



---

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

---



2023-24



**Elmbridge**  
Borough Council  
*... bridging the communities ...*

# Overview and Scrutiny

## What is 'Overview and Scrutiny'?

The Local Government Act 2000 first introduced the requirement for every local authority to include provision for at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Subsequent amendments to the Act have further developed the role of Overview and Scrutiny within local authorities.

Although not a decision-making body, effective Overview and Scrutiny has potential to influence and inform decisions made by both the Council and partner bodies affecting the Borough.

The Committee can review and scrutinise any matters which affect the Council, its area or the residents of that area, in order to provide greater transparency and accountability in the delivery of local services.

**The following key roles were identified as areas which Overview and Scrutiny should be concerned with in Elmbridge:**

- **Holding the Cabinet to account**, which may include reviewing decisions taken by Cabinet, but not yet implemented, via the 'call-in' procedure;
- **Monitoring Council performance**;
- **Reviewing policy**;
- **Developing policy**;
- **Scrutinising externally** issues of public concern beyond the remit of the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has 13 members. All Elmbridge Borough Councillors are eligible to sit on the Committee, except for members of the Cabinet. No Councillor can be involved in the scrutiny of a decision with which they have been directly involved. The Committee is chaired by a member of the opposition party. During 2023/24, the Committee met on 8 occasions.

Detailed arrangements regarding the operation of Overview and Scrutiny can be found in the Council's Constitution.



**Chairman**  
Cllr John Cope



**Vice Chairman**  
Cllr Neil Houston

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

During 2023-24 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approached scrutiny of key local issues and the Council's work thematically with the aim of hearing from both the Council's perspective and from external partners and other organisations where possible.

The Committee considered the work being undertaken regarding **Enterprise Elmbridge and the local economy** with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Enterprise, and Local Economy in attendance along with guest speakers from the Cobham Chamber of Commerce and the Walton Business Improvement District.

Representatives from the Forestry Commission and Active Surrey attended to provide external insight regarding the Oak Processionary Moth and leisure provision in the borough respectively. The Leader also attended as a substitute for the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Commercial Strategy along with the Chairperson of the Countryside Consultative Group to speak about **leisure, green spaces, and the Oak Processionary Moth**.

The Committee scrutinised the **Council's approach to engagement with residents and community groups** with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Policy and Transformation in attendance along with representatives from the two Citizen's Advice organisations covering the Elmbridge area, Central Surrey Voluntary Action, and Walton Charity who are some of the Council's key strategic partners.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and the Portfolio Holder Community Care attended the Committee to discuss the **2024/25 budget and the Community Services Transformation Plan**, which also included a discussion on the temporary **community centre closures**, respectively.

While considering the **annual report from the Community Safety Working Group**, the Committee had a discussion on initiatives in the local area to tackle violence against women and girls with Surrey Police in attendance to contribute to the discussion.

The Committee heard from Thames Water regarding **improving the water quality of local waterways** in the borough following an all-member briefing with the company earlier in the year.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Enterprise, and Local Economy attended to discuss **planning enforcement and the effective use of the Community Infrastructure Levy**. Representatives from the Royal Town Planning Institute were also in attendance to advise on best practice.

An invitation was extended to Surrey Council County (SCC) to update the Committee on the **impact of ULEZ on Elmbridge and improving local roads** however they were unable to attend therefore, a separate briefing was arranged.

The Committee also provided invaluable scrutiny of documents and policy proposals, offering feedback on the 2023/24 **Community Safety Partnership Plan**, the annual **refresh of the Vision** ahead of 2024/25 and the **Walton PSPO** consultation.

The Committee continued to effectively utilise their progress tracker and rolling two-year work programme following their introduction in 2022-23.

## Outcomes

The Committee's progress tracker contains a number of outcomes achieved throughout the year and several of the topics on the Committee's work programme in 2023/24 were added throughout the year as a result of progress tracker items. Key highlights include:

- A review of the process for business grant applications.
- Written responses from local partners such as SCC and Thames Water on matters of local concern.
- All-member and O&S Committee briefings on topics such as Walton, planning services performance, SCC highways and water quality in local waterways.
- Closer ongoing oversight of green spaces matters such as signage and tree removal.
- Scheduled attendance of Committee members on tours of the Suez Eco Waste Park.



## Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups

**Established to perform issue-based/time-limited reviews of specific issues**

There were no Task and Finish Groups in 2023/24.



## Overview and Scrutiny Standing Panel

**Established to perform scrutiny related functions throughout the year.**

The Performance and Finance Standing Panel undertakes detailed scrutiny of often complex financial and performance information. In 2023/24 the Panel continued to review and monitor Council services to ensure they are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Issues examined this year by the Panel included 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budget update, an update on the Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25, the Budget and Council Tax report and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy Action Plan.

The Panel also reviewed the quarterly income and expenditure as well as performance indicators progress against the Vision 2030. In addition, it reviewed the quarterly Crime and Disorder Benchmark report and the 2024/25 Budget.

## Overview and Scrutiny Working Groups

**Collaborative consultative forums providing views on matters within its remit.**

There are three permanent Working Groups reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### Community Safety Working Group

The Community Safety Working Group fulfils the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's responsibility as the designated crime and disorder committee. Therefore, much of the group's focus was on the general work of the Elmbridge Community and Safety Partnership. There were discussions on CCTV performance and the monitoring of the Walton-on-Thames Public Spaces Protection Order. The Borough Commander was in attendance to provide commentary on the latest crime statistics.

## Elmbridge Annual Grants Panel

The Panel met in September 2023 to allocate funding to 18 voluntary sector organisations for the 2023/24 financial year to the value of £35,000. The Partnership Fund Panel (which includes representation from the Annual Grants Panel) met in December 2023 with partners Walsingham Care and Walton Charity and allocated funding to 10 voluntary sector organisations to the value of £45,000.

## Elmbridge Connects Advisory Body

Elmbridge Connects was formerly known as the Elmbridge Older Person's Advisory Body, changing their name in 2023-24 to better reflect the work they undertake. The group continues to review, develop and promote key Community Services as well as those of external partners based in the community. At their most recent meeting, discussion was focussed on the Carers Working start and finish group and a PA Housing update.

## Looking forward to 2024-25

Following the work of the Committee in 2023-24, it is now time to develop in more detail the Committee's programme for 2024-25 and where appropriate, 2025-26.

The Committee will continue to review key local issues and engage with a range of partner organisations to ensure that its work reflects the priorities of residents and businesses. While external bodies are under no obligation to attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings, we are hopeful invitations sent in 2024-25 to representatives from external bodies will be accepted and meetings attended in the spirit of community co-operation and good will. With the challenging financial environment for local government set to continue, the scrutiny of performance and financial information will continue to be a core aspect of the Committee's work.