

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.