



Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report

2018-2019

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What is Overview & Scrutiny?

In general terms, Overview and Scrutiny is the process whereby Councillors investigate, scrutinise and oversee the work of the Council. More specifically Overview and Scrutiny pays particular attention to:

- ❖ The decisions made by Cabinet, Council and officers in relation to Council policy or key decisions.
- ❖ The activities carried out by the Council and other bodies (such as the NHS).
- ❖ The performance of the Council in relation to its targets and objectives.

Work Programme

The work programme for Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny is created by a combination of:

- ❖ What Councillors feel are important topics (this is gathered from their work in their wards and activities across the whole of the Council).
- ❖ Members of the public highlighting issues for debate, either through Call-Ins or through consultation.
- ❖ Requests by Thurrock's Cabinet for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake "pre-decision scrutiny" prior to policies being taken to Cabinet for consideration.

The agendas and associated reports of each Committee can be accessed by the following link: <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/>

Committees

At Thurrock, the work of the Overview and Scrutiny function is carried out by six committees, which each have a specific remit:

- ❖ Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- ❖ Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- ❖ Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- ❖ Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- ❖ Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- ❖ Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership

The membership of Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny Committees is made up of Councillors drawn from all the political parties of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny function enables Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet (also known as the Executive) to have an active role in the decision-making process of the Council.

Thurrock has a number of non-Councillors sitting on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Children's Services Committee has two parent-governors as well as a diocesan representative from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches respectively. There are also two co-opted members on the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and one co-opted member on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee representing health and housing interests across the borough.

In addition, sub-committees or panels may also be formed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to undertake specific tasks, such as a review, the membership of which is decided alongside the remit of the review.

The decision making process

In Thurrock, Overview and Scrutiny plays a key role in adding value to the Council's decision-making process. It also reviews the existing practices of the Council and makes recommendations to Cabinet to enhance and improve service provision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet in an informal atmosphere and engage with people who can help with their work and provide evidence for their reviews. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committees and at the discretion of the Chair may even be able to take part.

Overview and Scrutiny Online

Overview and Scrutiny has a dedicated section on Thurrock Council's website and can be found at <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/overview-and-scrutiny/overview-and-scrutiny-committees> .

Thurrock Council's website provides the most up-to-date information on Overview and Scrutiny in Thurrock. Participation from the public is actively encouraged and promoted online.

A number of documents are available and easily accessible, including our Overview and Scrutiny annual reports. Reports, agendas and minutes from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting are also available electronically from Thurrock's website.

Getting in Touch

Our Democratic Services Team manages the Overview and Scrutiny process at Thurrock, and is located within Legal Services. Democratic Services manage the Council's decision-making process and services a wide range of Council decision-making bodies including the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet, Planning Committee, Licensing Committee, as well as Full Council.

If you have any queries about this report or the Overview and Scrutiny process, or if you are interested in participating, please feel free to contact us.

Email: Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Address: Democratic Services, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays
Essex RM17 6SL

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny

I assumed the position of Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2018, but being a member of the Committee from the beginning of the municipal year, I can report on the work of the committee for the year 2018-19.

We began the year by considering the Children's Social Care Development Plan, which was developed to improve the Council's OFSTED rating by addressing issues, such as the recruitment and training of staff. We questioned the time it took to recruit new foster carers, as Members felt the eight-month time-scale was too long and discussed how to increase the number of adoptions, as this was an underperforming service. As a Committee, we felt it was important to see the Development Plan after officers had considered our suggestions, and therefore did not agree to the Plan, until amendments had been made. In addition, Members also analysed regular updates on the performance of children's social care and discovered that the biggest challenge for young people leaving care was housing and safeguarding. Due to these ongoing discussions, we requested additional reports on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and missing children. As a part of this, Members of the Committee visited the MASH team and got a chance to better understand its workings and talk to staff members.

In addition, the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly undertakes pre-scrutiny of reports, which then follow the governance process with sign off by Cabinet. One of the reports we pre-scrutinised was the Children's Transport Re-Procurement of Service that outlined the statutory service of providing home to school transport. We questioned how to increase bus usage for school routes, and how 'safe' routes to school were assessed. We recommended to Cabinet that they change the methodology of determining a 'safe' route to school.

We also considered the Free Schools Programme that provided an update on the progress of the proposed three new schools across the borough and the planning process they would have to follow. We welcomed the new schools but raised issues with the increased congestion and pollution that could occur, and concerns around safeguarding. Because of these discussions, we requested an update report later on in the municipal year, so we could closely monitor the development of these schools.

Objectively, the most important piece of scrutiny we undertook this year was of the Social Care Services Review, which occurred due to serious whistleblowing allegations. The report outlined the six recommendations that were suggested by the independent investigation. Members requested regular updates on the recommendations being implemented, and requested a meeting with the social care team so we could speak with staff face-to-face. We also recommended a new KPI that could be monitored by the Committee, and asked for Members to receive further service specific training at the beginning of the next municipal year.

My personal highlight of the year was the visit to the Brighter Future's Children's Centre in Tilbury that the Committee requested, so that we were able to see the good work the Centre's were doing for the local community. Whilst there, we

observed a 'stay and play' session and were able to speak with parents and members of staff. It was great to see how the Centre has benefitted parents and how well they had embedded within the local community. We also welcomed two new Parent Governor Representatives whose expertise and guidance was widely appreciated.

As mental health has become a large issue for Thurrock residents, we requested that The School Wellbeing Service deliver a presentation on the emotional wellbeing and mental health for children and young people. We were pleased to see that mental health was being taken seriously, and discussed teacher and pastoral care capacity in schools and the availability of specialised training for staff. The Committee also heard a presentation by the Youth Work Team on the activities they run across Thurrock for young people aged 11–19 years of age, which emphasised their continued support in young people's personal and social development to help boost their confidence, and improve their peer relationships. The Committee supported projects run by the Youth Work Team such as Tilbury Youth Club and #USound Music Studio that had been set up, but Members questioned how vulnerable young people such as carers and youth offenders could take part.

To conclude, I feel that it has been a successful year. I would like to thank all Members of the Committee, Officers of Children's Services, and Democratic Services for their hard work and commitment.

Councillor Bukky Okunade

Chair of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny

This year the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee have scrutinised a number of items that included Grounds Maintenance, Street Cleansing, Fly Tipping, Refuse Collections, Recycling Services and a report on Air Quality and Health.

The main focus of the year's agenda was the progress of development at the Linford Household Waste and Recycling Centre, and how this could lead to significant increases in recycling and re-use facilities on-site. We were excited to have the chance to visit the Centre and saw first-hand the new signage; CCTV; and waste disposal containers. Following our site visit the Committee requested to see the proposed development plans, so we could scrutinise ideas such as the dedicated turn-lane on the highway for access to the site. The Committee also suggested use of a road sweeper at the Centre to maintain the appearance and cleanliness of the site. Finally, we were pleased to hear that a new commercial vehicle access scheme was in place, and staff were now completing more extensive training.

Following on from these discussions, the Committee requested an item that would focus on the current recycling position, and planned actions to improve recycling across the borough. In this report, the Committee discovered that recycling rates across the borough were decreasing, but the Council were tackling this through increased communication and education. Members discussed reasons why recycling rates were decreasing such as worn out 'contaminated bin' stickers and usage of different bins throughout the year. To tackle this, the Committee asked for all worn out 'contaminated bin' stickers to be replaced; and a review of brown bins, focussing specifically on cemeteries and winter collections, to take place, with findings coming back to the Committee.

Based on a motion made at Full Council, a new Tree Planting Strategy was brought before the Committee, so we could decide which option would best suit the borough and its residents. We had to choose between three options, which were replacing trees on a like-for-like basis; replacing trees on the basis that for every one removed, two would be planted; and backdating tree replacement. The Committee considered this item in great detail and discussed how the trees would be maintained once they were planted, and how proposed developments could include the new strategy. We ultimately decided on the replacement of trees on a like-for-like basis and the backdated replacement of trees, and this decision was reported to Cabinet for final sign-off. We wanted to closely monitor the development of the Tree Planting Strategy so requested that an update come before the Committee in a year's time.

Due to the increase in gang related violence across the borough, we also requested an item come before Committee so we could discuss measures being put in place to reduce the number of incidents and increase safety for residents. We invited the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour; Essex Police; and the Youth Offending Service, so we had the opportunity to question them and hear about the partnerships that were in place to tackle gang violence. We questioned the number of injunctions being handed out, and how many arrests were made based on these injunctions. Following this evidence session, we were reassured that the

council were working hard to tackle gang violence across the borough, and had good partnerships with authorities such as Essex Police.

A report on the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy also came before the Committee to highlight how the Council were dealing with this issue, as well as violence against men, domestic violence, and child sexual exploitation. We were glad to hear that Project MAYA, which was aimed at tackling female genital mutilation, worked with Barnado's, who were embedded in the multi-agency service hub (MASH). The Committee raised concerns with some aspects of the report such as the lack of available data, and the number of repeat offenders who repeatedly committed violence against women and girls. We also questioned the number of points of contact for victims, and asked if one single point of contact could be established, who could then direct victims to the correct service. After these discussions, we requested an additional recommendation be added to the report to ensure the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy was resourced adequately.

One of the highlights of the year was the re-establishment of the Prevent Member Working Group, which will be led by the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and will work towards the prevention of terrorism and extremism across the borough. As a part of this, we were pleased to hear an update on the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership, which detailed how the Council were tackling extremism through education, and the Committee are excited to start work on the Prevent Member Working Group.

Members of the Committee also discussed the Air Quality and Health Strategy, which outlined measures being taken to improve air quality and reduce air pollution across the borough. We heard how the strategy was promoting public transport, working with schools to promote walking and cycling, and promoting a heavy goods vehicle management scheme. The Committee suggested that additional tree and hedge planting was included in the Air Quality and Health Strategy, to ensure the Tree Planting Strategy was implemented in all new policies. We recommended that officers consult with Tree UK on this issue, and requested that Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) investigations be brought to committee in the following municipal year so the Committee could closely monitor the development of the Strategy.

I would like to thank Officers, Democratic Services and all those guest speakers for all their hard work and contribution to this committee.

Councillor Lynn Worrall

Chair of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

It has been an eventful year for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which I have been proud to chair. We have examined a wide range of issues relating to the council's corporate functions and made a number of recommendations.

The year started with a review of the disposal of land to build schools within Thurrock. The committee warmly welcomed the commitment to provide more school places, but raised concerns on the process followed to identify sites, and in the level of communication between the council and those groups impacted by the decision. An extraordinary meeting was held on this topic so the Committee could study the decisions in detail, and representatives from affected local groups attended and were able to give their opinion.

In September, the Committee heard an update on our Communications Strategy, which gave the Communications team the chance to update Members on the progress made in implementing the strategy in the last six months, including the increased use of social media, and the success of specific campaigns such as recruiting new foster carers. The Committee also invited members of the local media to directly feedback on the experience of working with Thurrock Council. This led to a good debate and a strong feeling from Members that we must work with local media organisations in a closer partnership and ensure that they are well used as fantastic channels of communication with our residents. The committee recommended an approach of 'proactive openness' with the local media to ensure that our relationship was on the best footing.

Later in the year, the committee considered our Long-Term Investment Strategy and reaffirmed our belief in a robust investment approach and in speeding the development of Thurrock Regeneration Limited. We also took the opportunity to consider how best to deploy the council's capital investments, and heard how the Council found investments; duly considered them; and maintained them through their life span. The long-term budget and proposed Civic Offices expansion were also discussed by the Committee in detail.

The Committee also heard a report on the Customer Services Strategy and we discussed improvements that have been made to customer services such as a new contact centre telephony platform; a Customer Contact Association industry accreditation; transformation of the face-to-face customer services area on the ground floor of the Civic Offices; and the implementation and development of online only services.

Along the way, we have also begun consideration of how we can improve the scrutiny process and ensure that the views of scrutiny are considered by Cabinet; continued to review our corporate performance and KPIs; and ensured that budget proposals were fully debated and scrutinised. At every step, the committee has

worked openly, constructively and not along party political lines, and we look forward to this approach continuing next year.

Councillor Oliver Gerrish

Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny

This year the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to look at a large range of topics ranging from the development of a new residential care facility and a new model of primary care in South Ockendon, cancer waiting times, learning disability health checks, to the future of libraries in the borough.

One of the first items on this year's agenda was the development of the Integrated Medical Centres (IMCs) across the borough. We raised concerns over how the proposed IMCs would cope with predicted population increases and sought assurances that the IMCs would be up and running before the closure of Orsett Hospital. We also questioned parking and public transport links to the new IMCs and felt that public transport links should be improved to ensure accessibility for all residents. The Committee therefore requested an additional report in the next municipal year and further updates to be brought before the Committee to focus on parking and public transport concerns. We also suggested inter-linked working with the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee so both Committee's expertise could be shared to ensure the right decisions are made that benefit all residents.

In addition, the Committee spoke at every meeting about Orsett Hospital and the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) plans. The committee held one extraordinary meeting on this important issue, ultimately referring the plans to the Secretary of State for Health for his consideration. We decided that the consultation process and the decision to close Orsett Hospital was not in the best interests of Thurrock residents. I know that this is a very important issue and will continue to be discussed by this committee. Therefore, we established the Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group in September 2018 to discuss and study the proposed closure of Orsett Hospital. The Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group held its first meeting, where we agreed the Terms of Reference, elected the Chair and Vice-Chair and considered research into the planned closure, including press articles and case studies.

As well as establishing the Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group, we also joined the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to be able to work in partnership with other local authorities, such as Southend Borough Council and Essex County Council, on the issue of the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) plans. This year, we outlined Thurrock's agreement to join, agreed the Terms of Reference, and elected Chairs. We also decided upon Thurrock Council's nominees to join the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee felt concerned over the amount of time residents were waiting to see a specialist after a diagnosis of cancer, so asked the Deputy Chief Executive of Basildon and Thurrock Hospital to attend a meeting to discuss the capacity and capabilities of the hospital. We listened to his comments and ideas, and felt that more should be done to reduce the instances of lung cancer, such as increased education and stopping people smoking outside the Civic Offices. We requested an update in the next municipal year to closely monitor if waiting times after cancer diagnosis were decreasing.

Mental health was an important feature in this year's work. Sadly, mental health support is not as good as it should be in Thurrock. This is not isolated to Thurrock – accessing consistently good quality mental health support is an issue across the country – however in Thurrock we have acknowledged we need to do better. We felt that waiting times to see a mental health provision was too long, and wished to see increased mental health provision in schools for early intervention. The council undertook a peer review and excellent work began on developing our plans for adult mental health service transformation. The Committee will closely monitor this work in the coming year too.

During the standing agenda item that allowed HealthWatch to give their update, the Committee were made aware that funding for the South Essex Rape and Incest Crises Centre (SERICC) had been stopped before alternative provision had been put in place. As a Committee, we discussed plans for funding and data sharing, and agreed to write to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to share our concerns. In response to our letter, the CCG agreed to extend the funding grant for six months until a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment had been carried out.

The Committee also considered the Strategy for Developing Libraries as Community Hubs, which was the first comprehensive strategy for libraries and had gone out to consultation, with this report informing Members of the responses. We were very pleased to hear that no libraries would be closing in Thurrock and the strategy outlined their future plans for development as community hubs.

Thank you to Officers, Democratic Services and the outside organisations who sit on the committee for all their hard work and to fellow Councillors on the Committee for their dedication and constructive contributions.

Councillor Victoria Holloway

Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It has been a pleasure to Chair the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in what has been a busy and stimulating year. A key issue this year was a focus on the safety measures installed in high rises across the borough, following the tragic fire in Grenfell Tower in June 2017. The Committee considered a number of additional fire suppressant systems and reviewed policies for compartmentalisation and evacuation in case of emergency. We asked the Council to bring forward the programmed inspection of every high-rise dwelling in the borough; and felt assured once the in-house team, an external fire safety consultant, and Essex County Fire and Rescue had inspected every block. We also requested additional information on the process of retrospectively fitting sprinklers into every block, and where funding for this could be provided in the budget. The Committee also asked for additional safety testing of the cladding used in high-rises. These requests were sent to Cabinet for them to consider as part of their Executive function.

The Committee also raised an issue regarding the state of council-owned garages and therefore started an on-going review of garages. We asked officers to undertake a comprehensive review of all council-owned garages across the borough, and garages were either marked for removal if deemed to be end of life, or were marked for improvement works. The Committee were pleased to hear updates of this review, and heard how the Committee's ideas were being implemented on officer level, for example how detailed records of garages were now kept, as well as increased liaison with the legal team to organise agreements so residents can store items other than cars in their garages. We asked if the Youth Offending Service could include garage painting as part of their community service scheme.

In February 2018, the Committee requested a review on the cases of homelessness because of domestic abuse and mental health. Although this began in the previous municipal year, we continued to hear updates so we could ensure the process was effectively scrutinised and received Member input. To add to this, we requested a review of findings to ensure that housing staff were adequately trained in cases of homelessness due to domestic abuse and mental health. We also wished to meet with frontline staff to ensure they felt they were receiving adequate training, and added this as a recommendation to the report.

Members have also encouraged social housing on a number of occasions and have considered a government Green Paper on social housing and a consultation on the use of "Right to Buy". In addition, we scrutinised the proposal for internal and external redecoration of council properties across the borough, to help benefit those residents in social housing. We felt that we needed additional information before we approved the internal/external redecoration of council properties, so deferred the item until the report contained additional information and more detailed figures.

Pre-scrutiny was a large part of our role this year and as a part of this we had the opportunity to have an in-depth study of the Housing Allocation Review, which recommended a number of changes such as removing band five from the housing list; changing the criteria for the financial threshold; and cancelling inactive

applicants on the housing list. We expressed our concern over the removal of band five as we felt it could disadvantage some residents who needed council housing. Therefore, the Committee did not approve all recommendations before they went to Cabinet. Cabinet noted our concern, and asked us for additional scrutiny, particularly regarding the financial qualification for the housing list, which we were happy to provide.

The Committee had previously requested the chance to view the out of hours procedure for sheltered housing, due to concerns raised during the previous municipal year. We questioned the procedures for sheltered housing, and also questioned how often pendant alarms were tested and if this happened regularly enough. Members felt assured after listening to officers that the out of hours procedure was sufficient to enough resident's safety and comfort. In addition, we considered the re-procurement of the contract for gas servicing repair and renewal, and felt that the council should increase communications with residents, so everyone was aware when gas works would be taking place in their area. We also discussed issues that residents had been having with the gas servicing hotline, and requested that these issues be fixed before the contract was procured. In addition, the Committee asked for the new contract to include apprenticeships, so local young people could learn and upskill.

My thanks go to all the officers who worked to bring reports and support the Committee, as well as Democratic Services for the efficient organisation of all meetings. My thanks also go to my fellow Councillors on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were committed to the scrutiny process.

Councillor Gerard Rice

Chair of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny

The Planning, Transport and Regeneration (PTR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had a good year with many positive reports. Following an update on the Development Plan provided to the Committee at the start of this municipal year, PTR agreed on the formation of the Local Development Plan Task Force. We established the Task Force to consider the amount of affordable homes in Thurrock and proposed sites, as well as the impact of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing on home-building across the borough. This year we agreed Terms of Reference and elected the Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as considering the Local Plan as a whole, by receiving an overview and outline. In addition, the newly formed Task Force invited a representative from David Lock Associates and the Town and Country Planning Association who delivered presentations on 'garden cities', which showed the Committee the types and scales of development that could be undertaken in Thurrock. I was pleased to see the Local Development Plan Task Force undertaking some good work scrutinising the Local Plan to help Thurrock and its residents grow.

The Committee also invited Purfleet Centre Regeneration Ltd to give a presentation that updated the Committee on the new regeneration scheme, and we supported the project to bring new infrastructure to the town. In addition, we invited representatives from developers who were investing in Purfleet such as Urban Catalyst, and also invited the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration. It was great to hear from such a variety of people and gave the Committee the chance to draw on their expertise and ask some great questions. The Chairman of Purfleet-on-Thames Community Forum was also in attendance, and had the chance to present his forums views. I have to thank the Chairman of Purfleet-on-Thames Community Forum, and other community forums, for the fantastic work they do in their communities. It was fantastic to see the investment being given to Purfleet and the plans to develop it into a vibrant town.

We also were kept informed on the progress of the Grays South Regeneration Project, and questioned the proposed new pedestrian underpass, which was now in a position to begin the next phase of development. Members of the Committee supported this proposal as the barrier crossing at Grays train station could be dangerous for residents, and felt assured that the new underpass would include CCTV and sufficient lighting to mitigate against anti-social behaviour. The Committee was also pleased to have the chance to scrutinise other ongoing projects, such as the A13 Widening Scheme. We invited a representative from Kier who detailed the timelines and planned works for the A13 Widening Scheme, and the Committee asked for future updates be provided to the Committee, to keep us informed of progress as the scheme develops.

The Committee also heard presentations from Network Rail and c2c that detailed actions being undertaken to tackle trespassing, safety, and train delay issues. I was pleased to hear that c2c are in the process of changing their systems, which are over twenty years old and would help to reduce the number of delays. At the Committee meeting in March 2019, we challenged the ticket machines that were to be placed in Stanford-le-Hope train station, and c2c reassured us that station staff would be on site to help with route and ticket purchase enquiries.

I feel that this has been a productive year for the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee and we have heard a variety of interesting reports. I want to thank Members of the Committee, officers, and Democratic Services for their hard work and support over the year.

Councillor Martin Kerin

***Chair of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration
Overview and Scrutiny Committee***



Budget Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny Members were keen to scrutinise the budget to ensure that the Council was on target to achieve significant budget savings and to identify if further value for money and efficiencies could be realised. Members were keen to ensure that Thurrock was getting good value for money for its residents, as well as finding new income streams and protecting services that were important for people in the borough.

Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny

Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed proposed fees and charges, particularly the increased fees for the use of Wi-Fi in public libraries; the increased charge for school's visiting Coalhouse Fort; and increased charges for cultural services in the Thameside Theatre. Members also queried the lack of discount for early repayment of fixed penalty notices for fly-posting, and requested additional information before agreeing the proposed fees and charges.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and agreed to the proposed fees and charges, and engaged in detailed discussions on issues such as increased nursery charges and increased fees for the use of the Grangewater facility.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a freeze in Council Tax for the next municipal year, and enquired into alternative plans, should the Council opt to increase in Council Tax. The Committee also welcomed the aspirational approach suggested for the Capital Programme, and scrutinised capital plans such as the widening of the A13, Grays underpass, East-facing slip roads; and an improved cycle network.

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny

The Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy for 2018/19, and felt that the online application for Blue Badges was difficult and asked relevant officers to provide support to those filling in the application. Members also raised issues with the increased transport fees for the domiciliary care workforce, before agreeing the fees and charges.

Housing Overview and Scrutiny

The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the delivery of income targets for 2018/19 and agreed the proposed fees and charges, but raised issues regarding the increase of fees for mobile home licensing fees and the effect this could have on travellers across the borough.

Planning, Transport & Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny

The Planning, Transport & Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee raised queries regarding the introduction of fees for schools providing scooter training and the increasing of fees for skip and highways licenses. All proposed fees and charges under the remit of PTR Overview and Scrutiny were agreed.

Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

Overview and Scrutiny Committees can establish Scrutiny Review Panels to investigate in-depth issues, which have come to their attention.

Therefore, a Task and Finish Group may be established by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider a specific piece of work and make recommendations to its parent committee or directly to the Cabinet. The number of Members of the Task and Finish Group and its terms of reference must be specified when it is established.

An Overview and Scrutiny Committee may establish Working Groups to consider a specific piece of work or look into a particular issue in more detail outside of the formal meeting of the Committee. Any such Working Group will comprise of members of the Committee, working informally with Officers or other Members and reporting their findings back to the Committee.

There were two Task and Finish Groups convened this year, which were the Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group set-up by the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and the Local Development Plan Task and Finish Group set-up by the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In addition, the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force continued their work investigating Highways England's plans to build a new Thames crossing.

Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group

The Orsett Hospital Task and Finish Group held its first meeting in November 2018 to scrutinise the proposed closure of process of Orsett Hospital and looked at the following:

- Proposed transfer of services.
- Timings and operational position of the integrated medical centres.
- The future of Orsett Hospital and alternative proposals.

Members also received a briefing note regarding the Sustainability and Transformation Plan and this was discussed in detail.

Local Development Plan Task and Finish Group

The Local Plan Task and Finish Group held its first meeting in January 2019 to discuss and make recommendations in relation to the development and implementation of the Local Development Plan and looked at the following:

- The preparation, development of strategies, and policy approaches of the Local Plan and provided comment on its scope and development
- Reports, presentations, and updates on government policy and the South Essex Joint Strategic Plan.
- Reviewed the Council's approach to community engagement in the plan-making process.

Members received an overview of the Local Plan and of the Issues and Options 2 Consultation, in which residents had the opportunity to express their opinions on the Local Plan. The Task and Finish Group also received a presentation by David Lock Associates, and the Town and County Planning Association, which informed Members about the most effective way of building new 'Garden Cities', and how to deliver effective communities. Members also discussed transport in relation to the Local Development Plan as traffic and pollution was an issue for Thurrock residents.

Lower Thames Crossing Task Force

The Lower Thames Crossing Task Force was set up in 2017, and continued its work this municipal year. The Task Force meet on a monthly basis and seeks to hold Highways England to account and oppose the proposed Lower Thames Crossing. During the year the Task Force considered the following:

- Highways England's statutory consultation, which contained the Local Authority response and a Land Owner response.
- Local issues such as the Tilbury Link Road, the location of the Rest and Service Area, and the impact on the Gammon Fields Traveller Site.
- Traffic modelling and the design of the proposed crossing.

Throughout the year, Highways England attended meetings of the Task Force which allowed Members and co-opted members the chance to question and listen to a variety of topics. In addition, technical experts were also invited to attend meetings to give their opinion and help Members understand the process and governance behind the new crossing.

Call-ins

Thurrock's Call-In process is a vital aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny function. It allows Councillors or members of the public to ask that a decision of the Cabinet not be implemented until it has been subject to scrutiny by the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A Call-In of a Cabinet decision can be requested by two elected Members who are not members of the Cabinet, a Chair of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a voluntary group with an interest in the Borough, or a local business situated in the Borough. A Call-In can also be requested by a minimum of ten residents in the Borough. The Call-In must be in writing and include reasons for the Call-In together with an alternative course of action.

The Call-In, once it has been verified as legitimate and in accordance with the provisions of the Council's Constitution, is then referred to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The Committee receives all the evidence relating to the issue in question and following consideration makes recommendations about whether the original decision should stand or whether Cabinet should be requested to reconsider its original decision.

During 2018-2019, no Call-ins were submitted to an overview and scrutiny committee.