

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

Chair's Foreword

Scrutiny plays an important role in the democratic decision-making process, by collating and analysing relevant evidence, in order to recommend changes to council policies, plans and activities.

Over the course of 2022-23 we have considered a number of complicated, multifaceted issues, making recommendations for improving the way services are delivered and bringing challenge to key decisions, including those connected to budget development.

A highlight has been our two task and finish investigations which gathered a wealth of evidence over a number of months from a wide variety of sources to make feasible, practical suggestions intended to have a positive impact on the lives of residents. I think that, as a result of our investigations, we have made a real difference to both the future of community gardening and to affordable workspace policies, as Lewisham emerges from the Borough of Culture Year, keen to increase participation and creative involvement for all its citizens.

In the coming year, topics like the ongoing cost of living crisis and the pressing climate emergency, which we've been discussing for the past year, will remain significant. Scrutiny must continue to focus on and engage with these complex, long-term challenges, and respond creatively and pro-actively to these and further emerging challenges and opportunities that we encounter.

Finally, through a new focus on pre, rather than post, decision scrutiny, we must play a key role in developing and exploring policy ideas with a scope, and local engagement focus, that can ultimately be critical to the success, quality and durability in the community of later executive decisions that follow on. Effective scrutiny of this kind in many ways forms the combustion chamber where the critical partnership and community elements that fuel the engine of local government policy are blended, tested and ignited.



Cllr Mark Ingleby
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

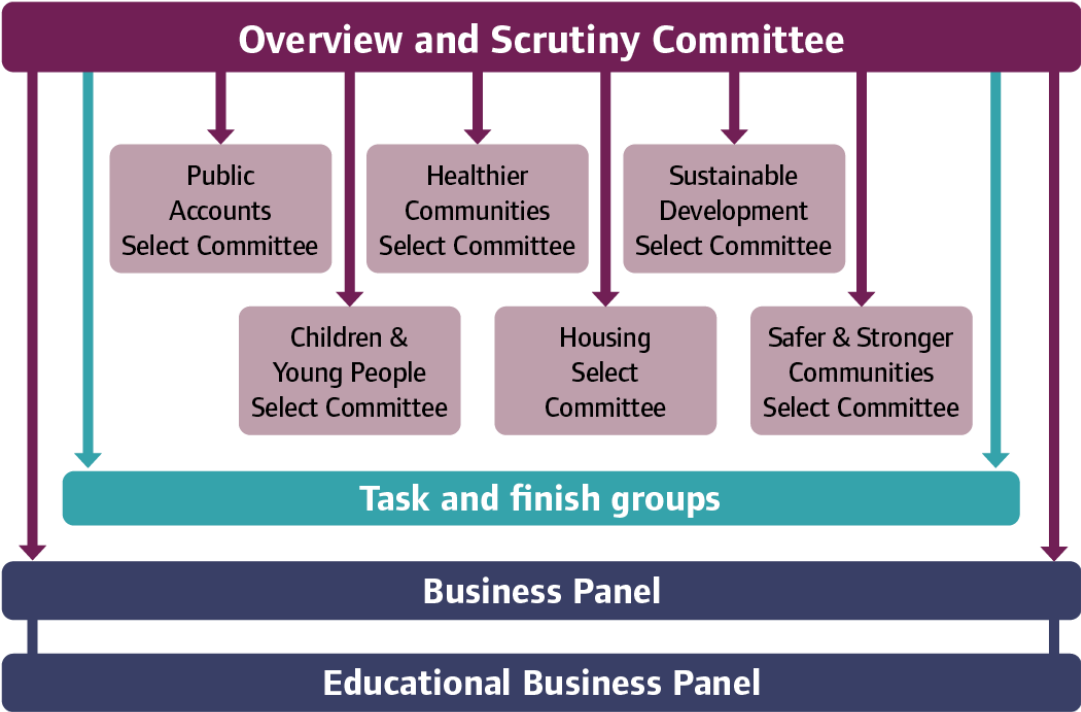
Overview and Scrutiny in Lewisham

Overview and scrutiny provides an independent 'check and balance' to the Council's Mayor and Cabinet. It contributes, through that accountability and the evidence-based recommendations it makes, to the improvement of services for the benefit of residents.

At Lewisham Council, to conduct effective scrutiny, we:

- Prioritise
- Are independent
- Work collectively
- Engage with residents and service users
- Make recommendations which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

Overview and Scrutiny structure in 2022/23



Overview and Scrutiny Chairs



Cllr Luke Sorba

Children and Young People
Select Committee



Cllr Chris Best

Healthier Communities
Select Committee



Cllr Mark Ingleby

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
and business panels



Cllr Stephen Penfold

Housing Select Committee



Cllr James Rathbone

Public Accounts Select
Committee



Cllr Ayesha Lahai-Taylor

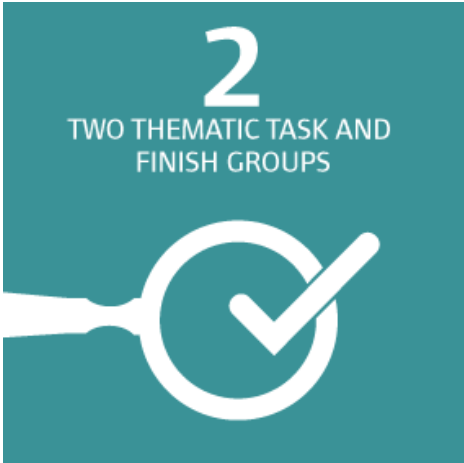
Safer Stronger Communities
Select Committee



Cllr James Royston

Sustainable Development
Select Committee

Scrutiny committees in numbers



Overview and Scrutiny Committee highlights

In 2022/23, the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** focussed its scrutiny on a few key strategic matters:

[The Resident Experience Programme](#)

The Committee continued to build on its work in this area, following on from Members' interactive session with Lou Downe (the author of 'Good Services') and the four member-led, themed workshops held in 2021 which informed the scope of the programme. A further two Member feedback workshops were held: one to provide a sense check on, and prioritise, the insights gathered to date; and one to consider how to turn the insights into an improvement plan to inform the delivery phase (and ensure that sufficient advocacy and support was included for residents).

Cost of Living Crisis

The Committee scrutinised the Council's response to the crisis and the work being carried out to support residents in [September 2022](#) and [February 2023](#). At the request of OSC, specific Select Committees contributed to this work:

- The Healthier Communities Select Committee reviewed the draft Food Justice Action Plan and assessed the commitment to providing Warm Havens for residents where they could spend time as the weather turned colder.
- The Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee reviewed the Cost of Living programme from an equalities perspective to ensure that support was being provided in an equitable way for Lewisham residents.
- The Children and Young People Select Committee looked at the cost of living crisis from the perspective of children and young people, **hearing from invited guests; and going on relevant visits. Members heard moving, and sometimes harrowing, testimony from teachers, parents and carers about the impact of living in poverty.**

[Thames Water](#)

Aware of resident anger at the performance of the company and the impact of frequent burst pipes and delayed infrastructure work on Lewisham streets, the committee invited senior executives from Thames Water to attend their February 2023 meeting. They were interrogated on their plans for performance improvement, better communication, investment, waste water management, social value and recruitment. The Committee was not satisfied with the progress being made and recommended that they (a) develop a SMART improvement plan to address poor performance in Lewisham, including attendance times in relation to emergency events and the length of time excavations are open in relation to both planned and unplanned events; (b) ensure that their improvement plan includes allocating sufficient resource to deal with emergencies, as when emergency events occur concurrently there are regularly significant delays in attendance; (c) ensure that all planned and unplanned activity is clearly communicated to businesses and residents; (d) ensure that the compensation policy for businesses and residents affected by water leaks is clear and accessible; and (e) commit to working with the Council to deliver required improvements to its emergency response; produce and deliver costed, joint investment plans for managing surface water, based on detailed local risk maps and modelling going forwards - in line with National Infrastructure Commission recommendations for 2025 and the need for locally agreed targets; and ensure that Lewisham benefits from its social value policy and that the benefits are in line with agreed priorities, including apprenticeship opportunities.

Children and Young People Select Committee highlights

Children and Young People's Emotional and Mental Health

The Committee began the year by considering a report, and hearing oral evidence from the Council and NHS officers, on [Children and Young People's Emotional and Mental Health](#).

Cost of Living

[In November 2022](#), the Committee considered the impact of the 'cost of living' crisis on Lewisham's children and families and the Council's response. Ahead of the meeting, to enhance its understand of the challenges faced in the community, the Committee visited a special school to speak to parents/carers, school staff and pupils about the issues they were experiencing. At the meeting, the Committee heard oral evidence from Young Advisors and food bank organisers, in addition to Council officers. The Committee's evidence was referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to inform its broader scrutiny of the Council's cost of living response.

Amplifying the Voices of Children and Young People

[In March 2023](#), the Committee received a report containing update on the Young Mayor and Young Advisors' work with the Council and their suggestions for how young people's voices could be better heard by the Council and reflected in its work. The Young Mayor and 11 Young Advisors attended the meeting and discussed their suggestions with the Committee, which ultimately referred the young people's suggestions to the Mayor and Cabinet, resulting in the development of a young people's participation strategy informed by the suggestions.



Healthier Communities Select Committee highlights

Lewisham Mental Health Estates and Mental Health Care Model Review

[In February 2023](#), the Committee considered a report on 'Lewisham Mental Health Estates and Mental Health Care Model Review'. This report provided an update on the development of a business case aimed at replacing the Ladywell unit and modernising the adult mental health care model in Lewisham. To enhance their understanding of the report, the Committee members undertook a visit to the Ladywell Unit. This on-site visit allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of the physical limitations and shortcomings of the existing infrastructure. This direct exposure enabled them to empathise with the needs of the patients and healthcare providers, which in turn allowed for more informed discussions and decision-making. The site visit provided a tangible context to the report, making it easier for the Committee members to identify specific areas for improvement and provide targeted feedback. Early prevention in mental health, along with the modernisation of the mental health care model and the associated physical infrastructure, holds a high priority on the Committee's agenda and it will be continuing to engage with this business case in 23/24.



Lewisham's Health Care and Wellbeing Charter

The Healthier Communities Select Committee has played a crucial role in the process of developing Lewisham's Health Care and Wellbeing Charter, which aims to establish a set of shared values and principles to enhance the health and wellbeing outcomes and experiences of residents, patients, and service users. The Committee actively engaged with officers on this matter in [June 2022](#) and received subsequent updates in [February](#), [June](#) and [September](#) 2023. Co-production and co-design of the Charter remain key priorities for the Committee, as they recognise the importance of involving the community in shaping its content and direction. The Committee plans to further involve the community by conducting outreach and engagement activities related to the Charter.

Housing Select Committee highlights

Climate Emergency Action Plan update - Housing retrofit

[In January 2023](#), the Committee considered a Climate Emergency Action plan update focussing on housing-related actions, particularly those concerning housing retrofit. To better understand the topic and witness practical implementation, Committee members observed housing retrofit works at a housing estate in Lambeth, funded under Wave 1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to retrofit socially rented homes to make them net carbon neutral – through which around 20,000 social housing properties currently below Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C rating are being upgraded, helping to cut fuel bills for social housing tenants as well as delivering warm homes and reducing carbon emissions. This on-site experience added significant value to HSC members' understanding of the issue and enabled them to assess the effectiveness and impact of housing retrofit measures.

Repairs update - Housing Providers

[In March 2023](#), the Committee invited local housing providers including L&Q, Peabody, Clarion Housing Group, Hyde Housing, Southern Housing Group and Lewisham Homes, to provide an update on their repairs services. The Committee examined key performance indicators such as the number of disrepair cases, complaints received and repairs performance for damp and mould cases. The providers have been invited back in 2023/24 to ensure continuing accountability for their performance, actions and decisions.

Lewisham Homes coming in-house

Throughout 2022/23, the Housing Select Committee maintained a strong focus on the Arms-Length Organisation Lewisham Homes and the prospect of bringing it back in-house. The Committee discussed the plan for the transition and received regular progress updates. It also discussed Lewisham Homes' repairs service [in November 2022](#) but due to regarding performance, it invited Lewisham Homes back [in March 2023](#).



Public Accounts Select Committee highlights

Financial monitoring and budget pressures

Throughout the 2022-23 municipal year, the Committee considered regular financial monitoring reports. These set out the financial stability of the Council's directorate budgets – as well as the position of the capital programme, the dedicated schools grant and the housing revenue account. The Committee used the information from this monitoring to prioritise its work programme. In 2022-23, reported budget pressures in adults and children's services resulted in focused scrutiny on the finances of both areas. Members considered the implementation of the savings projected by the adult social care improvement programme (itself an initiative resulting from a recommendation from PASC) and heard from the Director of Community Services about the approach being taken to ensure that quality adult services are being delivered in Lewisham within the resources available. Budget pressures in the Children and Young People Directorate have been a repeated source of concern for members of PASC. The Director of Children and Young People, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Director of Children's social care are regular attendees at Public Accounts Committee – which focused all of its [final meeting of 2022-23](#) on the finances of children's social care.

Budget cuts proposals

[In December 2022](#) (as in previous years), the Committee considered referrals from the other select committees on the cuts programme (alongside the scrutiny of cuts proposals within its own remit) The Committee's aim was to provide overarching consideration of the cuts programme – and to identify potential conflicts or issues with implementation. The Committee heard from select committee chairs and members of the Cabinet - before reaching a balanced view on the proposals for submission to Mayor and Cabinet. The Committee highlighted its concerns about the resilience of the organisation and its employees – in the light of ongoing organisational changes and the aftereffects of the response to the pandemic.

Council budget 2023-24

[In February 2023](#), the Committee invited the Mayor to present the draft budget for scrutiny. Members of other select committees, executive directors and members of the cabinet were also in attendance. This provided the opportunity for questions to be answered in public about: the Council's priorities, sources of potential risk and issues arising from ongoing budget pressures.

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee highlights

Equalities

Throughout the year, the Committee considered equality, diversity and inclusion in all its work. It reviewed the Council's '**cost of living**' **response** and **adult learning provision** with an express focus on equalities in [January 2023](#) and [October 2022](#) respectively.

Crime and Disorder

[In January 2023](#), the Committee received updates from the Police and Fire services before scrutinising the **2023 Safer Lewisham Plan**, fulfilling its statutory crime and disorder role.

Borough of Sanctuary

[In March 2023](#), the Committee received an update on the Borough of Sanctuary Programme which included the progress of local implementation of Safer Surgeries and reported the recruitment of officer resource to lead the development of a workplan including short- to long-term actions. In addition to taking evidence from officers, the Committee heard from the Director of Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL), who set out AFRIL's concerns regarding the extent to which the BoS was embedded across the Council, the challenges faced by sanctuary seekers, and made suggestions regarding how the Council and its partners could better support sanctuary seekers. The Committee referred to Mayor and Cabinet its recognition of the vitality of the Borough of Sanctuary Strategy to the Council's support for the most vulnerable and made a number of recommendations regarding its delivery and supporting sanctuary seekers more broadly.

Borough of Culture

[In March 2023](#), the Committee received an update on the Borough of Culture Legacy including reflections on Lewisham's year as the London Borough of Culture and how the Council intended to ensure the year left a positive, lasting legacy, including the development of a cultural strategy.

Sustainable Development Select Committee highlights

Air quality action plan

[In June 2022](#), the Committee scrutinised the final draft of the air quality action plan – in advance of its approval by Mayor and Cabinet. The Committee questioned the process for carrying out consultation on the plan and asked officers to include additional information in the plan to increase its accessibility.

Climate emergency action plan

[In January 2023](#), the Committee considered the latest update on the implementation of the climate emergency action plan. In 2019, the Committee was tasked with regularly reviewing the plan. Its recommendations in January led to further information being provided to Mayor and Cabinet on the status of each of the actions in the plan.



Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group set out with the intention of: identifying good practice, linking plots of available land with interested groups and exploring options for increasing participation in community gardening. The Group's work drew from and built on the work carried out by the Council to tackle food poverty through the food justice action plan.

The Group quickly realised that there was limited information available about the people and groups using existing growing spaces (including Council allotment land) and it has recommended that further work should take place to engage with people on the allotments waiting list – as well as existing plot holders on allotments. It considered that this would be the first step in targeted future action to increase participation and engage all sections of the community in food growing. The Group visited a number of local growing spaces and considered the work taking place to build networks of growers and gardeners in the borough.

The Group also engaged with housing providers and spoke to an organisation delivering quality community gardens in Edinburgh social housing developments.

[The Task and Finish Group's report is available here.](#)



Workspaces Task and Finish Group

The significant role played by workspaces has been recognised in the London Plan. They provide support to the economy, new business, SMEs, remote workers, and artists and other creatives. The Task and Finish Group aimed to consider how the Council can maximise opportunities to increase the availability of flexible and affordable workspaces in the borough.

The TFG conducted extensive research, culminating in a report and recommendations considered by Mayor and Cabinet in July 2023, in alignment with, and contributing to the development of, the Council's Affordable Workspace Strategy.

Members of the TFG visited existing workspaces in Lewisham and engaged with workspaces providers (through the Affordable Workspaces Forum), property developers, and officers from other councils, and conducted a survey to establish the specific needs of people working in the creative sector.

The TFG developed a strong understanding of existing provision and identified opportunities to enhance support for existing providers and ways for the Council to unlock its assets to provide workspaces. It explored opportunities for the planning process to be used to encourage the provision of workspaces. Throughout its work, the TFG remained focused on ensuring equal access to workspaces, emphasising diversity and inclusivity.

Key achievements during the task group's process included its contribution to the Affordable Workspaces Strategy, identifying underutilised assets, initiating discussions on improving the use of community spaces such as the 2000 Community Action Centre, Pepys Community Library and Lewington Centre, and establishing a constructive dialogue with the Musician's Union.

[The Task and Finish Group's report is available here.](#)



Executive responses to task and finish groups

On 20 September 2023, the Mayor and Cabinet agreed formal responses to the recommendations made by the two 2022-23 task and finish groups.

Both sets of recommendations were well received, with the majority being wholly or partly accepted.

The full responses can be read by clicking the subheadings below.

[Community Food Growing](#)

As a result of the recommendations, a new Community Food Growing Officer role is to be established to deliver the recommendations and manage the resulting increased focus on community growing in Lewisham.

[Workspaces](#)

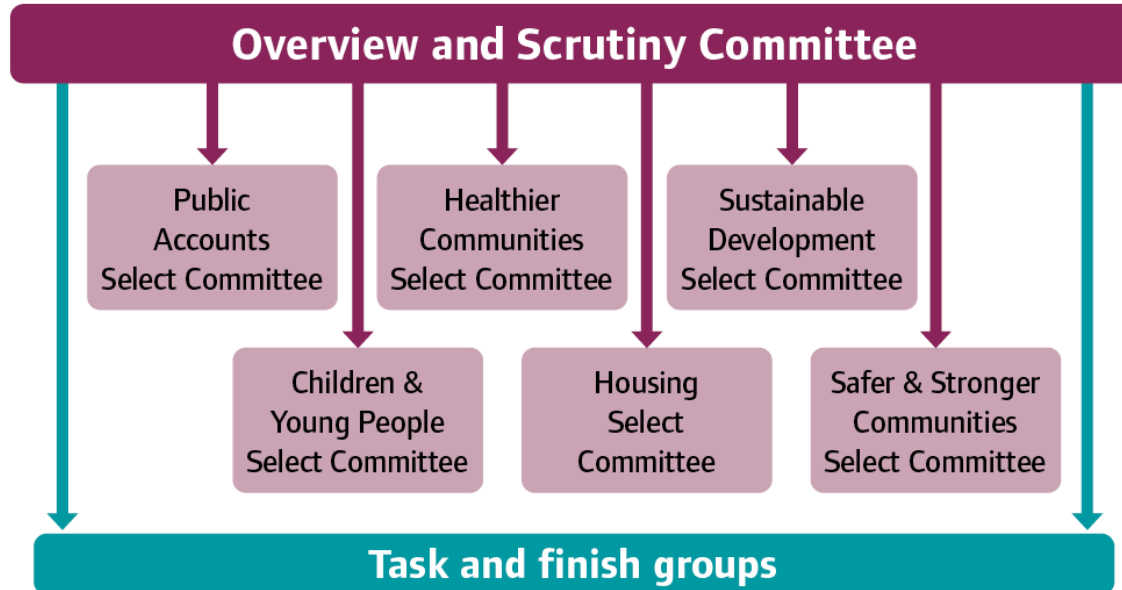
Several recommendations informed the new Affordable Workspace Strategy and are informing the developing Strategic Asset Management Plan.

Key actions to be taken directly as a result of the recommendations include the development of an accreditation framework for affordable workspace providers, the collection and analysis of local workspace market data, the upgrading of rehearsal spaces to medium priority in the Strategy and the inclusion of affordable workspaces in the scope of the local Investment and Opportunity Strategy.

Looking ahead – new structure

At the [Annual General Meeting in March 2023](#), full Council agreed a number of changes to overview and scrutiny including:

- Dissolving the business panels and returning their functions to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Reducing the number of members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee from 44 to 10 including the six select committee chairs



Looking ahead - priorities

Make in-depth scrutiny a success, however it happens

The Task and Finish Groups conduct in-depth scrutiny investigations over a period of months drawing on a wide range of evidence. We need to ensure that the Select Committees also have the opportunity to conduct in-depth scrutiny, including hearing from expert witnesses, carrying out engagement and going on site visits.

Conduct high quality scrutiny of key decisions before they are taken

Scrutinising key decisions at an early stage allows scrutiny to significantly influence the actions, decisions, policies and strategies of the Council and ensure that residents' needs and wants are taken into consideration

Collect evidence from a range of experts and stakeholders

Scrutiny has the most impact when it makes recommendations based on solid, triangulated evidence from a wide range of internal and external experts and stakeholders, including service users.

Looking ahead – Improving Scrutiny TFG

- In June 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a task and finish group to identify opportunities to improve the functioning and impact of the Council's overview and scrutiny function.
- The Task and Finish group will review the role of, and approach to, scrutiny in the Council, endeavour to clearly define a future role for scrutiny, and seek to develop improved processes and ways of working to facilitate the delivery of the recommended role for scrutiny by elected Members.