



# Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report  
2010-2011

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# Introduction

## Welcome to our annual Overview and Scrutiny Report for 2010-2011



Cllr. Stuart  
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Cllr. Bukky Okunade



Cllr. Angie Gaywood



Cllr. Barry Johnson



Cllr. Pauline Tolson

There were significant changes made to the Overview and Scrutiny structure in 2010 – 2011, which saw the creation of dedicated committees for cleaning, greening and safer issues, as well as a specific committee for planning transport and regeneration, while the old Performance and Improvement Committee was replaced with a more refined Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Alongside this revised structure came a greater demand from our Members for specific task and finish reviews into a range of topics, from littering to the impact of the Olympics on sex trafficking.

Due to the rise in reviews we have decided to present the annual report in a different way this year. Whereas before we would give an account of each committee's work, this year, we will focus on the key issues that the committees picked for in depth investigation. We hope this gives you a better idea of how overview and scrutiny has achieved outcomes

and resolutions for key community issues. Of course, this approach will only give you a snapshot of the biggest issues we tackled so if you wish to see more detail on other topics the committees discussed in the regular round of their meetings, you can access all the information via our meetings database:

<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/CommitteeSelection.aspx>

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members who sat on the committees or reviews for their effort this last year, as well as the council officers and residents who contributed to our work. 2011-12 already promises to be busy and with many more issues for us to investigate with the residents, we are looking forward to another fruitful year.

THE CHAIRS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

## What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny is the process whereby Councillors investigate, scrutinise and oversee the work of the Council. More specifically Overview and Scrutiny pays particular attention to:

- The decisions made by Cabinet, Council and officers in relation to Council policy or key decisions.
- The activities carried out by the Council and other bodies (such as the National Health Service (NHS)).
- The performance of the Council in relation to its targets and objectives.

## Work Programme

The work programme for Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny is informed by a combination of:

- What Councillors feel are important topics (this is gathered from their work in their wards and activities across the whole of the Council).
- Members of the public highlighting issues for debate, either through Call-Ins or through consultation.
- Requests by Thurrock's Cabinet for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake "pre-decision scrutiny" prior to policies being taken to Cabinet for consideration and decision.
- Council officers requesting Overview and Scrutiny to investigate and consider certain issues on their behalf.

## Committees

At Thurrock, the work of the Overview and Scrutiny function is carried out by five committees, each of which have a specific remit:

- Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

## Membership

The membership of Thurrock's Overview and Scrutiny Committees is made up of Councillors drawn from the political parties of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny function enables Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet (also known as the Executive) to have an active role in the decision-making process of the Council.

Thurrock has a number of non-Councillors sitting on Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Children's Services Committee has two parent-governors as well as a diocesan representative from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches respectively. There are also two co-opted members on the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee representing housing and health interests.

In addition, sub-committees or panels may also be formed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to undertake specific tasks, such as a review, the membership of which is decided alongside the remit of the review.

## The decision making process

In Thurrock, Overview and Scrutiny plays a key role in adding value to the Council's decision-making process. It also reviews the existing practices of the Council and makes recommendations to Cabinet to enhance and improve service provision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet in an informal atmosphere and engages with people who can help with their work and provide evidence for their reviews. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Committees and at the discretion of the Chair may even be able to take part.

## Overview and Scrutiny on the web

Overview and Scrutiny has a dedicated section on the Council's website and can be found at [www.thurrock.gov.uk/democracy/scrutiny/](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/democracy/scrutiny/).

This web-site provides up-to-date information on Overview and Scrutiny in Thurrock.

Participation from the public is actively encouraged at Thurrock Council and it is promoted through the Council's website. A number of documents are available on the website including our Overview and Scrutiny annual reports. Reports, agendas and minutes from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting are also available electronically from Thurrock's website.

## Getting in Touch

The Overview and Scrutiny process at Thurrock is managed by Democratic Services, which is part of Legal Services. Democratic Services manage the Council's decision making process and service a wide range of Council decision making bodies including the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet, Planning Committee, Licensing Committee as well as full Council

If you have any queries about this report or the Overview and Scrutiny process, or if you are interested in participating, please feel free to contact us.

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Alternatively you can contact the team by fax on: 01375 652779.



## Basildon and Thurrock University Hospital (BTUH)



The Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee first became interested in issues at BTUH following a poor report on the hospital in October 2009, which the Committee discussed in

early 2010. As summarised in last year's annual report a review was established to investigate whether the hospital was improving certain standards and a number of activities, including site visits to the hospital, an extensive consultation with staff and service users and meetings with the hospital's executive board, were undertaken.

Following these activities the Review Panel, which consisted of Councillors John Purkiss, Wendy Herd, Barbara Rice (replacing Tony Fish) and an independent chair from the Local Involvement Network agreed thirteen recommendations:

1. South West Essex PCT is encouraged to develop and enhance its end of life strategy by promoting services, options and support for patients and their families.
2. The Hospital revise its hand washing signage to ensure even greater visibility and increase proper use, especially by visitors.
3. Utilise the reception area more to promote hand washing and to encourage visitors to report uncleanliness.
4. Produce plain English booklets or posters informing patients of service standards and cleaning procedures so as to tackle misperceptions of cleanliness.



5. Build on the 'Restoring Reputation' communications strategy to enhance the Hospital's image within the community.
6. Review the cleaning contract at its next renewal to ensure it encompasses all aspects of hospital cleaning.
7. In consultation with staff, revise the staff appraisal procedure, as well as the training scheme, to ensure it meets staff expectations as well as those of the organisation.
8. Devise and implement an effective recruitment and retention strategy including ways to improve staff morale.
9. Utilise the Hospital reception and the A & E reception to better effect by making it more welcoming and using it to deliver key messages and images about the Hospital.
10. Develop and implement a strategy to recruit and utilise advocates/volunteers to act as first points of contact in the Hospital to proactively approach visitors and help with enquiries.



## Litter

It became apparent this year, through the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that litter in some areas of the Borough remained a challenge. Following litter related issues being raised at a full council meeting, the Committee set about establishing a review into the causes of litter and what the Council could do to reduce it. The aim of the review was to investigate cost effective ways in which the Council could educate residents to reduce litter but also, find ways of enforcing littering penalties.

11. Appoint disability champions from the staff body to engage relevant community groups on how to enhance and tailor provision for disabled people.
12. Work with relevant organisations to improve the use of Health Action Plans for patients with learning disabilities.
13. The Secretary of State for Health be informed of the Panel's findings and asked to intervene in the Hospital's improvement process should improvements not be sustained to the satisfaction of the Hospital regulators.

The report was received by the hospital and the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the hospital's response to the review at its late March 2011 meeting.



The Panel consisted of Councillors Pauline Tolson (the Chair), Steve Liddiard, Diane Revell and Sue Gray who liaised closely with some ward councillors in East Tilbury and South Ockendon to understand better the types and frequency of litter. The Panel also looked at evidence from other councils who had implemented different schemes, particularly Sandwell and Middlesbrough Councils. Some of the different options explored included 'Megaphone Man' (to raise awareness of littering in the street), talking CCTV cameras and using youth services to promote a cleaner environment.

The Review looked at a diverse range of options and issues over a period of three months during which the Panel supported a project Councillor Liddiard initiated to look, in detail, at the structure of street cleaning in Tilbury whilst simultaneously researching the uses of specialist environment charities to see if they could work with Thurrock Schools to improve awareness of the negative impact of littering.



The Panel made the following recommendations to Cabinet in April 2011:

1. The Tilbury pilot scheme to look at the effectiveness of the street cleaning service is supported by members of the council. If it is found that improvements can be made in street cleaning or that a new form of managing service expectations is proved effective that these changes be applied throughout the borough.
2. The Street Services Manager undertake weekly supervisory visits across the borough to meet street staff.
3. Areas known to have high incidents of littering are targeted in special events that involve all enforcement officers from all organisations with the powers to take enforcement action for littering. The events would serve to issue fines but also raise awareness amongst these particular communities.

4. The Council work with the Thurrock Gazette to pilot a campaign whereby photographs are published of litterers that have not been fined because their identities are unknown.
5. The Council support the work of the Chief Executive in resolving the issue of litter on the A13 that falls under the responsibility of the Highways Agency. The Chief Executive and relevant officers are given a mandate to progress this issue with the Secretary of State.
6. Posters containing litter prevention information be designed and made available for residents and businesses online. The availability of these posters be promoted through the Thurrock Gazette and other media alternatives.
7. Establish a recognition scheme for residents who actively pick up litter or organise awareness raising or litter picking events.
8. Thurrock Music Service is asked to work with communities to produce a 'Litter Song' to be performed at events.
9. The Council work with the national Eco-Schools Programme to encourage Thurrock Schools to raise awareness of littering amongst their pupils and for every school to have a litter action plan.

### **Libraries and Leisure Facilities**

An important aspect of any overview and scrutiny function is reviewing budget proposals. This year it has been particularly important for overview and scrutiny to do this because of the large savings the Council is required to make. During the year, the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee was particularly interested in the decisions to make



savings through library and leisure services. A short task and finish review was established to investigate these proposals and explore options for each service. The Panel was made up of all members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, namely councillors Arnold, Herd, Gaywood, St. Clair-Haslam, Halden and Wendy Curtis.

With regards to leisure services the Panel met with representatives from Impulse Leisure to learn how savings would impact on services. After hearing that some swimming pools were in jeopardy of closing the Panel agreed to offer a range of specific savings to Cabinet as alternatives.



In terms of savings impacting on library services, the Panel investigated the options available to Thurrock's libraries. Having

weighed up the evidence, Members felt that the service should be kept in house and with regards to service provision they preferred two options, namely:

- Three libraries representing the most convenient, popular and even geographical spread be kept open full time while all other libraries have reduced opening hours of twelve hours a week.



- All libraries shut on a Monday which represents a 20% reduction across all library opening times.

Cabinet agreed with the findings and views of overview and scrutiny and, in February 2011, agreed to make savings that avoided the closure of swimming pools by offering alternative savings from Impulse Leisure. Likewise, it agreed the second option considered by the Panel in relation to library services and reduce the opening times of all libraries by 20%.





## Community Engagement

A key aim for the Council in 2010-11 was to assess how well it engaged with the community when making decisions and delivering services. It was also important for the Council to look at ways it could improve this engagement through new and innovative methods. As early as July 2010, overview and scrutiny had taken up an invitation to help contribute to a community engagement strategy with the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreeing to establish a Community Engagement Review Panel.

The Panel convened a number of key witness sessions to gather evidence.

Witnesses included:

- The Deputy Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council who discussed how they had changed services to involve the community more.
- The Participatory Budget Unit.
- Former officers from Southwark Council who specialised in community engagement.
- Community Forums.
- Voluntary Sector Groups.

By late September the Panel had come up with a number of key factors they felt needed to be addressed if community engagement was going to be enhanced in Thurrock.

The main factors were:

1. Adopt a strategic approach to engagement by developing a Community Engagement Strategy.
2. Develop Area based working along multiple ward boundaries taking into account natural communities.
3. Devolve Budgets to Councillors
4. Develop Participatory Budgeting (PB)
5. Explore Commissioning and Re-commissioning of Services, particularly around health and GP service provision; and unemployment and housing benefits; to explore the re-commissioning of local services where local residents can deliver themselves.
6. Foster a 'can do' attitude across the Council which encompasses officers and Members
7. Explore online engagement
8. Develop themed groups of communities who might be difficult to engage and design outreach for them.
9. Explore how public bodies can be made more accountable locally.
10. Develop robust Governance arrangements for local bodies.
11. Develop Neighbourhood profiles for use by Members.

Two of the Panel's members, Councillors Anderson and Liddiard, made presentations on the Review's findings at Cabinet's

January 2011 meeting. Cabinet agreed with all eleven recommendations of the Panel and asked officers to progress the work accordingly.

## LAKESIDE SHOPPING CENTRE

The Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to make the regeneration of the Lakeside Shopping Area one of its key issues of investigation in 2010. Due to the large scale of the regeneration and the impact it would have on all aspects of Thurrock life, Members undertook an extensive site visit with Council officers to gain a better understanding of the issues involved.



At subsequent meetings Members expressed a desire for the Council to encourage businesses and developers to invest in the area and held meetings with the Council's Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regeneration to discuss how the Council could work to encourage investment. Using the development to create more leisure opportunities for residents was discussed in depth. The Committee also investigated the changes made to special levies raised from developers and ways in which the Council could manage

these to attract business but also benefit the community.

The work carried out by the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Committee on this issue was contained within their regular round of meetings and was not undertaken as part of a dedicated review. The Lakeside Development still has a very long way to go and Overview and Scrutiny will no doubt be taking an active role within its progress next year and beyond.

## Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)

The future of PCSOs became a crucial issue for the Council as a whole in 2010-2011 and became a focus for the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee. Before the Committee discussed the issue at their meeting, a number of Members undertook site visits to ascertain the uses and impact PCSOs had on Thurrock's communities.



Councillors Tolson and Halden focused on the way PCSOs were perceived by the community and spent a morning in the Homesteads ward surveying members of the public, including shop owners, on their opinions of PCSOs. Councillor Stone helped

the Committee gather evidence from a different point of view by accompanying PCSOs in Grays Town Centre and Little Thurrock to observe the types of jobs they carried out during a daily beat.

Chief Inspector Paul Moor of Essex Police was invited to a subsequent meeting where the Committee discussed the funding of PCSOs and their roles within the community. The Chief Inspector took on board the comments and observations of the Committee agreeing to follow up a number of action points including fostering a closer working relationship between councillors and PCSOs. Following its research, witness session and debate, the Committee recommended:

1. That it recognise the important role PCSOs play in the community and where possible this service should remain.
2. Following the budget consultation, if PCSO funding is to be reduced, then the Council and Police work together to ensure that what limited resources are available are used to the best effect.
3. If PCSOs are reduced due to future budget decisions that a staggered reduction in posts is undertaken so as to limit the impact.

## THE PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT (PRU)

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to tackle a wide remit in 2010 and 2011, looking at a variety of education and social care issues that affected children within the Borough. A re-occurring issue and one that the Committee chose to follow throughout a large part of the year was the performance of the Pupil Referral Units



(PRU) which cater for children who may be facing personal difficulties and therefore not in mainstream education.

The Committee was alerted to performance issues at the Primary PRU early on in the year with Councillor Gaywood following this up with a visit to the PRU to meet with staff, pupils and parents. At the visit and at meetings, the committee members asked questions around the key challenges for the PRU, namely the appropriateness of the building, the availability of learning resources, safeguarding children and the curriculum.

The Children's Services Committee finished the year with a meeting to discuss the progress of the Primary PRU and was pleased to hear of its improvement. The Committee continues to take an active interest in the PRU and made further recommendations to improve the service, suggesting that the lack of a hairdressing salon, where pupils can train for hair and beauty courses, be provided through partnership working with local businesses.

## SEX TRAFFICKING AND THE OLYMPICS

In late 2010 Overview and Scrutiny was approached by the South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre (SERICC) to request that an investigation take place on the impact of the Olympics on sex trafficking within Thurrock. SERICC was concerned that the hosting of the Olympics would cause a rise in sex trafficking and that the Council had a duty of care to ensure Thurrock residents were not at risk or adversely affected by this crime.

In response to this request the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee established a special task and finish group in early January 2011 to look into the issue. The Panel is composed of Councillors Herd, Gaywood, Healy and Arnold.

The Panel undertook some preliminary work to gather information on this issue. The Panel visited the Olympic site to understand better the size of the development and the large amounts of people it will attract.

In March the Panel held a witness session with Eaves Housing (a specialist women's charity) and the South Essex Rape and Incest Crisis Centre to discuss the impact of sex trafficking in Thurrock during the Olympics. Both Essex and the Met Police fed their views into the meeting through Council officers, who had liaised with both police services. Following a lengthy discussion the Panel drew up the following recommendations:

- Essex Police liaise with specialist Met Police officers to build knowledge and capacity in order to deal with potential cases of sex trafficking.
- Thurrock Council's Licensing Department to monitor any increases in sex establishments and report any activity that may suggest an increase in sex trafficking to the relevant bodies.
- Thurrock Council's Licensing Department to raise awareness of sex trafficking issues with clubs and sex establishments where sex traffickers are likely to target.
- The Council to write to all local newspapers to remind them of Section 14 of the Policing and Crime Act and to ask that they cease to publish advertisements for the sex trade.
- If local media do not cease in publishing such advertisements, the Council proceed to advertise in these papers outlining the law in regards to Section 14 of the Policing and Crime Act and publish the Crimestoppers phone number as an anonymous service for those wishing to report sex trafficking. These adverts should be visible on the same page as the sex trade adverts.
- Adverts outlining relevant parts of the law be published in the short term lettings sections of local newspapers to discourage sex traffickers.
- The Council identify key individuals in relevant departments and ensure they have a clear process of monitoring and referring suspected cases of sex trafficking.
- Ensure Essex Police has Tilbury docks and the UK Borders Agency as partners as part of Operation Pentameter.
- Ask Ngage to work with community forums to raise the awareness of sex trafficking and the local signs it might be occurring, encouraging residents to report any cases.
- TRUST be asked to contribute to ngage's work in this area as and when required.
- The Panel reconvene in January 2012 to receive an update on the recommendations made above.

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