



Scrutiny Committees'

Annual Report 2022-23

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1. Introduction

This report presents the work of the scrutiny committees over 2022-23. It identifies key areas where the scrutiny committees have engaged in good governance, ensured political accountability, and contributed to policy development.

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a statutory function of the local authority, as originally set out in the Local Government Act 2000. It requires the Council to make arrangements for one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which are responsible for holding the Executive of the Council to account. This is done by reviewing policy and implementation, including how services are delivered, and how key decisions are likely to impact on residents. The Council also has powers and duties in respect to scrutinising local health services, and these are delegated to the Health Scrutiny Committee. The Committees can make recommendations, though they are not decision-making bodies.

How is Scrutiny in Waltham Forest Structured?

Waltham Forest has eight scrutiny committees, covering a full range of council services and community partners:

- Adult Social Care
- Budget and Performance
- Children and Families
- Climate
- Communities
- Growth
- Health
- Housing

The committees have the following collective responsibilities, as set out in the constitution:

- To monitor and review the policies and practices of and services provided by the Council, its partners and contractors;
- To investigate how successfully Council policies deliver these services and to make recommendations on future policy development;
- To scrutinise decisions of Cabinet that affect matters falling within the remit of each Committee;
- To undertake particular reviews of services within the Committee's remit as may be requested from time to time by Council or Cabinet and to make reports or recommendations on matters which affect these services in the Borough's areas.

In line with political proportionality, each committee was comprised of five Labour and two Conservative members in 2022-23. Each committee met five times throughout the year. With some additional meetings arranged for committees to jointly consider issues.

A scrutiny reference group supports the function by sharing expertise, identifying common challenges and providing strategic direction. This reference group is comprised of key officers, the Chair of Audit and Governance and the chairs of all scrutiny committees.

Portfolio Lead Members regularly attend their relevant scrutiny committee and provide an opportunity for committee members to ask questions and hear updates.

How is Scrutiny Supported?

Each scrutiny committee is supported by the services that fall under its remit. This includes report writing, information sharing and attending meetings to answer questions. In addition to this, the committees are provided with committee management support as well as a scrutiny team that provides briefings, advice, research and liaison with key officers to assist in preparing for meetings. The scrutiny team is structurally independent from the services being scrutinised.

2. Summary of Committee Activity in 2022-23

2.1 Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Richard Sweden
Chair



Cllr Marie Pye
Vice-Chair

The first Adult Social Care (ASC) Scrutiny Committee of the 2022/23 municipal year took place in June 2022, followed by four subsequent meetings covering ten items. A total of 43 actions and/or recommendations arose during the 22/23 cycle of meetings, including a Cabinet Referral.

The agenda item which had the most impact was ASC Transport Policy, which was discussed on 3rd November 2022 as a pre-decision Scrutiny item. Officers informed the Committee of the proposed policy, which was developed in consultation with residents, highlighting that there was no existing ASC transport policy in place. The Committee raised concerns that the six-week consultation had a low response rate which did not reflect the 300 service users in the borough. Members also questioned whether the consultation document went far enough to address accessibility issues as the provision of easy-read documents only help those with the relevant training. Finally, members raised concerns regarding potential inequality issues following the implementation of the policy as they would miss out on transport provision.

This Cabinet Referral led to changes within the policy, including an extension of the consultation period which allowed greater participation. Demonstrating how effective scrutiny can influence policy decisions and hold decision makers to account.

Members have scrutinised application of the Dementia Strategy for 2021-2026, which officers brought to the January meeting. A recommendation arose for 'services to consider encouraging all LBWF Council contractors to adopt dementia-friendly employment policies and attitudes'. In response, the Intensive Dementia Outreach Service ran Dementia Friends sessions for Service Store, Waltham Forest Community Transport, May Harris and Morgan Sindall, with upcoming sessions for Astons staff.

This has been received well amongst contractors, with Astons also requesting the Council review their online staff dementia training modules. ASC Scrutiny Committee has played a vital role in ensuring the dementia-strategy is a driving force for change within the borough.

Two members of the Scrutiny Committee also visited the Dementia Hub, along with Healthwatch, on 19th April 2023. Members were given a tour of the Hub and were able to see first-hand the services provided for residents. Healthwatch joined the Residents' Panel the following day and stated the visit was extremely helpful. There has been sustained interest from members, with another Dementia Hub visit taking place on 17th May (during Dementia Action Week) where members attending the opening of the Salon. Continued collaboration

with the Dementia Hub allows service users to see the Council is working to champion their voice.

Members also raised concerns over the lack of representation of individuals with autism on the Autism Strategy Board. A recommendation arose to recruit more individuals with autism onto this board, ensuring those who the strategy effects have a say in how it is developed. Current timescales suggest officers should be able to implement this over the next municipal year.

Overall, during the 22/23 cycle of meetings ASC has ensured the voices of residents who are directly impacted by the changing policy landscape have been consulted, whilst considering accessibility barriers. The past year has promoting transparency and trust with residents of the borough, increasing the visibility of the function of Scrutiny.

2.2 Budget and Performance Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Keith Rayner
Chair



Cllr Jenny Gray
Vice-Chair

Budget and Performance Scrutiny Committee met five times throughout the municipal year, the first meeting took place in June 2022.

The Committee covered a total of thirteen agenda items and thirty-two actions and recommendations resulted from discussions across the year.

The Committee looked at a variety of items, most notably continuing their scrutiny of the Fair Deal Programme and also following the process of the new Corporate Framework: 15-Minute Neighbourhoods before it was taken to Cabinet in March 2023.

The Committee also maintained their oversight on Corporate Performance, receiving a report containing key headlines for each quarter. The Committee regularly made suggestions on how to improve the performance report, which officers responded to and incorporated into each subsequent report.

Throughout the year the Committee scrutinised the budget proposals for 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy as they were developed, asking key questions about short and long-term sustainability. There was continued uncertainty caused by inflationary and cost of living pressures, and around expected central government reforms that had been delayed further, such as the fair funding review. The Government once again produced a single-year settlement for 2023-24, this meant assumptions have been made for the future and makes the long-term forecast uncertain.

In addition to this, the Committee were concerned with funding around adult social care, noting that pressures could impact services in the future.

In February 2023, the Committee reviewed the final budget proposals for 2023-24 and made a referral to Cabinet, this outlined their findings over the year, made recommendations and identified risks¹.

2.3 Children and Families Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Miriam Mirwitch
Chair



Cllr Kisha Green
Vice-Chair

The first Children and Families Scrutiny Committee of the 2022/23 municipal year took place in July 2022 and met a further four times. During this time, 17 agenda items were covered and 17 actions and/or recommendations were suggested by members.

At the beginning of the year members agreed to have a standing item looking at OFSTED recommendations and the wider service improvement plan, to ensure members were kept up to take with the action plan which was implemented following a two-day Ofsted Focused Visit to children's social care conducted on the 25/26th May 2022. This fed into the wider Council ambitions and priorities as set out in the Public Service Strategy. Throughout the year members received an update on how the Council were progressing with the action plan to improve services along with how officers were preparing for the next inspection.

The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee have ensured young people have remained engaged throughout the past year, namely through the topics covered in the joint themed review with Communities Scrutiny Committee Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Child Safeguarding. During the year, two items which stood out for input was officer reports on school exclusions and children/young people who have had experience in the criminal justice system. These topics encouraged members and YA/YIAG to question borough level statistics and ask why ethnicity data showed young people of colour are disproportionately affected.

These topics were focused on during the Young Peoples Evidence Session, allowing different cohorts of young people to share their opinion in a safe and comfortable environment. The following groups were identified for participation: YA/YIAG and Voices in Partnership (VIP) and Voices and Influence (those experiencing care and care leavers). Members participated in two evidence sessions which held in Spring 2022. Over these sessions, members were split into smaller groups which also included an officer and a scribe. Discussions were facilitated by the young people and all evidence given was

¹ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/s88560/APPENDIX%2011%20-%20Referral%20from%20Budget%20and%20Performance%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf>

anonymised and fed into recommendations for the themed review. Feedback from these sessions was positive overall. Councillors were appreciative of the frank and direct conversations with young people which may not have happened in the Chamber during a traditional Scrutiny meeting. The young people who attended feedback that the sessions were interesting and there was an overwhelming appetite for more sessions to be held in the future. An important takeaway from the young people's feedback is that it is vital officers and members keep them informed of progress made following on from these sessions. This promotes transparency and ensures the young people feel their opinion is valued.

The recommendations which stemmed from the joint themed review directly influence the direction of travel over the next municipal year. Although the themed review was far reaching in its scope, members are keen to look further into Care workload of cases and invite social workers and care leave coaches to share their experience. The Children and Families Scrutiny Committee aim to work with a broader scope of young people living within the borough over the next municipal year. Members are keen to hear from voices who have not historically communicated with the Council, this will allow the Committee to shape their recommendations over the next year with every young person in mind.

2.4 Climate Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Tony Bell
Chair



Cllr Caramel Quin
Vice-Chair

At the Annual Council Meeting on 25 May 2022, it was agreed that Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee would be renamed to Climate Scrutiny Committee. This was to reflect the work the Council was conducting as part of the Climate Action Plan², and to ensure that the actions set out in the plan are being delivered effectively, changes would benefit our residents and funding was spent appropriately.

Climate Scrutiny Committee met five times throughout the municipal year, the first meeting took place in June 2022. The Committee covered a total of ten agenda items and thirty-four actions and recommendations resulted from discussions across the year. The Committee looked at a variety of items, including the relaunch of The Hive (formerly Suntrap) and reviewed the Council's Air Quality Action Plan before it was taken to Cabinet in February 2023.

² <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/Waltham%20Forest%20Climate%20Action%20Plan%20%28Desktop%29.pdf>

The Committee also committed their time outside of planned meetings to make visits to key sites in the borough, this allowed members to boost their knowledge of facilities that were discussed within items to ask informed questions and make impactful recommendations based on their experiences. The Committee visited Edmonton Eco Park in September 2022 ahead of an item on Recycling in November 2022, and they visited The Hive in March 2023 ahead of an item on The Hive in the same month.

The Committee received a report for pre-decision scrutiny around the Council's Climate Action Plan (CAP). The Committee made a number of recommendations based on this initial report and referred these to Cabinet alongside the CAP in October 2022. The Committee then decided to take an item at each subsequent meeting based on the four overarching actions of the CAP. This allowed the Committee to focus on specific workstreams within the CAP in more detail, resulting in targeted discussions in this area and further recommendations for services to incorporate into these workstreams going forward.

The Committee were able to prompt services to commit to targets in a number of areas. In the short-term, ensuring retrofit installations for vulnerable households were completed by the end of February 2023 – a target which was met by the Council. In the long-term, that the Council commit to providing facilities across the borough by a set date, such as providing water refill stations in every town centre and promoting reuse facilities in every neighbourhood.

The Committee will receive a report on the fourth and final main action of the CAP in June 2023, then will proceed to take items on specific workstreams within the CAP when appropriate throughout the year.

2.5 Communities Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Yusuf Patel
Chair



Cllr Katy Thompson
Vice-Chair

The first Communities Scrutiny Committee of the 2022/23 municipal year met in July 2022 and met a further four times, looking at 17 agenda items in total. From these meetings, a total of 49 actions and/or recommendations were suggested by members.

Two prominent themes underpinned the forward plan of the Communities Scrutiny Committee over the last year: community safety, and the joint themed review with Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Child Safeguarding.

Members and co-optee's have had sustained communication and collaboration with representatives of the Metropolitan Police covering a variety of topics pertaining to community safety. Members have repeatedly scrutinised Violence Against Women and Girls

(VAWG), inequalities within the borough and pop-up projects to promote safer streets for residents. Young Advisors and Youth Independent Advisory Group (YA/YIAG) held the local police to account when looking into stop and search statistics for residents in borough. Police committed to working more closely with the YA/YAIG to explore best practise when engaging with young people, sometimes vulnerable young people, in the borough.

The Committee held a 'meet and greet' session with members of the Volunteer Charity Sector (VCS) in February, this was a novel way to scrutinise services and will hopefully pave the way for similar events going forward. Scrutiny officers worked closely with officers in other areas of the Council to organise this event, which required significant planning. Officers invited members of the VCS whose charities were relevant to the following agenda items: food insecurity, volunteering strategy and the cost-of-living crisis. These were encompassed by the overarching theme of promoting community support in an uncertain time. Attendees were split into three groups on the night, ensuring there were representatives from different charities in each group. An officer and a scribe ensured conversations were captured and Councillors were given the opportunity to ask questions and listen to attendees suggest ideas, raise concerns, and learn about each other charity work.

Feedback from this session was positive, from both Councillors, attendees and officers who helped organise. Attendee's found conversations particularly useful when learning about challenges and solutions championed by similar charities and benefited from the opportunity to hold frank discussions with Councillors in an informal environment. Discussions which took place during this session have directly fed into the next iteration of the Winter Spaces Network (the Living Rooms Network), resulting in the re-designing the programme to make it more appropriate and better suited to communities. Actions which arose during the meeting helped shape the ways the VCS community communicate going forward, with a platform being set up/tweaked to allow charities to help each other with the regulations and admin work required which can be overwhelming. Attendees who fed into the session and being kept up to date with changes the Council are making thanks to their input. Officers and members are both keen to run a similar event in the future.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee conducted a joint themed review on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Child Safeguarding. Members dedicated an item each meeting to look at a relevant topic with the aim of understand barriers facing young people whilst they are in the education system, care system and Youth Justice System (YJS) to ensure each young person in the borough has the same opportunities. As the themed review topic was broad, members are keen to continue looking into this going forward into the next municipal year.

2.6 Growth Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Marie Pye
Chair



Cllr Steve Terry
Vice-Chair

Growth Scrutiny Committee met five times throughout the municipal year, the first meeting took place in June 2022. The Committee covered a total of twelve agenda items and thirty-two actions and recommendations resulted from discussions across the year. The Committee conducted a thematic review on town centres this cycle, starting from the September meeting. At the first session, the Committee heard from officers around the Council's current approach for the borough's town centre. The Committee then decided to use the subsequent meetings of the cycle to invite witnesses from a range of organisations, to share experiences, initiatives and comment on their own successes and failures. The Committee heard from other local authorities, think tanks, the GLA and organisations dedicated to improving town centres. The evidence they heard prompted insightful questions and from this discussion were able to form twelve recommendations to the Council around their approach going forward to the borough's town centres³ – most notably to develop a town centre strategy to inform and guide the Council's future work in this area.

The Committee looked at a range of items over the course of the year, including an early look at the Corporate Framework – 15-Minute Neighbourhoods. This report set out the approach to this model and the engagement carried out to support this approach. A young advisor sits on the Committee, and they suggested that officers ensure they involve young people in the development of this strategy. The Committee also received a report on the Council's Lido Vision, receiving a report on site allocations for the project, with the expectation that further work in this area is brought back to the Committee when appropriate.

³ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=41633>

2.7 Health Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Catherine Deakin
Chair



Cllr Richard Sweden
Vice-Chair

The first Health Scrutiny Committee of the 2022/23 municipal year took place in June 2022 and met a further four times, covering a total of thirteen agenda items and suggesting 43 actions and/or recommendations.

The Committee focused on a wide array of issues, notably the “A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest Equity and the Social Determinants of Health in Waltham Forest” (the Marmot Report) as the Council begin the journey towards fulfilling the Marmot Principles. This agenda item attracted a wide audience, with all Council members invited to observe the meeting. Dr Cordelle Ofori, Deputy Director of Public Health at Manchester City Council, attended as an expert witness to share their experiences of becoming a ‘Marmot City’ and best practise. A standing item was introduced to ensure the Committee were kept informed of progress and to highlight the Committee’s dedication to ensuring the Marmot Recommendations reflect resident’s needs. A priority which members championed was to ensure protected characteristics are considered when developing a response to the Marmot Report, which was recommended to the Cabinet. This theme will continue into the next municipal year as the report is due to be scrutinised again ahead of Cabinet. The Health Scrutiny Committee has been vital in ensuring the Marmot report remains in the forefront of the Council’s conscience and policies champion every resident in the borough.

The Committee consistently measured progress of services before and after Covid-19 restrictions were implemented, ensuring the borough is not only clearing the backlog of services but also exceeding the pre-pandemic standard. This themed was a continuation from the final meeting of the 2021/22 municipal year, which shifted focus from the pandemic response to the ‘new normal’. The Committee considered the lasting impact of the pandemic on residents by showing an interest in both the physical and mental health of every resident within the borough, ensuring there are services readily available for all ages. This reflects the increased national spotlight on mental health services as a repercussion of the pandemic. Members heard about the pressure’s health services are under and consistently sought for more data including: waiting times for Adult mental health services and the latest data breakdown by ethnicity and age to ensure service users are proportionate to the demographic of the borough for Children’s mental health services. The Committee ensured there was an equal focus on both physical and mental health services.

In May, the Committee visited the Sir Ludwig Guttmann Health and Wellbeing Centre in Stratford, which is a Tier 3 Sexual Health Service. This visit stemmed from discussions around adequate provision of services within the borough for residents. NHS colleagues produced a brief which included borough-specific data and provide members with information ahead of the visit. This data was provided to enable members to have a clear

picture of who the service users are and gain an understanding of potential barriers they may face. Members were able to see first-hand the services available to residents and help them shape questions when the Sexual Health Transformation Strategy is brought to Scrutiny during the 23/24 forward plan. The visit has provided the Committee with an opportunity to work closely with NHS colleagues to deepen their understanding of services provided in the borough,

Over the past year, the Health Scrutiny Committee have covered a wide array of topics, encompassing all aspects of public health. The Committee will continue to hold the Council accountable to the promise of reducing health inequalities within the borough throughout the next year.

2.8 Housing Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Andrew Dixon
Chair



Cllr Steve Terry
Vice-Chair

Housing Scrutiny Committee met five times throughout the municipal year, the first meeting took place in July 2022. The Committee covered a total of twelve agenda items and thirty-one actions and recommendations resulted from discussions across the year. The Committee conducted a small thematic review around repairs and maintenance and the tenant experience related to this. The Committee used their final two sessions of the cycle, firstly looking at the performance of the organisations contracted to carry out repairs, and the second on tenant of experience of this and how we manage both of these aspects. The Committee heard evidence from officers as well as witnesses, including representatives from each contractor and members of the STAR Panel (Strategic Tenant and Resident Panel). The Committee made a total of eleven recommendations⁴, including identifying where systems could be improved, greater communication and upskilling of staff and recognising that additional support may be required for those with additional needs.

The Committee covered a range of other items over the year, including reviewing the Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) Rents and Service Charges proposals before these were taken to Cabinet for approval. The Committee recognised the need for the increases but highlighted it was important these increases were communicated appropriately to residents and signposting was clear to those that may need extra support. The Committee also received a report on the update to the Housing Allocations Policy review and recommended to officers that engagement with those on the housing register was frequent and clear, to

⁴ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=41634>

ensure they understood their position and their housing options going forward. The Committee also received regular updates on the Damp and Mould Task Force, which was set up in to respond effectively to reports of damp and mould in council owned and managed properties, and to strengthen the approach taken in the private rented sector. The Committee agreed to monitor the progress of this over the next cycle of meetings.

2.9 Whips Cross Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Richard Sweden
Chair



Cllr Beverley Brewer
Vice-Chair – London Borough of Redbridge

Whips Cross Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee met four times throughout the municipal year, the first meeting took place in June 2022.

The Committee covered a total of thirteen agenda items and seven actions and recommendations resulted from discussions across the year.

The Committee continued to receive regular updates on the position of the redevelopment of Whips Cross Hospital as a standing item on the agenda. The Committee benefitted from good engagement and honest reflections from NHS officers involved in the redevelopment. Frustratingly, the national policy on the redevelopment of hospitals across England stalled significantly over the course of the year – however an announcement is anticipated to learn the future of the redevelopment project.

As well as the redevelopment itself, the Committee were able to review the numerous transformation programmes ongoing across the Whips Cross footprint, and learn how the NHS are adapting to change, not only for the new hospital but in terms of health and social care more generally. The Committee learnt how these transformation programmes will improve efficiency in services and improve patient experience.

The Committee will receive a progress report to map how these programmes are working, and this will identify if a suitable amount of bed numbers are predicted in the new hospital. The Committee continued their interest in End of Life Care in the Whips Cross footprint, receiving an in-depth report around the proposals for this service in the future. The Committee were able to feed into this process and hope to meet with the End of Life Clinical Reference Group before proposals go for consultation with local residents and other key stakeholders.

Whips Cross JHOSC has maintained strong engagement from local residents and local campaign groups, with frequent requests for public participation at meetings, allowing residents to engage with the redevelopment process.