

The Scrutiny Annual Report 2013/14

Chairman's introduction

Welcome to the Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2013/14 year, which gives a flavour of the scrutiny work that has been undertaken in Hammersmith & Fulham over the past twelve months.

It has continued to be a challenging time for local authorities and for scrutiny, with budgetary pressures becoming increasingly apparent. I am proud therefore of the work of the Borough's four scrutiny committees, which have helped to ensure that costs have been driven down while preserving, and in some cases enhancing, the high levels of service our residents expect. Scrutiny has played an important role in engaging both our partners and local residents. We have hosted well-attended meetings that have given the public the opportunity to be heard on issues as diverse as the reconfiguration of health services, proposals for a flyunder in Hammersmith and the role of pubs in our communities. Our partners, such as local NHS services and the Police, have attended scrutiny meetings to present their work, but also to hear from the communities they serve and be guided by local wishes. Scrutiny has also provided the platform for some of our less high-profile residents and partners to make themselves heard – for example the Education & Children's Services Select Committee particularly appreciated the attendance of a long-term foster carer who has cared for over fifty children over the years and two parents who were soon to adopt a child. It is these front-line, real-life stories that are so vital for effective scrutiny as these are our customers and the people we serve, so their experiences must shape our services.

Scrutiny in Hammersmith & Fulham is not however restricted to formal committees. For example colleagues have visited a number of schools and participated in an informal event with young people, and we have appreciated the work undertaken by our task group. The Business Rates Scrutiny Task Group met over a number of months and investigated in detail the issue of business rates and how the Council could help deliver successful high streets and town centres. The Task Group spoke with a number of witnesses, including Government representatives, the Valuation Office, local community groups and local businesses represented by the Business Improvement District. The Final Report and recommendations of the Task Group were approved by the Overview & Scrutiny Board at the end of the municipal year, and we look forward to responses from the Council, Government and the Valuation Office early in the new year.

2013/14 also saw the Borough's first call-in by a scrutiny committee for over ten years. Call-in provisions allow for scrutiny to stop an executive decision being implemented without further consideration and debate. In this instance the decision regarding the discontinuation of Sullivan Primary School and the enlargement of New King's Primary School. It was clear that the proposals were contentious and of significant interest to the public, and scrutiny provided those concerned to have their say and make their views known.

This past year has been another engaging, productive and challenging year. I believe that scrutiny has helped to make a real difference to the Borough, and this would not have been possible without the contributions of officers and residents. I would therefore like to thank all residents, Council officers, representatives from partner organisations and my colleagues on scrutiny for getting involved and working so hard.

Cllr Alex Karmel
Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board

The role of scrutiny

Scrutiny in local authorities was formally created by the Local Government Act 2000 to act as a balance to the establishment of structures which placed executive power (ie decision-making) in the hands of either an elected Mayor or Leader and a small Cabinet authorised to make decisions both individually and collectively.

Scrutiny however, is about much more than merely holding the Cabinet to account. It provides an opportunity for non-executive councillors to bring their own independent expertise to bear on strategy and policy issues, and to work constructively with the Cabinet, local people, community organisations, partner agencies, service users and other customers to develop evidence based recommendations which improve policies and provide effective and responsive services. Increasingly scrutiny is focusing not just on the work of the Council but all areas of public service which touch the lives of the local community.

Five core roles can be readily identified, however these are far from exhaustive:



Scrutiny has a wide ranging remit and can also have an important role to play in engaging the public with the decision making process, ensuring corporate priorities are met, providing satisfying and meaningful roles for non-executive councillors and undertaking area based reviews.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has identified four key principles that underpin effective scrutiny;

- Effective Scrutiny should be a ‘critical friend’ to executives, external authorities and agencies. It should challenge policy development and decision making in a robust, constructive and purposeful way while developing a partnership with external agencies and authorities.
- Effective Scrutiny should reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities. It should ensure an ongoing dialogue with the public and diverse communities where the public voice is heard and responded to. It should have open and transparent processes with public access to information.
- Effective Scrutiny should take the lead and own the Scrutiny process on behalf of the public. It should be independent from the executive, legitimated by the Council and should have adequate public representation and political balance that is representative of the current political groups involved.
- Effective Scrutiny should make an impact on the delivery of public services. It should promote community well-being and improve the quality of life, providing co-ordinated and strategic reviews of policy and performance in line with strategic objectives.

Scrutiny in Hammersmith & Fulham

At Hammersmith and Fulham, there are four main scrutiny committees:

- The Overview & Scrutiny Board
- The Education & Children’s Services Select Committee
- The Housing, Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee and
- The Transport, Environment & Residents Services Select Committee

The committees have cross-cutting remits designed to reflect the Council’s key priorities and objectives and comprise of nine non-executive councillors. The committees may also co-opt members, who can bring a particular expertise or direct knowledge of the service-user perspective to assist with their work. Most of the co-opted members are not entitled to vote (although formal votes are rare in scrutiny) but can participate fully in the committee’s discussions. Legislation requires that the Education & Children’s Services Select Committee has at least two parent governor and two diocesan representatives co-opted onto the committee with full voting rights on any education matters. The Overview & Scrutiny Board, which is responsible for coordinating the scrutiny function, includes the Chairman of each select committee.

The scrutiny committees are empowered to hold inquiries and investigate the available options for policy development and may appoint advisers and expert witnesses to assist them in this process. They may interview council officers, representatives of external organisations, service users and other witnesses, undertake site visits, conduct public surveys, hold public meetings, commission research and do anything else that they reasonably consider necessary to inform their deliberations. The Leader, Cabinet Members and senior officers are under a duty to comply with any request to attend. Reports and recommendations on proposals may be submitted for consideration to the Cabinet or Council who are obliged to respond, normally within eight weeks.

If a committee wishes to examine a topic in particular detail, a special task group can be established to examine evidence, consult with the public and service users and interview expert witnesses over a period of a few weeks or months. The Task Group then produces a report and recommendations, which it will ask the Committee to adopt. Recommendations can be made to the Council, central Government or to local partner agencies. All of these special task group reports are available on the Council's website.

The committees are normally open to the press and public (although occasionally it may be necessary to meet in private session when dealing with certain confidential information). Members of the public may be invited to speak at meetings, at the discretion of the Chairman. Deputations signed by at least ten registered electors of the Borough may be presented directly to the committees.

Performance review and monitoring of Council services and functions is at the heart of local scrutiny activity with particular emphasis on examination of the annual budget papers in accordance with the Council's emphasis on the delivery of high quality value for money services. All departmental business plans and key performance indicators are submitted to the relevant scrutiny committees for review, which ensures that scrutiny is well placed to contribute to the strategic business planning and performance management processes.

Each committee receives the list of Key Decisions (a rolling list of key decisions which the Cabinet is planning to take in the coming months) at every meeting, which assists in the development of work programmes and the identification of forthcoming key decisions that could benefit from closer scrutiny and input. Scrutiny committees have powers to call-in executive decisions for review and, if it agrees it to be necessary, request the original decision maker to reconsider. Action to implement the decision is suspended during this process. Accountability is further enhanced by the attendance of the relevant Cabinet Member and senior officers from the appropriate service department at most scrutiny meetings to report on activity and answer questions as they arise. Scrutiny Committees also have a wider role in policy development, originating topics of interest and feeding views back to the Cabinet and individual Cabinet Members, officers, external partners and service providers.

You can find out more about scrutiny in Hammersmith & Fulham at www.lbhf.gov.uk/scrutiny

The Overview & Scrutiny Board

2013/14 has been another successful and productive year for the Board. Just like local authorities across the country, Hammersmith & Fulham has been operating in a climate of economic austerity and significant financial concerns. The Board has helped the Council to manage these pressures while continuing to deliver high quality services to our customers. A key example of this is our ongoing monitoring of two important projects: the tri-borough ICT programme and the tri-borough Managed Services project. Both topics have been discussed multiple times throughout the year, and are likely to be discussed during 2014/15 as well.

All large organisations are dependent upon IT and computer systems to carry out their work, and the Council is no different. Since Hammersmith & Fulham started working closely with our tri-borough partners at Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster, some officers have experienced difficulty as each authority worked with different systems and networks. The Board is therefore pleased to monitor the ongoing process to simplify IT provision to ensure tri-borough working is as effective and efficient as possible. My colleagues and I on scrutiny look forward to revisiting this project next year and working with the officers and Cabinet Members responsible to ensure the project is completed on time, on budget and with an end product that meets users' needs.

The Managed Services programme is another significant piece of work being undertaken by the Council, and the Overview & Scrutiny Board have given it the detailed scrutiny it warrants. Whilst not immediately visible to members of the public, the Council's back office functions are extremely important and Managed Services sought to align multiple functions to achieve vital savings of around £1.2m each year. During the course of the year however it became apparent that the original 'go live' date for the new systems would not be possible and the project was scrutinised again by the Board. Members sought to understand the reasons for the delay and how further delays could be avoided. The Board was reassured to hear that officers had recognised areas for improvements and action was being taken, such as more robust project plans with precise milestones and stronger project management.

The Overview & Scrutiny Board's remit includes a lot of corporate functions that deal with how the Council as an organisation operates. However the Board is also concerned with the experiences of our customers: residents of the Borough and users of Council services. In September we reviewed the Annual Complaints Performance Report and were pleased to learn that overall, there had been a 10% decrease in the number of complaints received by the Council. The Board challenged the Leader and officers over some of the results, such as the trend for an increasing number of complaints regarding responsive repairs for leaks and floods caused by faulty plumbing. In response to the results, a new protocol was developed to improve the Council's response time to reported leaks.

The views of our residents were also discussed in March when the Board considered the results of the Annual Residents Survey. Overall we welcomed the news that there was increasing levels of resident satisfaction for most Council services. However it was apparent that sport and leisure facilities had experienced a drop in satisfaction since the previous year. Upon closer investigation, the Board learned

that the previous Residents Survey was held in 2012, when the post-Olympic enthusiasm had created an artificial spike for all things sport-related and that in fact 2013's results were still showing signs of positive progress since 2011.

At our November meeting, the Board discussed the innovative community budgeting pilot at White City. The project was initially funded by a Government grant, and the Board was keen to ascertain how sustainable it would be once this funding had ceased. Members heard how the Council was working to build capacity within the community and to identify advertising and income sources to ensure Team White City was able to continue with minimal Council support. The work carried out so far has been largely preparatory, and scrutiny will be monitoring progress to ensure the wide range of proposed initiatives are delivered. Issues of particular interest will be the editorial impartiality of the White City fanzine, and efforts to improve literacy and numeracy in the area.

In January, the Board considered the draft Council Budget for 2014/15. However scrutiny's role in the financial management of the Council is not restricted to one meeting a year. Every quarter, the Overview & Scrutiny Board has been receiving reports on performance management within the Council and the latest situations with the capital and revenue budgets. These reports allow scrutiny members to keep track of trends and follow issues of concern. For example this year we have heard that the Council, like many others, has been informed by HMRC that it is at risk of breaching its VAT partial exemption limit. By receiving regular updates, the Board has been satisfied that Council officers are managing the issue and that there won't be a negative impact on the Council's budget or on the delivery of services to residents.

2013/14 has been another interesting year for the Overview & Scrutiny Board, and I'm sure my colleagues would agree that whilst we recognise the achievements made so far, we must not be complacent. I therefore look forward to 2014/15 and the continuing importance of scrutiny.

Cllr Alex Karmel
Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Board

Education & Children's Services Select Committee

This has been another busy and interesting year, with a varied agenda to scrutinise. We continued to focus on the key areas of safeguarding and child protection, education and children's health, plus many other important areas some of which are detailed below. We welcomed many external contributors to the meetings, including school representatives, youth workers, the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, who helped us to understand their roles and experiences.

Over the past few years the Committee has considered a report on the views of children in care and care leavers and it continued with this monitoring by receiving a report at the June meeting, which also included the views of the parents. Prior to the meeting, the Committee Members met with a number of young people in care to discuss their views in order to hear about their experiences first hand. The key issues raised were then fed back to the main meeting.

Social care was also the theme of the April meeting, where we reviewed reports on achieving permanency for young children and the annual report on foster care. A foster carer and two adopters kindly attended the meeting to talk their experience and gave the Committee an opportunity to ask them about the invaluable role they play in fostering and adopting.

Children's health was the focus of the September meeting. The Deputy Director of Public Health presented a report on the public health responsibilities which had transferred to the Council, and also summarised the function, activities, resources and structure of the current Tri-borough Public Health department, in particular those that were specific to the commissioning and delivery of children's health services. The other health item was a report providing information on access to children and young people's mental health services (CAMHS) and paediatric speech and language therapy (SALT) services in H&F. Given the interest in this report, it was agreed that we would invite the officer back to a future meeting to keep the Committee updated on this area.

An update on the Strategic Plan for Children was also considered at this meeting, which reported on the progress made in respect of the priorities set out in the previous report, which included child poverty, safeguarding, health and education. It also included an indication of future planning in relation to the Children's Trust Board, Health and Wellbeing Board and other partnership arrangements.

The 19 November meeting was dedicated to the review of the Ofsted reports of 13 schools that had been inspected in the period from December 2012 to July 2013. The strengths in each school and the areas for improvement were highlighted as part of the presentation of the report. Out of the 13 schools, four had been judged as outstanding and six as good in overall effectiveness; of these, one improved from satisfactory (requiring improvement) to outstanding and another from satisfactory (requiring improvement) to good. Two schools were requiring improvement, and one was inadequate. The headteachers and Chairs of Governors of the schools were invited to the meeting to take part in the discussion on their reports. Prior to the meeting, visits to the schools were arranged for Members of the Committee to see the schools in action.

A report outlining the outcomes of this year's school tests and examinations and school Ofsted inspection outcomes was also considered by the Committee at the November meeting. It was noted that the proportion of schools judged to be good or outstanding was high against national averages; at the start of this academic year 91% of schools were good or outstanding. Performance in Hammersmith and Fulham continued to be above national averages in primary and secondary schools. The Committee agreed that once the results had been finalised, a letter would be sent to all schools to congratulate all staff and pupils for the excellent results.

An additional meeting was arranged in February following the call-in by over 50% of the voting members of the Committee, relating to the Cabinet decision on the proposed amalgamation of Sullivan Primary School and New King's Primary School. Members of the public attended the meeting, and depositions were heard both for and against the Cabinet Decision. The Committee agreed, following a vote by the majority of its members, to recommend that Cabinet reconsider its decision using all available materials. Cabinet met on 20 January 2014 to re-look at all available materials, and it agreed to affirm its original decision taken.

Careers education and guidance services in Hammersmith and Fulham schools was considered by the Committee, which noted the key change that the duty to provide careers guidance had moved from the local authority to schools. Three colleagues from Phoenix High School attended the meeting to present on the school's model it had used over the past few years to gain the Investors in Careers kite mark. The presentation highlighted the benefits from the award and what the accreditation involved.

Links with young people through the Borough Youth Forum continued and a special event was held in June which was well attended by young people from the Borough Youth Forum and Children in Care Council, Councillors, Co-opted Members and officers. There were workshop style sessions arranged to give a chance for the young people and members to engage in an informal setting to discuss various issues; the sessions focused on cyber bullying and skills young people expected to require to be successful in the future.

Last year we reviewed young people's participation in Hammersmith and Fulham and had welcomed the opportunity to visit youth clubs to see them in action. Following on from this request, a schedule of visits to youth clubs and different organisations was arranged and a number of Committee Members were able to view the activities on offer and to see how they could help highlight the services available.

In response to a request, we received a report on the third sector and business involvement in young people's services, which described the range of voluntary sector activity, volunteering and business involvement which supported the Council's services for young people in the borough. We were pleased to welcome Matt Bell from the Berkeley Group and Si Ledwith from Cricket for Change to the meeting, who gave an interesting insight into the Street Elite programme. Street Elite was a 'training for work' initiative that used sport, mentoring and youth engagement to inspire and motivate young people who were currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). Following from the discussion, it was agreed that ways in which

the relevant young people could be referred to the programme by the Council would be looked at by officers.

The Pupil Premium Task Group's final report and recommendations was presented to the Committee during the year, which included case studies and the proposed action plan for implementation and monitoring of the recommendations. The Members of the Task Group thanked all those who were involved in the review.

There were also many other items that were considered throughout the year, which included the revenue budget, the school organisation and investment strategy, an update on the progress of delivering the Troubled Families Programme in Hammersmith and Fulham, school performance 2013, the Local Safeguarding Children Board's annual report 2012/13, a child poverty JSNA update report, a progress report on the family support localities services, the Youth Offending Service and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disabilities Strategy.

We have continued to be updated on relevant issues that were not included in the agendas through the Director's Oral Report agenda item, such as updates on recent Ofsted inspections, children's centres inspections, the new Ofsted inspections for children in care, the Adoption Reform Grant, the Tri-Borough Children and Young People's Survey, the Youth Justice Custody Pilot, the Adoption scorecard results, and the implications of the Children and Families Bill, for example.

Looking forward to the year ahead, we will continue our key aim of scrutinising and monitoring the protection and welfare of children in the borough. We look forward to meeting young people, parents, our partners, service users and officers to continue our dialogue on how we can improve services where possible.

Cllr Donald Johnson
Chairman of the Education & Children's Services Select Committee

Health, Housing & Adult Social Care Select Committee

During 2013/2014 the Committee focused on a number of important items, in addition to ongoing key issues from the previous year.

HOUSING

We continued to monitor the welfare reform legislative changes and the Council's response. We were reassured that the total number of households subject to the capping process was considerably fewer than the original estimate and that the HB Assist team was building a statistical picture of the movement in and out of the borough.

We were advised of the work in respect of under-occupying cases claiming housing benefits affected by the changes, including the award of Discretionary Housing Payments to assist the most vulnerable tenants affected or those who had committed to downsizing and the visits by officers to tenants to ensure that they were fully aware of the available options.

At the committee's request, the progress report in respect of the ten year Repairs and Maintenance Contract awarded to MITIE Property Services Ltd. with effect from 1 November 2013, which had been planned for after the initial six month period was brought forward to the April meeting. We were pleased to welcome MITIE's representatives to this meeting.

Officers informed us of initial problems with which MITIE were confronted such as the threefold increase in call volumes, some 1,500 jobs which had been held back from the former incumbent contractors, and a legacy of uncompleted works.

Representatives of MITIE explained how necessary additional resources had been committed to resolve these issues. We noted that properties in good repair would be more cost effective to maintain in the long run, and therefore MITIE could expect to recover this early investment over the duration of the contract. We concluded that MITIE had made a promising start and were impressed with its management team.

The Housing and Regeneration Department Key Performance Indicators remain a regular agenda item.

HEALTH

'Shaping a Healthier Future', the North West London NHS service reconfiguration continued to feature on the Select Committee agenda and Councillors Ivimy and Vaughan again represented the committee on the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC).

Whilst both the Council and the JHOSC initially expressed serious concern at the proposals, a majority of committee members were re-assured by the additional proposals for a significant enhancement following the original proposals for Charing Cross Hospital, which will upgrade Charing Cross from a local hospital to a specialist health and social care hospital.

The proposals had been accepted by the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts in February 2013 and in November senior Clinicians and Managers from both Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust (ICHT) and the Hammersmith & Fulham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) updated us on implementation of the proposals. The Outline Business Case will be scrutinised at the June 2014 meeting.

In January 2014, an additional meeting, primarily to consider ICHT's NHS foundation trust application, was held at St. Mary's Hospital. We formally responded to the consultation supporting the application, whilst recommending that ICHT reconsidered the proposed governance structure.

We continued to monitor ICHT's performance and specifically cancer services. At the January meeting, the trust reported that it had delivered seven out of eight of the nationally defined cancer standards and that performance to December would show that all eight standards had been delivered. The committee will review this at its June 2014 meeting.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

We received a presentation on the Care Bill, which will become law in 2015, and the potential financial impact on the Council. Members were told that significant additional funding would be required. We noted the concern in respect of the timescales and specifically in respect of the IT system.

We requested a progress report in respect of self-directed support. We were informed of the plans to improve the payment system through the introduction of pre-loaded cards, which would make it possible to monitor all accounts regularly and the plans for in-house direct payments support. The committee recommended that attention be given to communication with users and potential users.

We received the Adults Safeguarding Annual Report and also a report setting out the arrangements in place for the Council to meet its new statutory responsibilities when the Care Bill becomes law.

There were many other items scrutinised throughout the year including: the Adult Social Care Customer Feedback report; the recommendations of the Francis Report regarding local authority scrutiny; the Housing & Regeneration Joint Venture Vehicle and the procurement of a private sector partner; the Health & Wellbeing Strategy; HRA Financial Strategy and Rent Increase Report 2014/2015; Revenue Budget 2014/2015; Transition Planning for Children with Disabilities. In addition, the Care Quality Commission provided a presentation on its role and revised direction.

Cllr Lucy Ivimy
Chairman of the Housing, Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee

Transport, Environment & Residents Services Select Committee

I am pleased to present our annual update on the Committee's work. During the year, we continued to monitor the work of the Environment, Leisure and Residents Services and Transport and Technical Services Departments, and investigated a wide range of issues affecting the borough's residents. This included a review of both departmental budgets at our January meeting.

The Committee covered a number of transport issues during the year, looking at the way the Council and other agencies is working to get the borough moving. We looked at both how the Council is seeking to create new infrastructure to improve transport in the borough, on and off road, and the steps it takes to ensure that traffic flows as smoothly as possible.

At its February meeting, the Committee considered a draft report from the Flyunder Study Group, at a meeting that was attended by over a hundred members of the public. The Committee heard about the work undertaken by the Study Group in consulting with residents and in identifying potential technical solutions. We heard that three potential tunnels had been identified, and the merits and demerits of those schemes; we heard that the ability to the potential viability of a number of routes for a tunnel. The Committee commended the work undertaken by the Flyunder Study Group, and recommended that the Cabinet agree to submit the report to Transport for London for further detailed study. The Committee also identified a need to fully emphasise and promote the environmental benefits the scheme would create; this would ensure that decision makers took these into account when deciding how the scheme would proceed.

At its September meeting it received reports on highways maintenance and on works in the public highway, looking into the ways in which the Council decides its roads maintenance programme and how it liaises with utilities to keep the quantity of roadworks and associated disruption to a minimum. At our March meeting, we received a report outlining the proposals for the Old Oak Crossrail/HS2 interchange . The Committee agreed on the issues on which the Council proposes to petition, noting that traffic disruption if the proposals were unaltered could be severed.

The Committee also received reports on enforcement activity carried out by the Council. At our September meeting, we received an update on Civil Enforcement Officer Safety. We had previously heard that the number of assaults was high. Pleasingly, we heard that, following the introduction of cameras as supported by the Committee, the number of assaults on Civil Enforcement Officers had been greatly reduced.

The Committee also received, at its November meeting, a report on Blue Badge Enforcement, from Council officers and the Council's contractor, BBFA. The contractor worked with the Police to identify fraudulent use of blue badges, and had been successful in reducing their use, ensuring that parking was available for those genuinely in need. Finally, following media interest in the issue, we received a comprehensive report at our January meeting on congestion, with specific emphasis on moving traffic violations and CCTV enforcement. The report covered the context for the borough's policies and use of CCTV. We reviewed the various ways in which

the Council used CCTV to monitor and police good driver behaviour, and the impact this was having on reducing congestion.

The Committee also received reports on the ongoing Bi-Borough integration process, and associated service reviews. At our June meeting, we received the Environmental Health service review, and at our November meeting, we received the Waste and Street Scene and Markets service reviews. In relation to the latter, we agreed with the identified need for a North End Road Market strategy and asked to be kept updated, asking to review the policy prior to its adoption.

We received the Waste and Street Scene service review as part of a wider focus on waste issues. We received a report on the ongoing review of governance arrangements at the Western Riverside Waste Authority, which is responsible for the disposal of the borough's waste. At the same meeting, we reviewed the Cabinet report agreeing an extension of the SERCO waste collection contract prior to its approval.

The Committee received two reports on offender management, following up a longstanding interest in the area, at our first and last meetings of the year, with input from the Probation Service and officers from the Community Safety team. The Committee welcomed the establishment of the Tri-Borough Reducing Reoffending pilot and the creation of the community rehabilitation companies. It was pleased to see that work was taking place in this area, but believed that there remained an issue with housing for released prisoners. We agreed to review the progress of the pilot and community rehabilitation companies in 12 to 18 months' time.

We also examined the issues surrounding traditional pubs in the borough, with input from CAMRA, the British Beer and Pub Association and local publicans, as well as Council officers. The Committee heard about the economic position of pubs locally and nationally, the licensing regime as it affected traditional pubs, and the planning rules that applied to pubs. The Committee noted the constraints imposed by national planning legislation on change of use class, but believed that the Council should lobby to allow greater powers to prevent change of use and adopt a specific pub protection planning policy in line with that in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

It has been a successful year with a number of important outcomes. Looking forward to next year, we plan to consider a wide range of issues, including the borough's flood preparedness, high streets and the outcome of Bi-Borough service reviews.

Cllr Stephen Hamilton
Chairman of the Transport, Environment & Residents Services Select Committee

The Business Rates Scrutiny Task Group

The Business Rates Task Group was established following the reform of the business rates system that took effect in April 2013. The changes to the system were intended to give local authorities a direct stake in local economic development by allowing Councils to retain a portion of the rates they collected. The Task Group therefore also reviewed the work being undertaken by the Council to support the borough's high streets and town centres.

The Task Group found that the business rate system was no longer fit for purpose as it is based upon a valuation methodology that is capricious and disincentivises high street investment. In the view of the Task Group, the current system creates too many anomalies and distorts a level playing field for retailers. This is because the tax is too heavily linked to individual premises and the rents that particular tenants can negotiate. The Task Group would advocate a locally-consistent banding system that could promote rather than hinder town centre vibrancy. Such a system would also potentially remove the need for the large number of appeals that are still outstanding in Hammersmith & Fulham. The Task Group found that the Council has significant difficulty making financial forecasts when so much of the business rate income it is collecting is still subject to appeal. More needs to be done by the Valuation Office Agency and Government to address this backlog and restore certainty for the Council and local businesses.

Whilst the Task Group believes that reforming the current business rates system is of paramount importance, members also identified a number of actions that Government and the Council can take to help high streets. A significant issue is the increasing clustering of betting and pay day loan shops. As well as having worrying public health implications, betting shops detract investment and harm the perception of an area. Members of the Task Group reached the conclusion therefore that Government should revise the planning legislation to put betting and pay day loan shops into a separate Use Class, and the Council should consider removing the new permitted development rights and developing planning policy to limit shops becoming betting or pay day loan shops. The Task Group also explored the work the Council is currently undertaking to support local businesses. It recommends a bolder approach to empty shops that includes applying a vinyl-wrapping to shops that are vacant for extended periods, even if the owner cannot be identified.

The final report and recommendations of the Task Group were presented to the final Cabinet meeting of the municipal year. A response from Cabinet, the Government and the Valuation Office Agency is anticipated early in 2014/15.

Scrutiny committee membership 2013/14

The Overview & Scrutiny Board

Councillors Rachel Ford, Steve Hamilton, Lucy Ivimy, Donald Johnson, Andrew Jones (Vice Chairman), Alex Karmel (Chairman), PJ Murphy, Harry Phibbs and Max Schmid

Education & Children's Services Select Committee

Councillors Elaine Chumnerly, Tom Crofts, Charlie Dewhirst, Belinda Donovan, Donald Johnson (Chairman), Caroline Needham (Vice Chairman), Harry Phibbs, Matt Thorley and Mercy Umeh

Co-opted members (voting):

Eleanor Allen – London Diocesan Board of Schools representative

Philippa O'Driscoll – Westminster Diocese Education Service representative

Sue Fennimore – parent governor representative

Nadia Taylor – parent governor representative

Co-opted member (non-voting)

Michele Barrett – head teacher representative

Health, Housing & Adult Social Care Select Committee

Councillors Andrew Brown, Daryl Brown, Joe Carlebach, Stephen Cowan, Oliver Craig, Peter Graham, Lucy Ivimy (Chairman), Peter Tobias and Rory Vaughan (Vice Chairman)

Co-opted member (non-voting):

Patrick McVeigh – Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability (HAFAD)

Bryan Naylor – Age UK

Transport, Environment & Residents Services Select Committee

Councillors Michael Adam, Iain Coleman, Ali de Lisle, Gavin Donovan, Steve Hamilton (Chairman), Wesley Harcourt (Vice Chairman), Lisa Homan, Robert Iggulden and Jane Law

Business Rates Scrutiny Task Group

Councillors Robert Iggulden, Lucy Ivimy (Chairman) and Max Schmid

Contact details

We welcome your comments on this report. We would also be pleased to answer any questions that you may have about the scrutiny function at Hammersmith & Fulham or to receive suggestions for improvement in the way we work and ideas for service area reviews.

Please contact Craig Bowdery, Scrutiny Manager, Tel: 020 8753 2278, email craig.bowdery@lbhf.gov.uk

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Housing, Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee; Sue Perrin, Tel: 020 8753 2094, email sue.perrin@lbhf.gov.uk

Transport, Environment & Residents Services Select Committee; Craig Bowdery, Tel: 020 8753 2278, email craig.bowdery@lbhf.gov.uk