



Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government 2024/25 & Havering Reflections

Highlights of Local Governance and Scrutiny

<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Annual-Scrutiny-Survey-2024-25-results.pdf>

Scrutiny Committee Structures



Most councils operate **multiple scrutiny committees**

- **35%** report **five or more committees**
- Only **13%** have a single overarching scrutiny committee
- Across respondents: **506 thematic committees** were identified
- Most common themes:
 - Health & Care (21%)
 - Children & Education (18%)
 - Economy (12%)
 - Housing (11%)
 - Finance (11%)
 - Environment (8%)

Views on Opposition-Chaired Scrutiny

- **88%** believe opposition-chaired committees bring value
- Reasons cited: independence, balance, accountability
- Minority concerns: risk of politicisation

Scrutiny Chairing Arrangements & Diversity

- **63%**: scrutiny chairs held by majority party
- **20%**: chairs held by opposition
- **17%**: politically balanced
- Diversity representation:
 - **34%** female chairs
 - **12%** chairs from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds
- Councils report **612 chairs** and **502 vice-chairs** in total



How well Scrutiny Works



Ratings (0–10 scale):

- **7–8 (fairly well): 47%**
- **9–10 (extremely well): 7%**
- **0–6 (less well/not well): 46%**

What Effective Scrutiny Looks Like

What Helps & Hinders Scrutiny

Positive reasons

- Good relationships with Executive
- Effective tracking of recommendations
- Active involvement in policy and budget reviews

Negative reasons:

- Resource constraints
- Political inertia and dominance
- Poor chairing or limited engagement



Ideas for Improving Scrutiny

Councils suggest:

- More focused scrutiny & better work planning
- Better Executive–Scrutiny relationships
- Fewer committees / more streamlined structures
- Greater political balance
- More public involvement
- Stronger recommendations and follow-up

Conclusions from the Survey



Closing

The survey highlights both:

- **Strong foundations**
(engagement with partners, thematic breadth, general belief in value)

- **Systemic challenges**
(resourcing, political culture, process inconsistency, diversity gaps)

Overall: scrutiny is valued but **not yet working at its full potential.**

What Poor Scrutiny Looks Like



Poor scrutiny results in decisions that are not transparent

Poor scrutiny can harm the interests of the community

Poor scrutiny practices can lead to inefficient use of resources

Informs Commissioners Judgements



Scrutiny's Impact (Sentiment Statements)

Strong agreement/ agreement levels show scrutiny is seen as having positive influence on:

- Local area challenges
- Local people's lives
- Financial & resource management
- Partner organisations
- Adoption and use of AI



Impact of Scrutiny on Residents

Residents have a greater trust in local government

Government decisions are more transparent

Residents report higher satisfaction with public services

Could think about



• **Engaging with External Partners**

Commonly engaged sectors include:

- Voluntary sector
- Health & Social Care
- Education & young people
- Emergency services
- Business & Economy

Councils want stronger relationships, improved collaboration, better visibility, and more digital/hybrid options for partner involvement.

• **Place-Based Scrutiny**

- Focuses on organisations beyond the council (e.g., NHS, Police, utilities, universities)
- Where engagement occurs, outcomes are generally positive
- Many councils **have not attempted** outreach to some key sectors (e.g., broadband providers)

Board recommendations for Strengthening Scrutiny in 25/26



April 2025 Overview & Scrutiny Recommendations from the annual self-assessment of 2024/25. Presented to 7th May 2025 Cabinet by Chair and Deputy Chair:

- 1. The relevant Cabinet Member should be required to attend each meeting of the Board or Sub-Committees where there is an item relevant to their portfolios.
- 2. All Cabinet responses to scrutiny recommendations or comments should be included as an agenda item at the next scrutiny meeting.
- 3. Comments and recommendations to Cabinet should be presented at the Cabinet meeting by the Chairman and Vice-Chair of the Board or relevant Sub-Committee.
- 4. Cabinet responses to scrutiny comments on called-in decisions should be circulated to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board as well as other Members supporting the call-in.
- 5. Cabinet supports the Board's request for scrutiny reports to be received two weeks ahead of publication as this will facilitate earlier pre-meets and general consideration of the material.
- 6. That Cabinet commends the Overview and Scrutiny Board reviewing the work it undertook over the past year, and its ongoing efforts to make the scrutiny process as effective as possible for residents.
- 7. That a protocol be developed for working practices between Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Board including, but not limited to, the issues outlined in the recommendations above.

Thoughts on How to Strengthen Scrutiny Arrangements in Havering for 26/27



- Length of tenure- is one-year sufficient to learn the roles?
- Working Protocol between Cabinet & Scrutiny
- Timely training and support
- mre-meet with new administration & scrutiny prior to scrutiny Meetings commencing
- Focused work-planning and pre-meets
- Thematic key lines of enquiry
- Post-decision scrutiny: reviewing the impact a decision has had.
- Focus on financial position
- Adoption of task and finish groups (see next slide)
- Tracking of recommendations/implementation/actions agreed
- More joint sub-committee scrutinies
- Provide access to relevant information and data
- Engage more with stakeholders and the community
- Monitor the impact of policies and decisions
- Other?

An independent example of reviewing and strengthening scrutiny arrangements



[Reports | Westminster City Council](#)

<https://committees.westminster.gov.uk/documents/s70838/Item%2010%20Appendix%201%20-%20SITG%20Summary%20Report%20-%2012%20February%202026.pdf>

Takes you to all T&F Group reports

The February 2026 one covers strengthening scrutiny arrangements: The recommendations were sorted into five themes in order to most effectively discuss and respond to them.

- Vision and impact;
- Role and relationships;
- Structure;
- Training and development; and,
- Work programmes and collaboration.