

Meeting Name:	Council Assembly
Date:	22 May 2024
Report title:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2023-24
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	Yes
From:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Foreword – Councillor Ian Wingfield, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In line with the Council’s Constitution, I present this report to the annual meeting of Council Assembly.

As in previous years cabinet members, senior officers and partners have co-operated in the scrutiny process when requested, so once again, I would like to thank them for their continued positive contributions to the various scrutiny reviews and briefings highlighted throughout this report. I would also like to thank the public and external organisations for their part in bringing issues to the attention of scrutiny and for contributing to this important process, and members of overview and scrutiny committee and the various commissions for their work and contributions towards improving council services.

As a council, we are keen to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the scrutiny function, and throughout the year, we will see the implementation of the scrutiny improvement recommendations and actions to achieve this aim. The council has already agreed to the widening of the scrutiny call-in process to all members of the council, and this change enables all councillors the opportunity to take part in formally bringing decisions of concern to the attention of the overview and scrutiny committee for review.

There will be a review of the Budget Scrutiny process, to be undertaken by the strategic director of finance, and will lead to improvement in how we scrutinise council finances.

This year I look forward to seeing the scrutiny function having a greater involvement in pre-decision scrutiny and policy development with the support of the cabinet and senior leadership; more scrutiny of partner organisations; an increase in involvement of the public and community organisations, and adding value to the council’s decision-making processes.

I recommend this report to Council Assembly.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That council assembly note the scrutiny activity for the 2023/24 municipal year as detailed in paragraphs 6 - 54 of the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The council's scrutiny function provides a critical challenge to delivery of public services in Southwark through power to make inquiry into matters of local concern. The scrutiny function is undertaken by the council's overview and scrutiny committee and its commissions and can take a number of forms including.
 - Reviews into individual topics
 - 'Call in' – scrutiny of executive decisions taken before they are implemented
 - Call to account of officers on receipt of a petition of 500 or more signatures from the general public
 - Interviews with individual cabinet members and senior officers.
3. The overview and scrutiny committee and its commissions have specific functions in respect of policy development and review, health and wellbeing, scrutiny of decisions and performance of the council in relation to policy objectives. The committee and its commission may make recommendations to the cabinet and/or council assembly arising from the outcome of a scrutiny process.
4. The scrutiny function is significant and wide ranging – detail of its specific functions and terms of reference are set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
5. Section 2, Article 5 of the Council Constitution requires the overview and scrutiny committee to report annually to council assembly on the workings of the overall scrutiny function. The committee may make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. Section 6.1(h) of the overview and scrutiny committee procedure rules (terms of reference) requires overview and scrutiny committee to report annually to all councilors on the previous year's scrutiny activity. This report sets out the activity of the overview and scrutiny committee and its commissions for the 2023/24 year.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Activity of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its commissions

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership: Councillors Ian Wingfield (Chair), Irina von Wiese (Vice-Chair), Suzanne Abachor, Victor Chamberlain, Ellie Cumbo, Sam Foster, Jon Hartley, Laura Johnson, Sunny Lambe, Margy Newens, Bethan Roberts, Chloe Tomlinson

Co-opted Members: Martin Brecknell, Jonathan Clay, Marcin Jagodzinski, Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer

(Reserves: Councillors John Batterson, Rachel Bentley, Sunil Chopra, Sam Dalton, Esme Hicks, Sandra Rhule, Jane Salmon, Andy Simmons, Cleo Soanes

6. The overview and scrutiny committee established four scrutiny commissions for the 2023/24 municipal year:
 - Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
 - Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
 - Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission
 - Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission
7. In October 2023 the overview and scrutiny committee transferred the 'community engagement' remit to the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission resulting in the renaming of the commissions as follows:
 - Environment Scrutiny Commission
 - Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Activity

8. The overview and scrutiny committee considered a number of topics throughout the year including scrutiny of major works delivery (particularly relating to Canada Estate, and Devon Mansions Estate). Considered the outcome of the council's independent scrutiny improvement review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and agreed the recommendations arising from the review.
9. The committee also held a cabinet member interview with the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees on 'the Keeping Education Strong Recommendations agreed by cabinet in June 2023. Received a briefing on the Councillor Delivery Plan Annual Performance report.
10. The overview and scrutiny committee also received briefings throughout the year on various aspects of the council budget 2023-24 and 2024-25, and held its annual budget scrutiny meeting, involving interviews with cabinet member

portfolio holders and senior officers (on the proposed council budget for 2024/25) in January 2024, and made recommendations to the cabinet on the proposed budget. The committee also received information on the general fund capital programme refresh and the housing revenue account budget.

11. The committee did not consider any call-ins during the 2023-24 year.
12. The overview and scrutiny committee met nine times – its first meeting of the new municipal year held in May 2023.

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (overview and scrutiny committee)

Scrutiny Commissions

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

Membership: Councillors Chloe Tomlinson (Chair), Rachel Bentley (Vice-Chair), Jason Ochere, Joseph Vambe, John Batteson, Renata Hamvas, Irina von Wiese

Co-opted Members: Martin Brecknell, Jonathan Clay, Marcin Jagodzinski, Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer

(Reserves: Councillors Maggie Browning, Bethan Roberts, Laura Johnson, Victoria Mills, Victor Chamberlain, Sunil Chopra, Adam Hood)

13. The education and local economy scrutiny commission's main areas of focus for 2023/24 were *school amalgamations and closures* and *community wealth building and youth employment support*.
14. School amalgamations and closures – throughout the year the commission received evidence from head teachers of various impacted schools, the Education union, the cabinet member for children, education and refugees, and council officers. Various themes were discussed, including, demographics of a school, possibilities of avoiding closure and amalgamation, council's role and communication, falling school rolls, financial challenges, potential impact on educational programs and services, collaboration and integration with other educational institutions, impact of closures on staff and pupils.
15. Following the evidence gathering sessions the commission formulated its draft recommendations for consideration by cabinet. The recommendations are available online in draft form and are available to view [here](#) – see item 6.
16. Community wealth building and youth employment support – throughout the year the commission received information from council officers on community wealth building, and youth employment support. The commission also heard from case workers from St Giles Trust on youth employment programmes, and the council's role.

17. Following the evidence gathering sessions the commission formulated its draft recommendations for consideration by cabinet. The recommendations are available online in draft form and are available to view [here](#) – see item 6.

Other areas

18. Throughout the year the commission also received information / briefings on Education Health Care Plans, the Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership, East Street Market renovation project. The commission also held interviews with the cabinet member for children, education and refugees, and cabinet member for jobs, skills and business on various aspects of their portfolios.
19. The commission met six times – its first meeting held in July 2023.
20. [Link to agenda and minutes](#) – (Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission)

Environment Scrutiny Commission

Membership: Councillors Margy Newens (Chair), Graham Neale (Vice-Chair), Cassandra Brown, Youcef Hassaine, Leo Pollok, Reginald Popoola, David Watson

Co-opted members (non-voting): Anna Colligan, Simon Saville

(Reserves: Councillors John Batteson, Rachel Bentley, Gavin Edwards, Maggie Browning, Renata Hamvas, Adam Hood, Kimberly McIntosh)

21. The environment scrutiny commission's main areas of focus for 2023/24 were *sustainable freight* and *biodiversity*.
22. Sustainable Freight – this was a continuation of a review undertaken in 2022/23. Throughout the year the commission received information / evidence from ENSO Ltd on sustainable tyres, council officers on the installation of vehicle footway crossovers, with a view to loss of front gardens and impact on biodiversity. The commission also received a briefing from Imperial College London on the health impact of particulates from tyre, brakes and road dust. The commission also received information from the Port of London Authority on river freight.
23. Following the evidence gathering sessions the commission formulated its draft recommendations for consideration by cabinet. The recommendations are available online in draft form and are available to view [here](#) – see item 8.
24. Biodiversity – throughout the year the commission received evidence from council officers on the Southwark Nature Action Plan and tree management, an officer representative from Lambeth Council on Lambeth's Community Weeding Scheme and the council's work to go herbicide and pesticide free, the Pesticide Action Network UK, a presentation from Incredible Edible on work with Lambeth Council on community gardening, a presentation on insect

life in the bushes, information on rain gardens and sustainable drainage systems, a co-opted member on improving biodiversity in Southwark, Southwark Nature Action Volunteers on nature recovery in Southwark, officer reports on the Environment Act covering biodiversity net gain & local nature recovery plan, and supporting community food growing and gardening. The commission also received a presentation on the Urban Agriculture revolution.

25. The commission is still undertaking its review on biodiversity and has rolled over the finalisation of its recommendations to cabinet to the 2024/25 municipal year.

Other areas

26. Throughout the year the commission also received briefings on the Southwark Land Commission, Streets for People Strategy 2023-2030, and Waste and Cleaning from the cabinet member for climate emergency, clean air and streets, and council officers. The commission also received briefings from council officers on Waste in Parks.
27. The commission met five times – its first meeting held in July 2023.

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission – July 2023 to September 2023)

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (Environment Scrutiny Commission – November 2023 to May 2024)

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission

Membership: Councillors Suzanne Abachor (Chair), Maria Linforth-Hall (Vice-Chair), Sam Dalton, Esme Dobson, Sandra Rhule, Nick Johnson, Sunil Chopra

Co-opted Members: None

(Reserves: Councillors Naima Ali, Victor Chamberlain, Sabina Emmanuel, David Watson, Kath Whittam, Charlie Smith)

28. The health and social care scrutiny commission's main area of focus for 2023/24 was *Access to Toilets* and *Adult Safeguarding*.
29. Access to Toilets – Throughout the year the commission received evidence from Age UK London, residents and council officers on access to toilets in Southwark.
30. Following the evidence gathering sessions the commission formulated its draft recommendations for consideration by cabinet. The recommendations are available online in draft form and are available to view [here](#) – see item 5.
31. Adult Safeguarding – the commission received an officer briefing on definitions of Adult Safeguarding, how safeguarding allegations were investigated, how Southwark Adult Social Care worked with providers and

families, and the training offered. The commission also interviewed the independent chair of the Southwark Safeguarding Adults Board, and received the Safeguarding annual report, heard evidence from the Hourglass organisation in relation to ending harm, abuse and exploitation of older people in the UK. The commission also received information on Safeguarding Concerns and Enquiries for 2022-23.

The commission is still undertaking its review and has rolled over the finalisation of its recommendations to cabinet to the 2024/25 municipal year.

Other areas

32. Throughout the year the commission also received presentations / briefings on the council's healthy weight strategy, health impacts of drugs and alcohol, Healthwatch report on access to health and social care services for Latin American Communities in Southwark, Blue Badge application process and criteria for award, and Musculoskeletal commission change.
33. The commission also held an interview with the cabinet member for health and wellbeing on various aspects of her portfolio.
34. The commission met six times – its first meeting held in July 2023.

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission)

Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Membership: Councillors Sam Foster (Chair), Emily Tester (Vice-Chair), Ellie Cumbo, Jane Salmon, Barrie Hargrove, Esme Hicks, Victoria Mills

Co-opted Members (non-voting) Bassey Bassey, Cris Claridge, Ina Negoita

(Reserves: Councillors Portia Mwangangye, Hamish McCallum, Sam Dalton, Adam Hood, Joseph Vambe, Ketzia Harper, Cleo Soanes)

35. The housing, community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission's main areas of focus for 2023/24 was *housing allocations, homelessness, heating and hot water outages, and policing in Southwark*
36. Housing allocations – Throughout the year the commission received evidence from the deputy cabinet member for housing allocations, on the housing allocations and lettings policy for council homes and housing associations, and the cabinet member for new homes and sustainable development on Temporary accommodation.
37. Homelessness – The commission received a report from the cabinet member for new homes and sustainable development on the draft homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, and also heard evidence from the Guys and St Thomas' Hospital Homeless Health Team, St Mungo's Southwark SPOT outreach team, and Southwark Law Centre.

38. Heating and hot water outages – The commission received an officer report on the compensation scheme for heating outages, heard from residents and local ward councilors concerning heating and hot water outages at Rouel Road, and received officer reports on the matter.
39. Policing in Southwark – The commission interviewed the Borough Police Commander for Southwark, covering matters on policing initiatives and programmes, changes and plans as a result of the Baroness Casey Review, and approach of the local police towards responding to incidents concerning mental health.

Other areas

40. The commission also held interviews with the cabinet member for council homes, and cabinet member for community safety on various aspects of their portfolios.
41. The commission also interviewed the Borough Fire Commander for Southwark concerning matters relating to fire safety in Southwark.
42. The commission discussed draft recommendations it wished to put forward to cabinet at its March meeting, and is in the process of producing final recommendations/reports to cabinet on the various reviews undertaken throughout the 2023/24 year.
43. The commission met six times – its first meeting held in July 2023.

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission - July 2023 to October 2023)

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) (Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission - December 2023 to March 2024)

Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (JHOSC)

44. There is provision in the constitution for the council to form a joint health overview and scrutiny committee (JHOSC) with other local authorities to consider a consultation on a proposal for substantial development of or variation to the health service affecting each council's area. Detailed below are the current JHOSCs that relate to Southwark.

South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)

45. Southwark is part of the 'South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee', which consists of councillor representatives from Bexley, Bromley, Lambeth, Lewisham, Royal Borough of Greenwich and Southwark. The JHOSC role is to scrutinise health services across South East London, in particular the work of the South East London Integrated Care Board to ensure that improved, safe and sustainable health services are delivered across the region.

46. The JHOSC is currently administered by Bexley Council. The JHOSC has met twice – its first meeting held in July 2023.

[Link to agenda and minutes](#) – Bexley council website (South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

Southwark Scrutiny Improvement Review

47. As reported last year the council enlisted the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to undertake a scrutiny improvement review of the council's scrutiny function. The overview and scrutiny committee has accepted all the CfGS recommendations, noting that a number of them will require further approval from either cabinet or council assembly.
48. Since then the council has reviewed and agreed new arrangements relating to the call-in of an executive decision, widening the call-in process to all members of the council.
49. Additional resources have been made available to enable scrutiny to be more creative in its approach to scrutiny such as scrutiny in a day, task and finish groups, meetings taking place outside of the main council offices, and to employ an additional scrutiny officer to improve officer support to the process.
50. The council is currently in the process of producing an Executive Scrutiny Protocol which will make clear the expectations and behaviours for both cabinet members / senior leadership and the scrutiny function in the interests of improving the outcome of scrutiny.
51. The majority of actions arising from the CfGS improvement review will be implemented in the 2024-25 year.

Scrutiny activity for 2024/25

52. The overview and scrutiny committee has not given an indication of the areas the committee and its commissions should focus on in 2024/25 municipal year. It will be for the overview and scrutiny committee to agree the 2024/25 work programmes for the committee and commissions.

Resource implications

Support to the scrutiny function

53. The scrutiny function is supported by the scrutiny team, which sits within the Governance and Assurance Department under the direct responsibility of the Assistant Chief Executive for Governance and Assurance. The team currently consists of the head of scrutiny, and two full time scrutiny officers.
54. The recruitment of an additional scrutiny officer will be undertaken shortly.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

55. As indicated in paragraph 5 of the report, the overview and scrutiny committee is required to report annually to all councilors on the previous year's scrutiny activity.

REASONS FOR LATENESS

56. It was not possible to finalise the annual report in time for the council assembly agenda despatch.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Everton Roberts 020 7525 7221
http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=308		
Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva 020 7525 0496
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=550		
Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Julie Timbrell 020 7525 0514
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=606		
Environment Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Julie Timbrell 020 7525 0514
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=661		
Health and Social Care Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Julie Timbrell 020 7525 0514
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=519		
Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva 020 7525 0496
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=605		

Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission Agenda and Minutes	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva 020 7525 0496
https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=662		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Scrutiny Functions and Terms of Reference (Extract from the council constitution)

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Member	Cllr Ian Wingfield, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Lead Officer	Doreen Forrester-Brown, Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	
Report Author	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny	
Version	Final	
Dated	17 May 2024	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director, Finance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	17 May 2024	