

A Year in Review

A summary of the activity of the Southwark scrutiny committees

For more information on anything in this report please contact:

Overview & Scrutiny: Councillor Gavin Edwards or Shelley Burke

Education & Children's Scrutiny: Councillor Jasmine Ali or Julie Timbrell

Healthy Communities Scrutiny: Councillor Rebecca Lury or Julie Timbrell

Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny: Councillor Tom Flynn or Fitzroy Williams

Overview and Scrutiny Committee: A year in review

Councillor Gavin Edwards, Chair Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Over the past 12 months we have worked hard to ensure scrutiny continues to be challenging and constructive. The output from the committee shows we are continuing to achieve that objective.

Right to Buy for Housing Associations

Our report into the impact of right to buy for housing association tenants and forced sale of “high value” council homes shows how scrutiny can tackle an issue of huge importance to the council and be of real practical use to the council.

Working together, we conducted interviews with officers, chief executives of major housing associations, Lord Kerslake (former head of the Civil Service and current Chair of the Peabody Trust). These interviews provided a sound footing for the evidence gathering we needed to do. We also reviewed a series of external reports on the impact of extending right to buy and forced void sales, submitted a number of written requests for statistical and other information from Southwark Officers and interviewed, at the Committee, the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Strategic Director, Housing Services and Community Services.

With this information we were able to put together a comprehensive report and make recommendations which help Southwark to prepare for this wrong-headed policy.

The Budget

The committee has also handled sessions on a range of sensitive and difficult issues including cemeteries, regeneration and the budget. In particular, our day long budget scrutiny sessions were challenging and robust, making sure that all possibilities had been investigated to get maximum value for the money we spend.

Cabinet members engaged with the process in a positive and constructive manner, again responding well to a series of detailed recommendations.

Cabinet member interviews

We also carried out numerous Cabinet Member interviews during the course of the year, holding the Cabinet to account and finding out more about the detail of their work.

Southwark’s retail and CVS estate

We also carried out important scrutiny of our retail and CVS estate, securing resources to carry out an audit of our rental agreements. We discovered that some rents were not being accurately charge and revealed how historic inherited arrangements are causing serious issues in implementing a fair system which complies with current council policy. As a result of our work issues which had previously been unclear can now be addressed.

Call-ins

In addition OSC called in several decisions, including the decision to award a council contract to a company, weeks after Southwark Council Assembly passed a motion stopping trade union blacklists from getting our contractors. The decision is being reviewed as a result.

Underpayment of the national minimum wage

Finally, we also looked into the issues of underpayment of national minimum wage and the implementation of our Living Wage policy, this is work which will hopefully be continued in the coming year.

All OSC meetings were live streamed and recorded as a public record, an innovation which has saved resources by removing the need to keep detailed minutes and opened up the scrutiny process to people who might not be able to come along to meetings.

All Overview & Scrutiny meetings are streamed online and can be viewed here:

<https://bambuser.com/channel/southwarkscrutiny>

For more information about anything in this report, please contact [Councillor Gavin Edwards](#) or [Shelley Burke](#)

Education & Children's Services Committee: A year in review

Councillor Jasmine Ali, Chair Education & Children's Services Committee

Female Genital Mutilation

The Committee has acted to challenge the high incidence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Southwark, which has the highest rate of FGM in the country: evidence told us that 10.4% of children in Southwark will have a mother who has been genitally mutilated. We held a 'scrutiny in a day' session and heard from community and voluntary groups, and then followed this up with a workshop from Coventry University on an EU-wide community based behaviour change action research programme. We brought together leading experts like Dr Comfort Momoh from Guys and St Thomas's, and specialists from health, the police and community groups.

The LGA peer review commended our approach in their report: "innovative approaches to scrutiny can be seen, including the hosting of community events when considering the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM), and bringing in partner organisations, from the likes of health and education, to aid joined-up thinking." [Female Genital Scrutiny Review 2015/16](#) went to OSC in April 2016, and will be going to Cabinet in May 2016.

Autism Strategy

In Southwark a mapping exercise revealed that out of 1500 assessments of local children 70% are autistic. We were concerned to develop a strategy. Cllr Kath Whittam led this work for the committee. She and Cllr Ali met with Jay Stickland, Director of Adult Social Care and Peta Smith, Commissioning Manager. The strategy was released in November 2015 and through careful scrutiny, we made sure the strategy set out aspirations for autism to be more readily recognised, so that staff are confident when dealing with children and young people with autism, and that mapping will help identify children with autism so money and support can be targeted where it is needed. A [recording](#) is available of this session.

The closure of Kids Company

On 5 August 2015, Kids Company ceased operating and announced that it would begin the process of placing itself into compulsory liquidation. The Education and Children's Services committee was concerned about the many thousands of children that had worked with the organisation and were supported in Southwark. We were the first local authority to scrutinise the impact of the closure on the local community. We spoke separately to young people about the transition of children and young people from Kids Company to alternative services in Southwark.

Following its closure 1,699 cases had been passed to London, of whom 299 clients were from, or had a connection with, Southwark. The committee was satisfied that Southwark's strategic director had done an excellent job in helping Southwark residents in their transition from Kids Company to the Council support through the exemplary efforts of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in responding to the closure of Kids Company. Young people raised issues with the committee about children and young people who may fall through the net: these cases were examined the next day by the strategic director. [Kids Company Scrutiny 2015](#)

Mental Health Assessment

The committee carried out a joint review with The Healthy Communities Committee of the Council's Joint Mental Health Strategy, and focused on the mental health needs of children and young people in the borough. Our scrutiny session with relevant and dedicated professionals was able to draw on the work that we carried out with in 2014/15, published in the [Narrowing the Gap in Attainment Report](#) and in our [Adoption Review](#). The scrutiny observations and recommendations are attached. It is heartening to see that the recent [Education Committee Inquiry](#) has mirrored some of the committee's recommendations in particular a whole school approach to working with pupils with poor mental health. A [Joint Approach to Mental Health](#) went to OSC in April 2016, and goes to Cabinet in May 2016.

Youth services

The scrutiny team had been approached by young people who were concerned about 'cuts to youth services' in the 2015/26 budget, and we held a session with the young people. We captured every question and issue raised by the young people in this session. We fed this back to the Cabinet the very next day in the form of an issue log. The Lead member came back with a response and further meetings with the young people. The results were positive and the young people wrote to thank the committee and lead member for its fast response. The session was lively and can be seen on our webpage.

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2

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Healthy Communities Committee: A year in review

Councillor Rebecca Lury, Chair Healthy Communities Committee

Personalisation

We started our year finalising our evidence gathering around personalisation. [Making Southwark Personal](#) called on the Council to improve the service standards and timescales faced by our residents in applying for personal budgets, with a focus on giving our residents a truly person-centred approach to personal budgets.

SLaM Place of Safety

South London & Maudsley have proposed changes to the way in which the Places of Safety for those presenting in mental health crises operate across Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark and Greenwich. Again Southwark took the lead chairing this meeting, where we closely scrutinised SLaM's proposals, hearing from representatives from each Council, local health service organisations and police forces about the impact of these changes.

The Committee agreed that SLaM should act on the initial recommendations and come back to the Committee before any further action should be taken.

Joint Health Scrutiny Committee

The Clinical Commissioning Group asked Southwark to join with five other boroughs in South East London to form a joint health scrutiny committee. Cllr Rebecca Lury was elected as the Chair of the Committee, which is looking at the [5 year plan for health services across South East London](#). Our first meeting set out the Terms of Reference and our priority areas of interest, which will be explored in more detail over the coming months.

Care Homes

With the announcement of the imminent closure of Camberwell Green Care Home by HC One, our inquiry into care in Southwark became our next priority, focusing on care homes, home care, care in the community and the Ethical Care Charter.

The Committee summoned the care home providers in Southwark to our first meeting, which gave us the opportunity to closely [scrutinise HC One](#), probing them about their plans for relocating current residents, and improving their other care homes in Southwark. The Committee also hosted its first roundtable of the year, inviting community groups, care workers, unions and charities to talk to us about what they wanted to see from a care system. Ideas were wide-ranging and the free flowing discussion left us with a huge number of recommendations to consider.

[Time to Care](#) makes recommendations around a second Ethical Care Charter, the consideration for the Council to open its own Care Homes and better signposting for families and individuals as to the services that Southwark and Southwark businesses provide.

Mental Health

The Healthy Communities Committee's conducted its second major review in conjunction with the Education & Children's Services Committee, looking at the Council's Joint Mental Health Strategy.

The Health Communities Committee focused on the overall strategy, looking at the role of the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in delivering this strategy. Having interviewed the Cabinet Member, and relevant officers from both the Council and CCG, we invited [community organisations, charities, hospitals, South London & Maudsley and community groups](#) to share their thoughts on what needs to be included in the strategy. This roundtable produced a wealth of ideas which we distilled down into recommendations around timeliness of identification, support for the voluntary sector and education & training.

[A Joint Approach to Mental Health](#) also went to OSC in April 2016, and will be going to Cabinet in May 2016.

Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub Committee: A year in review

Councillor Tom Flynn, Chair of Housing & Community Safety Committee

Call Centre opening times

We started the year with an investigation into the changes to call centre opening times, hearing from officers and representatives of Tenant Council, and making suggestions on how to improve consultation in future and on improving communication of changes to residents to ensure that they are aware of changes and understand the reasons for them.

Borough Commander interview

The borough police commander took questions from the committee on a range of topics from crime figures to noise nuisance.

We interviewed cabinet members for Housing (Richard Livingstone) and Communities and Safety (Michael Situ) on a range of issues relating to their portfolios.

All interviews were briefed in advance to local media and questions taken from residents on Twitter who were watching the live stream.

Resident services-led pilot

In March we were briefed on the resident-led services pilot. The committee has asked to be kept updated throughout this exciting pilot, which will see residents having more say over their housing repairs service to fit local needs.

Housing Association Right to Buy

We collected evidence for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's report into Housing Association Right to Buy, and members of our committee wrote sections of the report on the impact of the legislation on housing associations and the impact on house building.

The committee interviewed representatives of the Leathermarket JMB tenant management organisation on their repairs service, and the advantages (localised service, improved accountability) and disadvantages (purchasing power compared to a large contract, economies of scale) of a smaller repairs contract. The committee found that the JMB service allowed residents to feel more able to resolve problems with repairs, as they had access to a local office and the officers involved in their repairs would remain fairly constant. The committee has used its findings to feed into the current resident led services pilots in Camberwell and Peckham.

Empty homes in Southwark

In January, we started a major scrutiny investigation – a 'state of Southwark' report into empty homes in the borough. So far we have taken evidence with regards to council homes and the private sector, including securing an interview with LendLease to discuss the work they are doing to prevent empty homes in their developments at Elephant Park. We will take further evidence in the new council year from housing associations, other councils, the London Assembly and representatives of the new mayor.

Fire Commander interview

The committee undertook a number of high-profile interviews including Southwark's first interview with a borough fire commander for many years. We asked the fire commander about plans to remove an appliance from Old Kent Road, and we heard about the differences in response times for second engines depending on where you are in the borough (i.e. some places bring the average up, some drag it down).

The future

In the new council year we are hoping to conclude our work on empty homes and investigate the circumstances which led to the council being fined millions of pounds for overcharging residents for their water.