

Part A

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: 13 October 2020

Report author: Senior Democratic Services Officer

Title: Scrutiny annual report 2019-20

1.0 Summary

1.1 The constitution requires that a report be 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 committees and task groups during 2019-20.

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 2019-20.

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

4.0 Scrutiny at Watford Borough Council in 2019-20

4.1 Scrutiny Structure

4.1.1 New scrutiny arrangements were agreed by Full Council on 19 March 2019, effective from May 2019. These retained the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and one Finance Scrutiny Committee (formerly Budget Panel) and made provision for up to three time limited task and finish groups per year (see figure 1 below).

4.1.2 Issues previously considered by the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel and the Community Safety Partnership Task Group were added to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

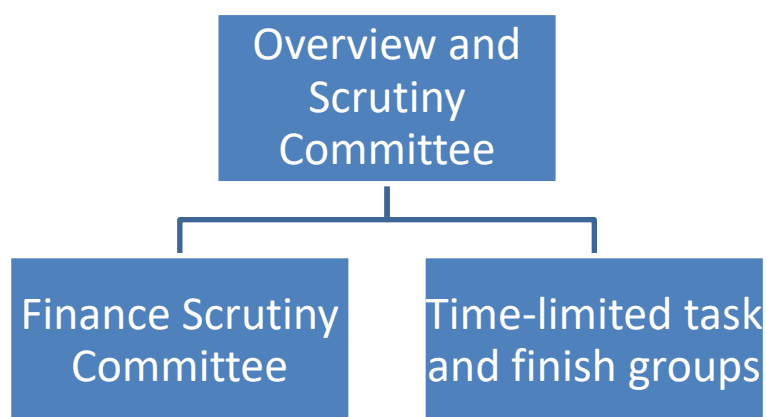


Figure 1

4.1.3 During the year, three task groups were set up to review suggestions submitted separately by an officer (Watford Colosseum Task Group), the Mayor (Mental Health Task Group) and Deputy Mayor (Health Services for the Deaf Task Group).

4.1.4 Also in May 2019, the Government issued new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny. The guidance was reviewed by officers to ensure that the council's scrutiny function was operating in accordance with the policies and practices set out in the document. Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the council was required to have regard to the guidance.

4.2 **Councillor attendance at scrutiny**

4.2.1 During 2019-20, 22 out of the 30 non-executive councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting or one of the three scrutiny task and finish groups organised during the year.

4.2.2 Four portfolio holders attended a scrutiny committee or task group meeting 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 or participating in scrutiny task and finish groups. The scrutiny training would be in addition to the brief introduction given to new councillors at their induction. Training must be repeated every two years.

4.3.2 Eleven councillors attended the compulsory training session run by the Senior Democratic Services Officer in June 2019. An additional one-to-one training session was arranged with one councillor later in that month.

4.3.3 Finance Scrutiny Committee held one bespoke training session. This took place at the first meeting in June and set out the role of the Finance Scrutiny Committee.

4.4 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.4.1 Membership

The scrutiny committee comprised nine councillors:

Councillor Amanda Grimston (Chair)

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa (Vice chair)

Councillors Dawn Allen-Williamson, Rabi Martins, Bilqees Mauthoor, Maggie Parker, Glen Saffery, Jessica Stiff and Matt Turmaine

Other attendees included:

Councillor Karen Collett, portfolio holder responsible for Community to answer questions

Councillor Keith Crout, substitute

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

Councillor Mo Mills, substitute

Councillor Jennifer Pattinson, substitute

Councillor Nasreen Shah, substitute

Councillor Richard Smith, substitute

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

Councillor Hall, Chair of Scrutiny at Broxbourne Borough Council came to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 February 2020 to observe scrutiny at Watford Borough Council.

4.4.2 Committee's work programme for 2019/20

Following the introduction of the new scrutiny arrangements from May 2019, Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme broadened considerably. The committee met on eight occasions during the year. No Executive key decisions were called in. The following items were discussed:

- **West Hertfordshire Hospitals Redevelopment** – future hospital services in West Hertfordshire and the implications for Watford General Hospital.
- **Performance updates** – quarterly reviews on the council's performance across its services
- **Rough sleeping in Watford** – rough sleeper numbers in Watford and the steps being taken by the housing service with its partners to resolve the issue.

- **Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities** – government’s statutory guidance on scrutiny, published on 7 May 2019.
- **Scrutiny task and finish groups** – establishment and completion of three scrutiny task and finish groups reviewing issues relating to Watford Colosseum, Mental Health and Health Service for the Deaf.
- **Small Grants Fund Review Year 3 2018-19** – allocation of small grants in the period April 2016 to March 2019 and proposed changes to the fund, including increasing the maximum grant from £2,000 to £3,000, introducing some match funding and amending the permitted frequency of applications from the same organisation.
- **Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework Year 3 and the funding period 2016-19** – review of the framework against key performance indicators.
- **HQ Theatres and Hospitality** – performance of the Watford Colosseum Management Contract during year 8 (September 2018 – August 2019) and information on the closure of the Colosseum at the end of 2019 due to issues with the ceiling in the main auditorium.
- **Leisure Centre Contract – SLM** – outcomes, initiatives and projects delivered through the Leisure Centre Management Contract during year 1 (June 2018 – June 2019), including Cassiobury paddling pools and splash pads.
- **Waste, streets and parks contract with Veolia** – end of year 6 contract performance with particular reference to improved street and environmental cleanliness, levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly-posting.
- **Revenues and Benefits** – processing and collection rates for the service together with a review of changes brought in as part of the Watford 2020 transformation programme.
- **Previous review update: Watford Community Housing** – review of the task group’s recommendations and progress on implementation.
- **Watford 2020 Programme updates** – quarterly updates on progress.
- **Executive Decision Progress report** – details of all proposed key decisions and those key decisions taken by the Executive and officers, including information about any consultations with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee** – updates 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 Finance Scrutiny Committee** – as required from the Finance Scrutiny Committee chair in response to scrutiny members' questions.

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

4.4.3 Due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 March 2020 was cancelled. At this meeting it had been intended to consider the Community Safety Partnership. This item was moved to the first meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the new municipal year which took place (virtually) on 18 June 2020.

4.5 **Finance Scrutiny Committee**

The scrutiny committee comprised:

Councillor Matt Turmaine (Chair)

Councillor Peter Kloss (Vice chair)

Councillors Dawn Allen-Williamson, Nigel Bell, Jane Johnson, Asif Khan, Rabi Martins, Jennifer Pattinson and Glen Saffery

Other attendees included Councillor Mark Watkin (portfolio holder responsible for Resources and Customer Services) and Councillor Mauthoor.

Finance Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions during the year. The following items were discussed:

The final outturn for 2018/19. Finance Scrutiny Committee considered in particular: budget variances for major projects, the council's reserves and the risks associated with staff vacancies. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.

Property Investment Board. The committee received a presentation on the current activities of the Property Investment Board.

Financial planning. Members reviewed the council's proposed budget and paid particular attention to borrowing related to major projects, the charging policy, details of the capital programme and the anticipated budget gap.

The Finance Digest Budget Monitor was also reviewed regularly by the committee.

Details of the committee's agendas and minutes are available [here](#).

4.6 Task Groups

4.6.1 Mental Health Task Group

The task group met on three occasions between June and September 2019 to consider a scrutiny suggestion from Mayor Taylor to look at current mental health provision in the borough and consider what more Watford Borough Council could do to support those living with mental health difficulties. Membership comprised Councillors Dawn Allen-Williamson, Amanda Grimston, Rabi Martins, Bilqees Mauthoor and Glen Saffery (Chair).

Three main activities were agreed by the task group:

1. Undertake a review of organisations dealing with mental health issues in the borough to understand the extent of current provision and identify any gaps;
2. Carry out a basic survey of these organisations to provide an overview of their roles and activities, identify any areas not covered and seek feedback on best practice that could be adopted; and
3. Understand the role of the council's Mental Health Champion and how he/she interacts with other mental health champions across Hertfordshire.

The task group's final report and recommendations were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in October 2019. It was forwarded to the Health and Wellbeing Forum, which subsequently accepted the task group's recommendations and has been working on their implementation. A copy of the report was also passed to the Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community.

4.6.2 Watford Colosseum Task Group

The task group proposal came from the Head of Community and Environmental Services and met in September and October 2019. Membership comprised Councillors Keith Crout, Amanda Grimston, Rabi Martins, Richard Smith (Chair) and Maggie Parker.

Dealing with issues of commercial sensitivity, the task group considered responses from private sector theatre operations in a direct market engagement exercise designed to inform an innovative approach to the development of a service specification and potential changes to the Watford Colosseum. This was intended to follow refurbishment works taking place during March to November 2021.

The task group's final report and recommendations were considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in December 2019. These were agreed in full.

4.6.3 Health Services for the Deaf Task Group

The task group's work took place in January and February 2020. The task group proposal was submitted by Councillor Karen Collett following concerns raised at a meeting with Watford Deaf Club. The membership was Councillors Steve Bolton, Aga Dychton, Amanda Grimston, Glen Saffery (Chair) and Richard Wenham.

The task group held an initial meeting with Watford Deaf Club to learn about deaf residents' experiences in accessing health services. This was followed by an evidence day attended by representatives of local health services.

The task group's final report and recommendations were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in June 2020. It was then forwarded to the Chairman of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee who has indicated that the recommendations will be taken forward as part of a county-wide review.

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 Group 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. Consideration in 2019/20 was delayed due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. It was carried out by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the earliest opportunity after the Government imposed lockdown in June 2020.

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](#))