



Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2015-16

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Introduction

Overview and Scrutiny in Thurrock during 2015-16 have tackled a wide range of issues from intercepting unsafe goods at border ports to widening access to arts, culture and heritage among children and young people in Thurrock. Members have also held a witness day and considered in detail matters that are important in the Borough, such as Government proposals on a new Lower Thames Crossing.

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

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 better understand 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 continued to build strong links with Youth Cabinet, with two Youth Cabinet Members attending meetings to give young people a voice on matters affecting children and young people in Thurrock, such as young people's Mental Health Issues, the development of the 'Inspire' youth hub and sharing ideas on apprenticeship and work placement opportunities. A non-voting representative from HealthWatch was also co-opted to the Committee by Council in October 2015, at the suggestion of Committee Members, who felt that Healthwatch would embed the public's voice at the heart of the decision making processes on services for children and young people.

High on the agenda for the Committee has been to consider and monitor the learning points from the Serious Case Reviews issued by the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Board this year, with Members requesting regular updates and scrutinising action plans in order to demonstrate how the Council and its partners were being held to account. Children's Safeguarding is a topic at the forefront of the Committee's work, and as a result in February 2016 the Chair requested that a standing item be included on the agenda for each meeting so that the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Board could refer a matter or cause for concern without delay for consideration by Committee Members.

The Committee have reviewed the progress and performance of the Troubled Families Programme in helping to turn around the lives of families in Thurrock, and heard that during Phase 1 of the programme Thurrock had exceeded their target, with the programme aiming to assist 1160 more families by May 2020.

Members were keen to see how the Cultural Entitlement programme was making a difference to the lives of children and young people in Thurrock in widening access to arts and culture activities across the Borough and take full advantage of opportunities from partners such as the Royal Opera House in Purfleet. This further built upon the work of the Committee in relation to Supporting Pathways into Work for Young People as successful apprenticeships had been delivered through the programme.

In addition to examining various other issues ranging from Child Poverty to Supporting Parents back into Work, the Committee also examined the alternative delivery model for the Thurrock Youth Offer which proposed the development of 'Inspire', the Youth Trust, as a staff mutual in order to respond to and take advantage of funding and partnership opportunities as a means to address social-economic, health and educational inequalities facing the young people of Thurrock.

I am extremely proud of how my committee stacks up against its peers. All committees and all members do great work, but the officers and members on my committee do deserve high praise. This Committee sat for more meetings than in previous years to ensure a diverse and ambitious agenda could be dealt with and by far has spent more hours in committee debating and discussing issues of importance, and has heard more reports on a vast range of key subjects. Yes I know sometimes officers were run a little ragged getting everything in order and my fellow members had a number of very late nights, but I know we can all say that we truly had a robust and energetic committee that was serving the people of Thurrock.

Together we made efforts to ensure that committee ran better than ever. When parents in East Tilbury were concerned about Nursery Care, we invited them in to debate with the same rights as members. When we started to look at school improvement, we took the entire committee out to be hosted in a school to try and make us more accessible to the public. We took the Youth Cabinet and Healthwatch and rather than give them tokenistic involvement, we made them a part of the committee with real projects to work with us on. Finally we added a standing item for The Local Children's Safeguarding Board so they can come to committee at any time to report concerns to members. As Chairman, myself and Democratic Services kept a running log of all actions and recommendations of the committee so everyone could track our work and the committee's genuine contribution to education and child social care. Of course it is not just about the sheer tonnage of work we undertook. It is about outcomes. We took a Serious Case Review (Julia) and instead of just reviewing it we returned it to committee many times to track the councils learning experience from tragedies in child social care. I personally chaired our working group that produced a refresh of our work experience and pathways for young people into employment policies that won high praise. We pored over and helped refine the creation of our staff mutual for youth skills and we launched a major and fruitful project where we spoke to London partners about working together to tackle Serious Youth Crime. That is not to mention our over-viewing of school improvement, the use of the pupil premium, NEET provision, the budget, adoption figures, the Local Child Safeguarding Board issues, school transport, social worker issues, and much more still.

Not only do I thank those officers in education and child social care who prepared our reports and briefings, the team in Democratic Services who supported me as Chairman, and my fellow members who made our overview, scrutiny and policy development discussions in committee so worthwhile, but mostly I thank all those teachers, carers and all those who work in children services in Thurrock who are working hard to make our borough great.



Councillor James Halden
Chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny

This year the Committee heard that in light of the significant reductions in the money received from Government and other pressures on services the Council will have to make, the Council could no longer afford to operate all of the services that it has historically provided and it has to focus its attention on delivery of its statutory functions. As a result the Committee explored a number of options for community delivery of services and functions and highlighted examples of opportunities to empower groups to take ownership and responsibility for local facilities, in response to the fact that community organisations had approached the council who wished to take responsibility of environmental services in parks and open spaces.

Instances of fly-tipping and fly-posting in the Borough remained a cause for concern for the Committee, who requested regular updates in relation to what action was being taken to mitigate this issue, examine how intelligence was being followed up and progress on the clean-up at the Cory Wharf site.

The Committee also scrutinised what action was being taken by the Trading Standards team in intercepting unsafe goods at border points in London Gateway and Port of Tilbury. Members were advised that Thurrock's Trading Standards Team were in their third year of delivering the Safety at Ports project on behalf of the National Trading Standards Board (NTSB) that prevented unsafe products, including a range of cosmetics, toys and electrical items, entering the UK. The Committee were notified that the previous Chief Executive received a letter of thanks from Lord Toby Harris, chair of the National Trading Standards Board for the work Thurrock's Trading Standards team had undertaken and the contribution to the UK economy.



It has been a privilege to serve as chairman of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee this past municipal year and I thoroughly enjoyed the task.

I would like to thank all the committee members that attended the meetings and for their input into the issues that were put before them. Also many thanks for officers that supported this committee and presented many a presentation.

It was a good induction as to be a chair of what is a very worthwhile and important committee as at the very first meeting held in July we had to attend to an item of urgent business which was about the travellers that decided to invade and camp out at Lakeside sports ground and later when they were moved on, Belhus Park. This meeting was attended by Essex Police with a report on the issue. It was requested by committee that they report back at a later date which they did at the October meeting.

At the November meeting we had Essex Fire and Rescue Services attend with a very good presentation but sadly it was all about the reduction in services for The Borough of Thurrock which the committee conveyed their disapproval of and request that they attend with an update on this important issue at another meeting. This they did in March 2016. Sadly there was no change in the outcome.

The Cleaner, Greener and Safer committee has covered many issues over this past municipal year including Community Delivery of Environmental Services in Parks and Open Spaces, a very good cause and excellent report. Report on COMAH site in Thurrock, Waste Framework, Thurrock Trading Standards on intercepting unsafe goods at ports which Thurrock Council are doing a very good job at. Fly Tipping, Fees and Charges for Thurrock, Prevent and Local Air Quality, a very important issue as Thurrock is one of the worst areas for air pollution in the UK.

As you can see the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee have had a very productive year and covered some very important issues and I know there are many more in the pipeline for next year's committee.

Many thanks again to all parties that took part and supported this very important committee.

Councillor Roy Jones
Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had a busy year, not only in scrutinising the performance of the Council in relation to matters such as recycling rates and taking the lead in reviewing the work of the Budget Review Panel Process but also in initiating and overseeing a number of other projects.

One of the biggest matters considered by Committee Members was monitoring the progress achieved in transferring services from SERCO back to the Council and ensuring this was a smooth transition. On the 21st July 2015 the Council and SERCO announced that they had mutually agreed to terminate the Shared Services Partnership Agreement under which SERCO were responsible for the provision of a range of mainly back office and support services and functions. As part of this work the Committee reviewed the background to the transition programme, the work completed to date and the proposals for the hosting and management of the returning services which included the transfer of 350 permanent staff, around 75 contracts and approximately £3 million worth of equipment.

The Committee also reviewed the range and scope of officers training and development across social care which included mandatory training, certification requirements, how the Council ensured staff remained competent and demonstrated the balance between personal/council accountability. Following on from this Members Training and Development was also studied to establish whether further training could be provided to better equip Councillors in their work in the local community, as community leaders and advocates for local residents. Subsequently a Members Training Working Group was established which Committee Members Councillors Deborah Stewart and Graham Snell took part and shared their views.

In September 2015 the Committee considered the approach adopted by Thurrock in regards to Members DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks and Register of Interest process and welcomed the proposal to introduce enhanced DBS checks for all Councillors and any Co-Opted Members who were members of a Committee or Board which discharged an education or social services function. This was later referred to the Standard and Audit Committee as the appropriate decision making body, which endorsed the decision.

In February 2016, Members examined the issues and options associated with moving to whole-council elections and reviewed the notional costs/savings of such a change, together with the relative advantages and disadvantages of each method of conducting elections. As a result Members recommended that Full Council consult further with the communities in Thurrock and potential changes to the electoral cycle of the council which could involve a move to whole-council elections every four

years, rather than electing by thirds. It is expected this work will continue into the forthcoming municipal year.

“How good actually is Thurrock Council?”

Councillors are residents of the borough too, and we have our own varied opinions on the matter. Some things are good; some not so good; some are excellent; some require improving. This year we investigated how Thurrock actually performs and whether we are in the right place yet to push Thurrock further into a more unknown, but equally exciting, future. Our key aims were:

- The Committee’s principle purpose was to start to identify what a “platinum standard” looked like in terms of customer service with residents.
- It wanted to cast an eye on the council’s performance and commitments to its “customers”
- It wanted to be a “doing” committee, not a Committee which just “noted” officer reports. Actions, not words!

One of the proudest changes to this year’s Corporate Committee, was the remodelling of the way we review performance:

- Performance indicators which are not hitting target for consecutive months and facing continued challenges are now reviewed differently – Directors/Heads of Service come to Committee and we discuss options, make recommendations, and the presenter then goes off to pursue what has been discussed, in an attempt to turn the trend back upwards.
- We took the stance that staff performance reviews were integral and linked to department performance and investigated ways these could be more aligned.

We also looked at four yearly elections of Councillors. We investigated the options in moving from an election-by-thirds model which we are using currently (where a third of the council are elected each year, and councillors have more choice over who is in office), to a single vote once in four years (where we vote for all 49 councillors for 4 years, and the voters will usually provide the councillors the answer who should be in office). This was extensive, well-balanced, and unnerving for councillors. Good – it was designed to be. Views were very diverse and often diametrically opposing – but collectively we agreed that Thurrock residents should actually be the ones to give us their views on what election model works best for them. This is the recommendation which will be pursued in the next municipal year.

“What is the Council’s role in theatre provision? What does “fairness in Thurrock” actually mean?”

The Committee also reviewed a number of independent reports and made recommendations for Cabinet. The future of the Thameside Theatre in Grays was a key discussion this year. As was the Fairness Commission report. Both reports were discussed, debated, and recommendations made. Some of the future decisions are not going to be easy; perhaps some of the hardest local government politicians will

ever make in Thurrock- it will come down to making some cross-party and timely decisions.

“Does our Council have the credentials already to be a “platinum-standard” Council?”

Thurrock clearly does a lot of things right. It would be easy for me as an opposing party politician to say we are not doing any of the right things. We have seen awards issued to Planning and other departments, who have moved forward in their capability in providing a “platinum-standard” service. However we looked into a number of potential ways to enhance the Council’s offer including staff training records, IT and Environmental Management.

“Is Thurrock’s budget book ready for the future?”

Of course, we reviewed the budget for this year, and assessed our ability to be impregnable from future changes. We supported the Adult Social Care precept unconditionally, and although there were some disagreements, the majority view was that the council tax contribution needed to increase by the maximum 1.99% too.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Clearly there is lots of “caring” about things in Thurrock. I will end by adding some thanks to all councillor colleagues who sat on the committee, and who engaged with activities designed to take the council, and ourselves, out of our comfort zones on many occasions. I am not one for patting my colleagues on the back unnecessarily, but there was some good cross-party collaboration – so thank you. Likewise to the report writers and speakers, I appreciate your work that you compiled and presented.

Can we be the best unitary authority in the UK? – Yes. It is ours to make happen; let’s do it.

Councillor Shane Hebb
Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny

The Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had a busy year scrutinising many emotive local issues, which has been particularly challenging against the backdrop of the considerable budget pressures faced by the adult social care service. Adult Social Care was required to deliver in-year reductions of £500,000 in 2015/16 as Thurrock faces cuts on a scale that has not been seen in the Borough before. Although to date most of these savings have been made through cuts and increased efficiency in back office functions; it is becoming increasingly difficult to find ways of making savings that do not impact on front line services. This is exacerbated by the changing demographic growth and that Thurrock's population of older people is growing and the complexities of people's needs are increasing.

At the start of the year the Committee heard that there were to be considerable reductions in the Public Health Grant for 2015/16 and at the same meeting an urgent item of business was raised for Members attention by the Chief Operating Officer of HealthWatch Thurrock on Coach House, a residential care home, which the providers Family Mosaic had served notice to the CCG.

Following the announcement by Central Government that it was placing £3.8 billion of existing health and social care funding into a single pooled budget to enable health and social care services to work more closely together, the Committee was keen to continually review and monitor the progress of the establishment of the Better Care Fund. This pooled fund required to be established by April 2015 and administered in line with a Section 75 agreement between NHS Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group and Thurrock Council.

One of the most significant legislative changes affecting Adult Social Care which the Committee considered the impact of was the introduction of The Care Act 2014, as Part 1 of the Act became operational in April 2015 and introduced a number of new duties and requirements for councils and their partners including a general duty of wellbeing, a duty to prevent, reduce and delay the need for care and support, and the duty to provide information and advice.

The future of the Thurrock Walk-In Service was an issue that received much press interest locally and Committee Members were keen to hear the summary of the findings and feedback from both pre-consultation and public consultation processes which informed the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) decision to close the walk-in service from April 2016 and reinvest the funds in four GP hubs across Thurrock.

The Committee valued the contributions from the representatives from HealthWatch and Thurrock Coalition, who provided important input on issues relating to patients' care in the Borough throughout the year. Their feedback was particularly welcome in

relation to the consultation on the proposed changes to the way Social Care was provided in Thurrock, which was received by the Committee in January 2016. At this meeting Members scrutinised the proposed actions to reduce costs and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of adult social care services, which affected the following four following key areas:

- Day Care for older people including the service at the Carers' Centre
- Charges for adult social care services
- Equipment and adaptations costing less than £50
- The provision of Extra Care Housing

First of all, I would like to thank the Officers and Members of the committee for their hard work over the past municipal year. Some of the meetings have gone on a bit and some have been a touch feisty but throughout, all committee members have been exemplary in their conduct. In a challenging year dominated by funding cuts and changes to adult social care the committee has been robust in its scrutiny of the issues and has always focused on achieving the best outcomes for the people of Thurrock.

Councillor Graham Snell
Chair of Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee have kept up-to-date with the Government's key policy changes that were announced in July 2015 and formalised in the Housing and Planning and Welfare Reform Bills 2015. Committee Members examined the impact of these changes on Thurrock and the key issues that in turn affected the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, which included:

- 1% reduction in social rents for four years from the 1st April 2016;
- "Pay to stay" proposals from 2017/18; and
- A requirement for local authorities to finance the cost of the expansion of the Right to Buy and associated discount to tenants in Housing Association Homes.

Committee Members have also monitored the Council's ambitious programme to improve the quality of Council owned homes within the borough to a high standard that supports the long-term viability of the asset and to build new affordable homes for current and future generations, such as through the Transforming Homes Programme. One of the challenges has been to review changes to existing housing investment and development programmes in order to deliver a balanced HRA to absorb the impact of more major changes in central Government policy.

In June 2015 the Committee reflected on the four main causes of homelessness in Thurrock, the impact of welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit on rates of homelessness and scrutinised the Homelessness Prevention Strategy which set out the plan for the prevention of homelessness and for securing sufficient accommodation and support for homeless residents or those at risk of becoming so.

Early in 2016 Members reviewed the Housing Allocations Scheme, which was in its second year, and recommended further amendments along with more detail to reflect recent additional legislative requirements. Such recommendations included:

- Procedural changes to how properties are advertised
- Local lettings plans for new developments on existing Council housing estates
- Pre-tenancy training for all new tenants
- Allowing tenants to under occupy 2 bedroom, older person properties, where there are no waiting applicants who meet the 2 bedroom criteria
- Discretion to award a welfare priority for homeless prevention

In November 2015 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a Call-In that had been received in relation to the Housing Estate Regeneration of Seabrooke Rise, specifically the future of the three Grays high rises – Butler, Davall

and Greenwood House. The Committee particularly welcomed the comments of local residents in its consideration of the Call-In, which highlighted the added value the public can bring to the scrutiny process in Thurrock.

I would like to thank all Committee Members and Officers for their hard work and contributions to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee over this past municipal year.

My thanks also go to the Housing Tenant Representative for her involvement and valuable input as a Thurrock tenant. Of the many items discussed at this year's Scrutiny Meetings, those that I am most proud of were the Housing Estate Regeneration Call-In, where we wanted to hear the comments of local residents and three tenants were invited to the November 2015 committee to express their views and the Local Lettings Plan that clarified which Thurrock Council tenants met the set criteria that could apply from the housing stock that was available.

A working group was also set up to which Members and Officers visited The Mears Group in Manchester who provide a rapid response and maintenance services to Thurrock tenants and saw first-hand how calls were handled on a day to day basis.

As is it clear from the above comments, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had a busy year with some very important agenda items. As to next year, I know the work programme is currently being prepared with even more interesting and vital items.

Many thanks again to all parties that took part and supported this very vital committee.

Councillor Cathy Kent
Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny

The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered and endorsed a number of wide ranging developments which are of great interest to Thurrock residents and the local business community this year, including the regeneration of Grays and improvements to Grays Rail Station.

One of the biggest issues that has come to the fore and been reviewed by the Committee are the changes to the c2c timetable, which was of significant public interest. In December 2015, c2c changed their train timetable train to increase capacity on their Thameside service and accommodate 3,000 more passengers during the morning peak. The changes were designed to leave most passengers better off, however there has been an unexpected surge in passenger numbers, leaving many stakeholders dissatisfied with the resultant service.

c2c representatives attended the meeting in January 2016, where the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to hear first-hand the reasons for the timetable changes, the nature of the operational difficulties that have resulted and the plans in place to respond to stakeholder concerns. This was a good example of the scrutiny process working and engaging with stakeholders to inform future timetable amendments, and a matter that is likely to remain of interest to Committee Members going forward.

Committee Members were also keen to scrutinise proposals for changing Local Bus Services and considered alternative ways of providing communities with the transport services required. This was particularly challenging, and Members were keen to continue support to local bus services that without financial support were likely to be cut due to the fact that some routes were not commercially profitably or at times had low levels of demand, principally in areas such as Fobbing, East and West Tilbury, Bulphan and Horndon-on-the Hill.

It has been my pleasure to have Chaired the Overview and Scrutiny committee during the last year. Thank you to all the other members of my committee for their contributions.

I would like to comment on the two main aspects that this committee are tasked to oversee. One is the internal working of this council, and the other, items that affect us of which we have little control over, but can influence.

As previously mentioned in the report, one of these was the removal of rural bus services that were likely to cause hardship. A really robust meeting primarily dealing with this considered public opinion and suggestions for a way forward. Pressure for a solution was applied and cabinet was asked to take a long look at reinstating a form of service that would help those in need. Thankfully this has now been implemented this year.

It is particularly heartening to be able to take our residents views of Regeneration proposals like those at Purfleet, Grays Town Centre and Tilbury.

Overseeing the development of a replacement for the current Thurrock Local Plan. This item is as yet in its formative stages but will become the dominant document that informs our future direction as a community. This committee has been involved with this process from the very beginning and has been able to comment and propose suggestions as to how our community can be really involved.

C2C were called in by this committee to explain the reasons for the dip in performance since Christmas. It is pleasing to see that C2C have recently announced that they will be providing more carriages on trains from October this year. This committee will continue to challenge underperforming organisations.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the officers who have worked to support this committee. I would also like to thank all the contributors to our committee, without their input our decision making would have been less effective.

Councillor Brian Little

Chair of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Budget Overview and Scrutiny

The Council set a balanced budget for 2015/16 having made some difficult decisions about where savings could be made. Pressures remain in the current financial year and are expected to escalate in the following years. The cumulative effect of £83.2m savings over 6 years now visibly impacts on communities and it will also make the Council's ability to make further savings increasingly challenging.

In July 2015 the cross-party Budget Review Panel was endorsed by Cabinet which held a series of meetings to inform the strategic approach to shaping the Council in this financial context with consideration of the complexity and scale of the challenge that lay ahead.

Group Leaders, Deputy Group Leaders, the Chief Executive and Head of Corporate Finance formed the Panel which was chaired by the Leader, and Portfolio Holders and Directors were invited to attend specific sessions.

The purpose of the Panel was to:

- Build and strengthen awareness and ownership of portfolio budgets and issues across Group Leaders, shadow portfolio holders and other opposition leads
- Consider and comment on the Council's draft 2020 Vision, the four change programmes, and the on-going bottom up review of Council functions
- To explore options for budget savings in either 2015/16 or 2016/17 to be taken forward through the autumn scrutiny process, ensuring proposals are broadly consistent with the 2020 Vision and direction of travel
- To refer to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny the task of overseeing the Budget Review Panel process

The Panel was not a decision making but areas identified by the Panel were drawn together to identify areas for public consultation and review by Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee taking an overview of the whole Shaping the Council programme. Scrutiny Committees held productive and engaging debates on a number of key issues in order to maximise efficiency savings to the authority and in February 2016 the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to comment specifically on two areas: the recommended increase in Council Tax; and the issue on bus subsidies, in part linked to the motion that was carried at the Council meeting on 25 November.

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 2015-16 the work of two Scrutiny Review Panels concluded, which had begun the previous year, the details of which are set out below.

Thameside Complex Review Panel

In July 2015 the Thameside Complex Review Panel issued its final report and recommendations following its comprehensive review to support the consideration of the options for the future of the services and the complex. The cross-party panel had been established in January 2015 by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee where it was felt the complex and its services were vitally important to Thurrock and needed proper consideration. As part of the review process a witness day was held to meet with voluntary sector tenants, service managers and theatre specialists in order for panel members to gain an insight into the challenges faced by the Thameside Complex and the benefits.

What became wholly evident during the review was the exciting potential to improve and modernise cultural provision in Grays and Thurrock. The panel made a number of conclusions, which included:

- That there was potential to modernise and improve the Museum, Library, Theatre and Registry Services. The Council should take the opportunity with relevant funding, if available, to improve services as much as possible.
- Services must remain accessible to all and close to transport links and other related amenities.
- That the theatre played an important role in the lives of many residents and community groups. However, there is potential to improve it to become a viable regional theatre attracting more popular acts with wide appeal.
- If the theatre offer was to be improved it must maximise its commercial revenue and not rely on Council funding.
- The theatre should remain in Grays as it is a key urban centre as well as helping to contribute to the economy of the town.
- The Thameside Complex is not suitable for the future aspirations of the services currently residing there.
- That there was no evidence that housing is being considered to replace the Thameside Complex and the Arts

These conclusions helped to formulate the recommendations the panel referred back to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then in-turn to Cabinet for a

decision in October 2015, which were presented by Councillor Graham Snell in his capacity as Chair of the Thameside Complex Review Panel. The recommendations included:

- 1. A site that represents the Arts should remain in Grays.**
- 2. The Council should endeavour to improve and modernise the library, museum and registry service whether this be in the Complex or in another location.**
- 3. Any theatre needs to cater for the community but also a variety of professional acts and productions. It should represent the aspirations of a competitive regional theatre.**

At the meeting, Cabinet accepted the conclusions set out within the panel's final report as a set of guiding principles when exploring future cultural provision at the Thameside Complex.

Supporting Pathways into Work for Young People

In November 2014 the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the Supporting Pathways into Work for Young People Review Panel to examine how Thurrock Council and its partners currently support young people into the workplace, particularly through teaching employability skills in education and the work experience offer in Thurrock.

The Task and Finish Group was primarily concerned with the 11-16 age bracket which is prior to sixth form / college education and the common age of taking on part time work. The group took evidence from local businesses, educational providers, and included the Thurrock Youth Cabinet in all meetings of the group. The group was comprised of Cllr James Halden (Conservative, Homesteads) as Chair, Cllr Graham Snell (UKIP, Stifford Clays), and Cllr Steve Liddiard (Labour, Tilbury St Chads).

In November 2015 the panel formulated its conclusions and issued its final report, which were later referred to Cabinet in January 2016 where it was presented by Councillor James Halden, as Chair of the Supporting Pathways into Work for Young People Review Panel, and subsequently agreed. The panel's final recommendations included:

- That work experience offers became a part of the published admissions information given to parents and students when deciding upon a school.**

- **That work experience quality become part of the education awards and the business awards.**
- **Thurrock Council to offer a small amount of premium provision work experience places as a part of a Borough wide award for young people's community service.**
- **Youth Cabinet and Thurrock Youth Services to support schools and young people who wish to shape their own work experience offer.**
- **Thurrock Council to continue to work with Ensign Buses and C2C regarding the associated travel costs of work experience.**
- **That a request be made to the Chair of the Thurrock Business Board for a future agenda item on Youth Employment and Work Experience, that takes account of the outcomes from the recent Business:Education Summit.**

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 2015-16 the Overview and Scrutiny Committees considered one Call-In as detailed below:

Housing Estate Regeneration, Seabrooke Rise

The future of the Seabrooke Rise Housing Estate was a matter of much interest this year with debate at various meetings, the submission of petitions by members of the public and the matter being subject to a Call-In.

In October 2015 Cabinet agreed not to award decant status to three Grays high rises – Butler, Davall and Greenwood House, but instead to note that continued consultation should take place with residents to include detailed design on alternative home provision to ensure residents were given a clear unambiguous set of choices. At this meeting it was also noted that the Council's new build development on Seabrooke Rise will be allocated in accordance to the Council's existing Lettings Policy and existing residents of the Seabrooke Rise high rise towers will not benefit from enhanced priority status at the current time, therefore Council explores a local lettings plan as a matter of urgency.

Following this meeting, Councillors Ojetola, Coxshall and Halden called in the recommendations of the Cabinet report 'Housing Estate Regeneration' (decision 01104415), in their capacity as three non-executive Members.

The Members who called-in the decision argued that the flats were not sustainable and did not represent 21st Century Britain, that a clear strategy needed to be in place that set out how the flats could be brought up to a decent homes standard or if they could not, to demonstrate a viable alternative option, such as demolition.

In November 2015 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the comments of the Call-In Members together with the views and comments of officers, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Lyn Worrall, and a number of residents of the Seabrooke Rise Estate who had also made representations at the earlier Cabinet meeting. Following a debate the Committee agreed to reject the Call-In with four votes to two, with the prevailing viewpoint that Cabinet had made a sound decision with the information available at its October meeting.

Lower Thames Crossing

In early 2016 the Government released an announcement following a planning exercise for a number of Thames Crossing location options in Thurrock. Highways England is currently consulting on options for a Lower Thames Crossing; a new road crossing of the River Thames connecting Kent and Essex in order to reduce congestion at the Dartford Crossing and unlock economic growth, supporting the development of homes and jobs in the region.

The assessment by Highways England led to a proposal which is a tunnel under the Thames located east of Gravesend and Tilbury, with three possible route options north of the river, and two south of the river, which would connect to the new crossing being identified.

With such a significant scheme being planned for Thurrock and the considerable impact it will have on residents, businesses and third sector organisations, the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee organised a witness session for businesses and community organisations during the day of 9 February 2016, as an evidence gathering session where a number of community forums, charities, residents and businesses had an opportunity to share their views on the proposals.

Speakers included but were not limited to, Bonners Residents Association, Woolings Close Community, Horndon on the Hill Society & Community Forum, Lower Dunton Group, Orsett Forum, South Essex Wildlife Hospital, CPRE (Campaign for Preservation of Rural England), Vopak/Greenergy, Port of Tilbury and residents from Baker Street (Orsett), Bulphan, Chadwell St Mary and King Edward Drive. Many questions were raised by these groups at the witness session, which included:

- Why option D was ruled out and could it be relooked at?
- Why the outer ring option was not being considered.
- What was the problem that the crossing was aiming to resolve? It was felt that the problem was revised as the consultation continued.
- How Highways England and the Government would ensure that community severance would not have a major impact on the local people and that people would not be isolated.
- Would houses be built next to the new road in the green belt?
- Would a 14% traffic reduction on the existing crossing be value for money?
- Would the new crossing require Police escorted tankers?
- Was there evidence that work had already begun on both sides of the river?

All interested parties were concerned about the flood risks and air quality impact on Thurrock residents' health and wellbeing. It was felt that the current options were not

long term sustainable solutions to traffic growth and that the new routes would not reach their full capacity in the near future. Interested parties also highlighted that statistics used by Highways England were out of date and they alternatively raised many positive aspects of option D. Residents and communities feared that the only wildlife hospital in the region based in Orsett would be affected including rare wildlife and that the green belt required to be preserved along with Grade 2 listed buildings.

Following this witness session an extraordinary meeting of the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held that was chaired by Councillor Brian Little and included an update on the outcomes of the witness session, a presentation by Highways England and information on Lower Thames Crossing Consultation Options. As part of this meeting a number of Members from all political parties made statements, including Councillors John Kent, Sue Little, Tim Aker, Gerard Rice, Oliver Gerrish and Lynn Worrall.

At the meeting the Chair of the Committee also read a written statement to Members which was produced by the South Basildon and East Thurrock Member of Parliament Stephen Metcalfe. The MP's statement specified that he remained firmly opposed to all the options, however if following the consultation Highways England were determined to press forward with a new crossing in Thurrock, it was stated that Thurrock must have confidence that this was a genuine consultation and not a public relations exercise. The Committee were informed that the MP would be holding a number of drop-in session events for residents to bring their concerns directly.

Highways England are also hosting a number of information sessions in addition to other events hosted by the local authority, prior to closure of the Highways England Consultation which is anticipated to close on 24 March 2016. With such a considerable issue affecting the lives of Thurrock residents this matter is likely to continue to be a topic high on the agenda for Overview and Scrutiny next year.

The Lower Thames Crossing witness session was an extraordinary event, allowing local residents, businesses and organisations to put forward their opinions on the proposals from Highways England. Thank you all for giving your time and making your points so succinctly.

I was Chairing this committee for the day and also the evening session for Thurrock Council members.

A consolidated report which also included responses from consultants appointed by Thurrock Council was presented and agreed at cabinet for adopting as Thurrock Councils formal response to the consultation proposal.

Many hours were spent setting up the witness day, producing minutes and finally proposals. Thank you to all involved, it was an extremely professional report with clear messages.

The consultation has now closed and further announcements are expected later in the year.

The strength of feeling against these proposals was evident in the first days of the consultation.

Many organisations have been formed to continue the campaign against these proposals. I support your aims and wish you well in your endeavours.

Lastly I would like to thank the members of my committee for their time and efforts over the consultation period.

Councillor Brian Little

***Chair of Lower Thames Crossing Witness Day and
Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee***

