Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny in Watford Borough Council 2013/14

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

1. Introduction and overview

In 2013/14 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 2013/14 were –

- Watford Community Housing Trust (continued from 2012/13)
- Property Review (to be continued in 2014/15)

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

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs met three times with the Mayor and members of the Cabinet in 2013/14. Further information is available in section 6.2.

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

In 2013/14 there was an increase in councillor involvement in scrutiny. 28 out of 36 councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting. 22 Councillors had participated in a scrutiny meeting as a member or a substitute. Three Portfolio Holders attended scrutiny meetings to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive. Three Councillors had attended meetings as observers and participated when permitted by the scrutiny committee or panel.

2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership:

Councillor Karen Collett (Chair)
Councillor Asif Khan (Vice Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Nigel Bell, Sue Greenslade, Kareen Hastrick, Stephen Johnson, Ann Lovejoy and Rabi Martins

The following Councillors also participated in Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:
Councillors Jackie Connal (observer), Shirena Counter (Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel), Jagtar Dhindsa (Chair of Budget Panel), Anne Joynes (observer), Malcolm Meerabux (observer), Lindsey Scudder (substitute) and Darren Walford (substitute)

The following Portfolio Holders attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year:
Councillors Derek Scudder (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Strategy and Client Services), Iain Sharpe (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development) and Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Democracy and Governance)

2.1 The Committee's work programme for 2013/14

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 Members discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas. Members continued to monitor the performance of the **Benefits Service** and received regular updates throughout the year.

- **A referral from Audit Committee** was included on the agenda in March. Audit Committee had reviewed the Council's Risk Register and concerns had been raised about **homelessness** and the potential pressures on the Council's use of temporary and bed and breakfast accommodation. The Head of Community and Customer Services and Housing Section Head attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting in March to provide a presentation on the Council's legal duties in respect of homelessness and how it was managed in Watford. Information was provided about the

HomeLet scheme which had started in July 2013 and was included in the performance report.

- **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 on a decision needs to be submitted to Council.

- **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee** became a regular item on the agenda in 2013/14. The Council's appointed representative for 2013/14 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 added as regular items to the agenda during the year. Members on Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that as the over-arching scrutiny committee for the Council it should be aware of the work being undertaken by the other Scrutiny Panels and Task Groups. The three Chairs are invited to each meeting to provide an update of their panels' latest meeting. If the Chair is unable to attend a written update is provided.

- **Task Groups –** there were no new scrutiny topics considered during the year. Two scrutiny Task Groups carried out reviews during the year. One Task Group completed its review of Watford Community Housing Trust and the other commenced its review of the Property service. Further information is available in Section 5.

- **Review of previous reports** Throughout 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 2013/14 were –

  Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework
  (review update)
  Hospital Parking Charges (review update)
  Affordable Housing review (review update)
  Services for the Deceased (review update)
  Management of Disabled Parking Bays
  (Cabinet response and review update)
  Watford Community Housing Trust
  (Housing Trust and Cabinet's responses and review update)

2.2 Call-in

There were no call-ins of Executive decisions during 2013/14.

The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the recommendation from the call-in in December 2011. At the meeting in 2011 the Scrutiny Committee had ratified the Cabinet's decision but had requested that scrutiny should examine the impact on the four organisations which had been subject to the largest cuts in voluntary sector grants. Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided with a summary of the impact on the four organisations and the latest status of the groups.

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

Scrutiny still continues to develop both in terms of its approach to monitoring the Council's performance and seeking to improve its involvement with the public. This report provides the opportunity to review last year's activity within Overview and Scrutiny.

Our committee monitored Revenues and Benefits which over the past year has implemented several changes, one being reducing the waiting time for claimants to receive payment. In addition the department identified areas to improve and one of these initiatives was to meet with Thrive Homes and WCHT to discuss the service provided by the teams and for the registered social landlords to be more specific when questioning tenants, thus cutting waiting times. Furthermore it was clear that staff had been asked to put forward improvements and that the morale of the team was much improved. The committee was pleased with the new approach and the service would continue to be monitored in 2014/15.

One of the main areas of work that Overview and Scrutiny under took was a review of services provided by Watford Community Housing Trust. This was brought about by councillors receiving large volumes of casework. It was agreed by the task group to invite tenants to the Town Hall and for a survey to be carried out. Engaging with the tenants enabled us to understand their concerns and the results mirrored the calls and enquiries Councillors had received. Overall 20 recommendations were put to the Trust, which consisted of aims and strategies, customer satisfaction, repairs, communication and social enterprise. I am pleased to report that many of these areas are now being looked at and are included in the Trust's aims. The call waiting time in our opinion is far from satisfactory and this we will be pursing in future meetings with the Trust. I on behalf of O&S would like to thank them for all their cooperation in sending us the relevant information and answering questions during the process.

Our Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel has gained additional services over the past year. It was felt that such an important area required training for all Councillors and I am pleased to report this will be carried out in July.

The Community Safety Task Group has received an ASB and Scan Net briefing which was very informative and the public were comforted that this was in place.

All councillors have now received all contact details of police officers for their wards. Later this year the panel will consider the impact of the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill on Watford and the Police.

A Property Task Group was set up in the year in which they were given a presentation by the Property Team. There is currently a Property Review taking place which the task group is involved in.

We look forward to a visit from Paul Regan from Healthwatch Hertfordshire who has been invited to attend O &S to provide a presentation. Healthwatch Hertfordshire acts as patient advocates. Furthermore Councillors have shown an interest in looking at Mental Health concerns within young people; this was due to newspapers and agencies reporting an increase in the last year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Chairs of Task groups and Panels as well as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their dedication and interest over the past year. Furthermore I would like to thank all officers of WBC and outside agencies who attended to update us and answer questions. In addition a huge thanks to Democratic Services, Pat Thornton, Sandra Hancock, Rosy Wassell and Jodie Kloss for their research, minute taking and follow ups. Lastly, I want to thank the community of Watford for attending meetings and helping us make the improvements necessary to improve services. This is in my opinion is effective Scrutiny and one we should all be proud of.

Councillor Karen Collett
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2013/14

3. Budget Panel

Membership

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Chair)
Councillor Steve Rackett (Vice Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Shirena Counter, George Derbyshire, Sue Greenslade, Rabi Martins, Peter Taylor and Matt Turmaine

The following Councillors also participated in Budget Panel during the year: Councillors Nigel Bell (observer), Jackie Connal (observer), Peter Jeffree (as a substitute), Stephen Johnson (as a substitute), Anne Joynes (observer), Asif Khan (observer), Malcolm Meerabux (observer) and Mo Mills (observer)

The following Portfolio Holders attended Budget Panel meetings during the year: Councillor Derek Scudder (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Strategy and Client Services), Councillor Iain Sharpe (Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development) and Councillor Mark Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Shared Services and Democracy and Governance)

3.1 The Panel's Work Programme for 2013/14:

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

- **The Final Outturn for 2012/2013** was considered by Budget Panel prior to it being presented to Cabinet. Members discussed several areas in depth, including the Pension Fund, budget estimates, the Revenues and Benefits Service and the Car Parking Reserve. As a result of the discussions it was agreed that reports would be produced for future meetings on the financial performance of Revenues and Benefits and the commercial rent portfolio.

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

- **The Medium Term Financial Strategy** was considered at several meetings during the year and discussions covered several areas in the Strategy. Members had welcomed the Head of Strategic Finance and Shared Services' clear explanation of the Strategy. The latest Strategy was presented to the Panel with the Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates report in January.

- **Revenues and Benefits Finance** was reviewed by the Panel in September and October. The Panel discussed Benefit Subsidy and received comparative data at the October meeting. It also reviewed the collection rates for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates.

- **Non-Domestic Rates – Review of Discretionary Relief** was discussed in September. The Panel was advised of the types of mandatory and discretionary relief available. As a result of this discussion it was agreed that a training session would be incorporated into the work programme in order to

inform the Panel about Business Rates since April 2013. The training session took place at the November meeting.

- **Review of Parking Reserve Account** was carried out by the Panel in October. Members were informed about the Parking Reserve Account and the proposed traffic related schemes that had been identified for the forthcoming financial year. The Panel discussed the staffing arrangements at the Parking Shop and the deployment of Civil Enforcement Officers. At the end of the discussion it was agreed that at this stage the Panel would not make any suggestions about the future use of the reserve. It was acknowledged that the Panel would be able to review the parking permit charges at the following meeting when it was due to review fees and charges.

- **An Overview of Commercial Rents and Next Steps** was presented to the Panel in November. The presentation provided an overview of the property owned by the Council, debt management and asset valuations. The Panel was informed about the Property Review being carried out during 2014.

- **Fees and Charge 2014/15,** the draft report was reviewed by the Panel. Members focussed on the proposal to increase the parking permit charges. Members were concerned at the high percentage increase of the first permit from £22 to £25. The Panel agreed that a modest increase of £1 would be more acceptable. This recommendation was reported to Cabinet as part of the budget report in January.

- **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2014/2018 and Treasury Management Strategy 2014-2017** 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**

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

The session in October provided an overview of Local Government Finance and how the Council was funded.

The second training session, held in November, provided the Panel with an overview of the changes to Business Rates since April 2013 and the impact on Watford Borough Council.

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

3.3 **Chair/ Vice Chair's Commentary**

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

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

Two training sessions were organised for the benefit of new members on the Budget Panel. The first session in October provided an overview of Local Government Finance and how the Council was funded. The second training session, held in November, provided the Panel with an overview of the changes to Business Rates since April 2013 and the impact on Watford Borough Council. The feedback has been very positive.

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

I feel that the Panel worked well with there being lively discussion on a number of occasions. One of them was on the proposal to increase the parking permit charges for the first permit from £22 to £25. After a long discussion the Panel agreed that a modest increase of £1 would be more acceptable. It was generally felt that the political dimension had not intruded upon the ultimate decisions taken by the Panel.

Finally I would like to thank the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services, Councillor Mark Watkin for attending each meeting and answering questions. We would like to thank Joanne Wagstaffe, who joined us last year, for all her hard work and a very personal thank you for all her help to me as Chair. Thanks to all other officers who attended the meetings to present their reports and answer questions and my personal thanks to Sandra Hancock for her hard work/help. I would like to wish the new Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel best of luck.

Last but not least a big thank you to Steve Rackett (the vice chair of the Budget Panel) for all his work/help, who served on the panel for a number of years and stood down this year as a Councillor.

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa
Chair of Budget Panel 2012/13

4. Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel

Membership

Councillor Shirena Counter (Chair)
Councillors Sue Greenslade, Kareen Hastrick, Anne Joynes and Steve Rackett

The following Councillors also participated in the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel during the year: Councillors Stephen Johnson (observer) and Derek Scudder (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Strategy and Client Services).

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

4.1 The Panel's Work Programme for 2013/14:

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

1. Terms of reference

Following the Council's service redesign, which saw the outsourcing of waste, recycling, parks and open spaces to Veolia, the Panel's terms of reference were updated. The contracts which come under the remit were specified to be as follows:

- Waste, Recycling, Street Cleansing, Parks and Open Spaces
- Leisure centres
- Colosseum
- Management of Hostels and Temporary Accommodation
- The Parking Service

Additional contracts are to be added to the terms of reference as and when they are entered into.

In addition, the corresponding new Council structure had led to the creation of a new service, Corporate Strategy and Client Services. At its first meeting of the year, the Panel received an introduction to the structure of the new service and how the contracts were monitored by officers.

2. Quarterly performance indicators

The Panel has received regular performance reports provided by the Partnerships and Performance Section Head. The format and content of the reports has evolved over the year as the Panel has scrutinised different contracts and decided to monitor particular indicators on a regular basis.

Among the performance indicators monitored through this report are:

- Usage of the leisure centres measured in membership and throughput levels
- Number of performances and community hires of the Colosseum
- Satisfaction levels with leisure facilities
- Levels of residual waste and recycling

- Number of missed bins and time levels for resolution
- Numbers of parking penalty charge notices, appeals won and the reasons for any lost

As the Panel reviews services, further indicators are added to the performance report and this has allowed the Panel to monitor services on an ongoing basis after reviewing them in detail. Councillors have been particularly keen to increase the number of qualitative indicators to the performance report to gain a fuller understanding of residents' views.

3. The contract with Veolia

The Waste and Recycling Client Manager attended the meeting of the Panel in November. The presentation provided the Panel with a background to the contract, an overview of the services provided, an explanation of how the contract was managed by the Council's environment client team and details of the performance mechanisms that were in place.

The Panel considered the early results of the new co-mingled recycling service and discussed the feedback from residents. Issues such as contamination levels in the recycling collections and fly-posting were also discussed with officers.

Members received a further update on the service at the meeting in February 2014 after the new service had had more time to settle down. The update provided the Panel with the latest waste and recycling figures. There was a discussion about chewing gum and other street-care issues as well as the process for increasing the number of parks to be awarded Green Flags. This contract is to be monitored closely through the performance report and in more detail again in early 2015.

4. The Colosseum contract with HQ Theatres

The contract with HQ Theatres was scrutinised at the meeting in February 2014. The presentation provided the Panel with details of the history of the Colosseum, how the programmes were delivered, key performance indicators, a summary of performances between September 2011 and December 2013, community use and an overview of the finances. In addition, details were provided about the vision for the future and the areas for development.

The discussion centred on the balance between commercial hires to ensure sustainability and opening the venue up to community groups. The Panel also received further information about the way the finances were structured.

Chair's Commentary

The Panel is still a relatively new panel and with the increasing number of services needing scrutiny, is still very much "finding its feet". Part of its work this year has been to determine the level of scrutiny required so that it is not overwhelmed with excessive detail, yet scrutinises performance sufficiently thoroughly to identify any areas that may be of concern.

The meetings have been productive and all members have actively participated. As user satisfaction is one of our key concerns, we have requested more qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data and provide a more holistic picture of performance.

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

Councillor Shirena Counter
Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel (2013/14)

5. Task Groups

5.1 Community Safety Partnership Task Group 2013/14

Membership:

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)
Councillors Jeanette Aron, Anne Joynes, Ann Lovejoy, Rabi Martins, Kelly McLeod and Malcolm Meerabux

The following Councillors also participated in the Community Safety Partnership Task Group during the year as observers: Councillors Mark Watkin and Tim 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.

The Task Group's Work Programme for 2013/14:

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

- Drug and Alcohol Treatment with input from Spectrum and Hertfordshire County Council
- Scan Net and the changes to the Antisocial Behaviour regime with presentations by Hertfordshire Constabulary and the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Coordinator

The topics considered at the meetings were:

1. An introduction to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

The Task Group welcomed the new Chief Inspector for Watford who provided Members with an overview of his priorities for the Borough. He discussed how best to engage with the vulnerable members of the community which was to be a particular focus.

Councillors discussed the new structure for the neighbourhood policing teams with the Neighbourhood Inspector. Other topics covered included engagement with residents' associations and the Immobilise programme which recorded details of mobile phones to prevent thefts.

There was a discussion about the use of stop and search; the Task Group were asked about the checks and balances in place.

The Partnership's action plans also considered as well as the targets achieved during the previous year.

The Community Safety Manager summarised the changes to the CSP including the inclusion of the NHS on the Watford Responsible Authorities Group and changes in the Probation Service.

2. Thriving Families

The Task Group were interested in learning more about the Thriving Families programme and how it operated in Watford. The County Council's Programme Manager and the Watford and Three Rivers Team Manager presented an overview to Members. This presentation covered:

- Ethos and aims of the programme
- Problems experienced by the families involved
- How outcomes were measured
- Operation in Watford
- Future development

The Task Group discussed how the programme interacted with other agencies as well as early intervention and identifying local hotspots.

3. Community Safety Engagement Surveys

In early 2013, the Task Group considered scrutiny suggestions put forward by Members. One of the suggestions, made by Councillor Meerabux, related to how community groups engaged on community safety issues. The Task Group decided to circulate three questionnaires to councillors, local residents' associations and community groups and Police officers from the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

At the meeting in December, the Task Group considered the results of the surveys which included:

- Councillors found that casework, residents' association meetings and other neighbourhood meetings were the most effective ways of engaging with local residents on community safety issues.
- For the Police, the most effective engagement strategies were community events and beat surgeries

The Task Group considered the results and agreed a number of actions to encourage engagement on community safety issues. These included highlighting the availability of the Police to attend community events, providing a contact sheet to councillors with the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team's details and encouraging residents with an interest in community safety to contact their local Sergeant.

4. Learning Points from all-member briefings

There were two areas that the Task Group felt that that all councillors might be interested in learning more about. These were drug and alcohol treatment and Scan Net and the changes to Antisocial Behaviour. Task Group members attended the briefings and then discussed the learning points at subsequent meetings. This approach gave opportunities for wider participation in learning about community safety.

Chair's Commentary

The committee played an important role this year with a much more of a strategic focus on issues related to community safety. Many of the meetings involved

greater member and partner involvement which showed the strong interest in this area.

In an era of spending cuts and shrinking budgets, it is testament to all the partner agencies on how they are meeting the challenges that they are being confronted with.

There was a strong emphasis at looking at the impact of community safety on the most vulnerable in our communities; this work is vitally important to continue.

Members of the panel engaged in thorough scrutiny of the work carried out by the partner agencies including the use of Scan Net and the impact of drug and alcohol treatment within the borough. In addition as important changes to the anti-social behaviour legislation are going through parliament, we had a timely update from Liam Fitzgerald. All of these areas are something which have scope for further enquiry.

I would like to thank all the partner agencies for their contributions to the panel as well as other community organisations that are actively playing an important role in community safety. Going forward, we would welcome councillors to bring any suggestions they wish the task group to scrutinise.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude to the members of the task group who were all pro-active in the meetings and worked extremely closely in the scrutiny that took place.

Councillor Asif Khan
Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group (2013/14)

5.2 **Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group**

Membership:

Councillor Asif Khan (Chair)
Councillors Karen Collett, Jackie Connal, Stephen Johnson and Anne Joynes

Councillors Ian Brandon and Kelly McLeod attended meetings during the review.

The Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group was completed in September 2013. It had been carried forward from 2012/13. A successful drop-in session for tenants had taken place in May 2013, enabling residents to speak individually to Councillors. The Task Group then met the Housing Trust's Chief Executive who responded to the Task Group's questions. The final report was forwarded to the Housing Trust, those residents who had attended the drop-in sessions, residents' and tenants' groups and the Council's Executive.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee has monitored the original recommendations. In January 2014 the Scrutiny Committee invited the Housing Trust's Chief Executive to provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations. A further update has been requested to take place during 2014/15.

5.3 **Property Task Group**

Membership:

Councillor Nigel Bell (Chair)
Councillors Kareen Hastrick, Stephen Johnson, Asif Khan and Malcolm Meerabux

The original scrutiny suggestion was submitted by Councillors Asif Khan and Steve Rackett. Although appointed to the Task Group by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Rackett stepped down as he had been elected as Chairman of Watford Borough Council for 2013/14. Councillor Nigel Bell replaced him on the Task Group prior to the first meeting. During 2013/14 there has been one meeting of the Task Group. At the meeting the Task Group received a presentation by the Head of Regeneration and Development and the Programme Manager setting out an overview of the property owned by Watford Borough Council and asset management. The Programme Manager also explained about the review that was to be carried out by a consultant. It was agreed that the Task Group would be informed of the review's progress and would be able to review the consultant's report.

This Task Group will continue to work in 2014/15 until it has completed its review and made its recommendations.

The reports and minutes of all scrutiny meetings are available on the Council's website.

For further information please contact the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

6. Other Scrutiny work

6.1 2013/14 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.

Councillors' survey

Of the 36 councillors and the Mayor in Watford Borough Council, 19 have completed the survey; this is an increase of two more respondents than in 2012/13. 10 out of the 19 Councillors who were members of a scrutiny committee or task group during 2013/14 completed the survey. The results of the survey showed that:

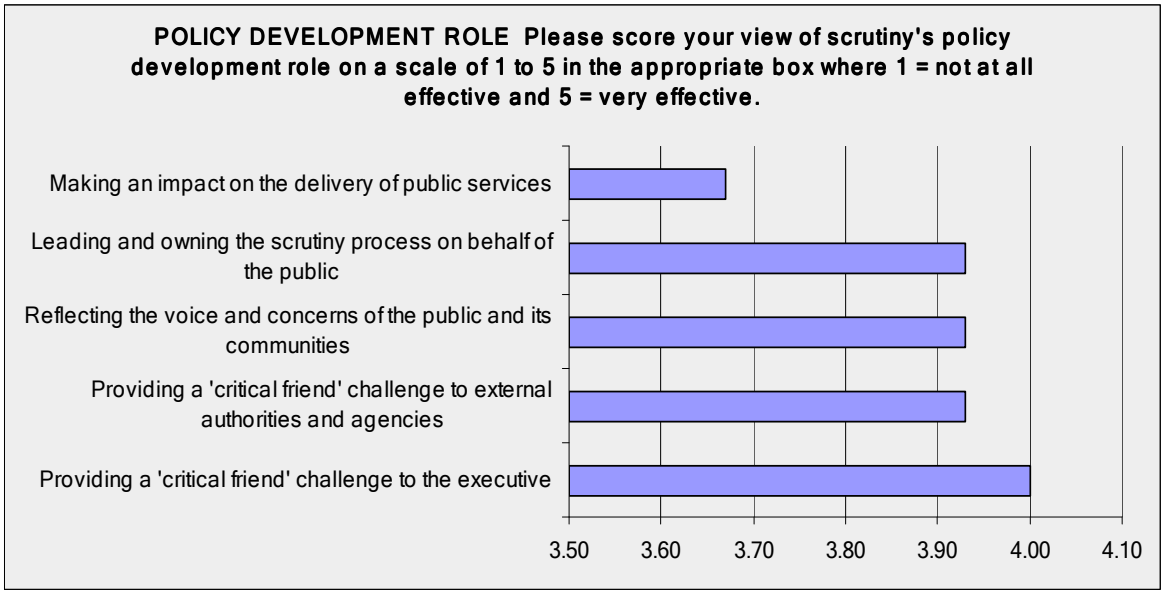
One Member had not taken part in scrutiny during the year as they were a member of the Executive. Three other respondents stated that they had no time or had other commitments. One person stated that there had been no task groups proposed where they could take part.

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.

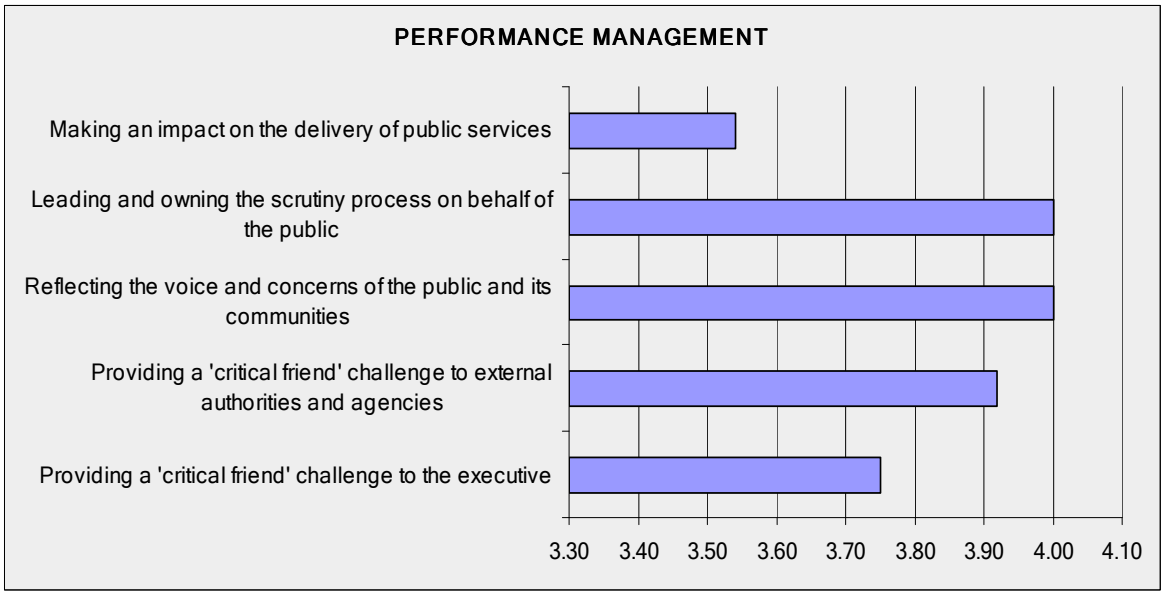
- Making an impact on the delivery of public services
- Leading and owning the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Providing a 'critical friend' challenge to external authorities and agencies
- Providing a 'critical friend'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

15 of the respondents completed the questions about scrutiny's roles in policy development and performance management. 14 respondents scored scrutiny's budget and finance role. 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 2.92 or higher. This showed a small decrease of 0.15 when compared to the 2012/13 survey results. The decrease was due to lower averages in scoring scrutiny's budget and finance role. The individual scrutiny areas are explored further in the following graphs.

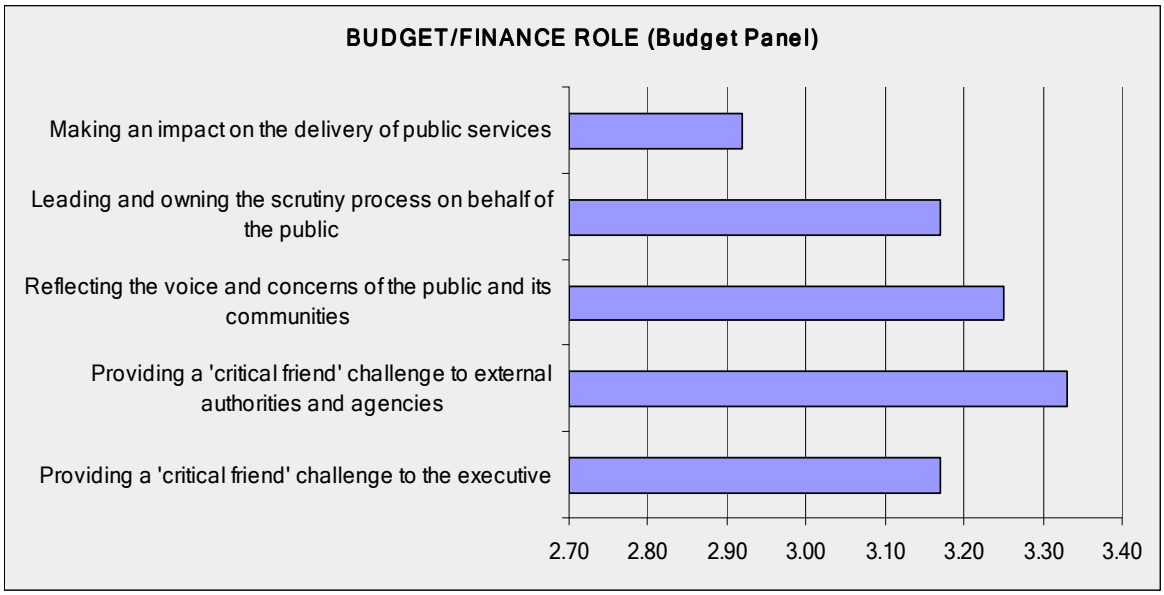
The first graph below shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Policy Development** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.67 and the highest was 4.00. This shows an overall improvement on the 2012/13 results, which were 3.33 and 3.94 respectively.



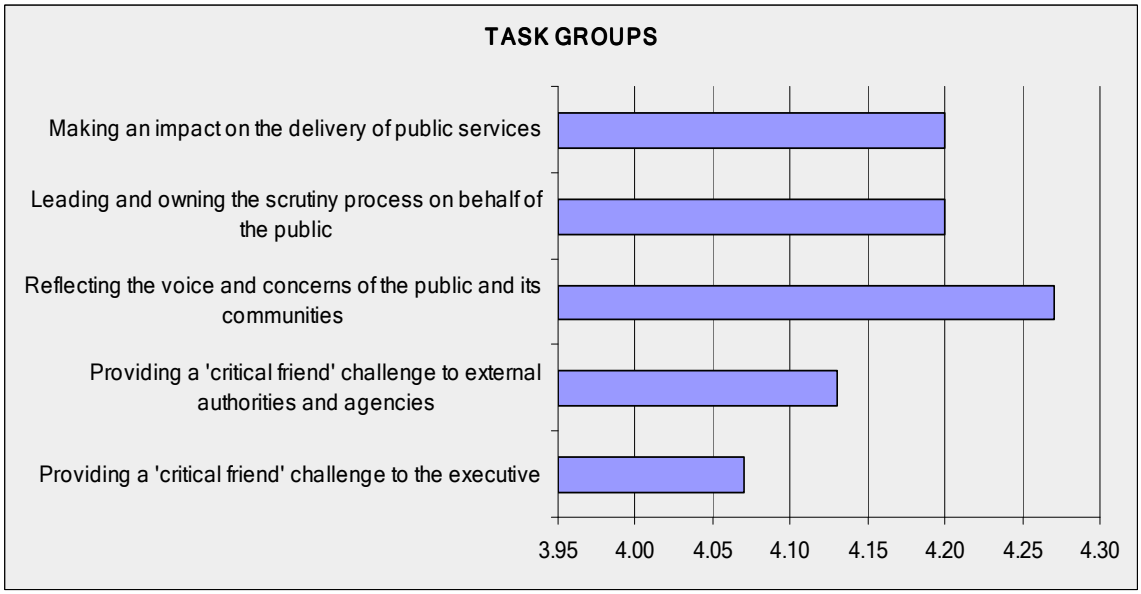
The second graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Performance Management** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 3.54 and the highest was 4.00. This shows an improvement on the lowest rating of the 2012/13 results, which was 3.40. There has been a slight decrease in the highest rating which was 4.07 in 2012/13.



The third graph shows the average rating for each aspect for the **Budget and Finance** role of scrutiny. The lowest rating average was 2.92 and the highest was 3.33. This shows an overall decrease in Members' views on the effectiveness in this area of scrutiny when compared to the 2012/13 results, which were 3.07 and 3.60 respectively.



The final graph shows the average rating for each aspect for **Task Groups**. The lowest rating average was 4.07 and the highest was 4.27. This shows an improvement on the lowest rating of the 2012/13 results, which was 3.73. The highest average rating has stayed the same, namely 4.27, which had been scored in both surveys for 'Reflecting the voice and concerns of the public and its communities'.



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.

- "I think the member make up of the scrutiny topic groups should reflect members' interests and not reflect any political bias/majority."

  The scrutiny Task Groups are not politically balanced. When a scrutiny suggestion is received the Committee and Scrutiny Officer emails all non-executive councillors and invites them to express an interest in participating in the proposed review. All the names of Councillors who have responded stating they wish to be included in the Task Group are then included within the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report sets out the scrutiny suggestion and the Scrutiny Committee decides whether to proceed with the review. The names are recorded in the order in which they are received by the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

- "It may help new members of scrutiny to have a summary of the past topics and outcomes."

  For 2014/15 the Committee and Scrutiny Officer has produced a 'Welcome to Scrutiny' pack for all new Councillors elected in June 2014 and all Councillors appointed to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget Panel, Outsourced Services Scrutiny and Community Safety Partnership Task Group. Within the pack a list of all previous scrutiny reviews has been provided, including the dates the final reports were submitted to the main scrutiny committee and the Executive. This information enables those interested in a review to find the information on the Council's website.

- "There were a few problems with a member using their position to politicise meetings which in my mind detracts from our reason for being there. This was being dealt with and so hopefully any future meetings will always be non political allowing members to do their work properly for the benefit of the Watford Community."

  Members are advised that scrutiny should be non political. Officers are only able to remind Councillors of this and can not control a meeting as that is the role of the Chair.

There were two further responses which provided positive comments about the Committee and Scrutiny Team and the development of scrutiny over the years.

Survey of officers

This survey, similar to the Councillors' survey, was completed by 10 officers. The survey showed that 8 of the officers, who responded to the survey, felt that they understood their role and had been appropriately briefed by the Committee and Scrutiny Team. The other two respondents had skipped these questions. Officers were asked whether they considered scrutiny had been an effective 'critical friend' to their service. There were no negative responses.

When asked how scrutiny could be improved one officer commented “Scrutiny has improved significantly over the last year with a sense of the process being well organised. I think when setting the topics and agendas it is important to recognise the time and resource required to undertake a thorough piece of work and to be proportionate. This aspect has also been better achieved this year even with quite a challenging set of agendas.” The Committee and Scrutiny Team will continue to work with other services to ensure that realistic timescales are reflected in reviews and work programmes. The Team will also ensure that scopes for Task Groups clearly define the aims of the suggested review.

A second officer stated that “We will need to work with TRDC on scrutinising the shared services under the new model.” The scrutiny of shared services at Watford Borough Council will be carried out by the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel in 2014/15. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer has contacted the Principal Committee Manager at Three Rivers District Council to identify the Lead Councillor for shared services at that authority. The Lead Councillor at Three Rivers District Council will be added to the contact list for the Scrutiny Panel. They will be informed of the dates of meetings and the agendas and reports as they are published. The procedures will be developed further during the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

Survey of members of the public and external organisations

This survey was completed by 6 people who had been guests and witnesses at scrutiny meetings. One respondent had attended Community Safety Partnership Task Group and the other five respondents had attended the Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group. There was one fewer response when compared to the 2012/13 survey.

All six of the respondents stated that they had understood the purpose of the meeting and their role. Two people commented on the atmosphere of the meeting. One of the responses referred to the use of the committee room, which it was felt diluted any welcoming atmosphere. The layout of the committee room had made it challenging when presenting evidence or responding to questions. The Committee and Scrutiny Team will review the use of the Committee Rooms for Task Groups, liaising with the relevant Chairs.

One respondent commented about guests being able to air their views about the subject under scrutiny. They said that more events where the public were able to meet Councillors and talk to them would be useful and more were needed. The Committee and Scrutiny Team works with Task Groups to review the witnesses required for the subject under scrutiny and how to involve them in the review. The Team has used a variety of ways to engage with the public including questionnaires and open drop-in sessions.

One person has made a suggestion for a scrutiny topic. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will contact the person to discuss the suggestion further.

Scrutiny Suggestions

Several scrutiny suggestions were included in the three surveys. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer will try to identify those people who have submitted suggestions and ask them to complete the scrutiny proposal form for more information.

6.2 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.

Three Joint Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings were held during 2013/14. The first meeting in July 2013 reviewed the scrutiny work programmes for the year and received an update on the current Task Groups. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee updated the meeting on scrutiny's progress throughout the year, often assisted by the other scrutiny Chairs.

6.3 Scrutiny Training

Two training sessions were held at the beginning of Budget Panel. The sessions covered Local Government Finance and Business Rates since April 2013.

One Councillor attended a training session about Local Government Finance organised by the Local Government Information Unit. He also attended the Parliamentary session organised by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Training on scrutinising contract management and services delivered by external providers has been arranged for 2014/15.

6.4 Scrutiny Library

Democratic Services has compiled a Scrutiny Library. Members are able to borrow the documents. Some of the documents are available online and the scrutiny library index provides the relevant links. All Councillors on a scrutiny committee or panel in 2014/15 will be provided with a copy of the available documents.

6.5 Hertfordshire Scrutiny Network

The Scrutiny Network has continued to hold meetings throughout 2013/14. The group continues to receive notification of Police and Crime Panel meetings. Each authority's work programmes are circulated to the other councils; this enables officers to see what else is being scrutinised around the county. The Network enables officers to share experiences and feed back 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 enables officers and the Executive to decide 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.

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

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