

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE: Annual Joint Report of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees 2023-24	
REPORT OF: Cllr Jenny Headlam-Wells, Cllr Lorraine Revah, Cllr Linda Chung, Cllr Awale Olad and Cllr Kemi Atolagbe	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Council	DATE: 4 th March 2024
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>Scrutiny plays an important role in improving outcomes for residents – making sure services meet resident’s needs, exploring issues which impact the wellbeing of the borough and providing improvement recommendations to the Council.</p> <p>The Joint Chairs of Scrutiny Committee was set up to enable a collaborative and joined up way of working across the scrutiny function in Camden to ensure it delivers the best outcomes for residents. This is the fourth report of the Joint Chairs of Scrutiny to Council and presents the activities and achievements of Camden’s five scrutiny Committees over the last municipal year.</p> <p>LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - ACCESS TO INFORMATION: No documents which require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>CONTACT: Nick Kimber Director of Strategy and Policy Design 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG nick.kimber@camden.gov.uk 020 7974 2472</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>Council is asked to note the report.</p>	

Annual Joint Report of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees 2023-24

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This is the fifth annual joint report of the Chairs of the scrutiny committees to Full Council. The first report was received by Full Council in February 2019. Until November 2017, the Chairs submitted individual reports on their respective committees. To support collaborative working, reflect the interdependent nature of the work and promote the role of scrutiny, it was agreed in July 2018 that Chairs would submit a joint written report to a meeting of the Council.
- 1.2. As a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the normal schedule of scrutiny committees and work programmes was paused while the Council focussed its resources on putting in place its emergency management arrangements and supporting residents through the crisis. During this period a cross-party Covid Oversight Panel met regular to provide scrutiny of the Council's emergency response. The Panel reported to Full Council on its activities in March 2021.

2. OVERVIEW

- 2.1. Scrutiny plays an important role in improving outcomes for residents – making sure services meet resident needs, exploring issues which impact the wellbeing of the borough and providing improvement recommendations to the Council. The scrutiny function has a democratic mandate to monitor decisions affecting local residents, contribute to the formation of policy and hold the executive to account.
- 2.2. The Joint Chairs of Scrutiny Committee was established to enable closer working relationships across the scrutiny function. Its terms of reference state that the Committee will discuss the Leader's Annual Statement to the Council and other relevant cross cutting matters arising from the business of the Cabinet or as advised by the Chief Executive.

Supporting our community vision

- 2.3. We Make Camden, is a community strategy that has sought to capture everything we learned from the previous community strategy (Camden 2025) and the work of the Renewal Commission, which was set up to support a strong recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Scrutiny Committees have played their role in shaping the development of the strategy and look forward to continuing their role to help ensure the successful delivery of the new strategy.

- 2.4. We Make Camden continues to advocate opening up the Council so that all citizens have a voice. The Council has been delivering on this ambition through our thematic Full Council meetings and continued use of participatory methods such as citizens assemblies. The Joint Chairs of Scrutiny and Scrutiny Members are keen for scrutiny to involve residents meaningfully in the process whilst maintaining the democratic mandate of Councillors.
- 2.5. We Make Camden has also gone further in proposing how the Council and partners will use data and evidence to provide insight into how well we are delivering on the aims of the strategy, and to ensure transparency and accountability. A key element of this is the State of the Borough report – a shared evidence based for the Council, partners and communities.
- 2.6. Joint Chairs of Scrutiny have committed to using the State of the Borough report to inform future work planning i.e. as a source of evidence for issues of concern and relevance to each committee to explore and scrutinise, and as a tool for communicating to partners about the borough issues scrutiny wants to explore.
- 2.7. In planning for 2024/25 the Joint Chairs of Scrutiny will also consider how best to examine progress and development of the missions and challenges identified in We Make Camden collectively and across their individual scrutiny committees.
- 2.8. The Joint Chairs of Scrutiny will also continue to work with officers and members over the next 12 months to consider the future model of scrutiny in Camden.

Cabinet Portfolio Annual Reports

- 2.9. Individual Scrutiny Committees continued to receive Cabinet Member annual portfolio reports, helping them to build a closer working relationship with the Executive. The Leader's Annual Statement will be discussed by the Joint Chairs of Scrutiny at their next meeting.

Summary of the Scrutiny Committees' work

- 2.10. The **Health and Adult Social Care (HASC) Scrutiny Committee**, chaired by Cllr Lorraine Revah, scrutinises the Council, care providers and health partners to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities, to deliver the best services and the best use of the public's money and to deliver the ambitions related to health and adult social care within We Make Camden. In 2023/24, among many other areas, the committee scrutinised progress on the new Health and Wellbeing

Strategy, changes to Public Health and Adult Social Care services, access to NHS dentistry and health inequalities among the Bangladeshi community. A panel was formed to investigate screening and prevention uptake and barriers. Looking ahead, the committee will monitor the development of neighbourhood integrated working, and continue overseeing the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and We Make Camden to ensure services are working towards improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities for our residents.

- 2.11. The role of the **Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee**, chaired by Councillor Jenny Headlam-Wells, is to scrutinise the performance of the Council in its efforts to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families in Camden. It plays an integral role in delivering on our We Make Camden vision of ensuring the borough is safe and that children are given the best start in life. The committee is made up of elected members, co-opted school governors, Youth MPs and diocese representatives. This year the Committee carried out influential work examining the work of the Council to support the education our young people, keeping them safe, keeping them healthy, and making sure our looked after children are doing well. The Committee published the well-received final report of a Special Panel, *Initial investigation into the impact of Covid on the language development of early years and Key Stage 1 children in Camden*. Following on from this, they have established a new Special Panel looking at support for children with SEND in Camden to understand how best to provide valuable support. The board has also changed how it receives reports in order to have an increased focus on impact and allow more time for discussion and scrutiny.
- 2.12. The **Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee** is chaired by Cllr Awale Olad and contributes to We Make Camden's aims to create safe, strong and open communities. The Committee also focuses on sustainability and empowering people to tackle the climate emergency. Additionally, it serves as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee.
- 2.13. During the last municipal year the Committee has addressed a diverse range of areas, using their role to provide critical challenge to improve services for our communities. They have scrutinised the annual Cabinet Member reports from A Sustainable Camden (November 23), Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion (Dec 23), and New Homes, Jobs and Community Investment (Jan 24). On occasion, the Committee also invited the Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture to attend. The Cabinet Member attended to discuss and provide more information on the Council's policies in relation to Sports and Physical Activity for Children and Young People, and Libraries (Sep 23); and the Council's Culture Programme (Nov 23).

- 2.14. The Committee heard from a number of external organisations throughout the year on a range of issues:
- Royal Parks – on the gating of Primrose Hill Park and issues of anti-social behaviour in the Primrose Hill area (July 23)
 - Police – With Royal Parks, supported the item outlined above on a wide-ranging discussion about crime and anti-social behaviour in Primrose Hill Park (July 23), and also responded to concerns raised with the impact of Policing on Local communities (Nov 23)
 - TfL – issues with ventilation and safety in hot temperatures for customers and staff on routemaster buses. (Sept 23)
 - Lime and Human Forest (Bike Hire Scheme operators) - Parking compliance and monitoring compliance with the contract (Jan 24)
 - Thames Water – Update on progress with issues caused by flooding on Belsize Road (Jan 24)
- 2.15. The Committee also welcomed deputations from campaign groups and residents, including:
- Primrose Hill Keepers querying the decision to install gates on Primrose Hill Park (July 23)
 - Save the Motorcycle Campaign – group of residents concerned with the Council’s policies in the treatment of motorcyclists in the borough. (December 23)
 - Residents – requesting that the Council consider using Plant based catering at Council events (December 23)
 - Belsize Road residents with regards to the flooding in the area. (Jan 24)
 - Local resident querying the sustainability of the dockless bike hire scheme (Jan 24)
- 2.16. The Committee also set up a panel to look into the impact of a Circular Economy and received a report on the panel’s findings in November 23.
- 2.17. In 2023, the **Housing Scrutiny Committee**, continued to work with its new Chair, Councillor Kemi Atolagbe. It contributes to the We Make Camden aim of ensuring the everyone in Camden has a place to call home, with enough decent, safe, warm, and family-friendly housing. The committee has provided close scrutiny of performance across all housing services with a clear focus on the experience of residents. This was augmented later in the municipal year through the addition of three new co-opted members.
- 2.18. The focus has been scrutinising the Housing Transformation Plan with the aim to keep delivering high quality housing services for the borough’s tenants and residents. Included within this programme were additional reports on: the Intensive Participation and Engagement on Camden’s Estates; Building Safety Act & regulatory standards including Fire Safety; supporting our tenants during

the cost-of-living crisis; and the Housing Ombudsman case summary and self-assessment with a focus on damp and mould. The Homelessness Scrutiny Panel was set up and met in February 2024, presenting findings and recommendations to the Committee.

- 2.19. The Committee welcomed representatives from Housing Associations who presented their annual performance report as well as updates from Cabinet Member for Better Homes.
- 2.20. The **Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee**, chaired by Councillor Linda Chung since September 2022, led on the scrutiny of some of the key strategic and corporate policies and performance of the Council this year. This included providing robust scrutiny to the Council's financial position, including progress delivering the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Council's approach to treasury management, and the Council's approach to income and revenue. The Committee has also focussed on the Cost-of-Living crisis and the Council's delivery of support to residents, communities, and businesses experiencing financial vulnerability. The Committee has also played a key role in scrutinising the ways in which the Council communicates and interacts with Camden residents, the impact that it has in the community, and opportunities for learning and improvement.

3. HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE

- 3.1. The Health and Adult Social Care (HASC) Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the Council, care providers and health partners to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities, to deliver the best services and the best use of the public's money, and to pursue the ambitions of We Make Camden and Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 3.2. The Committee understands that health and wellbeing influence all aspects of people's lives and has implications for all Council services, and that good health and wellbeing is heavily influenced by the social determinants of health. As a committee we therefore look beyond healthcare services, understanding that having a safe home, a good education and good employment play an equally influential role in improving health and wellbeing for Camden residents. By recognising the influence of the social determinants of health, we aim to help the Council and partners tackle poverty and improve the lives of Camden's most disadvantaged residents, which in turn will lead to reduced inequalities and improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 3.3. HASC Scrutiny Committee supports a population health approach in its considerations, in line with Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This

means focussing on prevention and community based early interventions which are often more effective at helping people lead healthier, independent lives for longer. Yet the Committee also recognises the importance of all Camden residents being able to easily access high-quality clinical care when necessary.

Key activities

- 3.4. This year, the committee have continued to scrutinise progress of Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-30 and the relevant challenges within We Make Camden. In January, the committee took an item on community connectedness and friendships, a priority within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, social isolation and loneliness is also a challenge within We Make Camden. The item set out how the Community Connectedness and Friendships working group have progressed work through the development of theories of change to focus on three priority areas for action; to improve identification of people who are lonely or social isolated, to optimise services to support people to connect to their communities and to undertake a communications campaign to raise awareness and reduce stigma. The Committee engaged in in depth discussion, highlighting the importance of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in supporting residents to connect with one another, Members offered to propose further community groups the project could work with to ensure all partners are engaged and contributing. Members also raised issues around measuring success, and concerns were expressed about digital exclusion and the risks of digital services to connections for older people.
- 3.5. This municipal year has seen many services within health and care undergo transformation. In March 2023, the new Camden Public Health Service, now known as the Health and Wellbeing service, was established, having previously been a shared service with Islington. The Committee requested an item in September, to present Members with the future ambitions of Camden's Public health service. The item detailed the new service structure and outlined the department's priorities. The Committee are encouraged by the new arrangements, and the potential this provides to better integrate health and wellbeing into all policies. During the discussion, Members raised the importance of utilising data to understand health inequalities and target interventions, and to continue funding projects that improve health and wellbeing such as the Community Champions.
- 3.6. Adult Social Care are also undertaking several transformational initiatives which were presented to the Committee in September. These include Neighbourhoods, Adult Early Help, Co-production, Transforming Care and Support at Home, as well as the Accommodation Strategy. During the item, Members raised the importance of home care visits not being rushed and the

need to improve conditions for staff to improve recruitment, retention and wellbeing. The Committee were encouraged to hear that the expectation was for no visits to be less than 30 minutes, and that adopting the London Living Wage has resulted in less care workforce turnover. At February's meeting, the Committee took an in-depth item on care and support at home.

- 3.7. HASC play a crucial role in scrutinising all health partners, including the NHS and Primary Care. In September the Committee were presented with an overview of the current general practice landscape and future plans. This item outlined North Central London Integrated Care Board's (NCL ICB) work with providers to deliver better primary care in Camden. The committee raised concerns about the availability of prescribed medicines, the inconsistency of GP services and the importance of communicating changes to service provision effectively with residents.
- 3.8. Following [local evidence](#) and national reports of NHS dental services in crisis, in November the Committee requested an item from NCL and NHS England to set out the situation in Camden and the action being taken to improve access. The Committee are particularly concerned about the implications on inequality, and the cost implications on acute dental care as resident's are unable to find routine appointments that help to identify and treat conditions early before worsening and requiring more costly procedures. At the meeting, the Committee highlighted the difficulties faced by homeless people, people with disabilities and older people on low incomes, and that communication needs to improve so that those on low incomes are aware that they can apply for discounted dental services.
- 3.9. The past year has continued to be incredibly challenging for our residents due to soaring inflation leading to a cost-of-living crisis. The Committee recognises the threat this poses to health outcomes and rising inequalities as the link between poverty and health outcomes is well documented. While the Committee always ask officers to consider health inequalities in their reports, the committee also requested a specific item looking at health outcomes among the Bangladeshi Community at February's meeting, this follows from a scrutiny panel that investigated the topic in 2017.
- 3.10. A Scrutiny Panel on Screening and Prevention was established this year, Chaired by Cllr Anna Burrage. The Panel's objective is to conduct an investigation into available screening and prevention programmes to help; a) determine which programmes should be prioritised for attention due to low uptake and demographic relevance, b) create an enhanced understanding of the barriers to take-up and c) facilitate the development of recommendations for how to improve participation across the borough both for where the most

major gaps exist but also for where health inequality is worst on the fringes of society. In February, the Committee were presented with an interim report, setting out findings from interviews with relevant stakeholders from the health system and voluntary and community sector. The interim report included preliminary recommendations, that the Panel will now refine before presenting their final report to the committee early in the next municipal year.

- 3.11. This year, HASC have sought to increase involvement of voluntary sector partners who work to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. We are very grateful that representatives from Camden Carers, Camden Disability Action and Age UK Camden have contributed their time and provided valuable input at many of our meetings. The Committee have also considered deputations from residents, in December the committee heard a deputation from representatives of Caversham Practice Patient Participation Group regarding draft proposals to permanently close the Peckwater Centre to convert it into a secondary care dialysis unit, relocating it from St Pancras Hospital. Concerns were raised about the lack of communication and impact on Camden's health system ambitions to deliver integrated health services. Following the deputation, the ICB were asked to provide a response at January's meeting, where Members requested the programme urgently assess the impact of the relocation on existing service users and ensure that patients and GPs are consulted on fully before any decision is made.
- 3.12. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Anna Wright as the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, for her helpful updates to each meeting. In November, HASC members held an in-depth discussion of the range of transformative initiatives across the health and care portfolio as the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care presented her annual report, in particular focusing on how the Council are taking a population health approach to improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

Future priorities

- 3.13. In 2024/25 the Committee would like to further explore how to increase public engagement in the scrutiny process. Bringing in the voices of people directly affected by council policy and service users brings valuable perspective and insight that is crucial to identifying improvements and providing the best services for our residents. We will also continue to increase scrutiny participation of voluntary and community organisations who work to improve health and wellbeing in Camden. We will work closely with Healthwatch Camden to ensure they feed in their fantastic work at our meetings.
- 3.14. The Committee will follow up issues discussed in 2023/24, such as the continued impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, the borough partnership's shift

towards integrated neighbourhood working and the progress of transformational work within Adult Social Care.

- 3.15. The Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy and continue to review progress against the priorities set out in Supporting People Connecting Communities. Members will also scrutinise aspects of We Make Camden that fall within the committee's remit, with particular regard to the social isolation challenge.

4. CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

- 4.1. The role of the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee is to scrutinise the performance of the Council in its efforts to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families in Camden. It plays an integral role in delivering on our Camden 2025 vision of ensuring the borough is safe and that children are given the best start in life. The committee is made up of elected members and co-opted school governors, youth MPs, and Anglican and Roman Catholic diocesan representatives. It is particularly valuable to have the two Youth MPs on the Committee to give us the perspective of Camden Sixth Formers, currently from Regent High School and Camden School for Girls.
- 4.2. The Committee hears from Cabinet Members with reports and issues throughout the year and received two Cabinet Member Annual Portfolio Reports this year. The Committee's Work Programme is largely governed by the educational calendar and the statutory reporting duties of the Council.
- 4.3. The Scrutiny Committee has focused on many critical areas, including the academic performance of our young people, school place planning, early years support, youth justice, special educational needs and disabilities, safeguarding, and children and families' experience of social work meetings.

Key Achievements

- 4.4. The Committee heard two Annual Reports from Cabinet Members - for Best Start for Children and Families from Councillor Boyland in November 2023, and for Young People and Culture from Councillor Francis in January 2024. Each of them then answered probing questions from members of the committee and other elected members. Both Cabinet Members gave portfolio updates at each of the other Scrutiny committee meetings throughout the year.
- 4.5. Ensuring access to high quality school education is a key interest of the committee. In July, they heard reports on school finances and the steps taken

by the Council in partnership with schools, Headteachers and Camden Learning to manage financial pressures and the transition to the new National Funding Formula (NFF). In November, the Committee heard from the Head of Education Commissioning and School Organisation on School Place Planning. Over the last five years, there has been a significant reduction in demand for school places within Camden and the wider London area. A number of complex factors affecting family decision-making means that there is a significant degree of uncertainty in forecasting future demand for school places. In response to these changing demographics, the council has taken a proactive approach and made the difficult decision to close forms and schools. The Council is continuing to model anticipated pupil numbers and take action to ensure sustainable school provision into the next decade and beyond.

- 4.6. In July 2023, the Committee considered a report on the recommissioning of *Camden Learning* to provide school improvement services, training, and school support for a further three years, with the option to extend for an additional two years. The committee challenged the recommissioning to be ambitious on behalf of children and to reduce educational inequalities. In September, the Chief Executive of *Camden Learning*, Stephen Hall, presented provisional exam results, and a further presentation of results will take place in February 2024, when they have been validated and it is possible to look at performance of distinct groups within headline data sets. The results highlighted differences between different schools in Camden and helped to inform targeted work to improve performance.
- 4.7. In February 2023, the Committee published the final report of a Special Panel, *Initial investigation into the impact of Covid on the language development of early years and Key Stage 1 children in Camden*. This report was well received by the relevant services and more broadly across the borough. It was sent to all Primary Heads and Chairs of Governors in Camden primary schools, and beyond the borough to the Deputy Mayor of London, and to relevant Government and Shadow Education Ministers. The Cabinet Member for the Best Start for Children and Families will report back on the report and recommendations in March 2024. The Report not only presented an analysis of the situation during the research period but also predicted future learning problems for some of the 'Covid Cohort' of children who may struggle through the remainder of their school careers.
- 4.8. The Committee continues to take a keen interest in the early years, and, in January, the Committee heard from the Head of Early Years on Camden's implementation of the new Early Education Entitlements and the development of Family Hubs.

- 4.9. The Committee has taken a particular interest in children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND). In September, the Committee heard a report on the progress of the implementation of the SEND Strategy 2022-27 and readiness for the Ofsted inspection of the Local Area SEND Partnership. At the same meeting, the committee agreed to set up a SEND Provision Special Panel. This panel is led by Councillor McNamara and aims to investigate what different stakeholders understand as best value; explore the accessibility of services; explore the tensions between what the Council offered, what parents wanted, and what was delivered by schools; understand the picture of what could and could not be offered by the Council in terms of resources; and how the service communicated with disadvantaged children and families. The final report of the panel will come to the Committee's meeting in July 2024.
- 4.10. The Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) holds the responsibility for planning to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The committee considered the CSCP annual report for 2022/23 and the impact of the CSCP in maintaining good governance and strategic oversight of the quality and performance of our multi-agency safeguarding. In January 2024, the committee received the Corporate Parenting Annual Report, providing an overview of the achievement, progress, and challenges in meeting the needs of Camden's children in care and care-experienced young people.
- 4.11. In December, the Committee heard a report from the Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture, the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families on the Camden Youth Justice Plan 2023-25, before going to Cabinet and then to full Council for final sign-off. It outlined the priorities for the Youth Justice Service over the next 2 years, 2023-25. It provided an overview of the progress from the previous plan, referenced national and regional priorities, and how Camden seeks to deliver on these priorities.
- 4.12. The Young Inspectors Programme of Inspections has been providing input to service planning and development in Camden for the past fifteen years. Every year a team of Young Inspectors undertakes research into the views of other service users and professionals about the services provided by partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children. This year, the Young Inspectors investigated children and families' experience of social care meetings. They ran focus groups and questionnaires with children, young people, parents/ carers, and social workers, and used their findings to develop eight key recommendations for Camden's Social Care Service. Two young people presented their findings to the committee, as well as sharing some of their own experiences of social care meetings in a personal and moving way. In discussion, they highlighted that the most important recommendation was

that the child should be prepared for the meeting and understand what was in the report in advance. Also, adults should chat to the children before the meeting and make them feel comfortable during the meeting. This is a valuable opportunity to hear from the users of this Camden service and to ensure that our young people have a voice in decision-making on their care.

- 4.13. In December, the Committee received a Deputation from Netley School, including the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors, and the Executive Head. The Deputation outlined Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision in Camden and appealed for a solution to the current situation where the school and the Netley Centre of Autism was oversubscribed and consequently suffering a shortage of funding.
- 4.14. This year has seen new Chief Officer appointments to the Supporting People Directorate. We welcomed Tim Aldridge as Executive Director, Children and Learning, and Vikram Hansrani as Director of Educational Commissioning and Inclusion. CSF Committee Members and the Chair were pleased to take part in the selection and interview process for these appointments and that of the post of Director of Relational Practice.

Future Priorities

- 4.15. During the year, the Committee decided to make a radical change to the style of report-giving at meetings. Presentations by Officers would be restricted to a maximum of ten minutes in total for each Agenda item. In addition, there would be less information on details of operational activities and more reporting on their strategic outcomes and the impacts of intervention. In future, reports would also contain case studies and illustration of real evidence, together with more information on benchmarking against statistical comparators, both regionally and nationally. This new approach has now been piloted and approved by members of the Committee and will continue in future. The aim is to give more opportunities for interrogating the work of officers and Cabinet Members and increase accountability to the Scrutiny Committee.

5. CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- 5.1. As outlined above, the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee contributes to We Make Camden's aims to create safe, strong and open communities as well as make Camden a sustainable place with everyone empowered to contribute to tackling the climate emergency. It does this by scrutinising the Council's cultural and environmental policies and the provision, planning, financing, management, and performance of services relating to

culture, environment, regeneration, community safety and the voluntary sector. It also serves as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee.

- 5.2. The Committee hears from Cabinet Members with reports and issues throughout the year but welcomes the opportunity to scrutinise the portfolios in detail. The Committee has received three Cabinet Member annual portfolio this year.

Key Achievements

- 5.3. In July the Committee received a report on **sports and physical activity for children and young people** from the Director of Recreation. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also attended this discussion. The report was focused on the current sport and physical activity open to Children and Young People in Camden. The levels of current activity and steps taken to increase both access and participation were discussed. As an introduction to the report the Committee was shown a brief video clip called 'Wildcats captured in their Natural Habitat' of young children playing football and enjoying physical activity. The Committee discussed use of MUGAs (multi-use games areas), leisure centres and green spaces across the borough, and barriers to physical activity for different groups of young people in Camden, plus ways to alleviate these barriers.
- 5.4. Also in July, the Committee received a report from the Director of Royal Parks and Director of Public Safety on **crime and anti-social behaviour in Primrose Hill Park**. During this item the Committee heard that according to crime statistics the area was not a hotspot for major crimes such as sexual offending and rape. Around half of the crime calls relating to Primrose Hill Park were reportedly related to phone thefts and other occurrences of crime include noise complaints, alcohol, mental health incidents and anti-social behaviour. However, the incidents of crime were obviously of concern for residents – particularly women and young people - and aspects of crime prevention were discussed. This included ways to increase crime reporting, the inclusion of Primrose Hill Park in a pan-London Summer Violence plan, and closer working between Camden's Community Safety Service, Police and the Royal Parks Operational Unit.
- 5.5. In September, the Committee received a report focused on **Fire safety risks associated with lithium-ion batteries**. This report followed a tragically fatal fire in a Camden property in July 2023. Following this tragic incident information was sent to all council tenants and leaseholders informing them of the fire risks associated with lithium-ion batteries and that charging and storing them is not permitted in communal areas. Guidance was included on how lithium batteries

can be safely stored and charged. During this agenda item the information for tenants, and ways to store e-vehicles safely was discussed.

- 5.6. At the same meeting in September, the Committee also received an update on Camden's **Tree Maintenance and Tree Planting Strategy**. The Committee heard about some of the reasons behind an elevated number of tree losses since the Covid-19 pandemic, but there had been an overall net increase of 1000 trees from 28,000 to 29,000 over this period. The Committee also considered the skills level within Camden's Tree team - Camden being the host borough of the London Tree Officer Association, the current Chair of the Association worked for Camden's Tree Manager, Camden's Tree Manager sat on the national executive around trees and advised the Woodland Advisory Committee nationally. The Committee was pleased to hear that the Council's Tree team was well placed and at the forefront of policy development as well as day to day work on trees.
- 5.7. Also in September 2023, the Committee received an update on **Camden's Cultural Programme**. The Committee was pleased to receive this report as the borough's cultural and creative sector contribute greatly to Camden's unique identity and the borough is home to many of the UK's most visited cultural destinations. In the report the Committee heard about some of the challenges faced by our cultural infrastructure and for people engaging with the arts – namely the impact of the pandemic, unprecedented inflation and cost of living crisis, climate emergency and racial inequality.
- 5.8. In spite of these challenges, the Committee praised number of events in the borough throughout the past year – especially those that celebrate and recognise the heritage of our diverse population – much needed at a time when many cultures are being marginalised and denigrated. There was particular praise for the Windrush 75 homecoming event, and the emotional and thought-provoking Little Amar. The Committee asked whether more events could be held in the northwest of the borough and acknowledged the importance of the Culture, Education, Learning and Support Fund.
- 5.9. In November 2023, the Committee considered the report of the **Circular Economy Panel**. The report was presented by Cllr Julian Fulbrook, who explained that the report investigated the applicability of Circular Economy concepts to the work of the Council, considered any appropriate recommendations for further application. The Chair of the Committee praised the very comprehensive report noting that it covered so many areas and thanked the Panel members for a deep dive into the topic. The Committee discussed possible future concepts such as a 'Library of Things' in West Hampstead Library and encouraging cycle safety/ cycle lessons in Camden primary schools.

- 5.10. Also in November 2023, the Committee received a report on **impact of policing on local communities in Camden**. This item was in response to a number of complaints concerning allegations of racism, sexism and homophobia from members of the public received by Camden and Islington Basic Command Unit (BCU). In response to these complaints the Camden and Islington Police BCU denied mistreating Black and ethnic minorities and noted that in many instances they were required to act on sensitive intelligence information and that sign off of prospective warrants took place at the Magistrates Court, which would need to be satisfied that action was justified. The Committee also discussed the impact of Stop and Search on communities and the use of facial recognition technology, and whether this technology upholds racial biases. The Committee heard that the facial recognition service used by the Police was based on already stored images of wanted people, and not based on artificial intelligence.

Future Priorities

- 5.11. The Council's role in tackling the climate emergency will continue to be a priority for the Committee during the coming municipal year. The Committee will hear an update on the **Annual Review of Camden's Climate Action Plan**, including a **Climate Resilience Plan**. Together this item will allow the Committee to examine Camden's response to tackling the climate emergency, and also how we will ensure our communities are resilient to the impact that the climate emergency will have on all of us. Discrete areas of work related to our climate response – such as the Clean Air Action plan – will also continue to be examined by this Committee.
- 5.12. The Committee will also scrutinise the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) joint waste strategy – This strategy will outline how we – along with six other North London Authorities (Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest) plan to manage the combined waste from over 1.7 million residents, and small businesses in our communities.

6. HOUSING

- 6.1. In 2023, Housing Scrutiny Committee continued to work with its new Chair, Councillor Atolagbe. The committee has provided close scrutiny of performance across all housing services with a clear focus on the experience of residents. This was augmented later in the municipal year through the addition of three new co-opted members.

Key Achievements

- 6.2. A challenge included within We Make Camden is that the borough has enough decent, safe, warm, and family-friendly housing. In July officers presented an update on the **Housing Transformation Plan** with the aim to keep delivering high quality housing services for the borough's tenants and residents. Using tenant feedback, initial changes had been implemented such as insourcing all Council's caretaking responsibilities, which had led to greater satisfaction from tenants and residents in comparison to the previous arrangement. Funds had been made available to help tenants and residents in need due to the cost-of-living issues and facing fuel cost difficulties by putting extra resources into the heating pool fund to keep the increases down. Members of the scrutiny committee welcomed the approach being followed by officers.
- 6.3. Additional newly implemented improvements included the trial of a focused **Moving Homes Team** to seek to improve voids turnaround (key-to-key programme) as well as **Income Team** to seek to address the current high levels of rent arrears. The **Repairs Improvement Plan** had been developed, with a work stream focusing on void performance with a view to improving the turnaround time, working closely with the Moving Homes Team. The **Family Friendly Programme** has been established to help tackle the ongoing challenge of overcrowding households. The Committee requested more information regarding homelessness applications received last year and specifically more detail on rehousing data with a focus on families. Linking in with the Pan-London Association to support tenants to move across boroughs and how tenants engage with this Camden's home-swap scheme.
- 6.4. To continue to **tackle the cost-of-living crisis** for all residents the Welfare Rights Team reported on their aim to ensure that more people in need were aware of the existence of the service, along with what services it provided. This would be taken forward through appropriate publicity and the use of social media. The Welfare Rights Team also helped tenants meet all their financial commitments - not only paying their rent but also meeting Council Tax and utility commitments. The scrutiny committee asked that its thanks be passed through to officers in the Welfare Rights Team for all the good work that they had been doing to help tenants and residents in financial difficulty.
- 6.5. The Committee received an update on the **Intensive Participation and Engagement of Camden Estates**. The Council rolled out the pilot which would enable officers to speak directly to tenants and gain feedback on council services, with the aim to use lessons learnt from the engagement days to template across the borough. The cost-of-living bus also engaged with tenants raising their awareness of what was available to them, along with assisting them in making applications for available cost-of-living funds. Officers agreed to

provide a revised timetable regarding Camden estates where partnership organisations were actively engaged to support in relevant wards.

- 6.6. In September Officers provided an update on the **Building Safety Act & Regulatory Standards** regarding the way forward for the Council following the regulatory notice, providing the action plan arising from the regulatory notice once it had been signed off by the Regulator of Social Housing. The Council remained focussed on achieving the highest standards of resident safety and had been part of the Government's early adopter group. The Council had a good record of informing its own residents regarding the duties and responsibilities arising from the new regulatory framework. The committee made a recommendation for regular updates as a standing item on the fire safety and regulatory standards, damp and mould and any outstanding work on building safety which would focus on performance and flagging possible risk.
- 6.7. In September 2023 it was agreed that a **Homelessness Scrutiny Panel** would be established to conduct a deep dive analysis into homelessness services across Camden. It was commissioned in order to understand more about resident perceptions of homelessness and the support that can be accessed. It is also recognised that the Council plays a key role as a convenor across the wider system and therefore, should work to drive partnership working and integration across the health and care system. The Panel drafted a report to present to Committee at the February Meeting. It sets out the key findings of the examination and 17 recommendations for consideration. Which include incorporating insights from partners and residents into the ongoing work of the Homeless System Transformation programme which would include reviewing specific functions such as the Out of Hours Provision and VCS funding. Along with Facilitating Collaborative Forums; Enhancing Multi-Agency Working; Increasing Training for Partners and support for Hostel Residents; Implement Trauma-Informed Approach.
- 6.8. To meet borough wide missions as set out in We Make Camden and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, continuing the strategic partnership working with **Housing Associations**, consideration was given to the **annual performance** information in November 23. It outlined the challenging economic conditions they were operating within. This had meant that resources had to be reprioritised, and this had a knock-on effect in relation to resourcing service provision and housing development. All Housing Associations work with and respond to the Social Housing Regulator and Housing Ombudsman guidance and directions for service improvements. The new tenancy satisfaction measure outcomes, available in 2024, would allow for improved scrutiny of future performance which the committee welcomed. Committee Members further scrutinised for additional information to be shared

including the reassessment of information provided by Clarion in relation to number of reported anti-social behaviour cases reported in Camden, as well as adding information regarding tenancy allocation and how this is advertised within Camden to the next year's annual report.

- 6.9. Housing Associations agreed to invite Councillors to attend viewings of new build provision within the borough, as several schemes were coming up in the next few months. The Chair thanked the Housing Association representatives for attending and answering the scrutiny committee's questions.
- 6.10. In January 2024 the Committee received an update on the **Housing Ombudsman** after they carried out an investigation in relation to the way the Council dealt with leaks, damp and mould, complaints handling and repairs, of which the majority of cases were from 2021. The report included information regarding the Councils self-assessment undertaken to measure current performance against the Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on damp and mould. Since then, a number of improvements had been put in place in the way the Council handled these issues. This had resulted in their being fewer determinations made against the Council over the last 6 months. The Council was looking forward to working with the Housing Ombudsman to explain what the authority had now put in place to improve its processes, along with listening to the Housing Ombudsman regarding any other changes that could be made to processes and procedures. The committee requested further information regarding how Officers undertaking home visits were seeking to understand the needs of the tenant, and as part of this being aware of issues to report such as damp and mould.
- 6.11. **Improvements to Housing Repairs engagement** with residents were discussed outlining the changes in the use of new technology to allow tenants and residents to report issues. The feedback in relation to the use of the new methods (such as WhatsApp, live chat etc along with the new Saturday appointment offer) was overwhelmingly positive, as tenants and residents felt that these options enabled them to contact the Council easier. Also, the Council would be setting up a new housing resident's Complaints Panel in February 2024 and they would be looking at the complaints that come in across both repairs and housing, as well as looking to see if there were themes and trends that needed to be addressed.

Future Priorities

- 6.12. The Committee will plan its work programme for 2024-25 in the coming months. This will be framed around the successful implementation of meeting the housing challenge as set out in We Make Camden. The Housing

Transformation Programme puts this priority at the centre of the work of Housing and Property services and the Committee will continue to receive updates regarding developments in this area. The wide scope of the programme will ensure reports continue to be shared surrounding working with the Social Housing Regulator and Housing Ombudsman, as well as improvements to support residents with Allocations, Voids, Temporary Accommodation, Repairs including the challenge for homes with damp and mould, Fire Safety, supporting tenants with energy bills and tenancy arrears. As well as this resident safety and the ongoing homelessness challenges will remain a priority along with the development of new, affordable homes (via CIP and other schemes) as well as energy efficiency and sustainability (and the progress of the retrofit programme).

7. RESOURCES AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

- 7.1. The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the strategic and corporate policies and performance of the Council. It scrutinises the provision, planning, financing, management, and performance of the central council services (the Corporate Services Directorate).
- 7.2. It also assists the Cabinet in the development of the Council's annual budget (capital and revenue) and in reviewing and scrutinising its overall budgetary management.
- 7.3. Furthermore, it also scrutinises any other Council functions not otherwise addressed by any other scrutiny committee.

Key Achievements

- 7.4. It has been a busy and productive year for the Resources and Corporate Performance Committee as it scrutinised the Council's financial management, its use of resources, its performance, the ways in which it engages with Camden residents, and the support it has been providing to communities during the Cost-of-Living crisis.
- 7.5. Helping to ensure **strong financial management and financial resilience and sustainability** in a challenging economic climate has been a key focus for the Committee in this municipal year. The Committee scrutinised the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy at its meetings in July 2023 and December 2023. At both meetings, Members raised questions about factors that have impacted the Housing Revenue Account and measures that the Council is taking to address pressures in the context of housing need in Camden, and at

the December 2023 meeting Members raised questions about the likelihood of the Council delivering savings measures in the 2025/26 financial year.

- 7.6. The Committee also received a report in September 2023 on the income available to the Council and how officers seek to ensure that income is maximised. Member expressed interest in the social value that the Council gains from its assets, sources of income for development projects, and business rates retention.
- 7.7. The Committee has also scrutinised the **Council's approach to treasury management**, receiving the Treasury Management Annual Report and Mid-Year Strategy in November 2023. The report gave the Committee the opportunity to review the treasury activity during 2022/23 and the first half of 2023/24, review compliance with guidance and treasury indicators and receive update on the economic background shaping the strategy.
- 7.8. The Committee has scrutinised the Council's management of its resources at its meetings through the year. The Committee received a report setting out the Council's approach to creating a **Community Wealth Fund**, which described it as a mission-driven social investment fund for people, businesses, and organisations in Camden. Members scrutinised the Community Wealth Fund's governance, its finance model, and the Council's approach to risk management, noting the investment of the Council's own resources. The Committee also expressed an interest in learning that could be drawn from similar approaches taken elsewhere.
- 7.9. The Committee has also scrutinised the Council's management of its non-financial resources. In November 2023, the Committee received the **Human Resources Annual Report**, which provides an overview of critical activities related to the Council's workforce such as workforce diversity and inclusivity, talent acquisition, pay, flexibility, well-being, and assistance provided to staff during the cost-of-living crisis. Members praised all aspects of the Council's approach to inclusivity. Members expressed interest in the factors that influence the proportion of Camden staff who live within the borough or local to it, including the housing market and flexible working arrangements, and the impact that this has on Council services and workforce management.
- 7.10. **The Cost-of-Living crisis** continued to be high on the council's agenda in 2023/2024 municipal year. The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee has therefore continued to pay significant attention to the Council's activity to support residents experiencing financial vulnerability. In July 2023 the Committee received a report that provided an update on the Council's work to tackle the Cost-of-Living crisis and its plans to allocate

resources to support an ongoing emergency response, in response to which Members scrutinised the Council's allocation of resources to community initiatives, school clothing support, and future projects within the Council's budgetary framework.

- 7.11. In the context of the Cost-of-Living crisis, Members scrutinised the Council's plans for the current **Council Tax Support** scheme to remain in place for 2024/25 at the Committee meeting in December 2023. In February 2024, Members received a report that set out an overview of how the Council is reforming its approach to **debt**, within the context of its strategy to support residents experiencing financial hardship and vulnerability.
- 7.12. This year the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee took a strong interest in the Council's **engagement and interaction with communities**. The Committee received a report in September 2023 that set out the Council's corporate approach to **communications** and the approach that the communications service takes to delivering evidence-based, multi-channel communications campaigns. In response, Members discussed the efficacy of various channels that the Council uses and the approach to developing content for those channels that responds to what communities need from them. Members also raised questions about the Council's **website**, which was the subject of a report brought to the Committee in November 2023. Responding to this report, Members scrutinised the design and functionality of the Camden Council website in the context of a re-design and improvement measures that have been taken and raised questions about the ways in which the Council plans to continuously learn and update the website. The Committee also received a report in February 2024 that provided an overview of **citizens' contact and interaction** with the Council, following a piece of design-led research and changes within the contact service.
- 7.13. The Committee has also paid attention to feedback that the Council received from the residents in the form of **complaints**, and how insights from complaints can be used to improve service delivery. In September 2023, Members scrutinised the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, and in January 2024 Members scrutinised the Annual Complaints Report 2022/2023.
- 7.14. The Council's **performance** has remained a central focus for the Committee, and Members have received reports through the year that highlight the Council's approach to performance management, learning, and improvement. Most notably, in July 2023, Members scrutinised the Corporate Performance Report for 2022-23, and in December 2023 Members scrutinised the Insight,

Learning and Impact Report for Quarter 2 2023-24. The latter report represents a development in the way the Council reports its performance, with more focus on key areas of challenge, opportunity, and learning as well as quantitative measures.

- 7.15. The Committee would like to thank the officers who brought items to committee meetings this year for their work.

Future Priorities

- 7.16. Looking ahead to 2024/25, the Council's performance, its financial management, and its engagement with Camden's communities will continue to be priorities for the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will also scrutinise key aspects of the Council's corporate strategy, including its approach to strategic change through the We Make Camden missions and its approach to equalities.
- 7.17. The Committee will continue to prioritise scrutiny of the Council's financial management and the performance in service delivery with a view to ensuring that the Council is securing best value for residents.

8. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

- 8.1. The Executive Director of Corporate Services has been consulted and has no comments to add to the report.

9. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 9.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no comments to add to the report.

10. Environmental Implications

- 10.1. The proposals in this report have no negative environment impacts.

11. Appendices

- 11.1. No appendices

REPORT ENDS