

Part A

Report to: Council

Date of meeting: Tuesday, 18 July 2023

Report author: Senior Democratic Services Officer

Title: Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

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 2022/23.

2.0 Risks

2.1 There are no risks identified from this report.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That Council notes the scrutiny annual report for 2022/23.

Further information:

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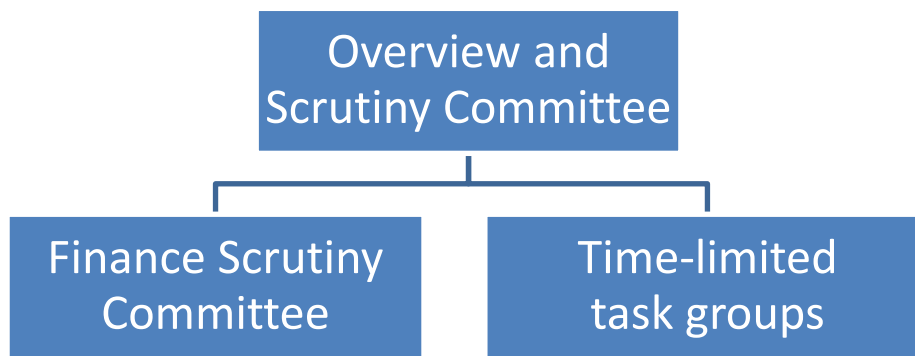
Report approved by:

4.0 Purpose and structure of scrutiny at Watford Borough Council

4.1 Scrutiny is part of Watford Borough Council's democratic structure. It is led by non-executive councillors who check and challenge decision-making to ensure that it is carried out in the best interests of Watford's residents. With a focus on optimising services for the local community, scrutiny members undertake three key areas of work:

- Reviewing and developing council policies to help shape the delivery of public services;
- Scrutinising decisions to check that the actions being taken are correct and that services are operating effectively;
- Examining external partners providing services which impact on the local community.

4.2 Watford Borough Council has two main committees: Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance Scrutiny Committee. In addition, there is provision for up to three time-limited task groups per year:



5.0 Scrutiny in numbers

5.1 During 2022/23

- 23 out of the 30 non-executive councillors attended at least one scrutiny meeting or the task group.
- There were 17 attendances by portfolio holders to a scrutiny committee or task group meeting to respond to questions on behalf of the Executive.
- 25 substantive issues were scrutinised by members.
- 14 public scrutiny meetings were held by Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance Scrutiny Committee.
- 1 in-depth task and finish group was completed.
- 5 partners and stakeholders provided evidence to scrutiny.
- In total 145 hits were made to the website to view part or all of a scrutiny meeting across the year, this is a similar number of views per meeting as the previous year. Note that not all meetings were webcast in 2022/23.

6.0 Scrutiny training

6.1 Scrutiny training is compulsory for councillors sitting or substituting on scrutiny committees. It must be repeated every two years.

6.2 15 councillors attended the in-house training session provided by Democratic Services. In addition, the Head of Finance held a bespoke training session on the role of the Finance Scrutiny Committee ahead of its first meeting as well as a session on treasury management later in the year.

7.0 Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7.1 Membership

The council's overarching scrutiny committee comprised nine councillors:

Councillor Simon Feldman (Chair)

Councillor Favour Ezeifedi (Vice Chair)

Councillors Shafiq Ahmed, Peter Kloss, Rabi Martins, Tom Osborn, Kennedy Rodrigues, Jessica Stiff and Matt Turmaine

Due to councillors taking leaves of absence, Councillor Osborn assumed the Chair for a number of the meetings and Councillor Jeffree substituted for much of the year.

The following portfolio holders also attended meetings during the course of the year:

- Portfolio Holder for Community, Councillor Aga Dychton.
- Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing, Councillor Jennifer Pattinson.
- Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability, Councillor Ian Stotesbury
- Portfolio Holder for Property, Resources and Customer Service, Councillor Mark Watkin

7.2 Committee work programme in 2022/23

- 7.2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on nine occasions during the year. No Executive key decisions were called in. Details of the committee's agendas and minutes are available [here](#). The following section summarises discussions on the substantive items considered by the committee.
- 7.2.2 Council Plan and performance updates: Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to receive the regular updates on progress against the council plan and key performance indicators (KPIs). Members continued to provide challenge around the targets for certain KPIs. The committee also noted updates on various initiatives in the council plan, asking for more details on timelines as required. On the Organisational Development Strategy, councillors asked about the use of the new office space and staff wellbeing at work. A recurring theme has been the performance of the return-to-work interviews KPI which is affected by annual leave. Following the end of the municipal year, members of the committee were invited to a briefing on the refreshed KPIs which are being measured from April 2023.
- 7.2.3 ArrivaClick contract: This item had been scheduled during 2021/22 when the committee looked at the other sustainable transport contracts. A representative from Arriva attended the meeting virtually. Factors affecting usage were considered and the committee requested further data on riders which was provided. There were discussions around publicity and how the service could be supported. It was agreed that a workshop be arranged for councillors; this took place in September 2022. The purpose of this session was informing and equipping councillors to talk about the service with residents and groups.
- 7.2.4 Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSCF): This item reviewed the annual report of the VSCF. Members focused on the impact of the inflationary environment and the standstill budget that was in place. Officers provided reassurances that support was being provided wherever possible.
- 7.2.5 Community Safety Partnership (CSP): The usual practice has been for the CSP to be scrutinised on an annual basis, but members requested an interim update so it was reviewed twice during 2022/23. At the first update, the Community Safety Manager made a presentation to the committee, setting out progress against the agreed objectives. The committee were interested to discuss the perception of crime levels, how reports of antisocial behaviour should be made and how to ensure strategic approaches were being taken. In February 2023, the newly-appointed Chief Inspector also attended and presented his priorities for Watford. Overview and Scrutiny discussed community triggers, the reassure and inform priority, Police presence in the streets and street lighting.

- 7.2.6 ICT Strategy: Officers provided an overview of the ICT Strategy and the key priorities for the service. The committee discussed cyber security at length and also the possibility of bring-your-own-device for members.
- 7.2.7 Voluntary Sector Strategy (VSS) and the Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) task group update: This item provided an update on progress against recommendations made by the VSS and the W3RT task group. Representatives from W3RT attended and provided an update on their work. There were discussions around continuing to improve engagement with diverse communities, ensuring due diligence in funding applications and the priority of engaging with younger people.
- 7.2.8 Other task group recommendations updates: The committee reviewed updates against recommendations made by the Sustainable Transport Strategy Task Group and the Electric Vehicles Task Group. The committee discussed the importance of enforcing lower speeds, noting that there had been little progress on extending 20mph roads through the borough. Members also asked for further information on school travel plans as well as data on Beryl Bike usage. The committee noted the continuing progress on EV charging infrastructure and that the outcome of a significant funding bid was awaited.
- 7.2.9 Watford Community Housing – update on maintenance: Following recent events nationally around social housing standards, the largest local registered provider, Watford Community Housing (WCH), were invited to present an overview of the approach to maintenance. The committee discussed the energy efficiency programme, work on damp and mould, the inhouse repairs team, triaging of repairs, benchmarking of customer satisfaction and WCH’s wider development programme. It was agreed that a Housing task group would be established in the new municipal year.

8.0 Finance Scrutiny Committee

8.1 Membership

The scrutiny committee comprised:

Councillor Matt Turmaine (Chair)

Councillor Peter Kloss (Vice chair)

Councillors Karen Clarke-Taylor, Asif Khan, Rabi Martins, Lenny Nembhard, Bill Stanton, Darren Walford and Richard Wenham

The portfolio holder responsible for Property, Resources and Customer Services, Councillor Mark Watkin, also regularly attended meetings.

8.2 Committee work programme in 2022/23

- 8.2.1 Finance Scrutiny Committee met on five occasions during the year. Details of the meetings can be found [here](#). The following items were discussed.
- 8.2.2 The final outturn for 2021/22: Finance Scrutiny Committee considered in particular: the carry forwards and their justification, the impact on revenue accounts of re-profiling of major capital projects which spanned several years, the impact of how projects were

managed and the need to carry forward funding, the rephrasing of the Woodside Sports Village, the impact of the inflationary environment on capital projects. The minutes of the discussion were forwarded to Cabinet.

- 8.2.3 Joint ventures: The committee received a presentation by the Head of Finance, outlining various commercial ventures designed to support the council's revenue. This covered the structures, objectives, budgets and oversight of joint ventures. Members were interested to discuss the best way to deliver affordable housing and the personal risks associated with officers acting as directors.
- 8.2.4 Financial Monitoring 2022/23: The members discussed these quarterly reports throughout the year. The committee particularly focused on budgetary pressures, risks to the budgets, service costs and the longer-term impact of Covid 19 on service demands. with any recommendations being sent to Cabinet.
- 8.2.5 Property Investment Board and Croxley Park: Part B (confidential) updates were received from officers and Lambert Smith Hampton Investment Management who manage the council's property investment portfolio.
- 8.2.6 Budget Planning Framework: The committee received a report detailing the budget setting framework and they discussed the risk associated with debt and the recovery process.
- 8.2.7 Financial Planning: Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2023/24 and Medium-Term Financial strategy to 2025/26. Members discussed the Public Works Loan Board, increased costs for the parking service, housing service costs and the impact of Covid-19 on demand, the capital investment programme and re-profiling, land transfers, service costs, controlled parking zones, increases in garden waste collection, decent homes strategy, and the zero-carbon strategy.
- 8.2.8 Additional items: These included training sessions on the role of the Finance Scrutiny Committee and on treasury management and capital investment framework, delivered by the Head of Finance.
- 8.2.9 Work programme: Finance Scrutiny Committee's work programme was agreed at the start of the year but remained open for new suggestions from members.

9.0 Task groups

- 9.1 There was one task group during 2022/23 looking at the Sustainability Strategy, later renamed the Environment Strategy.
- 9.2 Following a scrutiny proposal by the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport, a cross-party task group met in November and December 2022 to review the draft strategy. Membership comprised Councillors Mark Hofman (Chair), Peter Jeffree, Rabi Martins and Sara-Jane Trebar.
- 9.3 The objectives of the task group included:
 - To ensure the soundness of the strategy in meeting its aims.

- To review the extent to which consultation feedback has been captured by the strategy.
- To secure ownership of the strategy by non-executive councillors; assisting with strengthening residents' understanding and buy-in.
- To consider the governance and monitoring of the strategy following implementation.

9.4 It was agreed that the task group would focus on certain key areas including targets, leading by example, people power and governance. The meetings took the form of presentations by officers and discussions. The task group worked in tandem with the development of the strategy to ensure their report would be presented to Cabinet alongside the strategy.

9.5 Drawing its conclusions, the task group was positive about the ambitious nature of the strategy and highlighted areas that should be considered priorities for successful implementation. The recommendations included:

- That one of the targets in the strategy should be increased.
- That the consideration of sustainability impacts in internal decision-making should be strengthened.
- That any off-setting required should be within Watford as much as possible.
- That the delivery plan should be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9.6 The report and its recommendations were accepted in full by Cabinet alongside the final strategy itself.

10.0 Looking ahead

10.1 Following the resolution at Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2023, a task group will be established to look at Housing.

10.2 The 2023/24 training offer for councillors will see a refreshed approach with input from a number of officers around the council plan and performance management as well as the wider introduction to the scrutiny function. Further training will be delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in September 2023. This will focus on skills for scrutiny.

11.0 Implications

11.1 Financial

11.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications arising from this report.

11.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

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

11.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

11.3.1 No implications.

5.4 Staffing

5.4.1 No implications.

5.5 Accommodation

5.5.1 No implications.

5.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

5.6.1 The council has a statutory duty to scrutinise the local crime and disorder partnership and this took place in November 2022 and March 2023 and is scheduled again for February 2024.

5.7 Sustainability

5.7.1 No implications.

Appendices

None

Background papers

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

- Reports and minutes of scrutiny committees are available on the [council website](#).