- The framework will accompany all work programme reports to committee and should be referred to as a structure to underpin ongoing work programming activity.
- The framework will be reviewed annually by O&S Chairs, and lenses reviewed annually by O&S Committees in annual work programming, to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

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