

Strategic Planning & Environment (SPAЕ) OSC Annual Review 2023-24

The purpose of SPAЕ is to perform the overview, scrutiny and policy development role in relation to all matters and business associated with the Cabinet Portfolios for 'Environmental Services & Sustainability', and 'Planning & Regeneration'.

The committee held 9 meetings between April 2023 and March 2024. In addition to the regular scrutiny of the quarterly performance reports, the committee received briefings on significant policy areas including consultations on the Local Plan and a Walking and Cycling infrastructure plan. The committee reviewed these policy and consultation proposals in detail and provided feedback to the Portfolio Holder and officers before the final versions were taken to Cabinet and full Council.

The committee noted the backlog challenges that the planning enforcement team had for most of the year and welcomed the council's actions to address this, including employing a new team leader and investing in temporary additional resource to cut the backlog and improve performance against targets for high priority cases. The committee looks forward to seeing positive improvements in the performance statistics in 2024-25.

The committee recognised the sterling work done by the team fighting fly tipping, including some impressive successes in court.

The committee was pleased to note that there was limited disruption to bin collections after the routes were revised with the aim of increasing efficiency in collections. There were few issues on the small number of streets whose collection day was changed.

The committee also took an interest in the location and number of bins available for general and dog waste, especially following the Canal & Riverside Trust's decision to remove all dog poo bins from towpaths. The committee won assurances from officers that ward councillors would be consulted on bin and bench locations in their wards where these are being reviewed and especially when new bins or benches are being proposed.

The committee was particularly grateful to have briefings from Thames Water and Affinity on sewerage and water supply, and the Environment Agency on the Gade River Project. Members of the committee also joined a briefing in Gadebridge Park by the Environment Agency on the move of the Gade back to its original position.

Items that are currently on the committee's radar include:

- Luton Airport
- Economic Development Update
- Place Strategies (Hemel, Berkhamsted, Tring)
- Maylands Master Plan
- Visit to Cupid Green and CCTV
- Hemel Garden Communities
- Air Quality
- Rural Plan
- Climate Change
- Verge Hardening
- Natural England & National Trust

Cllr Claire Hobson

Chairman, Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee