



Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny in Watford Borough Council 2015/16

A report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer

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1. **Introduction and overview of 2015/16**

In 2015/16 the scrutiny structure comprised Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the overarching committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. Community Safety Partnership Task Group continued to monitor the Community Safety Partnership. (See scrutiny structure on page 2.)

Task Groups which took place during 2015/16 were –

- Controlled Parking Zones Policies (review carried out during 2014/15; final report presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2015/16)
- Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres)
- Management of Conservation Areas
- Neighbourhood Forums (agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2015/16, but to be carried out during 2016/17)

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

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer continued to attend the Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network: a network of officers from the County Council, the ten district and borough councils, within Hertfordshire and neighbouring local 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.

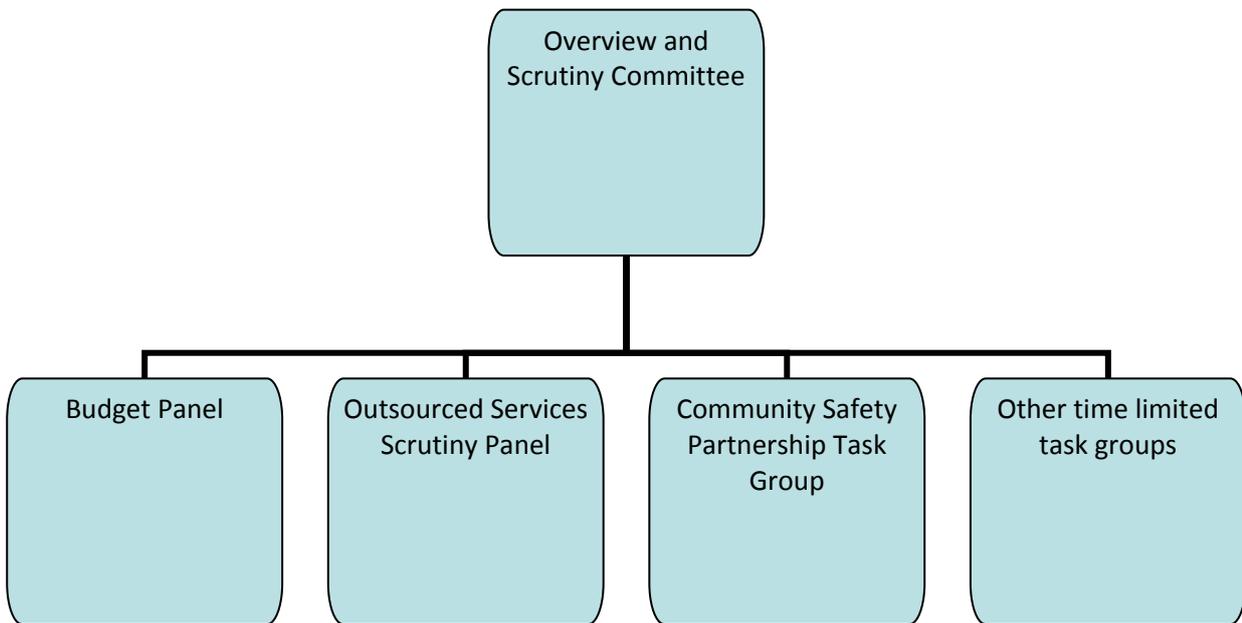
In 2015/16, 27 out of 36 councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting; this was the same number as in 2014/15. 23 councillors participated in a scrutiny meeting as a member or a substitute. Two portfolio holders attended scrutiny meetings to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive. Two councillors attended meetings solely as observers and participated when permitted by the scrutiny committee or panel.

In 2015/16, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Committee held some meetings outside of the Town Hall, at venues relevant to an item on the agenda.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee held its January 2016 meeting at Watford Museum. One of the items related to the work of the museum and its performance. Prior to the meeting the scrutiny committee was given a guided tour of the museum by the Museum and Heritage Manager and the Museum Collections Officer and experienced the pop up tearoom. Later councillors were allowed to handle some of the newer acquisitions. Councillors and officers felt that this had worked very well and are keen to hold meetings outside the Town Hall when appropriate.

Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel visited Watford Leisure Centre Woodside when reviewing the SLM contract. Councillors were given a tour of the facilities, enabling them to see the facilities in use. Following the tour the scrutiny panel's meeting was held in one of the meeting rooms at the leisure centre.

Scrutiny structure 2015/16



2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership:

Councillor Karen Collett (Chair)

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Vice Chair)

Councillors Keith Crout, Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes, Asif Khan, Anne Rindl, Linda Topping and Darren Walford

The following Councillors also participated in Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year: Councillors Nigel Bell (substitute), Mark Hofman (substitute), Rabi Martins (substitute and Chair of Management of Conservation Areas Task Group), Sean Silver (substitute), Seamus Williams (substitute and Chair of Community Safety Partnership Task Group) and Tim Williams (substitute)

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

2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2015/16

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on six 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 councillors discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas. Councillors regularly discussed the housing related indicators and in July received a presentation from Head of Community and Customer Services and Interim Housing Section Head (further information is shown below).
- A **Housing update** was given to the scrutiny committee following councillors' concerns about the under performance of the indicators linked to housing and temporary accommodation. The Head of Community and Customer Services and Interim Housing Section Head provided a report to the scrutiny committee which set out information on the various aspects of the Housing service, including temporary accommodation, homeless demand, private sector rents and housing benefit and rough sleeping. The officers also included comparisons with other boroughs and districts within Hertfordshire. The scrutiny committee had a thorough discussion.
- **Corporate Complaints and Comments** were presented to the scrutiny committee in November. Councillors were given an overview of the council's management and performance in responding to complaints and comments about council services. They were advised that any complaints about outsourced services should be made directly

to the provider of the service. At the request of the scrutiny committee the Committee and Scrutiny Officer referred the matter of managing complaints about outsourced services to Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, which would be able to investigate procedures during its reviews of the service providers.

- **The Big Events Series** was discussed at the January meeting held at Watford Museum. The Culture and Play Section Head provided the councillors with an overview of the Big Events Series, including the lessons learnt from previous years and how these influenced year two. Councillors had a thorough discussion which included funding, sponsorship and value for money, which also included social value to the local community.
- **Watford Museum Service and Heritage Lottery Fund Project** were also discussed in January. The scrutiny committee was given a tour of the museum prior to the meeting. The Museum and Heritage Manager provided information about the museum building and its contents. She also spoke of the staffing arrangements and the volunteers. She provided information on the performance indicators which were monitored in relation to the museum. The Museum and Heritage Manager explained about the Heritage Lottery Fund Project, called 'Re-engaging with Watford's past'. She showed councillors the initial designs for the building which were mindful of the building's listed status. Discussions included reference to the museum linking to the school curriculum and council funding towards the development project. Councillors were given an opportunity to see some recent acquisitions to the museum's collection, which had been acquired at no cost to the service.
- **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 been followed correctly and, if not, whether a report 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 a regular item on the agenda. The council's appointed representative for 2015/16, Councillor Kareen Hastrick, provided the scrutiny committee with an overview of the work carried out by the Health Scrutiny Committee. Full details of the Health 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 –**

Controlled Parking Zones Policies was set up in 2014/15 and completed its work that year. In 2015/16 the final report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following a question from Councillor Silver it was agreed to amend one of the recommendations which was accepted by the relevant officers.

Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) was approved in 2014/15 and completed its review during 2015/16. Regular updates were provided to the scrutiny committee and the final report was presented in July.

Management of Conservation Areas was agreed as a new task group in 2015/16. The task group carried out a thorough review. The Chair provided a regular update on the task group's progress. The final report was presented to the scrutiny committee and Cabinet.

Neighbourhood Forums was approved as a new task group at the last meeting. The review would commence following the local elections in May 2016.

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 a previous review. The review carried out in 2015/16 was –

Controlled Parking Zones

2.2 Call-in

No Executive decisions were called in during 2015/16. The reports and minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found on the council's website – [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

2.3 Chair's commentary

This is my final report as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and I want to begin by thanking all the officers I have worked with, in particular Sandra Hancock who has been incredibly supportive over my past 4 years in this post. In addition, my huge thanks to Kathryn Robson our Partnerships and Performance Section Head who provided us with key performance indicators each quarter and detailed answers to our questions. Lastly, my thanks to the whole committee for their enthusiasm, dedication and support, task group members, Chairs and our Vice Chair Jagtar Dhindsa.

One of the things I am most proud of is involving the public more in decision making and this year we repeated the exercise of inviting residents into the Town Hall to discuss and review the effectiveness of the Watford Conservation areas, the turnout was excellent. Furthermore, to reach more people we took the decision to advertise by way of an online

survey; as well as door knocking talking directly to those who live in those areas. In addition, earlier in the year another task group was set up to look at the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres). Our recommendations highlighted the need for more advertising and to look at the demographic of need within the communities. What was clear from our point of view was discovering that our Centres do provide a wide range of activities, advice and support for the residents of Watford.

Can I make a request of all councillors to take part in the Scrutiny survey that Sandra sends out once a year. Your input and ideas are important in order for the process to improve and change its practices to reflect and suit the current day. Thank you.

Finally, I want to wish the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee all the best for the coming year and wish Cllr Kareen Hastrick well in her new role as Chair. It is important for us all to remember that Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains effective and accountable to monitor service delivery, performance and review policies and practices and above all remain a critical friend.

Councillor Karen Collett
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2015/16

3. Budget Panel

Membership

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)

Councillor Anne Joynes (Vice Chair)

Councillors Shirena Counter, George Derbyshire, Mark Hofman, Rabi Martins, Tim Williams, Nigel Bell and Mark Whitman

The following councillors also participated on the panel during the year: Councillors Karen Collett (as a substitute) and Anne Rindl (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 Budget Panel's work programme for 2015/16

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

- **The final outturn for 2014/15** prior to it being presented to Cabinet. Members considered a number of areas in more depth: the council's underspend for the year, proposed carry forwards, capital programme, ICT budget provision, capital projects programme and issues surrounding the growing problem of homelessness in the borough. Budget Panel's recommendations to Cabinet were agreed.
- **Entrepreneurship.** The Chair led the panel in a constructive discussion about how the council might respond positively and creatively to the reduction in central government funding. Acknowledging that Watford Borough Council had been far-sighted and innovative in recent years, the panel concluded the need for a flexible and varied approach, drawing on innovative policies and best practice in other councils.
- **The Finance Digest Budget Monitor** was reviewed regularly by the Budget Panel. Members monitored the expenditure, income and pressures on services.
- **Outstanding debt** was examined by the panel with the Head of Revenue and Benefits. He outlined the comprehensive toolbox of options available to the council and the success that had been made in recent years to reduce outstanding debt levels.
- **Increases in bed and breakfast costs** were monitored by the panel. It was noted that additional provision had been made in the 2015/16 budget to meet the rising demand for temporary accommodation.
- **Fees and charges 2016/17.** The draft report was reviewed by the panel at its January meeting. Members discussed in detail proposals to increase burial fees for Watford residents and commercial hire rates at Cheslyn Gardens. The panel recommended that

Cabinet note its concerns about the steep rise in burial fees and the potential impact of this increase on Watford residents.

- **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2016/19 and Treasury Management Strategy 2016/19** were considered by Budget Panel at its meeting in January, prior to discussions at Cabinet and Council. The panel reviewed the report in depth, seeking clarification on a number of points from Heads of Service. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.

3.2 Training

Training was provided in September to give members an overview of Local Government Finance, including how the council was funded.

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

4. **Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel 2015/16**

Membership

Councillor Keith Crout (Chair)

Councillor Shirena Counter (Vice Chair)

Councillors Jagtar Singh Dhindsa, Anne Joynes, Rabi Martins, Sean Silver and Seamus Williams

The following councillors also participated on the panel during the year: Councillors Karen Collett (substitute and observer) and Anne Rindl (substitute).

The following Portfolio Holder attended Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillor Stephen Johnson (Portfolio Holder for Housing – including Private Sector Housing).

The remit of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel is to scrutinise services which have been externalised or which are shared with Three Rivers District Council; 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. ICT Contract

At the September meeting, the panel received a report of the Managing Director setting out the decision to terminate the Capita IT outsourced contract. He responded to members' questions in relation to the report. The public and press were excluded from this item under the provisions of Section 100(4) of the Local Government Act 1972; as exempt information would be disclosed.

2. Quarterly performance indicators

The panel received quarterly performance reports (at the July, September, November and February meetings) provided by the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. These related to a significant number of key performance indicators for the services that had been outsourced to external providers and those shared with Three Rivers District Council.

Indicators relating to the shared Finance Service were monitored by the Budget Panel as part of the Finance Digest.

The panel continued to use its in-depth review of services to raise questions and actions on performance and to suggest new indicators for monitoring.

3. Hostels and Temporary Accommodation

Officers attended the meeting in September to update members on the Hostel Management Contract let to the Watford Community Housing Trust (WCHT) in April 2013. This was a five year contract, with the ability to extend by a further two years, and was proving successful (after some initial poor performance levels). The contract

was managed tightly - with regular meetings between the housing team and representatives from WCHT.

Members raised issues around the time taken to carry out repairs; and the portfolio holder and officers explained the categories of repairs and how improvements had been made to procedures. Matters around anti-social behaviour at certain premises were also discussed.

4. Contract with HQ Theatres

The council's 10 year contract with HQ Theatres, to operate the Watford Colosseum Theatre, was awarded in 2009. The Colosseum re-opened in 2011 following a £5.5 million refurbishment and extension programme. It is the home to the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Following a tour of the venue by the panel immediately prior to the October meeting, members had the opportunity to pose questions to representatives from HQ Theatres and the council's Contract Management Team. They asked about the appropriateness and effectiveness of certain key performance indicators, about apprenticeship wages and the competition to make use of the venue.

The representatives from HQ Theatres provided information on the commercial and non-commercial rates for community hires, about parking issues, in relation to methodologies to target certain audiences and how well the sector was performing despite the recent economic downturn. A proposal for further improvements would be brought to the council early in 2016.

5. Contract with SLM – Operation of the Leisure Centres

The January meeting of the panel was held at the Woodside Leisure Centre following a tour of the facility by members. This provided a useful backdrop prior to the SLM contract being discussed with officers and with representatives from the company. Members had received reports on the key performance indicators for the centres, the activities provided, an overview of staff numbers and membership and the SLM complaints procedures.

The 10 year leisure centre management contract was awarded to Sports and Leisure Management (SLM) to operate Watford Central and Woodside Leisure Centres in June 2008.

During the meeting, councillors asked a wide range of questions of the officers and representatives including in relation to: competitive pricing and comparisons with budget gyms, why membership of the leisure centres was increasing, advertising the facilities, how complaints about cleanliness/cleaning were managed, women only swimming sessions, staffing levels and safety, healthy food options in cafeterias and use of a climbing wall.

Members were particularly interested to learn how younger people were encouraged to participate in sports activities.

6. Parking Services Annual Report

Officers introduced the report to the panel at the February meeting. The document had been revised this year to ensure that the most salient information was easier to extract. Members felt the new lay out was impressive and a considerable improvement.

In response to questions from councillors, officers provided information on Controlled Parking Zones (including how locations for these were determined), the review of short stay parking in St Albans Road, the potential stimulus for parking controls emanating from the Croxley Rail Link, a range of matters in relation to parking enforcement (explaining the reasons for an increase in penalty charges issued) and subjects with regard to Blue Badge holders.

The reports and minutes for Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel can be found on the council's website – [Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel](#).

4.2 Chair's Commentary

During the year we looked in detail at a number of the council's outsourced services and how these were being managed. Despite the amount of work that had gone into sorting the difficulties with Capita and the ITC contract it was sad to hear that this was now being terminated.

On a positive note we had two memorable visits - one to the Colosseum to look at the HQ theatres contract and one to the Leisure Centre to look at the SLM contract. Both visits were interesting and led to a lot of inquisitiveness and probing from members. It was good to see that both contracts were running well despite market difficulties.

We enjoyed full participation from members of the committee throughout the year and once again we got excellent support from the officers involved for which we were all grateful.

Councillor Keith Crout
Chair of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel (2015/16)

5. Task Groups

5.1 Community Safety Partnership Task Group

Membership

Councillor Seamus Williams (Chair)

Councillors Sohail Bashir, Stephen Bolton, Rabi Martins, Binita Mehta and Mo Mills

The following councillors also participated on the task group during the year: Councillors Karen Collett and Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (substitutes).

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

Work Programme

The task group met on three occasions and arranged an all-member briefing, conducted by the Community Safety Partnership Co-ordinator, relating to anti-social behaviour end of year data, child exploitation and the 'Prevent' agenda.

The following topics were considered at meetings:

1. Review of Performance – CSP Action Plan 2015/16

At the September meeting, the Watford Police Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector provided information on overall crime levels (an increase of 4%) and specifically in relation to offences of burglary (dwelling), theft from motor vehicles, violent crime against the person and criminal damage and the activities undertaken to tackle these matters. He also outlined the steps being taken to progress the local policing priorities of combating anti-social behaviour and criminal damage, dealing with road safety concerns and protecting vulnerable people.

Members asked questions about the use of stop and search powers by police, the training of registered door staff, the training of police officers on diversity issues, concerns about the closure of the Watford Police Station custody suite and the Watford Safer Streets campaign.

2. Review of the Community Safety Partnership's Communications Plan

Also, at the September meeting, the Task Group received a presentation on the CSP's Communications Plan outlining the Safer Watford Communications Strategy and the associated objectives. Information was provided on the communication audiences, how key messages would be delivered, the launch campaign, complementary communications, the next steps and evaluation.

Officers responded to questions about the success of the campaign's launch video, the delivery of crime prevention messages, the use of the Watford Town magazine, advertising local events (including how to stay safe) and publicity around the promotion of Watford Football Club to the Premiership.

3. Watford Pubwatch

In January, the Chair of the Watford Pubwatch and a licensed premises door supervisor attended the task group. They explained that the festive season had gone very well with no difficulty experienced in the town - and outlined the 'vulnerability training' that was being rolled out bar by bar across Watford to help improve safety. There was excellent communication between Pubwatch and the WBC Licensing Team (with monthly meetings held) and liaison with the police Town Centre Team was very good. They discussed issues around usage of the extensive CCTV in the town and the operation of the CCTV control room.

Members talked about the frequency of Pubwatch meetings and raised issues around the operation of the Scan Net system, how Pubwatch worked with the local community, the impact on licensed premises of Watford Football Club's promotion, the potential for an increase in door supervisor numbers and the safe operation of taxis.

4. Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue

Also, in January, the Task Group received a presentation on how Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue worked with young people and local communities. With regard to young people the presentation included information on: The Life Project, working with the Prince's Trust, The Fire Cadets, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Box Cleva, local youth groups and local schools, Youth Connexions, fire station open days, work experience and the West Herts College. In relation to community engagement the presentation included information on: Watford Safer Streets, private landlords, temporary accommodation/accommodation above shops, Beds in Sheds, Safe Start Young Parents, Side by Side, Caring Together, Mencap and Driving Home for Christmas.

Members were extremely impressed by the number and range of initiatives. They asked questions about funding issues, the assistance provided by the fire service to vulnerable elderly groups, work with resident's associations and the impact of changes to legislation in relation to private landlords.

5. Overview of Annual Performance in relation to the CSP Plan 2015/18

At the March meeting, the task group received presentations from the Watford Police Safer Neighbourhoods Inspector and the WBC Community Safety Coordinator. Crime levels in Watford had increased by 10.7% (although levels of burglary had reduced) – this, a smaller increase than across Hertfordshire Constabulary as a whole. The Watford detection rate was also higher than across the force. An increase in criminal damage had a link to matters relating to anti-social behaviour and information was provided as to how the issue was being addressed. Levels of the reporting of domestic abuse had risen - this, in part, due to the enhanced victim support that was now available. A dedicated team at Hatfield Police Station dealt with these cases.

Violence against the person (VAP) had increased - although, not entirely due to the night time economy. Issues faced at Watford General hospital and the rise in houses in multiple occupation (HMO's) had had an impact; but the vast majority of the recorded incidents were the least serious forms of assault. In the future, VAP would no longer be reported to One Watford – the focus of the Safer Neighbourhood team would be

the CSP Protection Plan (although an update could be provided to the Task Group at a future meeting).

Members expressed concern about the increased crime levels and stressed the importance of identifying the causes. The police put context to the figures and provided reassurance about ongoing crime prevention and enforcement measures being undertaken. The Head of Community and Customer Services was conducting work around the HMO issues and would report back to the task group at its first meeting in the new municipal year when consideration could be given as to whether a further task group would be beneficial.

6. Update on proposed CSP Priorities for 2016/17

Also, at the March meeting, the Community Safety Co-ordinator advised the task group that there had been a near 5% reduction in anti-social behaviour in Watford this year. Watford was no longer regarded as the number one anti-social behaviour hotspot in the county – rather an area of best practice. The success was attributed to the positive impact of the Scan Net system and the partnership working of the community protection group.

The drivers for anti-social behaviour were highlighted to the task group; with neighbourhood disputes (often with a mental health link) now more predominant in the town. The task group was advised how mental health services were involved in resolution methods.

The focus for 2016/17 would be ‘Knowing our Communities’ – with uncertainty at present as to why there were few reports of anti-social behaviour in emerging communities. The police advised the task group that work to be undertaken in examining the issue could result in an increase in the reporting of cases by these communities.

5.2 Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) Task Group

Membership:

Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)

Councillors Karen Collett, Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes and Binita Mehta

The following councillors also attended the task group: Councillors Jackie Connal, Tony Rogers, Linda Topping and Seamus Williams

The task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 March 2016, following a request submitted by the Corporate Leisure and Community Section Head. The task group met on two occasions in May 2015. It had been set up to review the community centres within the Borough, which was part of a larger examination of the Commissioning Framework being carried out by officers. The task group made 10 recommendations. The final report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 July 2015, prior to the recommendations being included as part of the officer’s report to Cabinet in September regarding the complete Commissioning Framework.

Cabinet agreed the new Commissioning Framework which would be implemented from April 2016.

5.3 **Management of Conservation Areas Task Group**

Membership:

Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)

Councillors Karen Collett, Mike Haley, Anne Joynes and Linda Topping

The task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 July 2015, following a suggestion proposed by Councillor Martins. The aim was to review the town's conservation areas, with particular reference to the effectiveness of the Watford Conservation Area Management Plan.

The Task Group met on four occasions, with the first meeting taking place in November. The final report was produced in February 2016 and presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 7 March 2016. Cabinet's response was then reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 June 2016.

The task group's work included a drop in session at the Town Hall, a door to door canvass carried out by the task group and separate online surveys for the public and councillors. The public survey was promoted through the council's website, social media and the Mayor's newsletter. This resulted in 139 responses; only 12 of which were completed at the drop in session or by door to door canvassing. The success of the online survey, with the promotion through social media, is something officers are keen to carry out again for future reviews, where appropriate.

5.4 **Neighbourhood Forums Task Group**

This task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the last meeting of the municipal year. The scrutiny committee agreed that the new task group could be started after the local government elections held in May 2016. Further information will be included in the 2016/17 annual scrutiny report.

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. 2015/16 Scrutiny Survey Results

An annual scrutiny survey is carried out and councillors and those officers who have been involved with scrutiny during the preceding year are asked to participate. This year a survey was not sent to any organisations or individuals outside the council, as there had been very few who had been asked to attend as guests or witnesses.

6.1 Councillors' survey

Of the 37 councillors (including the Mayor) in Watford Borough Council, 16 have completed the survey; this is an increase of six responses compared to the 2014/15 results. Eight out of the 25 councillors who were permanent or substitute members of a scrutiny committee or task group during 2015/16 completed the survey. The results of the 2015/16 survey showed that:

- 8 had been a member of scrutiny or task group
- 1 had been a member of scrutiny or task group but not in 2015/16
- 5 had never been a member of scrutiny or a task group
- 2 were Executive councillors

Two respondents were new councillors, elected in May 2016 and two were no longer councillors following the local government elections. One respondent stated that they had no time or had other commitments to be involved with scrutiny during 2015/16. The majority of the scrutiny members all stated that they were 'very likely' to take part in scrutiny during 2016/17; the others stated that it was unlikely/definitely that they would not take part as they were no longer councillors. All scrutiny councillors confirmed that they had understood their role.

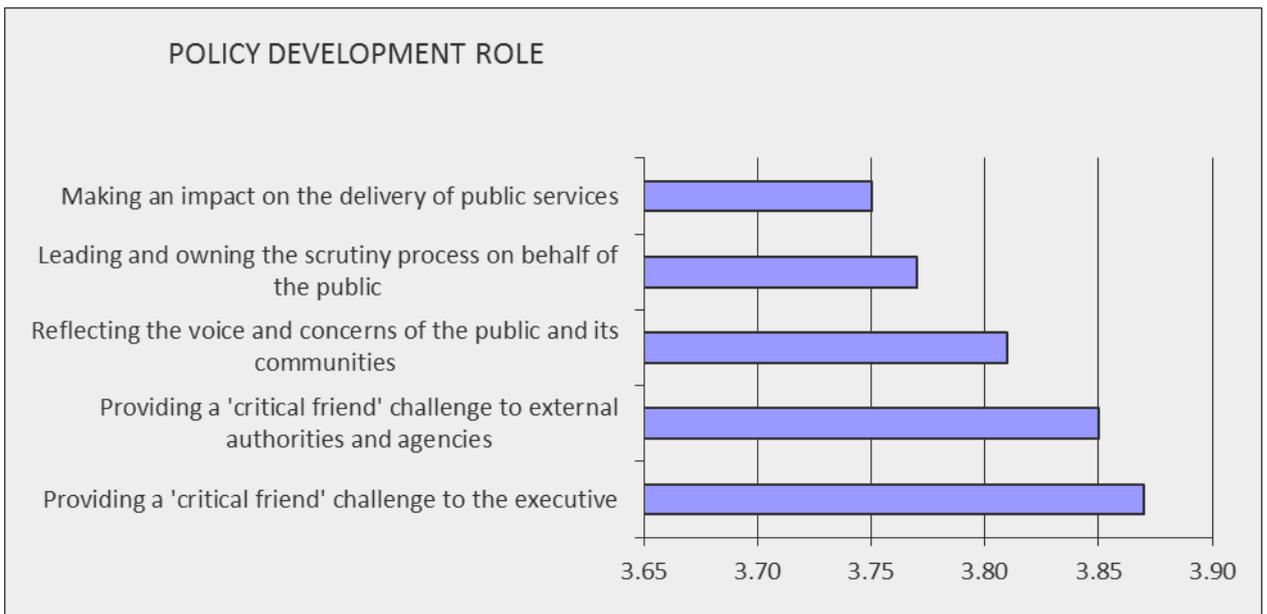
Members were asked to rate how effective they felt different aspects of the scrutiny work were in the five key areas identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

- 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

15 of the respondents completed the questions about scrutiny's roles in policy development and performance management; 13 responded to questions about scrutiny's role in budget and finance and 12 responded to questions about 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 3.46 or higher. This showed a small decrease of 0.29 when compared to the 2014/15 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 3.75 and the highest was 3.87. This shows an overall reduction in effectiveness on the 2014/15 results, which were 4.33 and 4.5 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 2 to 5.

12 of the respondents considered scrutiny had done a good job in this area. One person felt that it had not done a good job and felt that newer councillors or 'backbenchers' were kept in check by the Executive. They added that all councillors needed to undergo training, particularly as more services were outsourced.



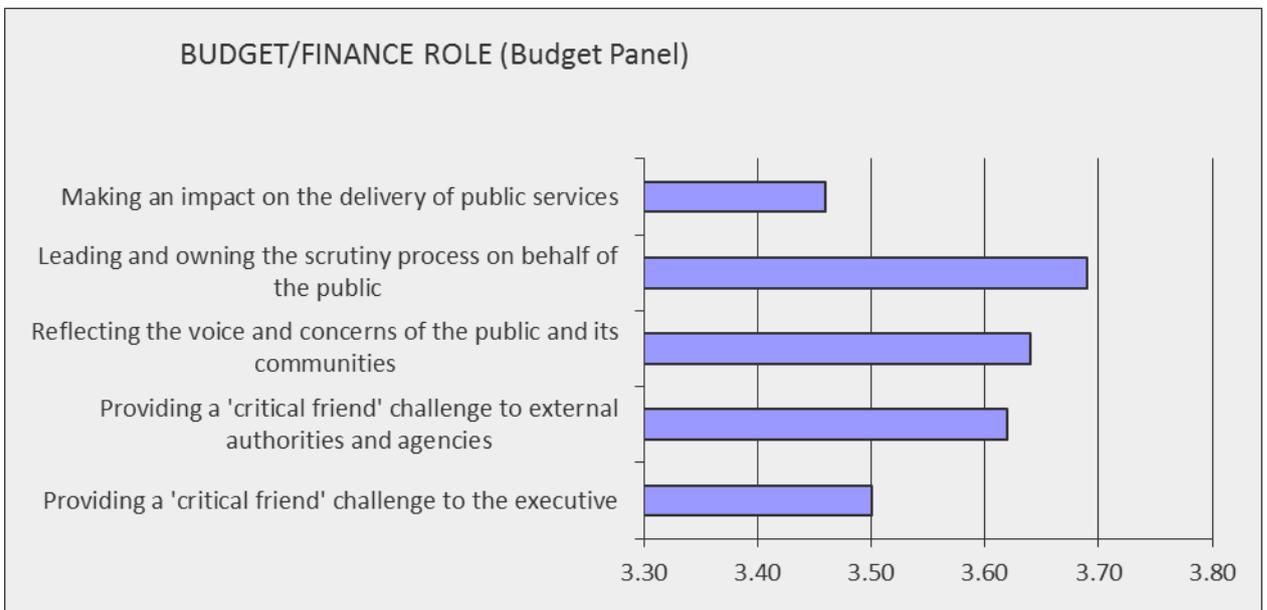
The second graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Performance Management** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.69 and the highest was 3.92. This shows an overall reduction in effectiveness on the 2014/15 results, which were 4.22 and 4.56 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 2 to 5.

12 out of the 16 respondents to this question thought that scrutiny had done a good job in its performance management role. Three respondents did not know and the other respondent considered scrutiny had not done a good job, but did not provide any feedback.



The third graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Budget and Finance** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.46 and the highest was 3.69. This shows an overall reduction in effectiveness in this area of scrutiny when compared to the 2014/15 results, which were 3.75 and 4.11. However it is an increase when compared to the 2013/14 results which were 2.92 and 3.33 respectively. Individual scores ranged from 2 to 5.

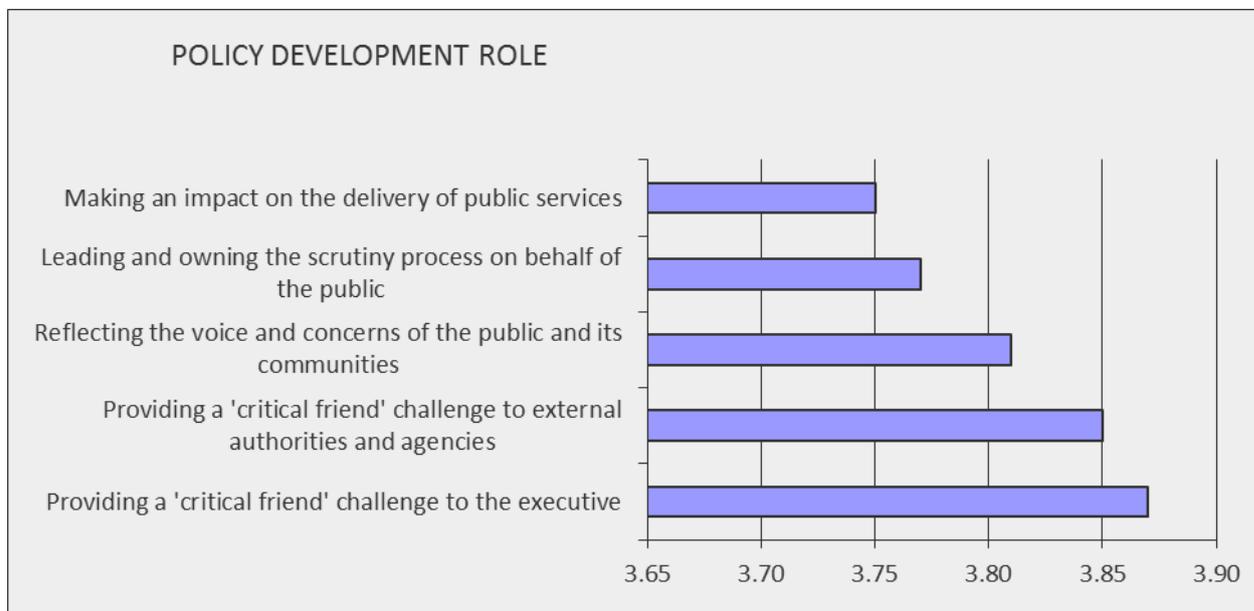
Nine out of the 13 respondents, who answered this question, agreed that scrutiny had done a good job in its budget and finance roles. The other four respondents answered that they did not know. No further feedback was given.



The final graph shows the average rating for each aspect for **Task Groups**. The lowest rating average was 3.77 and the highest was 4.08. This shows an overall reduction in effectiveness when compared to the 2014/15 results, which were 4.22 and 4.67 respectively. The results

were also lower than the 2013/14 results. Individual scores ranged from 2 to 5; however, the majority of responses for each section were rated as 3 or 4.

10 of the 12 respondents to this question thought that task groups had done a good job during the year. The other two replied that they did not know and commented that they had not been a member of a task group in 2015/16.



One respondent confirmed that they had proposed a scrutiny topic, which had then been taken forward. They agreed that the form had been easy to use and had no suggestions for any changes. They commented that they had been partially satisfied with the outcome and explained that they felt the review needed to be continued during 2016/17.

Councillors were asked for their views about how scrutiny could be improved in the future. There were five responses in total. One respondent said that they had no suggestions and a second had no suggestions as they said “it works - why change something that is working well”. Shown below are the other comments received. Democratic Services’ responses are shown in italics.

- “I think members of the Budget Panel should be provided with a copy of the Budget Book for the financial year.”

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will contact the Head of Finance (Shared Services) to ask whether this suggestion is possible. If it is agreed, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will ensure it is provided to all councillors who are appointed to Budget Panel.

- “That the Vice Chair attends meetings with the Chair beforehand – this is important as meeting with an officer can help with engagement.”

Democratic Services generally invite Vice Chairs to briefings with the Chair, where these are arranged. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will ensure that, with immediate effect, the Committee and Scrutiny Team will invite both the Chair and Vice Chairs to

briefings for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and Budget Panel, as briefings are arranged. This will not apply to task groups as they do not have Vice Chairs appointed to them.

- “Members of the ruling party need to be more critical in scrutiny.”

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer comments that this is a matter for the political groups. However, when training is carried out she will ensure that councillors are reminded that scrutiny should be holding the Executive to account and being a ‘critical friend’. As set out in legislation and guidance, scrutiny is independent of the Executive.

6.2 Officers’ survey

This survey, similar to the councillors’ survey, was completed by eight officers, all of whom had been involved with scrutiny during 2015/16. The survey showed that six of the officers felt that they understood their role and another said ‘partially’.

Four officers stated that they had been appropriately briefed by the Committee and Scrutiny Team and three said ‘partially’. Additional comments suggested that information about the set-up, format and which councillors were attending would have been helpful. The Committee and Scrutiny Team will ensure that all officers due to attend a scrutiny committee or panel are met and provided with information about the scrutiny committee, panel or task group. Another concern was that the task group was about one specific area of a service, but during the review it felt the whole service or other parts of a service were also under scrutiny. The Committee and Scrutiny Team will speak to chairs to ensure that scrutiny keeps to the subject under review and not to expand beyond the original remit. However, it is noted that there may be times when it may be necessary to look at a service as a whole to enable councillors to understand where the section under review fits within the department.

The majority of officers had responded that they had felt the demands on them or their service had been manageable. However two people said that it had been demanding. Officers were not asked for additional comments in relation to this question.

Officers were asked whether they considered scrutiny had been an effective ‘critical friend’ to their service. Budget and finance was the only part of scrutiny to receive no positive responses. However, it is noted that no officers from Finance completed the survey. The individual responses indicate that budgets were not relevant to the discussions at the scrutiny attended by these officers. There were some negative responses this year for policy development (1 person), performance management (4), budget/finance (2 as above) and task groups (1). The Committee and Scrutiny Team will review the comments and identify any areas for improvement.

In 2015/16 two officers had proposed a scrutiny topic. Both suggestions were taken forward to a task group and they were satisfied with the outcomes.

The comments for the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) Task Group were generally positive. The councillors’ input was welcomed and it was

considered that the organisations within the framework should be subject to scrutiny, as they were being grant funded.

One comment was received about the Management of Conservation Areas Task Group. The respondent felt that the findings were very limited. Also the process had been demanding for one person when there had been other resource pressures.

One scrutiny suggestion was received for a future review. This was regarding contract management and whether the council set up was right and if it was effectively monitoring the right areas. It also suggested that it could be considered whether there were any improvements that could be made. Unfortunately there is no indication as to who had submitted this suggestion, therefore the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will contact the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services and discuss the suggestion with her.

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

- “Increased benchmarking of KPI’s HCC or sub regional”

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will contact the Partnerships and Performance Section Head and discuss whether this can be arranged. Recently councillors have been asking for benchmarking information when they consider it appropriate.

- “Very happy with the style, brief, approach, having the meeting at our site helped, so being in the experience.”

“The Committee and Scrutiny Officer helped the museum to host scrutiny panel and providing something different, including a pop up tearoom, museum tour and object handling. This seemed to be positively received by members and gave the museum team a big boost to be able to present our work ‘in our own way’. I think this in the future could work well with other sections.”

In 2015/16 both Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel held meetings outside of the Town Hall at places relevant to the items on the agendas. Both officers and councillors welcomed this opportunity to see the sites in action. This is something that the Committee and Scrutiny Team plan to do again for appropriate subjects.

- “Whilst I fully accept the importance of the role of scrutiny, it is important that as part of the annual task setting, scrutiny need to check that the work area being considered has the resource capacity to commit to the process.”

Once a scrutiny topic has been suggested the application is forwarded to the Head of Service for comments. This provides an opportunity to indicate whether the service is able to support a review. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will also speak to officers to discuss any proposals and where necessary arrange meetings between officers and the scrutiny proposer. There are occasions when a scrutiny review needs to be carried out in a specific time frame and this is discussed with relevant officers. The Committee

and Scrutiny Team provide as much support as possible and will carry out additional research required by the task group.

- “I think members of the panel could be briefed more on the roles and responsibilities of officers attending prior to the panel.”

This is an area the Committee and Scrutiny Officer will look into further and discuss with the other officers within the Committee and Scrutiny Team. It may be possible to expand the ‘Introduction to Scrutiny’ handbook and / or the recently introduced ‘Information booklet’ for Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. Another option would be for the Chair to invite officers attending the meeting to introduce themselves and explain their role within the council.

6.3 Survey of members of the public and external organisations

This year a survey for members of the public and external organisations was not carried out as there were very few external people who had attended scrutiny as witnesses or guests. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer is currently working on producing a short questionnaire for external guests and will circulate it through the year. This will hopefully generate more responses and officers will also be able to act quickly should any issues arise.

6.4 Scrutiny suggestions for future reviews

Two scrutiny suggestions have been included in the councillors’ survey and one from an officer, as referenced in section 6.2. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will look at the suggestions and, where possible send the scrutiny proposal form and discuss with them the suggestion. She will also discuss the suggestions with the relevant Head of Service.

7. Other Scrutiny work

7.1 Cabinet/scrutiny meetings

The Joint Cabinet Scrutiny meeting usually comprises the Mayor and her Cabinet and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget Panel and Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. There were no meetings arranged during 2015/16.

7.2 Scrutiny 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'.

One councillor attended the 'Effective Scrutiny Programme' organised by the Leadership Academy.

There was one training session prior to Budget Panel in September 2016, to which all councillors were invited. The training covered an overview of local government finance and how the council is funded.

7.3 Scrutiny Handbook

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer updated the 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 scrutiny library. The handbook will continue to be reviewed and adapted as required.

During the year the Committee and Scrutiny Team worked with other officers to develop the new handbook for the members of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. It highlights the Council's key contracts and useful information for the Scrutiny Panel. This has been given to the 2016/17 scrutiny panel.

7.4 Scrutiny Library

The scrutiny library has been included in the scrutiny handbook 'An Introduction to Scrutiny', which is given to newly elected members and all participants of scrutiny committees and panels. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer regularly monitors the information and updates the library list accordingly. Some of the information is available online and other documents can be obtained by contacting the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

7.5 Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network has continued to hold meetings throughout 2015/16. The network comprises officers from Hertfordshire County Council, the districts and borough councils within Hertfordshire and representatives from local authorities in Bedfordshire. 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 and borough councils.

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

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