Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny in Watford Borough Council 2014/15

A report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer and Scrutiny Committee Chairs

1. Introduction and overview

In 2014/15 the scrutiny structure comprised Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the over-arching committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. Community Safety Partnership Task Group continued to monitor the Community Safety Partnership. Task Groups which took place during 2014/15 were –

- Property Review (continued from 2013/14)
- Controlled Parking Zones Policies Task Group

The Annual Survey has been carried out and a summary of the results can be found in section 6 of this report.

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs met on one occasion with the Mayor and members of the Cabinet in 2014/15. Further information is available in section 7.1.

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 and training across the councils. Further details are provided in section 7.5.

In 2014/15 there was a slight decrease in councillor involvement in scrutiny. 27 out of 36 councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting. 21 Councillors had participated in a scrutiny meeting as a member or a substitute. Four Portfolio Holders attended scrutiny meetings to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive. Two Councillors had attended meetings solely as observers and participated when permitted by the scrutiny committee or panel.

2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership:
Councillor Karen Collett (Chair)
Councillor Jagtar Dhindsa (Vice Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Nigel Bell, Sue Greenslade, Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes, Rabi Martins and Darren Walford

The following Councillors also participated in Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:
Councillors Peter Jeffree (observer), Asif Khan (substitute and Chair of Budget Panel), Kelly McLeod (substitute and Chair of Community Safety Partnership Task Group) and Peter Taylor (substitute and Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel)

The following Portfolio Holders attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:
Councillor Stephen Johnson (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2014/15

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions this year. 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 response 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. It was noted that the number of indicators presented to Overview and Scrutiny had significantly reduced since the introduction of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.

- **Executive Decision Progress report** was included as a regular item on the agenda following its introduction in 2011/12. The report included details of all proposed decisions and those decisions taken by the Executive and officers. It also included details of any consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee The Chair is consulted about any decisions which have not met the 28 day deadline or which need to be dealt with under the urgency procedures. The report enables the Scrutiny Committee to consider whether the key decision procedure has followed correctly and if not, whether a decision needs to be submitted to Council. The Scrutiny Committee was provided with links to the relevant Cabinet reports and minutes as requested.

- **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee** continued to be included as regular item on the agenda in 2013/14. The Council's appointed representative for 2014/15, Councillor Jeanette Aron, provided Members with

an overview of the work carried out by the Health Scrutiny Committee. Full details of the Scrutiny Committee are available on the County Council's website.

- **Updates from Budget Panel, Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and Community Safety Partnership Task Group** were provided by the relevant Chairs, either in person or in writing. The updates enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be aware of the work being undertaken by the other Scrutiny Panels and Task Groups.

- **Task Groups –**

  Property Task Group continued during 2014/15.

  Controlled Parking Zones Policies was set up and its work completed during the year.

  Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) was approved and carried out its review during the latter stages of the year.

  Further information about the Task Groups can be found in Section 5.

- **Review of previous reports**, during the year 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 2014/15 were –

  Small Grants Fund – A review of the Fund for the period May 2013 to March 2014 (review update)
  Watford Community Housing Trust
  (Housing Trust review update)

- **Fly tipping trends and service provision** was reported to the Scrutiny Committee following a request during discussion about the relevant performance indicators in June. The Environmental Crime officers gave a presentation on the role of the team, the regulations relevant to fly tipping and enforcement.

- **WBC Housing Services** moving forward was presented to Overview and Scrutiny. The report set out how the service was moving forward and covered different parts of the service including Households in temporary accommodation, number of rough sleepers in Watford, new build homes in Watford and the number of households accessing private rented sector accommodation.

2.2 Call-in

There were no call-ins of Executive decisions during 2014/15.

The reports and minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on the Council's website – Overview and Scrutiny

2.3 Chair's commentary

The Overview and Scrutiny committee continues to review services; scrutinising policy, performance and progress throughout.

One of the Presentation reports that the committee welcomed was that of the Head of Community and Customer Services which highlighted the work of the council's environmental crime team and functions as to how fly tipping is regulated and enforced. It was clear that our officers considered each case, either in a formal way or informal depending on the circumstances. In addition the team work with other departments and agencies to assist with investigations and to educate those who fly tip. Furthermore, this message is taken into schools and to land owners offering information and clear advice. The Head of Community and Customer Services provided us with a presentation relating to current housing trends, areas such as homelessness, temporary accommodation and private sector tenancies were discussed. The committee will continue to monitor the pressures that have made demands on the service throughout the year.

One of the task groups set up on the recommendation of officers was the review of Watford Borough's Council's Controlled Parking Zones. Officers wanted to resolve common issues raised by members of the public which needed clarity. The task group was to review:

- Current policies
- Councillor views
- Resident views and comments
- Business and Public views.
- Officers' within the service views.

This group was able to take their recommendations to Cabinet who agreed with the new proposals so making the rules and policies fit for purpose.

The Committee continues to receive reports from Outsourced Services Panel, Budget Panel and the Community Safety Partnership Task Group. This is so all members are updated on PIs, topics and policies. It is very important for us to be involved with decisions at an early stage to apply real influence and play the role of a 'Critical Friend' I feel that O&S has maintained those principles.

I and the committee agreed to look at The Corporate Plan in order to review other services due to the fact many of them are now outsourced and these will be incorporated this year. These will include Events, Watford Museum and Social Media.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Vice Chair Cllr Dhindsa and all members of O&S for all their hard work and support over the year. Moreover, my thanks to all the officers at WBC, outside agencies, stakeholders and members of the public.

Councillor Karen Collett
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2014/15

3. Budget Panel

Membership

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)
Councillor Anne Joynes (Vice Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Shirena Counter, George Derbyshire, Jagtar Dhindsa, Sue Greenslade, Rabi Martins and Peter Taylor

The following Councillors also participated in Budget Panel during the year: Councillors Karen Collett (as a substitute), Jackie Connal (observer), Mark Hofman (observer), Helen Lynch (as a substitute and observer) and Tim Williams (as a substitute)

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

3.1 The Panel's Work Programme for 2014/15:

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

- **The Final Outturn for 2013/2014** was considered by Budget Panel prior to it being presented to Cabinet. This report is presented annually to Budget Panel. Members discussed several areas in depth, including the increases to the reserves, variations to the relocation costs for the Hurling Club and employee costs related to the Veolia contract, income from Intu for the shopping centres, the use of agency staff in Shared Services particularly Revenues and Benefits and the increase in costs for ICT. The recommendations to Cabinet were agreed.

- **Watford Economic Growth and Delivery Assessment** was presented to the Panel by the Economic Development Manager and the Head of Regeneration and Development. Members were informed about the key employment sectors in Watford, the town's role in the region, future growth scenarios for Watford and the potential for new jobs. They discussed the redevelopment of areas including Watford Business Park and the area around Watford Junction. It was noted that an Economic Development Strategy was to be developed.

- **Property Rents** was brought to the Panel for information and discussion. Members were informed about impacts on the Council's income. Areas covered in the discussion included Intu, Watford Business Park, rent recovery, occupancy rates across the Council's portfolio and the property review that had recently been completed.

- **The Finance Digest Budget Monitor** was regularly considered by the Budget Panel. Members monitored the expenditure, income and pressures on services.

- **Fees and Charge 2015/16,** the draft report was reviewed by the Panel. The Panel welcomed the fact that many of the charges would not be increased in the new year. Members discussed the proposals to increase the charges for

Cheslyn Gardens, the removal of graffiti from private properties and special collections. The Panel recommended to Cabinet that there should be no increase in the charges for special collections.

- **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2014/2018 and Treasury Management Strategy 2015-2019** was discussed at the January meeting prior to its consideration by Cabinet and Council. Members considered the various components of the report including revenue estimates, reserves and the Capital Programme. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.

3.2 **Training**

There were no specific training sessions included in this year's work programme.

The reports and minutes for Budget Panel are available on the Council's website – Budget Panel

3.3 **Chair's Commentary**

With the government's continued program of austerity leading to local government finances being squeezed and paradoxically council services being used more than ever, it has never been more important to scrutinise the finances of the council. The committee has taken on this role very well, with members analysing the council's finances robustly. It has been absolutely clear that there is a need for the council to maximise its revenue and be less reliant on central government grant; this has been the ground work for 2014-15 of the panel.

Going forward, the panel will look at ways in which the council can increase its revenue through a more entrepreneurial approach. With local government finances looking more uncertain, it's important for council's finances to be on a sustained and surer footing.

Councillor Asif Khan
Chair of Budget Panel 2014/15

4. Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel 2014/15

Membership

Councillor Peter Taylor (Chair)
Councillor Kareen Hastrick (Vice Chair)
Councillors Counter, Dhindsa, Greenslade, Joynes and Martins

The following councillors also participated in the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillors Jeanette Aron, Karen Collett and Seamus Williams (substitutes) Councillor Asif Khan (observer).

The following Portfolio Holders attended Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillors Derek Scudder (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Strategy and Client Services) and Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Democracy and Governance).

Councillor Matthew Bedford, Lead Member for Shared Services at Three Rivers District Council also attended a number of the meetings which related to shared services.

The remit of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel is to scrutinise services which have been externalised and to regularly monitor the performance of these services. It is politically balanced and reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4.1 Work programme

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

1. The Shared Services Lead Authority Model and terms of reference

In April 2014, there was a change to the way that the shared services with Three Rivers District Council are delivered. Watford Borough Council is now responsible for delivering ICT and HR services which are sold to Three Rivers. Three Rivers is responsible for delivering Revenues and Benefits and Finance and Watford buys these services. The new model of governance means that the shared services were brought into the remit of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.

The Panel received a presentation covering the changes to the services at their first meeting in July. The terms of reference had also been amended as a result and the Panel reviewed these changes.

2. Quarterly performance indicators

The Panel has received regular performance reports provided by the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. As a result of the changes to the governance of shared services, the performance indicators related to these four services are now also reported to OSSP.

In addition to the indicators for the Veolia environmental services contract, the SLM leisure centres contract, the Colosseum and the parking service, new indicators that the Panel have oversight of include:

- ICT availability to users during core working hours

- ICT Helpdesk response times
- Sickness absence
- Average time to process housing benefits claims
- Collection rates of council tax and business rates

Indicators relating to the Finance service are monitored by the Budget Panel as part of the Finance Digest.

The Panel continues to use their in-depth review of services to suggest new indicators for monitoring.

3. Revenues and Benefits

This service had previously been scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Head of Revenues and Benefits attended OSSP on two occasions.

At the first meeting in September, he updated the Panel on outstanding issues in the service which included communication with residents, the impact of issues with the IT systems; benefit overpayments and how delays in the service were being minimised.

One issue which arose from the meeting in September was Council tax collection and recovery and officers returned to discuss this topic with the Panel in February 2015. The Panel discussed the progress made on benefit overpayments. Officers also responded to questions related to the impact of the ICT service on Revenues and Benefits. Councillors asked about how contact was made with people who were in arrears. There was also a discussion about the use of bailiffs and how this was overseen.

The Panel congratulated Revenues and Benefits on the service improvements and agreed to keep a watching brief on progress.

4. Parks and Streets

The Council's contract with Veolia, which covers both waste and recycling and parks and streets, is part of the Panel's remit for oversight. Having reviewed waste and recycling on a couple of occasions, the Panel wished to concentrate on parks and streets and officers attended in November to make a presentation to the Panel.

The Panel raised their areas of concern and interest with officers; these included fly tipping, overgrown vegetation and Green Flag awards. Members also wished to discuss how the levels of street cleansing were measured and the role of Council officers.

A number of actions were raised to investigate different issues around the Borough raised by members of the Panel.

5. ICT

The Council's ICT contract with Capita had also been added to the OSSP terms of reference. As there had been a number of concerns about the performance of the service, officers and representatives from Capita attended two meetings.

The discussion at the meeting in October centred on the programme for improvement and the associated milestones. Representatives from Capita updated councillors on how the staffing of the contracts would be restructured and improved. They also reiterated their commitment to the contracts and to ensuring improvements.

Members discussed the Modernise IT programme which would introduce hardware replacement cycles as well as an upgrade to the operating systems. A project was also underway to review the Council website.

An update on the ICT contract was requested and reported in February 2015. The Panel expressed some continued dissatisfaction with the service which was acknowledged by Capita who underlined that they were investing heavily and were aware of the issues. The Panel were updated on the improvements made in the number of outstanding calls and in the staffing contracts.

Council officers informed the Panel of the actions which had been taken. The way that the contract was monitored and the options for the Council were outlined.

6. SLM Leisure Centres

SLM manage the Council's two leisure centres and officers attended the meeting in January to update councillors on how the contract was monitored. They discussed how the targets were set and reported.

Representatives from SLM also attended the meeting and provided a presentation. Councillors were particularly interested in customer feedback and how this was undertaken. The standard of cleaning and review of equipment was also discussed and SLM outlined the improvements which were being made. They also highlighted partnership initiatives including with local healthcare professionals.

7. Site visits

This year, the Panel felt it would be useful to undertake visits to a number of sites which were important in the delivery of outsourced contracts. This enabled Members to increase their understanding of the operations and to meet key members of staff.

A site visit was undertaken to the depot on Wiggenhall Road which was Veolia's base particularly for the waste and recycling service. Councillors also visited Woodside Leisure Centre with representatives from SLM.

The reports and minutes for Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel can be found on the Council's website – Outsourced Services Scrutiny

4.2 **Chair's Commentary**

In our meetings this year we looked in detail at a number of the council's outsourced services and how these were being managed. Significant progress has been made in Revenues and Benefits and the Committee recognised that the Veolia and SLM

contracts are being well managed overall. Members remain concerned about the ICT contract with Capita and this was the focus of two of our meetings. I would anticipate that the Panel will want to revisit this contract again in the coming year.

On behalf of the Panel, I would like to thank all the officers involved for their hard work and support, which has ensured that the panel has had a very successful year. I would also like to thank all those who run outsourced services for facilitating visits and for attending our meetings. Finally, I would like to thank all the councillors who participated in our work this year for their constructive approach.

Councillor Peter Taylor
Chair of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel (2014/15)

5. Task Groups

5.1 Community Safety Partnership Task Group

Membership

Councillor Kelly McLeod (Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Stephen Bolton, Rabi Martins, Binita Mehta, Mo Mills, Seamus Williams

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group is a statutory Task Group which is established each year to scrutinise the work of the Community Safety Partnership.

Work programme

The Task Group met on three occasions and arranged two all-member briefings, these were:

- Domestic Abuse - with input from Hertfordshire County Council Community Safety Unit.
- Neighbourhood Watch and Crimestoppers - with a presentation by the Hertfordshire Constabulary Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator.

The topics considered at the meetings were:

1. An overview of the Community Safety Partnership

The Anti-Social Behaviour Coordinator provided the Task Group with an overview of the structure and responsibilities of the Community Safety Partnership and the work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group (ASBAG); including the Safety Net system. He informed Members about the types of anti-social behaviour the partnership dealt with, the recent changes to legislation and the powers for victims under the new regime.

Members discussed crime levels in Watford and how these had decreased. Other topics covered included how the 'Community Trigger' operated and how incidents of anti-social behaviour should be reported. The Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector explained the structure of the Police's Safer Neighbourhood Team and outlined the Police action plan for the coming year and the associated key areas. He explained that there would be a focus on community engagement and communication of community safety messages.

Councillors discussed the Safer Streets campaign and the extent of coverage in the town. They also discussed how offenders were supported after they had been discharged from prison; with the Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector outlining the Protection Plan for vulnerable people and the Online Watch Link (OWL) programme. Discussions were held about the Scan Net identification system used in licensed premises and the positive effect this had had on crime and disorder in the town.

The Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector updated Members about recent work on domestic abuse, the sporadic nature of criminal damage offences and he provided reassurance that football fans had a minimal impact on instances of

anti-social behaviour. It was due to this update that the committee decided that the wider council members should have the briefing before full council.

2. Visit to the Watford CCTV Control Room

Immediately prior to the December Task Group meeting, Members visited the CCTV Control Room at Watford Police Station where they were hosted by the Transport and Projects Officer. He provided information on the background to the project, CCTV camera design and positioning, camera activity, recordings, funding, incident analysis, data subject requests, Watford Business Against Crime, Pubwatch, police airwaves and future developments and opportunities. Members were given a demonstration on how the cameras and screens operated.

Discussions were then held at the subsequent Panel meeting about the visit and Members considered the control room to be very impressive. They discussed matters relating to portable CCTV equipment with the Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector; including protocols governing its use, funding issues and the use of signage. Members also discussed how partnership working could be utilised to help in the development of CCTV in general.

3. Update on Crime Figures for Watford

The Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector provided information on crime trends in Watford and on the activities being undertaken to address the issues. He explained that crime had fallen each year of the last five years and that this might be difficult to sustain. In fact overall crime had risen this year which might be partly due to new crime recording rules introduced by the Home Office; where each victim of an incident would now be recorded as an individual crime.

Members discussed a wide range of issues including pre-Christmas crime prevention messages, the revised crime recording procedure, the Safer Streets campaign, the Community Messaging system and Prolific or other Priority Offenders; the Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector provided reassurance about the systems in place when sexual offenders were released from prison. Members discussed the use of Hertfordshire Police and County Council websites with regard to the reporting of domestic abuse and how vulnerable people could potentially be identified during Safer Streets operations. The Community Safety Manager informed the Panel about research commissioned by the County Council on domestic abuse that would likely impact on the funding for the Women's Centre.

Councillors discussed issues around lone working and theft from person offences. They complimented the police for their operational activity in the town centre and other areas; including the seizure of alcohol, how they dealt with a potentially volatile situation and prevented criminal damage offences. The Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector outlined how the police worked in partnership with the Red Cross to improve safety in the town and reassured Members that police had a good understanding of patron numbers in night clubs. He also advised Members how they could assist the police in engaging with communities. In conclusion, issues around Operation Yew Tree, reported crime in Albert Road and communication methodologies were discussed.

It was believed to be helpful for members to have a briefing by the Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator on Neighbourhood Watch and Crimestoppers as this programme had lost momentum and was being re-launched in the community.

4. The Probation Service

The Panel welcomed a manager from the Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Community Rehabilitation Company (BeNCH CRC), who gave a presentation on changes to the delivery of probation services. The presentation included information on:

- The roles of the different organisations in managing high and low risk offenders.
- Details of the programmes run by BeNCH CRC.
- How risk levels for different offenders were determined.
- The changes brought in by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014.

Following the presentation, Members discussed the following issues with the manager; the varying terms of reference for the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies, the supervision of offenders, training of probation officers, mental-health pathways in probation, the relationship with the Housing Service, how anti-social behaviour by offenders was managed, how Councillors could support the Probation Service, details of offender based projects and how offenders needs were assessed.

5. Draft Community Safety Plan

The Community Safety Manager introduced the draft Community Safety Plan explaining that the Responsible Authorities Group had merged with One Watford as a trial to encourage creative solutions from a wider range of partners. She outlined the three priorities in the plan, which were:

- Updating crime – relating to how crime figures were reported having regard to changes in recording procedures.
- Protect our communities – relating to focusing on the victim and vulnerability and ensuring authorities understood the make up of communities.
- Reassure and inform – relating to the development of a communication strategy looking at targeted campaigns and case studies to illustrate successes and being more interactive.

In response to questions from Members, the Community Safety Manager informed the Group that work was being conducted to ensure authorities had a good understanding of the demographics of communities, that the partnership was always looking for ways to develop their work with new groups and that a plan would be developed and training provided to raise awareness of the Prevent Strategy.

The reports and minutes for Community Safety Partnership Task Group can be found on the Council's website –
http://watford.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeId=209

Chair's Commentary
This task group plays an important role in building relationships between council members, council officers and the various official bodies that provide Watford with community safety. It is a forum for council Members to influence and inform our community safety partners of local issues and concerns and to receive updates on what these partners are hoping to achieve and accomplish.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all who attended our meetings for their input and contributions and know that these relationships will continue to build.

Councillor Kelly McLeod
Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group (2014/15)

5.2 Property Task Group

Membership:

Councillor Nigel Bell (Chair)
Councillors Kareen Hastrick and Asif Khan

The following Portfolio Holder also attended the Property Task Group during the year: Councillor Iain Sharpe (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development)

The Task Group lost two of its original members in 2014/15. Councillor Stephen Johnson was made a Portfolio Holder and member of Cabinet and was therefore no longer eligible to participate as a scrutiny member. Councillor Malcolm Meerabux was not re-elected at the May 2014 elections.

The Task Group met on two occasions during 2014/15. As agreed at its first meeting held in 2013/14, Members considered the Strategic Property Review's interim report. The report had been produced by the appointed consultants, Lambert Smith Hampton. The Task Group discussed various aspects of the course including ICT systems, income, hostels and property investment. The Task Group also reviewed the consultant's final report prior to its presentation to Cabinet. During the discussions the Task Group made several recommendations to officers for consideration as the review continued.

There are currently no further meetings planned for the Task Group.

5.3 Controlled Parking Zones Policies Task Group

Membership:

Councillor Karen Collett (Chair)
Councillors Kareen Hastrick, Peter Jeffree, Anne Joynes and Darren Walford

The scrutiny suggestion was proposed by Jane Custance, the Head of Regeneration and Development. The aim was to review the various policies that related to the allocation of resident and business parking permits within the Controlled Parking

Zones. Originally Councillor Rabi Martins had been appointed to the Task Group, but it was agreed at the first meeting that Councillor Jeffree would take his place.

The Task Group met on three occasions and was provided with information on the complaints and comments that were received from the public about the policies. As requested Members were also provided with information about the rules and policies for parking schemes in other local authority areas. In order to support its work the Task Group agreed to send out a survey form to all those Councillors who had a parking scheme within their ward. Six out of 18 Councillors responded to the survey and their responses were circulated to the Task Group.

As a result of the information it received, the Task Group agreed to 20 recommendations related to different policies for the Controlled Parking Zones. The Task Group's final report was presented to Cabinet on 16 February and 9 March. Cabinet agreed all the recommendations.

Officers have been asked to provide an update on the progress of implementing the recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in November 2015.

The reports and minutes of all scrutiny meetings and completed Task Groups are available on the Council's website - http://watford.moderngov.co.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1

Task Groups' final reports are available in the online Library.

For further information please contact the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

6. 2014/15 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, council officers and members of the public or representatives from external organisations who have attended as guests and witnesses.

6.1 Councillors' survey

Of the 37 councillors (including the Mayor) in Watford Borough Council, 10 have completed the survey; there are nine less responses than in 2013/14. Six out of the 22 Councillors who were permanent or substitute members of a scrutiny committee or task group during 2014/15 completed the survey. The results of the survey showed that:

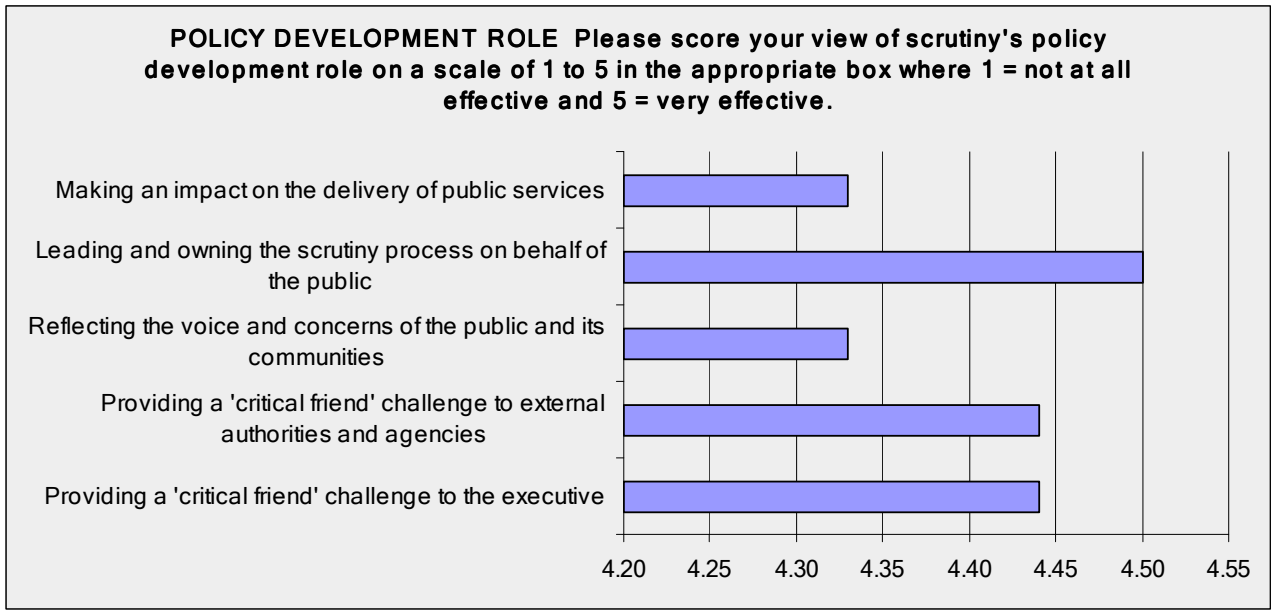
Two respondents stated that they had not been Members of a scrutiny committee or task group as they were a member of the Executive. One respondent stated that they had no time or had other commitments and the other person stated that they attended meetings when matters were of interest. The six scrutiny members all stated that they were 'very likely' to take part in scrutiny during 2015/16 and they had all understood their role.

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.

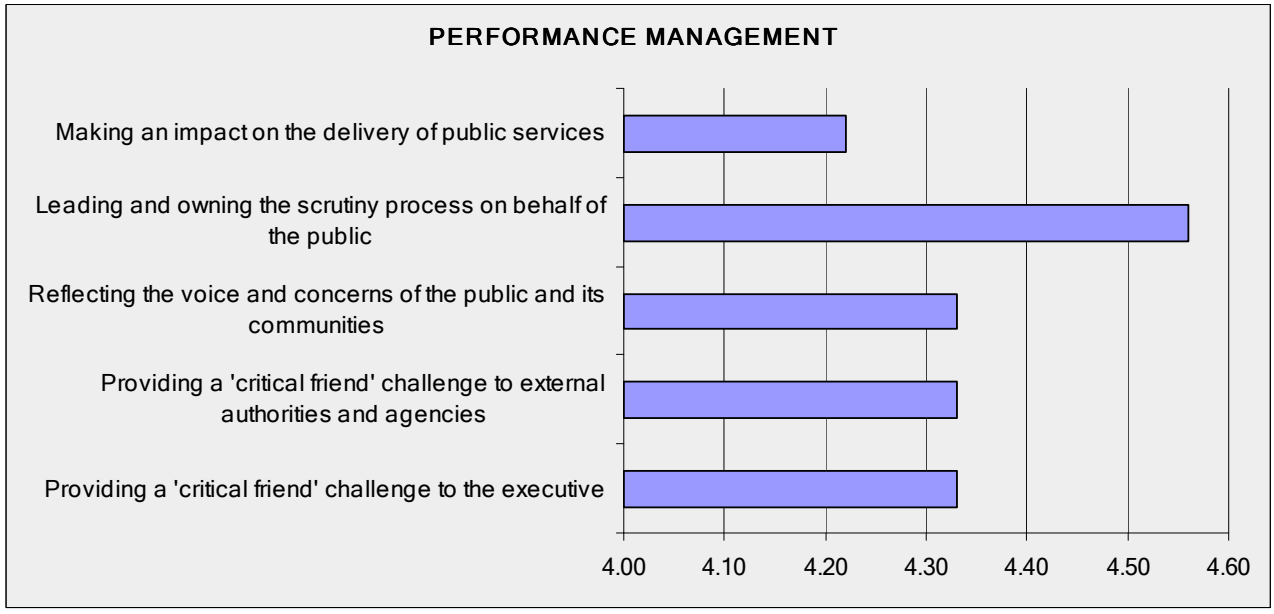
- Making an impact on the delivery of public services
- Leading and owning the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to external authorities and agencies
- Providing a 'critical friend'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

9 of the respondents completed the questions about scrutiny's roles in policy development, performance management, budget and finance and task groups. 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 3.75 or higher. This showed a small increase of 0.83 when compared to the 2013/143 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 4.33 and the highest was 4.50. This shows an overall improvement on the 2013/14 results, which were 3.67 and 4.00 respectively. All nine respondents considered scrutiny had done a good job in this area.

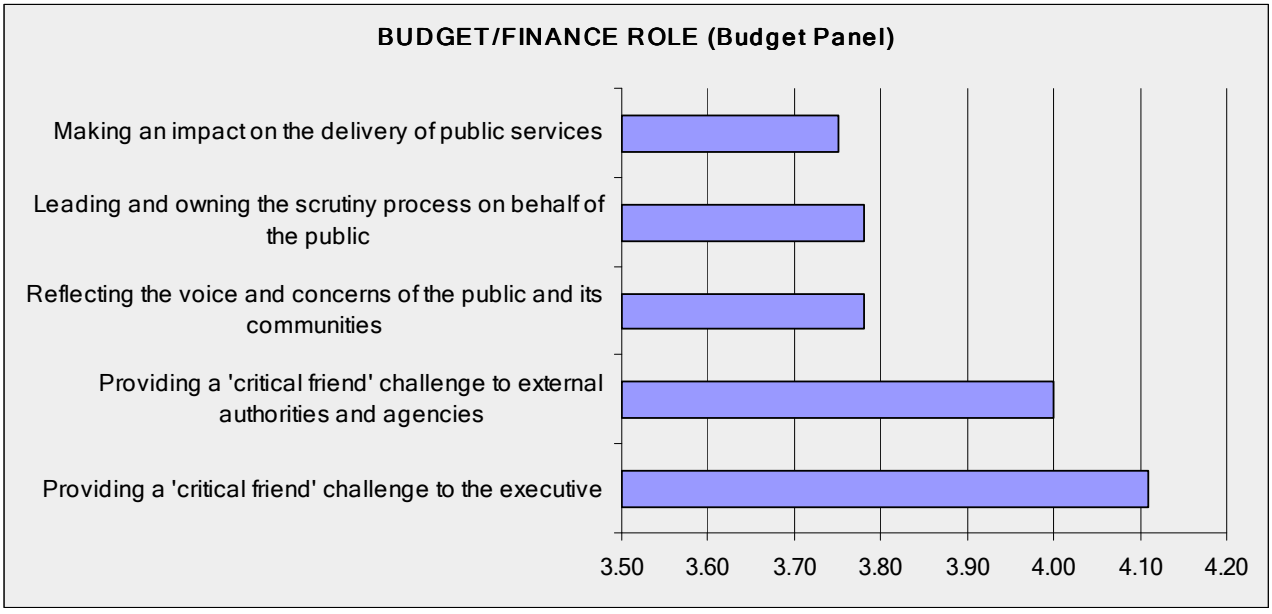


The second graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Performance Management** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 4.22 and the highest was 4.56. This shows an overall improvement on the 2013/14 results, which were 3.54 and 4.00 respectively. Eight out of the nine respondents to this question thought that done a good job in its performance management role. The other respondent did not know.



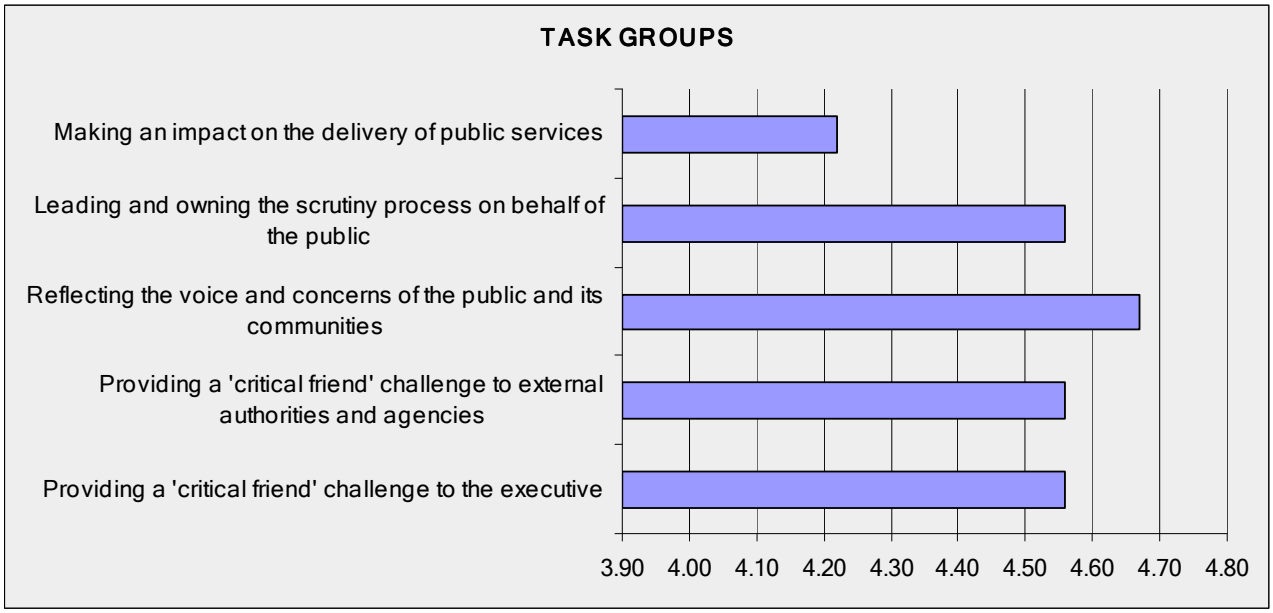
The third graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Budget and Finance** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.75 and the highest was 4.11. This shows an overall increase in Members' views on the effectiveness in this area of scrutiny when compared to the 2013/14 results, which were 2.92 and 3.33 respectively.

There was a mixed reaction to the effectiveness of scrutiny's budget and finance role in this year's survey. Eight of the respondents replied that scrutiny had done a good job, but two respondents had said 'no'. The reasons given were that Budget Panel appeared to make few suggestions and that Members did not drill into the budget and constructively challenge officers and the Executive.



The final graph shows the average rating for each aspect for **Task Groups**. The lowest rating average was 4.22 and the highest was 4.67. This shows an overall improvement on the 2013/14 results, which were 4.07 and 4.27 respectively.

The rating for 'Making an impact on the delivery of public services' had a mixed response. Four respondents gave it a 5 (very effective) rating and one gave it a rating of 2 (not particularly effective). There were no reasons given for this rating. Overall eight respondents thought that task groups had done a good job during the year.



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.

- "Provide guidance/training for Chairs as they are what determines whether or not the scrutiny is effective."

  "An in house presentation for councillors new and old would be good please. Just helpful to ensure all councillors know why we have this role, how to participate in the meetings, what can and cannot be done etc."

  Democratic Services has developed a guide for Chairs of all committees. It provides information on useful skills and the Chair's role before, during and after a meeting. Each year following Annual Council the document will be circulated to all Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

  An in-house presentation may be more suitable at the beginning of the Municipal Year. Democratic Services' presentation to the new Councillors at their induction includes a section on scrutiny and Members' roles in this part of the decision-making structure.

  The Committee and Scrutiny Officer has developed a scrutiny handbook which is given to all new Councillors at their induction and to all Members appointed to

scrutiny committees and panels at Annual Council. A short guide is being finalised for all Task Group members and will be given to them at the beginning of a review.

The Democratic Services Manager, Committee and Scrutiny Officer and Member Development and Civic Officer receive information from different organisations about training courses. As appropriate courses arise Members will be informed and offered the opportunity to attend.

- "I would like one question at a time and the Chair to ensure that the person asking the question does not just talk. Most Councillors are extremely concerned about their Wards, their Constituents, plans for the future etc. and they, like me, do not want time wasted with meaningless words."

  The 'An Introduction to Scrutiny' handbook contains a section on questioning skills. It suggests that questions should be posed one at a time, as asking too many at once can be confusing. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will remind all Chairs to ask Councillors to put one question at a time and ensure that those speaking do not wander from the topic under discussion.

- "I would prefer that notes/information regarding a topic were issued before meetings so that time isn't wasted and the committee can begin questions/discussion as soon as possible. It also gives members time to prepare questions. I am not a lover of 'informative' slideshows where the person delivering the presentation reads what is on the slide."

  The Committee and Scrutiny Officer acknowledges this comment and recognises that when Members are provided with information in advance of a meeting, they are able to prepare questions they may wish to raise at the meeting. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will advise all officers presenting a report to scrutiny that a written report/briefing paper should be forwarded to Democratic Services for publication in the agenda.

6.2 **Officers' survey**

This survey, similar to the Councillors' survey, was completed by 15 officers, only one of whom had had no involvement with scrutiny during 2014/15. The survey showed that 13 of the officers felt that they understood their role. 11 officers stated that they had been appropriately briefed by the Committee and Scrutiny Team. The other three respondents had answered 'partially'. Additional comments suggested that information about Members' concerns and earlier discussion would have helped the officers prior to the meeting. Democratic Services will ensure that all officers due to attend a scrutiny committee or panel are provided with information about Members' concerns and previous discussions. The majority of officers had responded that they had felt the demands on them or their service had been manageable.

Officers were asked whether they considered scrutiny had been an effective 'critical friend' to their service. There were some negative responses this year fro Policy Development (1 person), Performance Management (2) and Budget/finance (2). One officer was concerned that Members only appeared to be interested in performance issues. Two respondents indicated that Members needed to scrutinise performance

rather than it be used an educational tool about a service. One person felt that this may be due to Members not having sufficient knowledge. Performance Management is an area that Democratic Services will look to develop and ensure Members are provided with the right information and skills to aid them in this work.

In response to a request for comments on Property Review Task Group, several officers raised concerns about the review – 'not very effective', 'initial scope too broad', 'evolved into a much wider brief….'. Initially this Task Group and been requested and agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to consultant's being engaged to carry out a review of the Council's property portfolio. Once the Task Group started it was agreed that it would look at the consultant's interim and final reports before they were presented to Cabinet. This Task Group is still ongoing and has not yet produced a final report. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will discuss the future of the Task Group with the Chair, Councillor Bell, and officers.

The comments for the Controlled Parking Zone Task Group were more positive. The feedback from officers and Councillors involved in the Task Group were positive. All parties had worked well together and the Task Group produced a final report incorporating 20 recommendations. Some of the more negative comments about the Task group may not have been aware of the scope of the review.

When asked how scrutiny could be improved officers made the following comments (responses are shown in italics):

- "Better scoping of subjects"

  Further opportunity to engage with members as to the key drivers and issues within their respective patches, allowing for greater clarity to be presented on specific areas/perceived problem areas within the town. Getting under the skin of issues which are not always evident borough wide."

  Recently the Committee and Scrutiny Officer has arranged meetings between Councillors proposing topics and the relevant officers for the subject. This has enabled early discussions about the proposed subject and amendments to be made to the scrutiny proposal form as required.

  The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will encourage Councillors to discuss topics with officers at the earliest opportunity.

- "Documented briefing templates for scrutiny topics."

  "Better briefing from members what they want to see and areas to focus on."

  The scrutiny proposal form should set out the topic and any specific areas to be reviewed. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will ensure that all officers have been fully informed about the scrutiny topic under discussion and any specific areas Councillors would like officers to cover. She will look into the development of a template that can be completed and circulated to officers and the Chair prior to the meeting.

- "The process could be made more efficient if Elected Members are provided with an overview of the service and/or with supporting documentation prior to

the review."

Once a scrutiny topic has been agreed and a Task Group has been set up, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer identifies any background information that may be of use to Members. This would include any Council policies, information from the internet or previous reports to Council, Cabinet or scrutiny. The information is collated and each member of the Task Group is provided with the supporting documentation. As officers become more involved in a review and further supporting information is identified or requested this is also provided to the Task Group.

This year the Committee and Scrutiny Officer has asked the client management teams for the Council's outsourced services to provide her with a brief overview of each of the contracts. The information will be collated and put together to form an introductory handbook for Councillors appointed to the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. This will ensure that Councillors have important information about the contracts including who has been awarded the contract; the length of contract; monitoring arrangements and any additional information the client management teams feel that would be of benefit to the Panel. The handbook is currently being brought together and will be given to the Scrutiny Panel as soon as possible in 2015/16.

There was one further comment which said that it was important that officers were able to comment on draft minutes prior to approval as this ensured that any technical details was correct. The writer acknowledged that the committee team did this and was receptive to any clarification. Democratic Services will continue to do this for scrutiny and all committees to ensure the minutes are accurate before publication.

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

This year the survey was completed by one person, who had attended the Community Safety Partnership Task Group. The person had attended to give evidence to the Task Group and said that they had understood the purpose of the meeting. There further responses were positive. They did not make any comments about their experience at the meeting or suggestions for new reviews.

Due to the poor response rate the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will look into ways to improve responses to future surveys. One example may be to introduce a feedback form for circulation to members of the public, representatives from organisations or other interested parties soon after the meeting. This may encourage more people to respond if there is less of a time gap after their attendance.

6.4 **Scrutiny Suggestions**

Several scrutiny suggestions were included in the councillors' and officers' surveys. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will look at the suggestions and, if it is possible to identify the proposer, send the scrutiny proposal form and discuss with them the suggestion.

7. Other Scrutiny work

7.1 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.

One Joint Cabinet and Scrutiny meeting was held during 2014/15. It met in March 2014 and reviewed the scrutiny work programmes for the year and received an update on the current Task Groups. The Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel updated the meeting on scrutiny's progress throughout the year.

7.2 Scrutiny Training

In July 2014 a training session was held for non-executive councillors "Being an effective 'critical friend': questioning skills and techniques." It was arranged to enable councillors to develop their skills required for scrutinising outsourced contracts. The session was run by Tim Young, who is an independent scrutiny and policy consultant and Associate of the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Local Government Information Unit. It was attended by seven councillors.

In addition the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services held a 'Contract Management' session which was open to all councillors. The training session, held on 30 September 2014, provided Members with an opportunity to find out how key service contracts were managed by the Council and how good contract management practice was being developed. Six councillors attended the training.

An introduction to scrutiny at Watford Borough Council is covered in Democratic Services' presentation to new Councillors at their induction. They are provided with a copy of the handbook 'An Introduction to Scrutiny' and the Centre for Public Scrutiny's 'Overview and scrutiny in local government: a handbook for elected members'.

7.3 Scrutiny Handbook

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer introduced a Scrutiny Handbook, which was given to all Councillors involved in one of the scrutiny committees or panels. The handbook provided an introduction to scrutiny and its role at Watford Borough Council. It had a section on questioning skills and the different types of questions that could be used with their advantages and disadvantages. It also included a list of previous scrutiny reviews and the list of documents available from the newly established scrutiny library. The handbook will be regularly reviewed and adapted as required.

A new handbook is in the process of being developed for the members of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. It will highlight the Council's key contracts and useful information for the Scrutiny Panel.

7.4 Scrutiny Library

The scrutiny library has been included in 'An Introduction to Scrutiny, which is given to newly elected members and all participants of scrutiny committees and panels.

7.5 Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network has continued to hold meetings throughout 2014/15. The group continues to receive notification of Police and Crime Panel meetings. Each authority's work programmes are circulated to the other councils, enabling officers to see what else is being scrutinised around the county. The Network enables officers to share experiences and feedback from any training they have participated in.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informs the Managing Director, Heads of Service, the Mayor and relevant Portfolio Holders of scrutiny topic groups arranged by Hertfordshire County Council. This allows officers and the Executive to consider whether they wish to be involved in the review, either by submitting a statement to the topic group or attending as a witness. Final reports from topic groups are circulated to relevant officers and Councillors within the authority, enabling them to identify any recommendations related to the district councils.

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

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