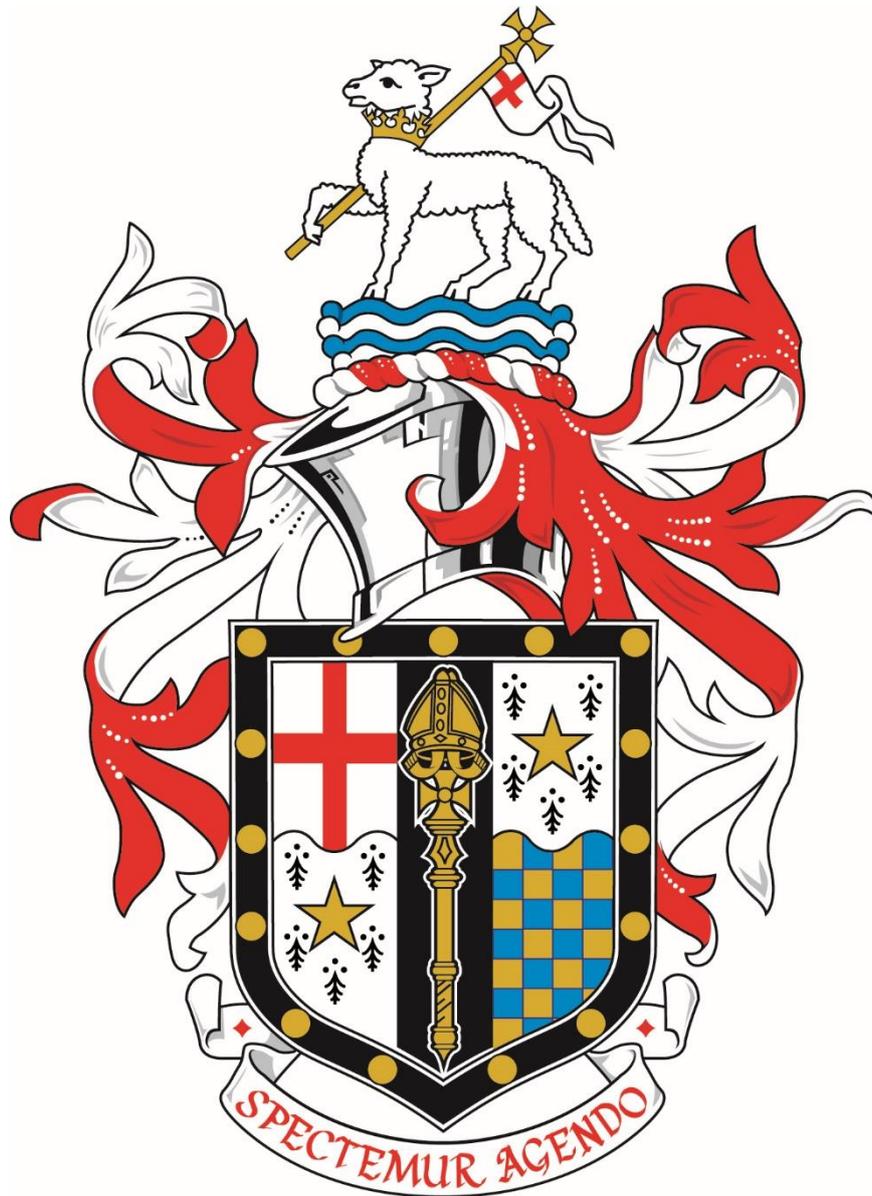


# London Borough of Lambeth



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2020-21

## CHAIR'S FOREWORD

In times of crisis, accountability, transparency and good governance are even more important than in more normal times. Scrutiny needs to be at the forefront, providing robust challenge, ensuring decisions are made on strong evidence and bringing a range of different perspectives to help the Council protect and support its residents.

Once enabling legislation was in place, thanks to our Democratic Services officers, Scrutiny quickly got to grips with the challenge of working remotely and involving a wide range of external witnesses. Our witnesses included Lambeth HealthWatch, Black Thrive, Lambeth Keep Our NHS Public, Yellow Qube, the Youth Council, the Children in Care Council, Victim Support, as well as trade union, parent and business representatives, headteachers, and residents. They gave us a much-needed reality check on what was happening in Lambeth and its impact on service-users and the wider community – especially as Covid-19 restrictions prevented us from making site visits. We were very pleased that these virtual meetings gave more local people the opportunity to dip into our discussions.

Over the last year members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CSSSC) have predictably spent most of their meetings focussed on the borough's response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our main focus was on how our most vulnerable residents were being protected and supported. We called for mechanisms to be put in place to support residents: experiencing food poverty, being required to shield, losing their jobs and suffering domestic violence. We sought reassurance regarding safety in schools and called for action to support children and young people lacking internet access for effective remote learning. We also called on the Council to aim for zero school exclusions especially for children with special educational needs and disabilities and for schools and families to be enabled to engage with support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at an early stage to support well-being.

The impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances, specifically the budget shortfall resulting from increased spending, the loss of income from fees and charges and the uncertainty about whether the Council would be fully compensated by government for Covid-19 related expenditure was subject to in-depth scrutiny. We expressed concern at the heavy reliance on income generation to address the budget gap and the impact of raising fees and charges on users and the take-up of services. We reiterated the need to maintain an adequate level of reserves to safeguard the Council's viability and effective service delivery particularly to the most vulnerable.

Another major focus was the need to build a more resilient and inclusive local economy which puts the most disadvantaged, hardest hit groups at its centre. We emphasised the importance of optimising local spend to generate social impact. We argued that local businesses supported by the Council should in return be required to prioritise unemployed Lambeth residents for any job vacancies. There should be targeted support for the over 50s who are out of work, more Council led apprenticeships and job opportunities for disadvantaged young people, provision of more flexible, affordable workspace and more support for local businesses through local business centres particularly in areas of highest need. The lessons for health and care services of the pandemic were examined. We commended the heroic work of Lambeth's health and care services and much appreciated their honest assessment of the challenges ahead. We were particularly concerned at the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on residents from a BAME background. We were dismayed at the failures of the national test, track and trace system and strongly supported increasing local involvement to deliver a system that works. Given the vital contribution of voluntary and community organisations, we called for their valuable work to be recognised and properly supported.

We also looked at what was being done to tackle climate change in light of Covid-19, looking at among other things our emergency transport strategy to encourage residents to walk and cycle more. We stressed the need for effective communication. In response to community concern about the rapid roll-out of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN) schemes in 2020 under the Council's Emergency Transport Strategy, we set up a commission. Led by Councillor Mary Atkins the Commission sought to examine the processes used to introduce and evaluate these measures with a view to identifying lessons for the future. It has considered evidence from a wide range of sources and will present its final report and recommendations in the autumn.

Another vital area was our scrutiny of the Safer Lambeth Partnership (SLP), the statutory community safety partnership for the borough which includes the Council, Police, Fire Service and Probation. Much concern was raised about the police tactics at the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard, following her murder in March 2021 which turned a peaceful vigil into a violent protest. We stressed the importance of local policing and the need for better information sharing between the Borough Command Unit and centralised Met units deployed in Lambeth. We argued that much more weight should be placed on the local knowledge and expertise of officers based in the borough when it comes to decision making. We called on the SLP to continue to provide long-term funding for organisations working to end violence against women and girls and to involve survivors in shaping services and implementing our borough-wide strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls. We also called for an assessment and improvement of existing stop and search practices to maintain trust and confidence in the police especially among young people

Councillors Marianna Masters, Nanda Manley-Brown and Joshua Lindsey have diligently scrutinised health arrangements in the borough through joint health overview and scrutiny committees with other south London boroughs. This has included examining the response of Our Healthier South East CCG to Covid-19 and the impact of the pandemic on acute services, waiting lists and CAMHS. They also scrutinised proposals to reconfigure mental health inpatient services at Lambeth Hospital, which are being transferred to the Maudsley Hospital site in 2023.

In addition to the activity described above, we used the opportunity of the pandemic to undertake a review of our scrutiny function to identify areas for improvement. For speed and simplicity and because of pandemic restrictions, we opted for a survey to find out the views of people such as back-bench councillors, cabinet members, council officers, co-optees and external organisations and individuals who had contributed to the scrutiny process. The questions in the survey were drawn from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's self-evaluation framework. Most responses were positive or neutral. However, they highlighted areas for improvement. As a result, there will be: wider and more pro-active officer support for scrutiny, more opportunities for learning and development for scrutiny members, greater efforts to identify external expert witnesses, service users and community organisations and ensure independent challenge and better public promotion of what we do. A new sub-committee focussing on Housing will also be set up in addition to that on Children's Services.

My sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to the work of overview and scrutiny this year: residents, co-optees, partner organisations, community groups, councillors and council officers. I am particularly grateful to Democratic Services officers: Gary O'Key, Maria Burton, Farah Hussain, Christian Scade and Wayne Chandai who have supported us so well this year and for the hard work of Councillors Mary Atkins, Marianna Masters and Lucy Caldicott who have respectively been assiduous vice-chairs of overview and scrutiny and chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

**Councillor Liz Atkins**

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

# 1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report provides an account of the activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and its commissions, as well as the CSSSC and Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees, during the 2020-21 municipal year. For reporting purposes, this covers the period from May 2020 to April 2021.

## **Introduction: the scrutiny process and structure in Lambeth**

- 1.2 Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic process of the council. The purpose of scrutiny and the activities undertaken by scrutiny councillors is to enable members who are not part of the Executive (Cabinet) to engage with and influence the policy development and decision-making of the council. They do this by reviewing or scrutinising decisions made by the council (and by some key partners), by contributing to the development of strategies and policies, and by making reports and recommendations on matters which are the responsibility of the authority or which affect the local area.
- 1.3 The Lambeth model of scrutiny comprises an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is responsible for scrutinising the whole range of the council's functions as well as exercising statutory responsibilities for health scrutiny (including the establishment of any joint health scrutiny arrangements that may be set up with other boroughs) and for crime and disorder scrutiny. In addition, at its AGM on 19 April 2017, Council approved the establishment of a Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee covering the provision, planning and management of all children and young people's services. This built on the work of the Improving Children's Services Scrutiny Commission, which was set up in July 2015 to provide governance oversight and challenge with respect to the Council's improvement journey following the Ofsted inspection report of May 2015 which judged Lambeth's Children's Services to be 'inadequate'. When matters are identified which require more in-depth scrutiny, OSC may establish short term task and finish groups ('scrutiny commissions'). Terms of reference and operational arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny and the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee are set out in the Council's Constitution (Part 3 – Scrutiny Functions, Section B – Scrutiny Procedure Rules).
- 1.4 Accordingly, scrutiny provides backbench members with the opportunity to question cabinet members, senior officers and other statutory partners on their proposals and hold them to account for their decisions and for the delivery of anticipated outcomes. Through commissions, scrutiny councillors in Lambeth undertake in-depth investigations on specific issues, including the work of other public service providers and its impact on the local community, and can make recommendations to support the ambitions of the authority. Scrutiny also seeks to involve the public and provide a voice for local people on the issues that affect them or may be of concern.
- 1.5 Through these arrangements, scrutiny is used to hold public-service providers in Lambeth to account and help improve public services in the area. Effective scrutiny improves accountability, ensures transparency of decision-making, contributes to service improvement and acts as a 'check and balance' on decision-makers.
- 1.6 In 2020-21 an evaluation exercise was undertaken to ensure Lambeth's scrutiny function continues to reflect best practice. Further details can be found in Section 8 of this report.

## 2. WORK PLANNING

2.1 OSC has a chair and two vice-chairs. Each vice-chair leads on a particular set of priorities as set out below, with the chair covering overall strategy plus any other areas not included within the vice-chair remit. The holders of these posts for the 2020-21 municipal year were:



**Cllr Liz Atkins**  
Chair



**Cllr Mary Atkins**  
Vice-Chair



**Cllr Marianna Masters**  
Vice-Chair

- a. Councillor Liz Atkins, responsible for: Finance and Investment; Sustainable Growth and Opportunity;
- b. Councillor Mary Atkins, responsible for: Resident Services; and,
- c. Councillor Marianna Masters, responsible for: Adults and Health.

2.2 The Chair and Vice-Chairs (alongside the CSSSC chair) continued with their schedule of regular informal meetings in order to provide a steer on operational issues and work planning, as well as discussing more strategic matters concerning the scrutiny function. They also continued to meet for quarterly briefing sessions with their corresponding strategic director(s). These briefings provide opportunities to better engage around budgets, performance, horizon scanning and issues for future scrutiny, as well as following up on relevant issues. This was done in light of the following principles underpinning the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the commissions it sponsors and the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee:

- a. Be independent from the administration and stakeholders;
- b. Be accessible and inclusive of everyone in the borough;
- c. Enable decisions to be challenged constructively;
- d. Strive for better services that produce the best outcomes;
- e. Base its decisions and recommendations on the best evidence available; and,
- f. Follow up its recommendations.

2.3 Being the third year of the four-year municipal term, 2020-21 saw only modest changes in committee membership from the previous year, meaning continuing members were able to build on the knowledge and expertise gained during 2019-20. This also enabled the Committee to take a broader contextual view, reflecting on previous findings when devising recommendations. Meanwhile new members were able to bring a fresh perspective while learning from the experience of the more established membership. A member induction session was held in summer 2020 covering such issues as the legislative framework for scrutiny (including the new statutory guidance issued in 2019), mechanisms and structures operated in Lambeth, questioning skills, assessment of evidence and work programming. Pre-meetings continued to be held prior to each scheduled OSC at a stage that could seek the input of all committee members, and these also enabled informal discussion of work programme priorities.

### 3. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### Membership

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises nine councillors – seven from the majority Labour Group, one from the minority Green Group and the sole Conservative councillor – plus four education co-opted members (who may vote only on education issues and therefore in practice attend the Children’s Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee), thereby enabling a genuine cross-party approach:
- a. Councillor Liz Atkins – Chair;
  - b. Councillor Mary Atkins – Vice Chair;
  - c. Councillor Marianna Masters – Vice Chair;
  - d. Councillor Lucy Caldicott – Chair of Children’s Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee;
  - e. Councillor Stephen Donnelly;
  - f. Councillor Josh Lindsey;
  - g. Councillor Joanna Reynolds;
  - h. Councillor Jonathan Bartley – Co-Leader of the Opposition (Green);
  - i. Councillor Tim Briggs – Opposition Member (Conservative); and,
  - j. Education co-opted members: Lynette Murphy O’Dwyer, Frank Roberts, Simon Funnell and Baboucarr Jallow (in practice the co-opted members attended Children’s Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee as this is the scrutiny body whose remit covers education and related matters).
- 3.2 The Committee held six scheduled meetings in the 2020-21 reporting period, as well as one call-in meeting. Outline meeting themes were established in the weeks and months prior to each meeting, which enabled the Committee to focus the bulk of each agenda on a particular area or set of cohesive priorities. In 2020-21, Covid-19 provided the backdrop to almost all committee discussions, with the outline meeting themes comprising:
- a. Covid-19 Emergency Response;
  - b. Council Finances/Climate Change;
  - c. Economic Recovery;
  - d. Health and Social Care (Lessons Learned from Covid-19); and,
  - e. Budget Proposals/Homes for Lambeth Governance; and Crime and Disorder.
- 3.3 Key issues that the Committee considered during the year are set out below. Full details of reports and minutes of the meetings can be found [here](#).

#### Public Participation

- 3.4 As alluded to in the introduction, OSC is keen to hear from external stakeholders wherever possible and as such invites individuals and organisations to attend its meetings (which are held in public) in order to hear their views. This helps councillors understand issues of community concern and contextualise the information received from the executive and senior officers, and is a key way for individuals and groups to influence Council policy and practice.
- 3.5 This year, the pandemic gave rise to challenges but also opportunities in this regard. While meetings were unable to be held in person due to Covid-19 restrictions – thereby forcing the Committee to meet virtually via Microsoft Teams for the entire municipal year – the ability of participants to contribute to meetings from their own homes without having to travel to the Town Hall and to ‘dip in and out’ of meetings more easily meant the process became more accessible to many people. As such, Scrutiny heard from a wide range of external witnesses over the course of

the year, including Lambeth HealthWatch, Black Thrive, Lambeth Patient Participation Group Network, Lambeth Keep Our NHS Public, Trade Union representatives, Victim Support and the Advocacy Academy as well as resident and business representatives. Some witnesses also sent in written submissions which proved invaluable to the Committee's deliberations and helped contribute to its recommendations.

- 3.6 If you are interested in participating in the scrutiny process in this way please contact: [democracy@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@lambeth.gov.uk).

## **Meetings**

### ***May 2020 – meeting theme: Covid-19 Emergency Response***

- 3.7 The first Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the reporting period was held against the backdrop of the Covid-19 outbreak which began earlier in the year and had such a devastating effect on residents and business, not just in Lambeth but the world over.
- 3.8 The meeting took the format of a question-and-answer session with the organisational leadership, including the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Deputy Leader (Housing and Homelessness), alongside senior officers including the Chief Executive. While this was formally an OSC meeting, members of CSSSC were also invited to attend and contribute in order to provide a more efficient and cross-cutting mechanism for all scrutiny members to hold the leadership to account while minimising the burden on already-stretched members and officers.
- 3.9 Members were invited to submit questions in advance and the meeting was split into themed sections based on these. Themes include supporting the vulnerable, housing, staffing, communications and decision-making under emergency circumstances.
- 3.10 The meeting was held entirely virtually using Microsoft Teams and set the template for the rest of the scrutiny committee meetings during the municipal year. Although systems had not yet been put in place to enable members of the public to contribute by video link, one representation was made by way of an audio recording played in the meeting.
- 3.11 Members made a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring the ongoing support to the most vulnerable in the Borough, including schoolchildren, was as robust as possible, as well as offering suggestions around flexible working for staff and how best to ensure key messaging around Covid 19 was clear and consistent.

### ***July 2020 – meeting theme: Council Finances and Climate Change***

- 3.12 The July meeting was dedicated principally to examining the impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances and the significant budget shortfall resulting from increased spending and the loss of fees and charges.
- 3.13 While the Committee was assured that prudent financial management meant Lambeth's finances were not as precarious as some other local authorities, there was nonetheless a great deal of anxiety regarding the ability of the Council to be fully compensated for Covid related expenditure together with ongoing uncertainty in relation to local government funding in general. A number of planning scenarios and assumptions were examined and the Committee stressed the importance of maintaining adequate reserves in light of the huge financial risks being experienced. Members were particularly keen to ensure that the Borough's most vulnerable residents were as protected as they could be from any budget cuts needed to balance the books.
- 3.14 At the same meeting, the Committee received a report regarding tackling climate change in light of the pandemic. This covered the efforts being made under the emergency transport strategy – one

of the first approved in the country – to encourage active travel and steer away from a car led recovery, as well as the plans for a Lambeth Citizens’ Assembly on climate change, which had had to be postponed. While members appreciated the work being done in-house, the Committee recommended that more learning be brought in from best practice elsewhere. Further recommendations were made regarding innovative work on heat transfer and the need for adequate communication regarding emergency transport initiatives.

***September 2020 – meeting theme: Economic Recovery***

- 3.15 At its September meeting, the Committee turned its focus to economic recovery, examining and providing input into two related strategies – Economic Resilience, and Skills and Employment. The massive economic shock caused by the pandemic had been keenly felt in Lambeth, due in part to the prominence of badly affected sectors such as hospitality and the creative industries, and these strategies sought to respond to the impacts of Covid 19 and inequality in the Borough while providing opportunities to reshape and rebuild a more resilient and inclusive local economy.
- 3.16 Members heard from small business representatives, an employment support specialist and Black Thrive Lambeth – a partnership established in 2016 to address the inequalities that negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of black people in Lambeth, and a regular contributor to scrutiny committee meetings in the borough – regarding their experiences and views. These were invaluable in shaping the Committee’s recommendations, which were grouped in line with the strategic themes of People, Business and Place, and included the need for comprehensive data capture and analysis (including equalities data), the important role which could be played by local flexible workspace initiatives such as Loughborough Junction’s ‘LJ Works’, and the need for further transparency regarding where and how developer contributions were accrued and spent in Lambeth.
- 3.17 Finally, the Committee received the final update on the action plan arising from the Jobs For All Scrutiny Commission, which was closely linked to the strategies mentioned above.

***October 2020 – meeting theme: Health and Social Care***

- 3.18 At its October meeting, OSC considered the lessons for health and care services of the pandemic alongside the Public Health annual report and a related paper on how public health activity was funded and prioritised. This meeting had originally been scheduled for November but was brought forward in order to ensure the Committee’s findings could be taken on board in advance of the winter period, which brought with it the usual pressures on the health service as well as the anticipated second wave of Covid-19.
- 3.19 Members put questions to the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care together with senior officers from Integrated Health and Care, and Communications; and heard from a variety of public witnesses. Among these were representatives from the local HealthWatch and Patient Participation Group Network organisations, Black Thrive and Keep Our NHS Public, all of whom spoke eloquently and passionately on behalf of service users.
- 3.20 The Committee commended the heroic work being done by health and care services in the Borough as well as the Communications team, and were very appreciative of the report submitted, which provided an honest and open assessment of the challenges ahead. The Committee gave its backing to the principle of increased local involvement in the Covid 19 test and trace system; recognised the important role of voluntary and community organisations and urged that this sector be adequately supported going forward; and requested assurance that face-to-face medical appointments would continue for those who needed them, in light of the increased move towards telephone and video appointments.

**December 2020 – meeting theme: Budget Proposals and Homes for Lambeth Governance**

3.21 At its December meeting, OSC considered the budget overview and financial implications for the Council set out in the Financial Planning Report 2020-21 to 2024-25. The Committee focused its scrutiny on such issues as income generation targets and reserves, as well as echoing the sentiments of the two trade union representatives who spoke at the meeting regarding the benefits of insourcing services. The Committee made a number of observations and recommendations to Cabinet as set out below, which OSC plans to monitor in future budget focused meetings.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Committee notes the heavy reliance on income generation (particularly in Resident Services) to address the budget gap and requests further updates on how these proposals are progressing against stated targets, including the impact of raising fees and charges on users and the take-up of services.
  2. That the Committee is concerned at the plans for a whole Council structural review in 2022-24 and the adverse effect this may have on service delivery, and in particular on low paid and BAME staff. The Committee therefore requests further detail on these proposals as and when they emerge and urges the Council leadership to consult with and empower staff throughout the process, both via the trade unions and directly.
  3. That the Committee reiterates its recommendation of 23 September 2020 regarding the need for greater transparency with regards to the generation and spending of developer contributions (note: the 23/9/20 recommendation states: "That further transparency is needed regarding developer contributions. This should include publishing details on the Council website of where Community Infrastructure Levy payments are generated and spent (over the last five years in each ward); a list of projects funded by CIL, NCIL and S106; and the criteria for each funding stream").
  4. That a thorough options appraisal be carried out regarding the future of the leisure contract, including consideration of an in-house option.
  5. That the Committee supports the intention to maintain an appropriate level of reserves in order to safeguard the Council's viability and enable the authority to continue effective service delivery, in particular those services aimed at the most vulnerable, and requests further future updates regarding the reserves position.
  6. That the committee requests details of how the hardship fund is applied and the outcome of the review of the fund.
  7. That the Committee notes the bigger than usual lag in capital investment spend this year due to the pandemic and requests further updates on the capital programme to monitor how this is addressed.
  8. That the Committee supports the expansion of HMO licensing as a means of both raising housing standards and generating income, and requests further details of the options being considered, including the projected revenue.
- 3.22 In addition, the Committee considered the governance arrangements of Homes for Lambeth, in light of certain concerns which had been raised in connection with the call-in meeting held in May 2020 (see section 4 below) and the subsequent independent review of HfL's governance by consultants Bevan Brittan.
- 3.23 Committee members questioned senior representatives from the Council and HfL together with the author of the review and recommended a simplification of the governance arrangements to avoid potential conflicts of interest together with a more structured approach to resident involvement.

### **March 2021 – meeting theme: Crime and Disorder**

- 3.24 The March OSC meeting was the annual scrutiny of the Safer Lambeth Partnership (SLP) – the statutory community safety partnership for the borough consisting of the Council, Police, Fire Service, Probation and other key partners.
- 3.25 Members put questions to the Chief Executive and the Metropolitan Police Borough Commander for Lambeth and Southwark, who together co-chair the SLP, as well as the Cabinet Member responsible. Valuable witness contributions were made by two local councillors regarding their experiences of the police response to a vigil on Clapham Common which had caused national headlines earlier in the month, and powerful testimony was heard from two local young people in relation to stop and search, and broader issues of trust and confidence in the police.
- 3.26 In its recommendations the Committee highlighted the importance of borough-based police with appropriate local knowledge in wider Met operations as well as the need for more action on women's safety. Members also urged an assessment of whether existing practices were conducive to maintaining trust and confidence in the police, particularly where young people were concerned, and consider what more could be done to improve this.
- 3.27 In addition to this a report was considered on a review of scrutiny arrangements in the borough, (further details of which can be found in section 8 of this report), and the final action plan update was received in relation to the Accessibility of Council Digital Services Scrutiny Commission.

## **4. CALL-INS**

- 4.1 As stated above, in 2020-21 the OSC also held one special meeting to consider the call-in of a key decision:

### **May 2020 – decision: Homes for Lambeth Delivery Plan and Homes for Lambeth Corporate Plan**

- 4.2 In March 2020, the Leader of the Council approved the HfL Delivery Plan and HfL Corporate Plan. The report set out the business plan for Homes for Lambeth – a house-building company set up and wholly-owned by Lambeth Council, to build and manage homes for local people on Council land. This decision was called in by the five Green Group councillors and OSC considered the issues at a special meeting in May. The call-in form cited eight separate grounds for calling in the decision; however, the Monitoring Officer's ruling was that only one of these – risk management, in light of the risks posed by Covid-19 and how these would be managed and monitored in the year ahead – was deemed a valid reason for the call-in.
- 4.3 Members heard concerns, voiced by Councillor Pete Elliott, regarding what he saw as the unacceptable levels of risk being taken on by HfL; a lack of transparency and scrutiny in relation to the HfL risk register; and the huge uncertainty in the housing market caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee also received representations from five residents.
- 4.4 After a thorough questioning of the Cabinet Member for Planning, Investment and New Homes and senior officers, the Committee decided against referring the decision back to the Leader for reconsideration and instead allowed the original decision to stand.

## 5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

### Membership



Cllr Lucy Caldicott  
**Chair**



Cllr Mohamed Jaser



Cllr Nanda Manley-Browne



Cllr Malcolm Clark



Cllr Jane Pickard



Cllr Nicole Griffiths

Plus Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer (statutory co-optee), Frank Roberts (statutory co-optee), Simon Funnell (parent/governor co-optee), and Baboucarr Jallow (parent/governor co-optee).

5.1 The remit of the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee (CSSSC) covers the range of services and provision, planning and management of children and young people's services in Lambeth. This includes education, learning and schools; youth services; early years; education capital estate; children's social care; safeguarding children; children with learning disabilities; children in care; troubled families and the Youth Offending Service (YOS). The terms of reference were well reflected in the work of the Sub-Committee during 2020-21 and up to three substantive reports were considered at each of the Sub-Committee's five meetings. Reports and minutes can be found [here](#), with the following list detailing all items that were scrutinised by CSSSC in 2020-21:

- a. Education and Learning response to Covid-19;
- b. Raising the Game (achievement of Black Caribbean pupils);
- c. Youth Offending Service progress report;
- d. SEND Inspection Outcome Letter;
- e. School exclusions;
- f. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) offer;
- g. Financial planning / budget proposals;
- h. Children's Services improvement update;
- i. Youth and Play Service update;
- j. Fostering Strategy;
- k. Children's Services response to Covid-19: one year on; and,
- l. Pupil Place Planning.

### Education

- 5.2 At its June meeting, the Sub-Committee received a report on the impact of Covid-19 on children, education and learning. This detailed the Council's work to mitigate impacts, ensuring all children, and vulnerable children in particular, were able to attend school and that schools and the Council were in regular contact with families. The Sub-Committee heard from the Cabinet Member and officers of their concerns faced by children, particularly the traumatic impact of ending formal schooling, low attendance, changing Government guidance and the impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. It was noted that pupils not in attendance could be referred to Education Welfare Officers without having assigned social workers or EHCPs, with virtual sessions for parents, special arrangements for children to attend school and ongoing work for schools and nurseries to remain open.
- 5.4 The Sub-Committee also scrutinised Lambeth's *Raising the Game* programme, aiming to narrow attainment gap for Black Caribbean pupils, which had the strong support of schools to correct a

long-standing issue that was particularly relevant given the borough's population demographics. During this discussion, efforts on the decolonisation of the curriculum, allowing young people to meet black professionals to expand their ambition through the *Aim High* initiative and future funding concerns were noted.

- 5.5 The October Sub-Committee received an update on permanent and fixed-term exclusions, hearing that Lambeth aimed for zero exclusions from primary and special schools, and minimal secondary exclusions; with extensive evidence showing a link between exclusion and poor life outcomes. There had been reductions in Lambeth with no special school, one primary school, and 20 secondary school exclusion from 37,000 children in Lambeth in 2019-20. Projects such as *Raising the Game* and *Social Workers in Schools* pilot were being expanded to avoid exclusion by targeting groups more at risk of being excluded, such as Black Caribbean children. The meeting heard from witnesses who noted concern over a lack of parental consent of children being removed from courses, subjects and/or placed onto vocational courses, difficulties transitioning between primary and secondary, parental support, support for or Portuguese-speaking children at risk of exclusion, and the use of managed moves particularly for SEND children, but the positive impact of the *Fair Access Panel* in regulating managed moves. Furthermore, the new *School Inclusion Fund* allocated £400,000 to supporting children who had needs beyond their existing SEND offer and £100,000 to support neurodiversity.
- 5.6 The March meeting considered Pupil Place Planning and heard that the number of children being born in Lambeth was falling, primarily in the north and centre of the borough with impacts mainly on primary schools, after a number of years' increasing birth rates necessitating school expansions and this was seen as likely to continue with Covid-19 changing living patterns. However, the Council planned to avoid closing schools by using school buildings flexibly and ensure that a choice remained, with any changes to be implemented fairly across the borough.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

- 5.7 The January 2020 Ofsted SEND inspection findings were positive and were being improved further with a new SEND Strategy due to report back to the Sub-Committee. Areas for improvement included children with unidentified needs entering Reception, data sharing with CAMHS, preparation for adulthood and ensuring EHCPs continued to meet children's needs.
- 5.8 The October Sub-Committee meeting reviewed the SEND offer for children in Lambeth, noting Lambeth's higher than national average and disparity by ethnicity with BAME children more likely to have a SEND diagnosis. Whilst ensuring that all children reached their full potential. The new SEND Strategy needed to improve engagement with and ensure young people's voices were heard and included, provided opportunities, lowered CAMHS waiting times, saw the expansion of the *Early Help* pilot programmes from Streatham and Tulse Hill.

### **Violence and Young People**

- 5.9 The Sub-Committee received an update on the Youth Offending Service at its June meeting, hearing that consistency of practice, workforce stability, training, and peer reviews were being addressed to build a child-centred and compassionate service. The impact of Covid-19 had reduced crime by 40% but had led to concerns over engagement, alongside concerns on racial disparities (95% of custodial cases falling on BAME individuals). Further improvements, such as unconscious bias training for magistrates and judges, were noted, but Lambeth's data did demonstrate ongoing Service improvements.

## Children's Services and Finances

- 5.10 The December meeting reviewed Lambeth Children's Services, noting progress across all seven priority areas identified as a result of the 2018 Ofsted inspection, but that these needed to be sustainable and long-lasting. The Council had updated its Fostering Strategy, Corporate Parenting Plan and Sufficiency Strategy, with a new Edge of Care team, improved cross-departmental working, increasing numbers of permanent staff and in-house foster carers. Lambeth now had 85% of young people on permanence plans and numbers of placements were in line with national averages; but disproportionate numbers of young black males were entering the criminal justice system or subject to serious youth violence and receiving feedback from young people remained ongoing issues. The Council was also exploring becoming a Child Friendly Borough.
- 5.11 The December meeting also considered Children's Services finances, mainly arising from the £10m Covid-19 shortfall, alongside a £4.6m projected Children's Services overspend. The Sub-Committee heard corrective plans such as hiring more permanent staff, recruiting more in-house foster carers, and securing council tenancies for care leavers, to address these pressures; with SEND costs, increasing numbers of EHCPs and transport services were the main drivers of cost.
- 5.12 January's meeting also scrutinised the Fostering Strategy, which noted the views of Looked After Children (LAC) who overwhelmingly said they wanted to live with families if they could not live with their birth families; and that other provision such as the *Independent Foster Carers* had worse outcomes and cost more. 73% of LAC were in foster care, but the Strategy aimed to increase this to 90%, whilst prospective foster carers would be exempted from council tax and have support 24 hours a day. The new Strategy had been met with approval from foster carers, whilst a young person in foster care asked that foster carers be made aware of key parts of young persons' situation before placement, improve signposting to services and provide greater opportunities for young people to make decisions about their own lives.
- 5.13 March's meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny reviewed the response to Covid-19, hearing thanks to school staff, children and families for their work and support during an unprecedented period. The Council had provided 5,000 laptops, PPE for schools, 23 new school streets, assisted all 90 of Lambeth schools' risk assessments, provided additional Foster Carer allowances, provided food during school holidays and launched a crowd-funder that had raised £15,000 for children's laptops. During this time and despite the pandemic, Children's Social Care had also improved, with a 350% increase in care proceedings since March 2020, and had continued to perform its other workstreams such as supporting families with NRPF, increasing funding for semi-independent living, and creating an edge of care service.
- 5.14 The Sub-Committee heard about the new challenges faced by the department and schools as children returned to school from lockdown, using its child-centred and risk-based approach, multi-agency meetings and in-person visits and the establishment of a critical safeguarding team to focus on the children of most concern. Witnesses noted the work of the Council during the Covid-19 pandemic, praising its concern of and support for young people, and for a continuation of these services, whilst noting continuing financial challenges. The pressure on CAMHS meant that there were small numbers of young children on waiting lists for a long time, but a DfE *Mental Health Support Team in Schools* funding bid had been successful to support an additional 210 young people.

## Youth Services

- 5.15 The January meeting saw an updated provided on Youth and Play Services, noting their importance to young people, the wide range of services offered by providers such as St Matthew's Project-operated football club, providing development opportunities, addressing holiday hunger

and giving health benefits. Additionally, the Youth Council had been brought back in-house, 2,800 young people being supported through *Early Intervention and Prevention Support* contracts in 2019-20 with feedback from young people on these directly to officers. Members heard from a range of representatives and young people who had benefitted from clubs, workshops but noted the need for greater access and knowledge of these to benefit all young people.

## **6. SCRUTINY COMMISSIONS**

- 6.1 In addition to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee, scrutiny commissions provide an opportunity for more detailed investigations of specific issues by a group of councillors. Commission reports and recommendations are approved by OSC on completion and then submitted to Cabinet (or relevant body) for consideration and action planning.
- 6.2 Formal commission activity in 2020/21 was limited to the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) Scrutiny Commission, further details of which are given below.
- 6.3 Additionally, the final action plan updates in relation to two commissions which first reported back in 2018 – namely, Jobs For All and Accessibility of Council Digital Services – were received in September 2020 and March 2021 respectively, having been delayed from March 2020 owing to the cancellation of that month's scheduled meeting due to the Covid-19 outbreak. On both occasions the action plans demonstrated that significant progress had been made against the recommendations and the Committee was given assurance that actions which remained outstanding would be taken forward via the Employment and Skills Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy respectively.
- 6.4 In September 2020, the Committee also received the first action plan update in relation to the Events Scrutiny Commission which reported to Cabinet in January of that year. Once again, the response to the commission's findings was very positive, with the vast majority of recommendations being incorporated into the new Events Policy. OSC is scheduled to receive a second and final update in relation to this commission in 2021-22, though the impact on the major events industry of the pandemic may affect the timing of this.

### **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission**

- 6.5 Membership: Councillor Mary Atkins (Chair), Councillor Paul Gadsby, Councillor Marianna Masters, Councillor Irfan Mohammed, Councillor Jane Pickard and Councillor Nicole Griffiths
- 6.6 The context for this commission was the rapid rollout of a number of Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) schemes in 2020 under the Emergency Transport Strategy, incentivised by the government's Emergency Active Travel Fund. Due to the stipulations of the fund, schemes had to be implemented extremely rapidly and without the usual consultation processes. While the emergency LTNs were welcomed in some quarters, they also gave rise to community tensions and polarised views. The commission therefore sought to examine the processes used to introduce and evaluate these measures, with a view to identifying lessons for future such situations.
- 6.7 A draft commission proposal was drawn up by Councillor Mary Atkins, OSC Vice Chair, and the scope and membership were agreed at the OSC meeting held on 9 December 2020. The commission subsequently met on 17 December to refine its terms of reference and agree an outline work plan.

- 6.8 The commission went on to hold a further seven meetings over a five-month period, taking evidence from the Deputy Leader of the Council (Sustainable Transport, Environment and Clean Air) and officers regarding the emergency LTN rollout in Lambeth; considering a variety of research papers, articles and reports on LTNs more widely; examining common themes in objections to LTN schemes; and hearing from two university professors with specialisms in active travel, and attitudes and behaviour change in relation to climate change initiatives.
- 6.9 The commission is expected to present its final report and recommendations to Cabinet in autumn 2021.

## **7. JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY**

- 7.1 As noted in the introduction, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee holds a statutory responsibility to scrutinise health arrangements in the borough. Where health service changes are proposed which impact across borough boundaries, these are considered via joint health overview and scrutiny committee (JHOSC) arrangements involving consideration of proposals by councillors appointed from the boroughs affected.
- 7.2 In 2020/21 Councillor Marianna Masters and Councillor Nanda Manley-Browne represented Lambeth on the Our Healthier South East London JOSC, with Councillor Masters as Vice Chair. In addition, a separate JHOSC, established in early 2020 with the London Borough of Southwark, considered proposals in relation to the reconfiguration of mental health inpatient services at Lambeth Hospital. The Council's representatives were Councillor Marianna Masters, as Chair, Councillor Nanda Manley-Browne and Councillor Joshua Lindsey.

### **Our Healthier South East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OHSEL JHOSC)**

- 7.3 Our Healthier South East London (OHSEL) Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) comprises representatives of the six boroughs across South East London - the London Boroughs of Bromley, Bexley, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark and the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The Joint Committee's role is to scrutinise health services across South East London, in particular the proposals and consultation processes of the NHS Our Healthier South East London programme to ensure that improved, safe and sustainable health services are delivered across the region.
- 7.4 The JHOSC has met thirteen times since it was set up in 2015/16. There were two meetings in 2020/21, with a particular focus on recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 7.5 At the September 2020 meeting the JHOSC considered an update from Andrew Bland, Accountable Officer, on the South East London CCG merger.
- 7.6 The Committee was informed that the merger had taken place on 01 April 2020. This had established the NHS South East London CCG as the formal body for the commissioning of health services for local residents across the six South East London Boroughs. NHS England had approved the merger application without any conditions or reservations. This had been part of a series of mergers nationally, including South West London and North Central London.
- 7.7 It was highlighted that the first major task of the newly formed body was to co-ordinate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, the JHOSC looked closely at cases and deaths across South East London with close attention given to workstreams that had been

established to support the response and the process and context for recovery, including borough recovery plans.

- 7.8 The second meeting, held in April 2021, provided an opportunity to scrutinise the impact of COVID-19 on acute services. This focused on Covid related demand across the acute hospital sector, elective restoration plans, and the significant impact on waiting lists. The JHOSC also looked at the impact on mental health, including the impact on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and the roll out of the vaccination programme.
- 7.9 Updates were also provided on pathology services and the next steps for integrated care systems.

### **Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Lambeth Hospital Redevelopment**

- 7.10 In late 2019 a service change proposal was received from NHS Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group and their provider, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) regarding the potential reconfiguration of mental health inpatient services at Lambeth Hospital; specifically, the transfer of one psychiatric intensive care unit (PICU) and four acute wards to a new facility on the Maudsley Hospital site, located in the London Borough of Southwark. Following conversations with commissioners and colleagues in Southwark it was decided that this proposal amounted to a substantial reconfiguration proposal covering more than one local authority area (in accordance with the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013) and, as such, a JHOSC has been established between the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark to scrutinise the plans.
- 7.11 This JHOSC held its first meeting on 6 February 2020, during which the Terms of Reference and consultation plans were approved. Last year, the Committee conducted a virtual tour of the Lambeth Hospital site and a fly-through of Douglas Bennett House, which will be built on the Maudsley Hospital site. In addition to the tour, information was provided on the need for change while updates were provided on the consultation process and the timeframe for decision making.
- 7.12 The consultation ran from 4 March until 31 May and the JHOSC met on 28 May 2020 to consider, and respond to, the proposals in more detail. A meeting on 30 June allowed further scrutiny, and recommendations to be made, before the South East London Clinical Commissioning Group made its final decision to relocate four acute wards and the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) from Lambeth Hospital to the Maudsley site.
- 7.13 These proposals were supported by the JHOSC. However, an additional meeting was held in January 2021 to ensure monitoring of progress. Moving forwards, the Committee will continue to be briefed on developments informally and, if required, will hold further meetings ahead of the opening of Douglas Bennett House in early 2023.

## **8. LAMBETH SCRUTINY REVIEW**

- 8.1 In addition to the activity described above, a review of the scrutiny function was undertaken in 2020-21 aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of Lambeth's arrangements and ensuring these were in line with recognised best practice, including the updated [statutory guidance for overview and scrutiny in local and combined authorities](#) produced in May 2019.
- 8.2 After considering a number of formats and options the Chair decided the most effective would be to instigate a survey to ascertain the views of a variety of stakeholders in the scrutiny process. The results would then be used to identify areas for improvement, around which an action plan would

be drawn up. This was based on the six-point self-assessment framework developed by the London Borough of Camden but amended to incorporate the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (formerly Centre for Public Scrutiny) [CfPS self-evaluation framework](#), and consist of a series of statements of best practice which participants were invited to respond to on a scale of *strongly agree / agree / neither / disagree / strongly disagree*. Also included was a free text box after each question to enable those taking part to make more specific comments as appropriate.

- 8.3 The survey was sent to approximately 120 people with some form of interest in, or responsibility for, the scrutiny function. This included backbench councillors (both those who currently sat on scrutiny committees and those who did not), cabinet members, a range of officers from the Chief Executive and members of management board to more junior officers who had had some form of involvement with scrutiny, co-optees, and external organisations who had contributed to the scrutiny process in the past. Fifty responses were received, from a range of respondents.
- 8.4 The resultant action plan was themed around three areas: officer support for scrutiny; member learning and development; and external input.
- 8.5 The scrutiny review report and action plan were taken to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held in March 2021 where they were agreed by the Committee. Work is underway to respond to the action plan and this will continue throughout the 2021-22 municipal year.
- 8.6 Further details regarding the scrutiny review, including the full report, survey results and action plan can be found online [here](#) (item 5).