

Part A

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: 9 July 2019

Report author: Senior Democratic Services Officer

Title: Scrutiny annual report 2018/19

1.0 Summary

1.1 The constitution requires that a report is presented to Council annually on the work of scrutiny during the preceding year. This report describes the work and process of the council's scrutiny committee, panels and task groups during 2018/19.

2.0 Risks

2.1 There are no risks identified from this report.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That Council notes the annual scrutiny report for 2018/19.

Further information:

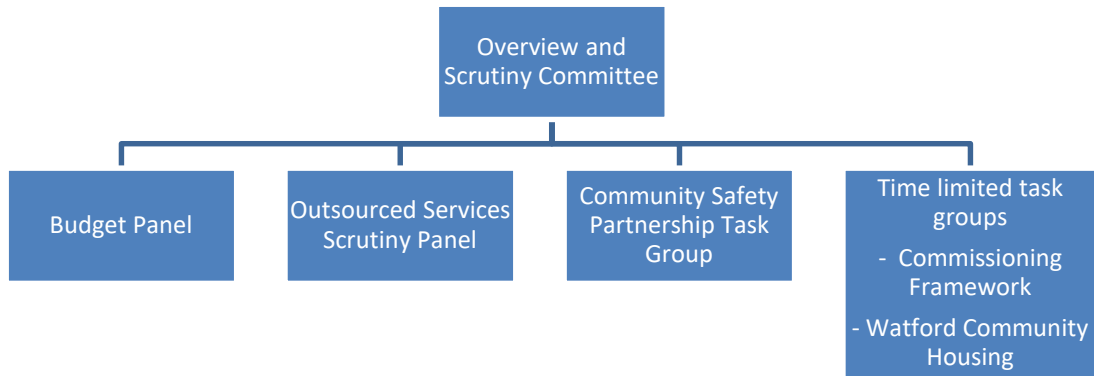
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Report approved by: Carol Chen, Group Head of Democracy and Governance

4.0 Scrutiny at Watford Borough Council in 2018/19

4.1 Scrutiny Structure

4.1.1 In 2018/19 the scrutiny structure comprised Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the over-arching scrutiny committee, Budget Panel, Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, which continued to monitor the local Community Safety Partnership. During the year two task groups were set up to review suggestions submitted by an officer and one from two councillors on behalf of a member of the public.



4.2 Councillor attendance at scrutiny

4.2.1 During 2018/19, 22 out of the 30 non-executive councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting; this is three fewer than in 2017/18. 21 councillors participated in a meeting either as a member or substitute. One councillor attended Budget Panel as an observer. Four portfolio holders attended scrutiny meetings to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive.

4.3 Scrutiny Training

4.3.1 At Council on 30 January 2018 it was agreed that scrutiny training would be compulsory for those councillors sitting or substituting on scrutiny committees. This training should be reviewed every two years. This would be in addition to the brief introduction given to new councillors at their induction.

4.3.2 It was agreed that an external provider would give the first compulsory training session. The Centre for Public Scrutiny was contacted and Tony Jackson provided the training. 18 councillors attended this training session and three others attended one to one sessions with the Senior Democratic Services Officer.

4.3.3 Budget Panel had one training session. It was provided at the first meeting and set out the role of Budget Panel.

4.4 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.4.1 Membership

The scrutiny committee comprised nine councillors. There was a slight change to the membership following the by-election in Oxhey in June.

Councillor Kareen Hastrick (Chair)

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Vice chair)

Councillors Sohail Bashir, Stephen Cavinder, Keith Crout, Mark Hofman, Imran Hamid (from July), Rabi Martins, Ian Stotesbury and Matt Turmaine (May to June only)

Other attendees included –

Councillor Asif Khan, substitute for Councillor Turmaine in June and as chair of the Watford Community Housing Task Group

Councillor Stephen Johnson, portfolio holder responsible for Housing and Property to answer questions

Councillor Mark Watkin, portfolio holder for Resources and Customer Services to answer questions

4.4.2 **Committee's work programme for 2018/19**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions during the year. No Executive key decisions were called in. The following items were discussed –

- **West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust** gave a presentation on developing local health services in west Hertfordshire. It also provided a general overview of the wider health service transformation; an update on the work to progress hospital developments and refreshing the strategic outline case. The Redevelopment Programme Director and Director of Communications for West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust responded to members' questions.
- **Performance updates** were presented on a quarterly basis. At the meetings councillors discussed the performance indicators and sought clarification in certain areas.
- **Small Grants Fund Review 2017/18** gave the scrutiny committee a chance to receive the annual review of the Small Grants Fund. It was noted that officers had taken on board comments from previous years and had included equalities data.
- **Housing – Homelessness Reduction Act** was discussed with the Head of Housing and he explained how the team was implementing the requirements of the new Act. He informed the scrutiny committee of the process followed from the first point a person approaches the council stating they are homeless.
- **Previous review update: Neighbourhood Forum** task group's recommendations were reviewed and progress on implementation was considered. All recommendations had been implemented except for one which had not been agreed by Cabinet.
- **Previous review update: Tackling Loneliness** task group's recommendations were reviewed and updated by the Senior Democratic Services Officer. There was still some work to be carried out on the recommendation requiring

information on the council's website. The work would continue to progress the outstanding recommendation.

- **Watford 2020 Programme and updates** were presented to the scrutiny committee providing councillors up to date progress on this important transformation programme for the council.
- **Firmstep presentation** by the Customer Service Section Head covered the new 'MyWatford' system some of which was already available to residents. Further forms were in the test phase for future inclusion.
- **Executive Decision Progress report** included details of all proposed key decisions and those key decisions taken by the Executive and officers. It also included information about any consultation with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report included links to the relevant reports and minutes.
- **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee** updates were provided by Councillor Karen Hastrick, who provided information on 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 given by the relevant chairs. The updates enabled Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be aware of the work being undertaken by the other scrutiny panels and task groups.
- **New scrutiny task groups** were presented for discussion by the scrutiny committee. The scrutiny committee agreed three new task groups. Two of the task groups were carried out during 2018/19 and the third was agreed to start in May/June 2019. Further information about the task groups carried out during 2018/19 is available further in this report.

The reports and minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Committee are available on the [Council's website](#).

4.5 **Budget Panel**

4.5.1 **Membership**

The scrutiny panel comprised nine councillors.

Councillor Sohail Bashir (Chair)

Councillor Peter Kloss (Vice chair)

Councillors Antony Barton, Nigel Bell, Jane Johnson, Rabi Martins, Maggie Parker, Glen Saffery and Nasreen Shah

Other attendees included –

Councillor Mark Watkin, portfolio holder responsible for Resources and Customer Services as an observer and to answer questions

4.5.2 **Panel's work programme 2018/19**

Budget Panel met on five occasions during the year. The following items were discussed –

- **The final outturn for 2017/18** (quarter 4) prior to it being presented to Cabinet. Budget Panel considered in particular: the revenue outturn, carry forwards for projects not yet completed in 2017/18, the capital position and capital programme, officers' management of the council's major projects, including Riverwell and the High Street. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.
- **Council Finances – business rates retention update.** Members were updated on government plans for business rates retention by local authorities. Watford Borough Council had joined the Hertfordshire pool of authorities piloting 75% business rates retention in 2019-20.
- **The Finance Digest Budget Monitor** was reviewed regularly by Budget Panel.
- **Budget report 2019/22.** The Panel reviewed the budget report, which included the revenue budgets for 2019-22, including details of the proposed fees and charges for 2019/20. Members discussed the financial implications of the Croxley Business Park proposal ahead of its presentation to Cabinet and Council. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.
- **Activities of the Property Investment Board.** At the request of members, Budget Panel received a presentation on the current activities of the Property Investment Board.

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

4.6 **Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel**

4.6.1 **Membership**

The scrutiny panel comprised seven councillors.

Councillor Stephen Cavinder (Chair)

Councillor Mark Hofman (Vice chair)

Councillors Jagtar Singh Dhindsa, Kareen Hastrick, Rabi Martins, Bilqees

Mauthoor and Glen Saffery

Other attendees included –

Councillor Amanda Grimston, substitute for Councillor Mark Hofman in July
Councillor Karen Collett, portfolio holder responsible for Community to answer questions

Councillor Stephen Johnson, portfolio holder responsible for Housing and Property to answer questions

Councillor Tim Williams, portfolio holder responsible for client services to answer questions

4.6.2 **Panel's work programme 2018/19**

Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel met on six occasions during the year. The following items were discussed –

- **Contract management overview** Members were provided with an overview of the council's approach to procurement, the governance arrangements and the emphasis on social value. They received information on the partnership approach taken by the council and how the panel could add value.
- **Quarterly performance indicators** Regular performance reports were received. Over the course of the year, the target-setting process was discussed and members challenged any targets which they did not feel were sufficiently robust. Further explanation was requested for areas of under-performance.
- **Parks and ground maintenance** Information was received about grass cutting and litter picking regimes; how Veolia responded to varying weather conditions and planned for peak visitor demand. The panel was advised on activities Veolia did to invest in the local community and what was planned for the future.
- **Hostels and temporary accommodation** The panel was advised as to how the council managed the accommodation contracts, the implications of a recent change to legislation, issues in relation to temporary and bed and breakfast accommodation, repair standards and timescales, annual fees and the new contract.
- **HQ Theatres, end of year report December 2018** An overview was provided on how the Colosseum had been utilised during the year (and how the events programme had been determined), on social value and community impact initiatives, environmental and sustainability issues, benchmarking, marketing strategy and future plans.

- **Street cleaning, Veolia annual leaf clearance programme** The scrutiny panel was advised on how the company had responded in 2018; including operatives out earlier and clearing leaves more effectively, how priority areas were identified and works coordinated, the hiring of equipment and a reduction in queries and requests.
- **Leisure centre contract, SLM** An overview was provided of the structure of the new contract, recent refurbishment works, the social value and impact of the contract, partnership work and the key performance indicators.
- **Parking enforcement contract with NSL** Details of the contract and the key changes and improvements to the service were explained. Councillors considered such matters as enforcement and removal of vehicles and the education of motorists.

4.6.3 Councillor Cavinder, the scrutiny panel's chair provided the following end of year statement.

“This has been a busy year for the panel during which it has diligently reviewed, debated and questioned several of Watford Borough Councils outsourced services partners. The panel has been pleased to see the continuing partnership approach which these contractors have adopted with the council and the improvements in services which this has brought about. In addition the panel has been comforted to see that each of its outsourced services partners takes their social responsibility seriously and has been delighted to hear of the many schemes which have been put in place for Watford's residents. The hard work of the panel during this year will ensure that the council's partners will continue to look for ways of improving what are already high standards of service.”

The reports and minutes of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel are available on the [council's website](#).

4.7 **Community Safety Partnership Task Group**

4.7.1 **Membership**

4.7.2 **Task Group's work programme in 2018/19**

The Community Safety Partnership Task Group carried out the council's statutory requirement to scrutinise the work of the local Community Safety Partnership. It met three times during 2018/19 and discussed the following topics –

- **Street homelessness** The task group received a presentation from Hertfordshire Constabulary and New Hope on how this issue impacted in Watford. Numbers had increased and measures being undertaken were discussed – including 'Operation Blanket', the Severe Weather Emergency

Protocol, humanitarian approaches, the use of an intervention team and the work of the Meadowell Surgery. The task group formerly recommended to the Community Safety Partnership that monies be made available to fund a mental health professional at New Hope.

- **Youth related crime** A presentation was given by Hertfordshire Constabulary and Chessbrook School on youth related crime issues. Members found the presentation to be extremely informative and beneficial.
- **Progress with the Community Safety Partnership's Protecting our Communities and Managing Crime Plan 2018/19** A progress update was provided at all meetings by the council's Community Safety Co-ordinator. It focussed on the four key elements.
- **Community Safety Partnership risk register** The task group was informed how the risk register would help to determine the partnership's priorities for 2019/2020.

The reports and minutes of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group are available on the [council's website](#).

4.8 Task Groups

4.8.1 Commissioning Framework Task Group

4.8.2 The Commissioning Framework Task Group's work took place during August 2018 over two meetings. The membership was Councillors Keith Crout, Mark Hofman, Rabi Martins (Chair) and Maggie Parker. The task group's final conclusions were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September. This timescale enabled the Leisure and Environmental Services Section Head to consider the task group's comments prior to his report to Cabinet in November.

4.8.3 The task group had recommended that the commissioning framework, which was due to expire in March 2019 should be extended for a further year to allow further clarity to emerge on the focus and direction of the council's policy and finances. The task group was referenced in the Head of Community and Environment Services' report to Cabinet in January 2019. Cabinet agreed that the new framework should commence from April 2019.

4.8.4 Watford Community Housing Task Group

4.8.5 Watford Community Housing Task Group's work took place between September 2018 and March 2019. The task group proposal was submitted by Councillors Asif Khan and Kareen Hastrick following contact from a local resident. The membership

was Councillors Stephen Cavinder, Aga Dychton, Amanda Grimston, Kareen Hastrick and Asif Khan (Chair).

4.8.6 The task group's final report and recommendations were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 21 March 2019. It was then circulated to Watford Community Housing who immediately responded to the recommendations. The Chief Executive and the Director of Operations will be attending Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September to formally respond and provide an update on progress in implementing the recommendations.

4.9 **Scrutiny from May 2019**

4.9.1 During 2018/19 a review of the council's constitution, including scrutiny, was carried out and reported to Council on 19 March 2019. Council agreed to a change to the scrutiny structure from May 2019. The new structure would comprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Finance Scrutiny Committee (replacement for Budget Panel) and time-limited task groups. The work previously carried out by Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and Community Safety Partnership Task Group will be undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has had its number of meetings increased to nine.

4.9.2 In May 2019 the Government issued new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny. The guidance will be reviewed to ensure that the council's scrutiny function is working in accordance with the policies and practices set out. The council is required to have regard to the guidance.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report.

5.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

5.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 There are no equalities, human rights or data protections implications as a result of this report.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 There are no staffing implications as a result of this report.

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 There are no accommodation implications as a result of this report.

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 The council has a statutory duty to scrutinise the local crime and disorder partnership. In 2018/19 this was carried out by the Community Safety Partnership Task Group.

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 There are no sustainability implications as a result of this report.

Appendices

None

Background papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

- Reports and minutes of scrutiny committees, panels and task groups (all are available on the [council's website](#))