

# Annual Scrutiny Report

2024/2025



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# Foreword

In 2024/2025, Newham Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Commissions have continued to tackle the big issues facing our residents in their daily lives, including finances, housing, health, community safety and education. As our annual report highlights, the work of our Overview and Scrutiny Committee has contributed to accountability and transparency by challenging the decision-makers whilst also helping to shape policies and drive improvements in services to our residents.

Challenge is a healthy part of any decision and policy-making process, and we carried out robust scrutiny of Newham Council's priorities, as identified in the in-year monitoring of the 2024/25 budget, and scrutiny of 2025-26 Draft Budget Proposals which is reporting £49m budget gap, and the Building a Fairer Newham Corporate Plan. We have aligned our work programme where possible with these corporate priorities.

This annual report summarises the main issues which have been reviewed and challenged throughout the municipal year and highlights some of the key achievements.

These include:

- ❖ Scrutinising Newham Council's finances and shaping the Council's budget for 2025-2026 in a challenging financial context;
- ❖ Highlighting concerns about the Royal Victoria Dock Bridge, the Carpenters Estate, People Powered Places, the Populo Living Business Plan, and Juniper Ventures via the Council's call-in procedure; and
- ❖ Reviewing housing demands, challenges and issues.

The next 12 months will be a defining period for our borough, especially in the wake of the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) received for 2025-26 and the Best Value Notice of 8 May 2025. The non-statutory Best Value Notice was issued because the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), though acknowledging that steps are being taken to identify and address issues, remained concerned as to Newham Council's capacity to comply with its best value duty under the Local Government Act 1999. We in Scrutiny have been of the same view, as is borne out in our various reports and decisions to exercise our call-in prerogative.

The MHCLG has identified for review the roles and responsibilities and scrutiny processes to enable more effective decision-making. Scrutiny has taken steps in collaboration with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and via the Council's on-going Constitutional Review Work Group to this effect.

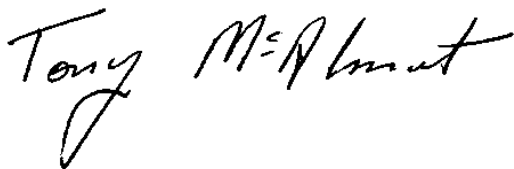
We are conscious of our role in informing Council policy, budget and key decisions. In the last three years, Budget Scrutiny has highlighted significant areas of risk to Newham Council's finances and services, via reports and recommendations to the Mayor, Cabinet and Full Council. The scrutiny commissions have maintained oversight of the risks to our vulnerable residents and the impact on council finances, including the £106m Temporary Accommodation overspend predicted of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy period, arising from Newham Council's management of temporary accommodation. That is why the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has reviewed five Cabinet and key decisions, valuing cumulatively at approximately £1.4 billion via the call-in procedure.

We have explored particular issues in-depth, such as Newham Council's C4 grading from

the Regulator of Social Housing, educators' roles in supporting Black boys, community safety, and the impact of population growth through the work strand of "Meeting Newham's Future Needs". Scrutiny also continued its work to better understand and address via recommendations the difficulties faced by our Black children and young men. These include persistent, ongoing obstacles to positive achievement and attainment of wellbeing, through the combination of class, environment and structural poverty. The disparities are not just statistical - they translate into real, lived struggles for many young Black boys and males in the London Borough of Newham. Issues such as racial profiling, low school expectations and permanent exclusion, housing instability, and mental health stigma form a complex web of disadvantage, affecting not only educational and career prospects, but also identity, belonging, and wellbeing.

Nominated a Borough of Sanctuary in October 2024, our borough is one of the most diverse in the country and our residents speak over 100 languages. We aim to reflect this vibrant diversity and embrace diverse experience within our scrutiny committee membership. Independent advisors and co-opted members sit alongside local politicians as we conduct our statutory work to hold decision-makers to account, bringing additional diversity of thought and expertise.

My thanks go to those committee members, Executive Members, and Council officers, who attended meetings and participated in our scrutiny work, in a variety of ways. I should also like to thank our external witnesses and partner organisations for their contributions, by providing information and attending meetings to present reports and answer questions in support of the Scrutiny function. Overview and Scrutiny has residents at its heart, with a mandate to amplify the voice of our residents and I would like to thank witnesses, including those from the voluntary sector and the general public, who contributed to our meetings and shared both their expertise and lived experiences with us.

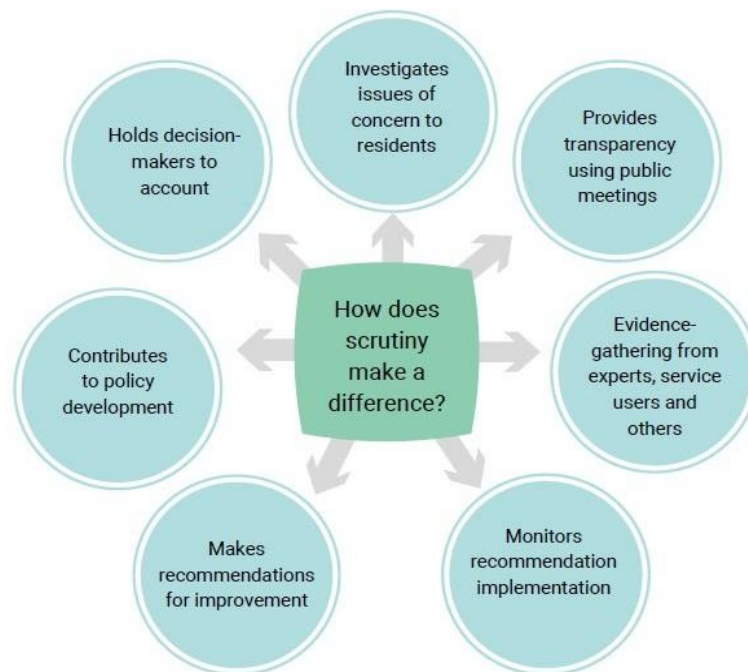


**Councillor Anthony McAlmont**  
***Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee***



# Overview and Scrutiny at Newham Council

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the local democratic governance arrangements for local authorities in England and Wales. It provides a vehicle for elected non-Executive councillors to influence the development of Council policy and to enhance transparency and accountability to the public. It can also drive improved service provision and strategic decision-making.



Newham Council is a mayoral authority, where decisions are taken by a directly-elected Mayor leading a Cabinet of Executive Members. Newham has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee that can establish scrutiny commissions to undertake work on particular areas and to scrutinise decisions taken by the Executive.<sup>1</sup>

In 2024-2025, the Committee established four main thematic Scrutiny Commissions, to consider issues across different service areas and to reflect the portfolio arrangements of the Cabinet.

These scrutiny commissions were:

- Crime, Environment and Transport Scrutiny Commission;
- Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission;
- Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission; and
- Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission.

In addition, the Committee also established “task and finish” scrutiny commissions to look at particular issues. These were:

- the Budget Scrutiny Commission (a permanent work stream);
- the Budget Scrutiny In-Year Working Party (ad hoc); and
- the Relationship Between Black Boys and the Borough Scrutiny Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> The stated role and terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Newham Council is set out in [Article 6 of the Newham Council Constitution](#).



## Call-In

The “Call-In” procedure at Newham Council provides a way for non-Executive Members of the Council to refer Executive decisions to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before implementation. Call-in is one of several checks and balances available to scrutiny and present in the Constitution to ensure effective decision-making and to enhance governance and accountability. It is a vital safety valve that enables a decision to be revisited, where there are serious issues or concerns. Once a decision has been called in, the matter must be included on the agenda of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for review.<sup>2</sup> Last year, the OSC called in one Cabinet decision (10 Victoria Street); over the course of this municipal year, four Cabinet Decisions and one Officer Key Decision were called in and referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review through the Council’s Call-In procedure. The five decisions called in were:

- the [Royal Victoria Dock Bridge](#);
- the [Carpenters Estate](#);
- the [People Powered Places programme](#);
- the [Populo Living 2025/2026 Business Plan](#); and
- Juniper Ventures.

More details can be found in the section on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at page 8.

<sup>2</sup>The Local Government Act 2000 requires councils in England operating Executive decision making arrangements to establish a Call In mechanism allowing executive decisions to be “called in” for review by its scrutiny committees ([s9F\(4\), Local Government Act 2000](#)).

## Key Achievements in 2024-2025

- ❖ Playing a formative role in shaping Newham Council's financial approach in 2024/2025, providing robust challenge and highlighting key areas of risk to the Council's finances and services through scrutiny of Newham Council's budget proposals for 2025-26, including the acceptance of the Budget Scrutiny recommendations by the Executive and Council.
- ❖ Pushing for stronger housing service data and information improved data analysis, leading to greater understanding of the cohorts.
- ❖ Promoting the use of disproportionality and attendance data into school governance, to support improved oversight of exclusion and reintegration strategies, and to endorse the importance of early intervention following review of the Child Protection Annual Report.
- ❖ Highlighting the risks to vulnerable residents and the impact on Council finances through ongoing oversight of Newham Council's management of temporary accommodation and housing, following the judgement of the Regulator of Social Housing.
- ❖ Reviewing the Cabinet decision to build the Royal Victoria Dock Bridge with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration.
- ❖ Reviewing the Cabinet decision concerning the Carpenters Estate with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration.
- ❖ Reviewing the Cabinet decision concerning the People Powered Places with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration
- ❖ Reviewing the Cabinet decision concerning the Populo Living 2025/2026 Business Plan with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration
- ❖ Reviewing the Officer Key Decision concerning Juniper Ventures
- ❖ Delivering a year-long scrutiny review into how services and infrastructure are planning to respond to one of London's most significant population increases, culminating in the *Meeting Newham's Future Needs* report, with 21 of 22 recommendations accepted through a joint executive response from Newham Council and the Newham Health and Care Partnership.
- ❖ Shaping the draft 2025–30 Air Quality Action Plan ahead of public consultation by calling for the latest LAEI figures to benchmark progress, stronger integration with transport and public health priorities, and clearer messaging on Silvertown Tunnel commitments, and pressing for joint scrutiny on air pollution's health impacts.
- ❖ Securing Cabinet commitment to review and refresh Newham Council's Emergency Housing Policy, following scrutiny concerns about rent arrears as a barrier for residents facing safety risks, and highlighting the need for clearer and more inclusive support pathways for those experiencing violence, harassment or other urgent circumstances.
- ❖ Challenging proposed parking policy changes, prompting revisions to retain all visitor permits, introducing a one-hour option, limiting price increases, and strengthening co-production through equalities forums in future reviews.
- ❖ Identifying dataset gaps, enabling greater visibility for the cohort of Black boys and young and stronger responses to the disproportionate impacts on Black boys and young men.

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the Council's main scrutiny committee. It undertakes scrutiny of corporate and cross-cutting issues itself and by setting up scrutiny commissions to undertake particular areas of work each year.

It also considers Executive Decisions that have been requested for review under the Council's Call-In procedure.

## *Membership of the Overview and Committee:*

- ❖ *Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair*
- ❖ Councillor Rita Chadha
- ❖ Councillor Joshua Garfield\*
- ❖ Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- ❖ Councillor Lester Hudson
- ❖ Councillor Carleene Lee-Phakoe
- ❖ Councillor Susan Masters
- ❖ Councillor Mehmood Mirza
- ❖ Councillor Terence Paul
- ❖ Councillor Lakmini Shah
- ❖ Mr Paul Leslie, Voluntary Sector Representative (Co-opted Member)
- ❖ Ms Ellen Kemp, MBE Diocese of Chelmsford (Co-opted Member).

## Key Areas of Work in 2024/25

- Council performance, including budget performance
- Calling in Cabinet and Officer decisions
- Regulator of Social Housing
- Governance and risk
- Finances

## Council Performance

Throughout this year the Committee considered Newham Council's organisational performance and delivery of the *Building a Fairer Newham* Council Corporate Plan, with questions to the Mayor and chief officers.

The Committee has also maintained oversight of the Council's budget performance throughout the year, scrutinising key areas of overspend, underspend and emerging financial risks.

As was the case last year, Temporary Accommodation has continued to be a significant contributory factor to Newham Council's financial pressures, with a housing list numbering some 37,000 households. The Committee focused on the Council's strategy to manage provision of temporary accommodation, with a substantial increase in placement of people in hotels, which has an impact on the quality and appropriateness of provision. The Committee reviewed options for more sustainable provision, and the impact of Temporary Accommodation on the Council's finances.

“As the Chair of our Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with more than a decade fulfilling this role, my guiding principle in our conduct of scrutiny has always been this: how can we deliver for residents? Residents are at the heart of scrutiny, and, in line with our statutory role as a scrutiny function, we aim to amplify the resident's voice and deliver world-class services here in our borough. The last five years have seen a global pandemic, with health and social inequalities being highlighted starkly, regional conflicts, and a cost-of-living crisis. As we know, global forces have an impact at the local level and this is visible in the work of our Committee. We, as elected members and scrutineers, strive to support our residents as we collectively navigate regional and international challenges played out in the local Newham context and conduct this scrutiny of the decision-makers and the organisation.

Collaboration is key as we endeavour to provide constructive challenge and to consider new, creative approaches to familiar issues. We have shared our concerns about finances, optimism bias and organisational culture, and look to building on work conducted and lessons learnt in 2024/2025 in the next year.”

***Councillor Anthony McAlmont  
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee***

## Calling In Cabinet Decisions

### **Royal Victoria Dock Bridge**

A decision of the Cabinet made on 4 June 2024 concerning the *Royal Victoria Dock Bridge – Allocation from Capital Programme* was referred for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with Newham Council's Call In procedure. The [Cabinet report](#) and its appendices (including the Exempt Appendix 2) were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 4 June 2024 and provide the background to the Cabinet Decision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 24 July 2024 and reviewed the decision with questions to the Mayor as the portfolio lead and departmental officers. The Committee, having reviewed the Cabinet Decision, resolved to refer the Executive Decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, stating its concerns and recommendations. The reasons for the referral included: the wider economic and regeneration benefits; the extra specifications of the enhanced Royal Victoria Dock Bridge; financial and legal considerations, including costs to Newham Council (£49.5 m over the term of the loan); the absence of a Gross Value Added report; questions concerning the Value for Money, Fairer Newham objectives; and governance issues, including the level of information provided in the Cabinet report.

### **Carpenters Estate**

A decision of the Cabinet made on 4 February 2025 concerning the *Restoration and Regeneration of the Carpenters Estate: Programme Update* was referred for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), in accordance with the Council's Call In procedure. The [Cabinet report](#) and its appendices (including the Exempt Appendices A-F and Non-Exempt Appendices G-K) were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2025.

In light of special urgency measures, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 18 February 2025<sup>3</sup> and reviewed the decision with questions to the Mayor and Cllr Blossom Young as the portfolio holders and departmental officers. The Committee, having reviewed the Cabinet Decision, resolved to refer the Executive Decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, stating the concerns and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee's reasons for the referral to Cabinet were as follows: a need for independent financial review (including public/private partnerships, optimal tenure mix and ways of reducing Newham Council's financial exposure), revised governance arrangements and board membership (including two councillors) for Populo, an internal audit of procurement costs, and comparison and alignment with Affordable Homes for Newham.

### **People Powered Places**

A decision of the Cabinet made on 4 February 2025 concerning the *Development of the People Powered Places Programme 2025-2027* was referred for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), in accordance with the Council's Call In procedure. The attached [Cabinet report](#) (Appendix A) and its appendices were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2025 and provide the background to the Cabinet Decision.

In light of special urgency measures, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 18 February 2025 and reviewed the decision with questions to Cllr Charlene McLean as the portfolio holder, statutory officers and departmental officers. The Committee, having reviewed the Cabinet Decision, resolved to refer the Executive Decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, stating the concerns and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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<sup>3</sup> Both meetings to call in these decisions were required to be held before the budget –setting Full Council of 27 February 2025 and allowing sufficient time for Cabinet to respond to the recommendations before that date. The necessitated re-scheduling the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission meeting of 18 February 2025 to a later date in March.

The Committee's reasons for the referral to Cabinet included alternative approaches for the allocation of NCIL funding, establishing a Neighbourhood Improvement Fund, targeted Grant Programmes, Match-Funding Approaches, A Community Asset Transfer Programme, a Commissioned Services Model through community consultation, and tangible, measurable implementation.

### **Populo Living 2025/2026 Business Plan**

A decision of the Cabinet made on 4 March 2025 concerning the *Populo Living 2025/2026 Business Plan* was referred for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), in accordance with the Council's Call In procedure. The [Cabinet report](#) and its appendices were considered by the Cabinet at [its meeting on 4 March 2025](#) and provide the background to the Cabinet Decision.

In light of special urgency measures, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 25 March 2025 and reviewed the decision with questions to the Mayor, Cllr Zulfiqar Ali and Cllr Blossom Young as the portfolio holders and departmental officers. The Committee, having reviewed the Cabinet Decision, resolved to refer the Executive Decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, stating the concerns and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee's reasons for the referral to Cabinet included identifying the need for a written five-year strategic Business Plan, a moratorium on all new Populo developments, sequencing of Cabinet approval of Council subsidiary business plans and budgets before the February Full Council, annual review by the Audit Committee, commissioning a forensic audit, and assessing and analysing the impact of the [Procurement Act 2023](#).

### **Juniper Ventures**

An Officer Key Decision made on 15 April 2025 concerning *Juniper Ventures* was referred for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), in accordance with the Council's Call In procedure. The [report](#) and its appendices provide the background to this Decision.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 8 and 21 May 2025 and reviewed the decision with questions to Cllr Sarah Ruiz and Cllr Neil Wilson as the portfolio holders and departmental officers. The Committee, having reviewed the Officer Key Decision, stated its concerns around equal pay and a two-tier workforce.

## **Governance and Risk**

The Committee reviewed Newham Council's governance and risk management strategies and arrangements, including the Council's risks profile, how they might impact on the delivery of the Council's priorities and sought assurance that the governance and risk management processes in place are effective.

The Committee made suggestions for improvement, which included closer oversight of gaps in the risk register, with entries and information in each entry kept up to date and checked on a more regular basis and that there should be more definitive clarity of the respective roles and relationships between the Audit Committee and scrutiny committees and functions.

## **Finances**

With 2024/2025 a year of continuing financial pressure and service transformation, the Committee provided essential challenge and added value to decision-making when scrutinising Newham Council's finances. This was conducted in various ways over the course of the municipal year, whether through budget scrutiny vehicles, the work programme of the OSC itself or as a priority of the four Scrutiny Commissions. The work programme of the Committee included focus on budget



performance, Newham Council's Borrowing Strategy, the projected £175 million budget gap by 2026, revisiting the Building a Fairer Newham Corporate Plan, the Liz Truss budget and the central government funding gap.

## Regulator of Social Housing

At its meeting in November 2024, the Committee also scrutinised Newham Council's C4 rating from the Regulator of Social Housing. The Committee expressed strong concern over how the failures were allowed to accumulate, the accuracy and integrity of compliance data, governance arrangements and lines of accountability, resident engagement and complaints handling, and capacity to deliver housing responsibilities in-house. Updates were provided on the accelerated programme of inspections, compliance checks, and recruitment of additional staff to strengthen housing compliance. The Committee was informed that an external review had been commissioned to assess housing services and data systems.

The Committee discussed how the Council would assure itself—and its tenants—that such failings would not be repeated and recommended that housing performance and compliance data be subject to regular scrutiny oversight. There was consensus on the need for cultural change in the housing service and a long-term improvement plan linked to regulatory expectations. The Committee received assurances that the Cabinet and colleagues would be working together to address the failings identified and that there would be transparency regarding governance, the improvement plan and the programme of works in response to the grading.

# Budget Scrutiny Commission

The Budget Scrutiny Commission was established to review the Mayor's draft Budget Proposals for 2025-2026 and to make any reports and recommendations through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Mayor and Cabinet and to full Council.

**“ Local government plays a crucial role for our society, providing many of the basic public services, influencing our residents' daily lives, and also enhancing them, as an important investor in infrastructure. Yet, alarmingly, since 2010 investment in (and therefore by) local government dropped substantially as a result of austerity measures, which resulted in lower central government grants to local authorities. The national landscape in 2025 remains one of local authorities continuing to navigate chronic constraints and financial failures. The Budget Scrutiny Commission's work was conducted in this context, with high stakes for our authority, facing even starker financial choices. Whilst recognising valiant efforts and that current overspending may be a result of historic underfunding, we nevertheless recommended tighter grip in areas of discretionary spending that we cannot currently afford, even if this means grasping nettles. There are no easy answers or decisions. Decisions made even less than a year ago may not be the right decisions now, in light of LB Newham's current financial health.**

**Until local authorities are empowered with resources to match our responsibilities for demand-led, high-need services - resources that extend meaningfully beyond a sticking plaster - then we as a council must navigate risks and take fast grip on hard decisions today to prioritise tomorrow's financial viability in order to continue to serve our resident. Effective budget scrutiny is key to this.”**

**Councillor Anthony McAlmont  
- Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Commission**

## **Membership of the Budget Scrutiny Commission:**

- ❖ Councillor Anthony McAlmont – Chair
- ❖ Councillor Rita Chadha
- ❖ Councillor Stephanie Garfield
- ❖ Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- ❖ Councillor Lester Hudson
- ❖ Councillor Danny Keeling
- ❖ Councillor Susan Masters
- ❖ Councillor Thelma Odoi
- ❖ Councillor Terrence Paul
- ❖ Councillor Lakmini Shah
- ❖ Councillor Harvinder Singh Virdee

## **Key Areas of Work in 2025/2026**

- ❖ Scrutiny of the Council's the 'in-year' budget position, performance and risks for 2024/25
- ❖ Review of the Executive's Draft Budget Proposals for 2025-2026;
- ❖ A report and recommendations to the Mayor and Cabinet and full Council.

The Newham Council Constitution requires the Executive to refer its initial budget proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration each year. Following the start of the 2024/2025 municipal year, in June 2024, the BSC Chair was invited by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to speak as a panel member about how Newham Council conducts financial and budget scrutiny at an event attended by 70 members and officers from a variety of local authorities.

As last year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the Budget Scrutiny Commission to scrutinise the Mayor's Draft Budget Proposals. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also opted to scrutinise Newham Council's finances through an additional vehicle this year, with groundwork for the Budget Scrutiny Commission being conducted through the establishment of the Budget Scrutiny In-Year Working Party (the Working Party), composed of up to seven members (the four scrutiny commission chairs and three additional members).

The Working Party examined in-year performance and budget monitoring for the financial year 2024/2025. This followed an informal meeting of scrutiny chairs in early August and was in line with the recommendations of the Budget Scrutiny Commission in 2023/2024. These had included a recommendation that budget scrutiny commence earlier in the municipal year, such as before the summer recess.

The Budget Scrutiny In-Year Working Party operated as a rapid response task group, established exceptionally by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the Council's in-year budget position and other financial matters in a context of financial challenges. It was composed of Cllrs Rita Chadha, Lester Hudson, Susan Masters, Anthony McAlmont, Terence Paul and Lakmini Shah, and was chaired by Cllr Hudson.

The remit of this Working Party was to:

- review and scrutinise the in-year budget performance, position and risks;
- receive and review the Budget Monitoring Reports (management accounts); and
- feed into the work of the Budget Scrutiny Commission.

Building on the findings of the Working Party, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee via its Budget Scrutiny Commission had to satisfy itself and report to the Executive and Council whether it believed that the £496m General Fund budget, efficiency savings (£32.2m), service growth (£128m) and delivery plans (as identified in the 2025/26 Draft Budget Proposals) would meet the priorities identified in the *Building a Fairer Newham* Corporate Plan. This was consistent with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's responsibility to ascertain what actions have been taken to identify and address organisational over-spending, especially in areas such as temporary accommodation, adult social care and children's services, where overspend has tended historically to be recurrent and whether realistic strategies were in place.

Last year, Newham Council had larger than expected in-year overspend and depleted levels of reserves in a challenging financial context. The Budget Scrutiny Commission's recommendations, which were accepted, had an impact on the financial viability of Newham Council as well as having an impact on Newham lives, such as, for example, via its recommendations concerning increased modelling numbers for Temporary Accommodation, usage of 10 Victoria Street and Newham Sparks.

This year, the challenges over the Medium Term Financial Strategy period have continued. In-year for instance, the 2024/25 budget is reporting a £45.5m budget gap. The £31m temporary accommodation overspend has largely contributed to this gap. However, there are other factors such as social care, undelivered efficiency savings and failure to secure the £16m Exceptional Financial Support from central government.

In light of the £45.5m in-year budget gap and £59.2m of capital financing reserves, the Council was given permission by central government for an increase of 8.99% in its Council Tax rates and made an application

for Exceptional Financial Support for £16m for 2024/25 and £51.2m for 2025/26 (£67.2m total) from central government. The forecasted budget gap for next year is £84m, however, even with council tax increases and the identified savings, this will leave a deficit of £46.9m. These are indications of the Council's continued, severe financial pressures and a possible Section 114 notice over the MTFS period.

The Commission held evidence-gathering sessions to scrutinise the Draft Budget Proposals for 2025/2026, organised according to themes; *People, Place* and *Resources*. This complemented the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in monitoring budget performance throughout the year.

Following the publication of the Draft Budget Proposals for 2025/26 on 24 December 2024, the Commission conducted three thematic evidence-gathering sessions. The Commission heard in evidence that Newham Council was expecting to overspend its budget by £157m, including Temporary Accommodation (£106m, in 2025/26).

At the end of the inquiry, ten strategic recommendations (in addition to additional efficiency recommendations) were made to the Executive, aimed at maintaining core services whilst addressing the overspend. The scrutiny recommendations reversed some savings proposals, identified efficiencies, offered alternative approaches to financial assumptions and planning strategy, and addressed Newham budget timetables and access to information.

The Budget Scrutiny Report and recommendations can be accessed [here](#).

The report and recommendations were received by [Cabinet on 18 February 2025](#), which broadly accepted six of the Commission's ten strategic recommendations. The Executive Response to the Budget Scrutiny Report and Recommendations can be found [here](#).



***“This has been another extraordinary year, with the stakes high for Newham Council and our residents. The Budget Scrutiny Commission was aware of the financial challenges facing local government generally and for Newham Council specifically. This was illustrated in the dialogue with central government and the need for Exceptional Financial Support. There are lessons to be harvested from this year’s budget scrutiny process, requiring changes to organisational culture and embracing parity of esteem. We know, both as Executive and Scrutiny Members, that it is necessary to make savings if we are to manage demand, meet need and fulfil statutory duties with less money and support our residents in all aspects of their daily lives. ”***

**Councillor Anthony McAlmont  
Chair - Budget Scrutiny Commission**

# Crime, Environment and Transport

The Crime, Environment and Transport Scrutiny Commission scrutinises Council policies and services relating to the environment, sustainable transport, and community safety, including oversight of the Newham Community Safety Partnership.

**“ This year, the Commission has focused on how services respond to real challenges in our communities — from scrutinising the council’s response to residential antisocial behaviour to securing a review of emergency housing pathways for residents at risk. We’ve strengthened oversight of waste services by pressing for a clear roadmap to meet recycling targets, supported improvements in air quality planning and sustainable transport, and held partners to account through the Community Safety Partnership. We’ve also pushed for better use of shared data and more joined-up, evidence-led approaches to keeping our neighbourhoods safe. Across every item, our focus has been on action, accountability, and making Newham’s neighbourhoods safer, cleaner, and more inclusive for everyone. ”**

**Councillor Terence Paul,  
Chair - Crime, Environment and Transport Scrutiny Commission**

## **Membership of the Crime, Environment and Transport Scrutiny Commission:**

- ❖ Councillor Terence Paul – Chair
- ❖ Councillor Femi Falola
- ❖ Councillor Shantu Ferdous
- ❖ Councillor Stephanie Garfield
- ❖ Councillor Nate Higgins
- ❖ Councillor Dina Hossain
- ❖ Councillor Sabia Kamali (from February 2025)
- ❖ Councillor Carleene Lee-Phakoe
- ❖ Councillor Jemima McAlmont
- ❖ Councillor Thelma Odoi
- ❖ Councillor Simon Rush

## **Key Areas of Work in 2024/25**

- Community Safety (including the Serious Violence Duty, NICE Model and Youth Safety Strategy)
- Emergency Housing Policy Review
- Recycling and Waste Strategy Development
- Parks, Biodiversity and Maintenance
- Landlord Licensing Scheme
- Residential Anti-Social Behaviours
- Sustainable Transport, Highways and Parking Strategy
- Air Quality Action Plan Consultation



## **Community Safety Partnerships and Serious Violence Duty**

In October 2024, the Commission focused on Community Safety. The Commission reviewed partnership performance under Newham Council’s Community Safety Partnership and

implementation of the Serious Violence Duty. Members considered progress on data-led enforcement, youth-focused interventions, and ongoing challenges such as court delays and digital reporting tools. The Commission also examined Stop and Search, neighbourhood policing, and hate crime responses, requesting further data and updates to support oversight of targeted interventions and strategic alignment.

The Commission also reviewed early implementation of the Newham Integrated Community Enforcement (NICE) model, designed to improve coordination across services tackling ASB and public safety. Members welcomed the model's collaborative and preventative approach, while seeking clarity on roles, performance measures, and plans for public-facing activity. The committee also raised issues around enforcement in privately managed areas, modern slavery, and the borough's sex worker strategy, requesting further updates and a follow-up report to support continued oversight.

The Commission scrutinised progress on the draft Youth Safety Strategy ahead of its publication. Members welcomed the shift toward a streamlined, partnership-led framework, consolidating nearly 100 actions into 26 cross-agency priorities. The strategy's focus on early intervention and child-centred approaches was noted, alongside the integration of youth voice through engagement activities. Members raised concerns about long-term financial sustainability, noting a significant projected reduction in grant funding for 2025–26, and sought greater clarity on outcomes, alignment with wider strategies, and plans for monitoring impact. The committee requested sight of the final strategy and proposed follow-up on areas including knife crime, youth exploitation, and links to the MOPAC Drugs Commission.

## Emergency Housing Policy Review

Following scrutiny concerns about rent arrears acting as a barrier to emergency housing for residents facing safety risks, the Cabinet Member committed to initiating a full review and refresh of Newham Council's Emergency Housing Policy. The Commission highlighted the need for clearer, more inclusive pathways to support residents experiencing violence, harassment or other urgent risk factors.

## Recycling and Waste Strategy Development

The Commission tracked key developments in Newham's waste and recycling services, including improved street cleanliness, service restructuring, and the East London Waste Authority (ELWA) re-procurement. Members welcomed a shift away from the previous PFI model towards more flexible, outcome-based waste stream incentives, and suggested a clear roadmap be developed to support delivery of the borough's 50% recycling aspiration. They also encouraged stronger use of local operational data—particularly on complaints and fly-tipping hotspots—and recommended integrating trend analysis into the council's new waste management system. The Commission reviewed plans for borough-wide food waste collection, welcomed learning from the pilot, and noted progress in securing funding. It also welcomed the launch of the Tidy Team, which contributed to a reduction in reported fly-tipping through more proactive clearance, including on private land, and suggested clearer communication of the council's responsibilities across different land types.

## Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030 Consultation

In response to the consultation, the Commission welcomed the policy's focus on women's safety and drink spiking but suggested broadening the language to reflect that spiking affects a wider range of residents. This feedback, echoed by other consultees, led to revised wording in the final policy to acknowledge wider vulnerabilities while retaining a focus on violence against women and girls. The consultation response led to a revision of the Statement of Licensing Policy 2025–30, with drink spiking reframed as a wider public safety concern. The final policy adopted clearer and more inclusive language on vulnerability, strengthening expectations for licensees.

## Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) Consultation

The Commission supported the draft 2025–30 Air Quality Action Plan proceeding to statutory consultation, subject to the inclusion of the latest available air quality and transport data, including updated 2019 London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (LAEI) figures. Members called for stronger alignment with transport and public health priorities, including clearer differentiation within the plan between the health impacts of poor air quality and other housing-related factors such as damp and mould. The Commission called for improved public messaging around the Silvertown Tunnel, particularly in relation to air quality commitments made during the Development Consent Order process. Members requested information on the uptake of public-facing air quality tools such as Air Aware and AirText to ensure they are accessible, well-publicised, and reaching residents most affected by pollution. The Commission also proposed joint scrutiny with the Health Committee to examine the public health implications of air pollution, including links to respiratory and airborne diseases.

## Parks, Biodiversity and Maintenance

The Commission welcomed Newham Council's shift towards more environmentally sustainable grounds maintenance, including reduced use of glyphosate-based weedkillers and biodiversity-focused practices such as habitat-friendly mowing. Members emphasised the importance of balancing these approaches with effective fire risk management and encouraged monitoring of their implementation.

Members proposed closer collaboration with Public Health to help define and communicate the health benefits of the Beckton Parks Masterplan, recognising the value of clearly articulating outcomes to residents. The importance of embedding biodiversity net gain into new developments was also highlighted, with members noting that where the 10% requirement cannot be met on-site, off-site offsetting should support wider environmental improvements through the planning system. The Committee encouraged the publication of local maintenance performance dashboards to improve transparency and resident understanding of service activity.

## Landlord Licensing Scheme

Reflecting residents' interests, Members' concerns were raised regarding enforcement gaps in unlicensed wards such as Royal Victoria and Olympic Park. Members sought clarification on the thresholds for inclusion under the four statutory licensing criteria—crime, anti-social behaviour, poor housing conditions, and deprivation—and the Council's expanded discretion under the Devolution Bill. The Commission recommended a review of current coverage and requested a breakdown of the process and criteria for potentially including these wards in the scheme.

## Residential Anti-Social Behaviour

The Commission raised concerns about fragmented handling of residential hate crime cases and limitations in the UNIFORM system, which had also been highlighted by the housing regulator. Officers committed to enhancing reporting systems, including the development of a new Power BI dashboard to improve oversight and transparency, with members requesting a walkthrough session once operational.

The Commission also requested a publicly accessible flowchart outlining how ASB cases are escalated and managed across all housing tenures, including housing association properties, with an emphasis on the Council leading by example in setting consistent standards. Additionally, members emphasised the need for clearer triage and referral pathways between police and council services and highlighted the importance of improving digital access to ASB reporting, including removing login requirements and simplifying the user journey.

## Sustainable Transport, Highways

In April 2025, the Commission reviewed the Council's approach to sustainable transport, active travel, highways infrastructure, and parking policy. Members considered progress on the Sustainable Transport Strategy, including active travel initiatives, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), and integration with Air Quality Focus Areas. The importance of borough-wide assessments, new air quality monitoring infrastructure, and alignment with GLA and TfL priorities was discussed.

The Commission also examined road safety measures, including 20mph enforcement and community-led schemes such as Community Road Watch. The Healthy School Streets programme was reviewed for its role in supporting cleaner, safer routes to school and promoting behaviour change.

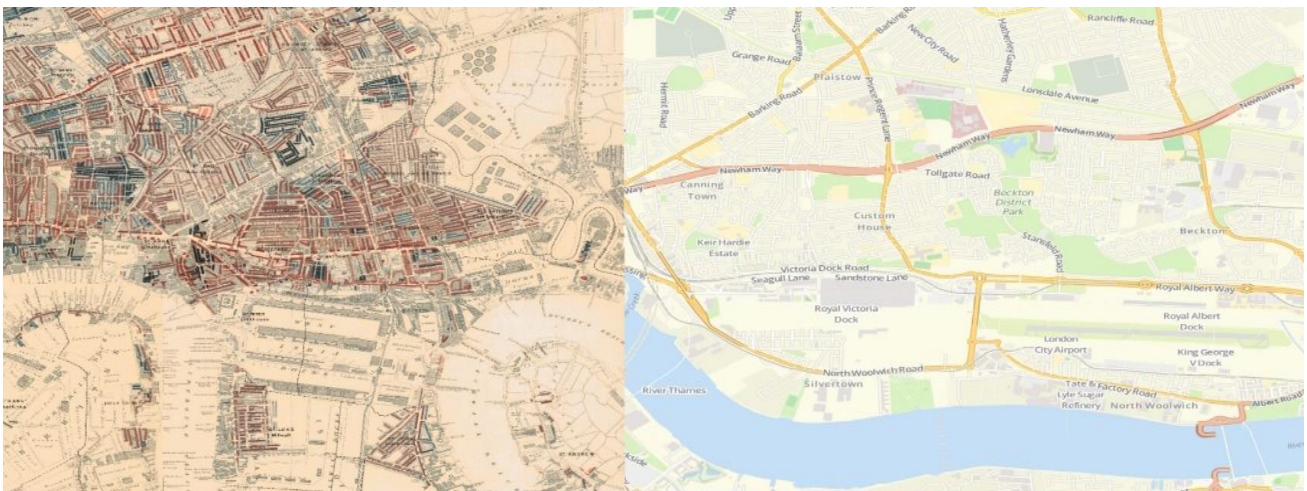
On highways, Members considered progress on major schemes including the Romford Road Public Realm Improvement, and discussed delivery risks linked to funding constraints. The committee reviewed how the council prioritises maintenance, manages congestion, and engages with residents, businesses, and schools in shaping infrastructure projects.

## Parking Strategy

The Commission undertook urgent scrutiny of the Council's proposed parking policy and charges shortly after the close of public consultation. A key area of focus was the proposed removal of existing visitor permit types, which had prompted widespread concern. The Commission helped amplify resident feedback and supported the adoption of a revised approach - retaining the full range of visitor permits, introducing a new 1-hour option, and limiting price changes.

Scrutiny secured commitments to strengthen the Equalities Impact Assessment to better reflect the needs of low-income households, families with disabled children, residents in high-restriction zones, and those regularly receiving home visits. Members also raised concerns about residents covering permit costs for repair contractors, leading to a commitment to clarify guidance for housing providers and tenants.

The Commission challenged gaps in engagement, prompting officers to commit to using the Co-Create platform and involving equalities forums in future consultations. Further action was agreed to review legacy Controlled Parking Zones and improve the flexibility of the digital permit system.



© Extract from Charles Booth's London, London School of Economics and Social Science (2016)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This is an extract of a map taken from Charles Booth's London (including his Poverty Maps and Police Notebooks), held in the Library Archive of the London School of Economics and Political Science. This is available online at: [Map | Charles Booth's London \(lse.ac.uk\)](https://map.lse.ac.uk). [Accessed 10 May 2024].

# Education, Children and Young People

The Education, Children, Young People and Lifelong Scrutiny Commission scrutinises Council services for children and young people, including education, safeguarding, and strategic leadership to support every child in fulfilling their potential.

**“ This year, the Commission has worked with determination to strengthen scrutiny of educational outcomes, tackle disproportionality, and champion the safeguarding of Newham's children and young people. We have challenged practice where needed, supported innovation through initiatives like the Virtual School's collaborative support approach and the Integrated Front Door pilots, and kept the voices and experiences of young people at the centre of our work. I am proud of the commitment shown by all members and officers alike in driving positive change across our borough.”**

**Councillor Lakmini Shah**  
– Chair - Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

## Membership of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission:

- ❖ Councillor Lakmini Shah – Chair
- ❖ Councillor Lester Hudson -Vice Chair
- ❖ Councillor Mariam Dawood
- ❖ Councillor Shantu Ferdous
- ❖ Councillor Alan Griffiths
- ❖ Councillor Imam Haque
- ❖ Councillor Dina Hossain
- ❖ Councillor Jane Lofthouse
- ❖ Councillor Jemima McAlmont
- ❖ Councillor Sophia Naqvi
- ❖ Councillor Salim Patel
- ❖ Ms Ellen Kemp, MBE Diocese of Chelmsford (Co-opted Member).

## Key Areas of Work in 2024/25

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Educational attainment in LB Newham
- School attendance
- Newham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report
- Youth Empowerment
- Youth Justice



## Youth Empowerment

The Commission considered Newham's Youth Empowerment Service, which delivers youth work through youth zones, participation programmes, detached youth work, advocacy services, and return home interviews. Members discussed how young people were influencing decision-making and heard that a new outcomes tool was being developed to better measure impact. The Commission explored service accessibility, and progress against Youth Safety Summit proposals, including counselling in schools and support around exclusions.

## Youth Justice

The Commission reviewed Newham's Youth Justice Service, which applies a child-first model to reduce offending and support vulnerable young people. Members discussed trauma-informed approaches, the risks of exploitation, and efforts to address knife crime. The Commission examined the over-representation of Black children in the youth justice system and received updates on regional partnership work reviewing custody decisions. The Commission was assured that young people had co-designed materials to improve understanding of stop and search rights and requested an update on reoffending rates linked to mediation services.

## Newham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report

The Commission considered the Newham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report, noting planned structural changes in response to *Working Together 2023* and the addition of Education as a statutory partner. Members were informed that recruitment for a new Independent Scrutineer was underway and explored the Partnership's focus on "golden threads" including poverty, safeguarding children with SEND, and learning from serious case reviews. The Commission was assured of progress in autism diagnosis waiting times and improved coordination during waits. Members raised questions about police funding, resourcing pressures, and responses to child sexual abuse. Updates were received on the Single Point of Access pilot, multi-agency safeguarding activity, and intersectional risks related to race, gender, and overcrowded housing. The Commission requested further updates on the local impact of *Working Together 2023* and how learning from the Casey Review is informing safeguarding practice.

## Experiences of Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Commission considered a report on the experiences of children in care and care leavers, noting improved outcomes since 2018 and local work to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic. Members discussed the profile of looked-after children, early support to prevent entry into care, and corporate parenting responsibilities. The Commission explored NEET risks, extended support to age 21, and foster carer recruitment, including the tri-borough hub and incentive campaigns. Officers also outlined HR changes to support care-experienced applicants and how protected status would strengthen equality impact assessments.

## Looked After Children (LAC) Sufficiency Assessments

The Commission reviewed Newham's Looked After Children Sufficiency Assessments, focusing on the rising number of adolescents entering care and the contributing factors of mental health needs, family breakdown, and exploitation. Members stressed the importance of benchmarking with statistical neighbours and sought assurance on safeguarding standards for children placed out of borough. Preventative services including Thriving Communities, Educare, the Turnaround Project, and the Youth Empowerment Service were explored. The Commission also discussed fostering recruitment, encouraging further promotion, and received an update on police engagement to support children's safety.

## SEND Improvement Plan and Virtual School Annual Report

The Commission maintained strategic oversight of Newham's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) improvement journey, considering the SEND Strategic Improvement Plan – Progress Update and supporting strengthened co-production with the Newham Parent Carer Forum following the local area inspection. Members reviewed the Virtual School Annual Report 2023–2024, examining the impact of the Virtual School on education and employment outcomes for care leavers. The Commission supported the development of the Virtual School's family business model and encouraged the expansion of cross-sector apprenticeship opportunities. Areas of focus included improvements to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes, early intervention on mental health needs, preparation for adulthood, and sustained post-16 support for care-experienced young people.

## Educational Inequality and Disproportionality

The Commission considered a report on educational inequality and disproportionality in Newham, noting persistent disparities affecting White and Black Caribbean, White British, and Black African pupils despite strong overall school performance. Officers outlined work with headteachers, SENCOs, and governors to strengthen inclusive practice, while members explored systemic drivers such as poverty and adverse childhood experiences. Attendance, exclusions, and suspensions were also examined, with members emphasising reintegration support and the need to challenge off-rolling. The Commission supported further intersectional analysis and measures to embed more inclusive curricula borough-wide.

## School Attainment and Attendance

The Commission reviewed DfE 2023–24 school attainment and attendance data, noting that the London Borough of Newham's outcomes remained above national averages, though attainment gaps between pupil groups persisted. Persistent absence patterns were explored, with distinct trends across primary and secondary phases. Members noted strong uptake of the borough's traded attendance service and Newham's national reputation for good practice. Concerns about off-rolling were raised, with assurance that cases are robustly challenged. The Commission also noted the end of national Key Stage 1 data collections and received an update on continued multi-agency oversight of Children Missing Education.

## Child Protection Annual Report

The Commission reviewed Newham's Child Protection Annual Report 2023–24, noting improved workforce stability with over 80% of children's social care posts now permanent. Ofsted's focused visit on care leavers confirmed continued progress, while work to address disproportionality—particularly for Black boys—remained a priority. The Commission explored safeguarding procedures for missing children in care and was assured of timely escalation. Youth Justice Service performance showed reduced reoffending and custody rates in line with child-first principles, despite an overall "Requires Improvement" rating. Members also reviewed learning from serious incident reviews and how this had shaped the Youth Safety Strategy and the wider adoption of the borough's relational Circles of Support practice framework.

## Performance Dashboard

Throughout the year, the Commission regularly reviewed the Children's Services Performance Dashboard, monitoring key indicators across safeguarding, education, health, and youth services. Key areas of focus included concerns about missed new birth visits, school suspension rates, disproportionality in exclusions, persistent school absence linked to unauthorised holidays, and an increase in knife injury incidents among young people. The Commission also maintained oversight of Education, Health and Care Plan timeliness and youth violence data.

## Health Adult Social Care

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission is responsible for statutory scrutiny of local health and Adult Social Care services and issues, putting questions to the Council Executive, the Directors of Public Health and Adult Social Care, executives of local NHS bodies and a wide range of other local organisations, patients and service users.

**“ This year our Commission continued to hold partners across Newham’s health and care system to account, focusing on how services are adapting to change, managing financial pressures and ensuring fair access as the borough grows.**

**We scrutinised Newham’s preparedness for the new CQC inspection framework and produced two major reports - one on the impact of population growth on our borough’s health and care system and one on Newham’s approach to keeping our population active. Both were shaped by data, lived experience, and the voice of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector.**

**I am proud that our ‘Meeting Newham’s Future Needs’ report received a full, formal response from partners. As we face continued demand and system change, both locally and nationally, we remain focused on ensuring that services are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the changing needs of Newham’s diverse communities.”**

**Councillor Susan Masters**

**Chair of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission**

### **Membership of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission:**

- ❖ Councillor Susan Masters – Chair
- ❖ Councillor Nur Begum
- ❖ Councillor Liz Cronin
- ❖ Councillor Mohammed Gani
- ❖ Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- ❖ Councillor John Gray
- ❖ Councillor Belgica Guaña
- ❖ Councillor Danny Keeling
- ❖ Councillor Joy Laguda, MBE
- ❖ Councillor Jane Lofthouse
- ❖ Councillor Melanie Onovo<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Councillor Onovo became a Cabinet Member following Full Council on 16 December 2024 and therefore was subsequently not a Member of this Commission for the remainder of the municipal year.

## Key Areas of Work in 2024/25

- Meeting Newham's Future Needs
- Adult Safeguarding
- CQC Adult Social Care framework
- Health Literacy
- 0-19 healthcare
- Leisure Services

## Emerging Issues

The primary aim of health scrutiny is to strengthen the voice of local people, ensuring that the needs and experiences are considered as an integral part of the commissioning and delivery of effective, safe health services. With this focus, the Commission retained a standing item to allow external partners and Council officers to present emerging issues, celebrate successes or enable Scrutiny Members to discuss local implications of concerns identified at national or regional levels.

In 2024/2025, this covered a range of issues including the national statement on adult social care reform, the prospective junior doctors' pay deal, safeguarding equity and cultural competency, the expansion of community diagnostics and elective care, and the implications of changes to NHS England for the borough, alongside a regular update on adult safeguarding.

## Health Scrutiny at Newham Council

Newham's Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission has powers to reach beyond the borough's geographic footprint to request attendance by, and hold to account, stakeholders from across the borough-wide health and care system. In the current scrutiny year, four public meetings were held, following on from an informal session to agree a work programme. Each meeting consisted of two substantive items, following on from a half-hour open floor. This standing item on emerging matters enabled members to ask questions on any relevant matters arising in the system but equally for partners to raise any issues or changes they are seeing on the ground.

The 2024/2025 work programme retained a tight focus on two key areas: Finance (given the challenges currently being experienced by the council and wider system) and (in advance of its first inspection) the council's readiness for the new CQC Adult Social Care framework. The golden thread of equity, which has run through the commission's work strands over the last three years, remained at the heart of its sessions.

Two reports have been produced in-year. A one-year investigation of the borough's response to one of London's largest population expansions, culminated in a round-up session in July and a report delivered to Cabinet in December. Newham's population expected to grow by 110,000 (around a third) between 2020 and 40, with the largest cohort expansion being recorded among the over 60s. The report queries the accuracy of such predictions but also the readiness of the system, across the board, to manage such an increase.

Historically, scrutiny reports making recommendations to stakeholders across the system have only received verbal responses from organisations outside of the council; the 'Meeting Newham's Future Needs' report, however, was the first to see a combined executive response, incorporating written responses from across the system, delivered by Newham Council's Cabinet. The report made twenty-two recommendations; all, barring one, were agreed by partners. The recommendations related to the strengthening of local leadership, reviews of funding formulae, population tracking, enhancement of local pharmacy services, protecting non-digital communication pathways, improving the alignment of networks of GPs, the structure of primary care services, monitoring of public health spend, improvement of mental and acute health services, an improved approach to prevention, support for a council of voluntary service and a stronger voice for residents and the Voluntary Community and Faith Sector.

A second report on the Council's approach to getting Newham' population more active will also be delivered. Despite its role as an Olympic host borough, Newham residents are recorded as being among the least active in England. The commission dedicated two sessions to looking at leisure opportunities in the borough. The resulting report will look at the data and local strategies designed to address this but equally the arrival of a new provider – Better (Greenwich Leisure Ltd) – to run our leisure centres, as well as the decisions being made, more widely, in terms of our local activities offer (from yoga and Tai Chi to tennis and football), in the face of financial pressures. The intention is that this could then build into a further report on the borough's approach to healthy weight, given that both have a vital impact on the future health and wellbeing of our residents.

In terms of the CQC inspection framework introduced following the 2022 Health and Social Care Act, the commission dedicated two sessions to LBN's preparedness. One, held in October looked at adult safeguarding practise. As the annual Safeguarding Adults Board report had been delayed, this was then picked up as part of the Standing Item on Emerging Matters in January. January was also the meeting where Newham Council used findings of a Peer Review to scrutinise the borough's wider readiness for the CQC. The CQC has started its inspection – which is likely to last for a number of months – updates (both in and outside of meetings) will be a standing item for the commission and the Chair will be one of those consulted by the CQC as part of their examination process.

Three other items were considered by the Commission in-year. External stakeholders had requested scrutiny of Health Literacy in the Borough, resulting in a session in January. This was prompted by concerns that a focus on lack of education and language barriers was masking issues such as use of overly complex jargon within services. In October, the Commission also delved into 0-19 Health Services as the service entered another restructure, recommending that the service be returned to NHS management. The Commission also looked at plans to transform community mental health services.

## Inner North East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Newham Council is also represented on the Inner North East London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (INEL JHOSC), which is a joint committee established to consider regional and sub-regional NHS service developments and changes that impact on local health services.

This scrutiny committee is made up of made up of a delegated number of scrutiny councillors from six local authorities. These include the City of London Corporation, the London Borough of Hackney, the London Borough of Newham, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the London Borough Waltham Forest. Representatives from Redbridge Council attend as observers. This municipal year, Waltham Forest hosted the Joint Committee; these hosting responsibilities will pass to the City of London Corporation after May 2025.

In July 2023, Councillor Masters, Chair of this Commission was appointed Vice-Chair of the INEL JHOSC. Newham Council was also represented on the Joint Committee in 2024/25 by Councillors Danny Keeling and Melanie Onovo.

This year, the Joint Committee scrutinised system-level changes in the local health system in two meetings; more meetings were not held as planned due to election constraints. The Joint Committee met on 6 November 2024 and 5 March 2025.



At the November meeting, progress was reported in reducing elective care backlogs, including the use of surgical robots to enhance treatment efficiency and recovery times. Cllr Melanie Onovo emphasised the importance of robust follow-up care and community support for mental health patients post-discharge to prevent relapses and emergency presentations. Discussions of the Focus on Specialised Services report examined the delegation of specialised commissioning from NHS England to the Integrated Care Board (ICB), with a focus on addressing local needs and integrating care pathways. Cllr Susan Masters supported increased local authority involvement in specialised services, such as home dialysis and advocated for incorporating place-based approaches. Cllr Masters also welcomed future reports to monitor the impact of the transition on local service delivery.

In addition to the usual Provider and System Updates, the Joint Committee received “deep dive” presentations on Maternity and Neonatal Care, and services for Long Term Conditions across North East London. The Best Start in Life: Shaping Future Maternity and Neonatal Services agenda item focused on service redesign, including standalone midwifery-led units and pathways for low- and high-risk pregnancies. Members highlighted the importance of addressing perinatal mental health and ensuring equitable access to care as integral parts of the redesign.

The March meeting of the Joint Committee focused on Primary Care and the NEL Anti-Racism Framework. The Joint Committee also scrutinised key developments including work around long-term conditions, the Provider Updates and NHS finance, where the NHS NEL MTFS update confirmed a £247 million underlying deficit for 2024/25.

# Housing and Regeneration

The Housing and Regeneration Experience Scrutiny Commission plays an important role in scrutinising housing and housing delivery within the borough. Newham residents face major challenges because of the housing crisis, including a lack of secure, affordable housing; and poor quality housing, which has an impact on public health pressures and life outcomes.

**“ The London Borough of Newham has the longest housing list in London, with 37,000 households on our list. Housing policy in particular is complex, as the needs and demands are acute, chronic and often connected to other areas of our residents’ lives, such as health, employment or education. Shelter is a basic human right and the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission therefore has an important role in scrutinising these services and how they meet our residents’ needs historically, in the present and for the future.”**

**Councillor Anthony McAlmont**

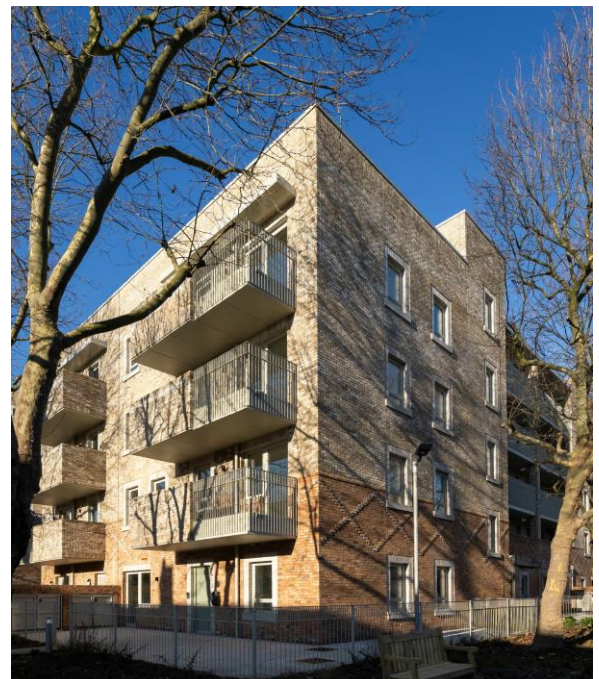
**- Chair, Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission**

## **Membership of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission:**

- ❖ *Councillor Anthony McAlmont – Chair*
- ❖ Councillor Musawwar Alam
- ❖ Councillor James Beckles
- ❖ Councillor Rita Chadha
- ❖ Councillor Joshua Garfield
- ❖ Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- ❖ Councillor Zuber Gulamussen
- ❖ Councillor Melanie Onovo
- ❖ Councillor Salim Patel
- ❖ Councillor Rachel Tripp
- ❖ Councillor Winston Vaughan

## **Key Areas of Work in 2024/25**

- Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention
- Regulator of Social Housing
- Fire and Building Safety post- Grenfell Tower Phase II Report
- Newham Council Repairs and Maintenance Service
- Housing Associations’ Scrutiny Panels
- Tenancy Audit
- HRA Business Plan
- Residents’ Experiences of Housing Services
- Building Safety



## **Building Safety**

The Commission scrutinised building safety in the borough, future plans and regulation, with particular reference to fire and flood risks. Officers highlighted how Newham Council was making good progress in ensuring that homes within the Borough were safe. Commission Members discussed communications with residents, the Grenfell Phase 2 Report, the Building Safety Act 2022, and the legislative and regulatory

implications for the design, construction and management of high-rise buildings. Members queried stakeholder engagement and consultation around these issues, appropriate messaging and communication with residents, reliable occupancy data, implications for Council finances, fire and water risks, and comprehensiveness of data.

## Residents' Experiences of Housing Services

In September 2024, the Commission reviewed an update report on the performance of key resident touchpoints with the Housing Service and the broader resident experience of Newham Council's Housing Services, detailing how directorate and corporate objectives are met. Commission Members heard that the "We Are Housing" programme was currently being refreshed to ensure that the Regulator for Social Housing consumer standards were met and that residents' experiences would improve. Commission Members also heard how a new resident access and engagement project was being developed to meet these standards and to ensure that Housing Services were designed to meet the diverse needs of our residents. Officers advised that this included responding to recommendations in the Housing Ombudsman's spotlight report on attitudes, respect and rights. The Commission also heard that within the work currently being carried out on the HRA Business Plan, a one-off investment over the next two years was being built into the budget to allow for much needed IT and Systems upgrading and modernisation.

Commission Members discussed the realignment of the complaints, contact centre, estate improvement and resident engagement functions within Newham Council's Housing Services to create a single service area, under the newly created role of Head of Resident Involvement. Commission Members also heard that performance in 2023/24 had been affected by budget constraints, together with the restructure of the way in which complaints are managed across Newham Council and requested follow up reporting.

## Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention

Following its work in the previous municipal year around Homelessness Response and Temporary Accommodation, the Commission reviewed the current situation within the Borough regarding temporary accommodation and homelessness prevention. The Commission explored some of the specific conditions in the Borough that contribute to housing instability and homelessness, considering actions taken to prevent homelessness and alleviate these pressures, as well as continuing to address this through Newham Council's corporate Homelessness Response Programme. The Commission noted that the information provided had been comprehensive and outlined several innovative approaches. However, as the report did not provide a definitive solution, the Commission raised and referred some actions to Cabinet for further consideration and reporting.

## Regulator of Social Housing

In March 2025, following scrutiny of Newham Council's response to the Regulator of Social Housing in October 2024, the Commission scrutinised how the Council was complying with the Remediation Actions plan since the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) report of October 2024 and Newham Council's C4 grading. The Commission received and considered the regulatory update – Newham Council's response to the Regulator of Social Housing Inspection as contained in its draft Housing Services Improvement Plan. The Commission noted the steps taken and timelines for actions by Newham Council since the report of the RSH in October 2024 on Council housing and housing services within the borough.

The Commission was informed that, since the C4 judgement, officers had been meeting with the Regulator on a fortnightly basis to discuss the approach to rectifying the identified failings and that work was continuing both to develop a programme of actions to improve the housing services and to mobilise to tackle the most issues identified by the Regulator, including organisation of the programme into four themes to reflect the consumer standards with a fifth theme namely, ways of working. The Commission noted the progress made

to-date, but questioned the pace of some areas of work and asked that the Council prioritise for remedy and state progress against the Items of Failings as identified in the RSH report. The Commission also requested updates on progress as a standing item at future meetings.

## Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

Following the budget in February 2025 and with a continuing focus on Newham Council's finances, the Commission reviewed the recent work to refresh Newham Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. The Commission scrutinised the financial modelling undertaken by the Council in preparation of its HRA Business Plan and considered recent government policy announcements and forthcoming measures that would affect Newham Council's HRA. Members also reviewed the potential budget gap and its impact on the HRA Business Plan, noting that it remains an evolving piece of work

## Repairs and Maintenance Service

Scrutiny Members received an update about the performance and delivery of the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Service and targets and performance. The Commission explored the long term aims or ambitions for the service and heard about the journey of change and improvement in housing repairs complaints: the Housing Ombudsman had found that Newham Council ranked third for the most housing complaints in London between 2016 and 2022.

Examining this topic enabled the Scrutiny Commission to conduct a timely review of housing complaints. The Commission scrutinised service delivery, examining the KPIs, data on 'first time' repairs, resident satisfaction, repairs appointments kept and emergency repairs, to examine the continuing work to improve performance and models of delivery.



<sup>6</sup> Britannia Village E16 from the Lea Crossing. For details of the source and author, please see [here](#).

## Relationship Between Black Boys and the Borough

Black boys and young men tend, on average, to fare worse than their peers across a range of important life outcomes, from poorer educational results to higher rates of offending. This persistent disproportionality has continued for decades despite attempts and initiatives to tackle this issue. This scrutiny inquiry has been established to address this challenge in Newham by influencing existing plans and policies aimed at reducing inequalities that face young Black boys and young Black men, focusing on key areas including social, political, criminal justice, economic, health and educational outcomes.

**“ Our Black children and young men face many persistent obstacles to their positive achievement and attainment of wellbeing, through the combination of class, environment and structural poverty. Education remains key, in order to ensure that there is no pipeline that leads to a life in and out of the margins.**

**The disparities are not just statistical - they translate into real, lived struggles for many young Black males in Newham. Issues such as racial profiling, low school expectations and permanent exclusion, housing instability, and mental health stigma form a complex web of disadvantage. The consequences can be lifelong and inter-generational, affecting not only educational and career prospects, but also identity, belonging, and wellbeing. How we address these systemic inequalities is critical in a borough like ours, where the future of the community is deeply tied to the outcomes of its youth. ”**

**Councillor Anthony McAlmont**

**- Chair, Relationship Between Black Boys and the Borough Scrutiny Commission**

### **Membership of the Relationship Between Black Boys and the Borough Scrutiny Commission:**

- ❖ Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair
- ❖ Councillor Joshua Garfield
- ❖ Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- ❖ Councillor Belgica Guaña
- ❖ Councillor Lester Hudson
- ❖ Councillor Danny Keeling
- ❖ Councillor Carleene Lee-Phakoe
- ❖ Councillor Susan Masters
- ❖ Councillor Terence Paul
- ❖ Councillor Lakmini Shah
- ❖ Councillor Harvinder Singh Virdee
- ❖ Mr Paul Leslie (Co-opted member).

### **Key Areas of Work in 2024/25**

- Education
- Addressing disparities in the Youth Justice System
- Equality and inclusion for Black boys and young Black men
- Community safety in LB Newham

- Employment
- Attainment in LB Newham

## Classroom, Career, Community

Commission Members conducted a series of site visits over the course of July and August 2024, and heard evidence from participants at the following organisations:

- [Elevate](#)
- Fathers United<sup>7</sup>
- [Fight for Peace](#)
- Future Light Leadership ([Newham Youth Partnership](#))
- [REIN](#)
- [Youth Justice Services](#) (YJS)

The Commission also held three focus group sessions with employers (13 November 2024), Governors (20 November 2024) and Headteachers (21 November 2024). The Commission noted with disappointment a lack of engagement with these sessions by two groups with great potential and power to make an impact on the life outcomes of our young Black residents. The Commission recognises that many governors have other jobs and commitments, whilst headteachers are the frontline, occupying pivotal points between families, society, institutions and the futures of our youngest residents. Efforts are still in progress to engage.



### Employers

The focus group meeting with employers was attended by representatives from a range of local employers. During discussions, participants recognised that there are different ‘Black Boys’: it is not one homogenous grouping. For aspiring young Black people, who will be going on to good colleges and achieving good grades at A-Level, the opportunities exist; however, more support is needed for other young Black people whose path to academic success is littered with obstacles. Participants also discussed the challenges of geography and postcodes within the Borough.

The Commission is finalising recommendations and a report drawing together its work of 2024/2025.

**“ Growing up in Newham has played a big part in moulding me into who I am today, not only because of the community but because the borough served as a microcosm for the rawness of the real world. I have been exposed to many bad things that I use as lessons in life, but I have also seen and experienced fantastic things in this borough. For example, almost every area has a high street where people of all races and backgrounds venture during their day and I can say that it has helped me become comfortable in uncomfortable situations. I see Newham as a home, a home for the courageous and the curious. Both of which is an equation for success. ”**

- Tyrelle, aged 18

<sup>7</sup> For more information about Fathers United, see [“It’s about getting that stress out of your system”: Mental health football club launched in Croydon – EastLondonlines](#)

## Youth Empowerment and the Young People's Charter

The Commission also held two meetings in public in November 2024, where evidence concerning educational attainment, policing and mental health/wellbeing was received.

At the meeting on 14 November 2024, the Commission received reports on [inequality, inequity and disproportionality](#); [Youth Empowerment, Youth Justice, and Youth Provision](#); and the [Young People's Charter](#). Commission Members observed that the data presented was generalised and not specific to the cohort of Black boys and young men, compounding a lack of visibility relating to Newham Council's actions in this area. Officers also referred to the establishment of the Commission on the Future of Inclusion and Belonging in Multi-Ethnic Newham in March 2023 and budgetary challenges subsequently. Members queried this, given that the cost of the Commission was £100,000 when compared to the budget of Newham Council. Without granular data relating to the cohort and multi-ethnic structural inequalities, it would be difficult to change outcomes or tailor offer towards a cohort in evident need.

***“ For someone like me to thrive is a rarity... for Black people and those of African descent...”***

At the meeting on 21 November 2024, the Commission heard evidence from LB Newham services (including Community Safeguarding, and Children and Young People Services) in addition to external stakeholders (CAMHS, NHS and the Metropolitan Police Service). Commission Members were encouraged by the commitment and passion of the meeting's participants for improved outcomes for the children and young people of the Borough. However, it emerged from the meeting that there are gaps in the data. Commission Members noted that, at a meeting focused specifically on Black boys and young men, there were data gaps for this cohort for various organisations. A data gap can translate into a crack through which a cohort can fall.

Discussions also focused on Metropolitan Police Service initiatives to increase awareness and sensitivity when dealing with children and young people with neurodivergence, including the pilot programme, "Policing With Compassion". This programme is being piloted in the Borough and is focused on adopting an inclusive, proactive, and preventative approach to policing through partnerships.



## Evaluation of the Scrutiny Function

Reflection on the effectiveness of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function can help to assess how Scrutiny is working for the Council and the residents of Newham. This can be undertaken by members of the scrutiny committees, assisted by the statutory scrutiny officer and scrutiny officers, and in consultation with key stakeholders, including the Executive and senior departmental officers. External invigilators and trainers can also be used to support the process, such as from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) or the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny<sup>8</sup> provides a useful reference point for assessing and embedding the key elements of effective scrutiny. This can be used to guide evaluation and reflection on the key elements of overview and scrutiny for any local authority.

In December 2023, the LGA undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge of Newham Council. The LGA report referenced the findings of the Scrutiny Improvement Review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and recommended a series of Governance and Scrutiny Development Workshops to coproduce an action plan for improvements in 2024 and beyond. Workshop sessions led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny were held over the summer in 2024, attended by Scrutiny and Executive Members as well as senior officers. A final session supported and led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to discuss and launch the Road Map will be held in May 2025.

To read the full Peer Challenge Report and draft Action Plan, visit the Newham Council website: [Newham Action Plan](#).

## Scrutiny in Action

In 2024/2025, the scrutiny function in Newham Council continued to be a governance partner, providing challenge and improving decision-making across Newham Council. Scrutiny tackled big issues – financial resilience and frontline services, policing, housing, health, education – and championed residents' voices and improved services.

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<sup>8</sup> Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities, originally published May 2019, and updated April 2024. Published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 22 April 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-combined-authorities-and-combined-county-authorities>

## Get involved

Newham Council welcomes the public's involvement in its Overview and Scrutiny process, either through submitting evidence or providing oral evidence to one of its scrutiny inquiries.

### Attend a meeting

Scrutiny Committees usually hold their meetings in public in East Ham Town Hall. There is a public gallery for members of the public and press who wish to attend in person. Meetings are advertised via [the calendar](#) on the Newham Council website.

Please contact the scrutiny team ([scrutiny@newham.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@newham.gov.uk)) or the Reception at East Ham Town Hall if you have any accessibility requirements and need assistance.

### Watch a webcast

The Scrutiny committee meetings are livestreamed and recordings can also be watched for up to six months after the meeting on the Council's website.

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyErdAzxu\\_rykDdpUHrEq9Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyErdAzxu_rykDdpUHrEq9Q)

### Contribute to an inquiry

To submit evidence on any current scrutiny inquiry, please email [scrutiny@newham.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@newham.gov.uk)

