

## **Scrutiny Annual Report – 2020/2021**

### **Foreword from the Chair, Councillor Geoff Gollop**

2020/21 has been a memorable period, during which Members have worked together to tackle the myriad of conflicting pressures relating to the Coronavirus pandemic that have affected our work and constituents in so many ways. Collectively, Members have risen to the challenge and adapted our procedures and practices in order to focus Scrutiny resources on the areas where we can make the most impact.

In my view, Scrutiny is about so much more than acting as the ‘critical friend’ or opposition and I believe decision making is greatly enhanced by taking a collegiate approach. One of the positives during these unprecedented times has been the success of our series of Covid related Task Groups where we took a number of ‘deep dives’ into areas that were pressing concerns for local residents. These Groups were set up in a very short period of time, yet because they were properly scoped and looking at the right topics, they achieved a demonstrable impact on the Council’s response to the pandemic.

Clearly, one of the most fundamental components of successful Scrutiny lies in partnership working, and, as demonstrated by the Task Groups, there’s great strength in enabling cross party Members, and the public, to feed into early stage policy development. I recommend that this model of working becomes more routinely embedded in our structures going forward. Not only because Task Groups are far less demanding of officers’ time, thus helping with productivity, but also because there’s much less political difference of opinion when ideas are in the initial stages of formation.

It’s been encouraging to see the positive response to our Task Groups when presenting findings to Cabinet, and we were pleased to hear that on several occasions this has led to follow up work directly with Cabinet Members, which I hope has been mutually beneficial.

I suggest that further strengthening of the relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive would be another component to our ongoing success. OSMB have made many referrals to Cabinet during the last year on a broad range of topics, all of which have been prepared with full cross party support and consensus, and I hope that the Executive will continue to value our considered contributions.

On a related note, the publication of the Mayor’s Forward Plan is a fundamental tool to enable Scrutiny to plan its work effectively. Where the minimum (statutory) requirement of 28 days’ notice of items going to Cabinet is provided it does present some challenges for Scrutiny, and I hope that we move towards a best practice approach during 21/22 and beyond.

To conclude, 20/21 has been an unusual year for so many reasons, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Scrutiny Member colleagues for their support, flexibility and commitment during this period. This includes my fellow Scrutiny Chairs who have fully played their part in making our work this year so effective. However, specific thanks must go to Councillor Celia Phipps as Vice Chair of OSMB for her continued support and for playing a major role in moderating our views to ensure they are genuinely cross party. None of this would have been possible without the dedicated Scrutiny team, led by Lucy Fleming, Head of Democratic Engagement with excellent support from Johanna Holmes, Scrutiny Co-ordinator and Dan Berlin and Bronwen Falconer, Scrutiny Advisors. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Tom Gray, Public Participation Officer for his technical support around the delivery of virtual meetings.

*Councillor Geoff Gollop, February 21*

## **Key stats**

- Number of formal Scrutiny meetings – 23
- Meetings of the OSMB Lead Members - 16
- Task and Finish Groups - 5
- Reports to Cabinet – 8

## **Scrutiny Successes in 20/21 – Summary**

The main achievements of Scrutiny during 20/21 are set out below;

- The style of Task Groups adopted; this has been very successful with the topics selected being priority issues with focussed objectives. The outcomes of the Task Groups have directly influenced policy development and this approach is recommended for future years.
- Members have adapted to 'virtual meetings,' which have been rolled out across the Scrutiny function and bring many benefits, most notably in terms of engaging with the public.
- Scrutiny has become truly 'Member led' in line with best practice, and the cross-party Lead Members of Scrutiny have maintained an effective structure for managing the function.
- A new approach to Health Scrutiny, with activities being picked up via a Health Sub Committee of the People Scrutiny Commission, has been introduced and is working well.

## **Scrutiny Work Programme 20/21 – Key Highlights**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB)**

OSMB has had a busy year focusing on both oversight of the Scrutiny Work Programme and looking into issues that are cross cutting and/or of significant interest city wide. Main areas of focus include;

- Conducting several sessions reviewing the Council's Clean Air Proposals in order to feed into the Cabinet decision in February 21.
- Carrying out the annual review of the Council's Companies' Business Plans, which ensures good governance.
- Reviewing the Council's Advertising and Sponsorship Policy; providing detailed feedback which helped shape the approach.
- Reviewing and monitoring the Council's plans in relation to Bristol Beacon.
- Keeping a watching brief of all items going to Cabinet for decision, raising queries as appropriate and providing comments. OSMB routinely submit cross party comments to Cabinet on forthcoming reports which help to ensure that a broad range of views feed into decision making.
- Taking a strategic review of the Council's performance and risk reports.
- Monitoring progress around all Scrutiny activities to ensure resources are being used effectively and concentrate on the areas where Members can add the most value. This includes receiving regular Chairs' progress reports on Task Group activities.
- Providing a vital interface for the public to raise issues of concern relating to work across the whole Council.

## **Communities Scrutiny Commission**

The role of the Communities Scrutiny Commission is the overview and scrutiny of matters that affect Bristol's neighbourhoods. Unlike other Scrutiny Commissions, it is not attached to a single Directorate and examines cross cutting issues. Key points of interest from the 2020/21 year include:

- In setting the 2020/21 Work Programme the Commission undertook a prioritisation exercise and survey with Members to ensure a focus on the most significant topics.
- The Commission received reports relating to Homelessness Support; Moving Forward Together; Decarbonisation of Residential Properties; HMOs and Licensing; Future Parks; Waste Management; Estate Security; and the Community Safety Partnership Needs Analysis Update.
- A strength of the Commission has been the ability to recognise where issues may span several areas, for example well-received items such as Homelessness Support (October 2020) which involved input from multiple Bristol City Council teams.
- The impact of Covid-19 on the Communities Scrutiny Commission, like much of Scrutiny, has been substantial. This has resulted in a number of items being either postponed or received in an amended format, and it is recommended that these be prioritised in the 21/22 Municipal Year.

## **People Scrutiny**

The Council's adult care provision, child and family support, safeguarding and education and skills fall under the remit of this Commission. The Health Sub-Committee of the People Scrutiny Commission carries out the statutory health scrutiny role. The highlights from the 20/21 Work Programme include;

- There has been a focus on mental health and well-being, with the update on the Mental Health Strategy and a review of how isolated older people could be supported.
- After representations from a local parents' group Members added the Temple Quarter school proposals to the Work Programme. Following the effective SEND Evidence Day last year, the full response and update from the administration was brought to the Commission in 2020. Both education items included constructive input from parents and carers.
- December's Commission meeting saw the Public Health team present a paper on the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. This enabled scrutiny of responses to findings of the rapid review conducted by the National Institute for Health Research and the University of Bristol, including the establishment, and ensuing work, of the Race Equality Covid-19 Steering Group.

### **Task Group;**

- 20/21 began with a detailed review of the Council's response to COVID-19 and recovery planning with regards to safeguarding children and young people in Bristol. The Task Group's aims remained focused on informing policy development and good practice so as to build resilience in light of ongoing issues relating to the pandemic.
- In August 2020 evidence was heard from 22 participants and the Task Group also considered 5 further submissions. There was also strong engagement from the Executive, city partners, local and national experts, and practitioners.
- Findings and recommendations have been referred to the Cabinet and partnership bodies, including Keeping Bristol Safe, for consideration. Positive feedback has been received that this has been a constructive and effective way of conducting scrutiny, and invaluable in terms of lessons learnt as we continue to tackle the pandemic.

## **Health Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee of the People Scrutiny Commission)**

The role of the Health Scrutiny Committee is to undertake scrutiny of local Health Service provision in accordance with Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013. Key areas of focus in 20/21 include;

- The Committee has been briefed by the NHS and the executive on the closure of the Banksy Ward at the Priory and this item was brought to the Health Scrutiny Committee in February 21.
- Committee Members received a briefing on the development of the Drug and Alcohol Strategy which informed the full discussion at the Committee meeting in February 21.
- The Committee commented on this year's NHS Trusts' Quality Accounts.
- The Joint Health Scrutiny Committee will meet in March 21 to consider the development of the new stroke services and hear from Bristol North Somerset South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group about its system plan, including the move to an Integrated Care System and Covid-19 recovery planning.

### **Task Group;**

- The Committee started 20/21 with a focused review of how COVID-19 has affected how people can access planned health care in the city. The focus of the Task Group was to act as a critical friend to the Council's partners and inform good practice and policy around health care, whilst keeping people safe during the recovery period and supporting people where there were delays.
- In August 2020 evidence was heard from a range of participants and Members received strong engagement by the executive, the Bristol North Somerset South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG); NHS Trusts, and other city partners and local and national experts. The CCG Governing Body considered the report and will bring a response back to the Committee.
- Findings and recommendations have been to Cabinet and partnership bodies, including the Health & Wellbeing Board, for consideration. Members' feedback has been positive and there is agreement that this has been a constructive and effective way of carrying out scrutiny.

## **Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny**

The Commission set a comprehensive Work Programme for the municipal year and where possible the meeting agendas were themed. Some of the key topics of focus this year were housing delivery, the Mayor's Climate Emergency Action Plan, local flood strategies and strategic transport.

In September the Commission were invited to input into the draft One City - Economic Recovery Strategy.

An extraordinary meeting was held in early January to consider the pros and cons of the potential expansion of the West of England Combined Authority.

In late January the Commission's whole meeting agenda focussed on some of the major regeneration projects across the City such as Temple Quarter (including Temple Meads Station), Western Harbour and the development of the City Centre.

### **Task Group;**

- Early in 2020 Central Government released Emergency Active Travel Funding (EATF) to local authorities to help mitigate the loss of capacity on public transport due to social distancing.
- The aim was to provide safe walking and cycling routes in a short space of time to enable people to move around more easily.

- During August the Task Group held three sessions that focused on the overarching strategy applied by Bristol City Council's Strategic Transport Team and the approach taken to deliver the individual projects. One session enabled a number of external stakeholders to engage and provide valuable feedback on their experiences.
- The Task Group's final report made seven recommendations and all those involved felt this was a positive and valuable piece of scrutiny work.

### **Resources Scrutiny Commission**

The Resources Scrutiny Commission has worked in a slightly different way choosing to have fewer formal public meetings and instead prioritising intense activity in several areas;

- Budget Scrutiny – OSMB have delegated responsibility for budget scrutiny to the Resources Scrutiny Commission and Finance Task Group. A robust process was devised to ensure that Members had access to comprehensive information in the run up to the budget setting process, which was delivered via the Finance Task Group. This culminated in a budget specific meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Commission where detailed comments were agreed and submitted to Members in advance of the budget setting Full Council meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021. The approach to budget scrutiny adopted this year was a particular highlight and generally thought to reflect best practice.
- Another key piece of work for the Commission was the continued focus on the Council's Social Value Policy. A scrutiny Task Group had previously been involved in developing the Social Value Policy. The policy had now been in place for a year and a review was scheduled to determine the outcomes and agree any changes that were now required. The Task Group held three sessions, one of which included external organisations including Bristol University, Voscur, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Social Value Portal Ltd. All those involved felt this was a very constructive process that produced a set of clear proposals to improve the policy and associated outcomes. The refreshed Social Value Policy & Tool Kit would be considered at a Cabinet meeting in March 21.

### **Opportunities for Scrutiny in 2021/22 and beyond;**

Since the implementation of Scrutiny as a model of governance in 2000, the function in Bristol has been constantly evolving in order to ensure it provides the best vehicle for Members and the public to influence and inform decision making. The 20/21 Municipal Year has accelerated change in many areas and also provided new opportunities for doing things differently. Detailed below are the areas suggested as future priorities;

- **Structure** – it's appropriate that the structure and style of scrutiny continuously adapts in order to meet current needs. A number of Scrutiny reviews have been completed in recent years, and all of this learning should be shared with the new cohort of Members post-election to inform their approach. Members will wish to carefully consider the way that Scrutiny is managed in order to find the right balance between formal Committee meetings and Task Groups (which could include Inquiry days), that look into a specific area of policy development. Whilst formal Committee meetings will always have an important role in raising the profile of issues, particularly in the public domain, Task Groups offer a more nimble and flexible approach where excellent outcomes can be achieved within a short space of time. It is strongly recommended that Task Groups be used more routinely going forwards.
- **Work Programme Setting** – the Work Programme is perhaps the most important aspect for Scrutiny Members to get right. There will inevitably be far more topics than Members can

reasonably cover and it's vital that the most suitable items are selected at the outset, ideally with input from Cabinet Members and senior officers. It is also recommended that a prioritisation task be utilised to ensure topics taken forward align with the Council's priorities; are being considered at the right time; and are the subjects that matter most to local residents. Differing formats have been used to set the Work Programme in recent times, and whilst it's clearly important that all Scrutiny Members have the opportunity to share their views on potential topics, it's suggested that the OSMB Leads be empowered to finalise the selection as they are best placed to take the necessary strategic overview.

- **Executive/Scrutiny Relationship** – there are a number of good examples during the 20/21 Municipal Year where there has been a strong working relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive, which has led to very positive outcomes. Going forwards, developing a more established 'two-way conversation' for reporting to Cabinet and receiving regular feedback could be one way to further strengthen the relationship.
- **Member Development** – with a new cohort of Members arriving in 21/22, consideration will need to be given to the range of support and training available. In recent years Members have benefitted from the high-quality Scrutiny training provided by both the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and the LGA, and it is recommended that similar provision be available for 21/22. The Member Induction Programme for 21/22 will be very comprehensive and cover related areas around governance, decision making, effective chairing skills etc, and new and returning Members are encouraged to take advantage of the full offer.
- **Public Engagement/Remote meetings** – to be agreed at the OSMB meeting on 24/02/2021
- **Scrutiny Forward Plan** – in order for the public to have maximum opportunity to contribute to Scrutiny debates, it's suggested that from 21/22 a 'Forward Plan' of items for the coming year be published, similar to that for the Executive Forward Plan.
- **Continual Improvement** – Scrutiny Members are encouraged to continually evaluate their progress in order to ensure that resources are being used as effectively as possible. It is recommended that for 21/22 a more structured way of Members reviewing their own performance be introduced. This could include producing a regular annual report to Full Council, but also informal discussions by the OSMB Lead Members.
- **Partnership Working** – there are some areas where additional clarification around the respective roles and remit of Scrutiny would improve efficiencies and prevent duplication. Examples include relationships with the Audit Committee, Human Resources Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board.