

# 1. The response of the Lewisham Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel

## Structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Lewisham

- 1.1. Overview and Scrutiny in Lewisham comprises all members not part of the directly elected Mayor's cabinet (the executive), currently 45 councillors. Those 45 members form the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which then appoints six thematic sub-committees (Select Committees) to carry out detailed scrutiny across strategic themes. Each committee meets 8 times a year and currently carries out a mixture of regular performance monitoring, policy development and in-depth scrutiny reviews. Each Committee has 10 councillor members, with additional faith and parent governor reps appointed to the Children and Young People Select Committee. All scrutiny committees are required to mirror the political balance of the Council.
- 1.2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also appoints a "Business Panel", comprising of the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, the six select committee chairs and 2 or more additional councillors, as required to ensure the political composition of the Council is reflected. Chairs and Vice Chairs are allocated on a politically proportionate basis. The Business Panel ensures a co-ordinated approach to scrutiny across the select committee to ensure there is no duplication across the various committees, and ensures the effective use of resources within the scrutiny function. The Panel also carries out executive decision "call-in" on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3. Scrutiny in Lewisham constructively challenges decision makers. It creates a democratic space to investigate emerging issues and inform the development of Council policy. Scrutiny in Lewisham is committed to creating maximum impact for its work. Select committees use evidence from a broad range of sources to challenge performance of Council services and to drive improvement. Scrutiny committees regularly also choose important issues for in-depth review. Through the in-depth review process, councillors have the opportunity to hear from guest witnesses and experts alongside council officers and representatives of other public services
- 1.4. So far in this term (2014-2018), this work has been delivered by:
  - 45 councillors on Lewisham's Overview and Scrutiny Committee
  - 6 select committees
  - 10 councillors on each committee
  - 2 time limited working groups
  - 2 business panels
  - 2 joint health overview and scrutiny committees
  - 37 select committee meetings in 2014/15
  - 48 select committee meetings in 2015/16
  - More than 80 external guests and expert witnesses, who have given evidence or contributed to scrutiny meetings
  - 16 in-depth reviews, 2 reports from working groups and 1 thematic review
  - 100+ referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

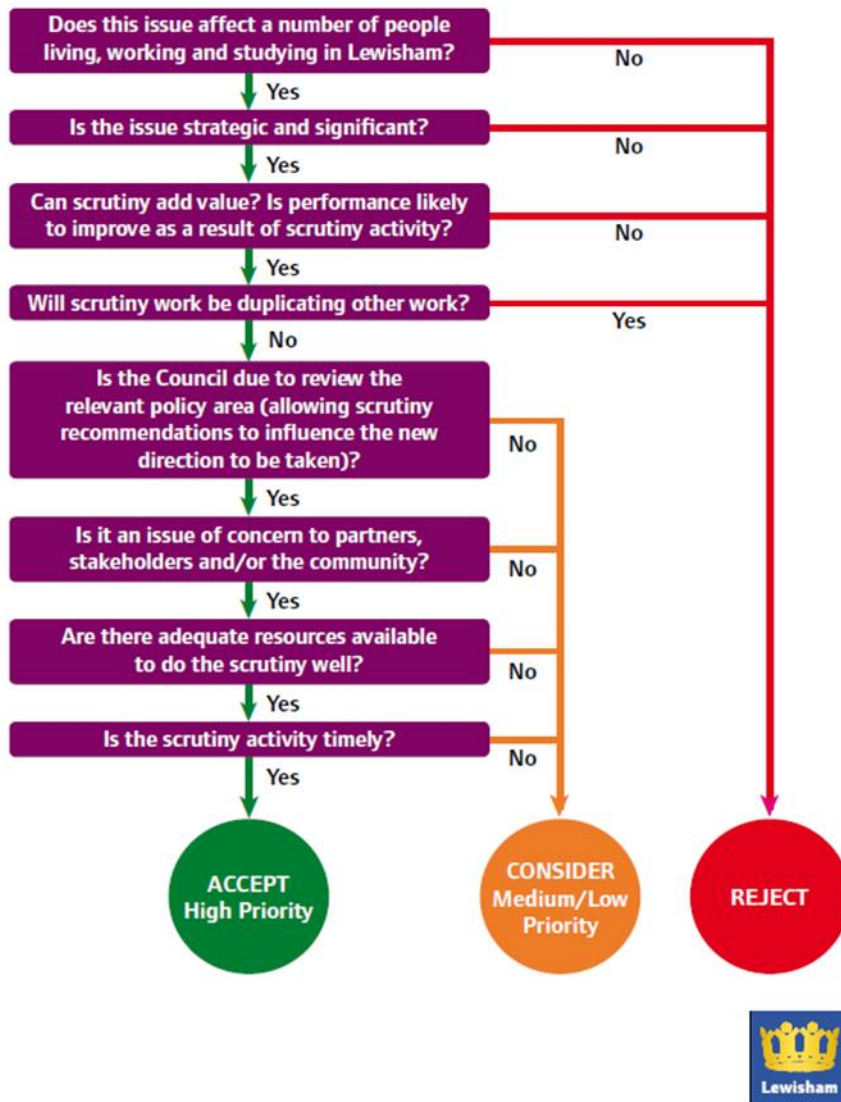
## Support given to the scrutiny function

- 1.5. A small officer team dedicated solely to supporting the overview and scrutiny function has been maintained. This ensures a high level of focused research and administrative support is available to all of the overview and scrutiny committees and supports the delivery of effective detailed in-depth scrutiny reviews, concluding with comprehensive reports and recommendations. The scrutiny team act as champions for scrutiny across the organisation, ensuring requests for information from scrutiny are responded to in a timely and appropriate fashion.
- 1.6. Scrutiny also benefits from the close involvement of officers from all levels of the Council. The Executive Directors of each of the Council's four directorates regularly attend scrutiny meetings to account for the development or delivery of a Council policy or programme, as do numerous senior managers. The Chief Executive has also attended scrutiny meetings on a number of occasions to share his overarching view of issues in the borough and the plans in place to deliver on Lewisham's priorities.

#### Selection of topics for scrutiny

- 1.7. To ensure effective use of scrutiny time and resources and to enable timely and appropriate information to be made available to members, all select committees agree a work programme for each year. To ensure the maximum impact of scrutiny committees, when agreeing a work programme all committees consider the following scrutiny prioritisation process to identify which potential areas for scrutiny should be chosen based on the timeliness of the scrutiny and the ability to impact on the outcomes for local people. Scrutiny strives to ensure it represents and champions local people and addresses the key issues of local concern.

## Scrutiny work programme – prioritisation process



### Scrutiny of partner agencies

- 1.8. Scrutiny in Lewisham was at the forefront of setting up effective scrutiny of health services when the relevant legislation was introduced, with the development of a protocol of understanding between the council scrutiny committee and NHS providers and commissioners and patient stakeholder groups (Healthwatch). Lewisham's health and social care scrutiny protocol is an agreement between partners in Lewisham's health care economy to deliver effective scrutiny, challenge and consultation. Partners have agreed to give prior notice to Lewisham's Healthier Communities Select Committee about consultations – in advance of the statutory requirements to provide information relating to substantial variations to health services. The protocol also

commits health partners to sharing their work programmes as well as commenting on, and submitting ideas for, the Select Committee's work plan.

- 1.9. The Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the implementation and delivery of the Safer Lewisham Plan. The Committee receives regular updates on the Safer Lewisham Partners' performance in delivering the plan. As part of its sustained focus on key crime and disorder issues, the Committee regularly invites representatives of the Metropolitan Police Service to account for its work in the borough. Councillors use their knowledge of local issues to act as a 'critical friend' to service providers
- 1.10. Through two major in depth reviews, scrutiny in Lewisham has been at the forefront of scrutinising the challenges faced by a number of public sector services, arising due to increasing demand and significant financial constraints, in a focused and joined up manner. The work of scrutiny in Lewisham in considering these key public service providers collectively has enabled the cumulative impact locally, of service changes and reductions, to be fully understood and addressed collectively where possible.
- 1.11. In 2013 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to carry out a review of emergency services in Lewisham. This was at a time when there were ongoing consultations about substantial organisational and operational changes to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and the London Ambulance Service (LAS). Proposals to reduce the Accident and Emergency Service (A&E), and emergency maternity care, at Lewisham Hospital had recently been agreed by the Secretary of State for Health, despite strong opposition from thousands of local people, their elected representatives and the GPs responsible for commissioning acute care locally.
- 1.12. Local people, the Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were concerned about the scale and pace of change being proposed to the delivery of emergency services in Lewisham and was worried that the cumulative impact of these proposals may not have been fully considered. The Committee wanted to ensure that the implications of all of the proposed changes were fully understood and planned for, and that a joined up approach to ensuring the best possible services for local people was taken
- 1.13. Scrutiny was best placed to carry out this important oversight role, requiring local health and emergency service providers to give account of their services and proposed changes at a local level. The scrutiny review increased local engagement and understanding of the potential impact of the proposed changes and enabled a unique picture of the cumulative impact of the proposed changes to be brought together. A series of recommendations to mitigate the impact and ensure collective responses were developed and accepted by the executive. The review also resulted in an ongoing scrutiny focus on effective partnership delivery across all of the public sector agencies in Lewisham, both in terms of ongoing performance monitoring and effective partnership working.
- 1.14. Following on from the success of the Emergency services in Lewisham review, a review into Public Spending in Lewisham was carried out, to further investigate the way in which other public sector organisations deploy their expenditure across the

borough in austere times. The Committee made a series of recommendations to the Council and partners organisations leading to openness, accountability and closer working. The review produced meaningful insights into how the Council and its growing public health responsibilities can dovetail with the various organisations within the NHS to provide better services for Lewisham residents.

### Joint scrutiny

- 1.15. In 2016, Lewisham and five other London boroughs (Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark) agreed to set up a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) to review and respond to proposals from the Our Healthier South East London programme OHSEL, which is responsible for developing and delivering the Sustainability and Transformation Plan for South East London.
- 1.16. The JHOSC was not satisfied with the proposed consultation on proposed major service change to elective orthopaedic surgery. The JHOSC raised the concerns voiced locally about the lack of detailed financial information available to the public and supported calls for one of the options that had been ruled out to be further evaluated and put to the public as part of the consultation. This work is now being undertaken by the OHSEL programme and the consultation will take place later this year.
- 1.17. Lewisham also worked jointly with Southwark, Lambeth and Croydon to review the proposed changes to the South London and Maudsley NHS foundation trust's arrangements for provision of 'places of safety'. The joint committee scrutinised the proposals from the acute mental health trust and their commissioners, to change the current service model of Place of Safety provision within SLaM from four separate Places of Safety, for the boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth, Lewisham and Croydon, to one centralised Place of Safety, provided in Southwark for all four boroughs.
- 1.18. The joint committee wanted to ensure that the proposals put forward by commissioners and providers led to the best possible service for residents. The Committee ensured that all relevant stakeholders were consulted fully, and that the potential implications for future ways of working were considered.
- 1.19. Scrutiny in Lewisham is currently working with 3 other London boroughs to collectively scrutinise the cause and impact of major water leaks across London. Thames Water, TFL and Ofwat are all being held to account by a concerted approach to scrutiny, and links with the London Assembly scrutiny of the same matter have also been developed. Joint scrutiny is incredibly effective at strengthening the voice of local people and holding service providers to account.

### Holding the Executive to Account

- 1.20. After every Mayor and Cabinet meeting an Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel meeting is scheduled. All executive decisions are subject to potential review by the business panel, and when it feels necessary, the panel can "call in" an executive decision and ask the decision maker to reconsider. Business Panel can also make comments and suggestions to Mayor and Cabinet, regarding suggested refinements to policies and practices, even if a decision is not formally called in.

## New Bermondsey

1.21. Scrutiny in Lewisham has played a pivotal role in providing critical friend challenge to the executive in relation to a proposed major regeneration scheme in the north of the borough. The scrutiny process enabled the voices of local stakeholders and residents to be heard. The scrutiny process in relation to this regeneration scheme has been raised in the House of Lords as an example of excellent scrutiny. Lord Young of Cookham advised the house that “the Hansard report of what the noble Lord (Kennedy of Southwark) just said should be sent to the members of every overview and scrutiny committee throughout the country to get an insight into how these committees can effectively further local democracy”.

## Impact of scrutiny

1.22. As well as those areas already outlined, a number of in depth reviews in Lewisham have had significant impact on policy development and performance of key services. Some examples:

1.23. As a result of the severe financial pressures faced by Local Government, the Public Accounts Select Committee decided to carry out an in-depth review into Income Generation, considering ways of maximising income generation to help protect the services to residents in the borough. The review led to a comprehensive package of changes in the development of initiatives and Council policy

1.24. Scrutiny in Lewisham has also looked at future infrastructure requirements locally. Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s review of the Centre for London’s work on ‘turning south London orange’ led it to recommend that the Council develop a strategic position on major infrastructure projects in the borough. Scrutiny urged decision makers to work proactively to consider how best to define Lewisham’s transport priorities. As a result of this the Public Transport Liaison Committee became a formal council body, recognising its importance and adding it to the other public services being held to account by member scrutiny. In London, public transport is key to regeneration and the daily lives of residents.

## Challenges

1.25. Lessons are still being learnt in relation to the delivery of scrutiny, particularly with regard to effective relationships. Scrutiny members feel that they are not always treated with full parity of esteem by all officers and members. There can be a perception that scrutiny members are “lower ranking” than executive members. This can lead to scrutiny members not always receiving the information they need to effectively carry out their role in a timely fashion. Some officers can also be put in an invidious position where their independence is called into question. Scrutiny members feel that sometimes it is challenging for legal officers to provide impartial advice to both executive and scrutiny. Scrutiny members feel that a cultural change can be necessary to ensure that all members and all officers value the democratic role of councillors, and that all members’ roles and responsibilities are supported and respected equally.

References:

[Overview and Scrutiny in Lewisham Mid-term review report](#)

[Public Spending in Lewisham scrutiny review report](#)

[Emergency services in Lewisham scrutiny review report](#)