



Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25

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2. Introduction

This report presents the work of the scrutiny committees during the 2024-25 municipal year. It contextualises scrutiny and oversight at Waltham Forest, summarises the key

work of each committee, and discusses the outcomes of this year's changes following the Scrutiny Improvement Review undertaken in 2023.

2.1. What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny and oversight is a statutory function of the local authority, as established by the Local Government Act 2000. This legislation requires the Council to operate at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These committees are tasked with holding the Council's Executive accountable by reviewing policy during formation and implementation, and the potential impact of key decisions on residents.

Whilst scrutiny committees do not have decision-making powers (compared to other statutory committees, such as planning or licensing), they can raise actions and make recommendations. The impactfulness of these recommendations, in terms both of their quality in the chamber, and the attention paid to them by officers and portfolio lead members, is a key sign of the health and vibrancy of scrutiny at Waltham Forest.

Additionally, the Council has the authority and responsibility to scrutinise local health services, a role that has been delegated to the Health Scrutiny Committee, the Inner Northeast London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Whipps Cross Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These committees are staffed by a wider range of stakeholders, including colleagues from the NHS and neighbouring boroughs.

2.2. How does Scrutiny work at Waltham Forest?

Like most London Boroughs, Waltham Forest organises its scrutiny committees thematically, aiming to cover all service areas whilst avoiding directorate silos.

For the 2024-25 municipal year, committee remits were:

- Coordinating
- Budget
- Children and Families
- Climate
- Communities and Public Protection
- Health and Adult Social Care
- Housing and Inclusive Economy
- Whipps Cross
- Inner Northeast London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny

The structure, remit, and terms of reference for scrutiny committees are laid out in detail in Parts 6 and 7.08 of the [Council's constitution](#). The key functions can be summarised:

- To monitor and review the policies, 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 review 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.

Each committee is comprised of 7 councillors, including a chair and vice-chair. In line with the political proportionality of members at the beginning of the 2024-25 municipal year, two seats of each committee were allocated to Conservative members. The remaining 5 members, including chairs and vice-chairs, were allocated from the Labour group. Portfolio Lead Members also attend their relevant scrutiny committee.

2.3. How is Scrutiny supported?

Each committee is supported by the service areas that fall within its remit. Senior officers from those services are the primary authors of reports that go to each committee. Officers share information outside of meetings as well as attend meetings to present reports and answer questions from members.

Additionally, scrutiny committees receive committee management support and assistance from Democratic Services. The publication of agendas and minutes, as well as clerking during meetings, is provided by Democratic Services officers. Furthermore, the Scrutiny team provides briefings, advice, research, and coordination between the committee and key officers to help prepare for meetings. The scrutiny team also deliver the Scrutiny Report at every meeting, covering actions, recommendations, and the Forward Plan. All aspects of Democratic Services operate independently from the services being scrutinised.

3. Summary of Committee Activity 2024-25

3.1. Coordinating



Cllr Gerry Lyons, Chair

This Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of the corporate framework, corporate performance and central/corporate services. This Committee has oversight of scrutiny committee work programmes, is responsible for monitoring the Cabinet forward plan and referring items to individual committees. This Committee is also able to commission time-limited informal groups to undertake scrutiny of cross-cutting issues.

Key Impacts

This Committee received regular reports on the new Corporate Impact Framework, as well as having access to the dashboard to view throughout the year. The reports contained key metrics identified by the team, including any noticeable trends or areas of strategic importance or risk, but members were also able to raise queries on any metrics they had identified during the meeting. The Committee regularly referred to key issues to Chairs and their individual scrutiny committees to explore. The Committee also contributed to the addition of metrics to the dashboard over the course of the municipal year.

The Committee identified an area of interest to Budget Scrutiny and Health & Social Care Scrutiny members, and an opportunity for joint working around adult social care budgets and transformation plans. The Committee commissioned a workshop around this subject, with some members from both committees suggested to attend. This is due to take place in early Summer.

The Committee received a report on the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan, outlining the peer challenge process and details of the development of the action plan. The Committee expressed concern around balancing investment in the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) while managing budget constraints, they highlighted the independent voice of the CVS as a positive step and identified strategies such as direct commissioning to enhance the CVS's role. The Committee received an update report coinciding with the peer teams follow up visit to the Council, this included initial

feedback and an update on progress made against recommendations. The Committee asked for the status of the integrated campaigns and communications framework, and officers committed to receiving committee input as this was developed.

The Committee received a report on the libraries service, outlining the strategic vision of libraries in the borough and performance. The Committee asked about the expansion and timelines for Welcome Hubs, and officers confirmed there was an initial focus on Walthamstow Library for evaluation before a wider rollout. The Committee queried whether all libraries received equal promotion, and officers confirmed they would consider focusing more on specific wards and mentioned that they plan to enhance promotions over the next 12 months. The Committee recommended that the Council considered collaborating with the University of Portsmouth and engaging students to increase footfall in Higham Hill library.

Moving Forward

This Committee was new to Councillors and officers this year. It has been successful in identifying issues for individual committees to investigate and commission work between committees. The Committee has begun to explore issues within its own remit and has built a strong list of items to look at throughout 25/26. The Committee will continue to monitor corporate performance and play a key role in shaping the metrics included on the dashboard.

3.2. Budget



Cllr Miriam Mirwitch, Chair



Cllr Uzma Rasool, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises budget and council tax setting, financial management and monitoring, revenues and benefits and commercial services, council owned companies and joint ventures. This Committee is provided with support by officers in the Resources directorate, and relevant officers across the Council and is attended by the Portfolio Lead Member for Finances and Resources and the Leader of the Council.

Key Impacts

The Committee received a report around the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 25/26. They received details of the changes, and the savings associated with the proposed scheme as well as results of the consultation that was taking place. The Committee asked how the Council intended to communicate to residents about changes to the scheme. Officers responded that the details of the new scheme would go out in advance of the new Council Tax period. The Committee recommended that bespoke communications were developed to those that were adversely impacted by any change in the scheme, including signposting to other support available to them.

The Committee maintained a strong relationship with officers in finance, with all members attending an informal workshop prior to the February meeting allowing an in-depth look at the financial situation, the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues with officers. The Committee also received update reports over the year, including the year-end outturn position for revenue and capital expenditure for 23/24 and the revenue month 3 position for 24/25 in September, the MTFs 24/25-27/28 in November and the Month 9 Financial Monitoring report in February alongside the Budget and Council Tax setting report for 25/26. The Committee heard consistently that the Council's main challenges were in Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Temporary Accommodation costs. The Committee heard from the Strategic Leads of these services at the February meetings and were able to ask for detail around the

main pressures in each area, and how they intended to fund spending gaps. The Committee recommended that the Council maintain a focus on key areas of overspend and ensure consistent monitoring with the opportunity for regular discussion on how savings plans are progressing.

The Committee heard that setting a balanced budget was increasingly challenging due to demand on services, inflation and the uncertainty around future local government funding, resulting in a budget gap for future years in the MTFS. The Committee asked what mechanisms were in place to ensure savings targets were met, they were informed that there was a robust change management system in place, and that Waltham Forest was moving in the right direction but there was more work to be done. The Committee recommended that the Council maintain the mechanisms in place to monitor ongoing transformation programmes and ensure that savings targets are met, with regular reporting back to scrutiny to promote accountability.

The Committee received reports around the Council's joint ventures and an update on the dormancy of the Council's housing development company, Sixty Bricks. The Committee were provided with progress and performance of the joint ventures with Evolve Norse and More Homes Waltham Forest. The Committee asked questions around the cost comparisons between JV dwellings and private sector accommodation. The Committee also queried how the Council could ensure value for money, leading to a recommendation for officers to ensure mechanisms were in place and comparing fees to local market rates.

Moving Forward

The Committee will continue to monitor the financial situation and budget setting of the Council, focusing on specific risk areas over the course of the year, including adult social care, children's social care and temporary accommodation. The Committee will receive reports on the revenue outturn position of the council, fees and charges for 26-27 and the MTFS.

3.3. Children and Families



Cllr Yusuf Patel, Chair



Cllr Marsela Berberi, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises statutory responsibilities in relation to Children’s social care (including services for looked after children, children in need of help and protection and care leavers), early help, education, and the integrated disability service. This Committee is provided with support by officers in the Children’s Services Directorate and was attended by the Portfolio Lead Member for Children and Young People, Young Advisors, and the Youth Independent Advisory Group. The Committee also has three co-optees; a parent governor, a representative from the Church of England and a representative from the Roman Catholic Church.

Key Impacts

The Committee received a report on the services response to the Ofsted report, which took place in July 2024. The Committee noted children in care were receiving ‘outstanding’ services and commended officers for their work. The Committee enquired around plans to improve the service further to ensure each young person understood their pathway plans. The Committee recommended for information to be provided in to commonly spoken languages in the borough to ensure care leavers are fully informed. Since the meeting took place, officers have confirmed the Corporate Parenting Service will be taking forward the recommendation and will provide the Committee an update on its impact at a future meeting.

The Committee received a report on the In-borough Home to School Transport Provision for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) as a pre-decision item as the service was being recommissioned. Officers explained the increase of service use was due to a rise in the number of children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), which is partly due to an increased awareness of behavioural issues. The Committee learned that there were no waiting lists for this service and if a child / young person qualified for an EHCP, they would receive home to school transport. The Committee suggested officers could explore linking the data between school attendance and wasted journeys to see if money could be saved.

The Committee discussed several statutory reports during the municipal year. Which included reports on the Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2024-2027. The Committee queried how services aim to prevent a crisis before having to separate a family and that every effort was made by the Council to keep siblings together where possible. Officers explained that the service is ambitious in helping care leavers to gain employment, education or training and were exploring the option of apprenticeships in local businesses. The Committee requested further information from the Care Leaver service so they could disseminate information via their communication channels. The Committee also received the Annual Report for the Corporate Parenting Board and sought assurances that most children and young people who move placement do not need to move schools, to promote stability. Officers also highlighted the universal offer from the Council's Family Hub to support care experienced parents.

Moving Forward

The Committee will continue to scrutinise the statutory reports (Corporate Parenting Report, Children's Sufficiency Strategy, Children's Social Care – Annual Complaints Report, and the Youth Justice Plan). Officers will continue to update members on the attendance and exclusions data for the borough, as the Committee have demonstrated a high interest in this area. The Committee will scrutinise the SEND inspection findings and SEND improvement plan, following the conclusion of the inspection.

3.4. Climate



Cllr Tony Bell, Chair



Cllr Caramel Quin, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises green infrastructure and climate initiatives, alongside neighbourhood services, parking and highways. The Committee is provided with support by the officers in the Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate and is attended by the Portfolio Lead Member for Climate Emergency and Air Quality.

Key Impacts

The Committee was provided with a report around the operational readiness, communications and engagement approach and the behaviour change work for the implementation of a separate food waste collection service as part of the Council's Recycling Strategy. This item was requested by the committee last year, following scrutiny of the new Recycling Strategy and ongoing interest from members. The Committee asked a range of questions, including how officers intended to engage with traditionally 'hard to reach' groups. Officers stated that they had engaged with faith groups, local community groups, and volunteers including people that could speak different languages. The Council had created 'Binfluencers' as resident champions, to share key updates with their networks.

The Committee received a report on the progress by the Council as a Lead Local Flood Authority. The Committee asked questions including how the Council could raise awareness and increase communications around flooding and flood prevention, leading to the recommendation for officers to explore ways to engage with residents around this. The Committee also asked how the effectiveness of flood mitigation schemes were measured, and officers stated that flood modelling was undergone and mapped against surface run-off maps, as well as reviewing local feedback from residents.

The Committee received a report on the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) Joint Waste Strategy and were joined by officers from the NLWA. The Committee asked questions around how the strategy would be evaluated and progress would be

monitored, and officers responded that the strategy set out some targets to be delivered how more thought was needed on how to track progress. The Committee asked for details on how the strategy planned to maximise social value. Officers confirmed that construction of EcoPark House, an education and visitors centre had been completed, and officers encouraged members of the Committee to visit the facility, leading to a site visit being arranged.

The Committee received a pre-decision Cabinet report on changes to parking in the borough. This item generated a lot of public interest, was attended by many residents, and the Committee heard from six members of the public under the public participation item. The Committee asked a range of questions to officers, and in-depth discussion was had around the implications of any changes to policy. The Committee proposed a series of recommendations, and were voted on by members, of which two were carried. The recommendations made were to ensure the Council encourages take-up of blue badges and freedom passes and for services to support residents to pursue active travel.

The Committee received a report around biodiversity and nature networks in the borough. The Committee asked questions around how officers promoted biodiversity to the younger generation, and officers answered that work currently being undertaken by the Hive to engage with schools, and a Climate Leaders Programme which worked to inspire the younger generation in relation to the climate emergency. The Committee also asked questions around what could be done with disused tree pits in the borough and recommended to officers to explore the possibility of planting other plants or shrubs in these spaces to encourage biodiversity.

Moving Forward

The Committee will continue its monitoring of the Recycling Strategy, including the implementation of separate food waste collections and fortnightly bin collections. The Committee will also embark on their trip to the NLWA to understand the recycling process further. The Committee will also explore items across NED, including street lighting and EV charging. The Committee hope to examine the implementation of greener planning policies across the Council, and to have a session with Registered Providers in the borough to learn what work is ongoing to improve EPC ratings of housing stock in Waltham Forest.

3.5. Communities and Public Protection



Cllr Keith Rayner, Chair



Cllr Kira Lewis, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises community safety and crime, community cohesion, violence against women and girls, anti-social behaviour, enforcement, environmental health and trading standards, the voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. This Committee was provided with support by officers in the Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate, the Met Police, Young advisors and the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YA/YIAG), as well as the Portfolio Lead Member for Community Safety.

Key Impacts

The Committee received a report which outlined the current crime patterns in the borough and how the Council works in partnership with the Met Police and VCSE organisations in combating crime and sharing data. The Committee referred to this information throughout the year and maintained an interest in the levels of crime, and fear of crime, in the borough.

The Committee received a report on civil contingencies which outlined the Council's statutory duties and how the team responds to incidents which occur in Waltham Forest. The Committee heard about the lead up to the far-right counter protest which took place in August 2024, including engagement with local businesses and organisations. Officers explained the Council had received largely positive responses from residents due to team combatting misinformation. Officers welcomed the Committee to attend future contingency planning and agreed to seek more feedback from counter-protesters. The Committee received a report on Trading Standards and Community Safety, they heard about the work the Council is doing to combat illegal sales of items such as vapes and fireworks. Officers explained how they used an intelligence-led approach for enforcement and worked with trained young people to identify underage sales. This led the Committee to recommend the service explore ways to work with the YA/YIAG to conduct test purchasing.

The Committee received an update on the Citizens Assembly which highlighted issues around the relationship between young people and the Metropolitan police. Officers informed the Committee about the funding secured for an inclusive reverse mentoring scheme for young people involving senior officers in the police. The Committee acknowledged that some of the recommendations would need collaboration with the police to effectuate as they were outside the power of the Council. The Committee discussed the importance of ward panels in understanding the concerns of residents and recommended that services explore ways to publicise ward panels to increase awareness. The Committee also noted residents are often reassured by police presence in the borough and there is a disparity between the North and South of the borough due to abstraction.

The Committee received a report on the work being done to combat Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The Committee heard about the services provided to residents and how this is delivered in conjunction with the VCSE sector. The Committee discussed the importance of having materials available in health care settings and specialist training delivered to staff to identify potential survivors of VAWG. The Committee requested further information about the availability of resources throughout the borough and how data is being used to target VAWG hotspots. The Committee noted the financial pressures facing the VAWG team in their delivery of services and praised the service being delivered.

Moving Forward

The Committee will continue to explore ways the Council can improve the multi-agency approach to ensuring the borough is safe for residents. The Committee will have updates on the recommendations from the Citizen's Assembly and how the financial pressures can be reduced for the VAWG team. The Committee will continue to engage with members of the VCSE sector to identify gaps in support.

3.6. Health and Adult Social Care



Cllr Karen Bellamy, Chair



Cllr Richard Sweden, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises adult social care, adult safeguarding, wellbeing and independence, public health, health inequalities and strategic health partnerships. This Committee is provided with support by the officers in the Adult Services Directorate and the Stronger Communities Directorate and was attended by the Portfolio Lead Member for Adults and Health and co-optees from Healthwatch Waltham Forest.

Key Impacts

The Committee received a report about Substance and Alcohol Use Commissioning in the borough, which covered the current contract for the integrated all-age community-based substance and alcohol use treatment and recovery service. The Committee heard about the work conducted by Change Grow Live (CGL) in partnership with the Council. The Committee were particularly interested in the provision and distribution of naloxone, an opioid reversal medication, which can be easily administered by trained individuals. The Committee discussed whether there was potential to keep naloxone in the readily available defibrillators around the borough. Officers explained that the aim is to increase distribution of the medication to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Teams and Park Guards who often come across those who are using drugs. The Committee were keen to be kept up to date with the progress on the roll out and praised the collaborative work between the Council and CGL.

The Committee received a report on 'Learning Disabilities Day Review' which explored the potential closure of the Markhouse Centre and redistribution of care for the service users. This item generated public interest; the meeting was attended by public participants and their supporters. They spoke about the importance of the service and urged the Committee to ensure all other options had been considered, influencing the committee to request assurance around alternative options explored. Officers explained how each service user will be assessed to determine the best care for them. The Committee recommended that the alternative proposals for service users were

fully costed so Cabinet could be assured that the savings of closing the centre would be significant. The Committee also recommended that the building survey would be circulated ahead of the report going to Cabinet in December.

The Committee received the Learning Disabilities Day Opportunities Review a second time, as the Cabinet decision was subject to the 'call-in' process. The item drew large public interest again, with public speakers in attendance. The Committee discussed the contents of the building survey, which was circulated ahead of the meeting, and queried how far the contents of this report were independent. Considering this, the Committee recommended the building survey report should be examined by an independent company ahead of the decision going back to Cabinet. The Committee re-emphasised the importance of ensuring service users continued to receive the best possible care with the minimal disruption.

The Committee received a report on the ASC Care Quality Commission (CQC) Preparation which updated members on the steps the Council were taking ahead of the inspection taking place. The Committee sought assurances that frontline staff would feel empowered to respond to the questions and that feedback would likely be positive. Whilst officers stated they could not rule out negative feedback, there are workshops being established to ensure the frontline staff know what to expect from the inspection.

Moving Forward

The Committee will receive an update on the transition of service users following the closure of the Markhouse Centre and they will be informed when the future of the building has been determined. The Committee will also receive a report reviewing the first six months of the new befriending provider, Life Line. The Committee will also continue their focus on the CQC inspection findings, officers will provide an update on the recommendations. The Committee will monitor the health services provided in the borough and scrutinise where necessary.

3.7. Housing and Inclusive Economy



Cllr Whitney Ihenachor, Chair



Cllr Elizabeth Baptiste, Vice-Chair

This Committee reviews and scrutinises housing services, including housing strategies, housing standards and homelessness, as well as private sector housing and licensing, regeneration, culture, highstreets and town centres and employment business and skills. This Committee is provided with support by the officers in the Place Directorate and the Stronger Communities Directorate and attended by Portfolio Lead Members for Housing and Regeneration, Inclusive Economy and Libraries, Culture and Sport & Leisure.

Key Impacts

This Committee was formed following the Scrutiny Improvement Review and combined the previous Growth and Housing Scrutiny Committee remits. The Committee's first year was extremely busy with a range of items from across services and directorates. The Committee had Social Housing Regulators attend as observers as the Council's Housing Service received an inspection.

The Committee received an update report on the Housing Resident Involvement Strategy (RIS). The report outlined the progress and implementation of the RIS, and how it can meet new regulatory standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). The Committee noted that there was a red RAG status around digital inclusivity and asked if there were new targets, and how the dashboard could improve this. Officers stated it would be a hub for insight and engagement and would also allow residents to record their own requirements, helping the team to fix gaps in data.

The Committee received the Council's Cultural Action Plan as an item, which outlines the five-year strategy aimed at building strong communities through culture and creativity. The Committee highlighted the need to ensure equitable funding distribution across the borough, and officers acknowledged the issue of cultural infrastructure being Walthamstow-centric. Officers highlighted efforts to spread this across the borough, with key programmes in other areas and stated the desire for the strategy to

expand culture into the north and south of the borough. The Committee asked how the arts and creative sector could contribute to building community resilience. The PLM responded that arts could foster mutual understanding, shared experiences and therefore promote community cohesion.

The Committee received a report which was an update on the Council's implementation of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, the revised consumer standards and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The Committee was asked to note the critical role of scrutiny members in providing assurance under the new regulatory regime for social housing, demonstrated by the Regulators then observing the next two scrutiny meetings during their inspection of the Council's Housing Service.

The Committee received a report on the internal analysis of a Housing Ombudsman's severe maladministration determination for the Council, providing a summary and analysis of the findings, and the steps that have been taken to address the issues outlined. The Committee emphasised the need for more timely complaint resolution and requested more accessible data on complaint timelines. The Committee also noted the delays with larger contractors with carrying out repairs and suggested that involving smaller local contractors would benefit local residents and help with more timely repairs.

The Committee received a report on the new Private Rented Sector Strategy and heard how it was developed with input from residents, landlords and various Council Teams. The Committee asked about specific actions proposed to address health and safety issues, particularly in homes with damp and mould. Officers explained that the Council has enforcement powers under the Housing Act and uses a triage system to respond to reports of disrepair and highlighted the ongoing collaboration between Council departments around health risks, including targeted inspections on homes.

Moving Forward

The Committee will continue to monitor key housing documents, including the housing strategy and the housing compact. The Committee will also receive the outcome of the Social Housing Regulators inspection, and the resulting action plan, focusing on the key areas of improvement. The Committee will receive updates around commercial properties in the borough and an update around planning enforcement.

4. Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny

The Council is a member of 3 Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (JHOSCs). The Whipps Cross JHOSC is facilitated by Waltham Forest. The Inner North East London (INEL) JHOSC, is facilitated by participating boroughs on a rotational basis, and is currently at Waltham Forest for a 2-year term. The Outer North East London (ONEL) JHOSC, is facilitated by Havering Council, and has one Waltham Forest member on the committee.

4.1. Whipps Cross JHOSC



Cllr Richard Sweden, Chair



Cllr Beverley Brewer, Vice-Chair (Redbridge)

This Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the plans for redeveloping Whipps Cross Hospital. The Committee was supported by officers from the Whipps Cross Hospital Development team, Barts Health NHS Trust, and North-East London ICB. The JHOSC is made up of representatives from the London Borough of Waltham Forest, Redbridge, and Essex County Council. The Committee has also nominated observer members from Epping Forest District Council and the London Borough of Newham.

Key Impacts

The Committee received an update on the position of the redevelopment of the hospital, and heard how enabling works, including construction of the car park, had begun on site. The Committee also heard how a new research, education and training centre had been mobilised, based at Whipps Cross Hospital – the Academic Centre for Health Ageing (ACHA). The Committee received the Integrated Delivery Framework Annual Report and heard how the framework was delivering a range of improvements and had bought services together across the hospital and community-based care. The Committee asked questions around how the IDF influenced bed numbers in the new hospital and heard how the Trust intended to re-run the demand and capacity model, originally completed in 2018, again. The Committee were given

assurances that bed numbers in the new hospital would be at a range, enabling flexibility within the system to scale bed capacity up or down according to demand.

In May 2025, the Committee resolved to make the Whipps Cross JHOSC dormant until further notice, with the agreement that the JHSC can meet if required, if there is any proposed substantial change to health services in relation to the redevelopment. The Committee agreed for any minor updates to be included in the work programmes for existing INEL and ONEL JHOSCs. The Committee arrived at this decision after the Government's announced the findings of the New Hospital Programme (NHP) review, which placed Whipps Cross in investment 'wave 2', with an anticipated construction start date between 2032 and 2034. Consequently, there can be no expectation of further main programme funding before 2029/30, and as the Whipps Cross redevelopment programme has been funded from NHP direct allocations – there is insufficient programme funding past the end of 2024/25.

Achievements

Since inception, the Committee elected Cllr Richard Sweden from Waltham Forest to Chair the Whipps Cross JHOSC, alongside Cllr Beverley Brewer from Redbridge as vice-chair, with representatives from multiple boroughs and across political parties.

The Committee made end of life care and the future of the Margaret Centre a key priority. The Committee received multiple reports around this issue and were able to influence the future of palliative care in the Whipps Cross footprint – particularly that despite rumours of the Margaret Centre's closure, the NHS confirmed the only proposed change at the moment was to increase admissions from the community.

The Whipps Cross JHOSC benefitted from frequent and meaningful public engagement, particularly the campaign group Action4Whipps. Important topics were raised, and the group also met informally with the Chair and Vice-Chair to discuss key issues. One issue in particular was the flooding that occurred at Whipps Cross Hospital. The Chair proposed an informal online meeting following some technical questions from members of the public. This meeting involved council officers, Thames Water, Barts Health and Action4Whipps members – it was a successful meeting with challenging questions raised but deemed as educative and productive.

The Whipps Cross JHOSC benefitted from good relationships and honest reflections from NHS officers, with particular open engagement with the redevelopment team at the hospital, led by Alastair Finney. The Committee received regular updates on the progress of the redevelopment, and despite the programme stalling over the last couple of years, maintained its commitment and support to the programme – all whilst keeping political pressure on. This has undoubtedly contributed to an informative

scrutiny committee, that has successfully used its powers to add value to the redevelopment process so far.

4.2. Inner North East London (INEL) JHOSC



Cllr Richard Sweden, Chair



Cllr Susan Masters, Vice-Chair (Newham)

This Joint Health and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises the health services provided across the following London boroughs: Waltham Forest, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, City of London, with members from each borough attending. The Committee also nominates an observer member from the London Borough of Redbridge. The Committee was attended by NHS colleagues from East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT) and Barts Health, NHS Northeast London (NEL).

Key Impacts

The Committee received Health Update report at each meeting, covering the key points since the last time members met. The Committee sought assurances that work was underway to improve outcomes for people with long term conditions including testing and value for money, with a particular interest in HIV and Hepatitis. This led to a report being taken later in the year which looked specifically at long-term conditions allowing members to have an in-depth discussion with a specialist officer. Officers stated London was on track to get a nil rate of HIV infections which is ahead of the globally set target. The Committee recommended ongoing funding for services relating to ongoing conditions such as diabetes, sickle cell anaemia and cardiovascular disease. The Committee discussed the issue of residents who were not in regular contact with their GP Practice and/or dentist, NHS colleagues highlighted proactive ways being utilised to communicate with harder to reach residents. The Committee focused on ensuring waiting times have been reduced. The Committee heard about how artificial intelligence was being used to improve health care, specifically to train clinicians and to speed up lung cancer diagnosis.

The Committee received a Finance Overview report at each meeting, which provided an update on the deficit plan and the current overspend. Officers also provided an overview on long-term financial sustainability and the medium-term financial strategy; members noted their appreciation of the NHS's transparency. The Committee received a Provider Update each meeting, which covered Barts Health NHS Trust, Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and the North East London Collaborative. Officers from each Trust informed the Committee of its performance, staff changes, any new facilities and/or offers. Members used this item to stay informed on the measures in place to mitigate the added strain to Accident and Emergency Departments following the introduction of 'Right Care, Right Person'.

The Committee heard from public participants during the year, who expressed interest in officers bringing a report on the Cass Review following this, members have been working with NHS colleagues to receive a report which highlights the revised health policies considering the findings.

4.3. Outer North East London (ONEL) JHOSC



Cllr Richard Sweden, Joint
Health Lead Member

This Joint Health and Scrutiny Committee scrutinises developments concerning NHS services provided across the following London boroughs: Havering, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, and Epping Forest. Healthwatch are co-opted members of ONEL and were in attendance for some meetings. The Committee was also attended by NHS colleagues from Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHRUT) and other NHS Services.

Similarly to INEL, ONEL received a Health Update report at each meeting. The Committee focused on winter planning and discussed measures in place to ensure the populations needs were being met whilst the demand for services, such as ambulances, were increasing due to winter pressures. The Committee received a financial update at each meeting, discussing the deficit, any changes to services, and

the effect of the industrial action. At the beginning of 2025, officers presented a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and how this was built into the Governments 10 year plan.

5. Young Advisors

Members of the Young Advisors and the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YA/YIAG) are aged between 16 and 24 years old and attend Children and Families Scrutiny and Communities and Public Protection Scrutiny.

At the end of each municipal year, members and officers receive a survey to post their feedback for the YA/YIAG anonymously, this was implemented for the first time during the 2023/2024 municipal year to monitor progress, identify impact, and capture any areas for improvement. Impact is determined by whether the questions posed by the YA/YIAG led to a discussion between the Committee and officers, in a few instances this year these discussions have led to members asking for further information and forming recommendations. Examples of these can be found below. Feedback from officers was positive, stating that it was clear the YA/YIAG had prepared for the meeting and their questions had their input helps drives changes.

Prior to each Scrutiny meeting, members of the YA/YIAG attend a preparation session with officers. During these meetings, the reports are discussed, and questions are developed. These sessions were implemented at the beginning of the 2023/24 municipal year following feedback from the YA/YIAG that they prefer having an informal meeting to ensure they understand the context of the report. These sessions improved the quality of the questions asked, leading to increased impact.

Whilst the YA/YIAG cannot make recommendations, there have been instances throughout the year where the Committees recommendations have been informed by the line of questioning from the YA/YIAG. For example, when the Committee received a report around attendance policy in schools, members of the YA/YIAG queried how young people were being engaged, considering they may not be willing to speak to their teachers about issues they may be having. The Committee then discussed how schools may not be getting the full picture regarding why a pupil is missing school and this led to a recommendation for services to explore ways to work with the YA/YIAG to engage with young people and understand reasons behind their absences.

Whilst the Committee were discussing SEND provisions, members of the YA/YIAG queried why there is an opportunity gap between pupils who attend SEND schools compared to state schools. This led the Committee to discuss how parents may be torn between sending their child to a school which can support their needs vs one which will provide them with better opportunities post-education. Following this, the

YA/YIAG praised the establishment of the Youth Forum and suggested their input in Scrutiny would be useful to broaden conversations. The Committee agreed and recommended that the Youth Forum attends future Children and Families Scrutiny Committee's. The YA/YIAG highlighted how a year previously there had been a commitment to include youth voices in the Annual Complaints Report, but this was not reflected in the update. Following this, officers agreed to revisit the action and provide a response for the Committee.

The YA/YIAG members who deliver the Streetbase peer engagement programme presented to members of the Communities and Public Protection Scrutiny around the work done by youth engagement groups operating in the borough, to increase knowledge and promote the programme. They provided examples of projects being undertaken by the YIAG along with the work being done by Streetbase on their foot patrols. Members learned that 2936 young people had been engaged with over 249 patrols during the 2023/24 financial year.

The YA/YIAG will be recruiting over the summer and new starters will receive scrutiny training before attending their first meeting. The team will continue to tailor support to best suit the individual to promote the best possible outcomes.

6. Scrutiny Reviews

6.1. Background

Scrutiny committees can identify a topic for a review whilst setting their work programme for the year. Typically, these have taken place in the form of thematic reviews, where committees undertake continuous, in-depth engagement with one topic in the remit of the committee. Committees could use a range of different methods to facilitate a thematic review, including witness sessions, evidence gathering and self-directed research. Committees usually opted for the formulaic way to explore an element of the topic at each meeting across the year, then forming recommendations and presenting these to Cabinet for agreement.

The Scrutiny Advisory Group (formed during the Scrutiny Improvement Review and throughout implementation), agreed a report that offered different approaches to scrutiny work that does not fit in a committee setting – namely 'task and finish' work. These are typically shorter, and able to break down silos that have been present in the scrutiny structure, ensuring cross-cutting issues receive adequate attention without convening joint committees. The coordinating scrutiny committee is able to commission this work, receive reports and monitor the work to present to Cabinet once finished.

Support for scrutiny reviews is usually provided by officers from the service area, the relevant portfolio lead member, the scrutiny team, and other relevant witnesses identified by the committee.

During 24-25, one scrutiny committee completed a thematic review, and one 'hackathon' style of task and finish work between two committees, a summary of each is provided below.

6.2. Communities and Public Protection

The Committee agreed to conduct a themed review into 'Home Streets', which is a concept which builds upon existing community safety work ongoing in the borough. The aim was to understand the complex crime patterns in the borough, identifying where extra resources are required; the Committee looked at a different report each meeting and engaged with the Met Police and VCSE representatives to achieve this.

The Committee held a series of meetings involving Council officers, the Met Police, and VCSE representatives. These discussions focused on the use of crime data to identify hot spots, community-based preventative programs, and the importance of transparency and youth engagement. The Committee invited representatives from Street Aunties and PL84U AL SUFFA, who emphasised the need for data-informed support services, funding for CCTV, and greater protection for service users and volunteers. The Committee explored substance misuse services provided by Change, Grow, Live (CGL) and heard from Solace Women's Aid on issues like safe accommodation, language barriers, and misconceptions about abuse victims. The Young Advisors and Youth Independent Advisory Group (YA/YIAG) raised concerns around knife crime, sexual harassment, and underage vaping. Their work informed recommendations to improve public health outreach and trading standards enforcement.

The themed review concluded that to improve safer streets there needed to be investment in local partnerships, strategic use of data, and inclusive engagement with community voices. The Committee recognised the need for stronger police-community relations, accessible ward panels, and responsive support systems that address the borough's diverse needs. These insights and recommendations will shape future policies and initiatives aimed at building a safer and more cohesive Waltham Forest.

6.3. Budget & Health and Adult Social Care

The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee agreed to establish a time-limited task and finish review to take a deep dive into adult social care transformation in the context of

increasing need exceeding available resources. The proposed methodology was a one-off 'hackathon' style session, this was deemed the most suitable option for the issue as it allowed collaboration across both committees, allowing members to 'deep dive' outside of a formal meeting setting on a specific issue, collate relevant information and feedback to each committee on their findings. This was due to take place this municipal year, however due to some difficulties in timing, this will take place at the beginning of the 2025/26 cycle.

7. Scrutiny Improvement Review Implementation

7.1. Background

The Scrutiny Improvement Review involved a comprehensive evaluation of the scrutiny process at Waltham Forest, designed to identify both areas of strength to build on, and areas of weakness to be addressed. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) were commissioned review the Council's current scrutiny arrangements. There was a focus on determining whether scrutiny is effective in delivering accountability, improving policy and decision making, and making a quality contribution in the delivery of Council policies and plans.

A full breakdown of the brief, and the 11 following recommendations made, can be found in the December 2023 Scrutiny Improvement Review [Report for Full Council](#). The main recommendations concern a review of committee remits, the creation of a coordinating committee, a renewed focus on the impact of scrutiny, the implementation of a prioritisation tool for forward planning, and the establishment of a training and development programme.

The CfGS report recommendations were taken to a new cross-party Scrutiny Advisory Group for discussion and revision. The Group proposed its recommendations to full Council in December 2023, which were endorsed. The Scrutiny Team then implemented those recommendations, with changes to remits and committees beginning this year.

7.2. Changes to Remits – first year update

7.2.1. Housing and Inclusive Economy

Housing and Growth Committees were merged into a single Housing and Inclusive Economy Committee, to reflect the increasing cross-cutting issues between the two previous committees. This Committee has consistently had a very busy agenda, despite the additional meeting this year. The Committees duties to scrutinise housing services, plus the inspection from the Social Housing Regulators has placed priority

on housing items. The Committee will need to build a balanced approach across its remit to the work programme in 25/26.

7.2.2. Health and Adult Social Care

Health and Adult Social Care (ASC) committees were also merged into a single Health and Adult Social Care Committee, to allow for a more efficient and impactful scrutiny of health partners, and the inclusion of social care officers in wider health delivery. The Committee has benefited by merging as it allows for a broader approach to issues and reduced duplication of work for officers. For example, the Committee were able to discuss over-lapping issues such as primary care waiting times, and hospital discharge delays promoting joint accountability for residents' care journeys. Going forward, the Committee will need to ensure there is a balanced work programme in 25/26 to continue the improved oversight.

7.2.3. Joint Health Lead Member

The new Joint Health Lead Scrutiny Member was vice-chair of the Health & Adult Social Care Committee, as well as chairing the Whipps Cross and Inner North-East London JHOSC and sitting on the Outer North-East London JHOSC. This new role reflects a coordinated approach to scrutinising health partners, representing the boroughs interest across the JHOSCs, inputting into work programmes and raising issues relevant to Waltham Forest residents.

7.2.4. Children & Families, Communities and Climate

Minimal changes were made to the remits of Children & Families, Climate, or Communities. Communities was renamed to Communities and Public Protection, gaining services related to environmental health, trading standards, and enforcement to its remit from Climate. This has given these services an opportunity to demonstrate how they interact with services such as community safety, providing the committee with reports such as trading standards community safety related initiatives.

7.2.5. Budget

Budget and Performance Scrutiny Committee remit was refocused on budget setting and financial management, and revenues and benefits. This has allowed services to bring reports focusing on financial matters such as fees and charges and the council tax support scheme, as well as regular financial monitoring – with the scope to 'deep dive' into key areas of financial risk.

7.2.6. Coordinating

The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee took responsibility for scrutinising corporate performance, it also shaped some of the metrics used as well as how the committee

received the updates. The Committee oversaw the work programmes of all other scrutiny committees at each meeting and utilised the Cabinet forward plan and corporate performance at each meeting to ensure individual committee forward plans contained key priorities. The Committee explored less of its own scrutiny responsibility during 24/25 as it found its feet but has gathered a list of items to cover in 25/26 from central services and ‘cross-cutting’ items such as refreshing the Council’s equalities objectives.

7.3. Training Programme

A key recommendation made by the CfGS report that was then endorsed by Full Council was the implementation of scrutiny training and development programme for all major stakeholders in the scrutiny process.

EDI training was delivered in two sessions by an external partner, Laurelle Brown. The first session tackled the policy implications of personal biases and their impact on scrutiny. The second session explored members’ experience of considering EDI issues at committee in reports and impact assessments, support members to approach difficult conversations. A series of follow-up drop-in sessions were organised in Autumn 2024 and were attended by members to ask any further questions and share how they had put in practice what they had learnt.

Training and Development for members was run across several sessions in August and September. These sessions focused on the procedure and the purpose of scrutiny, with emphasis on forward planning and the forming/monitoring of impactful recommendations.

The roll-out of these training and development sessions has been supported by a new [Scrutiny Resources page](#) on the Councillor Hub. This hub has a wide range of resources and materials covering Waltham Forest services, scrutiny roles/remits, good practice guides, and a new comprehensive [Waltham Forest Scrutiny Handbook](#).

As we approach the 2026 Local Elections, scoping for training will be undertaken to ascertain what may be needed for any new councillors, or further development for returning councillors. The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee will play a role in shaping future training, as well as the scrutiny team working closely with the councillor development team to identify training needs.