



Annual report from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission (2020/21)

Introduction

Despite the problems placed in our way by the Covid-19 crisis, I am pleased to say that I can still look back at a busy and successful year for Scrutiny. One unexpected benefit of all the remote meetings has been a record level of attendance, which I will comment on later in my report.

Once again, my report, as well as covering last year, looks forward to the 2021/22 year and incorporates details of the Scrutiny Workplan agreed by the Commission earlier this month, which promises to keep us busy over the coming year.

The Role of Scrutiny

Some Council meetings, such as the Cabinet, are “decision making” bodies. Scrutiny does not make decisions but is instead made up of bodies who monitor and influence those meetings that do. The role, carried out by non-Cabinet members, is designed to support the work of the Council in the following ways:

- By reviewing and scrutinising decisions taken by the Cabinet, also known as acting as a “critical friend”
- By considering aspects of the Council’s performance
- By assisting in research, policy review and development
- By involving itself with external organisations operating in the District to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
- By providing a means of involving the community in the Council’s work

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Scrutiny may be consulted by the Cabinet on the development of policy and may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions. Scrutiny allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters by holding public inquiries into matters of local concern, which may lead to reports and recommendations that advise the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. The Scrutiny Commission and Panels also monitor the decisions of the Cabinet and in certain circumstances can 'call-in' a decision, which has been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented, to consider whether the decision is appropriate and whether or not to recommend that it be reconsidered.

Structure of Scrutiny in Harborough District Council

Scrutiny Commission

Harborough District Council has a Scrutiny Commission which meets up to four times a year to agree and review the Scrutiny Work-plan. The Commission has ten non-executive members appointed by the Council at the Annual Council Meeting. The Commission Chair may not also be a Panel Chair or Panel Vice-Chair. The role of a Commission Member is to suggest and approve topics for the workplan and to oversee and monitor all Scrutiny work.

The Council's rota of meetings includes two regular Scrutiny Commission meetings each year, with a further two dates reserved in case additional meetings need to be arranged. The Workplan is set at the June and December meetings, with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission making any changes that are required in between.

Scrutiny Panels

The Commission has appointed two Panels with overview and scrutiny 'broad-brush' responsibility: 'Communities' and 'Performance'. Both Commission and Panel meetings are open to members of the public and involvement of the public is actively encouraged by the invitation of members of the public and representatives of outside bodies to Scrutiny panel meetings.

Each Panel has seven members including a Chair and Vice-Chair and is subject to the proportionality rules in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The roles of the Chair and Vice-Chair are to oversee and provide leadership, management and strategic direction to the Scrutiny Panels. Panel Members receive and consider information on workplan items, make recommendations, as appropriate to Cabinet or

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Council. Panel Members may also undertake research and report back to the Panel or Commission.

Scrutiny Task Groups

In addition to the committee-based work carried out through the Panels, the Scrutiny Commission can also set up time-limited working groups to look at particular subjects in more detail. Scrutiny Task Groups, as they are known, are made up of seven members and their recommendations are submitted to the relevant parent Panel.

Scrutiny Activity 2020/21

Summary

Despite disruption at the beginning of the year, as we adapted to ways of remote working, Scrutiny managed to make up lost ground, with the following headline statistics:

- 10 Scrutiny meetings held
- 35 reports considered
- 23 hours of public debate

Attendance has been high, no doubt helped by the convenience of remote meetings, and I am pleased to report that attendance at Scrutiny meetings was 93% over the year, compared with 88% in 2019/20. The breakdown for the individual groups over the past two years is:

Scrutiny Cycle	2019/20				2020/21			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Commission	100%	N/A	80%	N/A	80%	N/A	90%	N/A
Performance	100%	100%	86%	86%	N/A	100%	100%	86%
Communities	71%	86%	86%	-	N/A	93%	100%	100%
Overall	88%				93%			

Work of Scrutiny during 2020/21 in more detail

The Scrutiny Commission, together with the Communities and Performance Panels, have covered a very wide variety of topics during the course of the year, including:

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- Quarterly Performance
- Financial performance
- Corporate Plan & Corporate Delivery Plan
- Council Budget 2021/22
- The Council's working arrangements with SLM (Everyone Active)
- Homelessness
- RIPA
- Provision of ICT Services to Members
- Registered Housing Providers
- Planning Enforcement
- Built Facilities Strategy
- Open Space Strategy
- Voluntary Sector Strategy
- Charities and Voluntary Organisations Reports
- Empty Property Strategy Review
- Harborough District Commercial Services Limited
- Section 106 Policy
- Lutterworth Town Centre Masterplan
- Community Safety Partnership Annual Review

During the year Scrutiny Task Groups have looked at the Council's Response to Covid-19 and have reviewed the Council's S106 Policy in detail. The suggestions from this last Scrutiny review have fed into Cabinet's recommendations to this meeting of Council.

Scrutiny Membership – 2020/21

Scrutiny Commission

- Cllr Dr Paul Bremner
- Cllr Barry Champion
- Cllr Peter Elliott
- Cllr Colin Golding
- Cllr Barbara Johnson
- Cllr Phil Knowles
- Cllr Bill Liquorish
- Cllr Amanda Nunn
- Cllr Mrs Rosita Page (Chair and Commissioner)
- Cllr Michael Rickman

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Performance Scrutiny Panel

- Cllr Neil Bannister
- Cllr Barry Frenchman
- Cllr Mark Graves
- Cllr Phil Knowles
- Cllr Rani Mahal
- Cllr Michael Rickman (Chair)
- Cllr Mrs Charmaine Wood

Communities Scrutiny Panel

- Cllr Mrs Janette Ackerley
- Cllr Barry Champion
- Cllr Dominic Fosker
- Cllr Robin Hollick
- Cllr Amanda Nunn (Chair)
- Cllr Mrs Geraldine Robinson
- Cllr Mrs Julie Simpson

Looking Ahead to 2021/22

The coming year will feature a detailed review of the Scrutiny Function, when, as part of the Council's Budget Challenge process, we will look at new ways of working to make the process of Scrutiny more efficient and streamlined. I fully hope that we will be able to reduce the number of regular reports being brought to the two Panels, so that they can concentrate their efforts on feeding into the development of policy, rather than merely on commenting on decisions that have already been made.

Scrutiny Commission

The Commission returned to face-to-face working with its meeting on 3rd June and set a workplan which has reprioritised the business of the Commission and Panels to reclaim time that has been lost due to the impact of Covid-19 and the cancellation of meetings in June 2020. To achieve this, an extra meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel is to be take place on 29th July 2021 to consider the Local Plan.

The Commission will also be considering an Evaluation of the HDC Covid Recovery Map at its meeting in November 2021. This meeting will give a further opportunity to consider the workload until the end of the 2021/22 year, but at present the work of the Panels stands at:

Performance Scrutiny Panel

- Quarterly Financial Performance
- Quarterly Performance
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)
- Harborough Innovation Centre and Grow-on Centre
- Corporate Plan, Corporate Delivery Plan and Performance Management Framework
- ICT strategy

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- Flexible Use of Capital Receipts
- Revenue and Capital Budgets
- Leisure Centres working arrangements and Covid recovery

Communities Scrutiny Panel

- Smarter Services Programme
- Lightbulb Service Delivery
- Equality Policy
- Empty Property Strategy
- Local Plan
- Community Safety Partnership – annual meeting
- Charities & Voluntary Organisations
- Registered Housing Providers
- Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan
- Rural Strategy
- Young People’s Strategy

Scrutiny Membership 2021/22

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Performance Scrutiny Panel
(Chair to be confirmed)

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Conclusion

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their input into a challenging, but ultimately rewarding, 2020/21 year for Scrutiny, despite all the difficulties, and I look forward to working with all Scrutiny colleagues during 2021/22.



Cllr R. Page
Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission
Harborough District Council