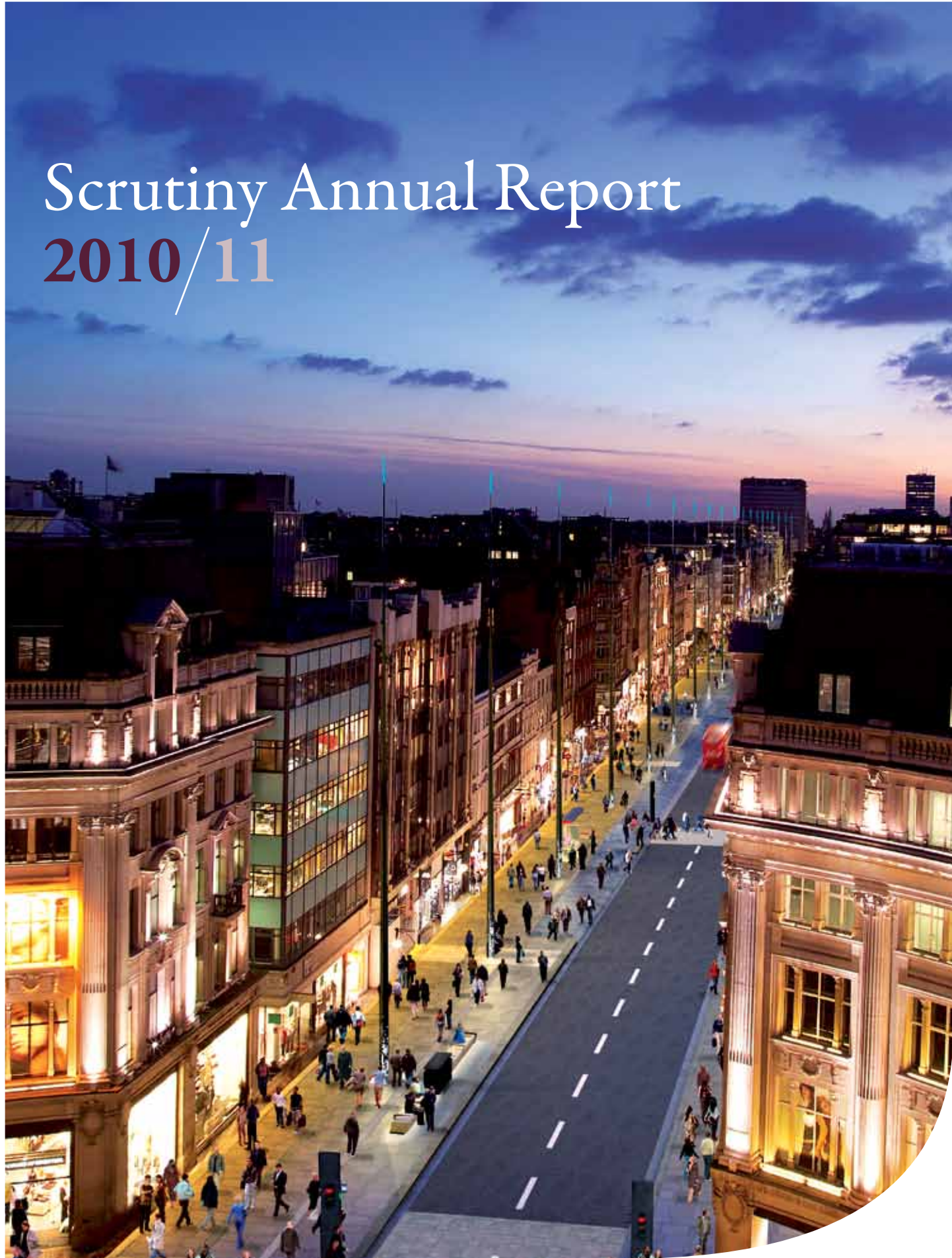


Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11



Westminster City Council

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City of Westminster

Message from the chairman



Cllr Sarah Richardson

It's been a busy year in national and local government. There's been the advent of the Coalition Government last May followed throughout the year by numerous policy consultations and initiatives including major shake-ups in the realms of health, education, policing, local government pensions, housing benefit and the funding of higher education.

There have also been other high profile campaigns and developments such as the Big Society agenda and the Government's commitment to localism as a means to removing unnecessary bureaucracy and empowering communities to do things their own way.

One would be hard-pushed to overlook the debate surrounding tackling the economic deficit over the last twelve months. The publication of the Government's Spending Review 2010 in October, which set the spending budgets for each Government department up to 2014-15, and the Local Government Finance Settlement in December, setting out the redistribution of local authority Formula Grant, brought home the scale of the challenge facing local government.

In Westminster, the council, under the leadership of the executive, has been quick in reacting to national developments and proactive in pursuing its own ambitious plans as part of its Living City agenda. I'm proud to say that at every step, policy and scrutiny has been there to hold the executive to account and voice the views of residents and stakeholders. As the rest of this report illustrates, by focusing on the issues that matter to people in Westminster, scrutiny has made a very real and noticeable impact on improving the delivery of council services.

Examples include detailed scrutiny of the council's budget setting process; special meetings on health and adult social care; dedicated task groups on high profile issues such as the transition from the City Guardians and City Inspectors services to the Westminster Wardens, overcrowding, parking policy and customer service; and ongoing scrutiny of tri-borough proposals to share services, which will continue throughout the forthcoming year.

Despite the challenging financial times policy and scrutiny has also been trialling innovative new practices such as our Young People's Scrutiny Panel, which has empowered over twenty young people from across the borough to investigate issues that matter to them and feedback directly into the council's decision making process.

This report provides just a summary of the key areas that policy and scrutiny have looked at over the past year, but importantly, as it is intended to be read online, you'll find links that will take you directly to additional information on each item. For a more detailed look at what each committee has investigated over the last year and to stay up-to-date in the coming year, you may also wish read our dedicated newsletter P&S Quarterly which is uploaded regularly to our website.

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The policy and Scrutiny retrospective look at how we are working and our agenda for the coming years committees.

WESTMINSTER'S
SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES

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Built Environment & Business Enterprise & Skills

Chairman: Angela Harvey

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Children & Young People

Chaired: Cllr Ian Adams

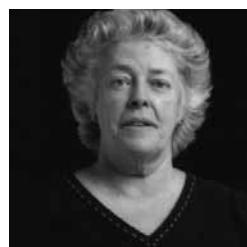
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City Management & Transport

Chaired: Cllr Alan Bradley

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Housing & Community Services

Chaired: Cllr Audrey Lewis

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Finance & Resources

Chaired: Cllr Andrew Havery

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Society, Families & Adult Services

Chaired: Cllr Sarah Richardson

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Acknowledgements & further information

Policy & Scrutiny 2011

Westminster City Council has six Policy & Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission, which looks at major cross-cutting issues and provides oversight of the process. Each committee is made up of a politically-balanced group of councillors that hold council Cabinet Members, senior offices and other partners to account on specific policy areas.

In Westminster the six committees and the commission not only examine the work of the council and monitor performance, they also actively contribute to developing policy by conducting research and making recommendations on how services can be improved. This is why in Westminster it is called Policy and Scrutiny instead of overview and scrutiny, which is what you may hear it called in other boroughs. The structure of the scrutiny set-up and the policy areas that each committee is responsible for is shown on the diagram opposite.

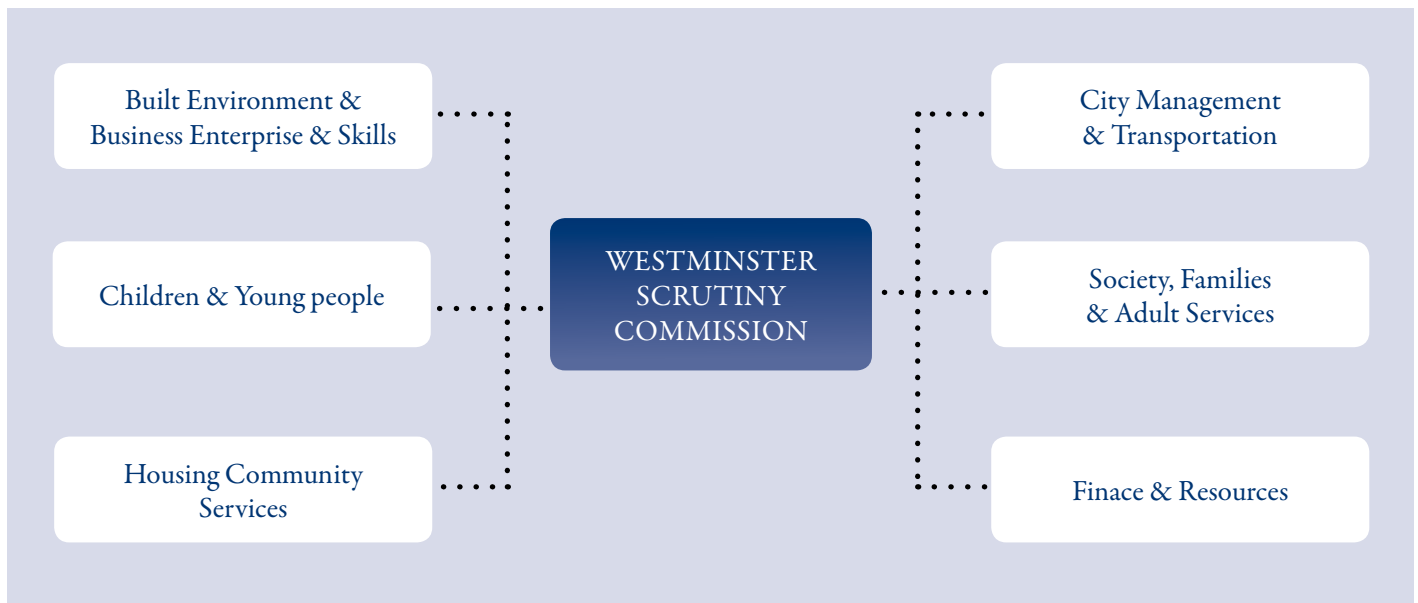
Scrutiny is vital in promoting local accountability as it allows local backbench councillors (non-executive) to hold the council's Cabinet Members (executive) to account. In many ways the process is similar to how national Parliamentary select committees scrutinise government departments and ministers. Importantly, other partners that provide services within the borough, such as the NHS and CityWest Homes, can also be subject to scrutiny, so the process acts as an important tool for councillors to champion the views of their constituents.

As the diagram illustrates, each of the six committees scrutinises the policy areas related to either one or two cabinet portfolios

and those cabinet members will have to report and provide information to their respective committee upon request. Each committee is led by a chairman and together, the chairmen of all the committees sit on the Scrutiny Commission along with a balancing political member from the minority party. The Commission investigates issues that cut across the work areas of a number of committees, such as the tri-borough proposals to share services, and provides an opportunity for councillors to question the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council. It also enables the chairmen to have strategic oversight of the scrutiny function to ensure it is being effective and making an impact.

Each committee typically meets on a quarterly basis and it is up to the chairmen as to how each committee conducts its business, though there are usually significant similarities in terms of questioning cabinet members and senior officers and making recommendations. However, some committees will prefer to focus in some depth on a select number of issues and actively develop policy around them, whilst others will cover a broader range and monitor performance in key service areas. The committees can also choose to hold special meetings on specific issues and this usually happens when a development occurs during the year which necessitates a quick response

Structure of scrutiny committees in Westminster for 2010-11



from scrutiny. Examples over the last year include additional meetings to formulate a response to the NHS White Paper, assess the council's consultation on proposals to reduce spending on adult social care, and the Olympics.

To develop policy and examine issues in more depth, committees typically establish councillor-led task groups. Over the last year, examples of task groups include investigations into overcrowding and health inequality, the Westminster Wardens service, parking policy and customer services. These reviews are shown throughout this report in special highlighted boxes. As part of this work, councillors will often hear from expert witnesses, question key officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and conduct site visits. Findings are then fed back to the committee which established it and presented to the Cabinet Member or partner organisation for consideration.

Policy and scrutiny committees are not in themselves formal decision-making bodies but they are supported by legislation to hold the executive and partner organisations to account. As part of this a committee can request that cabinet members, senior officers and external partners attend before it to present information and answer questions. Following this the committee can then agree on recommendations that have to be acknowledged, considered and responded to in due course. Committees also have the power to 'call-in' a cabinet member's decision on a proposal where they have concerns, questions or want further information. To do this three or more members of a committee have to agree to 'call-in' the decision.

Once a recommendation is made the committee will track that it is duly considered by the cabinet member or external organisation. Typically this entails requiring an acknowledgement that the recommendation has been received and then a fuller report after three-to-nine months (depending on the timescales for consideration/implementation) detailing how each recommendation is to be or is being implemented and the justification for why a recommendation might be declined.

The work programmes for the Policy and Scrutiny Committees are typically developed at the start of the municipal year in April and May but items can be added at any time if important issues arise. To find out more, please visit the web-page for the relevant committee to find upcoming meeting dates and agendas or look at the latest P&S Quarterly newsletter. Formal committee meetings are open to the public who are warmly invited to attend to observe proceedings. Alternatively, if you have a suggestion for a topic that affects a significant number of people in Westminster and could benefit from being scrutinised please complete our online contact form. If the issue is related to a specific case then it may be best to contact your local councillor.

Society, Families & Adult Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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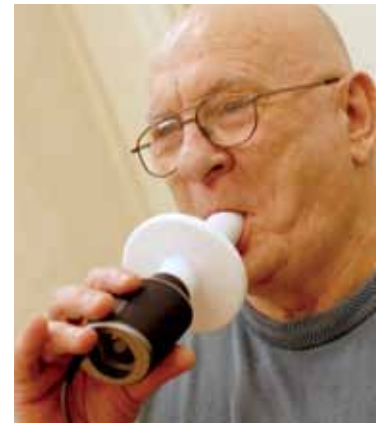
In a fast moving policy environment since the election of the coalition government, the committee has organised special meetings on the NHS White Paper, Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS, and the council's consultation on proposals to reduce spending on adult social care. In many cases the committee has looked at emotive issues which have the potential to impact upon significant numbers of Westminster's residents and those that visit the borough

In making a difference and striving to bring about greater accountability, transparency and engagement, the committee's efforts secured an extra consultation session for adult social care users at 42 Westbourne Park (the Princess Diana centre), allowed various interest groups to air their views on how the consultation on adult social care proposals was conducted, provided democratically accountable membership of the project management group on developing a framework for young people with disabilities aged 14-25 years, considered a number

of consultations on changes to local health services as well as drafting a response to the Health White Paper, and assessed how the council is performing on flagship programmes such as the Brathay Gang Exit Project and Family Recovery Programme, which targets intervention on families experiencing multiple problems. The committee has also sought to develop a stronger relationship with the Local Involvement Network (LINK) through regular liaison and having committee representation on LINK site visits.

In an innovative step we participated, as part of a collective of six North West London boroughs, in a Centre for Public Scrutiny national pathfinder investigation into the links between health inequality and housing. As part of this a task group evaluation of Health and Overcrowding Programme led to an increase in the resources allocated to the work which enabled it to more sufficiently address the health issues of overcrowded families.

The year ahead poses both challenges and opportunity for scrutiny. Major developments in health, with the development of GP commissioning consortia, the Council's role in local health improvement and the scrutiny of health and wellbeing boards are such examples. The personalisation agenda and impact of



increased eligibility criteria in adult social services, and the impact of funding cuts on policing will all need to be meticulously scrutinised so that local democratically elected councillors can stand up for what they see and hear in their communities.

HEALTH

RESPONDING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S NHS WHITE PAPER

What was looked at: In September 2011 a special meeting was held to look at proposals including the establishment of and devolving of funding to GP commissioning consortia, the abolition of Primary Care Trusts and the establishment of local health and wellbeing boards and the local HealthWatch.

What happened as a result: The committee heard from a variety of experts and submitted a response to the government's consultation. The government has subsequently adjusted proposals to ensure greater scrutiny of health and wellbeing boards.

More information:

Committee response to White Paper, Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS >> [Click Here](#)

View the meeting papers for this meeting >> [Click Here](#)

View the minutes of this meeting >> [Click Here](#)

FAMILY RECOVERY PROGRAMME

REVIEW OF WESTMINSTER'S FAMILY RECOVERY PROGRAMME

What was looked at: A Westminster flagship programme to target intervention on those families experiencing multiple problems as part of taking preventative action in order to save resources in the long term. The committee met to review the results of the first 50 families to have gone through the programme.

What happened as a result: The committee fully endorsed the work as an example of innovative working. The model has since been used as part of the basis of one 16 national 'community budget' schemes where Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Wandsworth are to work together to tackle and support families with complex problems.

More information:

Minutes to the meeting on the FRP can be found here >> [Click Here](#)

View the council's press release on Community Budgets >> [Click Here](#)

Government announcement on Community Budgets >> [Click Here](#)



ADULT SOCIAL CARE PROPOSALS TO REDUCTION ADULT SOCIAL CARE SPENDING

What was looked at: Following initial consideration in October 2010 the committee held a special meeting in January 2011 to review the council's consultation on proposals to raise eligibility criteria from moderate to substantial need, review charging policy for social care and end the day care provision at 42 Westbourne Park (Princess Diana Centre)

What happened as a result: October's scrutiny led to an additional consultation session being arranged for users and carers at 42 Westbourne Park Road. Findings of the special meeting were presented to the council's Cabinet on January 17th and were successful in securing a decision to conduct a further options appraisal, including allowing service users to come forward with proposals, for the use of the Westbourne Park Road site.

More information:

View the press release from the special meeting
>> [Click Here](#)

View the papers on the meeting focusing on the consultation >> [Click Here](#)

View the minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 17th January 2011 >> [Click Here](#)

THE PERSONALISATION AGENDA

What was looked at: In February 2011 the committee looked at the council's progress in rolling out personal budgets.

What happened as a result: Minutes currently in production

More information:

THE CARE QUALITY INSPECTION (CQC) INSPECTION OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE

What was looked at: The inspection focused on safeguarding adults whose circumstances made them vulnerable and increasing choice and control for older people.

What happened as a result: The committee congratulated the department on an excellent inspection and agreed to monitor progress in further improving the service in line with the CQC's inspection.

More information:

View the CQC inspection of adult social care at Westminster >> [Click Here](#)

View Westminster's improvement plan to CQC recommendations >> [Click Here](#)

View minutes from the committee's meeting on CQC inspection >> [Click Here](#)

CRIME AND DISORDER

THE BRATHAY GANG EXIT PROJECT

What was looked at: The committee investigated interim findings of an independent evaluation of the project, which focused on 20 young men aged 15-22 in Queen's Park who had been identified as being at risk of becoming involved in serious gang activity.

What happened as a result: The project was found to have been a great success and the committee praised the work that had been done. After the meeting, committee chairman Sarah Richardson, "this is not a panacea but it is an example of just one of the innovative ways that Westminster is looking to improve the chances for young people... [Brathay's] work helps deliver major benefits for the local community and young people in particular who have the most fear from the escalation of gang violence".

More information:

View the press release from scrutiny's investigation into the issue >> [Click Here](#)

More information on the background to the Gang Exit Programme >> [Click Here](#)

Minutes to the meeting on the Brathay Gang Exit Project can be found here >> [Click Here](#)

Safer Westminster Partnership update from October 2010 can be found here (due to be completed as subject to scrutiny again on 26 April 2011) >> [Click Here](#)

THE SAFER WESTMINSTER PARTNERSHIP (TO BE LOOKED AT ON 26TH APRIL 2011)

What was looked at: In October 2010 and April 2011 the committee reviewed Westminster's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, the Safer Westminster Partnership.

What happened as a result:

More information:

OVERCROWDING AND HEALTH INEQUALITY TASK GROUP

What was looked at: As part of a Centre for Public Scrutiny funded national Scrutiny Development Area, Westminster investigated the issue of overcrowding and health inequality. This formed part of a group of North West London boroughs looking at issues relating to housing and health inequality.

Westminster focused on evaluating the Health and Overcrowding Programme – a joint NHS Westminster and council funded project to help mitigate the negative health impacts of overcrowded accommodation whilst tenants wait to be re-housed.

As part of the project, task group members councillors Sheila D'Souza and Cyril Nemeth questioned lead housing and health officers, visited overcrowded households and viewed properties that were being made available to overcrowded families.

What happened as a result: The task group stressed the need for health visitors to be fully integrated into the project in order to adequately address health issues. As a result NHS Westminster allocated funding for an additional health visitor to receive referrals to visit overcrowded families and provide support in addressing their health needs.

More information:

Task group final report >> [Click Here](#)

