


LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	Cabinet 13 July 2023	
Report Title	Growth Scrutiny Committee Themed Review 2022-23: Town Centres	
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Ahsan Khan, Deputy Leader (Housing and Regeneration)	
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Wards affected	None specifically	
Public Access	OPEN	
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Themed Review 2022-23: Council support for job growth - Annex 1 – Summary of Committee Meetings Appendix 2 – Proposed Response Appendix 3 – Equalities Analysis Screening Tool	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council's scrutiny committees conduct themed reviews as part of an annual work programme. This is an opportunity for a committee to engage in a sustained way with a particular topic. This year the Growth Scrutiny Committee conducted its review on the Council's approach Town Centres. The attached report sets out the Committee's findings and recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Cabinet is asked to approve the following recommendations:
- (a) That the Growth Scrutiny Committee Themed Review report be noted;
 - (b) That the recommendations outlined in the report be adopted and taken forward as outlined in the proposed response in appendix 2 including where recommendations have been amended.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 The Committee conducted its themed review throughout 2022-23, and its approach is outlined in **appendix 1**. Officers have prepared a proposed response which is attached as **appendix 2**. Cabinet are asked to review and approve the response.

3.2 The full recommendations are outlined in the report (appendix 1). A summary of recommendations can be found below:

3.3 **Summary of recommendations**

The Committee recommends:

1. That the Council develops an evidence-based town centre strategy to guide and inform work across the borough and provide an overarching framework, ensuring:
 - It is informed by data and research, including evidence of good practice on a local, regional and national level
 - It allows services to measure the work that is undertaken in the borough's town centres
 - It allows flexibility to take individual approaches across Town Centres, recognising that each locality may have their own identity
 - That this flexibility provides opportunities to coordinate and learn from the work undertaken for each locality and how they can interact with each other
 - That businesses, local communities, partners and councillors are involved in the development of the Strategy.
2. That the Council seek to move beyond engagement with communities to involvement, co-production and co-design of Town Centres, particularly seeking to collaborate with existing community groups and to involve local residents in the process, to ensure each Town Centre is shaped to the local community
3. That, as a pathway for increased community involvement in shaping Town Centres, services consider creating Community Improvement District(s) in Waltham Forest
4. That services look for opportunities to facilitate and support community businesses
5. That the Council reflect on the diversity of communities and maintain awareness that Town Centres are for numerous groups within the local community
6. That the Council champion Town Centres as a social centre in the daytime, enabling it to be a resource for those that need support

most. This should include working with other public sector partners, for example, health partners, children's services and leisure providers so that the services needed most are within easy reach.

7. That the Council identify mechanisms to ensure diversification in High Streets and identify opportunities to make Town Centres mixed-use, this should include:
 - A variety of brands, independent and local businesses
 - Non-retail activities providing goods and services at different price points
 - Supporting leisure and cultural activity, such as galleries, craft and music workshops and sport
 8. That the Council considers the compulsory purchase or rental of empty units which could then be used for incubators for new independent businesses, leisure or cultural activities.
 9. That the Council prioritise bringing new local businesses and enterprises into new developments in the borough and consider offering subsidies or using neighbourhood CIL as an incentive.
 10. That services focus on providing support around resilience for new and emerging businesses, particularly local business to ensure they are successful and able to navigate instability
 11. That services utilise the findings from the High Street Task Force report in Leytonstone, and build these into the Town Centre Strategy
 12. That services look for opportunities for to introduce affordable workspaces in our town centres and to use them as way to promote good quality employment
- 3.4 Officers propose that all recommendations are accepted.

4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Committee has reviewed the Council's policy and practice, and its proposals relate to current service delivery. It is a requirement for the Cabinet to consider each individual scrutiny committee themed review and respond to the recommendations within the report.

5. COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

- 5.1 The attached report of the scrutiny committee sets out a number of ways the themed review has taken into consideration both local and national policies in respect to its area of focus.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1** Formal consultation is not required for a scrutiny committee to conduct a themed review. The Committee has, however, spoken to a range of witnesses and sought a diversity of views in respect to its topic, as set out in its report.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.1.1** The recommendations have been developed so that they can be implemented within the existing budgets available to relevant services. However, if in preparing to implement the recommendations contained within the themed review report, they are not sustainable within existing resources and officers find that additional expenditure is required, a report should be brought back to Cabinet to explain either: a) why the recommendations cannot be implemented; or b) proposals to finance their implementation.

7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1** Part of the Council's constitution sets out the Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules including, in paragraph 5, the procedure for Policy Review and Development. This report has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 6.1 of the procedure rules as a report by Overview and Scrutiny. The procedure rules provide that in carrying out any such policy review or development, Overview and Scrutiny must have regard to available budgets and resources (para.5.2) and make recommendations to Cabinet (6.1).

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

- 7.3.1** The Council must further take into account its wider Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 when making a decision. The Council will consider the impact of changes that might arise as a result of implementing the recommendations on those with protected equality characteristics, in particular where there is likely to be an impact on residents or service users from any changes to, or decommissioning of existing services. In order to assist with this, an Equality Analysis screening tool has been completed and is attached as **appendix 3**.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

- 7.4.1** The recommendations contained within this themed review report may have a positive impact on sustainability as engagement at an earlier stage may avoid sustainability implications at a later date. The recommendations may have an additional impact on sustainability, arising from day to day operations. These concerns will be taken into consideration by relevant officers during the design and implementation phase. If in preparing to implement the recommendations contained within the themed review report, they are

noted to have a negative impact on sustainability, a report should be brought back to Cabinet to explain either: a) why the recommendations cannot be implemented; b) options to curtail negative sustainability impact.

7.5 Council Infrastructure

- 7.5.1 The recommendations contained within this themed review report are expected to be delivered within existing council infrastructure and resources.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

See themed review for information.