

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b> Annual Joint Report of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees 2024-25	
<b>REPORT OF:</b> Cllr Lotis Bautista, Cllr Lorraine Revah, Cllr Linda Chung, Cllr Awale Olad and Cllr Kemi Atolagbe	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO:</b> Council	<b>DATE:</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2025
<p><b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b></p> <p>Scrutiny plays an important role in improving outcomes for residents – making sure services meet residents’ needs, exploring issues which impact the wellbeing of the borough and providing improvement recommendations to the Council.</p> <p>This is the sixth 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><b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - ACCESS TO INFORMATION:</b> No documents which require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p><b>CONTACT:</b> Osian Jones Director of Strategy and Policy Design 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG <a href="mailto:Osian.jones@camden.gov.uk">Osian.jones@camden.gov.uk</a> 020 7974 3177</p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION</b></p> <p>Council is asked to note the report.</p>	

## **Annual Joint Report of the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees 2024-25**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. This is the sixth 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, promote the role of scrutiny and ensure its visibility, it was agreed in July 2018 that Chairs would submit a joint written report to a meeting of the Council. A report of this kind has been submitted every year since 2019 except 2021, due to the disruption to the normal schedule of scrutiny committees associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The cross-party Covid Oversight Panel, which provided scrutiny of the Council's emergency response, reported to Full Council on its activities in March 2021. The continued joint reporting of the Chairs of the scrutiny committees to Full Council underscores the value of the committees' scrutiny and oversight function.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 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.

#### *Supporting our community vision*

- 2.2. We Make Camden is our shared vision for our Borough that builds on commitment to working with our Councillors and communities to shape a future for Camden that responds to the ambitions of our place. Scrutiny committees have played a role in shaping the development and delivery of the strategy and look forward to continuing this role to help ensure its success.
- 2.3. We Make Camden advocates for opening up the Council so that all citizens have a voice. The Council has been delivering on this ambition through thematic Full Council meetings and continued use of participatory methods such as citizens assemblies. Scrutiny Chairs are committed to involving residents meaningfully in oversight, working with Councillors in their democratic role to scrutinise the Council's services, performance and ambitions.

- 2.4. We Make Camden is clear that the Council and partners will use data and evidence to provide insight into how well we are delivering on the ambitions of our communities, and to ensure transparency and accountability about the Council's delivery and impact. A key element of this is the annual State of the Borough report, which is a shared evidence base for the Council, partners and communities, as well as the regular Insight, Learning and Impact report that all scrutiny committees receive that provides an overview of the performance and delivery of all Council services, as well as commentary on the challenges, learning and opportunities facing the organisation.
- 2.5. Joint Chairs of Scrutiny have committed to using the State of the Borough report, as well as the Insight, Learning and Impact reports, to inform future work planning 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 that the scrutiny committees want to explore.
- 2.6. In planning for 2025/26 the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees will also consider how best to examine progress and development of the missions and challenges identified in We Make Camden across their individual scrutiny committees in line with their terms of reference.
- 2.7. The Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees will also continue to work with officers and members over the next twelve months to continue to consider the future model of scrutiny in Camden.

#### *Overview*

- 2.8. 2024/25 has been a busy and productive year for the scrutiny committees. The committees have collectively covered a large number and diverse range of issues that are important to Camden residents, communities, and local partners.

#### *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. From 2024/25 onwards, the Leader's Annual Report, which has previously been scrutinised by the Joint Chairs of Scrutiny Committee, will be offered to the Chairs of each scrutiny committee, which the Leader will attend if required. It is envisaged that each scrutiny committee will focus on the parts of the Leader's statement that relate to its terms of reference. The Leader's

report will also be taken to an appropriate Cabinet meeting for discussion and comment. All Members of the Council will be notified of the meeting at which the Leader's report is to be considered and invited to attend and listen to the discussion. These proposed changes are set out in item 9 on this agenda.

### *Summary of the Scrutiny Committees' work*

2.10. The **Health and Adult Social Care (HASC)** Scrutiny Committee, chaired by Councillor 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 2024/25, among many other areas, the committee scrutinised progress on the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, transformational pieces of work within Adult Social Care, the findings of the screening and prevention panel and a response to the committee's challenges around the proposal to convert the Peckwater centre into a dialysis unit. Looking ahead, the committee will monitor the development of neighbourhood integrated working, follow up on the screening and prevention panel's recommendations, 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 Lotis Bautista, 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 of 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 Scrutiny Panel on the effectiveness of Children's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision in Camden, scrutinised safeguarding and care for vulnerable children in Camden, and reviewed initiatives to address offending behaviour among young people. A key priority has been to amplify the voices of children and families.

2.12. The Committee has received several deputations this municipal year, namely on the accessibility of Free School Meals, how AI technologies can support

SEND provision, and the environmental impact of school uniforms.

- 2.13. The **Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee** is chaired by Councillor 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.
- 2.14. 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 Planning and a Sustainable Camden (Jul 2024, Nov 2024 and Jan 2025), Safer Communities (Oct 2024), Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion (Dec 2024), and New Homes and Community Investment (Feb 2025). On occasion, the committee also invited the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities to attend to discuss and provide more information on the Council's strategic priorities, approach and progress in relation to the Violence Against Women and Girls (Jul 2024). The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture also attended the committee meeting in January to provide an update on the delivery of the 2024 Culture Programme and key priorities for the 2025 Cultural Programme for the communities of Camden.
- 2.15. The committee heard from a number of external organisations throughout the year on a range of issues:
- The Metropolitan Police provided an overview of crime trends and policing efforts in Camden; outlined their efforts to enhance policing and public safety under the "A New Met for London" plan, with specific reference to Camden's Local Action Plan; and provided an overview of the Metropolitan Police Service's use of facial recognition (Oct 2024);
  - North London Waste Authority updated on the development of the North London Waste Authority strategy that will guide work for the next fifteen years to help North London move towards a low-waste, sustainable future (Nov 2024);
  - Lime and Human Forest (Bike Hire Scheme operators) reported on parking compliance and monitoring compliance with their contract with the Council (Feb 2025); and
  - Thames Water provided an update on progress with issues caused by flooding on Belsize Road and information about their plan for the borough and issues raised in the deputation earlier in the previous municipal year (Feb 2025).
- 2.16. The committee also welcomed deputations from campaign groups and residents, including:

- Four deputations related to the Dartmouth Park Area Healthy Neighbourhood project / Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) (Nov 2024):
  - Chair of the Highgate Society;
  - Chair of London Living Streets;
  - 4 Roads Group; and
  - Camden residents.
- Two deputations related to the Camden Transport Strategy Delivery Plan 2025-28 and Local Implementation Plan (Nov 2024):
  - Camden Cycling Campaign – in support of the Council’s proposals set out in the Camden Transport Strategy Delivery Plan; and
  - Green School Runs – related to the Camden Transport Strategy Delivery Plan and requesting an increase in the frequency of the 603 buses.
- Fleet Road Residents – regarding Council plans and traffic orders on Fleet Road NW3 relating to the South End Green Streatery (Nov 2024);
- Residents – regarding the closure of the Central YMCA building in Great Russell Street to express their opposition (Dec 2024);
- Residents on Zipcar flexibility – asking for the Council to revisit its stance and permit Zipcar Flex in the borough (Feb 2025); and
- South Hampstead Flood Action Group - with regards to the flooding in the area and the role of Thames Water and the Council (Feb 2025).

2.17. In 2024-25, the **Housing Scrutiny Committee**, chaired by, Councillor Kemi Atolagbe, continued to contribute 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. The focus has been scrutinising the delivery and performance of housing services with the aim of ensuring high quality services for the borough’s tenants and residents. To this end, the committee has received reports on Camden’s Leaseholder services, repairs and capital works, anti-social behaviour policy, and an update on the Housing Ombudsman investigation. The committee also received a report on a review of Camden’s rough sleeping services. The committee has continued to scrutinise the Council’s Housing Transformation Programme and the financial strategy for Camden’s housing services.

2.18. The committee also welcomed deputations from campaign groups and residents, including:

- Camden residents on support for the deaf community in relation to housing service engagement;
- Streets Kitchen; and
- Climate Emergency Camden.

2.19. 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 Camden's corporate strategy and received reports on the Council's missions and partnerships. 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. 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. In January 2025, the committee were updated on progress for developing and delivering effective employment support for Camden residents, including the population health approach taken towards the Good Work and Employment priority of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2030, progress made by Good Work Camden and the Disability Job Hub in supporting residents to access good work. During discussions, Members raised concern about permitted work limits before residents become ineligible for certain benefits, and queried how the Council could influence government on this. Officers confirmed that a letter was being drafted to government highlighting how volunteering could help build skills, confidence and experience. Concern was also raised about the short term nature of funding for projects, including the difficulty in achieving good outcomes and what happens after the funding ends. Officers agreed to bring the evaluation for the Disability Job Hub, which would include performance outcomes, to the committee.
- 3.5. The committee have focused on multi-disciplinary working and the integration of health and care services. In January 2025, the committee were provided with an overview of Camden's partnership approach to neighbourhoods, a strategic priority for Camden's borough partnership, jointly led by the London Borough of Camden and NHS partners. The committee were reassured that housing and other services were embedded in the work, and that while initial focus had been on establishing an Integrated Neighbourhood Team in the East of the borough, there had been work going on to develop more joined up working in other neighbourhoods. For example, in the north of Camden, the work had begun within primary care. A GP was working with the Royal Free Hospital on moving heart health services into the community and using that as a basis for building an integrated team.
- 3.6. The committee continued to scrutinise transformational pieces of work within Adult Social Care, including the Supporting People Connecting Communities (SPCC) Accommodation Plan in January and Adult Early Help in February. The SPCC Accommodation Plan included particular focus on the redesign of the Mental Health Supported Accommodation Pathway, providing insight into the opportunities and challenges around delivering the ambitions of the plan. The committee commended the approach to consider the importance of maintaining independence, and of the link between good housing on improving health and wellbeing. The committee were reassured that every project within the Accommodation Plan was being designed with residents to ensure they respond to their needs.



- 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 update on the merger between the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust (RFL) and North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust (North Mid). The committee raised several key questions during the discussion such as the necessity to properly consult carers and disabled people and involve them in the service design process, and the potential distraction of the merger from improving patient care. Concerns were also expressed about the risks of the merger, such as the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust (RFL) being spread too thinly and missing local population nuances.
- 3.8. The committee have continued to invite citizens, community groups and partners to talk at meetings. In December 2023 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 a lack of communication and impact on the health systems' ambitions to deliver integrated health services. Following the deputation, residents returned for a further deputation in July 2024. Partners also attended the meeting to provide an update where it was confirmed that following challenges raised by the committee and deputees, a revised options appraisal process would be undertaken to find a new location for the unit. HASC will continue to scrutinise the options appraisal process.
- 3.9. Another way resident voice is heard at HASC is through the work of Healthwatch Camden (HWC). In December, HWC provided a snapshot of the health impact of a condition called endometriosis on women and young girls. The report included personal lived experiences of endometriosis and the services that support women's health in Camden. The report included a set of recommendations aimed at existing services as well as outlining the urgent need for additional provisions. Members thanked Healthwatch for their work addressing a condition that affected a lot of women. It was noted that health inequalities for women in Camden did need to be addressed and the establishment of a women's health hub was essential. An item on women's health has been requested in 2025-26.
- 3.10. This year, HASC have sought to increase involvement from voluntary sector partners by regularly inviting partners to meetings and encouraging them to contribute to reports. 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 our meetings. Examples throughout the year include the Carers Action Plan, presented to the committee in

September, where representatives from Camden Carers attended with Adult Social Care colleagues to present and respond to questions. During the item, Members raised concerns about sustainability of funding and were reassured that the Better Care Fund provided an ongoing opportunity to fund this support, together with health partners. In February, Camden Disability Action also contributed to a report exploring how the health and care system supports disabled residents. This report helped the committee identify areas of focus related to disability to prioritise in next year's work programme.

- 3.11. A cross-party Scrutiny Panel on Screening and Prevention, chaired by Councillor Anna Burrage, presented their final report to the committee in July. The Panel's objective was 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. The recommendations were agreed by the committee in July 2024, and the committee received a report from colleagues across the health system responding to the recommendations in November '24.
- 3.12. As Chair, I would like to thank all Members for attending meetings and contributing to discussions with thoughtful questions. The Committee would also like to thank Councillor Anna Wright as the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, for her helpful updates to each meeting. It has been particularly valuable receiving standing updates to each meeting on Adult Social Care waiting lists and safeguarding, this has ensured crucial oversight and deeper understanding of complex safeguarding issues among committee members. 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 their annual report, focusing on how the Council are taking a population health approach to improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

### **Future priorities**

- 3.13. In 2025/26, the Committee will continue to focus on involving citizens and communities in the scrutiny process. Hearing from those affected by council policies and service users helps us improve services. We also aim to involve more voluntary and community organisations that work on health and

wellbeing in Camden. The Committee will work closely with Healthwatch Camden to include their valuable input in the meetings.

- 3.14. The committee is committed to following up issues discussed in 2024/25, such as the Adult Social Care CQC inspection report, following up recommendations from the Screening and Prevention Panel, impacts of Trusts merging, 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 food mission and 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 a vital 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 composed of elected members and co-opted school governors, Youth MPs, and diocesan representatives. These representatives ensure a breadth of perspectives in its deliberations.
- 4.2. The committee's agenda is shaped by the educational calendar, statutory reporting duties, and emerging challenges and opportunities affecting children and families across Camden. Throughout the 2024-2025 municipal year, the Work Programme has focussed on key issues including academic outcomes, early years support, safeguarding, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Alternative Provision, and the voice and participation of families and young people in services.
- 4.3. The committee also receives reports from two Cabinet Members whose portfolios are most relevant to the work of the committee. They are Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families, and Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture.

- 4.4. At the start of the new municipal year, Councillor Jenny Headlam-Wells stepped down as Chair and Councillor Lotis Bautista was appointed Chair of the CSF Committee during the 15 May 2024 Annual General Meeting (AGM).

### **Key Achievements**

- 4.5. The Committee heard two Annual Reports from Cabinet Members in December 2024, one for “Best Start for Children and Families” from Councillor Boyland and the other for “Jobs, Young People and Culture” from Councillor Francis.
- 4.6. Each Cabinet Member answered questions from members of the committee and other elected members. Both Cabinet Members gave portfolio updates at two other meetings during the year – one update at the start of the municipal year in July, and one at the last municipal year meeting in February. The frequency of these updates has been reduced to twice a year to allow for more focused and in-depth updates.

The SEND agenda has been a central focus of this municipal year’s work. The final report of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Panel on the effectiveness of Children’s SEND provision in Camden was presented in October.

- 4.7. The panel was established in September 2023, in response to issues raised with Committee Members by many parents and professionals in relation to this service area. The Panel investigated this area for a full year, speaking to a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, parents/carers and officers, to hear as many perspectives as possible on Camden’s SEND provision. explored service accessibility, stakeholder perceptions, and communication challenges.
- 4.8. The Panel identified key challenges in the SEND system including increased demands on services, significant delays for autism assessments, and inconsistent timeliness in families receiving support.
- 4.9. Key recommendations included improving how professionals work with and communicate with families and raising awareness and skills across the workforces, particularly around autism and neurodiversity. A subsequent Panel Response Report was presented at the February meeting, alongside the SEND Annual Report, which welcomed the Panel’s recommendations and demonstrated strong synergies between the Panel’s findings and the 2022–2027 SEND Strategy and implementation plan.

- 4.10. Ensuring access to high quality education remains a priority. The committee reviewed provisional examination results for the academic year 2023-24 in October 2024, focusing on identifying performance trends and disparities. Updates on school place planning, finances, and school organisation were scrutinised in November, acknowledging ongoing demographic shifts and reduced demand for school places.
- 4.11. The committee commended the Council's proactive approach in managing school sustainability while recognising the complexity of decisions in this area. Reflecting concerns about rising challenges in school attendance, the Committee commissioned a new report focusing on attendance, inclusion, and alternative provision. This report was presented in November and explored the significant year-on-year increase in absenteeism.
- 4.12. The committee scrutinised the significant focus that Camden Council is placing on this issue with data and research collected to understand the underlying causes of lower school attendance, the cohorts of children and young people most at risk, and the ensuing targeted interventions that Camden Council is putting in place to bring all Camden children back to school.
- 4.13. Safeguarding and care for vulnerable children was a key feature of reports scrutinised throughout the year. The Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) Annual Report 2023-24, reviewed in December 2024, outlined in detail the continued progress in Camden's multi-agency safeguarding and governance. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023-24, which was reviewed in January 2025, highlighted achievements – such as the rolling out of an Edge of Care pilot to prevent family breakdown – and ongoing challenges – including the cost of external placements and some children experiencing placement instability – in meeting the needs of children in care and care-experienced young people.
- 4.14. The committee reviewed transformative initiatives including strategies to address offending behaviour and promote rehabilitation among young people, covered in November 2024 as part of the Youth Justice service report. The Committee also scrutinised the Family Hubs and the Start Well Transformation Programme in January 2025, which aim to integrate services for families and enhance early intervention. Priorities of the Youth Justice service, covered in November 2024.
- 4.15. A key priority has been amplifying the voices of children and families. In October 2024, the Committee assessed the Council's approach to participation and co-production, underlining the importance of meaningful

engagement in shaping services. The Children's Services Annual Complaints Report 2023/24, presented in November 2024, highlighted themes from service users' feedback and informed improvements in service delivery. The committee also heard the yearly Young Inspectors Presentation in January 2025, a key research report conducted by care-experienced young people. This year, the report focused on their experiences of the support delivered by the Virtual School. Reflecting the Committee's previous feedback, which requested a focus on how young people's recommendations were actioned, an appendix was added to this year's report demonstrating progress made on the recommendations from the prior year. The inclusion of this follow-up not only provided accountability but also highlighted the importance of embedding young people's voices in service improvement.

- 4.16. The Committee also dedicated significant attention to the health and well-being of children and young people. In July 2024, an item was brought forward focusing entirely on this topic. Discussions encompassed mental health services, physical health programs, and strategies to address health disparities among different demographics.
- 4.17. The committee emphasized the importance of integrating health services with educational and social support systems to foster holistic development. Members also reviewed data on health indicators, identifying areas requiring targeted interventions. Acknowledging that reports such as this were equally relevant to the CSF Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Adult Social Care (HASC) Scrutiny Committee. The chairs of both committees met in September and agreed to invite each other's members to their respective meetings for items relevant to their scrutiny area. This was then acted upon for the SEND Scrutiny Panel Item in September and the "Family Hubs, Family Help and Start Well" report in January 2025.
- 4.18. The committee has also received several deputations this municipal year, namely on the accessibility of Free School Meals, how AI Technologies can support SEND provision, and the environmental impact of school uniforms. Those deputation submissions have allowed the committee to have important issues brought to their attention and to hear from a breadth of voices and perspectives on matters relating to Camden's Children, Schools and Families.

### **Enhancement to the Scrutiny Process**

- 4.19. This municipal year, the committee has implemented significant changes to the style and content of reports and presentations, aimed at making the scrutiny process more purposeful and impactful. Reports now have a greater focus on benchmarking data, evidence of impact, disproportionality, and

intersectionality. They also include a higher number of case studies that bring residents' real-life perspectives to the forefront, while content related to operational activities has been streamlined. Each report embeds key questions to foster focused and productive committee discussions.

- 4.20. Presentations have also been revised to complement these changes. A new Presenter's Guide, issued by the Chair, provides additional support to presenters on how to structure their sessions. The guide has advised presenters to limit their presentations to ten minutes, to highlight key challenges and pose questions to stimulate discussion. It has encouraged presenters to avoid repeating report content and instead asked them to provide supplementary data and insights, while using prompts and scenarios to encourage meaningful engagement from committee members.
- 4.21. Another notable development has been a broader emphasis on the committee's remit to provide feedback on ongoing change and transformation initiatives within the Council. This shift, championed by the Chair, aims to enable the committee to offer more meaningful and impactful contributions in Camden's rapidly evolving strategic environment. For instance, reports such as the "Stock taking report on our approach to participation and co-production with children, schools and families" and the "Persistent Absence, Inclusion and Alternative Provision Report", presented in October 2024 and November 2024 respectively, sought the Committee's input on active strategic developments. These included the mainstreaming of children and parent participation to inform service development, as well as new initiatives being rolled out by Camden to address persistent absence. This approach has allowed the Committee's feedback to directly inform and shape current Council thinking.
- 4.22. The committee's approach reflects a commitment to high support and high challenge, promoting effective collaboration between members and officers. This renewed scrutiny process ensures discussions remain strategic, impactful, and aligned with Camden's goals for continuous improvement.

### **Future Priorities**

- 4.23. The committee remains committed to delivering the highest quality of Scrutiny in the area of Children, Schools and Families. This year's enhancements to the scrutiny process have been well received by officers and members and will be maintained over the coming year.
- 4.24. The committee will continue to scrutinise areas of priority, including school attendance and achievement, services for Camden's children and families,

intersectionality and equity. The committee will also remain responsive to the shifting landscape relating to children, schools and families, which means some new scrutiny areas of focus which might arise in the next municipal year, such as Camden's response to the national reforms currently being rolled out in children's services.

- 4.25. Finally, the committee will continue to work on ensuring that Camden's Children, Schools and Families' services remain innovative, relevant and supportive, and will look to best practice in other boroughs across the UK, whilst also championing Camden's unique efforts.

## **5. CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

- 5.1. The Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee contributes to We Make Camden's aims to create safe, strong and open communities as well as to 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 four Cabinet Member annual portfolios this year.

### **Key Achievements**

- 5.3 In July 2024 the committee received a report on **Violence against women and girls (VAWG)** from the Executive Director Corporate Services. The Cabinet Member for Safer Communities also attended this discussion. The report sets out the Council's strategic priorities, approach and progress in relation to VAWG, its commitment to women's safety in the public realm and the work taking place to advance this. The committee applauded the Council's initiative of raising public awareness about sexual harassment and the focus on educating young people as early as possible and raising their awareness by including this in the education system even at preschool age.
- 5.4 In November 2024, the committee received a report from the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden on **Camden Transport Strategy Delivery Plan 2025- 2028 and Local Implementation Plan**. The projects within the programme contribute to the three overarching themes of public health, environment, and local economy. Although significant challenges



remain, the Council has made extensive progress in delivering safer, healthier streets and travel in Camden since the Camden Transport Strategy (CTS) was adopted in 2019. Camden is currently ranked 4th amongst all London Boroughs by the independent “Healthy Streets Scorecard” assessment. In the new 3-year plan, the 3 recommended new “spotlight” areas: buses, car clubs and motorcycle safety. There had also been an improvement in the Council’s overall consultation and engagement approach, particularly since Covid. In terms of car ownership in the borough, data show an overall reduction in the last few years, particularly it showed a 22% reduction in car ownership in the borough between 2016 and 2022 which was the highest percentage in London.

- 5.5 Also in November 2024, the committee received a report on **Libraries and their neighbourhoods** from the Director of Recreation. The report was very much welcomed. Camden was hugely respected across the Library sector as evidenced by the range of organisations such as the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Arts Council England that were present at the training event organised by the Council. It is good that the Council is exploring different pathways into the sector such as training on the job. Libraries are not just a nice service to have, for marginalised residents and those in areas of deprivation in a mixed borough such as Camden they serve as free access to knowledge and cultural enrichment in a safe and trusted place. Camden has a Home Library Service which provides a service to vulnerable residents as well as a digital library. In terms of schools, the Council’s Library Service is very proactive working in conjunction with the British Library on a number of initiatives, including developing a group for school librarians in Camden to form a network to strengthen the links between public libraries and school libraries. Other initiatives with schools and the British Library includes the launch of the Summer Reading Challenge at the British Library which was a well-attended event by about 4 different primary schools. The Council’s Library team is always trying to work collaboratively with primary and secondary schools in the borough to engage different audiences of all ages. Over the last two years the Council’s Library team has built links with the three community run libraries in the borough, meeting up every six to eight weeks to share ideas and support each other where possible. In relation to demographics, the Council’s Library team has worked with the Reading Agency and the Council’s Data and Insight Team to carry out a needs analysis and review of library catchment areas based on demographic data. This data would inform the Reading Strategy.
- 5.6 In December 2024, the Cabinet Member for **Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion** presented their Annual Report. A lot of activities, funding and development work in the community is being done to bring people out of isolation. As a borough of sanctuary, the Council had achieved some key milestones including securing long term housing solutions for Afghan and

Ukraine refugees ensuring that they had a safe and stable environment to rebuild their lives. Over the past year, the Council's resettlement schemes had provided accommodation tailored to the needs of vulnerable families alongside the practical support for those transitioning from temporary housing into permanent arrangements. In terms of access to education and skills, the Council had focussed on the educational opportunities that could be provided to refugee children particularly those rapidly integrated into local schools; while adults benefited from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), which were programmes developed with community partnership organisations as well as Voluntary Community Sector partners. The Council had also collaborated closely with employers to provide pathways into sustainable jobs for refugees as economic independence was important for community integration. In terms of community engagement and cohesion, this was facilitated by encouraging interaction between refugees and local communities at events, such as interfaith dialogues and cultural exchanges. Refugees were also welcomed to Community Sponsorship Schemes where spaces were created and refugees felt welcomed.

- 5.7 Camden is leading, in conjunction with Leeds, on the concept of Brave Cafes aiming at dispelling myths and stigma involving deep set issues around discrimination and equality. Moreover, the Council invested £1.9m annually in 38 key community organisations providing unrestricted multi-year funding which allowed these organisations to adapt to emerging challenges while maintaining their core work. Camden's funding was long term flexible funding nationally recognised by the Institute for Voluntary Research as a leading example of open and trusting grant making.
- 5.7 Also in December 2024, the committee received an update on the **Biodiversity strategy**. The committee was pleased to receive this report and see the amazing work being developed. The committee discussed whether Camden could play a role in supporting the Wildlife Trust – leading on biodiversity national policy - at a national level as they had some sites in the borough.
- 5.9 In January 2025, the Director of Public Safety presented their report on **Cleaner, Safer Camden**. The report refers to the creation of the new multi-disciplinary Community Safety Enforcement service which has been designed to underpin the enhanced Council approach towards tackling on-street anti-social behaviour and environmental crime. The report presents an overview of the remit of the Community Safety Enforcement service and an indication of the activity delivered since its inception earlier this year.
- 5.10 Also in January 2025, the committee received the report of the Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment on the **Camden Council Cultural**

**Programme.** The report summarises the vision and ambitions for the Culture Service, reflects on the development and delivery of the 2024 Cultural Programme and sets out the key priorities for the 2025 Cultural Programme for the communities of Camden. The Culture Service has been created to reposition the council's unique role as connectors and enablers of culture between cultural organisations, communities, and neighbourhoods to realise opportunities, animate the public realm and uncover Camden creatives and the everyday creativity of Camden people.

### **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.
- 5.12 The committee will receive as well a report on the proposal of **plant-based food for all Camden internal catering**. This is part of the Council's work to provide information about how to eat healthy, climate-conscious food and on advocacy work and leading by example approach.
- 5.13 The committee will also scrutinise the **Dartmouth Park Low Traffic Neighbourhood Scheme** and how the Council engages with its communities – improvements that could be made based on the recommendations being made by an independent consultant.
- 5.14 The committee will also receive the Report of the Cabinet Adviser for Low Carbon Emissions.

## **6. HOUSING**

- 6.1 In 2024, the Housing Scrutiny Committee continued to work with its Chair, Councillor Atolagbe. The committee has closely scrutinized performance across all housing services, with a clear focus on residents' experiences.

### **Key Achievements**

- 6.2 In July, officers presented a proposal to co-opt three members to join for the 2024/5 municipal year in line with the Chair's recommendations. This was to enable a broader discussion and outside view of the services received and draw on expertise as well as lived experience. This has been successful and valuable addition to the meeting, and the committee have agreed to extend this into the next municipal year.

- 6.3 The committee also received **an update from the Cabinet Member for Better Homes**. The scrutiny committee welcomed the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes and the approaches she had identified in her report. The Members looked forward seeing further improvements to service provision regarding anti-social behaviour, voids turnaround and delivery, support for private rented sector tenants, the management of new homes and helping all tenants in all types of tenures arising from new developments. These items were later discussed and scrutinised at the committee throughout the rest of the year.
- 6.4 The committee also discussed a **Review of the Rough Sleeping Service** which was led by the Executive Director for Adults and Health. The review found that there were areas where Camden may make improvements and explore different models of rough sleeping service, and so the review made recommendations that informed the ongoing work to make improvements to how rough sleeping services operate.
- 6.5 In October, the committee received an update on the response to the report of the cabinet advisor on **Improving Services to Camden Leaseholders and Advocating for Leaseholders**. This outlined how The Private Renters Bill and the Leaseholder Reform Bill would both have an impact on future services in those areas. The improvement programme for Leaseholder Services included a number of key recommendations, including looking at its evidence and record keeping so that more detailed information was available to leaseholders through the Camden Account.
- 6.6 In November, officers presented an update on the **Housing Transformation Programme** with the aim to keep delivering high-quality housing services for the borough's tenants and residents. The committee received a report on how the recommendations made by the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel, set up in February 2024, has been incorporated into the Housing Transformation programme to improve service delivery. The Housing Transformation programme had put in place a number of activity areas one of which was seeking to improve its data and digital services. This activity area aimed to ensure that the data the Council held was compliant, accurate, accessible and could be used to develop insights about services and residents. The committee also reflected on the changes being made as part of the restructure of housing and how this had been unsettling for staff and how appropriate training and listening spaces had been put in place to help them through the change process. Members of the scrutiny committee welcomed the approach being followed by officers.

- 6.7 To continue the approach to tackling Anti-Social Behaviour and improving Camden's role as a landlord in its' neighbourhoods, the Neighbourhoods service brought an update to the committee on **Anti-Social Behaviour, Estate Parking and Tenancy Visits**. Officers outlined how through the new Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, housing officers were working with colleagues in adult social care and health to seek to put in place preventative methods to avoid issues becoming a crisis in the future. Officers also outlined a new programme of tenancy visits that are due to commence, as part of the requirements of the Regulator for Social Housing. Members were supportive of this initiative and approach.
- 6.8 The committee also saw a **Procurement Strategy for Retrofit at Scale for Council Homes**, a report of the Cabinet Member for Better Homes that later went to cabinet. This report recommended developing a prototype Retrofit Test Model targeting a relatively small sample of circa 3,000 of the Council's homes. The project aligns with ambitions of both the Council and the Government to improve energy security with support from institutional investment, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels for energy generation. The aim is to target homes with a low Energy Performance Certificate rating, people suffering from fuel poverty and low and medium rise properties. Initial research in this type of measure had shown that tenants and residents would be interested in being part of this type of scheme. The Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the proposals as set out in the report.
- 6.9 The Council's ambition is to be an excellent social landlord that places its tenants at the top of its priorities and provides quality housing that meets, and where possible, exceeds regulatory requirements. The Council is also committed to increasing the supply of good quality, energy efficient, family friendly homes through its Community Investment Programme, through its Registered Provider Camden Living, and through its acquisition programmes. Officers took members through a cabinet report which set out the Council's **Housing Investment Strategy** and how it will add to and adapt its housing stock through the Community Investment Programme, Camden Living and acquisition programmes. There was discussion around the need to continue lobbying central government around the need to fund social housing, and also members were keen to ensure rigour and through scrutiny before going ahead with any disposals.
- 6.10 In December, the committee was presented with a cabinet report setting out how the Council intends to deliver on its strategic objectives for housing in the increasingly challenging financial climate that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is operating in. It set out a balanced budget and proposed levels of rent and service charges from 1 April 2025 for the financial year 2025/26, which

includes savings as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved at Cabinet in January 2023 and some increases to those savings targets during 2025/26. Members were keen that officers ensured that the messaging around why rents and service charges were going up going was made clear to tenant's and residents.

- 6.11 In January, the committee also heard about the work housing services are doing to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and work being done to embed a housing-led response to domestic abuse across Camden. As part of this, all Camden staff had to undertake mandatory Domestic Violence and Abuse training. This was further enhanced by compulsory level one to three domestic abuse training for core housing teams, and bespoke training for teams such as caretakers and repairs staff. Two new roles had also been created to help co-ordinate domestic abuse cases across neighbourhoods and homelessness services. The Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report, the draft handbook and the work that had been undertaken to take this initiative forward that had been led by ex-councillor Angela Mason. The meeting also hoped that the approaches and practices that had been developed as part of this initiative could be taken through into other areas of housing services.
- 6.12 In February 2025 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, and an Extraordinary Council Meeting was held in January 2025. The report included information regarding the Council's 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.

### **Future Priorities**

- 6.13 The committee will plan its work programme for 2025-26 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 Regulator of Social Housing 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 productive year for the Resources and Corporate Performance Committee as it scrutinised the Council's financial management, the performance of its corporate functions, the ways in which it engages with Camden residents, and the progress that has been made towards the Council's strategic objectives.
- 7.5. Helping to ensure **strong financial management and financial resilience and sustainability** 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 2024 and December 2024. At the July 2024 meeting, members discussed central government funding of local authorities, the ways in which local authorities manage financial pressures associated with devolution of responsibilities from central government, and the Council's approach to fixed penalty notices. At the December meeting, members discussed the financial pressures associated with temporary accommodation and measures that are being taken to mitigate these pressures.
- 7.6. The committee has also scrutinised the **Council's approach to treasury management**, receiving the Treasury Management Annual Report and Mid-Year Strategy in October 2024. The report gave the committee the opportunity to review the treasury activity during 2023/24 and the first half of 2024/25,

review compliance with guidance and treasury indicators, and receive an update on the economic background shaping the strategy.

- 7.7 The committee has scrutinised the Council's approach to **Council Tax**, both in terms of how levels of Council Tax are set and how low income households are supported through the Council Tax Support Scheme. In February 2025, the committee received a report about the Council Tax that the Council expects to collect for 2025/26. Prior to this, in December 2024, the committee received a report on proposals for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26. Members raised questions about how the support available in Camden compares to other London boroughs, noting that only Camden and Merton offer up to 100% relief, and discussed aspects of the scheme that may be reviewed in the future.
- 7.8 The ways in which the Council supports Camden residents on low incomes has been a theme of the committee's business through this municipal year. In January 2025, the committee received a report that provided an update on the Council's work to transform its approach to supporting residents experiencing **debt** and other issues associated with personal financial challenges. Members raised questions about the groups of Camden residents who are being supported by Camden including residents who are being migrated to Universal Credit, how the service engages with residents initially, and the ways in which residents experiencing acute financial pressures are supported with ongoing household costs such as energy bills as well as debt.
- 7.9 This year the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee took a strong interest in the Council's **corporate strategy**, We Make Camden, and the "missions approach" that it commits to. In November 2024, the committee received a report on the We Make Camden Missions approach, which provided an update on how the Council has approached setting, understanding, and measuring the four Camden and summarised what this means for the Council's ways of working internally and with citizens and partners. Members raised questions about initiatives that are being undertaken to make progress towards the goals of the individual missions, the processes and systems that are in place to ensure that appropriate learning and evaluation takes place, and the language that the Council is using to describe and communicate about the missions. Members also asked to be kept up to date with the missions approach, including both the delivery of the national government's missions and the delivery of the Council's local We Make Camden missions.
- 7.10 In November 2024, the committee also received a report on the We Make Camden Partnerships Strategy, which focused on how the Council builds



networks and relationships with a view to enabling local organisations to contribute towards the shared goals for the borough articulated in We Make Camden. Members raised questions about the Council's approach to building relationships with businesses and external organisations, noted the importance of working in partnership with organisations whose values align with Camden's stated values, and noted a concern regarding the closure of high street bank branches in Camden.

- 7.11 The Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee received a report in October 2024 on the King's Speech, which took place on 17 July 2024 and set out the legislative programme for the government for the year. The report set out the implications for Camden that may arise from the announced legislation and advised the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee specifically on financial and resource implications. Members raised questions about the National Wealth Fund Bill and the interaction between this new body and the Camden Community Wealth Fund, which the committee received a report on in the 2023/24 municipal year, and about how Camden may engage with government officials to showcase the lived experiences of Camden residents and the realities of local public service delivery in order to inform national policy development. The committee requested that a report is brought to the Committee on an annual basis that considers the government's legislative agenda and its potential impact on Camden.
- 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 scrutinised changes to the Council's **website** and the Council's ongoing work to improve citizens' experiences interacting with the Council, which was the subject of a report brought to the committee in January 2025, and which provided an update on a previous report brought in November 2023. Responding to this report, Members discussed the functionality and accessibility of the website, use of the website via different kinds of devices, and data management.
- 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 July 2024, Members scrutinised the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, and in February 2025 Members scrutinised the Annual Complaints Report 2023/2024.
- 7.14 The committee has also scrutinised the Council's core corporate functions. In February 2025, 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.

- 7.15 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 as well as the performance of services within the Corporate Services directorate that the committee has responsibility for scrutinising. In July 2024, Members scrutinised the Insight, Learning, and Impact report for Q4 2023/24, and in December 2024 Members scrutinised the Insight, Learning and Impact Report for Quarter 2 2024-25.
- 7.16 The committee would like to thank the officers who brought items to committee meetings this year for their work.

### **Future Priorities**

- 7.17 Looking ahead to 2025/26, 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 the ways in which the Council engages with the wider policy context within which it operates.
- 7.18 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 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. This report contains no proposals that may have negative environment impacts.

## **11. Appendices**

11.1. No appendices

**REPORT ENDS**