

Mr M. Esom  
Chief Executive

Waltham Forest Town Hall  
Forest Road  
Walthamstow E17 4JF

Dear Mr. Esom,

### **Scrutiny Improvement Review: London Borough of Waltham Forest**

Thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of the London Borough of Waltham Forest's scrutiny function. This report is the conclusion of the Scrutiny Improvement Review. It provides feedback on the review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its scrutiny process further.

A debrief is offered as part of the Review for Members to explore the findings and suggested improvements. This would be facilitated by CfGS. If you think this would be helpful please contact the Head of Consultancy at CfGS.

The findings and recommendations presented are intended to advise the Council on strengthening the quality of scrutiny activities, increasing the impact of its outputs, and through its members and officers, developing a strong and shared understanding of the role and capability of the scrutiny function. The full recommendations can be found at **appendix 1**.

I would like to thank the Chairs, Members of the Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet Members and Officers who took time to complete the survey and take part in interviews for their time, constructive comments and openness. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Scrutiny Team for the capable way they managed the interview schedule and hospitality I was afforded.

I look forward to discussing with you what actions we might develop as a result.

Yours Sincerely,

Natalie Rotherham – Senior Governance Consultant, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

## Executive Summary & Background

- A.** The London Borough of Waltham Forest commissioned the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) to advise and support its members and officers in the review of the Council's scrutiny function. The aim is to ensure that scrutiny is effective in delivering accountability, improving policy and decision making, and makes a quality contribution in the delivery of Council plans and overall improvement at the Council.

CfGS was particularly invited to contribute to the following elements:

1. Organisational commitment and clarity of purpose.
2. Members leading and fostering good relationships.
3. Prioritising work and using evidence well.
4. Having an impact.
5. Facilitating crosscutting work across scrutiny areas
6. Ensuring a balance between one-off and longer-term matters (focus on future and past)
7. Building equality diversity and inclusion into Scrutiny
8. Taking scrutiny outside of the town hall and into the community

- B. Methodology** The Council last undertook a systematic review of its Scrutiny function in 2019. This was conducted by ADSO (Association of Democratic Service Officers). Recommendations were made and several of which the authority committed to implementing. CfGS undertook a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, involving evidence gathering through conversations with members and officers during January 2023. These were conducted through a mix of in-person structured conversations and interviews held remotely. Separate conversations were held with elected members, including the Leader of the Council, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs, Members of the Scrutiny Committees, officers, representatives of the Waltham Forest Management Team and officers supporting scrutiny. In total, 19 interviews with councillors and officers were conducted involving over 40 individuals. Of these, nine interviews were carried out by the project lead, in person, at council premises, with the remainder being held virtually. In addition, a scrutiny meeting was observed, webcast recordings of scrutiny meetings viewed, and key documents on the Council's website were reviewed. We also conducted a survey of councillors, 38 members responded in total (a 65% response rate). This included members who were not interviewed. A summary of the survey can be found at **appendix 2**.

- C.** There is a positive approach to Scrutiny at Waltham Forest with a strong drive to improve its effectiveness. The Cabinet and senior leaders spoken to were receptive to the greater contribution scrutiny could make to good governance of the authority. However, understanding of scrutiny and its ability to support the Council's governance and improvement strategy could be further developed. Several members and officers were concerned that at times Scrutiny is perceived as "*a poor*

*relation*” and that it is not always easy to identify the value of Scrutiny and its impact.

- D. Based on the discussions undertaken with members and officers three areas for development emerged. The key themes that emerged during the Review were
- Structure
  - Impact and Monitoring
  - Work Programme

## Introduction

- A. There is a strong sense that Scrutiny is improving at Waltham Forest along with a widespread commitment to Scrutiny among members and officers at the Council. Indeed, enthusiasm for the impact that effective Scrutiny can deliver was expressed by most of those spoken to during the evidence gathering. Cabinet members expressed their openness to Scrutiny holding them to account and would welcome more challenge to help strengthen decision making. The work of the Climate Change Committee was highlighted as an example of effective Scrutiny where the recommendations informed Council strategy and policy formulation.
- B. The Leader of the Council sees Scrutiny playing an important role in the Council’s performance and improvement sphere. There was frustration that there is no consistent view on Scrutiny’s remit and purpose. One member expressed their disappointment: *“The concept of scrutiny and what it is remains an issue for some members and their participation is accordingly not what it could be.”* Members and officers offered many practical and helpful suggestions to further strengthen the function. One that merits serious consideration is the creation of a co-ordinating board or committee to maintain oversight of the work programme, co-ordinate activity and identify where key or overarching issues should be explored in detail. Many identified areas where changes would contribute to Scrutiny’s impact, which are taken forward as recommendations within this report.
- C. The Scrutiny Improvement Review is well timed and the recommendations in this report are intended to assist the authority in developing Scrutiny as a vibrant and rigorous function.
- D. The Statutory Scrutiny Guidance issued in 2019 reiterates that effective overview and scrutiny should:
- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge;
  - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
  - Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
  - Drive improvement in public services.
- E. The Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) Guide published in 2019 to complement the Statutory Guidance provides further advice on managing Scrutiny. It

also addresses the management of politics within Scrutiny. It is anticipated that Scrutiny is undertaken by independent minded councillors who objectively review the evidence. While it is impossible to entirely remove politics from a member activity, it is imperative that this does not distract or dominate the discussion and behaviour of practitioners. The Guide states that “*Councillors sitting on scrutiny committees should not, at those committees, act in an overtly party political way. Scrutiny is meant to be a forum for the evidence-based discussion of issues affecting local people.*”

- F.** The CfGS Guide highlights three further components of good scrutiny and good governance which support and reinforce the principles at paragraph 2.4. These elements are necessary in order for democracy at a local level to be participative and necessary for good scrutiny to thrive. These are:
- **Accountability** – an environment where responsibility for services and decisions is clear and where those holding responsibility can and are answerable for success and failure;
  - **Transparency** – the publication, proactively, of information relating to services and decisions to allow local people, and others, to hold policymakers and decision-makers to account;
  - **Involvement** – rules, principles and processes whereby a wide range of stakeholders (including elected representatives) can play active roles in holding to account, and influencing and directing the development of policy.
- G.** There is no definitive description of what good scrutiny work looks like and it will vary from council to council. It depends on the culture and appetite for challenge and change. However, good Scrutiny does have some common characteristics: a willingness to challenge the accepted ways of doing things, being focused on improvement, addressing issues relevant to citizens; drawing on a strong evidence base (written and from witnesses), and that it is conducted by skilled, curious and committed members looking to build consensus. All these characteristics were evidenced during the Review giving a strong platform from which to further strengthen Scrutiny at the Council.

## 1) Structure

- 1.1** Scrutiny at Waltham Forest exhibits many of the positive characteristics at paragraphs 2.4 and 2.6 but there is not a uniform understanding of its purpose and how it is most effectively conducted. Work is required in clarifying the role of Scrutiny. Survey results and other evidence gathering highlighted some different and possibly conflicting perceptions about the purpose of scrutiny. For instance, one newer member saw Scrutiny acting as a quasi-cabinet with decision making powers. The approaches to developing the committee agendas and work programmes by some committees can feed a perception that Scrutiny is a forum for considering issues of personal interest but of less immediate relevance to the work of the authority.

- 1.2** Scrutiny works best when it has a clear role and function. This provides focus and direction. Prioritisation in the items considered is necessary, which means that there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at. This does not mean that topics are ‘off limits’ but it is about looking at issues and assessing whether scrutiny’s involvement can bring extra value or impact. There was a request from Scrutiny members interviewed and surveyed represented in this quote to “*Reduce overlap and duplication and identify gaps.*”
- 1.3** Currently there is a Scrutiny’s Chairs group. This lacks formal status, and this places limitations on its effectiveness as a non-committee board with officer representation. Several respondents advocated the establishment of a co-ordinating body or committee to have oversight of Scrutiny to ensure its focus is on key issues and impact. There is considerable merit in this proposal as currently interaction between the committees is limited and opportunities to identify cross cutting themes are missed. For instance, a member made the point that: “*The feedback loop could be strengthened. Scrutiny is not an end in itself. Deep dives need to be shared more widely... and identify gaps etc*”. A co-ordinating committee or board would be able to more easily share the work and outcomes of activity with the other scrutiny members. An oversight body should have the powers to commission focused and time limited scrutiny, capacity permitting.
- 1.4** Scrutiny practitioners are required to maintain Scrutiny’s independence and objectivity to consider issues that have an impact on the Council and for its residents. To assist this process the Council is urged to review the number and purpose of the scrutiny committees. This should include revisiting the remits of individual committees to ensure that the issues addressed enable Scrutiny to identify issues of greatest impact or concern. This does not require scrutiny to mirror cabinet portfolios or slavishly follow the objectives of the Council Strategy, as these frequently evolve. Rather, the work programme (discussed later) is the means to pursue key issues with significant impact for residents and the council, such as substantial transformation programmes. In this way Scrutiny would be able to highlight its relevance, value and impact.
- 1.5** The earlier scrutiny review that took place in 2019 found that the number of scrutiny committees at the Council was among the largest for a council, including other London boroughs. The resourcing of the current number of committees places a burden on officers and members. It inhibits members ability to undertake additional scrutiny activity necessary to effective running of the function such as site visits, task and finish group and learning and development.

#### **That the Council:**

- 1) Clarifies its Scrutiny arrangements.** There is some lack of understanding about the purpose of Scrutiny and how it should be conducted among members and officers. The Council needs to mark out the responsibilities and powers of Cabinet

and Scrutiny and make it clear to officers and members where decisions, policy and holding to account take place through revised remits supported in the Constitution.

- 2) **Creates a co-ordinating committee** to lead on the Scrutiny function and articulate the strategic function of Scrutiny. It would be responsible for oversight of the work programme/s, able to identify cross cutting issues for Scrutiny to investigate with responsibility for policy development. It would also commission time limited groups (task and finish, or sub committees) to undertake more in-depth or cross cutting work.
- 3) **Aligns Scrutiny committees with the Council's Strategy.** This to be complemented by the committees' remits that reflect current and emerging challenges. This would ensure that Scrutiny is addressing the key issues facing Waltham Forest and highlight to members and officers Scrutiny's relevance, impact and connections.
- 4) **Ensures that Scrutiny committees reflect the Waltham Forest priorities.** The Council should review the Scrutiny committees' remits to ensure that they reflect the Council's objectives and that these are given appropriate priority. The Growth Committee is an outstanding example of this approach that is already in place and should inform the development of similar committees.
- 5) **Considers the number of scrutiny committees and their membership** to enable greater capacity from members and officers for more intensive scrutiny work via task and finish groups.

## 2) Impact and monitoring

2.1 Scrutiny's purpose is to have an impact. Key to this are three elements:

- Making **effective, high quality recommendations**;
- Understanding how those **recommendations make a difference to local people's lives**
- **Monitoring** the implementation and impact for services and citizens

These issues reflect back on scrutiny's role, and how it prioritises its work.

Vagueness around the work programme or the importance of an issue can mean that scrutiny will have low impact and little effect.

2.2 In the survey members highlighted the benefit of how scrutiny councillors' work is improving policy and services. But Members have highlighted that they would like "*More clarity about what changes as a result of Scrutiny.*" Only 19% of respondents to the survey thought that evaluation of scrutiny impact works well whereas 69% saw

it as area for improvement. This was echoed in conversations with members (both cabinet and back benchers and cross party).

**2.3** Comments in the survey reflect the conversations held with members that it would “*Be good to have an evaluation framework monitoring how scrutiny is adding value*” to provide “*More clarity about what changes as a result of Scrutiny.*” Being able to demonstrate scrutiny’s impact is a multi-stage process.

- The first stage is to develop ways to establish what impact the work has;
- Secondly, identify ways to maintain or improve that level of impact.

Demonstrating impact is about being prepared to understand scrutiny’s effectiveness, and to improve it where necessary. A more systematic approach to gathering evidence of the difference that scrutiny has made is needed. Judging scrutiny’s effectiveness can be difficult and requires evidence from a variety of sources. This could include measuring the speed of response to recommendations from cabinet or partners, the number or recommendations that are implemented along with their impact, awareness of scrutiny’s work among the wider member and officer groups in the Council and discussion of Scrutiny at Council or Cabinet. Publicising the outcomes of Scrutiny, especially in the deep dive task and finish type work, raises awareness in the work of the Council among residents about scrutiny’s work on their behalf.

**2.4** Any report from Scrutiny should focus on the outcomes anticipated and the evidence to support those conclusions. Ensuring impact from scrutiny rests, crucially, on formulating recommendations which are accepted by the executive or partners, and which are implemented. Making good recommendations, and monitoring them, makes it more likely that scrutiny’s work will add value. The best recommendations noted as part of the Review had a clear focus on outcomes with a measurable change in a service e.g. reduction in housing rent arrears; fewer recommendations (such as six to eight) that make an impact and/or lead to service improvement are more effective than a long list that can be cherry picked. Fewer also enable the authority or partner to focus its response.

**2.5** Recommendations to avoid are those that are open-ended statements that do not commit decision-makers to further action and/or lack a timeframe; are simply back patting commendations for Cabinet or partners; or the “lobbying” of others (including central Government).

**2.6** CfGS would advise that Scrutiny be prepared to speak to the executive, senior officers or partners about recommendations in draft. The final recommendations remain absolutely with Scrutiny, but such discussions can help to ensure that recommendations are robust and realistic. It also flags to the recipient the focus of

the report and the key issues for action. Scrutinising an issue only “to note” it is not an effective use of time or resources.

- 2.7 The Council already has a system in place to track recommendations, but many members were unaware of it or felt that it lacked teeth. Currently, an update is made at each committee about the recommendations. To strengthen the process members would find it helpful to hear more explicitly what difference has been made with the portfolio holder and/or the senior office reporting to scrutiny on progress and impact and any reasons for delay.
- 2.8 The council has a process in place for an annual scrutiny report to be submitted to full Council. Generally, experience across councils indicates that this generates little debate or consideration of the report’s content. In discussion with scrutiny chairs and officers the council may wish to revise the annual report to focus more on key data highlighting outcomes, press and public interest generated via an executive summary heading the more detailed report.

#### **That the Council:**

- 1) **Gives greater priority to the monitoring of responses to scrutiny recommendations and outcomes** in its timeliness and authority accorded the work of Scrutiny.
- 2) **Ensures that follow up of recommendations** is made more systematic. Each committee should be clear about the impact that it has had. Better monitoring of responses and recommendations will facilitate this. The key outcomes of Scrutiny should be reported to full Council by the co-ordinating committee. The wider membership of the council should also be made aware of the work that Scrutiny has conducted and the impact for the Council or residents.
- 3) **Creates a refreshed approach to the annual report focussing upon impact of scrutiny work.** This needs to concentrate on issues where Scrutiny has added value and made an impact. Its focus should be issues that are of most importance to the public and council.

### **3) Work programme**

- 3.1 Effective work programming is the bedrock of an effective scrutiny function. Done well it can help lay the foundations for targeted, incisive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. It is important that scrutiny hears from external witnesses, not just officers of the authority. It also needs to fulfil its



“overview” function by looking outside the Council and maintain a view of services delivered by others e.g. transport.

- 3.2** Members are aware that there is a lot of business to transact and the committees will need to prioritise their work. When developing the work programme it presents an opportunity to consider the type of activity which will best serve the enquiry. The Leader of the Council would like to encourage Scrutiny to consider innovative approaches in delivering the work programme. One example already in train in the Council is the Commission style undertaking. This is a model with much to commend it. Piloting a Scrutiny Commission on a cross cutting topic such as poverty (an example mentioned during the Review), would enable members to see how the approach could be refined for future work. Along with its committee work, the co-ordinating body (if implemented) should consider establishing time-limited working groups to conduct its in-depth work. How the work programme is developed rests with individual councils and there are a variety of ways this can be done.
- 3.3** A range of views were expressed during the conversations with members about the development of the work programme. This was largely ascribed to the chair’s approach where some are more inclusive and involve the whole committee in deciding what items should be looked into. For others there was a request for *“More input from the Members of the committee on which subject should be looked at”*. Effective scrutiny should have an impact for services, users or citizens, with recommendations that will make a tangible difference. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme with sufficient flexibility to accommodate any urgent issues that might arise during the year. There was commentary from the interviews conducted that at times scrutiny is looking at *“business as usual”*. It is not the place for individual case work (members can raise these separately with officers or the portfolio holder). Scrutiny cannot look at everything and it needs to focus on strategic issues. At times members and officers expressed concern that Scrutiny was not addressing major issues with considerable impact on the borough. It was also seen, at times, to be inflexible and unable to address urgent issues in a timely manner. One example was the council’s response to extreme weather before Christmas 2022.
- 3.4** When devising the work programme Scrutiny should ask itself:
- Do we understand the benefits scrutiny would bring to this issue?
  - How could we best carry out work on this subject?
  - What would be the best outcome of this work?
  - How would this work engage with the activity of the executive and other decision-makers, including partners?

**3.5** It should also hear from or work with a range of stakeholders such as cabinet and others such as (**NB** *the bodies listed here are examples and it is not expected that Scrutiny would liaise with all of them all*)

- Cabinet members
- Executive officers of the council
- Public sector partners (like the NHS and community safety partners,
- Voluntary sector partners;
- Contractors and commissioning partners (including partners in joint ventures and authority-owned companies);
- Neighbouring principal councils
- Cross-authority bodies and organisations, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Others with a stake and interest in the local area – large local employers, for example.

#### **That the Council:**

- 1) Builds on the approach taken to work programming with greater involvement of committee** members, relevant Cabinet members, key stakeholders and partners. That identification of issues focusses on ensuring these are key strategic issues, understanding the benefits scrutiny would bring, the impact of outcomes and the opportunity to engage with the executive, stakeholders and partners, including consideration of external services. That flexibility should be built into the work programme to ensure that key issues arising during the year can be effectively covered.
- 2) Develops and applies a prioritisation tool** that creates a balanced work programme that has a focus on the impact for residents; that a range of approaches are utilised (as detailed in the report); both in terms of the importance and volume of the issues, and allows for items to be added during the municipal year.

## **4) Training and development**

- 4.1** The effectiveness of the Review recommendations will be consolidated if a complementary training and development programme for both members and officers is put in place. This was recognised by one of the new chairs with a request that there should be: *“Training for new councillors on how to make scrutiny committees functional, productive, robust.”*
- 4.2** At the last election the council welcomed 17 new members, that is a 28% of the total. 31% of the survey respondents were in their first term. They can bring a fresh perspective to issues and approaches to governance; and a number of members and

officers involved in the Review talked about making scrutiny more dynamic and adopting more creative approaches. This should be built on a solid understanding of Scrutiny at Waltham Forest. The report has already mentioned the inconsistent view of Scrutiny, its purpose and how it should assist the Council in its governance and performance. The view of both members and officers is reflected in this comment to the survey. A limitation in Scrutiny achieving its full potential is the lack of a clear and consistently held vision for it.

- 4.3** Some of the members felt that they were learning on the job and would like more training. The Council provides a comprehensive induction programme but there is a lot for new councillors to absorb when joining the council of which Scrutiny is one part. It is recommended that the Council revises the induction for new members, to ensure that it includes an introduction to Scrutiny for all councillors and that it makes clear its significance within the governance framework. At this stage in the municipal cycle some Waltham Forest members (in common with councillors elsewhere) can feel embarrassed to admit not fully understanding a brief or remit after the initial induction phase. Members may find it harder to flag the need for training, as they are no longer “new” councillors. To overcome this reluctance, it would be worth revisiting some aspects of the induction programme in clarifying what is the purpose of Scrutiny and what isn’t part of its remit.
- 4.4** One area that needs urgent clarification is where decisions are made. At the moment some scrutiny members believe the committees are decision making bodies. It was suggested that, in discussion with the group leaders, the training needs of specific members were identified. These then to be encouraged to undertake training, supported by their group leader. English as an Additional Language (EAL) was mentioned as a specific area, particularly when members are looking at complex or lengthy reports.
- 4.5** It is proposed that short bespoke sessions are held for members, especially those sitting on scrutiny to familiarise councillors with the process and procedures around the function to address paragraphs 6.3 and 6.4.
- 4.6** Councillors involved in the Review highlighted areas where they would appreciate training. Councillors expressed a lack of confidence about questioning skills and how to challenge effectively. Better understanding of scrutiny would help members to make appropriate, robust challenge with greater assurance when holding to account. It was commendable that some members have identified a new and specific area around Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)<sup>1</sup> training to equip members to test assumptions underpinning policy formulation when engaging with the council or external partners and stakeholders.
- 4.7** Policy was an area flagged by members for training and by officers for better clarification. It was pointed out that at the moment members are learning about policy review and formulation on the hoof during committee meetings. This is not ideal as it limits scrutiny’s success in informing policy and eats into committee time.

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<sup>1</sup> EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all. It aims to eradicate prejudice and discrimination on the basis of an individual or group of individual's protected characteristics.

Instead, it is proposed that “*policy education work*” should be added to members Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The session or sessions should also cover pre decision scrutiny as there is a mixed approach with some committees conducting valued work in this area and others less sure of what needs to be done. Better pre decision scrutiny would give the opposition the opportunity to comment on council policy at an early stage. Policy and pre decision were areas that some opposition and administration members expressed reservations about in the current arrangements.

- 4.8** Similarly, for items that will have an impact on the council or for residents a briefing in advance of the meeting for **all** members of the committee should be scheduled. Although some concern was expressed at developing questions or KLOES (key lines of enquiry) prior to the committee it would mean that the topic was forensically addressed, and the questions posed were relevant and powerful.
- 4.9** Part of the on-going training and development programme should include reviewing scrutiny practice elsewhere. Unlike two tier areas, where members often sit on both the upper and second tier authorities, Waltham Forest councillors are not able to benefit from the experience of other governance approaches. Via member and officer’s networks, and advice from CfGS, it would be a straightforward exercise to visit or hear about scrutiny practice in other councils and bring that learning into Waltham Forest.
- 4.10** Scrutiny’s influence on policy development and service improvement rests on the quality of the recommendations it make. Paragraphs 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 of the report provide guidance on developing robust recommendations. These begin with good work programming and scoping of the issue to be scrutinised. The recommendations need a clear objective for the recipient to meet, be deliverable and with a stated timescale. Scrutiny will also need to consider the response to the recommendations, as discussed previously at paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4. The formulation of recommendations could be addressed through training for members and officers.
- 4.11** A strong and independent scrutiny chair is vital in delivering robust scrutiny. They have a key leadership role in establishing the committee’s profile, its influence and ways of working. They may already have experience of directing bodies outside the council but may not be fully familiar with the constitutional requirements of chairing a local government body. Several of the newer council members chair scrutiny committees. The observations from conversations with members and officers highlighted their effectiveness. Both cabinet and scrutiny members described the chairs as the best the Council has had. However, chairs themselves identified specific training needs to help them maintain management of the multiple demands of the role, particularly ways of involving all members of the committee while avoiding wandering commentary, anecdote or case work to maintain debate relevant to the item. Chairs also play a vital role in helping the committee decide and shape recommendations that are rooted in what can be achieved by the council (or partner) to improve services.
- 4.12** Scrutiny is not the place for party politics but there will be occasions when an issue of arouse strong views. A skilled chair will ensure that debate is open and robust but

that the debate does not become party politic point scoring or grandstanding. To ensure that the committee delivers its agreed work programme the chair, through the scrutiny officer, should ensure that officers and witnesses are clearly briefed, that reports are concise and relevant and that significant topics are given due consideration. This will rely on the time allocated, quality of the questions asked and order of the meeting agenda.

- 4.13** A complementary exercise for officers at all levels should also be implemented. Confusion about scrutiny also exists among officers who attend scrutiny and can explain some of the mismatches that occur such as understanding what the committee are seeking, length and focus of reports, and whether it is officers or cabinet members who take questions. Officers specifically asked for greater clarity around what a committee is looking for and guidance on what the papers should include to ensure what is provided is helpful to the committee's work. A request for a revised report template was mentioned. Many of these points could be addressed with stronger liaison between directorate and scrutiny officers. It would also serve to allay anxiety and engender a win-win scenario.
- 4.14** Although the YIAG (Youth Independent Advisory Group) were not formally part of the SIR their contribution to Scrutiny is welcomed by members and officers. During the session with them they spoke enthusiastically about their involvement. An area where they would appreciate input is feedback about the difference their input makes. Updates could be provided to the monthly meetings they attend with the lead officer. The advisors also requested training to help them raise appropriate challenge and framing questions.

### **That the Council:**

- 1) Initiates a training and development programme** to address the SIR recommendations and issues highlighted by members and officers during the Review process. The individual recommendations will have greatest impact if implemented together. Discussion with Group Leaders about identifying the needs of individual members was proposed. Specific areas include:
- The training and development needs of officers should be reviewed.
  - Clarification of Scrutiny's purpose generally for all councillors but more detailed understanding of the functions remit and powers for committee members
  - For significant items a briefing for **all** members of the committee should be scheduled.
  - Complement the initial induction programme with bespoke training relevant to the scrutiny committee
  - Policy formulation and review was flagged by members and officers as area for development. A member proposal of policy education workshop/s has merit
  - Councillors highlighted questioning skills and making effective challenge as areas for further development
  - Formulation of robust and impactful recommendations

- Members are keen to improve their understanding of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) to actively test policy and service proposals
- Reviewing scrutiny practice elsewhere
- Chairs training to include: chairing skills, development of robust recommendations and effective monitoring outcomes.
- YAIG (Youth Independent Advisory Group) training to help them raise appropriate challenge and framing questions.

## Appendix 1

### Recommendations

#### 1) Structure

##### That the Council:

- 1) **Clarifies its Scrutiny arrangements.** There is some lack of understanding about the purpose of Scrutiny and how it should be conducted among members and officers. The Council needs to mark out the responsibilities and powers of Cabinet and Scrutiny and make it clear to officers and members where decisions, policy and holding to account take place through revised remits supported in the Constitution.
- 2) **Creates a co-ordinating committee** to lead on the Scrutiny function and articulate the strategic function of Scrutiny. It would be responsible for oversight of the work programme/s, able to identify cross cutting issues for Scrutiny to investigate with responsibility for policy development. It would also commission time limited groups (task and finish, or sub committees) to undertake more in-depth or cross cutting work.
- 3) **Aligns Scrutiny committees with the Council's Strategy.** This to be complemented by the committees' remits that reflect current and emerging challenges. This would ensure that Scrutiny is addressing the key issues facing Waltham Forest and highlight to members and officers Scrutiny's relevance, impact and connections.
- 4) **Ensures that Scrutiny committees reflect the Waltham Forest priorities.** The Council should review the Scrutiny committees' remits to ensure that they reflect the Council's objectives and that these are given appropriate priority. The Growth Committee is an outstanding example of this approach that is already in place and should inform the development of similar committees.
- 5) **Considers the number of scrutiny committees and their membership** to enable greater capacity from members and officers for more intensive scrutiny work via task and finish groups.

#### 2) Impact and monitoring

##### That the Council:

- 1) **Gives greater priority to the monitoring of responses to scrutiny recommendations and outcomes** in its timeliness and authority accorded the work of Scrutiny.
- 2) **Ensures that follow up of recommendations** is made more systematic. Each committee should be clear about the impact that it has had. Better monitoring of responses and recommendations will facilitate this. The key outcomes of Scrutiny should be reported to full Council by the co-ordinating committee. The wider membership of the council should also be made aware of the work that Scrutiny has conducted and the impact for the Council or residents.
- 3) **Creates a refreshed approach to the annual report focussing upon impact of scrutiny work.** This needs to concentrate on issues where Scrutiny has added value and made an impact. Its focus should be issues that are of most importance to the public and council.

### 3) Work programme

#### That the Council:

- 1) **Builds on the approach taken to work programming with greater involvement of committee** members, relevant Cabinet members, key stakeholders and partners. That identification of issues focusses on ensuring these are key strategic issues, understanding the benefits scrutiny would bring, the impact of outcomes and the opportunity to engage with the executive, stakeholders and partners, including consideration of external services. That flexibility should be built into the work programme to ensure that key issues arising during the year can be effectively covered.
- 2) **Develops and applies a prioritisation tool** that creates a balanced work programme that has a focus on the impact for residents; that a range of approaches are utilised (as detailed in the report); both in terms of the importance and volume of the issues, and allows for items to be added during the municipal year.

### 4) Training and development

#### That the Council:

- 1) **Initiates a training and development programme** to address the Scrutiny Improvement Review (SIR) recommendations and issues highlighted by members and officers during the Review process. The individual recommendations will have greatest impact if implemented together. Discussion with Group Leaders about identifying the needs of individual members was proposed. Specific areas include:
  - The training and development needs of officers should be reviewed.



- Clarification of Scrutiny's purpose generally for all councillors but more detailed understanding of the functions remit and powers for committee members
- For significant items a briefing for **all** members of the committee should be scheduled.
- Complement the initial induction programme with proportionate bespoke training relevant to the scrutiny committee
- Policy formulation and review was flagged by members and officers as area for development. A member proposal of policy education workshop/s has merit
- Councillors highlighted questioning skills and making effective challenge as areas for further development
- Formulation of robust and impactful recommendations
- Members are keen to improve their understanding of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) to actively test policy and service proposals
- Reviewing scrutiny practice elsewhere
- Chairs training to include: chairing skills, development of robust recommendations and effective monitoring outcomes.
- YAIG (Youth Independent Advisory Group) training to help them raise appropriate challenge and framing questions.

## Appendix 2

### Survey Findings Summary

To inform the scrutiny improvement review work, which CfGS has conducted at the London Borough of Waltham Forest, elected members from all parties at the council, were invited to complete a survey around decision making (via Survey Monkey). The responses collected were used to inform and supplement other activities involved in conducting the scrutiny improvement review at the council.

Many thanks to the elected members who took the time to complete the survey.

Graphs illustrating the results were created and exported directly from Survey Monkey.

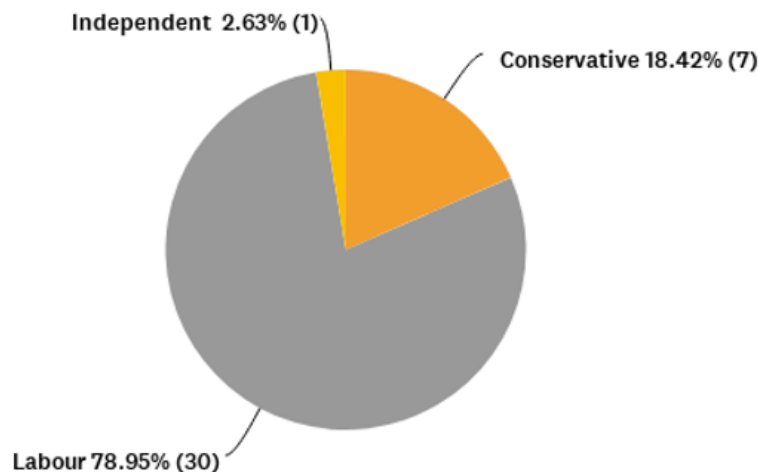
#### Demographics:

The survey responses revealed the following demographics: 38 elected members responded to the survey in total. This equates to a 65% response rate. The following graph provides a breakdown of respondents' political party:

- 18% Conservative.
- 79% Labour.
- 3% Independent

#### Which political group are you a member of?

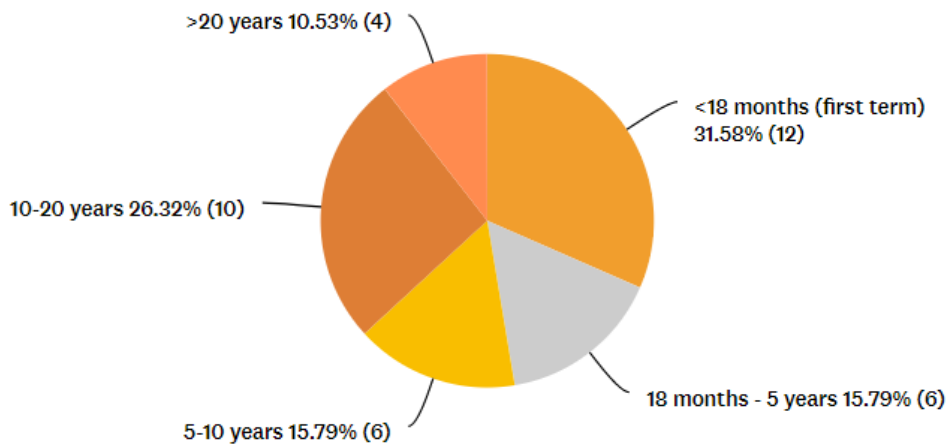
Q2 Which political group are you a member of?



We asked how many years had elected members sat on the Council. Responses are detailed below and varied from between:

- Less than eighteen months (first term) - 31.5 %
- Eighteen months to five year -16%
- Five to ten years -16%
- Ten to twenty years -26%
- More than twenty years - 10.5%

**How many years have you been on the council?**



The results here indicate that the majority of respondents have been in post for less than eighteen months and that they are serving their first term as elected members. This suggests that members might not have a vast breadth of experience of the Scrutiny function.

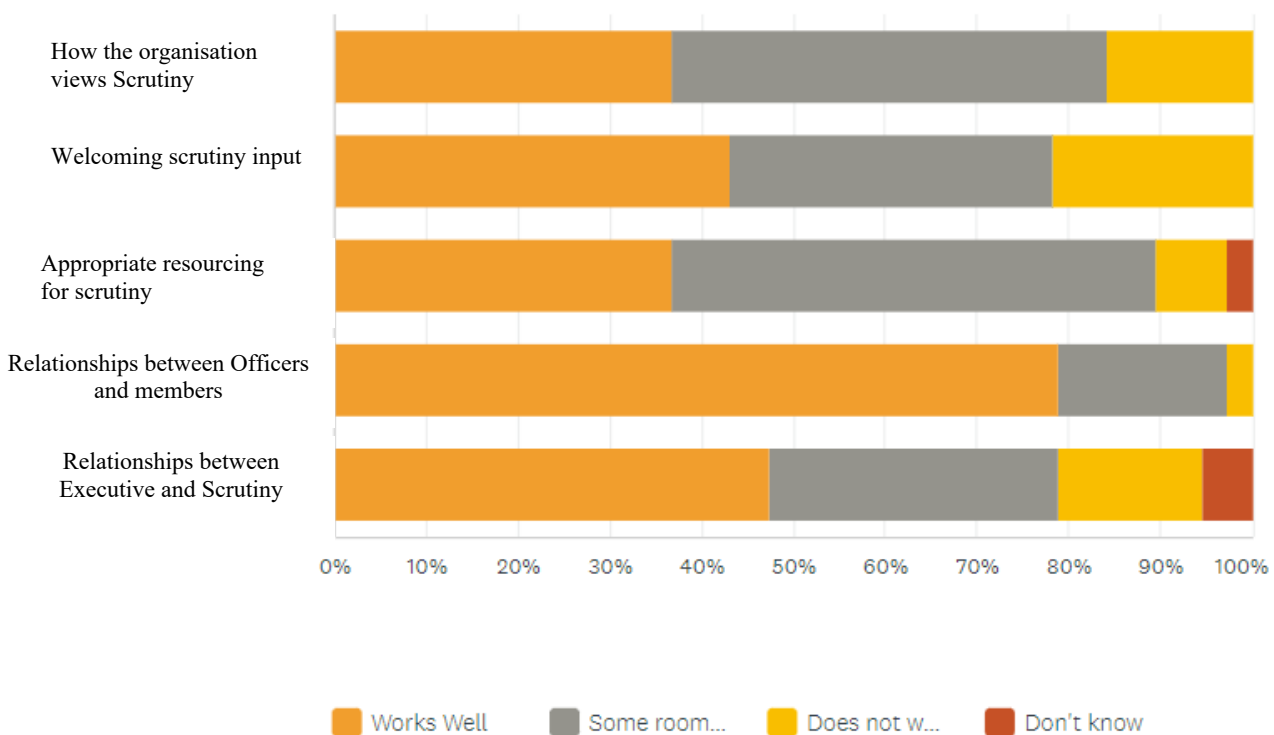
Nevertheless, 16% of those who responded have been in their roles for between either eighteen months to five years or for between 5 and 10 years, which might indicate a certain amount of maturity, in terms of knowledge and experience in their roles as elected members and within the scrutiny sphere. A large swath (26%) of elected members have been in post for between 10 and 20 years and 10% have been on the council for more than 20 years. These latter two results suggest a good number of members have vast experience in scrutiny matters gathered over a long number of years.

## Summary of Results:

### Culture:

Respondents were asked to think about their experience over the last eighteen months, regarding issues related to culture at the council. Respondents were asked to rate whether elements of culture at the council worked well, whether there was some room for improvement or does not work well and could be changed. There was also opportunity for respondents to advise if they did not know.

### Thinking about your experience over the past eighteen months or so, in your opinion how well do these elements work?



Results seem to suggest that nearly half of respondents think that there is some room for improvement relating to how the organisation views Scrutiny.

Similarly, when considering whether scrutiny's input was welcomed, the majority of results were fairly evenly split between those who thought that this worked well (43%) and those who thought that there was some room for improvement (35%). Twenty one percent of respondents believed that this did not work well and that it could be changed.

When considering appropriate resourcing for Scrutiny; over half of respondents (52%) stated that there was room for improvement in this area. 37% of respondents, however, did say that resourcing of scrutiny worked well. Only 8% believed that resourcing did not work well and that it could be changed. 3% had no opinion.

The results suggest that relationships between officers and members works well (79%). With 18% of respondents saying that there was some room for improvement in this area. This positive result suggests that officers and members collaborate effectively together.

47% of respondents stated that the relationships between Executive and Scrutiny worked well. However, 18 % of respondents, suggested that there was some room for improvement in this area.

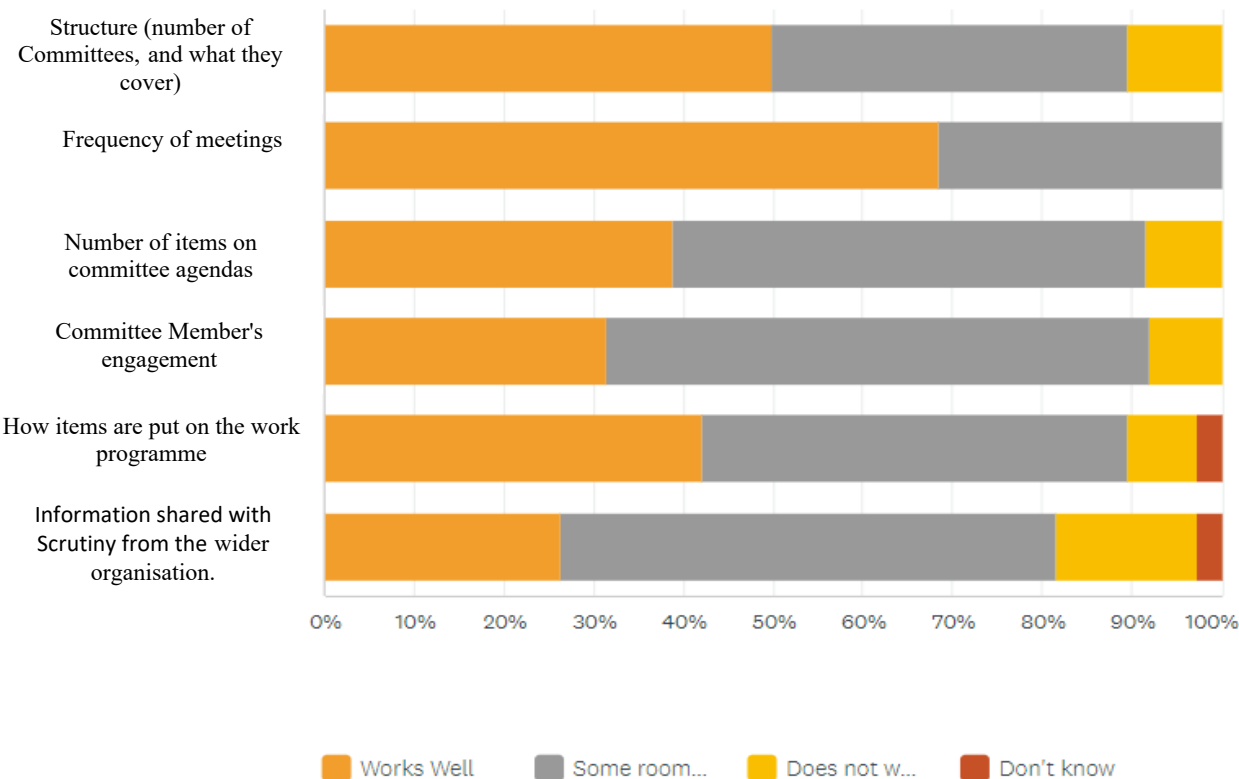
Analysis of respondents' quotes above supports the idea that currently scrutiny is seen as a tick box exercise, which is not welcomed and brushed off as something that just needs to be done as part of council processes, rather than as a crucial stage in the process of investigation and accountability. There is also a suggestion that there is a lack of awareness amongst many professionals in the regarding what scrutiny involves.

**Working practices:**

These quantitative results seem to suggest that thoughts about working practices among members vary. Results throughout were mixed. Data obtained is visualised in the graph below.

Analysis of respondents' ratings within the working practices theme, suggests that work practices work well. Nevertheless there is an indication to suggest that there is some room for improvement relating to all aspects of working practices measured in our survey.

**Thinking about your experience over the past eighteen months or so, in your opinion how well do these elements work?**



Regarding the structure of the Scrutiny function (number of Committees, and what they cover); half of respondents felt that this worked well. Nonetheless, 39% thought that there was room for improvement. 10% thought that it did not work well and could be changed.

A large percentage of respondents thought that the frequency of meeting works well (68%) with 32% stating that there was some room for improvement.

39% said that the number of items on committee agendas worked well. Over half (53%) of respondents stated that there was room for improvement, with 8% of respondents saying that this does not work well.

Of particular significance, is the result relating to committee member engagement. 60% of respondents stated that there was some room for improvement here. This data suggests that there is still some way to go before members feel confident in their scrutiny work and that members are proactively engaged in the process of scrutinising, in a meaningful way, when members attend committee meetings.

How items are put on the work programme revealed an even split between what works well and needing some room for improvement - 42% of respondents thought that this worked well and 47% thought that there was some room for improvement. 8% replied that they did not know. It would be fair to conclude from these results, that how items are put on the work programme at the council on the whole either work well or that there is room for improvement.

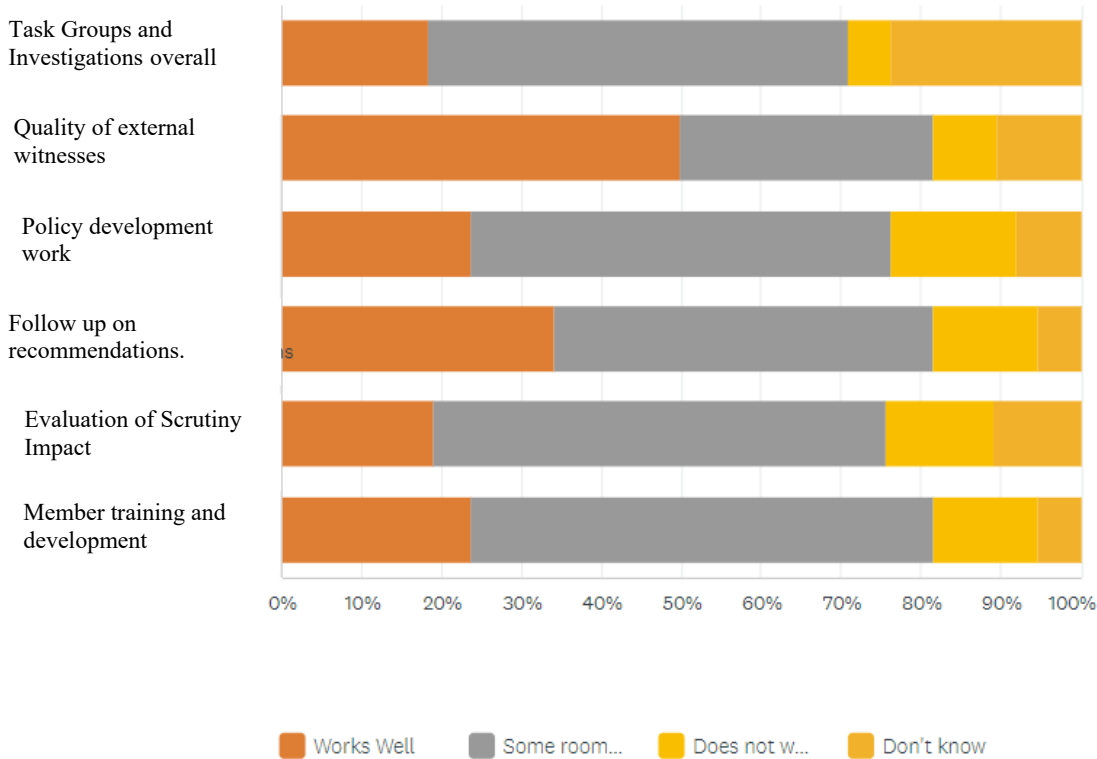
Results suggest that 'information shared with Scrutiny from the wider organisation' requires some attention 26% thought that it worked well; however, 55% of respondents rated this aspect of Scrutiny working practices needed some room for improvement. 16% stated that this does not work well and could be changed and 3% did not know.

These results suggest that information shared by the wider organisation with the scrutiny function at the council does require some improvement.

**Impact:**

Respondents were asked to rate elements relating to impact at the council, on a scale. Results are detailed in the graph below:

**Thinking about your experience over the past eighteen months or so, in your opinion how well do these elements work?**



Analysis of these quantitative results highlights that over half of respondents thought that task and finish groups and investigations overall had room for improvement (53%). Only 18% thought that task and finish groups worked well at the council. Five percent thought that this does not work well and could be changed. This suggests that task and finish groups and investigations overall, within, require some improvement.

Respondents were asked about the quality of external witnesses. The results suggest that there is good evidence to suggest that the quality of external witnesses is good as 50% of respondents answered that this works well. However, this also has some room for improvement, with 31% of respondents making this response. Interestingly, 9% of respondents said that this did not work well and could be changed and the remaining 10% said that they did not know. Clearly, there is an equal split between those who think that the quality of external witnesses works well and the other half thinking that improvement of some kind is needed.

Respondents were asked about policy development work. Only 22% of respondents felt that this worked well. The majority (53%) thought that policy development work needed some

improvement. While 16% said that policy development work does not work well. A further 8% said that they did not know.

Regarding follow up on recommendations: 34% said that this worked well. However, 47% claimed that there was room for some improvement. 13% were of the opinion that this did not work well and could be changed. 5% indicated that they did not know. These opinions seem to suggest that some attention needs to be paid to follow up on recommendations.

Members were asked about evaluation of Scrutiny Impact. From those who were surveyed 19% stated that this worked well, 57% stated that some improvement was required, 13% stated that this does not work well and could be changed and 11% did not know. The general viewpoint seems to suggest that some improvements could be made to Scrutiny's impact.

26% of those who responded said that training and development worked well. 58% of respondents said that there was some room for improvement relating to member training and development. 13% stated that this does not work well and 5% said that they did not know. These results suggest that more could be done to improve the training and development for elected members at the council. Further investigations would elicit specifics around this topic. For example, whether these issues are around the opportunities made available and/ or the type of training and development content that might be required by members.

Analysis of the quotes relating to impact, highlights several themes. The request for more training is mentioned by respondents. This concurs with responses provided in the quantitative results. Comments relating to various policy issues can be seen. For example, around policy formation and recommendations.

### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

Respondents were asked if there was one thing that was to change at the council to give decision-making and/or the role of Overview and Scrutiny the biggest improvement, what would that be. A large number of responses were obtained.

Respondents made lots of suggestions for improvement. Many of which inform the findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Improvement Review Report. The needs for members to have training offered was again mentioned; the necessity for all committee members to be present, fully prepared and engaged during meetings; ensuring that members and officers are properly introduced so that members know who to turn to for information, advice etc; the use of expert witnesses, having more clarity around the changes that have been made as a result of Scrutiny and the need for committee matching portfolio holder responsibilities.