



Annual Scrutiny Report 2023-24



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Foreword

Over the past year, Newham's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has carried out robust scrutiny of the Council's priorities, as identified in the Building a Fairer Newham Corporate Plan and the in-year monitoring of the 2023/24 budget and scrutiny of 2024-25 budget proposals.

The profile of Scrutiny has risen to an all-time high. I am delighted to present this year's Annual Scrutiny Report for 2023/2024. Scrutiny has focused its attention on issues that matter to our residents and has made a real impact on Council policies and services for residents. This report summarises the main issues which have been reviewed and challenged throughout the year and highlights some of the key achievements.

Some significant achievements for Overview and Scrutiny this municipal year include:

- Shaping the Council's budget for 2024-2025 amidst challenging times,
- Highlighting concerns on the management of Victoria Street temporary accommodation,
- Review of Newham's new Local Plan,
- Scrutiny of hospital charge for maternity patients and overseas visitors/non-UK nationals.

In Newham, amidst thirteen years of Conservative government cuts and exacerbated by a cost-of-living crisis and high inflation, our Council faces an extremely challenging financial landscape. Population growth outstripping funding strains Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Temporary Accommodation budgets. Scrutiny examined a proposed £394m budget with a £47m gap, to be filled by £22m in efficiency savings, £16m from asset sales, and anticipated growth of £76m, yet anticipates a further £60m shortfall by 2027. In light of these factors, Scrutiny, citing various concerns, provides limited assurance to the Cabinet. Currently, the projected overspend for the 2023-24 budget stands at £24.9m.

Through this work the scrutiny committees have played a demonstrative role in informing Council policy, budget and key decisions. Budget Scrutiny highlighted significant areas of risk to the Council's finances and services, via a report and recommendations to the Mayor and Cabinet and full Council. The scrutiny

committees have maintained oversight of the risks to our vulnerable residents and the impact on Council's finances arising from the Council's management of temporary accommodation. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed a £59.4m Cabinet decision to demolish the Council's Victoria Street premises with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

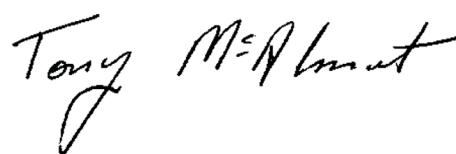
We have explored particular issues in-depth, such as the Council's role in supporting Black boys, and monitoring the impacts of the 'Right Care, Right Person' policy by NHS partners and the Metropolitan Police Service. The review of proposals for the Local Plan has enabled the scrutiny committees to make a positive and impactful contribution to Newham planning policy in important areas of concern to residents, including faith spaces and burial spaces provision. The scrutiny of Women's Safety strategies have provided accountability of how the Newham Community Safety Partnership are dealing with this significant issue of public concern with recommendations for improved accountability on data reporting.

These are just a handful of examples of the substantial work of the scrutiny committees over what has been a significant year for improving the impact and effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny in Newham.

We aim to embrace diverse experience within our committee membership and this is reflected in our scrutiny committees, which are cross-party and non-political with the overall aim of improving services and outcomes for our residents by holding decision-makers to account.

Overview and Scrutiny aims to amplify the voice of 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.

I commend this Annual Scrutiny Report to the Council.



Councillor Anthony McAlmont
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny at Newham

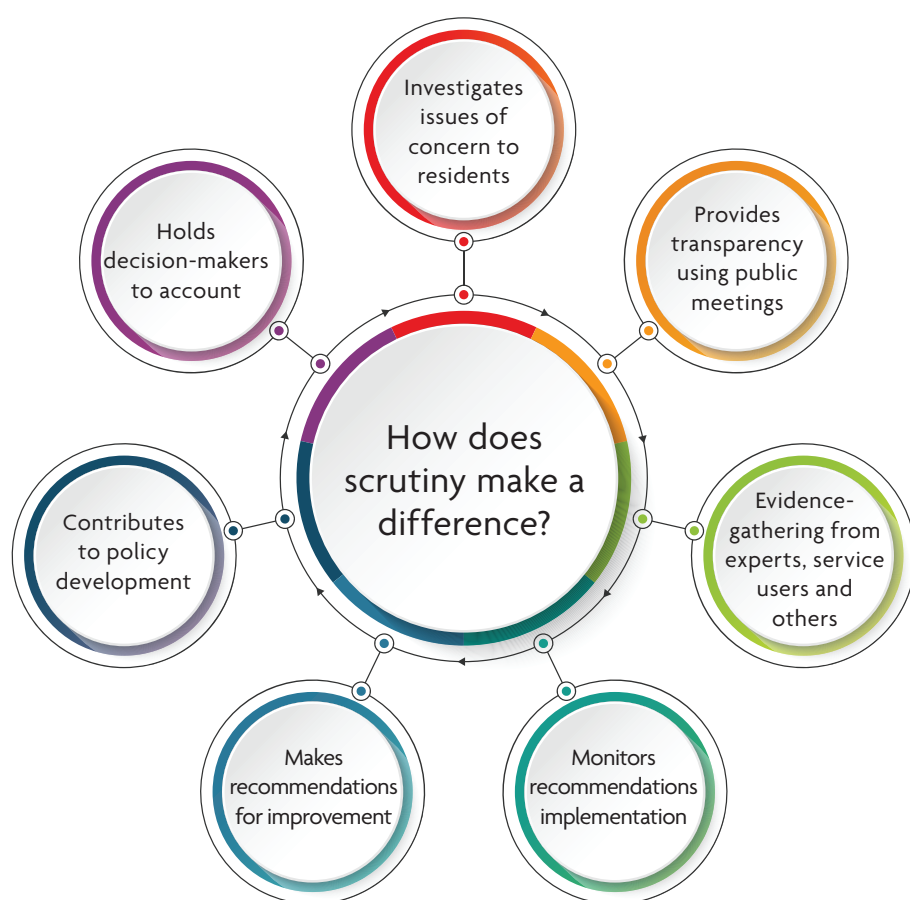
Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the local democratic governance arrangements for local authorities in England and Wales. It provides a vehicle for elected councillors to influence the development of Council policy and to enhance transparency and accountability to the public. It can also drive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

Newham Council is a mayoral authority, where decisions are taken by a Mayor and Cabinet Executive. Newham has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that can establish scrutiny commissions to undertake work on particular areas, scrutinising decisions taken by the Executive.¹

In 2023-2024, the Committee established four main thematic Scrutiny Commissions, to consider issues across different service areas, including areas.

These scrutiny commissions are:

- Crime, Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission;
- Education, Children and Young People and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Commission;
- Health and Adult Social Care, Equalities and Air Quality Scrutiny Commission
- Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission.



“ Overview and Scrutiny plays an important function in the work of the Council, providing valuable insight, experience and a ‘second look’ to the work of the Executive as we develop and deliver our policies and programmes set out in our corporate plan, Building a Fairer Newham. Overview and Scrutiny also provides a vital space that allows for deliberation and discussion of key issues which span beyond the council, and brings in the community and wider partners to those discussions. We are grateful to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the work and inquiries they have undertaken over the last municipal year, and look forward to working with them as we continue in our shared commitment to making a sustainable difference to the lives of Newham residents. ”

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE and Executive

¹ 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.



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

- the Budget Scrutiny Commission (a permanent work stream);
- the Local Plan Scrutiny Commission; and
- the Relationship between Black Boys and the Borough Scrutiny Commission.

Overview and Scrutiny aims to amplify the resident’s voice through its work and as part of the Council’s priority objectives to achieving People-Powered Newham and widening participation, including a commitment to:

Extend strategic and long-term policy making in Newham through the better use of the scrutiny process to include pre-scrutiny of decisions and policy, joint working with the Executive and the involvement of the residents from the Citizens Assembly, Neighbourhood Assemblies, Youth Citizens Assembly, Adult Social Care Citizens Assembly as well as the voluntary, community and faith sector in Newham.

This report profiles the work undertaken by the Council’s scrutiny committees throughout 2023-2024.

Call-In

The “Call-In” procedure at Newham provides a way for non-Executive Members of the Council to refer Executive decisions to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before implementation. Once a decision has been called in, the matter must be included on the agenda of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for review².

This year, a Cabinet Decision on Victoria Street premises being used to provide housing accommodation was referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review through the Council’s Call-In procedure. The Cabinet had made the **decision on 5th December 2023**. For more on this issue, the findings of the Committee and the Cabinet’s response see page 8.

² The Local Government Act 2000 requires Council’s 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 2023-2024

- Playing a formative role in shaping Newham'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 the Council's budget proposals for 2024-25. A significant outcome was the acceptance of the Budget Scrutiny recommendations by the Executive and Council.
- Highlighting the risks to vulnerable residents and the impact on Council's finances through ongoing oversight of the Council's management of temporary accommodation.
- Reviewing the Cabinet's decision to demolish the Council's Victoria Street premises with recommendations and a referral back to Cabinet for reconsideration.
- Contributing to the development of the new Local Plan and Newham planning policy in key areas of concern to residents, including faith spaces and burial spaces provision.
- Scrutiny of Women's Safety strategies with recommendations for improved accountability on data reporting.
- Assessing the health and care system's response to population growth predicted 110,000 extra people projected to 2040 focusing on service pathways, integration, and workforce and estate planning with findings to be presented to North East London Integrated Care System guiding future areas of focus and risk.
- Evaluating the impact of 'Right Care, Right Person' strategy and approaches shaping recommendations for system leaders ensuring all people experiencing mental health crises in urgent need of support receive appropriate care.
- Reviewing hospital charging for overseas visitors/ non-UK nationals and suggesting improvements to procedures and implementation of best practice, with particular reference to NHS maternity care.
- Supported the development of Newham's 'Ageing Well' strategy enabling input from community leaders on issues such as social class and housing conditions, fostering a more personalised and inclusive approach to ageing.
- Providing oversight and reviewing Special Education Needs and Disabilities provision in Newham
- Reviewing the children and young peoples' Mental Health - Single Point of Access pilot through a risk assessment and evaluation framework and how the pilot can impact children absent from school.
- Propelling new ideas for greater direct engagement with Black boys and young men.
- Championing stronger responses to the disproportionate impacts on Black boys and young men.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair of the 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 Elizabeth Booker³
- Councillor Susan Masters
- Councillor Terry Paul
- Councillor Rita Chadha
- Councillor Musawwar Alam
- Councillor Thelma Odoi
- Councillor Lakmini Shah (from 16th October 2023)
- Councillor Mehmood Mirza ((from 16th October 2023)⁴
- Councillor Daniel Lee-Phakoe (until 16th October 2023)⁵
- Mr Paul Leslie, Voluntary Sector Reps (Co-opted Member)
- Ms Ellen Kemp, Diocese of Chelmsford (Co-opted Member).

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Council performance, including budget performance
- Victoria Street Options Appraisal
- The Cost of Living Crisis
- Governance and risk
- Newham Council Communications Strategy

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 a voluntary sector member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I have found the process of scrutiny to be invaluable in holding the Executive to account in a supportive and challenging manner, providing a critical friend approach, which requires both robust argument and constructive alternative options for the executive to consider. The level of paperwork and reading required to keep abreast of the operations and actions of the council is quite intense, however this is matched by the commitment, tenacity and thoughtfulness of the committee members, who take their scrutinising role seriously, we aim to ensure the voice of residents and in my case, the knowledge and experiences of voluntary sector organisations, informs our questions and approach, in order to seek clarity regarding decisions made, actions carried out and suggested future actions that will impact on local residents across Newham.”

Paul Leslie – Co-opted Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chief Executive of Rights and Equalities in Newham

³Deputy Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee until 16th October 2023.

⁴Newham Independents Group Opposition Member from 16th October 2023.

⁵Resigned from the Council from 16th October 2023.

Temporary Accommodation has been a significant contributory factor to 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

Victoria Street Options Appraisal

The Council's Victoria Street premises has been used to rehouse single-parent families, as a part of the Council's approach to support residents through the housing crisis. A Cabinet Decision made on 5th December 2023 on the Victoria Street premises was referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review through the Council's Call-In procedure. The Executive Decision had agreed to undertake works on an option to demolish and rebuild the premises. This had included demolition of 218 studio flats in order to build 122 new homes at a projected cost of £56.5m.

The housing crisis in Newham remains acute, with severe impacts on the lives and well-being of residents. Victoria Street had been set up as housing for mothers with babies, with its use later expanding to incorporate families. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was concerned that proposals to demolish 10 Victoria Street would undermine the Council's holistic response to the housing crisis and homelessness, with the loss of homes for single homeless people and was of the view that it still had value in temporary housing terms in its original form.

Overall, the Committee was concerned that the Cabinet Decision provided less social benefit to meet the current and critical needs of homeless people in Newham, as well as less financial value for money to Newham Council.

The Committee referred the Cabinet Decision made on 5th December 2023 back to Cabinet for reconsideration, along with its main concerns and recommendations. The

Committee recommended the alternative options to *Retain and Reuse* the Victoria Street premises⁶ and more sustainable plans for temporary housing.

The Cabinet met on 30th January 2024 and noted the report and is expected to make a final decision and Executive Response at its meeting on 7th May 2024.

The Cost of Living Crisis

The cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on many of Newham's residents, with the cost of everyday essentials like food and bills increasing sharply, pushing more people into poverty. This issue was considered over two main evidence sessions; with the first session focusing on **Our Newham Money** and the measures that Newham Council and partners are taking to support vulnerable residents, and the second session focusing on external funding and support.

The Cost of Living increased sharply across the UK from 2021, following global demand for consumer goods and soaring energy and fuel prices. The effects of these increased costs were felt sharply in Newham, with an increase of 125% in the numbers of residents seeking support with their finances.

The session on Our Newham Money explored whether Newham Council and partner agencies are reaching the right people and reviewed government grants available, food banks in the Borough, including the role of the Newham Food Alliance and Social Welfare Alliance. It reviewed the key Council priorities for dealing with this issue and how the Council is supporting and working with voluntary, community and faith partners to support vulnerable residents.

The Committee welcomed the measures to tackle this issue, but also raised concerns about the accessibility of the Our Newham Money service to help some residents, such as those with language barriers and those not online or unable to reach service locations. The Committee also questioned the allocation of resources between Newham's New Work (employment support) and New

⁶ See paragraph 4.29, report to Cabinet, December 2022, available at: https://mgov.newham.gov.uk/documents/s160436/V.9%20Cabinet%20Submitted-%20Cabinet%20Report%20Victoria%20Street_KW%20COMMENTS_271122_RF.pdf

Money (financial support) services, and potential impact on Newham Council's ability to lift people out of poverty. It found that there was a need for more detailed data around future capacity and accessibility of services to ensure the crisis was being addressed through equitable and effective approaches.

Newham Council Communications

In March 2024, the Committee reviewed the Council's Communications Strategy, including Newham Council branding and delivery of the brand, as well as the vehicles for communicating with residents.

The Committee highlighted concerns about the lack of Council data on communications, including on the success, reach, and effectiveness of Council key messages via different channels. The Committee also made suggestions for improvement, including enhanced communications with residents, more input from residents to Council forums, joining up work around residents' experience, and reviewing Council communications integration and effectiveness, with more focus on "good news" stories about the Borough and enhancing online accessibility.

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.

People Powered Newham

In May 2024, the Committee reviewed the Council's 'People Powered Newham' policy, which included community partnerships, co-production, consultation, and engagement.

The Committee reviewed Newham Council's consultation and engagement strategy, including to what extent Newham Council reaches key minority populations, under-represented groups and perspectives, and how consultation is used to drive service improvement and decision making.

The Committee also examined the way in which Newham Council engages and works with community partners for service delivery, community outreach and to promote community wellbeing. The review of consultation and engagement included consideration of Newham Council's events programme, including consideration of events programming.

Budget Scrutiny



Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Commission.

The Budget Scrutiny Commission was established to review the Mayor's draft Budget Proposals for 2024-2025 and to make any reports and recommendations through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Mayor and Cabinet and to full Council.

Membership of the Budget Scrutiny Commission:

- Councillor Anthony McAlmont – Chair
- Councillor Elizabeth Booker
- Councillor Rita Chadha
- Councillor Stephanie Garfield
- Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- Councillor Nate Higgins
- Councillor Lester Hudson
- Councillor Jane Lofthouse
- Councillor Susan Masters
- Councillor Terry Paul⁶
- Councillor Lakmini Shah⁷
- Councillor Harvinder Singh Virdee⁸

“The Budget Scrutiny Commission's guiding principle this year has been this: 'how can we deliver for residents in these challenging times?' Residents are at the heart of scrutiny and how we can assure the services we provide. The fifteen recommendations of the Budget Scrutiny Commission have been informed by a desire to ensure the future financial viability of this Council and maintaining essential services, such as our Children's Centres. This means taking hard decisions now because the 'nice to have' tomorrow cannot be funded at the expense of 'the need to have' today.

Ability to pivot, agility in decision-making in a financial landscape of uncertainty, ever-increasing challenges and rising demand, and the political courage to recognise that 'cutting one's losses' on individual projects, however unpalatable in the short-term, are essential to ensure Newham's long-term collective financial viability in the interests of our residents.”

Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Commission

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Scrutiny of the Council's the 'in-year' budget position, performance and risks for 2023/24
- Review of the Executive's Draft Budget Proposals for 2024-2025;
- 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. This year, new approaches to financial scrutiny were adopted with the first phase of the Commission's work, including a series of bespoke member development sessions focused on building the expertise of the Commission whilst using experience already existing amongst its membership.

Four development sessions were held between September and November, via in-house training sessions led by the Newham Scrutiny Team, audit and finance officers, reading lists of materials, practical examples, and also drawing on independent external expertise from Grant Thornton.

The Commission held evidence-gathering sessions to scrutinise the 'in-year' budget position, performance and risks for 2023/24, and the Draft Budget Proposals for 2024/2025, 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 2024/25 on 23 January 2024, the Commission conducted three thematic evidence-gathering sessions. The Commission heard in evidence that the Council was expecting to overspend its budget by £14.2 m in 2024/25.

At the end of the inquiry 15 recommendations were made to the Executive, aimed at maintaining core services whilst addressing the overspend. The scrutiny recommendations reversed some savings proposals (such as for Children's Centres), 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](#).

“ This has been another extraordinary year, with the stakes high for Newham Council and our residents. The Budget Scrutiny Commission recognised how difficult a task it has been to put a budget together in the context of years of decreasing availability of central government funding for local government and increasing demands on local authorities. This was illustrated in the dialogue concerning the Budget Scrutiny Commission's recommendations, with initial acceptance of nine recommendations and ultimate acceptance of almost all of our recommendations. 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. ”

Councillor Anthony McAlmont
Chair, Budget Scrutiny Commission

The report and recommendations were received by [Cabinet on 20 February](#). 14 of the Commission's 15 recommendations were accepted. The Executive Response to the Budget Scrutiny Report and Recommendations can be found [here](#).



Crime Regeneration and Environment

The Crime Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Commission scrutinises Council policies and services with a crucial role in ‘place shaping’ for Newham now and in the future, including: local economy and strategic housing delivery; homelessness; environment and sustainable transport; and community safety.

Over the past year, the Commission has remained dedicated to building a Newham that is not only safer but also a more equitable place to live, instilling pride in future generations. We have tackled key community safety issues and our work on Newham’s Local Plan and the new Waste Management Strategy reflects our ongoing commitment to creating cleaner, sustainable, and vibrant communities for all.

Cllr Terry Paul,
Chair - Crime, Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Commission

Membership of the Crime Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Commission:

- Councillor Carolyn Corben
- Councillor Lester Hudson
- Councillor Terry Paul – Chair⁷
- Councillor Simon Rush
- Councillor Lakmini Shah – (until October 2023)⁸
- Councillor Rita Chadha – (until 14th September 2023)⁹
- Councillor Ken Penton – (from 14th September 2023)
- Councillor Mahmood Mirza - (from 21st December 2023)¹⁰

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- The Newham Local Plan
- Newham Community Safety Partnership
- Women’s safety in Newham
- Knife and gun crime in Newham
- Newham’s new Waste Management Strategy



Community Safety Partnerships

The Commission reviewed the Newham Community Safety Partnership and the [Newham Community Safety Partnership Plan 2022-2025](#), including strategies Knife Crime and County Lines; East Ham High Street; E20/Westfield shopping Centre; Stratford Town Centre; and Violence against Women and Girls; and responding to Mental Health calls.

This was part of an overarching three-year Community Safety Partnership Strategy shaped in response to Newham’s Community Safety and Crime Survey in 2022 as well as the priorities set by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) through the Mayor’s Police and Crime Plan for 2022-25.

www.london.gov.uk/publications/building-safer-london

The Commission followed up on previous scrutiny reviews of sex work-related issues against the background of paused consultations on Romford Road and investigated the impact of night-time operations (Operation Fondington) adjustments to police patrols during school hours to manage the visibility of sex workers, supported by enhanced CCTV monitoring and engagement with sex workers through support services like Hestia.



⁷Appointed Deputy Chair from 7th September 2023, appointed Chair on 21st December 2023.

⁸Resigned from committee from October 2023.

⁹Resigned from committee by OSC on 14th September 2023.

¹⁰Appointed Independent councillor from 21st December 2023.



**Councillor Terry Paul
– Chair of the Crime,
Regeneration and
Environment Scrutiny
Commission**

Night Safety Charter, aligning with the UN’s Women’s global initiative, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls.

The Commission evaluated safety performance compared with other boroughs and the extent to which Newham Council is aligned with the Mayor of London’s women’s safety directives and focused on the effectiveness of the Women’s Safety App as a communication platform between the community and police, highlighting the absence of metrics being reported from the Women’s Safety App in accurately assessing support needs. The Commission also called for further information on the implementation plan for Women’s Safety, including updates on Women’s Safety App data, service agreements with the app provider, and verification of contact information for women in distress in private car hires.

Women’s Safety

Following national concerns about women’s safety in public spaces, the Commission decided to review women’s safety in Newham. This included review of the Open Spaces Action Plan, covering the impact of [Newham’s Stay Safe App](#) (Women’s Safety App); the Women’s Night Safety Charter; the Hate Crime and Street Harassment campaign, as well as the Mayor of London Women’s

Knife and Gun Crime in Newham

The scrutiny review of knife and gun crime reflected a pressing concern about the escalating violence in Newham. This scrutiny inquiry reviewed resources, such as police staffing and public safety infrastructure, and focused on challenges in areas pinpointed as a hotspot for violent incidents.

Scrutiny Members considered police staffing during protests, officer redeployment, and the broader impact of protests on public safety, as well as targeted strategies for knife crime prevention in the Stratford ward, including school collaborations and parental engagement with youth involved in gangs.

The Commission was concerned to learn of the rise of weapons use during robberies across the Borough and learnt that proactive measures like the deployment of territorial support and dog units, as well as the regular use of knife arches, have been effective in seizing large weapons.

The Commission welcomed the positive response to the roll-out of bleed kits and training, and the resulting sense of community empowerment and preparedness and raised concerns about the sparse distribution of amnesty bins for weapon disposal and the appropriateness of publicising confiscated knives.

“Having been a member of Scrutiny for many years and a Committee Chair for three, I appreciate the valuable role that Scrutiny is able to play in enhancing the Council’s performance. The old adage that Scrutiny should be a critical friend of the Council is only too true.”

Councillor John Whitworth - Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning and Development, Air Quality and Climate Emergency

Newham's New Waste Management Strategy

The Commission reviewed Newham Council's new Waste Management Strategy against the Borough's objectives for environmental sustainability and public cleanliness, aligning with the 'Pride in our Environment' campaign, with a focus on recycling, street cleansing, reduced waste production, inspiring resident behavioural change, and lower emissions as part of Net-Zero objectives.

The Commission was encouraged by strong public engagement on the strategy's development and alignment with the London Mayor's 50% recycling rate through initiatives such as expanding plastic film recycling and introducing mandatory food waste collection. The Commission considered the capital and revenue costs associated with the food waste collection trial set for February 2025 and a proposal to shift to fortnightly black bin collections to increase recycling rates.

The Commission expressed concerns about potential reductions in Council public engagement teams and the potential impact on community engagement/behaviour change strategies and identified the absence of a plan for recycling lithium batteries and resulted in suggestions for greater lobbying for producer responsibility. The Commission also highlighted the importance of prioritisation of essential services like street cleansing and waste collection, and called for the presentation of a Private Finance Initiative plan to ensure adequate resources and alignment with Newham Council's environmental goals.



The Local Plan

The Local Plan Scrutiny Commission was established to contribute to the development of the Newham's Local Plan, considering the needs of residents and communities in the Borough. The Commission took a specific focus on housing affordability to address the urgent housing crisis aimed to align housing options with affordability targets and community needs.

“The Newham Local Plan is critical in shaping the place in which our residents live, work, play, worship and study. The Local Plan Scrutiny Commission considered various aspects in our scrutiny of the Local Plan, which plays a vital role in maintaining our vibrant, multi-age, multi-cultural communities, now and in the future in sustainable, affordable ways. As the Local Plan shapes and develops the Newham landscape in accordance with Newham needs, the Newham Local Plan itself must also be shaped and developed by Newham's needs. The Local Plan is a living, evolving policy, which changes with every new brick laid or tree planted, and requires nuanced approaches, and scrutiny plays a vital role in this.”

Councillor Terry Paul
Chair, the Local Plan Scrutiny Commission

Membership of the Local Plan Scrutiny Commission:

- Councillor Terry Paul - Chair
- Councillor Rachel Tripp
- Councillor Sasha DasGupta
- Councillor Lester Hudson
- Councillor Nate Higgins
- Councillor Anthony McAlmont
- Councillor Susan Masters
- Councillor Mahmood Mirza (Independent Group)
- Councillor James Beckles
- Councillor Ken Penton
- Councillor Carolyn Corben
- Councillor Simon Rush
- Councillor Nate Higgins.

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Housing needs
- Affordable accommodation
- Affordable workspaces
- Faith spaces
- Climate resilience, flood plains, and flood prevention
- Green spaces and biodiversity

The Local Plan Scrutiny Commission held two evidence sessions to review key aspects of the development of the new Local Plan. These included: social and affordable housing; student housing and housing for recent graduates; affordable workspaces; community cohesion; faith and worship spaces; community land spaces; green spaces and biodiversity; and flood protection and prevention.

The first meeting explored the challenges of statutory obligations, cost-inflation, and construction economics in a high-growth London borough during a housing crisis. The Commission also considered a Council resolution made on 11 December 2023 and the commitments made on social housing, including liaison with the GLA on the abolition of the fast-track application route. The Commission raised questions about affordable housing ratios, affordability, viability assessments timetable constraints, Newham faith groups, affordable workspaces and affordable retail space, student housing and housing for recent graduates.

The second meeting focused on the commitment for 50% Social Affordable Housing and the proposed wording for the Local Plan submission to reflect this.



The Commission reviewed how Newham Council monitors delivery of housing over the term of the Council's agreed priorities for workspace and industrial space needs; the employment land review, provision to ensure that faith communities are able to find spaces for practising their faith and for burials; building design for climate change; and flood protection and prevention.

The Local Plan Scrutiny Commission produced a report with three recommendations, which was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 April 2024.

Affordable Accommodation

The scrutiny report highlighted the mix of housing required to meet the needs of Newham's residents and that this would require the balancing of competing pressures. It recommended that the Executive ensure that the Newham Local Plan and other Council Plans and priorities provide a clear commitment to a minimum of 50% genuinely affordable accommodation across all developments (including Socially Rented Housing and London Affordable Rent, but not other products such as Shared Ownership). It recommended that this commitment include housing developments by Populo, the Council's wholly-owned housing development company.



Places of Worship & Burial Spaces

The scrutiny report identified a lack of faith spaces for worship and burial spaces and recommended that the Council improve engagement and communication with the Newham Faith Forum to ensure communication is more effective with Newham's faith communities and encourages participation in the consultation.

The report also recommends that the Local Plan set out a clear policy position to support provision for all Newham's communities, including the faith communities, such as Newham's Muslim community.

The Local Plan Scrutiny report is published [here](#).

The report has been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and referred to the Mayor and Cabinet for consideration and Executive Response.



Housing and Resident Experience



Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair of the Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission

The Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission plays an important role in scrutinising housing and how Newham Council engages with and listens to its residents. 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 are the needs, and often connected to other areas of our residents’ lives, such as health or education. The Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission therefore has an important role in scrutinising these services. We have welcomed the collaborative approach with the services over the past six months, with our residents located at the centre of what we – scrutiny, the Executive, officers – all do to improve outcomes and delivery of services for Newham’s residents.”

Councillor Anthony McAlmont - Chair of the Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission

Membership of the Housing and Resident Experience Scrutiny Commission:

- Councillor Anthony McAlmont – Chair
- Councillor James Beckles
- Councillor Areeq Chowdhury
- Councillor Femi Falola
- Councillor Lewis Godfrey – Deputy Chair (appointed 20th September 2023)
- Councillor Imam Haque
- Councillor Lester Hudson
- Councillor Thelma Odoi
- Councillor Winston Vaughan
- Councillor Rita Chadha – (from 14th September 2023)
- Councillor Danny Keeling (from 16th October 2023 until 21st December 2023)
- Councillor Zuber Gulamussen (from 21st December 2023)¹²

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Damp and Mould Strategy and Action Plan
- The Newham Council Contact Centre
- Homelessness and temporary accommodation
- Private rented sector housing
- Newham Council Repairs and Maintenance Service



¹²Appointed as Newham Independents Group Opposition Member from 21st December 2023.

Damp and Mould Strategy

Many local authorities, including Newham, have been left with legacy housing issues due to historic underinvestment in housing stock. The Commission reviewed Newham Council's Damp and Mould Strategy and Action Plan and its aim to eradicate damp and mould from housing in Newham. The Scrutiny Commission also considered a public consultation that had been conducted in June and July 2023.

The Commission heard that Newham Council had been issued with a maladministration case by the Housing Ombudsman, dating from 2019. The Council's Damp and Mould Taskforce estimated that around 40% of Council properties and 33% of privately rented properties in Newham could be affected by damp and mould, higher than the national averages. The Commission recommended instituting a "good practice system" to enable the Cabinet Member to have greater oversight and to be kept apprised of cases being referred to the Housing Ombudsman.

Newham Council's Contact Centre

The Contact Centre handles interactions on behalf of the Council, providing information about Council services, processing requests and responding to residents' complaints. The Commission reviewed information and data on the Contact Centre responsiveness and performance and gained an insight into residents' experiences of using the Contact Centre service through "mystery shopping"¹³, to understand the expectations of the service, feedback mechanisms, and complaint resolution. The review provided timely oversight one year ahead of the service's aim to embed the culture change, quality assurance and technology by December 2024.

Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation

The Commission reviewed the Council's Homelessness Response Programme, following on from the Homelessness Response Programme Definition Document and examined Newham's progress on the Homelessness Strategy, an outline of homelessness pressures and the provision of temporary accommodation in Newham. This included an examination of the programme's effectiveness during seasonal pressures, such as winter, and other challenges or risks, as well as the month-on-month increase in residents presenting as homeless.

The review highlighted Newham Council's prevention and support work to mitigate pressures, the impacts of the housing crisis across London. The Commission heard that Newham had seen the largest drop in available rental accommodation in tandem with a rise of over 160% in demands from asylum seekers for housing, and the budgetary impacts resulting from this. The Commission reviewed the Council's work in establishing an acquisitions' pipeline, liaising with landlords and supporting residents whether homeless, or temporary accommodation and explored the tangible support provided to residents to find alternative accommodation and out of borough options.

Private Rented Sector Housing

The Commission reviewed Newham Council policies to support residents in the private rented sector in Newham and measures to challenge exploitative practices whilst supporting residents and protecting them from poor quality, unsafe or non-standard housing in a challenging housing market. Property licensing has been in operation since 2013, establishing minimum standards. The Commission heard that some of the worst housing conditions are in the private sector, with some 28% of private rented sector housing in Newham found to have serious health and safety hazards.

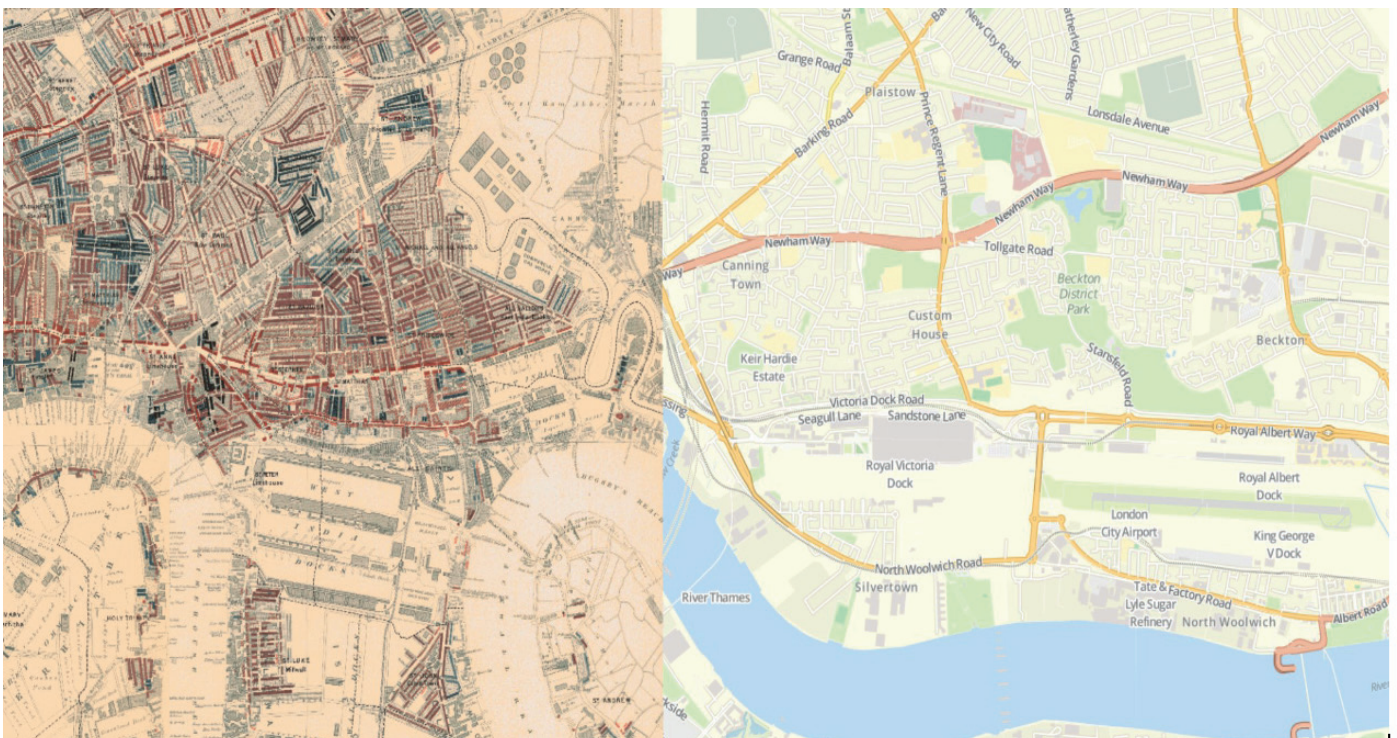
¹³ Mystery shopping is a method to assess or gather specific information about products and services by mirroring common consumer behaviours to test the consistency of qualities deemed important to a specific industry. Mystery shoppers submit detailed reports and feedback about their experiences. Mystery shopping can take the form of physical visits to business premises, or calling companies to evaluate their customer experience.

The Commission reviewed the Council's Licensing Scheme for 2023 – 2028 in its first year of operation, as part of delivering the Council's *Building a Fairer Newham* priorities to enhance the private rented sector inspection regime and ensure that all landlords in Newham are meeting standards for safe, well-managed housing and focused on enforcing minimum standards, cladding action, empty properties and energy-efficiency work. Through this review Scrutiny Members were able to shape current and future policy in this area and monitor whether Newham Council's licensing scheme was on track to meet the five-year aims, including recommending that the Housing Service improve promotion what support is available for private sector tenants.

Repairs and Maintenance Service

Scrutiny Members considered the performance and delivery of the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Service and targets and performance. The Commission explored other potential models of delivery, the benefits of the current delivery model, and the long term aims or ambitions for the service.

The Commission heard that Newham Council has been on a 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.



©Extract from Charles Booth's London, London School of Economics and Social Science (2016)¹¹

¹¹This 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 \(Ise.ac.uk\)](http://Map|CharlesBooth'sLondon(Ise.ac.uk)) (Accessed 10 May 2024)

Health Adult Social Care, Equalities and Air Quality



Councillor Susan Masters - Chair of the Health Adult Social Care Equalities and Air Quality Scrutiny Commission

Equalities reflecting ambitions to ensure comprehensive accountability of the Executive.

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. In 2023/24 the Commission's remit was broadened to include Air Quality and

Membership of the Health Adult Social Care, Equalities and Air Quality Scrutiny Commission:

- Councillor Susan Masters – Chair
- Councillor Rita Chadha – Deputy Chair
- Councillor James Beckles
- Councillor Nur Begum
- Councillor Areeq Chowdhury
- Councillor Femi Falola
- Councillor Mohammed Gani
- Councillor John Gray
- Councillor Joy Laguda, MBE
- Councillor Harvinder Singh Virdee
- Councillor Stephanie Garfield¹⁴
- Councillor Danny Keeling.

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Meeting Newham's Future Needs
- 'Right Care, Right Person'
- '50 Steps' Public Health Strategy Refresh 2024-29
- 'Ageing Well'
- Adult Safeguarding
- Maternity Inequalities Report
- Equalities
- Air Quality.

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 in 2023/24 allowing 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.

Previously, this tracked the perennial challenges of "winter pressures" and the resultant impact on local bed capacity. This item was diversified for 2023/24, encompassing a wider range of topics including a regular update on Council safeguarding. It also covered unique issues such as measles and cancer pathways, to areas meriting greater oversight such as the withdrawal of Operose - the UK arm of US healthcare company, Centene – from the UK health market, impacting backroom services for six Newham GP surgeries, and the sustainability of the Barking Birth

“ In 2023-2024, Newham's Health and Adult Social Care, Equalities and Air Quality Commission actively incorporated perspectives from the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector as well as residents with direct experience, and invited a broader range of council witnesses to our meetings. In October we were delighted to be joined by Housing colleagues in discussions on our Ageing Well strategy and care for those ageing, living with disabilities, or long-term conditions. We also expanded our scope to include Air Quality and Equalities with the aim of enhancing accountability for the improved well-being of all our residents. As we navigate the complexities of local and regional healthcare influenced by national directives and changing demand pressures, we remain dedicated to ensuring that care is accessible and responsive, and that services continue to adapt to meet the changing needs of our population. ”

**Councillor Susan Masters
Health Adult Social Care, Equalities and Air Quality
Scrutiny Commission**

¹⁴Appointed from 14th September 2023.

Centre. Other important topics discussed were the implications of a London Fire Brigade enforcement notice on Newham Hospital, the impact of industrial actions on pandemic backlog reductions, the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in health facilities, and a review prompted by an Ombudsman's judgement requiring Newham Council to reassess previously rejected Freedom Pass applications.

Meeting Newham's Future Needs

The period between 2020 and 2040 is projected to see a significant population increase in Newham, with an estimated growth of 110,000 residents, marking a 31% rise and is expected to be most pronounced in the demographic for people over 70 years. Stakeholder discussions across the local health system have identified this shift as the most pressing issue facing the Borough. Throughout the year, the Commission evaluated how different parts of the health and care system were addressing this challenge in terms of service pathways, levels of integration and plans for workforce and estates.

The Commission's inquiry was structured into the following sessions: Emergency, Urgent and Elective care, in September; Care for those Ageing and Living with a Disability or Long Term Condition, in October; Everyday (Primary) Care in January and March; and Mental Health, in March. Golden threads throughout this evaluation included inequalities and the growing involvement of the private sector. It was observed that whilst relationships appeared to be good, there was a lack of leadership capacity, suitable estate and funding at 'place' (borough) level to manage these pressures, across the system. The Commission plans to submit a comprehensive list of concerns to the leadership of the North East London Integrated Care System in the new municipal year, followed by a detailed report.

'Right Care, Right Person'

In March 2023, Sir Mark Rowley, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, announced a shift in police strategy concerning responses to calls involving individuals in mental health crisis. The new approach stipulated that police would no longer attend to such calls unless there was a clear threat to life or a crime was involved, recognising that mental health professionals were a more appropriate source of support. This strategy change

followed the successful introduction of this triage process in Humberside.

In view of identified inequalities and funding issues around mental health, the Commission closely monitored the development and implementation policy across subsequent meetings. It facilitated discussions and gathered insights from various stakeholders including the Metropolitan Police Service, the East London Foundation Trust (provider of Newham's mental health services), the London Ambulance Service, Newham Hospital, MIND, Healthwatch, the founder of the 'Hear Me Speak' lived experience campaign, and Newham Council's Adults Social Care team.

The Commission observed that since the strategy's roll-out in November, the police have reported a reduction in deployments from 41% to 27% of calls, creating additional capacity to respond to crime-related issues. Scrutiny Members noted that mental health services did not experience a corresponding increase in referral to crisis lines. The consensus among system partners was that collaboration remained effective, with minimal issues presenting. However, it was felt that it was premature to assess the strategy's success. The Commission also expressed concerns about the lack of detailed data on individuals referred elsewhere in the system, particularly regarding their alternative destinations, personal experiences, or any analysis of protected characteristics.

A report from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Care, expected in late spring, will further evaluate the impact of the *Right Care, Right Person* initiative. Meanwhile, the Commission has prepared a concise report detailing its findings and recommendations for consideration by health and care partners.

'50 Steps' Public Health Strategy Refresh 2024-29

In 2019, Newham Council introduced its '50 Steps' Public Health Strategy as an outline of how the Public Health team, Council service partners, the NHS, Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) organisations and residents were working together holistically to improve the health of the local population. Since its inception, the Borough has navigated a global pandemic and a national cost of living crisis. In this context, the Commission considered the draft refresh of the policy in September

2023, January 2024 and March 2024. Scrutiny Members investigated the co-design work involved in the strategy, including remuneration for the VCFS and welcomed a strategy developed to be more sensitive to the diversity of Newham's communities. However, they were concerned by the lack of any baseline to measure success by, a lack of any clear priorities and a lack of clear targets.

'Ageing Well'

In October the Commission considered the early findings of the Council's new Ageing Well strategy, which had been in place for a year. Research conducted as part of this strategy highlighted significant disparities in the ageing experience within Newham, influenced by factors such as social class, duration of residence in the Borough, and housing situations, all factors which represented a strong bearing on perceptions of Newham as a favourable environment for ageing.

Scrutiny Members welcomed contributions from expert witnesses such as the Reverend Bill Hopkins, working with Newham's LGBTQI community and Taskin Saleem from the Subco Trust, an organisation dedicated to supporting elderly individuals from South Indian communities. The Commission considered the need for a more nuanced, personalised approach to meet the needs of Newham's diverse communities.

Adult Safeguarding Review

January was seen as a timely opportunity for the Commission to assess the Adult Social Care team's approach to safeguarding vulnerable adults in the Borough. The Scrutiny Members' evaluation coincided with the onset of a new inspection framework for Adult Social Care by the Care Quality Commission and the appointment of a new independent chair to the Adult Safeguarding Board.

The Commission reviewed the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report and focused on the challenges of detecting safeguarding issues in environments where health and care professionals, adept at identifying abuses, are not present, leading to underreporting. Additionally, the session explored approaches underway to educate our residents from all communities about recognising safeguarding issues, the processes for reporting them, and how they might be resolved.

Maternity Inequalities

A key achievement in the Commission's previous municipal year was a comprehensive report on local maternity inequalities experienced by Black mothers and, to a lesser extent, Asian mothers in the local Newham health system. The report predated reports by the London Assembly and the [Women and Equalities Parliamentary Select Committee](#) covering the same area.

In 2023-24, the Commission continued to work with Newham Hospital and Barts Health NHS Trust, focusing on enhancing processes to prevent women from being mistakenly charged for maternity care. The Commission was pleased to learn that the hospital was continuing to work with a local group, Maternity Voices (now delivered by Healthwatch Newham), to improve responsiveness to complaints. The Commission heard expert evidence from [Maternity Action](#), a campaign group providing legal support to women who have been incorrectly charged for their care. The Commission plans to revisit this area in the new municipal year to maintain oversight and assess whether outcomes are improving from London-wide and national perspectives.

Air Quality

The Commission, traditionally focused on environmental scrutiny, recognised the significance of monitoring health impacts related to air quality, especially following the death of Ella Kissi-Debrah in Lewisham in 2013, which was partially attributed to exposure to poor air quality. During the first public meeting of the municipal year in July, Scrutiny Members investigated the effects of poor air quality on health in Newham and raised concerns about the limited capacity to enforce regulations against construction-related air pollution issues and a perceived lack of attention to pollution originating within homes.

Plans for a joint meeting in January between the Crime, Environment and Regeneration and Health and Adult Social Care Equalities and Air Quality Scrutiny Commissions to evaluate the Borough's new Air Quality Strategy were postponed due to capacity constraints. Instead, the Chairs held a preliminary meeting with officers from Newham Council's environment team in February 2024 to provide feedback on an early draft of the strategy. The intention is to include this strategy in a future work programme, to shape and incorporate a more robust health-focused narrative.

Equalities

Over the last two municipal years, the Commission has increasingly focused on equalities as a central aspect of its work. Previously, the Commission considered the importance of Sir Michael Marmot's work on health inequalities and the Commission broadened its scope to include a more general assessment of inequalities in areas such as mental health and maternity. This evolving focus led to acknowledgement that the Commission was well positioned to oversee Newham Council's broader initiatives in this area. In September, the Commission considered the council's positive record on gender and outcomes of its Tackling Racism Inequality and Disproportionality (TRID) programme.

In March, the Commission scrutinised the equalities data underpinning Newham's resident survey, and it was heard that inequalities are now as pronounced within the borough as between Newham and other wealthier boroughs. Additionally, inconsistencies in the quality of Equalities Impact Assessments were discussed and it was noted that the experiences of residents with disabilities or those from Muslim communities appeared to be notably worse than those who were white and self-identified as not having a disability.

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 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 of Waltham Forest.



In July 2023, Councillor Masters, Chair of this Commission was appointed Vice-Chair of the INEL JHOSC. Newham Council was also represented on the Committee in 2023/24 by Councillors Rita Chadha and Danny Keeling.

This year, the Joint Committee has considered a range of health services issues for the North East London area, including:

- The North East London Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Collaborative
- The North East London Health and Care Partnership Community Collaborative
- The North East London Integrated System (NHS NEL ICS) Five Year Joint Forward Plan
- System recovery and resilience: Place partnership mutual accountability framework and resilience in Urgent and Emergency Care
- Continuing Healthcare Policies for North East London
- Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care – NHS NEL
- London Ambulance Service update
- Barts Health NHS Trust and Barking, Havering, and Redbridge University Hospitals (BHRUT) NHS Trust Collaboration Update.

Education Children Young People & Lifelong Learning



Councillor Lakmini Shah - Chair of the Education Children Young People and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Commission

The Education, Children, Young People and Lifelong Scrutiny Commission was established to undertake scrutiny of Council services for education, children and young people. This Commission's remit includes scrutiny of children's safeguarding and strategic education support and leadership across the Borough to ensure that every child in Newham fulfils their educational potential.

“ This has been a busy year for this Commission in its focus on keeping children safe and working to improve outcomes. The Commission reviewed the new Council vision for Children and Young People, the strategy for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and explored educational attainment and attendance. It was pleased to receive presentations on wider areas of support needed for our families through the Mental Health - Single Point of Access pilot programme and Family Hub Networks. It recognised the increasing complexity within cases in the vital work of Keeping Children Safe in Newham and how we are working towards the revised Statutory Guidance. ”

Councillor Lakmini Shah – Chair - Education, Children Young People and Life Long Learning Scrutiny Commission

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

- Councillor Lakmini Shah – Chair (from 16th October 2023)
- Councillor Elizabeth Booker (until 16th October 2023)¹⁵
- Councillor Musawwar Alam
- Councillor Sasha DasGupta – Deputy Chair¹⁶
- Councillor Shantu Ferdous
- Councillor Alan Griffiths
- Councillor Jane Lofthouse
- Councillor Jemima McAlmont
- Councillor Simon Rush
- Councillor Madeleine Sarley Pontin
- Councillor Rachel Tripp (from 16th October 2023)
- Councillor Sophia Naqvi (from 21st December 2023)¹⁷
- Mr Paul Leslie, Voluntary Sector Reps (Co-opted Member)
- Ms Ellen Kemp, MBE Diocese of Chelmsford (Co-opted Member).

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

- Newham Council's Vision for Education
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Children and young people's Mental Health – Single Point of Access
- Educational attainment in Newham
- Family Hub Networks
- School attendance
- Children Safeguarding strategies and partnerships



¹⁵Resigned from 16th October 2023.

¹⁶Elected Deputy Chair on 26th September 2023.

¹⁷Appointed as Newham Independents Group Opposition Member from 21st December 2023.

Newham's Education Vision

The Commission reviewed [Newham Council's Education Vision](#) for the future of education in the Borough, exploring new ideas and methods as well as focusing on solutions to build improvements within the education service, including the work of the Education Partnership Board with schools in a collaborative co-design process with children and young people, parents, Head Teachers, partners and councillors.

The Commission commended the inclusion of children's voices and senior leadership engagement and also highlighted concerns around governor's engagement, which was partly due to low numbers of people engaged and suggested increasing the number of respondents in survey.

The Commission explored the extent to which underachieving Black Caribbean and White pupils have been included in the development of the vision and strategy and provided strong feedback to shape the vision and ensure that the steps to produce it are in place recommendations to make sure that underachieving children and wider stakeholders were engaged.

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

The Commission reviewed the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) strategy through the year. This included reviewing the support of children and young people between the ages of 0-25 years who have special educational needs or disabilities, and strengthen early identification and intervention and reviewing the Inclusion Strategy plan of action with key priorities over a five year period to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

The Commission reviewed the way that Newham's young people, families, educational settings, partners and professionals had been involved in the co-production of the strategy and recommended extra resources for Early Years pupils and additional targeted resources for SEND training for all staff, specialist training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and for specialist language therapy and made suggestions on improving the engagement process.

Mental Health – Single Point of Access

The Commission reviewed Mental Health - Single Point of Access, a pilot programme to help shape services to improve mental health outcomes for children and young people and better reach certain population groups. The programme will test out a 'front door' for people to access emotional well-being and mental health support.

The Commission investigated whether the pilot would speed up the first assessments in meeting children's needs and raised concerns that this might move areas of pressure to this service. The Commission explored the impact of the single point of access on children not currently in school, how the success of the pilot can be measured and suggested actions for a stronger evaluation of the programme and the use of feedback from families.

Educational Attainment in Newham

The Commission reviewed attainment and outcomes for Newham Schools and Pupils between 2016 and 2023, including attainment across different vulnerable groups. This reviewed how Newham Council supports targeted improvement at identified schools and the way data was collected and categorised so that the work is evidence-based. The Commission urged the Executive to explore obtaining extra funds for parents where English is not a first language.

Family Hub Networks

The Commission reviewed Newham Council's Family Hub Networks and helped to shape the ongoing work to improve outcomes for children and young people across Newham. Family Hubs have enhanced and improved the quality of the service offered within Newham's communities.

Scrutiny Members evaluated the continuation of grant funding after 2025 and whether staff working in the hubs will be retained when funding ends. Focusing on the resident experience, the Commission viewed the Family Hubs through the lens of its users, learning that the service is considered more accessible for families and is likely to contribute to reduced referrals to Newham's housing hubs. The Commission recommended greater support for parents, more parental involvement in decision-making and increased dissemination of information, as well as additional investment for parents whose first language is not English.

School Attendance

Following the recent Government Guidance on school attendance issued by the Department of Education (DfE)¹⁸, including revised expectations of local authorities, the Commission reviewed school attendance in Newham, considering the interconnections between attendance and attainment with a focus on groups of pupils of particular concern.

Reducing levels of persistent absence is a key priority for Newham with targeted support for specific groups of pupils with high levels of persistent absence such as pupils with Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND), children with challenging behaviour who are at risk of exclusion, pupils with mental health needs, mobile populations and children with an allocated social worker.

The Commission reviewed the Newham context and the Borough's school attendance campaign, "School's Here for You". Scrutiny Members heard how Newham's children and young people had provided feedback concerning their school attendance during the attendance workshops held in Summer 2023 and welcomed a supportive and targeted approach towards understanding and supporting our communities after the effects of the global pandemic.

Keeping Children Safe in Newham

The Commission reviewed the "[Keeping Children Safe in Newham](#)" report, the [Newham Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report](#) and noted the increased complexity of cases accompanied demand pressures across the system, and a rise in referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), for Child In Need cases, Child Protection cases and Children in Care.

The Commission considered the new Ofsted evaluation of Newham Council's services for young people in care and care leavers and focused on the support and preparation into adulthood, the quality and suitability of accommodation, and young people with specific needs, including those at risk of criminal exploitation and serious youth violence, and those in and out of custody. The Commission also considered the revised central government publication, "Working Together" (2023), which contains statutory guidance to support multi-agency working and safeguarding arrangements.

The Commission noted the growing numbers of children open to exploitation, the impact of poverty and the cost of living for focus in developing key priorities, as well as the need for particular measures for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees and highlighted concerns about young people at risk of radicalisation.

¹⁸Working together to improve school attendance, Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. Published: May 2022. Applies from: September 2022.

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.

“ I am gravely concerned that the narrative concerning Black boys has not changed in the forty years I have lived in the UK. It’s always about under-achievement in areas such as educational attainment, social and economic wellbeing and over-representation in the criminal justice system and mental health issues. Therefore, we are committed to listening and learning, prioritising the voices of Black youths, their families, and community organisations that support them. By understanding the specific needs and aspirations of these young people, we can work with our partners to further develop services that truly make a difference. This is about working positively to tackle disparities faced by these groups by creating a responsive, inclusive, and supportive environment for them to thrive. ”

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 Belgica Guana
- Councillor Harvinder Singh Virdee
- Councillor Lakmini Shah
- Councillor Lester Hudson
- Councillor Susan Masters
- Councillor Danny Keeling
- Councillor Lewis Godfrey
- Mr Paul Leslie (Co-opted member).

Key Areas of Work in 2023/24

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

Lived Experience of Black Boys

A group of young Black boys and men were invited to participate in a discussion with Commission members, as part of the evidence sessions. The young people spoke about their desire for strong connections and relationships and for the dominant negative narrative that is associated with them to be changed. The Commission has found that young Black boys and men are ready to engage, as community leaders, overcome obstacles and pioneer new ground in tackling complex challenges.

This work of the Commission has sought to find ways to ensure that the Council is supporting them and leverage opportunities to remove obstacles to achievement and address racism, discrimination and inequality faced by young Black boys and men.

“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



Black Boys in Newham Survey

The Commission considered the key messages emerging from the Black Boys in Newham Survey, and how this survey will be used to inform plans and policies to improve outcomes for Black boys and young Black men in the Borough. Newham Council has developed the Tackling Racism, Inequality, and Disproportionality (TRID) programme and commissioned Rights and Equalities in Newham (REIN) to engage with a broad range of Black boys aged between 10 and 25 years and to hear about their lived experiences. The survey was carried out using a relational approach, via key themes such as education, community safety, mental health and interactions with organisations, such as the Metropolitan Police Service and the NHS.

Scrutiny Members explored evidence that young Black boys perform well in early years and then fall behind, highlighting a need for detailed information and data from schools to understand these patterns and actively shape solutions.

The Commission focused on academies and access to data issues, as well as on nuanced approaches and other factors, such as poverty, wider disadvantage and complex learning needs when looking at educational attainment. It has noted particular school attendance disparities between children of African and Caribbean heritage, and the use of off-rolling¹⁹. The Commission noted that the Inclusion Service had successfully challenged 10 permanent exclusions last year and recommended a method of reporting such cases, working with governors and tracking student enrolment.

Community Safety in Newham

The Commission received evidence from the Council's Community Safety team and the Metropolitan Police Service on community safety in Newham and focussed on how young Black boys see their participation in society and pathways to opportunities, access to resources and their voice in relation to the interactions with the criminal justice system and the work that is taking place to address this.



Councillor Anthony McAlmont – Chair of the Commission at Newham School Governors Forum

In moving forward the Commission explored opportunities to review and refresh existing work, as well as to introduce new perspectives under the new leadership of Community Safety at Newham Council. The Commission explored opportunities moving forwards to review and refresh existing work and the introduction of new perspectives with new leadership of the Community Safety area at Newham Council.

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

Addressing Disparities in the Youth Justice System

The Commission received evidence on the work within the Youth Justice System (YJS) to improve outcomes for Black youths, tackling over-representation of Black children at every stage of the criminal justice system and arranged a visit to the Youth Justice Service to meet staff there and gain insights into the operation of gangs and county lines.

The Commission has highlighted the power and impact of mentoring in building connections and relationships that build confidence in young people.

“The use of stop and search is disproportionate...”

¹⁹The practice of **off-rolling** is the removal of a pupil without using the option of permanent exclusion. This practice disproportionately affects young people with additional needs.

Engagement with School Governors Forum to Tackle Disparities

The Chair of the Commission engaged with the Newham School Governors Forum meeting in April on ways to tackle disparities. This led to a discussion of key areas such as the transition from primary to secondary schools and schools' behaviour policies. It is anticipated that there will be follow up workshops with head teachers and governors later in the year

“We need a change – Black boys can't change until we see you change”

Equality and Inclusion for Black Boys and Young Black Men

The Commission received evidence on the Council's approach towards addressing equality and inclusion priorities for Black boys and young Black men in Newham, including powerful oral testimony from young people, which has led the Commission to highlight the importance of tackling structural and systemic inequalities.

“The importance of the scrutiny commission on the relationship of Black Boys with the London Borough of Newham, is immeasurable and has the potential to be life changing for Black Boys and how they navigate inequalities in the borough, now and in the future.

The commission has gathered information for some time, has met with young black boys and has questioned senior officers across a number of directorates, who individually and collectively have responsibility for education, community safety and policing, social care, children and young people's services. I and other members of the commission have spoken directly with young black boys, who in turn have fully engaged with the commission, with honesty, openness and transparency; I believe the commission is committed to facilitating sustainable service transformation that will have a measurable impact on the lived experiences of Black boys in Newham.”

Paul Leslie –Chief Executive of Rights and Equalities in Newham

The testimony received from black boys provided an insight into the lived experience of these Newham residents and highlighted particular issues, including the disconnection with teachers and the impact of cultural differences in educational settings. Some witnesses spoke of limited career pathways, with a focus towards primarily sports or music.

It was suggested that some teachers imposed limiting beliefs and this led to a discussion on teacher training and cultural awareness and the need for more targeted training. It was also suggested that there was a lack of Black teachers in schools and this highlighted a possible gap and suggested the need for more culturally and racially diverse teachers.

The young people said that they wanted to be exposed to a broader range of successful role models in different fields, and stressed the importance of education that goes beyond fitting into the system, covering diverse career paths, entrepreneurship, trades, and understanding of taxes and politics and suggested schools should organise more events to expose students to various professions such as banks, law firms and the stock exchange.

“Growing up in East London infused my identity with resilience and community spirit. The vibrant tapestry of cultures taught me the value of diversity, fostering an open-minded approach to life. The challenges of the East End instilled grit, shaping my determination to overcome obstacles & adversities. Every corner holds memories that fuel my commitment to social impact for my local community. East London isn't just my birthplace, it's the heartbeat of my values, pushing me to create positive change.”

James - aged 26



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 Scrutiny²⁰ 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.

At the end of 2022-2023 cycle, Newham Council commissioned CfGS to undertake a review of the scrutiny function at Newham Council. The aim of this review was to help evaluate and guide the scrutiny function's development in accordance with the Council's aspirations for democratic accountability, participation and greater engagement. Learning is already being implemented and embedded.

In December 2023, the LGA undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge of Newham Council. The LGA report referenced the findings of the Scrutiny Improvement Review and recommended a series of Governance and Scrutiny Development Workshops that will seek to coproduce an action plan for improvements in 2024. To read the full Peer Challenge Report and draft Action Plan, visit the Newham Council website: [Newham Action Plan](#).

In line with this, a Scrutiny Self-Assessment on Performance and Effectiveness process is proposed for the end of the next municipal year committee cycle. Evaluation and development of the scrutiny process could include:

- evaluating whether and how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is adding value to Newham Council's governance and decision-making processes;
- addressing areas for improvement;
- progress in implementing improvements;
- tracking scrutiny recommendations to completion and their associated impact; and
- enhancing scrutiny member development requirements to embed an evaluation and learning culture.

²⁰Overview 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

Get involved

Newham Council welcomes the public's involvement in its Overview and Scrutiny process, either through submitting evidence or proving 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 press and public who wish to attend in person. Meetings are advertised on the Newham Council website.

Please contact the scrutiny team (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. www.youtube.com/channel/UCyErdAzzu_rykDdpUHrEg9Q

Contribute to an inquiry

To submit evidence on any current scrutiny inquiry, please email scrutiny@newham.gov.uk



