

Appendix 1

Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2021-22



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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. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committees and can ask questions or make statements.



Overview and Scrutiny during 2021/22

The 2021/22 municipal year has involved lots of change and adaptation for the scrutiny function, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing work at the Civic Offices.

Scrutiny Committees at Thurrock Council continued to work throughout the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic. Committees were held in socially distanced rooms, with windows and doors open to provide good ventilation. Democratic Services also provided hand sanitiser and encouraged the use of face masks. Officers often appeared via Microsoft Teams to help reduce the spread of COVID and the Omicron variant.

Due to ongoing work at the Civic Offices, scrutiny meetings were also held at a variety of venues, including the Beehive Community Resource Centre and South Essex College, for some of the municipal year. Democratic Services would like to extend their thanks to staff at both the

Beehive and the College for their hard work ensuring that meetings had a suitable venue and were COVID-safe.

Scrutiny meetings continued to be recorded during 2021/22, which meant that members of the public who could not attend meetings in person could watch the meeting once it had concluded on the Council's website or YouTube from the comfort of their own home.

How have we helped you?

The following pages provide a brief summary of the work of Thurrock's six overview and scrutiny committees across 2021/22. 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.



Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Low Income Families and Child Poverty



One of our main areas of focus this year has been how to reduce child poverty within Thurrock and improve the lives of families living on low income, or at risk of safeguarding issues. At the first meeting of the year, the Committee agreed to consider this issue in detail. We then discussed the Ofsted focussed visit on extra-familial harm that been undertaken in Thurrock, and were pleased to hear that there had been an increase in oversight of services and a commitment to ensure families received a good service.

As a Committee we were also pleased to welcome an update report regarding

the Low-Income Families and Child Poverty Update for the Children and Young People Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). This piece of work required an update for 2021, and we discussed at length the problem of child poverty within the borough. Following this discussion, we were happy to agree an update to Chapter 6 of the report regarding 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing for Low Income Families and Child Poverty'.

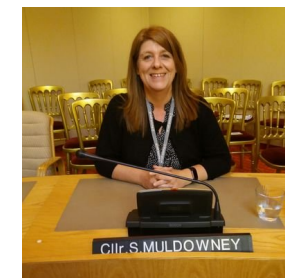
SEND Ofsted Inspection – Written Statement of Action

As a Committee we received regular updates throughout this municipal year, as this topic is important to all Members and residents alike. At the first meeting of the year, we received an updated action plan, which outlined all of the work undertaken by officers. In December 2021 Ofsted scheduled a revisit to the service and we requested an update to the Committee on the outcomes. In February 2022, we received this update and were pleased that Ofsted had found Thurrock to have made sufficient progress in all areas. The Ofsted Inspector had also highlighted the good work of scrutiny on this issue and particularly our

interest in the progress of the recommendations.

Throughout the year we have also scrutinised other areas of the Council, such as home to school transport and potential nursery closures. We felt that these issues were important to residents and therefore invited relevant Directors and Officers to answer questions. We discussed in detail the proposal to stop the school bus service from East Tilbury to St Clere's School and all Members of the Committee felt that this service should continue to ensure children could get to and from school safely.

This year we have worked hard to ensure that families on a low income and children with SEND needs received a good service and the care they required. We also said goodbye to Sally Khawaja as a Parent Governor Representative on the Committee and would like to thank her for her hard work over the previous year.



the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cleaner, Greener, and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Waste Strategy Implementation

As part of the ongoing Scrutiny Review, we decided that the Committee would focus on the implementation of the Waste Strategy throughout this municipal year. At the first meeting of the year, we received a presentation regarding how household waste was processed. This included how each type of waste was treated and provided the background to the waste strategy.

At the following meeting we heard how the waste strategy was being implemented and the work undertaken so far. We questioned at length the plans for the new service rollout of food caddies, which was scheduled for September 2022 and wanted assurances that this would be appropriately advertised and explained to Members.

We requested an update at the following meeting, and at this meeting discussed proposals for alternate weekly bin collections. We want to ensure that residents are aware of discussions and how this might affect them.



Off-Road Nuisance Motorbikes

One of our big concerns as a Committee has been the ongoing issues regarding anti-social behaviour on motorbikes throughout the borough's parks and open spaces. We invited the District Commander of Essex Police to the Committee to discuss the issue and outline how the police were working with the Council to tackle and prevent anti-social

motorbike riders. He briefed Members on Operation Caesar, which used evidence-based data to identify and police hotspots for nuisance motorbikes. We also scrutinised the funding that had been received regarding the new pilot to counter this type of anti-social behaviour.

As a Committee we also had the opportunity to review the actions taken by the Community Safety Partnership on this issue and thank them for their hard work.

Overall, this year we have worked to ensure that anti-social behaviour in the borough is reduced. We also want to ensure that residents are aware of any changes to their bin collections, and will continue to monitor this issue next year.

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



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Fair Debt



As a Committee we wanted to focus on fair debt this year and have worked closely with officers and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to ensure that this issue is scrutinised in detail. At the first meeting of the year we discussed the issue of Fair Debt as part of the scrutiny review and questioned timescales and other constraints before agreeing to this project.

In September 2021 we therefore invited the Assistant Director of Education and Skills to the Committee to discuss the Fair Debt Summit and how vulnerable residents could be supported. We questioned how best to support residents experiencing debt,

including young people in schools and in a post-COVID world. We also invited the Portfolio Holder to this meeting and questioned him regarding delivery of the programme. At the next meeting we held an evidence session with the Strategic Lead of Revenue and Benefits and questioned how the debt recovery team worked and the issue of compassionate collections. We were pleased to hear that the team were developing a Single View of Debt which would help residents clarify their debt, and would help the team differentiate between those residents who could pay but were unwilling, and those that were willing to pay but couldn't.

Asset Related Savings



This year the Committee also regularly received updates on the Council's proposals for asset related savings,

which included Grangewaters and the Thameside Theatre. This was an issue close to many resident's hearts and we were pleased to receive statements from members of the public in November 2021, including from Thurrock Yacht Club and the Save the Thameside Campaign. We listened to them at length and asked a variety of questions on the proposals.

The Committee requested an update on the report, which was received in March 2022. At this meeting we listened to another statement by Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions and were interested to hear of the developments on the proposals.

I'd like to thank officers and residents for their involvement in the Committee over the past year. We will continue to scrutinise all reports in detail and continue our work for residents.

Cllr Sue Little, Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

COVID-19 Pandemic

This year our main focus has again 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; hospitalizations; and vaccination rates. We've also considered the impact that the pandemic has 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. This year we have questioned the Director of Public Health extensively on COVID-19, including the new Omicron variant and the steps Thurrock need to take to move into a post-COVID world.

As the pandemic has progressed the Committee has been scrutinising the vaccine and booster rollout and we helped to ensure that the NHS offered

all residents the vaccine and boosters when appropriate. We have also tried to encourage residents to get the vaccine and boosters when offered, and increase vaccine uptake.

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.



Adult Social Care – Provider Services Transformation

This year we also welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Communities to the Committee to discuss proposals for transformation within the Adult Social Care service. The Committee questioned her in great detail as part of the pre-scrutiny decision making process, before the report was submitted to Cabinet. We questioned the type of service that

would be offered to residents and wanted to ensure that the meals on wheels service would continue for those elderly and vulnerable residents that needed it. As a Committee we decided to agree a new recommendation to ensure that thorough consultation was carried out with service users and individual plans were designed for meals on wheels service users. This was to ensure that vulnerable residents continued to receive a good service.

This year we have continued to scrutinise and monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccine rollout to ensure our borough's most vulnerable residents are protected against the virus. I'd like to thank the Committee, NHS partners and officers for their hard work this past year.



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

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Damp and Mould in Council Properties



One of the Committee's main concerns this year has been the ongoing issue that council tenants and borough residents have been facing regarding damp and mould within their properties.

At the first Committee meeting of the year we questioned officers on how damp and mould in properties was dealt with, how often properties were inspected for these issues, and what more could be done to help residents. We asked for more detailed information regarding the outcome of damp and mould flat inspections and asked for a report to come back to the Committee for these results to be analysed.

In November 2021 we received an additional report which outlined the damp and mould data and how homes suffering from damp and mould were repaired. As a Committee we felt that officers needed to undertake a more linked up method of working to ensure that all aspects of damp and mould, and subsequent issues stemming from this, were dealt with quickly and appropriately. We requested an additional report for the first meeting of the 2022/23 municipal year so we could continue to monitor this closely.

Lionel Oxley House Incident

Following a fire at Lionel Oxley House on Boxing Day 2021, we requested an urgent item be brought to our January Committee meeting to discuss the fire and the Council's processes. The Committee questioned officers on the cause of the fire, how the fire was dealt with and fire detection systems in the boroughs high-rises. We requested a report from UK Power Networks to discuss fire detection systems and what lessons could be learnt from the incident. We thanked the Fire and

Rescue Service and officers for their swift response to incident.

At our meeting in March 2022, we received an update report on the actions that had been taken by UK Power Network and officers following the incident, including lessons learnt sessions, updated emergency planning procedures and command structures. The Committee agreed a new recommendation based on the discussion that would ensure Ward Councillors, the relevant Portfolio Holders and directly responsible officers are made aware of any serious incidents within their ward/remit. We hope this will help the command structure during serious incidents and help those residents affected.

This year we have worked to ensure that residents in Thurrock have safe and secure housing, wherever they choose to live.



Cllr Lynn Worrall,
Chair of Housing
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Planning, Transport, and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Parking Policy and Strategy



As this report would form part of the Local Plan suite of documents, we analysed and scrutinised these in great detail during two separate committee sessions.

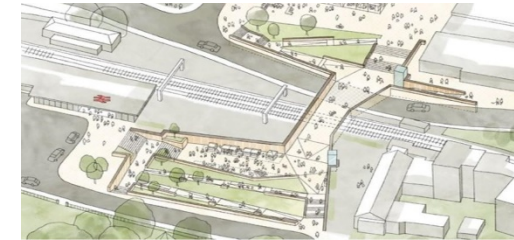
At the first session we questioned the parking standards for new builds, particularly within flats, as we felt that one car parking space per flat/house would be insufficient to meet a household's needs. We also scrutinised the number of electric vehicle charging points across the borough and felt that the report should increase electric vehicle charging provision, to lower emissions and improve air quality within the borough. After much discussion with officers on

the report, as a Committee we felt we could not agree the recommendations and requested that it come back to the Committee for further scrutiny.

At the next Committee meeting we continued to scrutinise the report and appendices. During this session we focussed on parking near schools and train stations, as we felt that any new developments in these areas should contain ample off-street parking provision. We had a long discussion and debate with officers on these issues, and agreed the recommendations contained within the report. The Committee rejected the idea that emission-based permit charges should be a part of the Council's Parking Strategy. This report, and the discussions had by scrutiny, were submitted to Cabinet for their agreement and approval.

Grays South: Delivering the Pedestrian Underpass

This year we received two reports relating to the proposed underpass in Grays. We thoroughly questioned officers regarding this topic, and



particularly focussed on the potential for Towns Board funding, the cost plan and any associated risks. We requested more information regarding the cost plan to ensure that taxpayers money was used efficiently and effectively on this scheme. We also amended the recommendations in the report to request additional updates on the scheme and did not agree to the cost plan based on the information provided.

Cllr Alex Anderson,
Chair of Planning,
Transport &
Regeneration
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

The PTR Committee has worked hard this year to ensure that parking provision in the borough is appropriate, and new town centre proposals have detailed cost plans to ensure taxpayers money is used efficiently and effectively.



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 2021/22

The Animal Welfare Working Group completed their work this year, and reported their findings back to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Working Group worked hard to draft a new Animal Welfare Policy, which was in line with updated legislation, especially regarding breeding animals and animals as prizes, for example at fairs and circuses. The Working Group presented their report at the first Committee meeting of the year and all recommendations were agreed unanimously by the Committee.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee also continued to monitor the implementation of the scrutiny review. The Committee heard regular updates as to the progress of the implementation, and were pleased that the majority of recommendations had been implemented, and Democratic Services were working hard to finalise the implementation of the outstanding 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 continued positive impact of the review over the coming municipal year.



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.

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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.