

# Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23

EALING COUNCIL



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## **CHAIR'S FOREWORD**



Effective scrutiny is essential to good governance and demonstrates the Council's commitment to transparency.

The Scrutiny function has always been strong at Ealing, with a large number of backbench Councillors involved in scrutinising the work of the Council and understanding the major issues that affect our residents. This remains to be the case as Scrutiny continues on its journey to transform the way the Council's Executive and Senior Officers are held to account.

The scrutiny panels in 2022-23 focussed on scrutinising the Council's strategic priorities, as expressed in the Labour Party's manifesto in the 2022 election, which subsequently became the Council Plan. This ensured that Scrutiny added value to the themes and issues that mattered to residents as expressed at the ballot box.

This annual report summarises all of the important work that was undertaken in 2022-23 and demonstrates the value that it has added to the work of the authority. It is intended to showcase the work of scrutiny to members, residents, officers and cabinet members.

For 2023-24, Scrutiny is continuing on its journey of improvement and will scrutinise the work of the newly appointed Strategic Directors in the Council's Strategic Leadership Team, as well as a panel considering Crime and Disorder issues in more detail.

I would like to express my thanks to all scrutiny panel member, council officers and outside partners who all made such a valuable contribution to the scrutiny process in 2022-2023.

**Councillor Yoel Gordon**

**Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2022- 2023**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AT EALING**

Overview and scrutiny plays an important function at Ealing Council- holding the organisation to account and ensuring that decisions made by the executive can be questioned or called in. Ensuring effective scrutiny of decisions is key to promoting principles of democracy, accountability, and transparency within the council. Overview and scrutiny also highlights areas for improvement and promotes efficient and high-quality delivery of public services for residents and service users.

In the 2022/2023 municipal year the scrutiny function comprised of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, four Scrutiny Review Panels and the Health and Adult Social Services Standing Scrutiny Panel. There were also joint health scrutiny arrangements across North West London through the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The scrutiny review panels focussed on differing themes, linking to key priorities as set out by the Ealing Council Plan (2022-2026), and enabled Committee members to scrutinise services, programmes and projects delivered by the organisation.

The four scrutiny review panels looked at the following topics:

- Scrutiny Review Panel 1, Cost of Living Crisis
- Scrutiny Review Panel 2, Recovery from the Pandemic
- Scrutiny Review Panel 3, Regrow, Rewild and Recycle
- Scrutiny Review Panel 4, Genuinely Affordable Homes

The Panels and Committee were responsible for putting together their own work programmes. This involved Committee or Panel members, Scrutiny Officers, Senior Officers and Cabinet Members informally meeting regularly to develop, establish and review progress on the work programme for the year ahead.

This report provides a summary of the work of each of the Committees and Panels held in 2022-2023. It focusses on the work that took place from June 2022 to May 2023 and a high-level overview of the role, focus and key highlights of each panel will be provided. An insight into how overview and scrutiny will develop its approach to become more strategically focussed to Ealing Council's priorities in 2023- 2024 will also be outlined at the end of this report.

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Role**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) is the body responsible for overseeing and managing the Council's scrutiny function overall. The Committee is central to scrutinising the Council's key administrative features such as budget strategy, performance, call ins, reviews of the Local Strategic Partnership and considers reports of a strategic, cross-cutting nature.

The Committee has the power to set up fixed term panels that review specific issues that have been outlined in an agreed work programme. The Committee also acts as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee. This placed responsibility upon the Committee to scrutinise the Council's response to the majority group's 2022 election manifesto pledge of 'Fight Crime and Antisocial Behaviour', which was worked into the Council plan.

### **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

The Committee had three main areas of focus for the year – call-ins of executive decisions, scrutiny of strategic issues that affected the Council and scrutinising Crime and Disorder.

The following executive decisions were called in for consideration by the Committee:

- Ealing Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facility Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2031;
- Perceval House Redevelopment Scheme Update;
- Future of Warren Farm Sports Ground;
- Replacement of Gurnell Leisure Centre

Each of these call ins were discussed in detail by the Committee and the original decisions were upheld, following careful scrutiny. Some of these issues generated more public interest than others. Members of the public spoke on all the items other than the Perceval House Redevelopment Scheme Update call-in. There was a significant turn out of members of the public for the Future of Warren Farm Sports Ground item.

The Committee fulfilled its statutory duty to scrutinise the Safer Ealing Partnership in April 2023, but also took an additional item in December 2022 providing a mid year update on the work of the partnership. This was a follow up item from the previous year's Safer Ealing Partnership report and sought an update on important projects and programmes the Police had been working on.

The strategically important items that the Committee considered were on housing safety in Council owned and managed properties; a pre decision item on the Housing Allocations Policy and the Ealing Safeguarding Adults and Children Partnership Annual Reports for 2020-21 and 2021-22.

In February 2023 the Committee considered the Council's Budget Strategy, the day before it was considered by Cabinet, prior to the final decision taken by Council. The

Strategic Director for Resources and Cabinet Member with the responsibility for Finance were present to be questioned by the Committee to scrutinise the budget.

At the conclusion of the municipal year a report was taken outlining some changes to the approach in Scrutiny for 2023/24. Details of the proposals in this paper can be found at the end of this report.

Some important items were proposed to be considered for the Committee in the next year including improving budget scrutiny arrangements and scrutinising the work of Broadway Living, a Council Owned Company tasked with delivering affordable housing.

Overall, the Committee considered a number of strategic issues that were of critical importance to the Council, as well as a number of items that had public interest. The Executive Members and officers delivering these projects and workflows were held to account and scrutinised.

## **HEALTH AND ADULTS SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **Role**

This Panel has responsibility for reviewing and scrutinising the planning, management, provision and performance of adult social services and has statutory powers to review and scrutinise matters relating to health services in the borough. The Panel was chaired by Councillor Daniel Crawford and the Vice-chair was Councillor Andrew Steed.

### **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

The Panel met 4 times through the year, it was scheduled to meet 5 times; however the September meeting was cancelled following the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Over those four meetings, the Panel considered the quality of adult social care which highlighted the challenging recruitment and retention environment in the sector, the quality of care homes and domiciliary care, and the impact of the cost of living crisis. Members were informed of the priorities for people with learning disabilities, which had been identified from the extensive consultation carried out for the Learning Disability Commissioning Strategy and considered the outcomes that were planned for each of those priorities.

The Panel considered the work of public health, health inequalities in the borough, the new annual health of the borough report, and the key priorities for improving the health of residents.

Members received reports from London North West Healthcare NHS Trust on the services being provided at Ealing Hospital and from NHS North West London on access to primary care in Ealing. The Panel also heard from and regularly engaged with West London NHS Trust on their proposal regarding the long-term future of Ealing's Acute Mental Health beds on the Ealing and St Bernard Site and their plans for enhanced public engagement.

As well as attending panel meetings, members undertook several visits throughout the year. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel visited Ealing Hospital, took a tour of the site, and thanked the hospital's staff and senior leadership for their unstinting hard work. Panel members visited adult social care services in neighbouring boroughs, public health and hospital services in Ealing, and community and voluntary services supporting older people in the borough. Members of the Panel also joined the Mayor of Ealing, Cllr. Mrs. Mohinder Midha, at a mayoral reception to honour the selfless service of Ealing's NHS workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chair of the Panel attended the 4 meetings of the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as Vice-Chair and hosted one of those meetings in Ealing.

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 1, COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

### **Role**

Chaired by Councillor Varlene Alexander with Councillor Seema Kumar acting as Vice-Chair, this Panel saw members scrutinise and assess Ealing Council's response and strategy towards the impact of the cost of living crisis. With a cross organisational lens, the Panel reviewed delivery of different directorates, teams and services across the council to explore the ramifications of the cost of living crisis and measures put in place to create positive outcomes for residents.

### **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

The year began with an introduction to income inequalities within the borough. Support available for residents, via schemes such as the Household Support Fund and means tested benefits administered by central government were presented. Furthermore, the council's recently launched community hubs were highlighted providing the public an opportunity to access support to navigate online council mechanisms (the website and My Account). A site visit to a community hub, located in Ealing Central Library, was arranged in March 2023 that saw members experience how residents engaged with the scheme. The Panel scrutinised public awareness of support available for residents and suggested schemes be more widely advertised.

In September 2022, the rise of utility bills and subsequent support available to residents was a key focus. The Panel heard Ealing was the lead borough for the £40.2m West London Green Homes Grant and delivered a range of schemes, such as Healthy Homes Ealing and Ealing's Affordable Warmth Programmes. With funding due to expire, members scrutinised the percentage of residents receiving support and the lack of supply chain to deliver programmes more widely. Panel members also visited foodbanks in October 2022 and acknowledged Crosslight, a debt advice service, was notably popular amongst users.

Following on from a site visit to Ealing Mencap, in December 2022, the Panel heard about the approach and strategies adopted by the employment, learning and skills service. A range of stakeholders such as the Local Welfare Assistance Team, Action West London and the Shaw Trust presented to the Panel about strategies used to combat unemployment and upskill residents in the borough. Scrutinising the council's efforts towards employment opportunities for people with disabilities as well as residents who were less digitally inclined, members shed light on targeting disadvantaged areas within the borough such as Greenford and Hanwell.

April 2023 saw the Panel hosting its final meeting, with members acknowledging that the Cost of Living Team had been set up recently to coordinate each directorate to create a more streamlined council response to the cost of living crisis. Furthermore, upon hearing presentations from external money management organisations, suggestions to create further clarity around tenancy agreements and council tax was noted.



## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 2: RECOVERY FROM THE PANDEMIC**

### **Role**

In the aftermath of COVID-19, a panel was set up to investigate and scrutinise Ealing council's response to the pandemic. With Councillor Jon Ball heading the Panel as Chair, Councillor Praveen Anand supported as Vice Chair. Through a series of four meetings scrutinised Ealing council's provision of local jobs, training provision and the support provided for small businesses to aid in the recovery of the local economy.

### **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

In July 2022, the Panel opened with an insight into the council's response to boost economic recovery post COVID-19. From launching the Ealing High Street Task Force (EHSTF) which enabled the council to provide local businesses with grants to undertaking a 'Shaping Ealing' survey as well as drafting the Local Plan, the Panel heard about measures launched to revitalise an inclusive economy across the borough. Whilst the council developed their future schemes and projects, there was a strong emphasis on resident engagement, such as consultations planned for 20-minute neighbourhoods.

Training provision support from the council was the focus of a scrutiny meeting in October 2022. Members heard an overview of council wide partnerships, such as Learn Ealing collaborating with external organisations, the delivery of training courses to upskill adults and the identification of aviation, construction and service industry as popular recruitment sectors. The Panel concluded with recommending the council lobby central government to relax employment history checks at Heathrow and improve channels of communication of employment opportunities. This was expanded upon in December 2022 where the Panel scrutinised Ealing council's local jobs provision. From receiving presentations from council officers to partner organisations such as High Speed 2 (HS2) and OPDC, members heard about the main blockers to residents accessing jobs were low quality CVS as well as negative perceptions of apprenticeships. Additionally, members considered council provision available for small scale and local businesses which were readily available through securement of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Whilst hearing that £2.7 million worth of grants were distributed to businesses throughout the pandemic, members also recommended the council review safety measures to combat antisocial and criminal behaviour ensuring that women and girls felt safe to work and visit all areas within the borough.

Throughout the past year, a range of site visits were organised allowing members to experience the different schemes and programmes launched to regenerate borough wide economic recovery. Furthermore, the Panel made fifteen recommendations to Cabinet that focussed on improved communication of support available to residents, employment opportunities and promoting the borough's rich heritage to promote tourism and jobs within the locality.

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 3: REGROW, REWILD AND RECYCLE**

## **Role**

This panel focussed on scrutinising Ealing council's response towards the Labour party manifesto pledge of 'Regrow, Rewild and Recycle', this Panel was chaired by Councillor Miriam Rice with Councillor Athena Zissimos supporting as Vice Chair. The Panel explored matters related to the council's strategy towards various environmental matters such as the biodiversity action plan and the implementation of reducing, reusing, and recycling waste in the borough.

## **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

Opening with an overview of the borough's current approach towards regrow, rewild, and recycle, the Panel formally met in July 2022 and received presentations from council officers and partner organisations. Subsequent meetings saw Ealing council's strategies, developed to promote environmentally conscious efforts across the borough, highlighted as a key focus. From hearing about the Ealing Trees Programme, that saw the planting of over 37,000 trees across the locality, to considering the Ealing Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) that aimed to preserve natural habitats for wildlife to flourish and enable people to connect with nature. Members also received updates of positive achievements, such as Ealing council attaining awards for some of its parks and open spaces for the eight consecutive year.

With the municipal year ending in May 2023, council officers and external partners updated the Panel on Ealing council's strategy towards the reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste in the borough. From hearing that Ealing were performing well in recycling waste, ranking in the top three of all London local authorities, the Panel also acknowledged that Cabinet was due to approve the council's new Reduction and Recycle Plan (RRP) in the coming months. Furthermore, the West London Waste Authority (WLWA) provided an overview of their work to members, highlighting their Fixing Factory initiative, which saw the statutory body fix electrical goods and then redistribute to those most in need in the community. The Panel concluded the meeting by recommending the revision of the council's communication strategies to ensure that material was available in different languages, formats, and channels so that it was readily accessible by the diversity community who called Ealing home.

In 2022/2023, members had opportunity to visit seven sites that supported the scrutiny function of the Panel making apparent to members the council's work and strategy towards achieving its climate and environmental objectives. For example, members visited the Materials Recycling Facility in Dartford and learnt more about the separation of mixed materials before they were then sold for new products. Additionally, the Panel made ten recommendations to Cabinet throughout the municipal year. These focussed on creating better channels of communication and promotion of the council's work regarding the biodiversity action plan as well as further guidance on what items can be recycled. Additionally, the council's reliance on volunteers to push forward efforts of achieving its environmental organisational commitments and goals was also highlighted.

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL 4, GENUINELY AFFORDABLE HOMES**

## **Role**

Scrutiny Panel 4 was tasked with scrutinising the Council's implementation of the Labour administration manifesto pledge of creating 'More Genuinely Affordable Homes', a Panel was set up and chaired by Councillor Chris Summers with Councillor Gregory Stafford as Vice Chair. The Panel explored a range of issues and scrutinised the council's strategy towards housing and homelessness as well as partnership working and delivery of an affordable housing development programme.

## **The Focus of Work over the Past Year**

The precedent for the Panel's work was set in July 2022, when members received updates on the council's progress of meeting the 2022-2026 Labour administration target of delivering 4000 genuinely affordable homes within the borough. Whilst hearing the council had historically performed well in meeting targets, members also acknowledged that the current economic climate may impact the delivery of homes as materials and labour costs had risen. Additionally, the council's partners were invited to deliver updates on their cooperation with the organization. From receiving praise from the Peabody Group to London Community Land Trust revealing the launch of schemes that would mirror similar projects in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, an emphasis on community engagement was highlighted to the Panel. A site visit to Copley Estate, where a major regeneration effort had been initiated, also allowed members to oversee the council's housing improvement efforts first-hand.

Subsequent meetings saw the Panel hear about the council's approach towards social housing and homelessness strategy. Members received presentations on the Broadway Living Development Guide- a guide that created aspirational standards to deliver high quality, sustainable and affordable homes for Ealing residents. The Panel considered the ramifications of new government legislation regarding building safety regulations in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. As per advice from the Regulator of Social Housing, Ealing council were seeking ways to actively engage with residents to ensure they were complying with standards to improve delivery of services. For example, the council were due to launch a Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) survey that would assess resident satisfaction of the council's housing services. Whilst members acknowledged that the council had not performed well in addressing housing complaints, the procurement of a new contractor (Wates Group) would aid in improving this service. The Panel also received updates on how the current economic and political climate presented difficulties in meeting the increasing demand for rehousing residents within the borough.

Over the course of the year, the Panel made thirteen recommendations to Cabinet. These recommendations varied from encouraging the council to promoting more building safety apprenticeships, ensuring a sustainable approach was in place to counter any housing emergencies within the sector, to topics for future scrutiny review panels as well as suggestions to produce an on-going five year plan to deliver genuinely affordable homes in the locality.

## **LOOKING AHEAD TO 2023-2024**

Ealing Council has been undergoing a shift regarding strategy, structure, and organisation within the Council. The past year has seen the recruitment of a new Chief Executive and six strategic directors raising an opportunity to improve the current Overview and Scrutiny model.

The 22/23 municipal year saw two standing panels (OSC and HASPC) along with four scrutiny review panels operate as the main scrutiny function within the Council. With all review panels reporting into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, this model will remain intact going into 2023-2024. However, a proposal to align each of the panels to a directorate within the Council enabled scope to alter the overview and scrutiny framework to enable a more strategic and focussed approach going forward.

With this alteration, the new municipal year will see the establishment of two standing panels (OSC and HASPC) and four scrutiny review panels attached to each strategic director's portfolio of responsibilities. The adoption of this revised framework will allow priorities of a cross-cutting and strategic nature to be explored in greater depth, providing opportunity for manifesto pledges outlined in the Council Plan to be dissected. Furthermore, 2023-2024 will see review panels given the ability to practice more autonomy, passing on their recommendations directly to decision making bodies rather than reporting into OSC as previously practiced.

An illustration of the Committee, Panels and how they will link up with Ealing Council's directorates has been reflected in the table below:

| <b>Overview and Scrutiny: Committee/ Panel</b>      | <b>Directorate</b>                   | <b>Strategic Director</b>    | <b>Chair/ Vice Chair</b>                        |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Overview and Scrutiny Committee                     | Strategy and Change; Resources       | Amanda Askham and Emily Hill | Cllrs Yoel Gordon (C) and Fabio Conti (VC)      |
| Health and Adults Social Services Scrutiny Panel    | Adults Social Care and Public Health | Kerry Stevens                | Cllrs Ben Wesson (C) and Andrew Steed (VC)      |
| Scrutiny Review Panel 1, Housing and Environment    | Housing and Environment              | Nicky Fiedler                | Cllrs Miriam Rice (C) and Jon Ball (VC)         |
| Scrutiny Review Panel 2, Economy and Sustainability | Economy and Sustainability           | Peter George                 | Cllrs Fabio Conti (C) and Chris Summers (VC)    |
| Scrutiny Review Panel 3, Children's Services        | Children's Services                  | Robert South                 | Cllrs Hodan Haili (C) and Gregory Stafford (VC) |
| Scrutiny Review Panel 4, Crime and Disorder         | Housing and Environment              | Nicky Fiedler                | Cllrs Swaran Padda (C) and Seema Kumar (VC)     |

## **LINKS TO THE PANELS' WORK IN 2022/2023**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

- [Committee details - Overview and Scrutiny Committee \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Health and Adult Social Services Standing Scrutiny Panel**

- [Committee details - Health and Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Scrutiny Review Panel 1: Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis**

- [Committee details - Scrutiny Panel 1 - 2022/23: Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Scrutiny Review Panel 2: Recovery from the Pandemic**

- [Committee details - Scrutiny Panel 2 - 2022/23: Recovery from the Pandemic \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Scrutiny Review Panel 3: Regrow, Rewild and Recycle**

- [Committee details - Scrutiny Panel 3 - 2022/23: Regrow, Rewild and Recycle \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Scrutiny Review Panel 4: Genuinely Affordable Homes**

- [Committee details - Scrutiny Panel 4 - 2022/23: Genuinely Affordable Homes \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

### **Links to each Panel's final report**

- [Scrutiny Review Panel 1: Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis](#)
- [Scrutiny Review Panel 2: Recovery from the Pandemic](#)
- [Scrutiny Review Panel 3: Regrow, Rewild and Recycle](#)
- [Scrutiny Review Panel 4: Genuinely Affordable Homes](#)