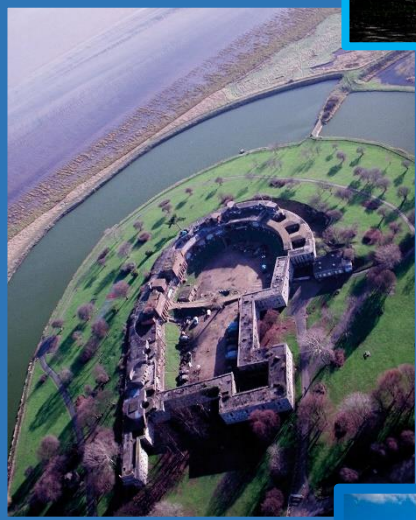


Appendix 1

Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2020-21



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What is overview and 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 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 created 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.

The agendas and associated reports of each Committee can be accessed by the following link:

<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/>

Committees

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

- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

An Overview and Scrutiny Committee can also form Working Groups or Task and Finish Groups to focus on particularly important issues.

Membership

The membership of Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny Committees is made up of Councillors drawn from all 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.

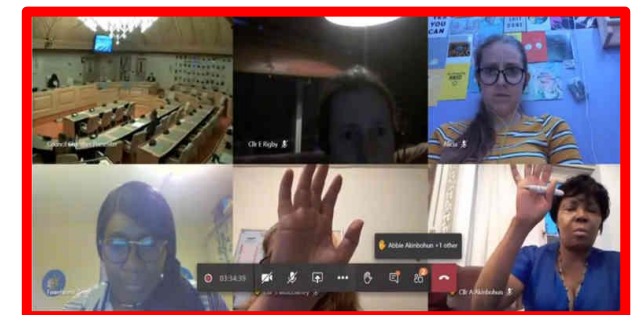
Thurrock has a number of non-Councillors sitting on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Children's Services Committee has two parent-governors as well as a diocesan representative from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches respectively. There is also one co-opted member on the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and one co-opted member on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee representing health and housing interests across the borough.

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. Under normal circumstances members of the public would be welcome to attend meetings of the Committees and would be able to take part.



Overview and Scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2020/21 municipal year has involved lots of change and adaptation for the scrutiny function, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic meant that Members could no longer physically hold scrutiny meetings in the Council Offices and members of the public could not attend these meetings either. This has meant that the function has switched to virtual meetings, using the Microsoft Teams application. When restrictions have allowed, meetings have also been held using a hybrid format, with some Members in the Council Chambers and some Members attending virtually. This has allowed Members to isolate or shield when necessary whilst continuing with their work on their scrutiny committee.

Despite the global pandemic, the scrutiny function continued to do its job, and held every meeting as scheduled with no cancellations or disruptions. Both Democratic Services and the IT teams worked hard to

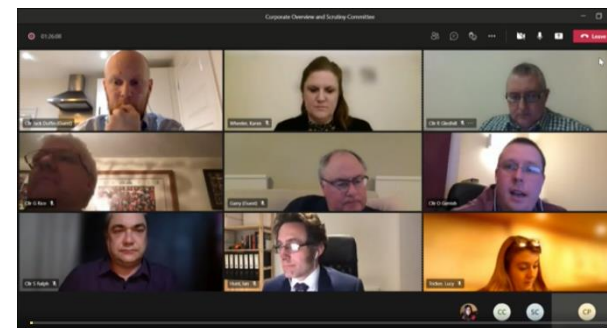
ensure that everything was 'alright on the night', and meetings continued using the new technology and hybrid/virtual formats.

Scrutiny Committees also continued to virtually meet with external stakeholders and guests during scrutiny meetings using the Microsoft Teams platform. For example, the Planning, Transport and Regeneration O&S Committee met with C2C rail directors; the Corporate O&S Committee met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Thurrock Association of Forums; and the Health and Wellbeing O&S Committee held NHS and CCG leaders to account.

Members of the public also had the opportunity to watch meetings live from the comfort of their own homes, first through the Council's YouTube channel, and then through the Council's public-I streaming service. This allowed members to watch discussions and decisions being taken live, even during COVID-19.

How have we helped you?

The following pages provide a brief summary of the work of Thurrock's six overview and scrutiny committees across 2020/21. Each page outlines the main achievements and considerations of each committee, to provide members of the public an insight into the work of scrutiny. This does not represent an exhaustive list of every meeting, agenda item or discussion, but should provide a brief overview and give members of the public a taste of what scrutiny at Thurrock has achieved, and how this has helped you and other Thurrock residents.



Overview and Scrutiny 2020/21

Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Home to School Transport and Travel Policy

At one of our first meetings this year, we scrutinised



the Home to School Transport and Travel Policy, which outlined the proposed changes to the policy. Some of us felt concerned regarding the recommendation that families living in temporary accommodation would have to move their child to a closer school after twelve weeks in one property.

We felt that these children were already at a disadvantage, and needed stability with their schooling, and therefore did not approve the recommendation. The report, including our comments, was then discussed by Cabinet who supported our decision to remove the recommendation. Therefore, parents living in temporary accommodation do not have to move their child to a closer school if they don't wish to.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Inspection Outcome – Written Statement of Action

Last year, we discussed at length the OFSTED SEND inspection, and subsequent Written Statement of Action, and continued to do so throughout this municipal year.

We continued to monitor the progress that was being made on the inspection actions, and requested an update at each committee, to be able to highlight any progress and areas of concern.

We also ensured the service had been



continuing to communicate with parents throughout the pandemic.

Later on in the year, we questioned the dissolution of the Carer/Parent Participation Group, but were pleased to hear at the next meeting that the group was being reinstated and would continue to help parents and carers.

This year, our Committee have worked hard to make sure the most vulnerable children in the borough remain safe and have the best possible outcomes. We'd like to thank officers and Members for their hard work during this difficult year.



**Cllr Alex Anderson,
Chair of the
Children's Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

Cleaner, Greener, and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Public Protection Work Involving Animals



One of the areas we discussed this year was animal welfare, and how to ensure Thurrock were working to protect animals across the borough, including from the problems associated with puppy farms and illegal breeding.

We discussed this issue at length during our October meeting, and questioned animal rights and the Animal Welfare Policy, which we believed needed reviewing. We decided that the best way to focus on this issue was to establish an Animal Welfare Working Group to update the policy in line with new legislation. We look forward to hearing more on their work next year, and believe it will help pets and their owners throughout Thurrock.

Cross-Party Waste Working Group and Municipal Waste Strategy 2021- 2031



Over the course of the past year, the Waste Management Working Group have been working hard to investigate

recycling rates across the borough, and study potential new approaches to increase recycling.

We were pleased to welcome members of the Working Group to our meeting to discuss their findings and recommendations. We also agreed to an additional recommendation to consult fully with the community before any changes were enacted, to ensure that all residents had the chance to have their say on the proposals.

PREVENT Strategy Update

This year, we continued to focus on the Council's response to terrorism. We considered potential local threats, as well as actions and responses that would address this.



**Cllr Joycelyn Redsell,
Chair of Cleaner,
Greener, and Safer
Overview & Scrutiny**

Our committee members felt this was an important issue, and recommended that PREVENT training be mandatory for all Members, to

ensure that all Councillors understood their PREVENT duties.

The work of the CGS Committee this year has helped keep residents safe, and worked to improve the environment, during a particularly challenging year. Thank you all for your hard work.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Local Full Fibre Network

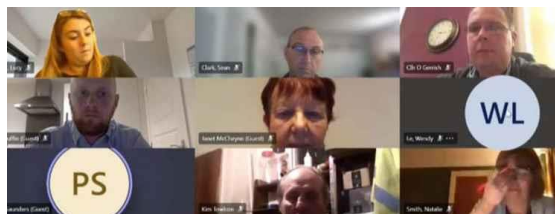


At our first meeting of the year, we discussed the bid to central government for a local full fibre network, which would help improve Council and public sector efficiency by improving Wi-Fi connections. We questioned which sites would receive the full fibre connections, and were

pleased to hear this included care homes, community buildings, and fire and rescue buildings.

We had lots of questions on this report, so requested an update later in the year. This update was brought to our Committee in November 2020, and we learned that the bid had been successful and was being delivered. We feel this will improve the local economy, as public buildings will now have improved internet connectivity.

Community Forums



This year, we invited the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary of the Thurrock Association of Forums (TAF), as we wished to investigate the relationship between the Council and forums, and how this could be improved.

We questioned how Councillors could help and support forums, for example through increasing public interest and knowledge of their work. We welcomed comments from the TAF representatives, and feel this will start an ongoing conversation and improve relationships between the two entities. We also agreed to encourage residents to join forums, and so they could make their views heard regarding their local communities.

General Fund Budget

After a difficult financial year in regards to COVID-19 and the ongoing pandemic, we believed it was important to scrutinise the budget.

We wanted to ensure that residents had been taken into account in the budget, and therefore scrutinised in detail the proposed council tax rise, and potential government support. We sought reassurance that the Council could balance the budget before we



**Cllr Oliver Gerrish,
Chair of Corporate
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

agreed recommendations and sent the report to Cabinet for final agreement. The Portfolio Holder replied to all of our comments at the Cabinet meeting, and they agreed the budget to Full Council.

This year we've helped you by ensuring the Council works effectively with its partners, as well as by holding the Council's finances to account during this difficult year.

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

COVID-19 Pandemic

This year our main focus has been the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effect this devastating virus has had on local residents and the NHS. We've received an update at every meeting we've held, and constantly monitored case numbers; ICU bed data; and death rates. We've also considered the impact that lockdowns have had on the mental health of our resident's, as well as the health impacts added stress such as unemployment or job insecurity can have. We've also scrutinised the Test and Trace system, and earlier on in the pandemic, we pushed to ensure all frontline healthcare workers received PPE.

We've continued to advocate for NHS and other frontline healthcare workers through the pandemic, by scrutinising the vaccine rollout and ensuring that all frontline healthcare staff were offered the vaccine when appropriate.

In addition, we've continued to scrutinise and hold the NHS and CCG's to account by inviting them to our Committee to ask questions and explain issues and concerns.

Throughout the year, we've also monitored the development of the Integrated Medical Centres, and worked to ensure that medical services remain in Thurrock during construction. I'd like to thank officers and Members for their hard work throughout this difficult year.



Proposed Consultation on Adult Social Care (Non-Residential) Fees and Charges

Alongside the pandemic, we've also continued to scrutinise Thurrock's adult social care sector, and were therefore pleased to invite the PFH to our

meeting to discuss the proposed increase in non-residential fees. He presented a series of options, including a gradual raise over three years, which we questioned him extensively on. We wanted to ensure that all residents affected by this change had the opportunity to put their views across, so we therefore suggested an extended consultation period, which included HealthWatch. In January 2021, we were pleased to hear that the consultation had received a good response rate.

I'd also like to offer my condolences to Ian Evans, a HOSC co-opted member, whose work and dedication to the Committee were invaluable. He was a passionate advocate for disabled residents in Thurrock, and we were deeply saddened to hear of his passing.



**Cllr Shane Ralph,
Chair of Health
and Wellbeing
Overview and
Scrutiny
Committee**

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Housing Development

This report continued to come before our Committee throughout the year, and we scrutinised these developments in great detail.

We started off the year by looking at potential housing development sites in Broxburn Drive and Riverview, and were concerned about the level of community engagement. At the next meeting, we were able to look at the consultation process, which outlined how residents could share their views, and the impact that COVID-19 had had on resident consultation. We wanted to ensure that residents had the opportunity have their voices heard on any potential housing developments in their communities.



Tenants and Leaseholders

We looked at the results from tenants and leaseholders satisfaction surveys. We scrutinised the way in which satisfaction rates were measured and the results.

From the results, ASB was the main concern for tenants and we questioned Officers on the actions proposed. We asked Officers to engage with Ward Councillors on ASB hotspots to fully understand the issues. Leaseholders' main concern was that they did not feel they were getting value for money for service charges and we questioned Officers' solutions. We will continue to monitor this and will scrutinise the solutions that will be coming back to Committee Members in the next municipal year.



Automatic Gates Update

We've also deliberated on the results of the resident consultation regarding automatic gates in some Council properties, and if there should be a charge on this system, or if some automatic gates at high rise sites be removed. We welcomed Councillor Holloway to this meeting as Ward Councillor and heard her views regarding the safety of elderly residents. The Committee then questioned the level of consultation response and the impact of no charges.

We asked officers to look into other options for maintaining the automatic gates without implementing a charge, such as sponsorship.

We've helped residents by continuing to ensure that homes are built in the right area, and that tenants and leaseholders' concerns are addressed to improve the area they live in.



**Cllr Luke Spillman,
Chair of Housing
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

Planning, Transport, and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

A13 Widening Scheme

Throughout the year, our Committee has continued to monitor and scrutinise the on-going work on the A13 Widening Project.

We've requested and received regular updates, including a breakdown of costs, details of financial shortfall, and other issues as they arise. We've continued to question any potential overspend, as well as the project completion date and work with contractors.

We'll continue to receive reports next year and ensure that the project gets completed to a high standard for residents.



Stanford-le-Hope Interchange Project

We've also been monitoring the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange Project, to ensure this is completed on time and on budget. We've reviewed the original scheme design and welcomed the new proposed plans for the scheme, including the newly designed car park and bus turnaround point.

Later on in the year, we received an update regarding the finances on the project, and requested regular financial updates to ensure that money was being spent efficiently and effectively, and the project would also be delivered to a high standard.



C2C Rail Update

This year we welcomed the Head of Communications at c2c Rail to discuss the new timetable they had

implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. We wanted to ensure that all residents that needed to travel into London were safe, and could still adhere to social distancing measures. We questioned the enforcement of mandatory face coverings, as well as hand sanitising stations and train cleaning, and welcomed the response from c2c.

We will continue to monitor this throughout the pandemic, and once life has resumed its normal pace.



We've worked hard this year to ensure projects will be delivered on time and on budget, and will help improve the lives of residents.



**Cllr John Allen,
Chair of Planning,
Transport &
Regeneration
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

Task and Finish/Working Groups

Overview and Scrutiny Committees also have the power to form Task and Finish Groups or Working Groups.

These groups can then focus on a particular issue and report back to their parent committee. This frees up time for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to focus on different issues, whilst still ensuring that the most important topics for you can be scrutinised in detail.

Task and Finish Groups 2020/21

The Waste Management Working Group completed their work this year, and reported their findings back to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This year we also undertook an Animal Welfare Working Group to draft a new Animal Welfare Policy and ensure our borough's pets and animals are kept safe.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee also continued their work on the scrutiny review, and were pleased to approve all

recommendations, and send this to Cabinet who also approved the recommendations.

Although a review is not an independent Task and Finish Group, it is a detailed piece of work, which can last up to a few years, and we look forward to seeing the review implemented in 2021/22.

The work of the scrutiny review is outlined on the following page.



Scrutiny Review

The Scrutiny Review began in 2018/19 to look in detail at the scrutiny function and how this could be improved. This work continued throughout 2019/20, and was finalised this municipal year. The Corporate O&S Committee have been pleased to see the work continue and receive regular updates, as well signing off the final recommendations to be agreed by Cabinet.

Executive-Scrutiny Workshop

In April 2020 members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet met virtually to discuss the draft review recommendations, particularly the proposed Executive-Scrutiny Protocol, as well as discussing how members from both functions felt and how the service could be improved. This was a productive workshop, with good comments coming from both overview and scrutiny and Executive Members.

These comments and recommendations were added to the final review document, for example ensuring all long-term projects met the

SMART objectives, and highlighting the importance of training for Chairs.

Review Agreement

We worked hard this year to formulate the review's recommendations and make sure that they work for all functions in the Council. For example, we proposed recommendations regarding improving training for scrutiny Chairs and Members; ensuring more detailed oversight of motions presented at Full Council; and proposed each Committee undertake a long-term project, focussing on an area of interest to both Councillors and residents. We hope that these recommendations, which cover both short and long-term, will improve the scrutiny function.

In November 2020, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the final review document. We commented on the implementation process, the next steps, and continued involvement of the Executive, and were happy to agree all recommendations. We therefore sent it to Cabinet for their

agreement and approval in December 2020.

Cabinet were also pleased to see the report and agreed all recommendations. They discussed how recommendations would be implemented and were looking forward to seeing positive changes.

This year we have been pleased to see the completion of the scrutiny review, and hope it will improve the function and provide better outcomes for residents. We look forward to seeing the review's implementation next year, and would like to thank Committee Members, the Executive, and officers for their hard on the review.



Cllr Oliver Gerrish, Chair of the Scrutiny Review

How can you get involved?

The Overview and Scrutiny process at Thurrock is managed by our Democratic Services Team, which is located within Legal Services. Democratic Services manage 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: Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Address: Democratic Services,
Civic Offices,
New Road,
Grays
Essex
RM17 6SL

Overview and Scrutiny has a dedicated section on Thurrock Council's website and can be found at (<https://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.