

Appendix 1
**Overview and
Scrutiny**
Annual Report
2022-23



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What is overview and 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, with each having 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

An Overview and Scrutiny Committee can also form Working Groups or Task and Finish Groups to focus on particularly important issues.

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 is also one co-opted member 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 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 engages 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 can ask questions or make statements.



Overview and Scrutiny during 2022/23

The 2022/23 municipal year has involved lots of change and adaptation for the scrutiny function, partly due to the ongoing government intervention and Best Value Inspection recommendations.

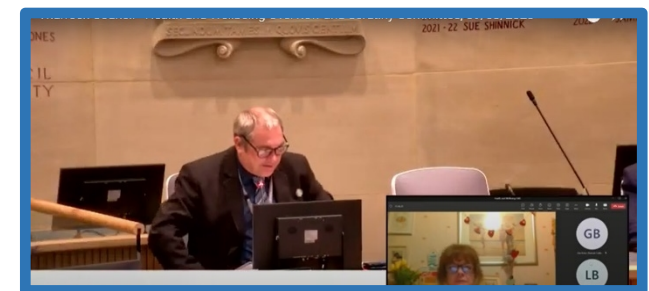
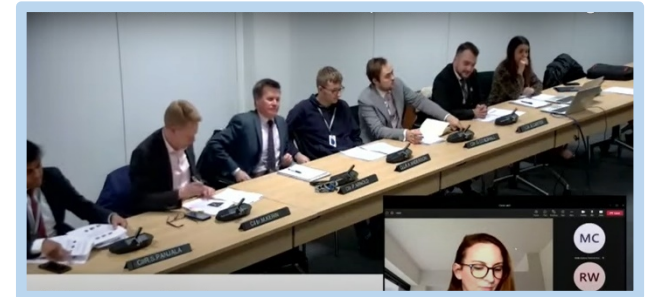
Scrutiny Committees at Thurrock Council continued to work throughout the intervention process, and held regular committee meetings. The overview and scrutiny function regularly considered reports from officers regarding how the intervention, Section 114 notice, and Best Value Inspection would affect their service areas, and how this could impact upon services to residents.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members regularly challenged officers regarding the Council's finances and the government intervention to ensure the right decisions were being taken. This year, Portfolio Holders also reported directly to Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which allowed

backbench Members to directly question Executive Members regarding their service areas.

Scrutiny meetings also continued to be live-streamed and recorded during 2022/23, which meant that members of the public who could not attend meetings in person could watch the meeting on the Council's website or YouTube channel from the comfort of their own home.

The following pages provide a brief summary of the work of Thurrock's six overview and scrutiny committees across 2022/23. Each page outlines the main achievements and considerations of each committee, to provide members of the public an insight into the work of scrutiny. This does not represent an exhaustive list of every meeting, agenda item or discussion, but should provide a brief overview and give members of the public a taste of what scrutiny at Thurrock has achieved.



Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Care Review of Children’s Social Care and National Safeguarding Panel Review of Child Protection



At the start of the 2022/23 municipal year, the Committee considered the recent Care Review undertaken by national government, following the tragic death of two children, and how this could affect services within Thurrock.

We questioned senior officers on investment that the Council could make to recruit additional foster carers, including both kinship carers and stranger carers; and how they could be supported on their journey through foster caring. We also questioned the use of unregulated placements and how the recommendations within the

Care Review could impact these, particularly regarding supported accommodation. We thanked officers for their hard work in beginning to understand and implement recommendations, and requested regular updates throughout the year.

We received our first update in October 2022 and heard how the recruitment campaign for foster carers had proven successful, but more work needed to be done to ensure foster carer retention. The Chair and Committee Members would like to thank Thurrock’s foster carers for their hard work and dedicated service.

Family Hubs, Start for Life Programme

In November 2022 we received a report regarding the Family Hubs, Start for Life Programme, which meant Thurrock Council were one of 75 local authorities to receive government funding to improve the lives of young children, particularly those affected by the loss of education during the

pandemic. We questioned if Thurrock would be ready to implement the delivery plan, and the locations of the proposed family hubs. We felt pleased that Thurrock had applied to this programme, and requested an update so Committee Members could monitor the programme and its potential implementation.

We accepted a verbal update on the programme in January 2023 and Committee Members discussed the recent submission of the delivery plan to the Department of Education. We also queried the multi-disciplinary board that had been established to monitor the delivery of the programme and its workstreams, and the funding for the additional staff resources. The Committee look forward to continued updates throughout the 2023/24 municipal year.

Cllr Adam Carter,
Chair of the
Children’s Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee



Cleaner, Greener, and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Single Use Plastics Policy Implementation



Last municipal year, officers and the Committee worked together to introduce a new Single Use Plastics Policy, that would ban all single-use plastics within the Council to improve the environment and reduce climate change. We requested regular update reports to see how the policy was being implemented and how it was working, and received the first of these in January 2023.

We scrutinised the report, which presented two options for implementation of the policy, and discussed in detail which option would

be most effective. We questioned the differences between the two options, and decided that option two would be most effective, as it would require less resources than option one and would be less intensive, whilst still delivering the required outcomes.

We also wanted to expand the framework of the policy to ensure that schools and local businesses were also aware of the damage that single use plastics were causing the environment. We were pleased that officers confirmed supporting documents would be delivered to schools, and an education team member had already been to schools to deliver a programme on recycling and single-use plastics.

Waste Services Report

Also in January 2023, we scrutinised the Waste Services Update report, which outlined the service changes that were being proposed for implementation in September 2023, including alternative weekly refuse

collection and weekly recycling collection.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the proposed food caddie bin, as many residents would not have space for this bin, and caddies were often lost or returned to the wrong house. We also questioned the current recycling rate in Thurrock, as well as the assisted bin collection service. We scrutinised the proposals for the brown bin collection service, as we were concerned that this service had not been running efficiently, and sought assurances from officers that this collection would resume as normal as soon as possible.



**Cllr Joycelyn Redsell,
Chair of Cleaner,
Greener, and Safer
Overview & Scrutiny
Committee**

We thanked officers for their hard work on this report, and their work to improve the service, but felt that the service needed to get better as well as improve communications with local residents.

Annual Update on the Community Safety Partnership

This provided the committee with the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the priorities of the Community Safety Partnership and to satisfy ourselves that concerns from local residents such as those individuals riding motorbikes off road, causing anti-social behaviour were being taken seriously. We were also able to use this opportunity to ask questions of senior officers from Essex Police.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Asset Reviews and Thameside Theatre



Throughout this year, the Committee have continued to consider the

Council's Asset Review policies. This included the potential disposal of a number of sites across the borough, including scout huts, village halls and other parcels of land. At our meeting in July 2022, we questioned the Assistant Director of Property regarding these pieces of land, and invited a representative from the Scout Association to speak to the Committee regarding their experiences and concerns. We requested that an update report be brought to the Committee later in the municipal year.

In March 2023, we held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the Thameside Theatre, which had been set for disposal in July 2021 until discussions with community interest groups had begun in January 2022. This was a politically contentious issue, and we welcomed a number of questions from concerned local residents and stakeholders. Following a very detailed discussion and questioning of officers regarding the future of the Thameside building, we

amended several Cabinet recommendations regarding consultation of the theatre, library and museum. We also requested an update report be presented to the Committee.

Our proposed recommendations were presented to Cabinet in March 2023, and the majority were accepted without amendment. We look forward to an update report in the 2023/24 municipal year, once consultation on these services has completed.

Draft General Fund Budget 2023/24

In February 2023, the Committee scrutinised the draft general fund budget for 2023/24, as well as the Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Programme, and Capital Strategy.

**Cllr Fraser Massey,
Chair of Corporate
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**



This issue has been of the utmost importance to the Council and culminated in the government intervention in September 2022, followed by the Section 114 notice in December 2022. We therefore felt this report needed detailed scrutiny and questioned senior officers on the budget, its sustainability, commissioners work, and investments.

We approved the recommendations within the report, but raised our concerns regarding timescales of investment divestment, and proposed increases of council tax for residents.

Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Integrated Medical Centres



The Committee worked hard throughout the 2022/23 municipal year

to monitor and scrutinise the progress of the integrated medical centre project, and this work has continued throughout 2023/24. We requested regular updates of the project to ensure it was on track, and received the first of these in June 2022. We thoroughly questioned the redesign of the Tilbury Integrated Medical Centre (IMC), and the impact this could have on the proposed budget, as well as the launch of the Corringham IMC. The Committee felt concerned regarding some aspects of the project, and therefore requested regular updates throughout the year.

We received another update, specifically focussed on the Grays Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre in September 2022, where we were able to question the level of engagement and feedback, and continue our scrutinization of the project. We asked for another update in November 2022 and the Committee remained concerned regarding the finances for the IMCs and the

proposed timeline for the closure of Orsett Hospital. We questioned the finances of the project and the proposals by NHS England and sought assurances from officers and NHS Partners that all IMCs would be delivered before Orsett Hospital was closed. Committee Members ensured that the IMCs remained at the front and centre of the Committee's mind by adding a standing item to the Work Programme regarding IMCs, to enable continued questioning and scrutinising.

Under Doctoring in Thurrock

In November 2022 the Committee considered a report regarding the level of GPs and doctors in Thurrock.

**Cllr Shane Ralph,
Chair of Health
and Wellbeing
Overview and
Scrutiny
Committee**



We asked questions regarding the fellowship programme for GPs and additional GP appointments that would be offered as part of the programme. The Committee felt that more work needed to be undertaken to ensure residents could easily get face-to-face GP appointments, as well as telephone and video appointments, as face-to-face was often easier for older residents.

We raised our concerns about the number of doctors in Thurrock, and asked officers and NHS partners to work to ensure there were more face-to-face appointments for local residents.

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Homes for Ukraine Response Programme



In March 2023, the Committee considered the government's and Thurrock's 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme, which had allowed UK citizens to take Ukrainian refugees from the war. We sincerely thank officers for their hard work implementing the scheme, and local residents for taking in refugees into their homes.

We sought clarification on the wrap around services that were being provided to Ukrainian families, such as pastoral care and mental wellbeing, as we wanted to ensure that Ukrainian families were receiving support for all aspects of their lives, including accommodation. We were pleased when officers confirmed that Ukrainian families were connected with the Adults and Children's Social Care teams, as well as with the Job Centre on their arrival into Thurrock.

We questioned the money that Ukrainian refugees received, as well as their host families and confirmed that this money was ring-fenced for this use. We also wished to see the welcome packs that Ukrainians

received on their entry into the UK, to further understand the information they were being given, and requested an additional recommendation to ensure Committee Members could scrutinise this document.

Blackshots Estate

Over the course of this year, we've also requested regular updates on the proposals for the Blackshots Estate high rises. We listened to our first update in November 2022 and questioned the timescales for this project. Some of our Committee Members felt concerned that the project was not moving fast enough, and we therefore requested continued updates to monitor the progress of the project.

In March 2023 we accepted another report from officers on the progress of the project.

**Cllr Allen Mayes,
Chair of Housing
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**



Committee Members again expressed their concerns that the project was not moving fast enough, and felt concerned for the health and wellbeing of residents currently living in the high rises. We also questioned the potential use of greenbelt space for the new development, and sought assurances that this greenbelt would be replaced around Blackshots. We were pleased to see that progress was being made, but requested an additional recommendation to ensure that regular public reports were presented to the Committee, including slippage factors, and that member-led mechanisms were in place to monitor the progress of the project.

Planning, Transport, and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Regeneration Projects



This year, the Committee have continued to review and scrutinise the Council's ongoing regeneration projects. These have included the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange Project, A13 Widening Scheme, Grays Regeneration, and the Tilbury Town Fund.

We are pleased to see that work on the A13 Widening Scheme is now almost complete and hope that progress can be made on the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange Project soon. At our meeting in December 2022, the Committee requested that a Working Group be formed to monitor more closely the work being undertaken on the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange project. We hope that this Working Group will ensure any potential overspend is scrutinised and the project is completed on-time, to ensure residents of Stanford-le-Hope and further afield, can benefit from the new station and bus terminal. We look forward to starting this Working Group in the 2023/24 municipal year and receiving their feedback. In addition to this, we also agreed to form a Working

Group who will conduct an in-depth review regarding the Integrated Transport Block and its allocation in across the borough where monies will be spent on roads, pavement and school safety.

Thurrock Supported Bus Services

In July 2022 we listened to officer's report on the Supported Bus Service, which included the 11, 265, and 374 which were all subsidised by the Council and serviced a variety of areas such as Orsett, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Fobbing and Purfleet. We considered the plans to stop funding these bus services, and questioned how this would impact on the Council's sustainable and green travel aims.

**Cllr Alex Anderson,
Chair of Planning,
Transport &
Regeneration
Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**



We were also concerned regarding the local communities in rural communities, who could lose their public transport links. Following this discussion, we requested a more detailed report once the consultation had concluded.

We received this report at an extraordinary meeting in January 2023 and raised concern that some residents would lose vital public transport links. We also felt concerned that not all possible alternative options had been explored, such as a Hub and Spoke Model, which could allow for public transport links in areas such as Purfleet and Fobbing. We requested an additional recommendation asking officers to consider other options for a new route, or changing existing routes to cover rural villages and outlying areas of the borough.

How can you get involved?

The Overview and Scrutiny process at Thurrock is managed by our Democratic Services Team, which 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

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.