



# The Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny in Watford Borough Council 2012/13

A report of the Scrutiny Committee Chairs

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## **1. Introduction and overview**

In 2012/13 the scrutiny structure comprised Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the over-arching committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, which was introduced at the beginning of the year. Community Safety Partnership Task Group continued to monitor the Community Safety Partnership. Task Groups which took place during 2012/13 were –

- Waste and Recycling (continued from 2011/12)
- Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework
- Management of Disabled Parking Bays
- Watford Community Housing Trust (to be continued into 2013/14)

The Annual Survey has been carried out and a summary of the results can be found in section 6.1 of this report.

A review of scrutiny was carried out during 2012/13 and a brief summary is included in section 6.2.

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs met twice with the Mayor and members of the Cabinet in 2012/13. Further information is available in section 6.3.

Officers have continued to attend the Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network, a network of officers from the County Council, the ten district councils, within Hertfordshire and neighbouring authorities in Bedfordshire. The network provides an opportunity to share scrutiny related information across the councils. Further details are provided in section 6.5.

## 2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### Membership:

Councillor Karen Collett (Chair)  
Councillor Asif Khan (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Nigel Bell, Sue Greenslade, Kareen Hastrick, Mark Hofman, Rabi Martins and Steve Rackett

The following councillors also participated in Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:

Councillors Jackie Connal (observer), George Derbyshire (as a substitute), Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (called in Executive decision), Peter Jeffree (as a substitute and observer), Stephen Johnson (observer), Malcolm Meerabux (observer) and Mo Mills (called in Executive decision)

The following Portfolio Holders attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:

Councillors Keith Crout (Portfolio Holder for Community Services), Derek Scudder (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services), Iain Sharpe (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Legal and Property Services) and Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services)

### 2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2012/2013

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on seven occasions this year. This included two meetings to consider called in Cabinet decisions. The Scrutiny Committee received reports on the following subjects –

- **Outstanding actions and questions** continued to be included as a regular report to the Scrutiny Committee. The report included all the actions and questions which had been raised at previous meetings. The actions and questions remained on the report until Overview and Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the responses and it was agreed the actions had been completed.
- **Performance updates** were presented on a quarterly basis. The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the performance of the Key Performance Indicators and other performance measures identified for review. At the meetings Members discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas. A continuing area of concern for Members was the performance of the Benefits Service. The Scrutiny Committee continued to monitor the service throughout the year. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services, the Head of Revenues and Benefits and the Director of Resources and Corporate Governance from Three Rivers District Council attended various meetings to provide updates on the service's performance. The Scrutiny Committee intends to continue monitoring the service throughout the 2013/14.
- **Forward Plan** was included as a regular item on the agenda. Members noted the additions and changes to the Forward Plan since the previous

meeting. Part way through the year the Government introduced the 'Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012'. The new Regulations effectively abolished the Forward Plan and replaced it with the requirement to publish a 28 day notice of all Executive key decisions, Officer Executive decisions and all Executive Part B (confidential and exempt) key and non key decisions. Partly due to the new Regulations the **Executive Decision Progress report** was developed. The report includes details of all proposed decisions and those decisions taken by the Executive and officers. It also includes details of consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee about any decisions which have not met the 28 day deadline or which needed to be dealt with under the urgency procedures. The report enables the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether the key decision procedure has been followed correctly and if not, whether a decision needs to be submitted to Council. This report is a regular item on the agenda.

- **Task Groups** – the Scrutiny Committee considered proposed topics for Task Groups and the responses from Heads of Service. Three new Task Groups were established during 2012/13, one of which completed its review within the Municipal Year. Further information is available in Section 5.
- **Review of previous reports** was regularly included on the agenda. The Scrutiny Committee received responses from Cabinet and checked the progress of recommendations from previous reviews. In some cases Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a further review in the future and in other cases Members agreed that the recommendations had been met. The reviews carried out in 2012/13 were –

The Way Ahead for Council Services (Cabinet response)  
Affordable Housing review (review update)  
Choice Based Lettings (review update)  
Neighbourhood Forums (review update)  
Hospital Parking Charges (review update)  
Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework  
(Cabinet response)

## 2.2 Call-in

Two meetings were held during 2012/13 to consider Executive decisions which had been called in by three non-Executive Councillors. Both meetings were chaired by Councillor Asif Khan, the Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### a) An update report on the Watford Health Campus

This Cabinet decision, considered at the meeting on 3 December 2012, was called in by Councillors Nigel Bell, Jagtar Singh Dhindsa and Mo Mills. Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the decision at its meeting on 20 December 2012. Two members of the public were invited to speak at the meeting on behalf of the Farm Terrace allotment holders. The Director of Strategy and Infrastructure, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust also attended the meeting and responded to

questions on behalf of the NHS Trust. Following the discussion the Scrutiny Committee agreed to uphold Cabinet's original decision.

b) Final decision on service re-design options for Parks and Open Spaces, Street Cleansing and Waste and Recycling (Part A and Part B reports)

This Cabinet decision, considered at the meeting on 3 April 2013, was called in by Councillors Nigel Bell, Jagtar Singh Dhindsa and Mo Mills. Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the decision at its meeting on 22 April 2013. A representative from Unison was invited to speak at the meeting and to provide Unison's views on the proposals within the report. Following the discussion the Scrutiny Committee agreed to uphold Cabinet's decisions.

The reports and minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on the Council's website – [Overview and Scrutiny](#)

## **2.3 Overview and Scrutiny Chair's commentary**

This is my first year as Chair of O&S and I feel that I have learned a lot in the process. I enrolled in some training with the Centre of Public Scrutiny (CfPS), along with some in house training for effective Chairing skills. Personally this has further heightened my enthusiasm for a more balanced and transparent approach to Scrutiny. Furthermore, in order to be a more effective Chair I felt it was important to have pre meetings with the Vice Chair to establish exactly what was expected from the review.

As you will see from this report the committee continues to review and monitor performance, ensuring accountability through challenge of decisions and actions, as well as shaping policy development. We have witnessed a period of unprecedented change in the delivery of local public services and so Scrutiny has had a more important role to play now more than ever. I am confident that our committee is robust and capable to meet any challenges which may come our way.

Hospital Parking Charges review update was disappointing. Key recommendations such as lowering the price for parking, introducing ANPR licence plate recognition, informing patients and visitors of concessions and improved signing had not been forthcoming. Eric Fehily Associate Director of Infrastructure spoke of major works to the hospital at present, as well as financial constraints. However the committee is optimistic that some of the recommendations will be incorporated at a later date. The committee agreed that the task group had conducted a good piece of scrutiny. Mr Fehily will be reporting back to the committee in June 2013.

At the Housing Benefit Review I was encouraged along with the committee that there had been improvement on the performance of the service. Officers were complimented for their transparency regarding resolving the number of claims and changes to claimants' circumstances. On hearing evidence of problems they faced, the committee members were pleased to hear that the service was now in a position to deal with the changes and the reduction in caseload. The service will be reviewed later in the year to ensure it is meeting demand.

One of our challenges was to actively involve the public from all areas of Watford to engage in the scrutiny process, giving them the opportunity to put their views across and be heard. One of our task groups looking at the Management of Disabled Parking Bays sent out 170 surveys and we were encouraged by the response of 99 residents; this was an exceptional turnout. The results indicated that many residents had encountered problems and had contacted their local Councillors rather than the Planning Department or Parking shop. Blue Badge Holders were not clearly informed of how parking regulations worked and, as a result of the task group, residents will now be informed and thanked for their participation. In addition this has been a learning curve for us all and has provided useful information for planning for the future. This clearly shows how important it is to investigate and communicate the actualities, so that we can deliver a more positive outcome for all.

I want to thank the Community Safety Partnership task group for taking a more strategic approach and concentrating on one specific topic at a time. One such topic was domestic violence which we know has been on the increase. A briefing took place where 14 councillors attended to learn of the effects that it has on women, men, teenagers and children alike. I was further encouraged when Cllr Steve Rackett, on becoming Chair of WBC, chose a charity, 'Behind Closed Doors' that promotes healthy relationships and how to avoid getting into violent ones. Well done to you all for yet another good piece of scrutiny.

### Scrutiny Review

As a result of a scrutiny survey a new task group proposal form was introduced and endorsed. The revised form is now clearer and concise when councillors, officers or members of the public propose a new topic. The review also identified the need for training for new Councillors on the role of Scrutiny; the follow up induction session with the new Councillors was well attended and was found to be useful for those interested in becoming members of the committee or keen to join a task group.

Challenges for the forthcoming year are as follows:

- To continue and encourage more public involvement.
- To make sure that the Scrutiny Review feedback is implemented.
- To ensure members are well versed regarding outsourced services work.

Lastly I would like to express my personal thanks to all the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Vice Chair, Chairs and members of all the task groups for their hard work and dedication over the past year. Moreover I would like to show my appreciation to all the officers in Legal and Democratic Services for their support, guidance and patience; we are indeed fortunate to have such expertise within this team. I extend my gratitude to all officers who work within the council for their knowledge and expertise which has assisted us in our work, external agencies and the whole community of Watford.

Councillor Karen Collett  
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2012/13

### 3. Budget Panel

#### Membership

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Chair)  
Councillor Steve Rackett (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Jeanette Aron, George Derbyshire, Sue Greenslade, Peter Jeffree, Asif Khan, Rabi Martins and Peter Taylor

The following Councillors also participated in Budget Panel during the year:  
Councillors Nigel Bell (observer), Mark Hofman (as a substitute), Stephen Johnson (observer) and Malcolm Meerabux (observer)

The following Portfolio Holder attended Budget Panel meetings during the year:  
Councillor Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services)

#### 3.1 The Panel's Work Programme for 2012/13:

The Panel met on six occasions during the year and considered the following:

- **Business Rates Retention** update was reported to the Panel, following on from its earlier discussion in October 2011. Neil Benn from CIPFA attended the meeting and gave a presentation to Members which explained the collection procedures at that time and the new scheme from April 2013. Members had several concerns which they voiced at the meeting. The Council's Economic Development Officer had provided information about the potential for Business Rate growth in Watford. Members had considered 'pooling' resources and did not rule it out completely, but it was felt more information was needed.
- **Localisation of Support for Council Tax** was discussed at three meetings, June, September and October. The Panel was kept informed of the Council's progress in devising a local scheme to support Council Tax payers. Members' views were sought on the consultation proposals. The Panel had favoured maximising the options to changes to Council Tax exemptions and discounts. Members were concerned about any changes which would have an impact on those people in receipt of Council Tax Benefit and that the responsibility for achieving the required savings should be placed on empty properties.

The Panel was kept informed of the progress of the consultation and received an interim report. Following the consultation Members were provided with details of the findings prior to a final scheme being developed and presented to Cabinet, which accepted Budget Panel's recommendation that current benefits claimants should not suffer.

- **Income Policy Review** was discussed in September. The Panel looked at the current income charging policy and other options that might be taken into account, for example commercial sponsorship. It had been felt that this had been a good starting point and that more detailed work could be undertaken at a future meeting.



- **The Final Outturn for 2011/2012** was considered by Budget Panel prior to it being presented to Cabinet. Members discussed the Reserves statement and whether it was possible to use reserves to reduce Council Tax. Members had been informed that a reduction would only be effective for one year and that the next year an increase would be required.
- **The Finance Digest Budget Monitor** was regularly considered by the Budget Panel. Members monitored the expenditure, income and pressures on services. The Panel also discussed overspend within certain services.
- **The Medium Term Financial Strategy** was considered at the meeting on 23rd October, which provided an overview of the financial issues affecting the Council over the next five years. The Panel was interested in the Council's Reserves and whether they might help to offset any overspend.
- **Review of Controlled Parking Zone Reserve** was carried out by the Panel. Members noted the current levels of income received by the parking service and the potential draw on the Parking Reserve for proposed traffic related schemes. The Panel discussed the levels of increase for parking permits set out in the report and its related papers. After a lively discussion Members considered that an increase of 10% for the first permit and 30% for a second permit would be reasonable. This recommendation was forwarded to Cabinet within the Fees and Charges section of the budget report in January and was ultimately agreed by Council.
- **Budget update** provided a progress report on revenue estimate preparation for the 2013/14 budget. The report highlighted known information about Central Government funding and the Collection Fund. Members were advised that Cabinet had agreed to adopt the national Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2013/14. This meant that it was not necessary to make reductions in benefit entitlement.
- **Shared Services Review** was presented to Budget Panel following the report's consideration at the Three Rivers and Watford Shared Services Joint Committee. Budget Panel broadly supported the strategy for achieving the residual £2.6 million of saving.
- **Update on Property** was provided at the last meeting of the Municipal Year. The Panel was informed about the projects the Property Team were involved in, including work with other Council departments. Members discussed the projects and the Council's property portfolio. The Head of Legal and Property Services and Property Section Head responded to Members' questions.
- **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2013/2016** was discussed at the January meeting prior to its consideration by Cabinet and Council. Members considered the various components of the report including fees and charges, reserves and the Capital Programme. The Panel's comments were forwarded to Cabinet.

### 3.2 Training

Two training sessions were organised and took place at the beginning of the meetings held in September and November.

The first related to the Corporate Recharge System. This session explained the background and current system for recharging support costs to individual services. Members were shown examples of how support costs were calculated. They were also informed how changes to service provision, for example outsourcing, had an impact and recharge support costs would have to be shared between the remaining council-run services unless the required level of support services was reviewed.

The second training session involved a presentation on local government budgets. The financial procedures and legal requirements were explained.

The reports and minutes for Budget Panel are available on the Council's website – [Budget Panel](#)

### 3.3 Chair/ Vice Chair's Commentary

This year has been another busy year for the Budget Panel with further cuts having been made by the Government.

I am pleased to say I thoroughly enjoyed Chairing the Budget Panel. The work carried out by the Panel is listed above.

The training sessions were organised for the benefit of new members on the Budget Panel and the feedback has been very positive.

All meetings attracted a very good attendance both from Panel members and interested member colleagues.

I feel that the Panel worked well with there being lively discussion on a number of occasions. It was generally felt that the political dimension had not intruded upon the ultimate decisions taken by the Panel.

Finally I would like to thank the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services, Councillor Mark Watkin for attending each meeting and answering questions. We would like to thank Bernard Clarke for all his hard work and providing experience and wisdom for the Budget Panel. I would like to wish Bernard Clarke all the best for his retirement and a very personal thank you for all his help to me as Chair. Thanks to all other officers who attended the meeting to present their reports and answer questions and my personal thanks to Sandra Hancock for her hard work/help.

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa  
Chair of Budget Panel 2012/13

#### 4. Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel

##### Membership:

Councillor Steve Rackett (Chair)

Councillors Shirena Counter, George Derbyshire, Sue Greenslade and Anne Joynes

One other Councillor participated in Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year:

Councillor Jackie Connal (observer)

The Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel was established following a recommendation by the Way Ahead for Council Services Task Group in 2011/12. This was endorsed by Cabinet at their meeting in March 2012.

The remit of the Panel is to scrutinise outsourced services and to monitor the performance of outsourced services on a regular basis. It is politically balanced and reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. At its meeting on 27 June 2013 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to extend the terms of reference by adding the following:

- To monitor performance and compliance of contractors who are delivering Council functions on behalf of the council
- To suggest improvements in service delivery and outcomes for citizens of Watford and the Council
- That the contracts the committee scrutinises be as follows:
  - Waste, Recycling, StreetCare Parks and Open Spaces
  - Leisure centres
  - Colosseum
  - Management of Hostels and Temporary Accommodation
  - The Parking Service
- That additional contracts be added as and when they are entered into

##### 4.1 The Scrutiny Panel's Work programme for 2012/13

The Panel met on three occasions and considered the following topics:

- **Quarterly performance indicators** update has been a standing item at all the meetings with regular reports provided by the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. The performance indicators included in the report have evolved as Members consider which would be most useful to monitor.

The Panel currently receives regular information including usage of the two leisure centres run by SLM, the number of hires and performances at the Colosseum run by HQ Theatres, and the numbers of penalty charge notices and updates on tribunal appeals for the parking service run by Vinci.

- **The leisure centre contract with SLM** was presented to the Panel, providing an overview of the contract and the monitoring arrangements that are in place in order to understand how the Council ensures the quality of the facilities. They discussed the financial position of the contract with officers and a representative from SLM.

The leisure centres had been scrutinised by the previous Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee in September 2010. The Panel also considered updates from officers on issues and actions raised by the previous review.

Members made recommendations to widen the performance information about SLM that the Panel receives, for an audit to be carried out of SLM staff qualifications and to receive updates on initiatives that are underway at future meetings.

- **The parking services contract with Vinci** was presented to the Panel providing an overview of the Council's contract with Vinci. Officers outlined the structure of the contract and the way performance was monitored and payments were made.

Members discussed the level of penalty charge notices, the level of income received through the service and the objective of parking enforcement. The Panel also discussed the Council's success at parking tribunals. There was consideration about problems experienced, particularly around schools, and Members asked for more information about work undertaken on this topic by a Task Group at Hertfordshire County Council.

The issue of irrecoverable write-offs in the service was raised and Members requested further data on similar authorities to Watford.

#### 4.2 Chair's Commentary

I would like to thank officers and members of the new committee for their contributions during the municipal year.

With the scrutiny of any Council service, Members may be tempted to use a committee session to follow through with individual casework but I am pleased to say the Panel has concentrated on overall performance issues of the contractors providing services to our Council.

We have instigated a number of new performance indicators to help improve services and in the case of the irrecoverable write-offs from parking offences, we have asked for comparative data from local authorities of a similar nature to Watford.

Councillor Steve Rackett  
Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel (2012/13)

## 5. Task Groups

### 5.1 Community Safety Partnership Task Group

#### Membership:

Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)

Councillors Jeanette Aron, Anne Joynes, Asif Khan, Ann Lovejoy, Kelly McLeod and Malcolm Meerabux

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group is a statutory Task Group set up to scrutinise the local crime and disorder partnership.

#### 5.1.1 The Task Group's Work programme for 2012/13

The Task Group met on three occasions and arranged an all-member briefing on domestic violence. The topics considered at the meetings were:

- **An introduction to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** was provided to the Task Group. The Chair of the CSP and the lead partner for each strategic priority attended the meeting. The Task Group received an update on the performance of the partnership and the targets in each strategic priority for the year.

There was a discussion about the monitoring and reporting of crime. The members of the partnership underlined the importance of publicising the 101 non-emergency number to residents.

Representatives from the Probation Service were in attendance and discussed how they worked with ex-offenders. The Task Group discussed levels of re-offending and the importance of role models.

The Community Safety Manager updated the Task Group on Watford's successful application for the Purple Flag Award for management of the night time economy.

- **Domestic violence** was selected as the main topic for scrutiny this year. Local agencies working with victims of domestic violence, including representatives from the Women's Centre and the Children's Centres attended the meeting.

The Task Group received an overview of the situation in Watford and the barriers and opportunities experienced by the agencies. The Chief Inspector explained the work that was being undertaken by the Police and how convictions had been increased.

The agencies also explained about the services they offered to victims and how they operated. The Task Group emphasised the role that Members had in being advocates for this issue. It was agreed that all members would benefit from hearing from the agencies involved and a briefing should be offered.

Following the meeting all members were invited to a briefing by the domestic violence agencies in Watford. 14 Members attended the briefing session.

- **Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment** was considered by the Task Group. The strategic assessment document allowed the partnership to review its priorities. The members of the partnership attended the meeting and provided an update on their priorities.

The Police reported on measures that were being undertaken to reduce crime in the town centre. The lead for the alcohol strategy from Hertfordshire County Council also reported on the progress for this priority.

- **The Police and Crime Commissioner** information was presented to the Task Group about the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The Chair of the CSP reported how an officer from the new PCC's office attended the partnership's Safer Watford meetings. The partnership had provided the Commissioner with information about the partnership and where funds were required. The Chief Inspector explained how the Police Service worked with the PCC.

#### 5.1.2 Chair's Commentary

Generally speaking, Watford is a safe place to live, work and play.

This is due in no small measure to the fact that all of the agencies involved in matters relating to community safety in the town work extremely hard individually and collectively.

That having been said, one factor that gives the Task Group some concern is the consistent message that came through from all agencies that the current programme of cuts will inevitably impact on their ability to deliver their strategic goals. The Task Group will continue to monitor this situation through dialogue with key members of the CSP.

The Task Group is also acutely aware that it is too early to gauge what additional pressures the changes to the benefits system will bring to bear on some of the members of the CSP. Early anecdotal evidence in the media suggests that there is likely to be an increase in homelessness and domestic violence.

As has been stated elsewhere in the report, the Task Group undertook a review of domestic violence in the town which demonstrated that the problem is more widespread than was generally appreciated by members. There is a strong case for taking this work forward through the Troubled Families Programme.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has supported the work of the CSP Task Group and urge all members to take a closer interest in Community Safety related matters. Members are invited to bring any concerns to the attention of the CSP Task Group through Jodie Kloss in Democratic Services

Councillor Rabi Martins  
Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group (2012/13)

## **5.2 Waste and Recycling Task Group**

### Membership:

Councillor Keith Crout (Chair for 2011/12) / Jeanette Aron (Chair for 2012/13)  
Councillors Sue Greenslade and Kareen Hastrick

The following Councillor also attended the Task Group:  
Councillor Derek Scudder, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

The Task Group originally started its work in 2011/2012. It reviewed the relevant statistics and carried out comparisons with other local authorities. During the course of the Task Group's work, officers undertook a review of waste, grounds maintenance and street cleansing which had culminated in a report to Cabinet on service redesign. The Task Group's final meeting was held in August 2012. At this meeting Members were updated on the current situation. During its work the Task Group had agreed that weekly collections should be maintained and that co-mingling should be introduced. The Task Group had, however, found it difficult to make any formal recommendations due to the ongoing service redesign work. A final report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2012.

A copy of the Task Group's report is available from the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

## **5.3 Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework Task Group**

### Membership:

Councillor Jeanette Aron (Chair)  
Councillors Ian Brandon, Sue Greenslade, Stephen Johnson, Anne Joynes and Rabi Martins

The subject for this Task Group had been put forward by officers from Community Services. The Task Group worked with officers during their development of the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework prior to it being made available for public consultation. Following the consultation the Task Group was invited to review the feedback and its comments were reported to Cabinet when the new framework was agreed.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be reviewing the Task Group's recommendations during 2013/14 and considering whether they have been incorporated into the new framework.

A copy of the Task Group's report is available from the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

## **5.4 Management of Disabled Parking Bays Task Group**

### Membership:

Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)

Councillors Nigel Bell, Ian Brandon, Karen Collett and Sue Greenslade

The following Councillors also participated in this Task Group:

Councillor Helen Lynch and Mo Mills

This Task Group had been suggested by Councillor Rabi Martins, following information from residents. Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the Task Group at its meeting on 21 November 2012. The Task Group has held three meetings in total. A major part of the review was a residents' survey which was sent to all residents who were recorded as having a 'disabled' marked parking bay in front of their property. There was a 58.2% response rate to the survey, with many of the residents adding extra comments.

The Task Group agreed six recommendations and the final report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 27 June 2013. The final report is to be forwarded to Cabinet in September for its comments. Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Executive's comments and consider when it wishes to review the Task Group's recommendations.

## **5.5 Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group**

### Membership:

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)

Councillors Karen Collett, Jackie Connal, Stephen Johnson and Anne Joynes

Other Councillors who have so far participated in this Task Group:

Councillors Ian Brandon and Kelly McLeod

This Task Group was agreed at the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2013. Councillor Asif Khan had suggested this topic following a number of comments he had received from residents within his ward.

The Task Group was asked to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2013 with its final report. The Task Group held its first meeting and agreed that it wanted to receive feedback from residents prior to meeting the Housing Trust. A drop-in session for Housing Trust tenants took place on 30 May 2013 and was attended by approximately 25 tenants. Further Task Group meetings will be arranged, including a meeting with representatives from the Housing Trust. The Task Group has agreed that its work will not be completed in time for Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June and will therefore provide an update to the meeting with the intention of completing its work in July 2013.



## **5.6 Other Scrutiny Suggestions in 2012/13**

There has been one other scrutiny suggestion put forward during the year which has been agreed but has yet to be started. Councillors Steve Rackett and Asif Khan proposed a Member-led scrutiny of the Council's property assets. Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that a Task Group should be set up to commence in September 2013.

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group has two scrutiny suggestions it is currently considering whether to progress further. In order for the Task Group to make a decision some preliminary work has been undertaken and the results will be reported to the Task Group during 2013/14. The first suggestion was about tenants' and residents' associations and how they engaged in community safety matters. Three different questionnaires have been drawn up, which have been forwarded to Councillors, Hertfordshire Constabulary and a wide range of community groups. The results of the survey will be presented to the Task Group to enable it to consider whether a full review is necessary. The other suggestion is related to the Probation Service and the support given to ex-offenders. Officers are suggesting to the Task Group that the Probation Service be invited to a meeting to discuss the issues raised on the scrutiny proposal form.

The reports and minutes of all scrutiny meetings are available on the [Council's website](#).

## **6. Other Scrutiny work**

### **6.1 2012/13 Scrutiny Survey Results**

An annual scrutiny survey is carried out and people and organisations who have been involved with scrutiny during the preceding year are asked to participate. This includes councillors, officers and members of the public or representatives from external organisations who have attended as guests and witnesses.

#### **Councillors' survey**

Of the 37 councillors (including the Mayor) in Watford Borough Council, 17 have completed the survey. 12 out of the 21 Councillors who participated in a scrutiny committee or task group during 2012/13 completed the survey. The results of the survey showed that:

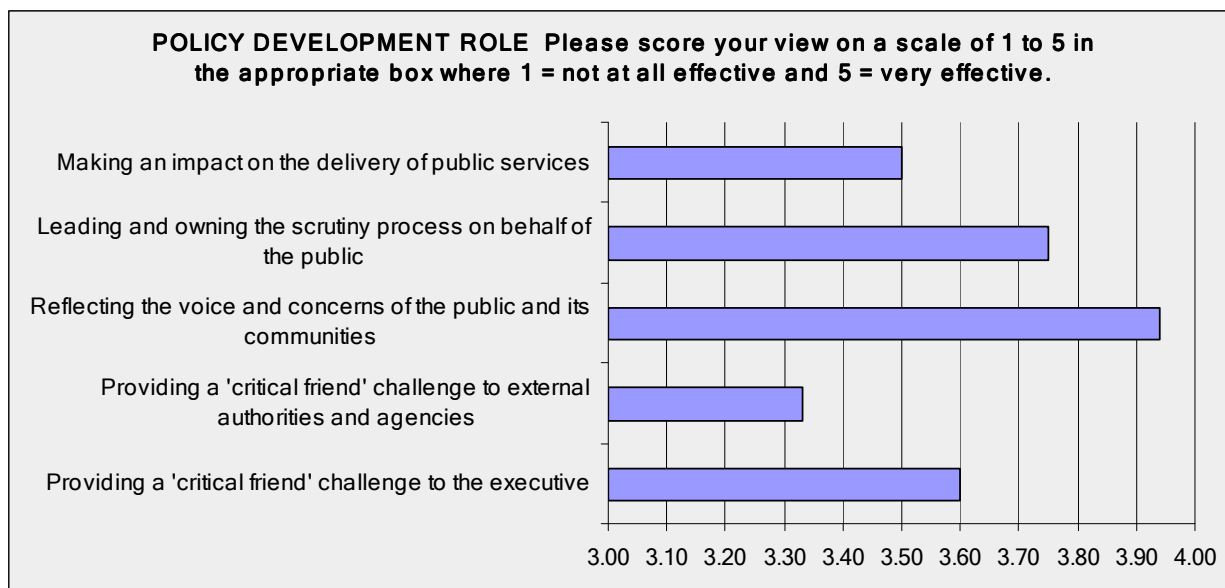
Two reasons were given why Members had not taken part in scrutiny during the year. One of the respondents was a member of the Executive. The reason given by the three other respondents was that they had no time or had other commitments.

Members were asked to rate how effective they felt different aspects of the scrutiny work were in the five key areas identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

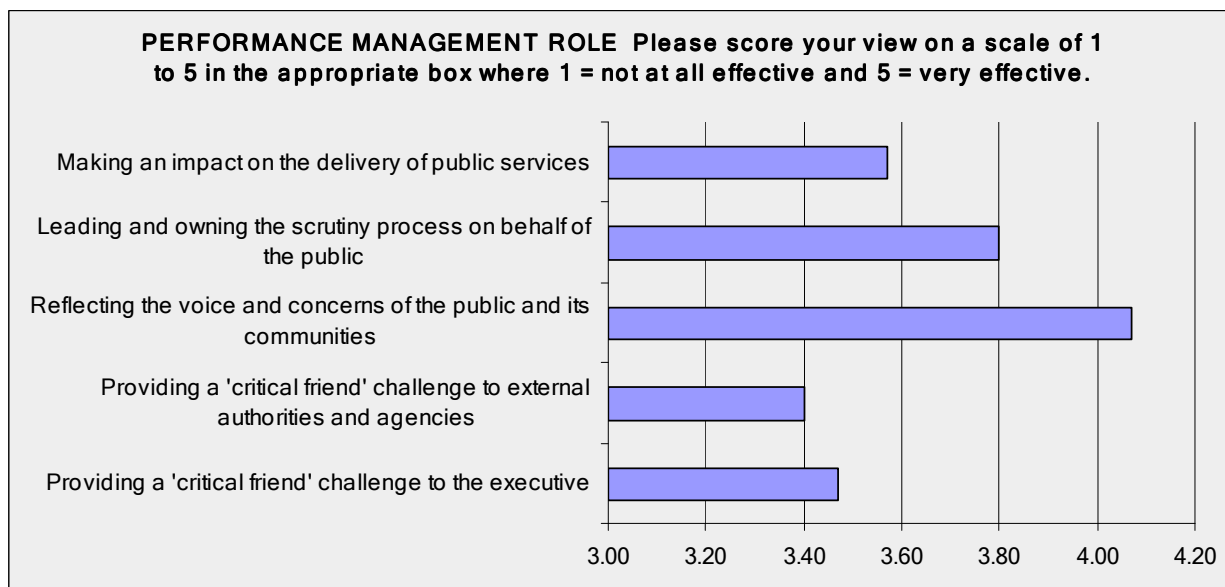
- Making an impact on the delivery of public services
- Leading and owning the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to external authorities and agencies
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to the executive

16 of the respondents completed these questions. The scores were out of 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. All the aspects of scrutiny work received a rating average of 3.07 or higher. This showed a small increase of 0.07 when compared to the 2011/12 survey results. The individual scrutiny areas are explored further in the following graphs.

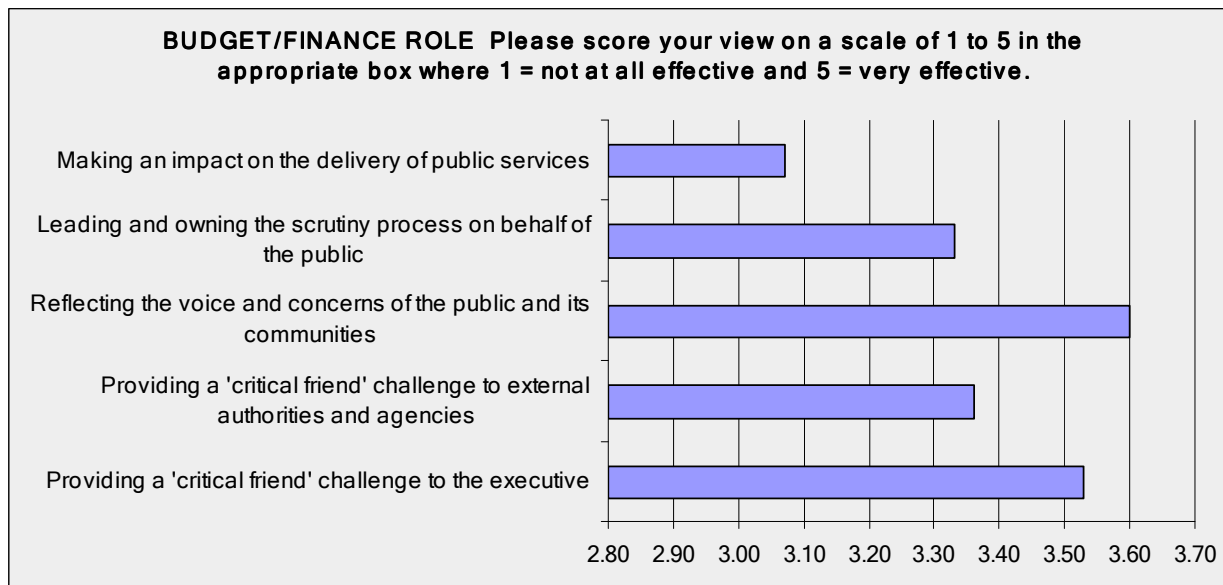
The first graph below shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Policy Development** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.33 and the highest was 3.94. This shows an improvement on the 2011/12 results, which were 3.00 and 3.38 respectively.



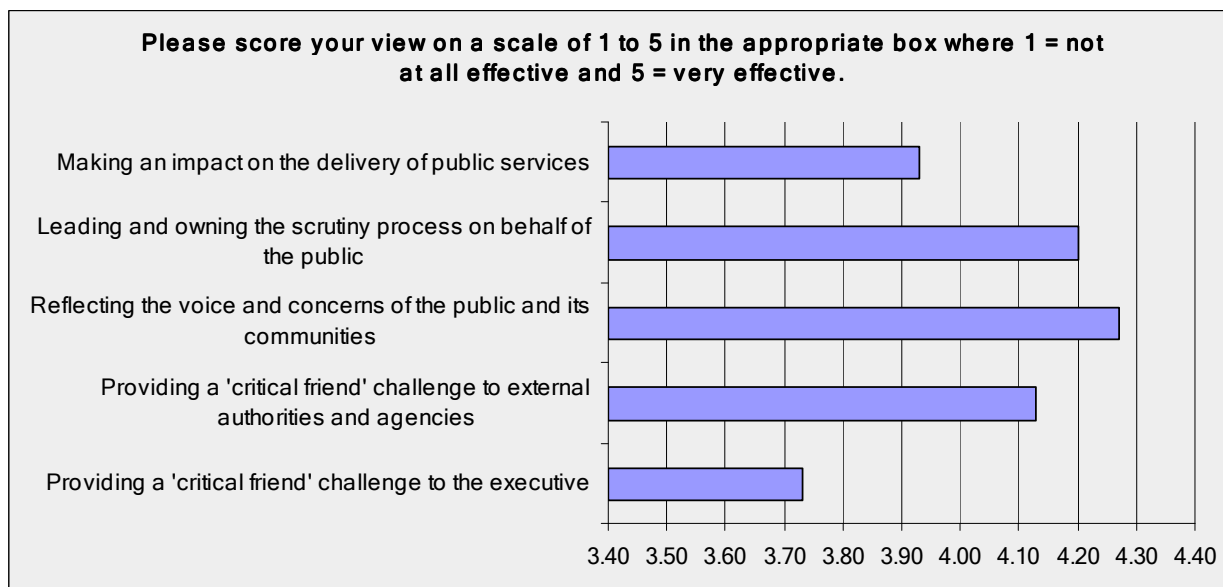
The second graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Performance Management** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.40 and the highest was 4.07. This shows an improvement on the 2011/12 results, which were 3.00 and 3.38 respectively.



The third graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Budget and Finance** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.07 and the highest was 3.60. This shows a small decrease in Members' views on the effectiveness in this area of scrutiny when compared to the 2011/12 results, which were 3.14 and 3.65 respectively.



The final graph shows the average rating for each aspect for **Task Groups**. The lowest rating average was 3.73 and the highest was 4.27. This shows an improvement on the 2011/12 results, which were 3.71 and 4.05 respectively.



Members were asked for their views about how scrutiny could be improved in the future. Shown below are some of the comments received. Democratic Services' responses are shown in italics.

- “Members given an opportunity to comment on the findings/recommendations of Task groups at an open meeting.”

*All Task Groups produce a final report and this is presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the report being forwarded to appropriate recipients. All Councillors are informed by email when an Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda is published. The Task Groups' reports are discussed in public and all Members are welcome to attend the Scrutiny Committee and, if approved by the Scrutiny Committee, speak on an item.*

- “A report of topics and findings from Chair of group in Members' Bulletins and at group meetings.”

*Democratic Services can provide a regular update on Task Groups in the Members' Bulletin. This will be introduced in 2013/14. A Task Group's findings are contained in its final report which is presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Please see previous response.*

- “I feel we need to engage the public more. This can be used as part of the Council using their communications team to highlight certain topics in order to make topics reach a wider audience.”

*As part of the Watford Community Housing Trust review, Democratic Services has worked with Communications to highlight the review and the open meeting, inviting residents to come along and speak to the Councillors about their experiences when contacting the Housing Trust. A news article was placed on the Council's website and a press release was sent out, which subsequently appeared on the Watford Observer's website.*

*Democratic Services intends to develop this further as suitable scrutiny topics arise.*

- “Maybe a suggestion box open to WBC staff and residents who probably have a better idea of the urgency of topics in the Customer Service Area or advertised in the Watford Observer as way of opening up the process and making it from the outset more transparent.”

*Democratic Services acknowledges that this area needs to be developed further.*

- “It would be lovely to have some form of in house scrutiny briefing / session / education to see what can really be achieved by knowing what to look for, the right questions to ask and whether something can be achieved that is worthwhile to all in bringing forward subjects for scrutiny.

*Section 6.4 provides information about the scrutiny session held at the follow*

*up induction for new Councillors during 2012/13. If Members have any training requests they should contact the Member Development and Civic Officer who will look for appropriate opportunities.*

### **Survey of officers**

This survey, similar to the Councillors' survey, was completed by six officers. The survey showed that four of the officers, who responded to the survey, felt that they understood their role and had been appropriately briefed by the Committee and Scrutiny Team.

During the year one officer had proposed a scrutiny subject which was taken forward to a Task Group. The officer has responded that they had been satisfied with the outcome of the Task Group's work.

When asked how scrutiny could be improved one officer commented "more discussion with services about what scrutiny is trying to ascertain and how this could best be carried out". The Democratic Services team currently tries to involve the relevant service as early as possible. This matter will be considered for further development.

### **Survey of members of the public and external organisations**

This survey was completed by seven people who had been guests and witnesses at Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Task Groups. This was the same number of responses compared to the 2011/12 survey.

Five of the respondents felt that they had been well briefed before attending the meeting and two had responded "partially". Six of the respondents stated that they had understood the purpose of the meeting and their role, but further information about other attendees and the full remit of the meeting would be helpful. It is also apparent from some of the comments that the people attending the meetings did not receive any information afterwards; Democratic Services will endeavour to develop this further over the coming year.

One person has made a suggestion for a scrutiny topic. Democratic Services will contact the person and ask them to complete a scrutiny suggestion form, which will then be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

## **6.2 Scrutiny Review**

The Scrutiny Review examined the scrutiny structure since its introduction in May 2011. The report explained about the changes to the staffing structure that had been implemented as a result of service prioritisation. It referred to new Regulations which came into effect on 10 September 2012 and how it affected scrutiny. The report introduced the Executive Decision Progress Report which provided Overview and Scrutiny Committee with details of proposed key decisions and all Executive decisions that had taken place, including those which had been taken by officers. An updated version of the Scrutiny Proposal Form was introduced. The new version would provide a complete history of a suggestion

from the initial proposal to the monitoring of recommendations carried out by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition the review incorporated the suggested improvements which had been put forward in the 2011/12 annual scrutiny survey. The final section of the review contained the views from the 2011/12 and 2012/13 Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2012. Members had discussed the contents of the review and it was felt that the Executive Decision Progress Report was clearer than the previous report on the Forward Plan. Some concern was raised about the new structure and the loss of the dedicated scrutiny officer role.

The report was then presented to the Joint Cabinet and Scrutiny meeting in April 2013 and discussed by the Mayor and the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

### **6.3 Cabinet/scrutiny meetings**

The Joint Cabinet Scrutiny meeting comprises the Mayor and her Cabinet and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.

Two Joint Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings were held during 2012/13. The first meeting in July 2012 reviewed the scrutiny work programmes for the year and received an update on the current Task Groups. The second meeting took place in April 2013. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee updated the meeting on scrutiny's progress throughout the year. There was a further update on the Task Groups which had been carried out during the year and details of two new suggestions which had been approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March. The final item was the Scrutiny Review, which had been completed during 2012/13 and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2012. Further information about the Scrutiny Review is shown in paragraph 6.2.

### **6.4 Scrutiny Training**

As part of the new Councillors' follow-up induction, a session was held on "Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny at Watford Borough Council". The training session explained the background to scrutiny and how it is implemented at Watford Borough Council. It covered how Members could submit a suggestion for scrutiny and how the suggestions progressed to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a decision on whether or not to set up time limited Task Groups to carry out a review into the suggestion. The final part of the meeting referred to call-in; what 'call-in' meant, who could call in a decision and the options open to Overview and Scrutiny Committee when they considered the called in Executive decision.

During the year the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended a Parliamentary session, which had been organised by the CfPS, and she also attended the Members' Academy organised by the CfPS Annual Conference.

Councillor Taylor attended a Budget training session at St Albans District Council.

## 6.5 Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network has continued to hold meetings throughout 2012/13. The group monitored the introduction of the Police and Crime Panel. Each authority's work programmes are circulated to the other councils; this enables officers to see what else is being scrutinised around the county. It enables officers to share experiences and feedback from any training they have participated in.

For further information on this report or copies of the final reports produced by the Task Groups, please contact -

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