

<b>Title of Report:</b>	Scrutiny annual report
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	1 July 2014

**Purpose of Report:** To inform the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission of the scrutiny activity undertaken during the municipal year 2013/2014.

**Recommended Action:** To note the contents of the report.

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# Executive Report

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the scrutiny activity undertaken by the authority in the municipal year 2013/2014. It contains an overview of the year, giving detail on each of the activities undertaken and includes a commentary, where it is possible to give it, on the value that the activity has added.
- 1.2 When agreed, this report will be presented to Full Council on 22 July 2014.

## 2. Overview of the last twelve months

- 2.1 This year has seen the dissolution of the Health Scrutiny Panel and the Resource Management Working Group. The activity that was scheduled to be undertaken by these two bodies transferred (in the main) to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission, which had its membership expanded from twelve to sixteen.
- 2.2 The Commission has carried out scrutiny on sixteen topics, three of which were call-ins, perhaps the most high profile and in-depth being the review of Adult Social Care eligibility criteria. In addition there was, of course, its standing examination of performance activity and financial outturn.

## 3. Activity in detail

- 3.1 *Schools performance.* The Commission explored the reasons behind the drop in English and maths GCSE attainment in the Districts' schools during 2012. Evidence was received from the Head of Education and the headteachers of John O Gaunt and Trinity schools.

*Added value.* The review showed that the causes of the drop in performance were complex. The Commission was reassured that appropriate action was being taken to make improvement.

- 3.2 *Youth justice.* The Commission considered an evaluation of the effect of the introduction by Thames Valley Police of the Youth Restorative Disposal and Youth Cannabis Warning.

*Added value.* Concerns that the introduction of Youth Restorative Disposals and Youth Cannabis Warnings were being used to skew crime figures were allayed and the Commission was satisfied that they were being appropriately applied.

- 3.3 *Schools early years and placement strategy.* As part of the consultation for the adoption of the strategy, the Commission gave its view on a number of aspects of it.

*Added value.* A number of recommendations were made to the Executive and work was followed up by the Commission itself.

- 3.4 *Housing allocations policy.* A small task group worked with officers in the Housing Service to develop a new policy for the allocation of housing.

*Added value.* The task group was able to influence and guide the content of the policy, supporting the shift to a focus on genuine need.

- 3.5 *Homelessness review and strategy.* The decision of the Executive to adopt the review and strategy was reviewed, following its call-in.

*Added value.* Detail was provided to the Commission that aided public understanding of the rationale for the adoption of the strategy.

- 3.6 *Fire Service.* In response to reports in the local media that targets for attendance at incidents were being missed, the Commission received information from the Fire and Rescue Service on its coverage, manning and deployment in West Berkshire.

*Added value.* Through its evidence to the Commission, the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was able to demonstrate that despite the relatively poor results in one particular aspect of its performance, overall the safety of the West Berkshire had improved year on year since 2002.

- 3.7 *Disposal of assets of community value.* The Commission considered the mechanism through which assets that had been identified by communities as having local value, such as the Control Tower at Greenham, would be disposed of by the authority.

*Added value.* A number of refinements were made to the process to ensure transparency and consistency.

- 3.8 *Performance management in primary healthcare.* An item transferred from the Health Scrutiny Panel, the Commission sought assurance that the performance monitoring regime in place for Primary Care Trusts was maintained following their succession by Clinical Commissioning Groups.

*Added value.* An understanding which informed the wider public awareness, was gained by the Commission of the performance monitoring arrangements in place for primary care.

- 3.9 *Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).* A legacy item from the Resource Management Working Group, the Commission reviewed whether the MTFS remained fit for purpose.

*Added value.* The consideration of the MTFS by the Commission contributed to the document's wider consultation prior to its adoption.

- 3.10 *Blue Badge Improvement Scheme.* Another item from the Resource Management Working Group, the Commission sought to understand the operation of new scheme.

*Added value.* The examination demonstrated that there was no scope for the local determination of charges to allow the scheme to be financially self sustaining.

- 3.11 *Continuing Health Care (CHC).* The Commission examined concerns that an undue funding burden was being borne by the Council due to delays in CHC assessments.

*Added value.* The examination of the subject by the Commission prompted management action to address some of the systemic difficulties encountered in the assessment process

- 3.12 *Adult Social Care eligibility criteria.* A task group conducted a review to determine if the Council's application of a threshold of 'critical' for eligibility for Fair Access to Care Services was in anyway discriminatory or otherwise unlawful.

*Added value.* The review was able to inform the Council's determination that the 'critical' threshold was not discriminatory, thereby supporting its defence should any challenge be made through Judicial Review.

- 3.13 *A4 Calcot widening improvements.* The decision of the Executive to approve the adoption of the scheme was reviewed, following its call-in.

*Added value.* Road safety concerns were publicly aired and a recommendation was made to the Executive Member for Highways that a review of the scheme's operation be carried out 2 years after its implementation.

- 3.14 *Newbury on-street parking.* The decision of the Executive Member for Highways to approve the adoption of the scheme was reviewed, following its call-in

*Added value.* The Executive Member for Highways was requested to consider a phased introduction of the scheme, in order to assess the impact of each element as it was introduced.

- 3.15 *Home to school transport policy.* The Commission considered the changes that had been made to the policy following a radical re-write.

*Added value.* The Commission was able to obtain assurance that the revised policy would not have any unforeseen, or unwelcome, consequences.

- 3.16 *Welfare changes.* As more changes were being implemented, the Commission considered the impact of them locally.

*Added value.* The Commission was able to determine that there were a number of effects that were being felt locally and a number of recommendations were made to the Executive.

#### **4. Recommendation**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Commission notes the contents of the report.

#### **Appendices**

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There are no Appendices to this report.