

# SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2002-2003

## Contents

	page
➤ Introduction	1
➤ Thurrock Council's Structure	2
➤ Overview and Scrutiny Committee	3
➤ Children, Schools and Family Panel	5
➤ Environment and Physical Regeneration Panel	8
➤ Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Sports Development Panel	10
➤ Social Justice and Inclusion Panel	11
➤ Vulnerable Adults and Health Panel	13
➤ Call in and Requests for Review Panel	15
➤ Further Information	17

## Introduction

This annual report describes the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and its panels in 2002-03.

The OSC is chaired by Councillor George Watts and ensures the effective running of the scrutiny function. The members of the Committee included the chairs of the panels, and the Education statutory co-optees.

Five standing panels have been meeting during the year –

The Children, Schools and Family panel  
chaired by Councillor Yash Gupta.

The Environment and Physical Regeneration Panel  
chaired by Councillor Alphonse Nuss.

The Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Sports Development Panel  
chaired by Councillor Peter Cooper

The Social Justice and Inclusion Panel  
chaired by Councillor Tony Fish

The Vulnerable Adults and Health Panel  
chaired by Councillor David Gooding

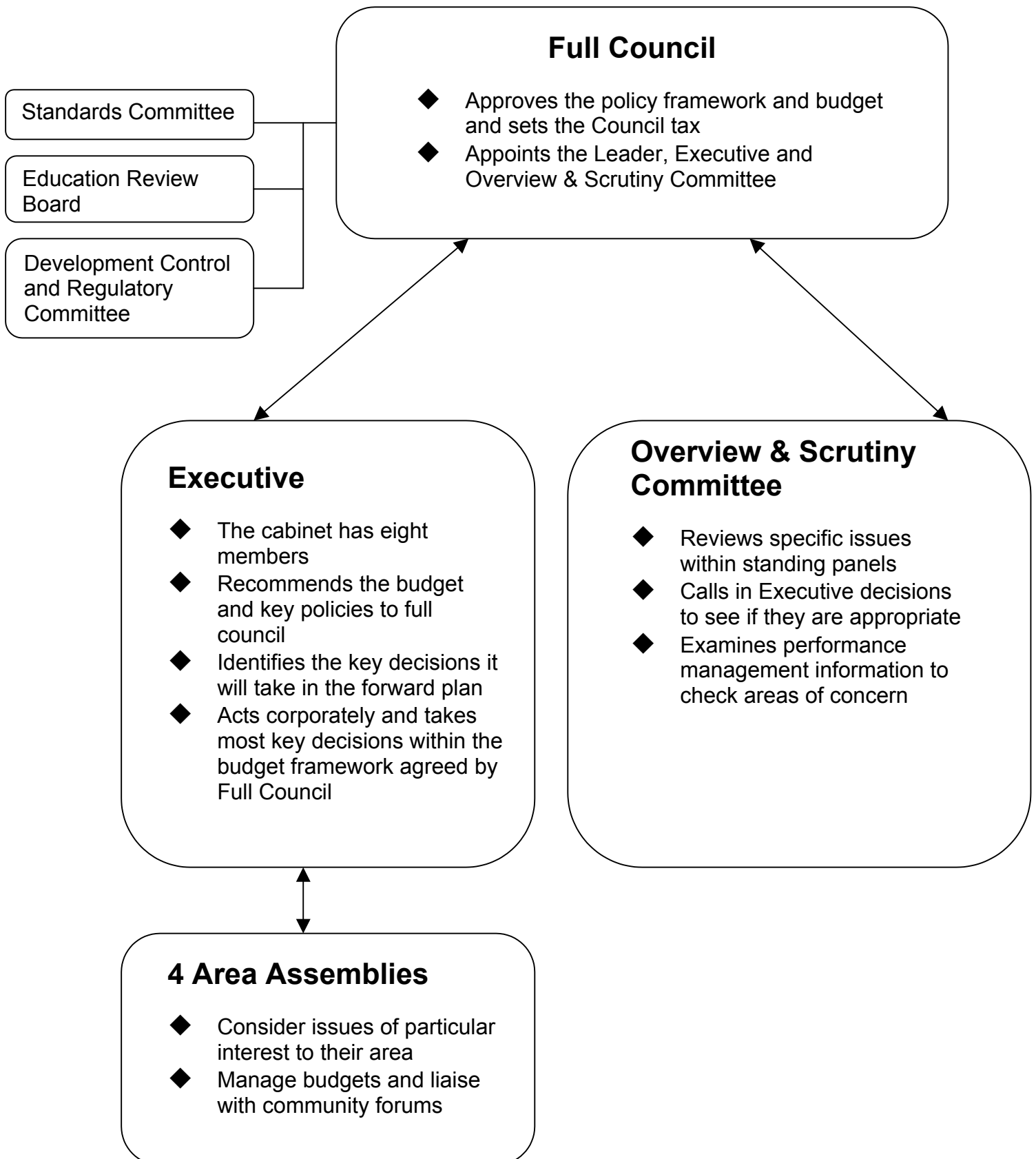
The Call In and Requests for Review Panel - chaired by Martin Healy has also met at regular intervals.

Call ins of Executive decisions can be made by Councillors or 10 members of the public making a request to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny plays a vital part in the modernising agenda for local councils. Its power lies in influencing decisions and holding decision makers to account. It promotes citizen involvement by encouraging attendance at meetings, visiting community groups and others, welcoming witnesses and by involving the public as lay members of the panels.

Above all, the aims of overview and scrutiny are to improve services for local people and participate effectively in the Council's community leadership role.

# The Council's Structure 2002/03



## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Chair: Cllr George Watts**

Being the Chair of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the 2002/2003 municipal year has been a real privilege for me. The work has been intriguing and rewarding, sometimes hard and challenging but always thought provoking.

My colleagues of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Standing Scrutiny Panel Chairs and their members, together with the extraordinarily hard working Lay Members, have achieved so much on behalf of the Council and the community we all serve. I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to them all. A special thank you also to the small band of council officers who have attended to our every need with professionalism and dedication.

The current year began with the advantage of the foundation laid down by my predecessor Cllr David Hooper who had started the process from scratch eighteen months or so previously. Right at the beginning of the year we held an informal Review & Planning Meeting so that, corporately, the way forward, our approach, to the year could be established. The Standing Scrutiny Panels changed from the previous year reflecting the new agenda and I was delighted when most of the various groups on the Council took up their allocated seats, alas the Conservatives were the exception.

With assistance from a variety of people I have been able, hopefully successfully, to take the cause of the Overview & Scrutiny function to greater heights and as a result ensured the Executive's work has been monitored effectively. This work has also allowed non-executive Councillors to be more involved in the development of policy. There is still much work to be done in this area of our duties but we recognise the challenges and have made changes in our approach and structures to address them. It will take a bit of time to show if we have been successful or not. I would not be surprised, if at the next informal Review & Planning meeting they are up-dated once again.

The Chairs of the Standing Scrutiny Panels report on the various projects undertaken, their outcomes and the recommendations made. All this can be found elsewhere in the body of this Annual Report. I am positive you will read them with interest.

There has been some concern expressed about what happens to reports after they have been completed – do they end up just collecting dust? A new Link member will be appointed by each Panel with the duty of reporting back to the main Overview & Scrutiny Committee the implementation progress of the report on a by-monthly basis.

Future projects, whether raised by the Call-in system or by Council members will really benefit from the publication of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Tool Kit, a remarkable document, judged to be an example of good practice, that can educate and inform anyone wanting to get involved in scrutiny for the first time and/or give excellent guidance to those carrying out a scrutiny review.

We also look forward to our Overview & Scrutiny Conference to take place later in the year. This will bring together people from far and wide to share with us their knowledge, experiences and possibly some disappointments thus benefiting all.

The massive changes in the way the National Health Service involves patients and public in its daily work has brought the task of Scrutiny of the Health Services to Local Authorities via the 2001 Act. I am pleased to report that we were able to respond to the challenges presented by participating fully in the development of a partnership with Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea. The partnership carried out a successful pilot project that looked into delayed discharges from acute hospitals in the Essex Strategic Health Authority's area. Its report is long but comprehensive.

I end by stating that I believe that Overview & Scrutiny has now begun to take its rightful place at the heart of the Council's business, has started to be recognised as **the** effective tool to use in service delivery review, monitoring and policy development and as such will bring many benefits to the whole community.

## Children, Schools and Family Scrutiny Panel

Chair: Cllr Yash Gupta

### 1) Membership of the panel:

#### Elected Members

Councillor Yash Gupta  
 Councillor Val Cook  
 Councillor Allan McPherson  
 Councillor Earnshaw Palmer  
 Councillor Rose McMahon

#### Statutory Co-optees

Alf Shepherd  
 Dave Oram  
 Mrs Pat Wilson

#### Support:

Democratic Services: Keith Pringle  
 Corporate Development & Improvement Team: Marion Canavon/Anita Evans

### 2) The planned work programme:

In their first meeting of the Panel on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2002, the following work plan was agreed

#### Children, schools and family scrutiny panel – work programme 2002/03

Review		Objectives		Purpose	Timescale
Review of policy on Special Education Needs, reducing the number of children out of school and meeting the needs of gifted and disabled pupils.	i.	To ascertain the current number and type of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN).	a)	To help ensure that all pupils in the Borough with Special Education Needs are provided the best possible tuition.	June 2002 to March 2003
	ii.	To examine the current provision for teaching pupils with Special Needs within and outside the borough.	b)	To contribute suggestions for reducing the number of children out of school.	
	iii.	To recommend measures as alternatives to excluding pupils from school.	c)	To help ensure the best possible support for gifted children in the Borough.	
	iv.	To research non-exclusion measures adopted by other Authorities	d)	To establish any steps being taken by the LEA and governing bodies for ensuring that schools are accessible and suitable for children who are academically able but have mobility or other disability problems.	
	v.	To assess support available for the needs of gifted pupils.			

Urgent reviews of issues affecting children, schools and families as when necessary	vi.	To examine how children with disabilities are supported in schools	See opposite	To be considered by the Panel during the year.
	vii.	If necessary, to recommend any measures for improving support available.		
	viii.	To make sufficient provision in the Panel's work programme for urgent reviews affecting schools, children and families as they might arise during the year.		

The panel decided to investigate three main issues relating to Thurrock Children with Special Education Needs.

- a) review of policy and provision for special needs.
- b) excluded pupils and children with emotional and behavioural problems.
- c) gifted and talented pupils

3) **Work referrals:**

There were no specific referrals for scrutiny.

4) **Achievements:**

Since the OFSTED report of 2000, there have been some necessary and welcome improvements and innovations in the provision for SEN pupils in Thurrock. However, the evidence provided to the Panel pointed to the gaps in provision and also to future developments in this area. The report outlined 56 conclusions and 53 recommendations. Recommendations included that further work should be undertaken on a behavioural management strategy; an extension of 'portage' assistance for pre school children and their families and in reducing the number of children placed out of borough. A number of recommendations were also made to enhance joint working between education, social services and health. Further details can be found in the report available from the Democratic Services Department (ext 2107) together with the response of the portfolio holder for Education

5) **Ways of Working:**

To complete its investigations, the Panel held 18 meetings in the evenings spread over a period from June 2002 to March 2003 when it heard evidence from all stakeholders in education of children with special needs including parents, head teachers, governors and councillors. Some children completed the questionnaires.

A visit was made to the London Borough of Newham to understand and compare their policies regarding children with SEN. Minutes were produced for all the panel meetings and reports were written by panel members after their school visits which were shared by all panel members.

6) **Lessons Learned:**

- a) The panel took up a very complex and wide topic of provision for SEN pupils in Thurrock. This didn't give any time to the panel to scrutinise any other policies and strategies adopted by the Education Directorate during the year.
- b) Some elected members were unable to attend panel meetings regularly and this hindered the investigation and discussion of issues.
- c) At times it would have been helpful to have had more officer support.

# **Environment and Physical Regeneration Scrutiny Panel**

**Chair: Cllr Alphonse Nuss**

## **1) Membership of the panel:**

### **Elected Members**

Cllr Alphonse Nuss  
Cllr Margaret Jones  
Cllr Tony Benson  
Cllr Anthony Sharp  
Cllr George Watts (ex Officio)  
Opposition Seat not taken up

### **Lay Members**

Mr Richard Price  
Mr Ray Offord

### **Support:**

Democratic Services: Keith Pringle  
Corporate Development & Improvement Team: Vaughan Hartridge

## **2). The Planned Work Programme:**

### **Two items made the programme of scrutiny for this panel:**

1. The continuation of a study of value for money in regeneration which had started in the year 2001 – 2002 on the benefits of SRB investments into Tilbury and South Ockendon.
2. A new investigation into the Council's property portfolio, particularly into the list of vacant properties, and surplus and under used properties in the Borough.

The two programmes ran concurrently.

## **3. The Two Objectives of Investigation**

### **A SRB Investment in Tilbury and South Ockendon**

This was the continuation of the scrutiny investigations which had started in the year 2001-2002. The first phase was chaired by Councillor Richard Price who carried on this year as a lay member of the panel, this ensuring a seamless transition.

The complexity of the investigation arises from the various geographical sites of the regeneration projects within Tilbury, the diversity of their local aims and objectives, as well as the chronological phasing from PORT I to PORT II. We were impressed by the enthusiasm displayed by both public and private stakeholders.

Among our recommendations, we stated that a continuous monitoring of the final phase will be necessary in order to ensure an effective exit policy. Equally important will be an assessment of the general public's awareness of what has been achieved for Tilbury.

**B Review on the extent of vacant, surplus and underused Council properties/land and method for non-disposal of the sites or their non-utilisation and any loss of income to the Council resulting from their non-disposal or non-utilisation.**

We surveyed the Council's properties/land portfolio and tried to be constructive in our recommendations by suggesting ways of rationalising the distribution of dwelling/trading premises, of disposing of certain properties and of taking measures, sometimes of a cosmetic nature, in order to reduce aspects of dereliction especially in the areas of high profile commercial activity.

We had to be cautious when dealing with allotments. A controversy caused by an unfortunate phrasing of a letter and the subsequent misunderstanding by the allotment community over their future was publicly aired by a joint consultation panel chaired by Councillor M. Canavon. We did not want to publish recommendations which interfered with that panel. As it turned out our final recommendations did not go against Councillor Canavon's panel's own decisions.

There remains outstanding a small item to be investigated: the future of small parcels of land which had been earmarked for now forgotten development.

**4) Ways of Working:**

Although the panel was office based, we endeavoured to visit sites whenever it was felt necessary. We made a list of all witnesses we intended to interview and additional names were added as required by the investigation in progress. Those witness statements were taken both on site or at the panel's base at the Council Offices.

## **Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Sports Development Panel**

**Chair: Cllr Peter Cooper**

### **1) Membership of the Panel:**

#### **Elected Members**

Cllr P. Cooper  
Cllr C. Curtis  
Cllr P. Harris  
Cllr B. Lawrence  
Cllr J. Purkiss  
Cllr G. Watts

#### **Lay Members**

Mr B Herbert  
Mr M.B. Jones  
Mr M. Ostler

#### **Support:**

Democratic Services: Lesley Edwards

Corporate Development & Improvement Team: Susan Rydings

### **2) The Planned Work Programme**

To carry out the following reviews:

#### **a) Tourism**

To review the impact of Tourism on the local economy, the current tourism activities in Thurrock, future potential tourist activities and markets and the future role for Thurrock Council in developing Tourism in Thurrock.

#### **b) Sports Development**

To ascertain if sport in Thurrock over the past 3 years has been developing in a way that has:

- i) allowed sportsmen and women to reach or work towards their full potential.
- ii) ensured it is an inclusive provision

A report on tourism in the borough and the potential for future development was produced by the panel and the recommendations are being considered.

The panel's work on sports development is being continued in 2003/04.

The panel wish to express their condolences on the death of the chair, Councillor Peter Cooper and hope his enthusiasm and commitment to the issues considered by this panel live on through further such reviews.

## **Social Justice and Inclusion Panel**

**Chair: Cllr Tony Fish**

### **1) Membership of the Panel:**

#### **Elected Members**

Cllr T. Fish  
Cllr P. Harris  
Cllr M. Canavon  
Cllr D. Cooper

#### **Lay Members**

Ms N. Warren  
(replaced by L Groombridge from October)  
Ms J. Akerman  
Mr S. Rouse  
(replaced by Mr T Borge from November)  
D. Coker

#### **Support:**

Democratic Services: Rachel Evans

Corporate Development & Improvement Team: Lorraine Pickard

### **2) The Planned Work Programme:**

- a) to review the Council's relationship with the voluntary sector
- b) to consider progress against the Equality Standard
- c) to consider the impact of legislation e.g. Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and Disability Discrimination Act.

### **3) Work Referrals:**

None.

### **4) Achievements:**

The panel was innovative in going out to organisations to interview them in their bases where appropriate in order to gain a better insight into the nature of their work and its effectiveness.

The role of the Lay members was crucial to the work of the panel and the panel was able to engage Lay people who had much expertise in the various areas of Social Justice and Social Inclusion. This gave added impetus to the panel and was of great assistance to the Members.

### **5) Ways of Working:**

The panel mostly worked through the method of interviewing witnesses in a formal setting followed by a whole panel session to discuss findings, although, as stated the panel did visit organisations where appropriate. Two workgroups were also set up consisting of a couple of panel members each. These also worked in the same way as the whole panel investigations with formal interviews followed up by a meeting of the workgroup members to discuss findings. It is anticipated that a variety of different ways of working will be required to complete the planned work programme in the coming year.

6) **Lessons Learned:**

The area of Social Justice and Social Inclusion is a very complex one and covers a wide variety of topics. It is, therefore, important to co-ordinate efforts with what the Executive is doing. If a panel wishes to do a piece of work it must have some resonance with what is happening at Executive level or it will be difficult to achieve a positive outcome to the project. It is also important to ensure at the outset of a project that all those who are to be interviewed have agreed a date for this and that those dates are timetabled in to the overall project plan.

7) **Future Work to be Completed:**

- The facilitation of social inclusion of young people by the creation of facilities and delegation of ownership to young people.
- The Social Model of Disability
- Housing Strategy
- Crime and Disorder Strategy

To monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the former Equality and Access Issues Standing Scrutiny Panel.

How to accommodate the passage of travellers through the Borough.

## **Vulnerable Adults and Health Panel**

**Chair: Cllr Dave Gooding**

### **1) Membership of the Call In Panel:**

#### **Elected Members**

Cllr D. Gooding  
Cllr D. Cooper  
Cllr M. Healy  
Cllr E. Southam  
Cllr E. Palmer  
Cllr G. Watts (Ex-officio)

#### **Lay Members**

Mrs J. Lawrence  
Mr C. Owen

#### **Support:**

Democratic Services: Lesley Edwards

Corporate Development & Improvement Team: Lynda Salvatore

### **2) The Planned Work Programme:**

In July 2002, the Panel agreed a work programme that include the draft Mental Health Bill; the Joint Review Action Plan; the number of social workers and the 'improving health agenda'.

After the setting of the programme, in December the Panel were requested by OSC to undertake a review of GP services in Thurrock in response to concerns about a perceived shortage of GPs in the borough.

### **3) Achievements:**

In September 2002, the Panel considered, in depth, the possible implications of the draft Mental Health Bill with the assistance of the service manager. A number of comments were accordingly agreed by the Panel and submitted to the Department of Health in response to the consultation

The Panel continues to monitor the position regarding social workers in post to support vulnerable adults having received a report at their February meeting.

Regarding the GP Scrutiny Review, the Panel developed a project plan and work programme in accordance with the Scrutiny Toolkit. An innovative approach to the review was agreed with a workshop for the Primary Care Trust, GPs, and other interested parties held in May 2003. In addition to the knowledge and understanding gained at this event, representatives from the PCT have provided further information by formally attending in Panel meeting in July 2003. Work is on-going in accordance with the work programme

4) **Ways of Working:**

The power to scrutinise health issues and services was first mentioned in the Health and Social Care Act 2001. Regulations issued in 2003 have clarified the extent of this power, for example that local authorities can require any officer of a local NHS body to attend a panel meeting and to provide appropriate information.

Thurrock has been innovative in both carrying out review activity within the PCT area and a joint review with Essex County and Southend-on-sea.

5) **Future Plans:**

The review of GP services is being continued.

## **Call In and Review Panel**

**Chair: Cllr Martin Healy**

### **1) Membership of the Call In Panel:**

#### **Elected Members**

Cllr Martin Healy  
Cllr Mrs Pearl Betts  
Cllr Mrs Cathy Kent  
Cllr Tony Benson  
Cllr Earnshaw Palmer

#### **Lay Members**

Gordon Gambier  
Peter Glover  
Grahame Thomas

#### **Support:**

Democratic Services: Lesley Edwards/Jill Osborne  
Corporate Development and Improvement Team: Keith Fenton

### **2) The Planned Work Programme for the Year:**

As a Scrutiny Panel Chair, I make plans for the panel to meet at least once a month on a Thursday evening to review the progress of work on panel subgroups and take evidence from relevant experts.

### **3) Work Referrals:**

The Call in and Review Scrutiny Panel is reactive in terms of Cabinet Call in decisions but we completed a Cleaning and Greening Review and reviewed the provision of IT equipment to Members. We are also progressing a Communications Review. We have had no Cabinet decisions referred to the Call In panel for review this municipal year, but 10 residents requested a review of traffic calming measures in a particular area. We reviewed the remedied works and recommended no further action be taken.

### **4) Achievements:**

The Call in and Review Scrutiny panel made a number of recommendations in our Stanford Cleaning and Greening Review. As we were conducting the scrutiny it was gratifying to note that officers were implementing our proposals as we went along.

### **5) Ways of Working:**

The Call in and Review Scrutiny panel works in an informal manner. The panel holds some meetings outside the Civic Offices in Grays if appropriate, does not meet when there is no progress to report and tries to allow both lay and elected members of the panel equal say in the findings and recommendations of a review or call in.

6) **Lessons to be Learned:**

All scrutiny reviews must have precise scoping to ensure eventual successful outcomes. All evidence supplied to the panels must be recorded and signed off by the panel witness. Portfolio holder Cabinet members who may implement panel recommendations must be aware of the review panel's work.

Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny reviews must pursue a consensual approach to recommendations and involve disparate political groups as far as possible.

7) **Future work of the Cabinet Call In and Review Panel:**

The communications review is in progress and the panel aims to complete its work by early Autumn.

The panel will consider Policy Overview on Cabinet Portfolio areas not picked up by other scrutiny panels e.g. Council budget and medium term financial strategy.

## Further Information

For further information about this annual report or any scrutiny issues in Thurrock please contact the Democratic Services Team:

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Senior Democratic Services Officer  
01375 652021  
aburgio@thurrock.gov.uk

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