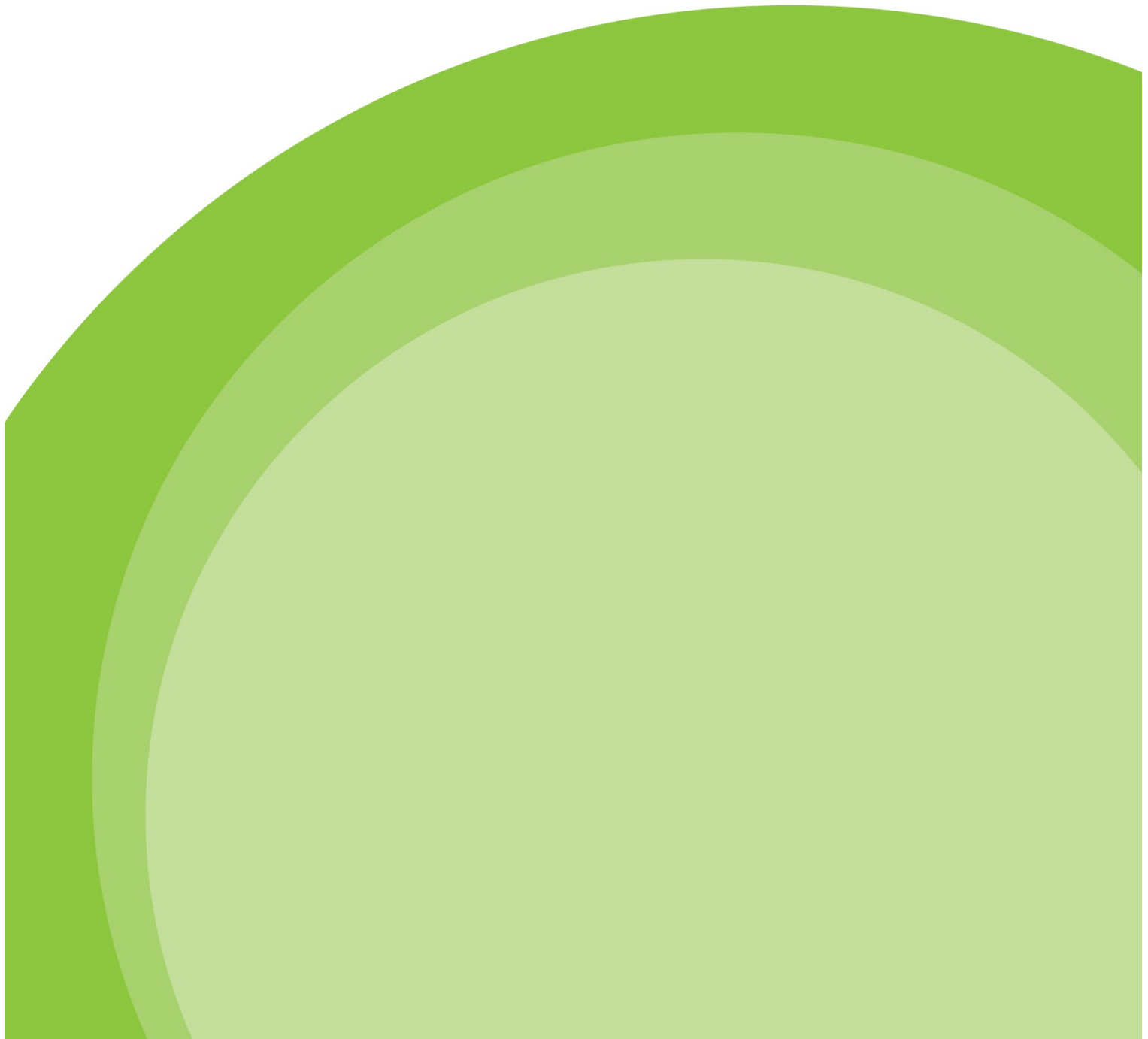




# Overview and Scrutiny annual report

The Central Bedfordshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee annual  
report for 01 May 2014 to 30 April 2015



## Introduction

## Foreword

During 2014/15 as chairmen of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees we have encouraged OSCs to provide a critical friend challenge and use overview sessions as an alternative means of briefing Members on information items and other topics of interest. This approach has enabled a wider group of Members than just those on one single OSC to discuss a topic. More and more of the items that we receive cut across several areas of work and require the engagement of a range of staff from different services. The challenge for us as Members is to recognise the cross-cutting nature of these items and encourage the collaboration that is necessary to achieve our objectives. We have made a good start at reducing the number of information items received by the Committees and the number of items that are noted and in the future this needs to go further.

Like many local authorities Central Bedfordshire finds itself concerned by the implications of national reviews such as those of Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, which have referred to the importance of the role of scrutiny in holding people to account and providing residents with a voice. In the coming years the OSCs must enhance their role by providing an open forum for residents to engage with the Council on major issues.



Councillor David McVicar  
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordination Panel

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If you have any comments on this report, or would like to see any of the papers that are referred to, please contact Jonathon Partridge, Head of Governance on **0300 300 4634** or [jonathon.partridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jonathon.partridge@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny provides an opportunity for elected Councillors and residents to discuss and comment on the Council's policies, plans and strategies before they are implemented. Meetings are normally held in public and residents are encouraged to attend to ask questions and make comments on the reports on the agenda. Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs), made up of non-Executive Councillors and co-opted parent governor representatives and diocesan representatives are held throughout the year to consider proposals and whilst they do not make decisions they provide recommendations to the Executive or full Council. These recommendations will be considered before the Council makes any final decisions.

OSCs can also undertake in-depth reviews of particular topics. These reviews involve a small number of committee members who will review the issue in more detail and consider evidence from various sources to provide a report and recommendations.

If committee members feel it is necessary they can also "call-in" decisions of the Executive. During a call-in a committee will re-consider a decision that has been made to determine whether the decision should be implemented straight away or referred back to the decision maker to be reconsidered.

Scrutiny committees can consider a wide range of issues but they also have statutory responsibilities in relation to scrutiny of health and crime and disorder matters. Issues relating to Crime and disorder will be considered at least once a year and any substantial changes to health services within Central Bedfordshire must be reviewed by the scrutiny committees before they are implemented.

Overview and scrutiny adds value in the following ways:-

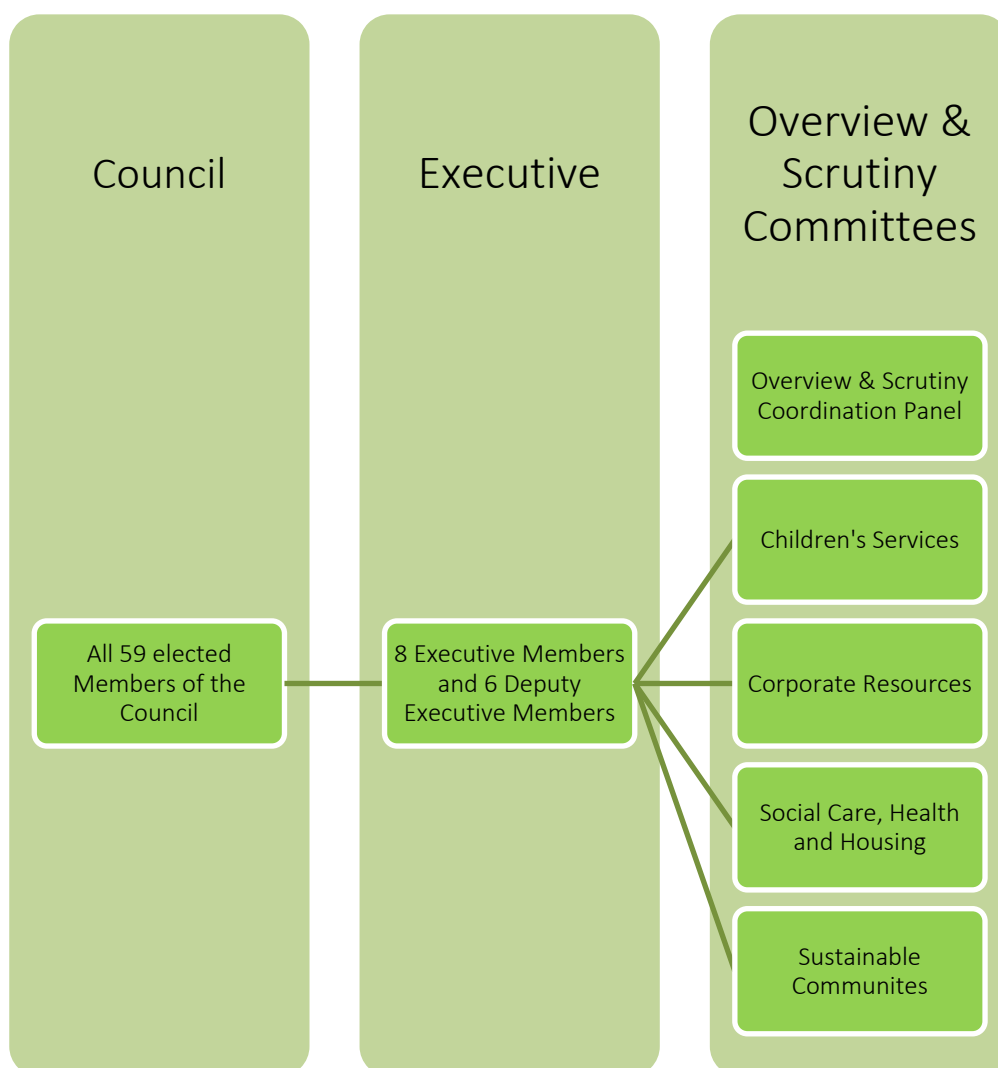
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|---|--|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>   |
| <b>Overview</b>   | <b>'Critical Friend' challenge by non-Execs</b>  |
| Providing briefings and quarterly updates on matters relating to finance and performance  | Engaging non-Executive Councillors and co-opted members in the process of developing plans and strategies or reviewing the outcomes of decisions and undertaking call-ins. |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>4</b>   |
| <b>Engaging public and partners</b>   | <b>Drive improvement</b>   |
| Providing a forum for discussion in which the public and partners can ask questions and contribute to the decision making process | Reviewing performance and tracking the progress of recommendations as well as encouraging the use of best practice and research from elsewhere                             |

## The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees

There are four OSCs in Central Bedfordshire, each of which meet approximately 8-weekly and are aligned to the Council's services. There is also a Co-ordination Panel (OSCP) consisting of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the OSCs, which meets as required to discuss the scrutiny function or matters that are relevant to more than one OSC.

In addition to the elected Members appointed to the OSCs, there are three parent governors and two diocesan representatives, one for each of the Church of England and Roman Catholic churches, appointed to the Children's Services OSC. A representative of Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch also attends meetings of the Social Care, Health and Housing OSC as an observer.

The remainder of this annual report sets out more detailed information regarding the activity of the OSCs during 02 May 2014 to 30 April 2015.



## OSC activity 2014/15

### Items received by the Committees

There were 29 OSC meetings during 2014/15, the best attended of which was a meeting at the Grove Theatre in Dunstable in May 2014 to consider the outcomes of statutory proposals to close three schools in Dunstable (where 150 residents attended). The Committee recommended to the Executive that the Council progress with the statutory notice to close but also requested that a further opportunity be provided for schools, either individually or in conjunction with another or other schools to bring forward viable business plans with any appropriate assistance being provided by Council officers, which could be scrutinised at the May 2014 Executive if possible or August 2014 at the latest. These business cases were presented to the OSC in July 2014 whereby the detail was scrutinised before being presented to Executive in August 2014.

The OSCs have fulfilled their statutory obligations by receiving statutory reports relating to substantial changes in health services and significant annual reports from the Children's Trust (Children and Young People's Plan, Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Schools Resilience Board, Adoption and Fostering Service). In light of major national reports the Committees have also received reports considering the implications of the independent inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, the Better Care Fund and the Care Act.

In September 2014 the OSCs also trialled a co-convened Committee to review the Council's Fees and Charges. There were several challenges relating to the meeting that meant it did not operate as effectively as it could and if this approach were used again in the future the process would need to be updated. However, the principal of collaborative scrutiny sessions and meetings involving a range of OSCs was supported by a large number of Members.

In addition to these items the OSCs have also considered a wide range of issues including the following:-

- Aragon Housing investment plan
- BCCG's financial recovery plan
- Budget proposals and fees and charges
- Climate Change Strategy and energy efficiency
- Community infrastructure levy (CIL)
- Councillor code of conduct
- Development Strategy
- Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- Dunstable Leisure Centre
- East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust Performance
- Quality accounts for health providers
- Homelessness Duty Policy
- Housing allocations
- Mental health service procurement
- Plan making programme
- School places and School's curriculum
- South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership programme delivery
- Stroke Services
- Youth audit action plan

## Overview activity

Items received by the Committees are grouped into categories providing an indication of whether they are for information or guidance only (overview), whether they are required by the Constitution to be considered by the OSC as they are listed in the budget and policy framework (statutory) or if they are being considered primarily because of public interest, performance concerns or because they are critical to the operation of the Council (Other).

During the period 01 July to 31 December 2013 a total of 32% of the items received by the OSCs were considered to be overview items for information. As a result the Chairmen of the OSCs agreed to reduce the numbers of overview items considered in meetings so that they could focus on those items where they could add a greater level of value and where it would be of benefit to engage the public. During 2014/15 the number of items considered by the OSCs were as follows:-

| Item  | 2013-14 * |     | 2014-15 |     |
|---|-----------|-----|---------|-----|
|   | No.       | %   | No.     | %   |
| Overview  | 38        | 32% | 32      | 30% |
| Statutory   | 27        | 23% | 28      | 26% |
| Other (such as critical report, performance concerns or requested item) | 54        | 45% | 47      | 44% |

*Figure for 2013-14 includes items received during 01 July to 31 December 2013.*

Throughout the year the OSCs have been able to request overview sessions for those items that would typically have been delivered at OSCs for information. These sessions are in addition to the quarterly reports on performance and budget information that each OSC receives in relation to each of the directorates and allows Members to spend more time in an informal environment discussing these matters. Specifically the event on the Care Act/health review was delivered in partnership with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and provided the opportunity to brief a significant number of representatives of the voluntary sector and elected Members on the Care Act 2014 and the Review of Health Services in Bedfordshire. During 2014/15 overview sessions have been arranged as follows:-

| Subject  | Attendees |
|--|-----------|
| Review of healthcare services in Bedfordshire  | 18        |
| Reforms of welfare, the discretionary housing payment policy and specialist fertility treatment local criteria | 14        |
| Mental health and domiciliary care   | 10        |
| Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group  | 25        |
| Housing allocation policy  | 21        |
| Visit to the Chiltern Hub  | 9         |
| Care Act/Health Review   | 72        |
| Total:   | 169       |

These sessions in addition to the visits that have been undertaken by one of the Committees have enabled Members to see first hand the work underway within Central Bedfordshire to deliver services to residents and to meet service users and support workers.

## Outcomes and recommendations

OSCs facilitate the engagement of non-Executive Councillors and co-opted members in the process of developing plans and strategies or reviewing the outcomes of decisions and undertaking call-ins. In addition to reducing the number of overview items the Chairmen of the OSCs agreed to focus throughout 2014/15 on reducing the number of items that are noted. During 2014/15 the outcomes of the OSC meetings were as follows:-

| Outcome                | 2013-14 * |     | 2014-15 |     |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|---------|-----|
|                        | No.       | %   | No.     | %   |
| Noted                  | 66        | 65% | 33      | 31% |
| Endorsed               | 4         | 4%  | 28      | 26% |
| Comment/recommendation | 31        | 30% | 43      | 40% |
| Deferred               | 1         | 1%  | 3       | 3%  |

## Call-ins

In addition to the regular items the Sustainable Communities OSC also received a call-in relating to traffic calming in Barford Road and High Street, Blunham. In fulfilling their statutory role the Committee referred the decision back to the Executive Member for it to be reconsidered.

## Engaging the public and partners

Each OSC agenda has a standing item for “questions, statements and deputations” and residents are encouraged attend meetings to ask questions and contribute to discussions during the meeting. In summary this year the OSCs engaged with the public and partners in the following ways:-

**195 residents** attended meetings mainly relating to proposals for schools in Dunstable.

**1 petition** submitted by a Councillor on behalf of residents relating to safety issues on Sunderland road, which was referred to a Traffic Management Meeting.

**20 questions, statements and deputations**, by registering to speak residents can ask questions at OSC meetings regarding any of the items on the agenda. During 2014/15 questions were raised in relation to the following:-

- statutory consultation regarding schools in Dunstable
- school places in Leighton Buzzard and Cranfield
- Housing Revenue Account
- provision for mental health and learning difficulties
- traffic issues in Potton
- housing numbers in Central Bedfordshire
- superfast broadband; and
- Anglian Water

**15 organisations attended meetings**, the OSCs can also invite specific witnesses and professionals to attend meetings where they feel it would be helpful to receive additional information. During 2014/15 representatives of the following attended meetings:-

- Aragon Housing Association
- Bedford Hospital
- Bedfordshire & Luton (Community Service)
- Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Bedfordshire Fire Service
- Bedfordshire Police
- East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
- Grand Union Housing Group
- Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
- Luton & Dunstable NHS Foundation Trust
- Mental Health Central Bedfordshire
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- SEPT integrated services
- South East Midlands Local Economic Partnership
- Tenant Scrutiny Panel



## Ways of working

In addition to continuing the work that has already commenced during 2014/15 the OSCs will continue to encourage improvements in the way O&S operates in Central Bedfordshire. These objectives will be informed by any national reviews of the process, and the good practice and guidance that is published for scrutiny committees throughout the year:-

### **Outcome focus**

Significant progress has been made this year by reducing the number of noted and endorsed items. Throughout 2015/16 the OSCs will focus on keeping this figure down whilst at the same time ensure that the purpose of items is more clearly defined and the expected outcomes of scrutinising a report are understood at the outset. This will support the Committees to deliver a critical friend challenge and agree recommendations that add value.

### **Information sharing**

Whilst the Committees have made progress in reducing the numbers of overview items this year more emphasis will be placed during 2015/16 on the use of overview sessions as a means of delivering information items and briefings to Members on key information topics. This includes making sure the processes for Members to request items and briefings are as open as possible. Building consensus and sharing information are a key part of helping Members understand complex subjects, but this does not necessarily need to happen at the OSC. Scrutiny briefings and Member Development sessions provide an opportunity to discuss information in more informal settings outside of OSC meetings.

### **Enhance engagement**

Attendance at OSC meetings usually occurs only at those meetings that consider particularly contentious items such as the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan or proposals to close schools. Residents and partners will be encouraged to engage more regularly in selecting work programme items, providing information for Members to consider at meetings or by attending meetings or watching online. This will also involve making sure that Members are aware of the opportunity to engage experts on topics where external input would be useful.

### **Encourage collaboration**

In order to drive improvement many items require the involvement of a range of services and partners, for example our approach to community resilience. Whilst the OSCs undertook a co-convened OSC during 2014/15 the nature of the priorities detailed in the 5-year plan and the cross-cutting nature of the Executive portfolios will require a more collaborative approach when reviewing those items that cut across more than one OSC.

## Getting involved

The residents of Central Bedfordshire are Overview and Scrutiny's most useful resource for finding out what the key issues are. Residents, community groups, local businesses and others that live or work in the area can make valuable contributions to much of the work Overview and Scrutiny does.

The work programme of Overview and Scrutiny can be flexible, so if there is an issue that you would like to see tackled or if you would just like to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny at Central Bedfordshire Council please contact the Overview and Scrutiny team:-

Overview and Scrutiny  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Priory House  
Monks Walk  
Chicksands  
Shefford  
SG17 5TQ

0300 300 4634

[scrutiny@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Details regarding forthcoming meetings, including copies of the reports and a list of future meeting dates can be obtained from the Overview and Scrutiny website at the following link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx>

All OSC meetings are open to the public and a list of future meeting dates is available from the Council's website. Residents are also welcome to come and speak and provide their views at meetings. If you would like to attend a meeting and speak please contact us in advance.



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**Contact us...**

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