



Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2013-14

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Introduction

Overview and Scrutiny in Thurrock during 2013-14 have tackled a wide range of issues from Non-Residential Care Charges to the Grays Town Centre Regeneration Scheme. Members have also undertaken two significant task and finish reviews in order to consider in detail matters that are important in the Borough.

The agendas and associated reports of each Committee can be accessed by the following link: <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock/Committees.aspx>

Sadly in the latter part of 2013 Councillor Diana Hale, Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, passed away and we lost a much valued member of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. We would like to pay tribute to acknowledge the positive contribution and the lasting legacy of Councillor Hale's work on the Children's Services Committee and for the wider community of Thurrock.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all Members who sat on the Committees for their efforts this last year, as well as the specialists and visitors who attended to help understand better some of the issues facing our communities. Council officers, third sector partners and residents also contributed to our work and their role should also be recognised.

What is Overview & Scrutiny?

In general terms, Overview and Scrutiny is the process whereby Councillors investigate, scrutinise and oversee the work of the Council. More specifically Overview and Scrutiny pays particular attention to:

- The decisions made by Cabinet, Council and officers in relation to Council policy or key decisions.
- The activities carried out by the Council and other bodies (such as the National Health Service (NHS)).
- The performance of the Council in relation to its targets and objectives.

Work Programme

The work programme for Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny is informed by a combination of:

- What Councillors feel are important topics (this is gathered from their work in their wards and activities across the whole of the Council).
- Members of the public highlighting issues for debate, either through Call-Ins or through consultation.
- Requests by Thurrock’s Cabinet for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake “pre-decision scrutiny” prior to policies being taken to Cabinet for consideration and decision.
- Council officers requesting Overview and Scrutiny to investigate and consider certain issues on their behalf.

Committees

At Thurrock, the work of the Overview and Scrutiny function is carried out by six committees, which each have a specific remit:

- Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
- Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership

The membership of Thurrock’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees is made up of Councillors drawn from the political parties of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny function enables Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet (also known as the Executive) to have an active role in the decision-making process of the Council.

Thurrock has a number of non-Councillors sitting on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Children’s Services Committee has two parent-governors as well as a diocesan representative from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches respectively. There are also two co-opted members on the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee representing health interests.

In addition, sub-committees or panels may also be formed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to undertake specific tasks, such as a review, the membership of which is decided alongside the remit of the review.

The decision making process

In Thurrock, Overview and Scrutiny plays a key role in adding value to the Council's decision-making process. It also reviews the existing practices of the Council and makes recommendations to Cabinet to enhance and improve service provision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet in an informal atmosphere and engages with people who can help with their work and provide evidence for their reviews. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committees and at the discretion of the Chair may even be able to take part.

Overview and Scrutiny Online

Overview and Scrutiny has a dedicated section on Thurrock Council's website and can be found at (www.thurrock.gov.uk/overview-and-scrutiny/overview-and-scrutiny-committees).

Thurrock Council's website provides the most up-to-date information on Overview and Scrutiny in Thurrock. Participation from the public is actively encouraged and promoted online.

A number of documents are available and easily accessible, including our Overview and Scrutiny annual reports. Reports, agendas and minutes from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting are also available electronically from Thurrock's website.

Getting in Touch

The Overview and Scrutiny process at Thurrock is managed by our Overview and Scrutiny Team. The Team is located within Democratic Services which is part of Legal Services. Democratic Services manages the Council's decision making process and services a wide range of Council decision making bodies including the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet, Planning Committee, Licensing Committee as well as full Council.

If you have any queries about this report or the Overview and Scrutiny process, or if you are interested in participating, please feel free to contact us.

Email: scrutiny.team@thurrock.gov.uk

Address: Overview and Scrutiny Team, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays
Essex RM17 6SL

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny

This year the Committee scrutinised a wide variety of issues and considered both statutory and non-statutory services which will help shape the future of Education in Thurrock. Due to the sad passing of Councillor Diana Hale, the Chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny changed in the latter part of 2013, however her work and legacy has been continued by the Committee and the current Chair, Councillor Charles Curtis.

In particular, this year the Committee were keen to build closer links with Youth Cabinet and give young people a voice on matters affecting children and young people in Thurrock, such as the re-development of Lakeside. Councillor Halden was appointed as Youth Link Champion who worked alongside Members of Youth Cabinet to launch Democracy Week and held a "question time" event in the Council Chamber. Councillor Roast later took up this role, and worked with the Chair and Youth Cabinet in December 2013 to identify the best options for youth participation going forward. As a result of this work an invitation was extended to Youth Cabinet to send representation to Committee meetings, which was met with high demand from Youth Cabinet, who currently nominate and send two different representatives to each Committee meeting. They also present an annual report on their activities and impact of their work to Children's Overview and Scrutiny. This has been a successful arrangement and one that the Committee hopes to continue and build upon in 2014-15.

Thurrock's Education Commission was established by Thurrock Council with cross party support as an independent commission to take a longer term look at the future of education in the borough. The Commission was particularly tasked to consider how to accelerate even further educational attainment. As a result, the Education Commission was an important theme and topic of scrutiny in 2013-14, with the Committee considering the findings of the "warts and all" report in October 2013, receiving regular updates and agreeing to the action plan in March 2014. These reports were crucial in keeping the Committee informed of Thurrock's school improvement strategy and this will be set to continue next year once further aspects of the report's recommendations are embedded, such as the Thurrock Education Alliance and the Thurrock Excellence Network Group.

Following on from the recommendations from the Education Commission other issues have been reviewed by the Committee, such as the developing strategy for school partnerships in Thurrock in order grow the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve.



The Committee were keen to hear about the outcomes of the public consultation and proposed Alternative Delivery Models for Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre to ensure its viability going forward. A working group was established and the Committee were kept regularly up to date of its findings, with a number of Members undertaking site visits to the centre to find out more about the good work undertaken by staff, facilities

that could benefit from improvement and evaluate the opportunities for alternative delivery models, such as a Charitable Trust. The Committee were keen to keep all options open and this matter is expected to come back for scrutiny later this year, prior to a recommendation which is anticipated to be referred to Cabinet in 2014-15.

The Principal and Assistant Principal of Palmer's College provided an update to the Committee in January 2014 following the Ofsted inspection of Palmer's College. The key judgements made by Ofsted and the college improvement plan were a key issue for Members to scrutinise, following which support for the action plan and areas that the local authority may work in partnership with the college were identified in order to facilitate the improvements.

The supply, provision and quality of school places remained at the forefront of education in Thurrock and Members were given the opportunity to comment on the Pupil Place Plan for 2014-18, setting the context of the provision of school places in the Authority.

The introduction of the Early Offer of Help Strategy and Troubled Families Initiative were both welcomed by the Committee alongside the implementation of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Members were particularly pleased at the provision of a single point of entry to multi agency services where there is concern of a risk of harm or where a multi agency response is needed. It is expected that the results of these initiatives will continue to be monitored by the Committee next year to ensure that the programme is on track and making a real difference to the lives of families in Thurrock.

With the sad passing of Councillor Diana Hale last year I was asked by the Leader of the Council if I would take over the role of Chair of this Committee. I can honestly say that the meetings of Children's Overview and Scrutiny were very constructive and that members held very thoughtful and lively debates concerning our children of Thurrock. It is so important that we get things right as the children of Thurrock are our future.

I believe one of the highlights of the year was when the Committee considered the report of the Education Commission. The Commission made six core recommendations:

1. Build a compelling case for change and a powerful vision for education across the whole community in Thurrock that increases pride in what is being achieved and ambition for achieving even more.
2. Redefine the role of the local authority, agree with partners what change means in practice and make sure services are provided efficiently.
3. Grow the role of schools themselves as the leaders in supporting other schools to improve.
4. Recruit and retain the best teachers and leaders by establishing greater pride in Thurrock.
5. Use Governors as key agents of support for improvement both within their own schools and across the school system in Thurrock.
6. Recognise and celebrate education and achievements in Thurrock.

These 6 recommendations are key to ensuring all schools will give our children an opportunity to excel. It will not happen overnight but I believe we will get there.

Other important topics scrutinised this year include Safeguarding and Child Protection and the Troubled Families Initiative, which is a major step forward in turning around the lives of families who face challenging pressures. The Committee have an important role in the welfare of Thurrock's Looked After Children, as we must ensure that they have access to the best opportunities to lead a safe, healthy and full life. There are so many different issues revolving around Children's Services and I have only mentioned a few. I sincerely hope that I have done Diane proud as she was a very hard act to follow.



Councillor Charles Curtis
Chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny

One of the key issues which was scrutinised by the Committee over the past year was bin collections in Thurrock. This was in light of the challenges which were faced by the service in summer 2013. Waste collection is a highly visible front line service affecting every resident in the Borough, and is often perceived by residents as one of the key functions provided by the Council, which is why this issue was prioritised so highly by the Committee.

To optimise performance and gain maximum efficiency from the service, collection rounds were reviewed and reconfigured during early 2013. At the same time, terms and conditions of employment of refuse crews were revised to reflect modern patterns of working and future service demands. The new rounds together with revised workplace methods came into effect in June 2013 and the Committee received regular reports on the outcome, progress, challenges and benefits of the rationalisation of waste collection rounds.

Crime remained high on the agenda, and the Committee reviewed the performance of the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership (TCSP) in 2012/13 in order to provide insight into the priorities for the Partnership and Police and Crime Commissioner for 2013/14. In particular, the Committee recognised the prevalence of violence against women and girls and welcomed the advocacy support for victims, awareness campaigns and the multi-agency approach that was being adopted in an attempt to tackle this issue.



The Committee supported the four priorities of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for 2013/14 which are:

1. To reduce anti-social behaviour
2. Tackle violence against women and girls
3. Reduce youth offending and the reoffending rates of adults and youths;
4. Reduce domestic burglary and vehicle crime

As part of the budget setting process for 2013/14, the leader of the Council asked Councillor Simon Wootton, Vice Chair of the Committee, to lead a task and finish group to explore Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) funding, its impact and relevance but also, to recommend to the Council as to whether the funding should continue. Subsequently a Review Panel was established and undertook a four month investigation into PCSO funding, finalising its report in October 2013. The panel

worked alongside a wide cross section of stakeholders including Essex Police, community groups and the Portfolio holder for Public Protection.

Following the PCSO Match Funding Review Councillor Cathy Kent, in her position of Chair of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee, is planning a walkabout with Special Constables to find out more about their work in the community.

The Committee also received a report on the outcome of the working group review of the Future Provision of Civic Amenity Sites and the proposals to introduce access controls at sites such as the Linford Amenity Site. As part of the on-going monitoring of the Linford site the throughput of waste was carefully monitored and it was noted that during the past year there had been a significant change in the patterns and volumes of waste being delivered to the site. As waste that was delivered to the site costs up to £105 per tonne for processing and disposal, it was essential that the Council maintains strong controls over materials that are accepted. Anecdotally it was highlighted that other local authorities had placed much more rigorous controls on the waste that they accepted and that this had led to a number of traders and businesses, as well as residents of other boroughs, visiting Thurrock to dispose of their waste.

Other topics of interest to the Committee have included Climate Local and Designated Public Protection Orders. Pollution monitoring and statistics has been identified as a topic that requires further detailed consideration and monitoring during the next municipal year.

This is just a brief snapshot of the work undertaken by the Committee this year.

I would like to thank all members for their hard work, commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism especially when dealing with subjects that are very close to our hearts, particular thanks to Councillor Wootton for his support as vice chair of the committee.

My thanks to all officers and partner organisations that have given evidence to the Committee over the past year.

And lastly my thanks to democratic services for all their help and support and in particular Matthew Boulter for ensuring that no matter what the committee threw at him he ensured every meeting ran smoothly and efficiently.



Councillor Cathy Kent

Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

It has been another exciting year for the Thurrock Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Tasked with oversight over the council's corporate and financial functions, the Committee always considers a wide range of issues and at some point in the year touches on every aspect of the council's work in the Borough.

One of the Committee's standing commitments is to consider progress against the council's key performance indicators. This is always a welcome opportunity for members to assess the success of council policies and strategies in achieving desired outcomes and it provides a jumping-off point for further investigation into areas of concern or good performance. One such area is staff sickness levels where stress-related absence forms a consistent area of concern for Members in 2013-14. The committee considered a thorough report on how the council is hoping to tackle stress related absence and commented on the strategies used to support staff members in difficult times.

The Committee also considered over a number of meetings the implications of the localisation of business rates and were kept updated throughout the negotiations for a local pooling scheme. The end result was an excellent piece of cross-council working that will generate real returns for capital investment in the budget and the Chair strongly commended all the officers involved.

Local government procurement is always a big issue in this era of outsourcing and the Committee considered two reports on the matter: the refresh of the council procurement policies and the implementation of the Public Sector Social Value Act. The latter allows councils to include social and environmental considerations in its procurement processes and offers a really powerful tool to effect change, not just deliver services, through the commissioning process. The Committee hope that the PSSVA delivers on its early promise and is strengthened wherever and whenever possible.

The Committee also convened a special meeting to consider the ongoing delivery of the savings in the two year 2012-2014 budget. This was a welcome opportunity for members to get a sense of the financial challenges facing the council and assess progress in meeting them. It was also indicative of the desire to have an open and transparent budgetary process where decisions are not made in closed rooms but are subject to robust and public scrutiny.

In September 2013 the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with cross-party support, agreed to establish a Task and Finish review to look at ways other local authorities deploy equality commissions within budgetary constraints and progress equality issues within their localities. This was an exciting piece of work,

where the panel found that much was being done to address inequalities in the Borough through the work of various strategic boards, partnerships and action plans developed by council officers and partners, and that these strategies were making progress in improving the life chances of Thurrock residents – including children and young people. However, the review panel also identified an equality gap and felt that this was something that will only be set to widen over time, particularly within this challenging economic climate. With this in mind a number of recommendations were made back to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and referred to Cabinet, one of which was to establish a Thurrock Fairness Commission to progress equality issues within the Borough.

2013/14 saw perhaps the most exciting piece of work in my two year tenure as Chair of the Thurrock Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Fairness in Thurrock Review panel considered issues of inequality and unfairness in the Borough and considered whether Thurrock could benefit from the successful Fairness Commission model in use in other Boroughs. The work of the Review Panel was unanimously endorsed by the full committee and the recommendations agreed by Cabinet in April 2014. It could be one of the most interesting and consequential pieces of work that the council does in the coming years.

This brief exploration of the highlights of the year doesn't do justice to the range of the work of the committee. It genuinely is one of the best places in Thurrock Council to debate the big issues that are facing our borough. And with tough financial circumstances likely to continue and a new raft of welfare changes on the way, the committee will continue to be busy in the future. I'd like to thank all the members of the question for their careful and insightful analysis throughout the year and Barry Johnson in particular for his supportive vice-chairing of the full committee and the Fairness Review Panel. I'd also like to thank all the officers who have appeared at the committee for their clear exposition and willingness to get involved in the nitty gritty of the debate. Special thanks go to Matthew Boulter and Stephanie Young from Democratic Services, the former for his excellent support to what can be a tricky committee and the latter for her incredible work on the Fairness in Thurrock Review panel.

Councillor Richard Speight
Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny

The Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee is one of the busiest Committees and one which scrutinises topics of much local interest. One of the positive news stories of this year was that Thurrock was chosen by the Alzheimer's Society to be an early adopter for Dementia Services, due to the notable progress that had achieved in order to make the community of Thurrock dementia friendly. With 1 in 14 people over the age of 65 and 1 in 6 people over 80 years of age with a form of dementia and with a predicted increase of nearly 25% in the next 7 years in the amount of people in Thurrock with the condition, Dementia is a growing issue and becoming an early adopter was a big accomplishment for Thurrock, as areas could only register if invited to do so.

Building Positive Futures was a recurrent issue, with the Committee keen to monitor the progress of Thurrock's transformation programme for Adult Social Care, since it was launched on 1 March 2012. The Committee supported strengthened leadership and governance arrangements, particularly in relation to member involvement and the engagement of Health and other partners, in addition to the government's integration agenda for Adult Social Care and Health – the Better Care Fund.

In November 2013 the Committee examined Non-Residential Care Charges and reviewed the results of the consultation with residents. As part of this review the Committee received a presentation by officers on the technology that was on offer and how this helped Thurrock residents.

Councillor Gupta also visited a telecare service user and the telecare control centre to see firsthand how this service had a positive impact on resident's lives. Following this review and consultation process the Committee recommended that Non-Residential Care Charges be means tested. Other Non-Residential Charges were discussed by the Committee, including double handed care and the meals on wheels service, and important decisions were made on both.



The Committee scrutinised the development of the Essex Primary Care Strategy which would transform regional health services by establishing new models of primary care that are responsive, integrated and deliver a consistent service for patients. The strategy was co-produced between NHS England and Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and was formed following a series of engagement events with patients and stakeholders.

The business case for the development of Hyper Acute Stroke Services across Essex was also scrutinised, which was resolved in early 2014 with Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) allocating £1 million to strengthen Stroke Services at Basildon & Thurrock University Hospitals. In April 2014 a joint Committee was held between Thurrock and Essex County Council in relation to the performance of Basildon & Thurrock University Hospitals, where representatives from the hospital presented information to Members and provided an update on the outcome of the latest inspections. Basildon and Brentwood Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) also presented information Members, which overall provided valuable feedback.

Throughout the year Members were kept up to date by Public Health who regularly provided information regarding their annual plan, major commissioning for 2014-15 and public health outcomes in the Thurrock population around the priority areas of smoking and obesity including details of current statistics, priorities and actions. The Committee also worked closely with the NHS Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group, who provided updates on the progress of the CCG's authorisation journey. In December 2013 the Committee further considered and supported a proposed merger of two Tilbury GP surgeries; however unfortunately this did not come to fruition as NHS England and the two GP Surgeries involved were unable to agree terms that met quality access requirements.

The Committee continued its important work with partners, such as Thurrock Coalition, who were vital in developing initiatives such as the "Sport for You" programme. In May 2013 a "Sport For You" Conference was held in order to engage with residents of Thurrock, parents, carers and families, council officers, Members and Third Sector groups to explore, map and discuss current and potential future provision of Sport and Activity for Disabled people in Thurrock. Four out of the five of the most popular sports identified at the conference (football, archery, table tennis, swimming) are now more widely available in Thurrock. Ian Evans, Executive Director of Thurrock Coalition (The User-Led Organisation for Thurrock) and co-opted Member of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee was vital in coordinating this work and providing invaluable feedback representing the views of service users.

Councillor Barbara Rice, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health, presented a report in early 2014 which highlighted the achievements over the past year, which were ever greater given the current economic and demographic landscape. This included the success of the Building Positive Futures programme, which saw the opening of Elizabeth Gardens extra care housing scheme in North Grays, securing an additional £1.3 million of Government funding to support the development of a 28 new properties for older people in Derry Avenue, South Ockendon, and the recruitment to Local Area Coordinator posts to identify people most at risk of needing care and support.

The Committee valued the contributions from the representative from HealthWatch, who provided important input on issues relating to patients' care in the Borough.

This year has been an exciting year for the Committee, where a number of important issues have been scrutinised. I am particularly pleased with all the work that has been undertaken in relation to the strategy that has been developed by Public Health and Adult Social Care to support our older residents in Thurrock. I also welcome the development of Thurrock's Better Care Fund plan which is an opportunity to transform local services so that people are provided with better integrated care and support that will enable the area to deliver better health and care outcomes for residents. It is brilliant to see council officers, health partners, community representatives and voluntary groups coming together to collaborate on strategies and work programmes in order to improve the health outcomes for residents in the Borough.

I would like to thank our partners for all their hard work and invaluable input this year and also my colleagues who worked hard to scrutinise reports presented by council officers and recommended important improvements for the benefit of our local residents. Special thanks to Councillor James Halden for his supportive vice chairing role. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank council officers from Health and Social Care for all their good work and in particular Matthew Boulter from Democratic Services for his continuous support to the Committee Members.

Councillor Yash Gupta MBE
Chair of Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny
Committee



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Throughout the year the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had the opportunity to examine in more detail the Council's borrowing strategy in order to fund the Wholly Owned Housing Company, Gloriana, in addition to the Council's own new housing building schemes within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). These have been a priority for Members which create positive opportunities for Thurrock residents and will see the construction of new homes in the Borough.

Members were regularly updated on the development of the Council's Transforming Homes five year capital programme, the progress made on the Thermal Efficiency retrofit programme along with actions taken to eradicate Damp, Condensation and associated Mould in Council Properties. The Committee were particularly keen to scrutinise what actions were being taken to reduce the number of residents who experienced fuel poverty and increase the levels of comfort and satisfaction in homes. Independent Customer Satisfaction scores were reviewed in April 2014 in order to transparently and openly reflect on the Housing Directorates performance. This was welcomed by the Committee who were interested to examine direct feedback from residents. In addition the Committee scrutinised the Private Sector Housing Strategy as ensuring that there is a provision of high quality housing in the private sector is becoming increasingly important as over 80% of homes in Thurrock are in private ownership.

Members of the Committee had the opportunity to see firsthand the condition of council properties and the impact of the initiatives when they visited a newly void property, a home on the waiting list for transformation and a newly refurbished home to the Transforming Homes standard in March 2014.

The Committee also reviewed the impact of welfare reform on Thurrock housing tenants, which included the change in allocations policy and the downsizing initiative to support tenants so that they would not be impacted by Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC).

In July 2013 and January 2014 scrutinised the quality and cost review of the caretaking, cleaning and ground maintenance services and recommended that a further detailed option appraisal be carried out with full resident involvement to ensure that better value for money is achieved.

Other key issues that arose throughout the year included the sheltered housing review, progress on voids, re-charging tenants audit and the examination of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) action plan. The condition and letting of garages is an issue that was raised by Members, and will be an area for further investigation during 2014-15.

This year, the scrutiny committee has reviewed Cabinet policies and execution of Housing services. Working closely with officers, I believe we have achieved much in the way of best practice, efficient procurement and improved housing standards.

Councillor Steve Liddiard
Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny

The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Committee have had a very busy year and scrutinised some of the most wide ranging regeneration developments that are set to stimulate Thurrock's local economy for years to come.

This is an exciting period of growth for Thurrock and the Committee have investigated and considered a significant number of high profile developments which are of great interest to both residents and the local business community alike. The scale and pace of regeneration in Thurrock is unprecedented and the volume of developments would be envy of other local authorities around the Country, which is why the role of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Committee was particularly important this year.

Some of these regeneration plans sought to readdress challenges and issues that have been faced in Thurrock for some time and are at the heart of many resident's, such as the Grays Town Centre Regeneration scheme, which included much needed solutions to the level crossing, refurbishment of commercial buildings, improvement to the shopping area and the conversion of Grays Magistrates Court to create a business incubation centre and possibly 200 new jobs. This is all against the backdrop of the new College Campus set to open in September 2014 – which will draw thousands of new students to Grays Town Centre.

The Committee scrutinised and endorsed the procurement process used to select a development partner for the Purfleet Regeneration Programme which is set to build 3,000 new homes, a primary school, health centre, and shopping and community facilities. This has been nominated in the Regeneration and Renewal Magazines top 100 projects in the UK and the project is number 22 on the list.

Another big issue was the Lower Thames Crossing, which was considered in detail by the Committee and a scrutiny seminar held in July 2013. At the seminar Members worked with local residents and organisations such as Transport for London (TfL) and Natural England to obtain feedback on the proposed options. All responses were fed back into Central Government's consultation process.

A number of other key issues were also examined, which included:

- The **Vision for Tilbury**
- Emerging proposals for **Thames Enterprise Park** (otherwise known as Thames Oilport).
- The review of the **Provision and Delivery of Skills and Training** to meet employment opportunities in the Ports, Logistics and Transport Sector.

- The endorsement of £10 million of expenditure over the next 4 years for the **2014/15-17/18 Highways and Transport Capital Programme**.
- The examination of progress that was being made at **London Gateway**.
- The evaluation and endorsement of the system of prioritisation for **Road Safety Measures outside Schools**.

In January 2014 the Committee established the Bus Working Group in order to examine best practice, other sources of income and partnership working opportunities to improve public transport access for local employees travelling to industrial and retail areas in the Borough. The working group aim to build relationships with local bus companies and also to encourage and improve cycling rates in Thurrock.



Members of the Committee also undertook two site visits this year, one to Thames Oilport and another to London Gateway, where they received presentations from partners on the work that had been undertaken in response to reports that had been submitted to the Committee.

These visits were helpful to the Committee and it is hoped that further meetings with representatives from Thurrock local industry can be arranged and the benefits of partnership working will continue to come to fruition next year.

The Committee visited DP World to see the £1.5 billion investment into the New Port and the Thames Oilport to see the regeneration of this part of East Thurrock and the forward plans for these 2 important sites. The Committee also welcomed the extension of the Port of Tilbury which would generate 750 jobs and the £200 million investment into Lakeside Shopping Centre.

The committee scrutinised the exciting policies for the regeneration Grays Town Centre and Purfleet with an investment of £650 million to provide 2300 homes, a new shopping precinct, and exciting plans for a Film Studio.



Councillor Gerard Rice
Chair of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Budget Overview and Scrutiny

This year was year two of the budget saving proposals which had been scrutinised and agreed in 2012-13. However, Members were still keen to scrutinise the budget to ensure that the Council was on target to achieve the significant budget savings and to identify if further value for money and efficiencies could be realised. With challenging public sector cuts and the knowledge that more was to come, Members were keen to ensure that Thurrock was doing all it could to ensure value for money and ascertain any new income streams.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee convened a special meeting to consider the ongoing delivery of the savings in the two year 2012-2014 budget. This was an opportunity for members to get a sense of the financial challenges facing the council and assess progress in meeting them.

Scrutiny Committees held productive and engaging debates on a number of key issues in order to maximise efficiency savings to the authority, some examples of these areas are outlined below:

National Non-Domestic Rates Pooling Opportunities

In June 2013 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report outlining changes to the 2013/14 Local Government Finance Settlement which increased the importance of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) to the Council's funding position and introduced the potential to use pooling arrangements to increase funding available to the Council. The new funding system still funds Councils through a mixture of Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates but they are no longer combined into a fixed level of Formula Grant. Instead Councils receive a guaranteed Revenue Support Grant with the balance made up of a share of retained Business Rates, which can increase (or decrease) depending on the growth (or reduction) in business rates collected.

In September 2013 the Committee considered a report summarising the modelling work used to inform a decision about entering into a pooling arrangement. The report expressed a preference for entering into a pooling arrangement with Basildon Borough Council and the London Boroughs of Barking & Dagenham and Havering on the basis of maximising financial benefit for Thurrock and meeting Government criteria for a pool concerning clear strategic links and a rationale for promoting growth.

Highways and Transport Capital Programme

In January 2014 the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the Highways and Transport Capital Programme for 2014/15 based on the Department for Transport's (DfT) allocation; the Council's package of capital measures to be delivered through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) for 2014/15; and the supplementary capital programme that hoped to prevent the decline in the highway infrastructure and how this might be funded. Members fully endorsed the proposals.

Cleaning & Caretaking and Environmental Services Review

The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the outcome of a quality and cost review of the caretaking, cleaning and ground maintenance services and recommended that a further detailed option appraisal of grounds maintenance service be carried out with full resident involvement. They also agreed that officers should undertake a more detailed review of the caretaking service to ensure that better value for money is achieved and that a new Environmental Services Service Level Agreement be implemented from April 2014.

Alternative uses for money previously used to match fund Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

The Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the options as to how to use the budget previously set aside for the match funding of PCSOs. Following much debate and review of all the options it was agreed that the portfolio holder for Public Protection, in conjunction with the Head of Public Protection, implement their desired preference with regards to an enhanced enforcement service.

Waste Collection Round Rationalisation

Waste Collection Round Rationalisation was a subject of much debate and scrutiny during 2013-14. Waste collection is a highly visible front line service and is perceived by residents as a key services provided by the Council. To optimise performance and gain maximum efficiency from the service, collection rounds were reviewed and reconfigured during early 2013. At the same time, terms and conditions of employment of refuse crews were revised to reflect modern patterns of working and future service demands. The new rounds together with revised workplace methods came into effect in June 2013 and Members continue to review the work and support the financial and operational benefits delivered by the rationalisation project.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

Overview and Scrutiny Committees can establish Scrutiny Review Panels to investigate in-depth issues which have come to their attention. In 2013-14 two Scrutiny Review Panels were established, the details of which are set out below.

Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Match Funding Review

At Full Council in February 2013 the Leader of the Council asked Councillor Simon Wootton to lead a task and finish group to explore PCSO funding, its impact and relevance but also, to give a steer to the Council as to whether the funding should continue.

A Review Panel was subsequently established and undertook a four month investigation into PCSO funding which involved a wide cross section of stakeholders including Essex Police, community groups and the Portfolio holder for Public Protection. A report was finalised by the panel in October 2013.

The primary aim of the review was to determine whether the Council's funding of PCSOs provided additional value. The panel's investigation found no conclusive evidence that the funding provided additional resources to PCSOs in Thurrock. Arguably there were 14 PCSOs within the current numbers who are there because of the matched funding. The panel also found the special services agreement and the performance monitoring to be inadequate and not fit for purpose.

As a result, 3 options were put forward for consideration by the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee which were agreed and referred to Cabinet in November 2013. However, at the time of finalising the review report Chair of the Panel was contacted by Chief Inspector Ben Hodder. He had been asked to review the management of PCSOs by his superiors. The recommendation had been made for Essex Police to cease all match funded arrangements across Essex and to provide councils the choice to fully fund however many PCSOs they wished.

With this new development the options left to Thurrock Council were reduced and at Cabinet in November 2013 it was agreed to cease match funding of PCSO's. It was also agreed that the Council would acknowledge the confirmation that Essex Police were ceasing match funding opportunities for PCSOs and welcomed the Chief Superintendants commitment that this would not mean any PCSO redundancies for Thurrock.

Fairness in Thurrock Review

The topic of Fairness was brought to the fore by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee, which wanted to explore and evidence issues relating to fairness in order to better understand and address the barriers to equality in the local area. In September 2013 the Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish group to look at ways other local authorities deploy equality commissions within budgetary constraints and progress equality issues within their localities. The panel's overall aim was to make recommendations on the relevance of a commission for Thurrock, other alternatives, as well as any costs involved. The Fairness in Thurrock Review Panel was subsequently established and undertook this investigation, finalising the report in March 2014.

At the first meeting of the Fairness in Thurrock Review the panel were particularly interested in mapping the pathway of inequality for children and young people (from birth to age 21). As a result, an analysis of the current data available was undertaken so that an informed data comparison of children and young people's life chances by ward area could be made. The panel engaged with officers across the Council to evaluate the current strategies, action plans, partnerships and boards that attempt to tackle inequality and to identify whether a Fairness Commission would add value to the equalities agenda in Thurrock.

A Stakeholder Workshop was held on 30 January 2014 to consult with partners who could be involved in the work of any future Fairness Commission – potential future Commissioners – in order to seek their views and establish whether there was any support. Participants at the workshop included representatives from Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERRIC), Open Door, Thurrock Coalition, Thurrock CVS, Thurrock Centre for Independent Living, One Community Development Trust, TRUST, Ngage, Essex Police and a spokesperson from the Troubled Families Initiative.

An open discussion took place on Fairness Commissions and whether this would add value to the equalities agenda in Thurrock. During the review the user-led organisation of Thurrock Coalition ran an engagement workshop with their partners – Thurrock Diversity Network (TDN). Thurrock Diversity Network has a broad membership base of 45 individuals and organisations with an interest in disability issues in connection to Thurrock. Through a series of group work, feedback and discussions they provided a report which informed the work of the Fairness in Thurrock Review.

During the review it was clear that there was a wealth of data that indicates a level of inequality exists in Thurrock and that there were a number of strategies and action plans in place to try to tackle this. The issues and initiatives around reducing

inequalities are cross council, cross theme and cross partners. By examining the evidence the panel found that much was being done to address inequalities in the Borough through the work of various strategic boards, partnerships and action plans developed by council officers and partners, and that these strategies were making progress in improving the life chances of Thurrock residents – including children and young people. Nevertheless there was still an equality gap and as a panel it was felt that this is something that will only be set to widen over time, particularly within this challenging economic climate.

As a result in March 2014 the panel made 4 recommendations to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee which included that Thurrock establishes a Fairness Commission to progress equality issues within the Borough, that no more than 15 Commissioners form the membership of the Thurrock Fairness Commission, that the work of the Commission was progressed within existing resources and that the work is regularly reviewed with a final report being referred to Cabinet one year after its inception. The Committee endorsed the panel's recommendations, which were subsequently considered and agreed by Cabinet in April 2014.

At the time of this annual report going to print, Directors were tasked to identify appropriate staff in their service area to facilitate the Fairness Commission, including an appropriate officer in the Chief Executive's Delivery Unit to coordinate the work. A Councillor from each of the two largest political parties in Thurrock was also being nominated in order for initial work in appointing Commissioners to begin, and it was intended that the outcomes of the review were reported back to the stakeholders who attended the workshop and contributed to the panel's investigation in order to involve partners and stakeholders to identify potential Commissioners.

Call-ins

Thurrock's Call-In process is a vital aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny function. It allows Councillors or Members of the public to ask that a decision of the Cabinet not be implemented until it has been subject to scrutiny by the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A Call-In of a Cabinet decision can be requested by two elected Members who are not members of the Cabinet, a voluntary group with an interest in the Borough, a local business situated in the Borough or ten residents in the Borough. The Call-In must be in writing and include reasons for the Call-In together with an alternative course of action.

The Call-In once it has been verified as legitimate and in accordance with the provisions of the council's constitution is then referred to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Committee receives all the evidence relating to the issue in question and following consideration, makes recommendations about whether the original decision should stand or whether Cabinet should be requested to reconsider its original decision.

During 2013-14 the Overview and Scrutiny Committees considered two Call-Ins as detailed below:

Private Sector Housing Fees

In July 2013 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a Call-In in respect of charges for licence applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation which fall within the mandatory licensing requirements of the Housing Act 2004, for fees for taking certain types of enforcement action and for charges for non statutory inspections, such as inspections of properties in connection with applications for UK Border Agency Clearance Reports. The Members who called-in the decision felt that the proposal did not provide sufficient value for money, provided an unfair advantage to applicants and impacted upon Thurrock tax payers.

The Committee considered the comments of the Call-In Members together with the views and comments of officers. Following a debate the Committee agreed to reject the Call-In on the basis that the licence charges did reflect the full cost of administering the scheme so there was no additional cost to tax payers

Grays Town Centre Regeneration Vision

In November 2013 a Call-In was submitted in relation to the Grays Town Centre Regeneration Vision, specifically pertaining to the exempt nature of the report and

the recommendations regarding possible multi-million pound expenditure on the State Cinema. Alternative proposals were agreed, which resulted in the item being referred back to Cabinet with suggested amendments. This included agreement of a new recommendation that any decision to acquire the State cinema should only be taken in a transparent way, once a full business case had been prepared, including costs of acquisition, conversion to an appropriate commercially viable use, and expected benefits.