

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held in the Council Chamber, The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, Market
Harborough

3rd November 2022 commencing at 6.38 p.m.

Present: Councillors Mrs Page (Chairman), Dr Bremner, Champion, Elliott, Johnson,
Mahal, Knowles, Rickman and Mrs Robinson

Officers Present: S. Hamilton and C. Mason

Officers remotely: C. Pattinson

Guest: Councillor King

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Golding, who was substituted by Councillor Mrs Robinson, Councillor Liquorish and Councillor Nunn who was substituted by Councillor Mahal.

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMISSION

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on the 9th June 2022 be accepted and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were none.

REPORT 1: SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Director of Governance and Law introduced the report¹ which set out details of the recent review of the Council's overview and scrutiny function undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The review assessed a number of key aspects including the culture, member engagement, member skills and application, information, impact, focus and structure. This provided feedback to the Authority on

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areas where scrutiny performed well and areas where the function and effectiveness of scrutiny can be improved and strengthened.

The Director of Governance and Law drew members attention to the CfGS suggestions for strengthening the overview and scrutiny structure, as detailed in the report, and she reminded the Commission Members of the current structure which includes the ability to convene task and finish groups.

The rationale behind the Officer recommendation to strengthen the scrutiny structure by removing the Scrutiny Commission and focus two panels in alignment to the corporate priorities was explained. The proposal would also enable the Chairs of the two panels to closely work together on cross-cutting issues and if necessary have joint scrutiny panels on issues such as budgets or new emerging issues.

The proposed structure would ensure that the meeting schedule of the Panels aligned more effectively with the performance reporting system and Cabinet meetings. Portfolio holders should be expected to attend scrutiny meetings to account for the performance of their respective portfolios and communicate future plans. The structure would also facilitate one task and finish group for each panel at any one time, or two joint task and finish groups which would allow the Panels to be extremely responsive and focused. The workplans of the Panels would also be more closely aligned with the Cabinet workplan.

The Director of Governance and Law confirmed that any agreed changes to the structure would be robustly reflected in the Constitution, and reiterated the benefits of having a strengthened overview and scrutiny function which would substantially contribute to improving the governance of the Authority.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Governance and Law for her presentation and asked the Leader to address the Commission. The Leader highlighted the opportunities that all Members had been given to participate in the review, and that a consensus from Members involved in the scrutiny function was requested in order to move forward. The Leader expressed the need for the scrutiny process to ensure that sufficient consideration is given to the forward decisions of the Cabinet and Council, and also to encourage all scrutiny Members to actively engage in meetings.

The Chairman confirmed that the report would be considered by the Performance and Communities Panels, provided representations submitted electronically by Councillors Mrs Wood, Modha and Golding and opened the debate to the Members present.

Members were in agreement in relation to the need for the alignment of the Cabinet and Scrutiny workplans, for decisions taken by the Cabinet, Committees and the Corporate Management team to be held accountable by the scrutiny function, for the scrutiny function to be both retrospective and forward looking as appropriate, and to

encourage member engagement. Other points raised included the opportunity for Scrutiny Members to have comprehensive training in effective scrutiny.

In response to a question regarding the number of task and finish groups in any municipal year, the Director of Law and Governance confirmed that any number was permissible provided only one was in progress per panel at any point in time. She also advised that it was proposed that more support for the administration of the task and finish groups would come from the relevant Service area for the particular project being considered.

Following the discussion three votes were taken as follows :-

1. Do you want dedicated Scrutiny Officer resource ?

Six members voted in favour, one members voted against and one member abstained.

2. Should the Scrutiny structure consist of two panels with increased meetings, with task and finish groups as necessary ?

Four members voted in favour and three members voted against and one abstention.

3. Should the Scrutiny structure consist of three panels with increased meetings, with task and finish groups as necessary ?

Four members voted in favour and four members voted against.

The Director for Governance and Law confirmed that following the consultation with the Commission and Performance and Communities Panels, the agreed recommendations would be put forward to the Constitutional Committee meeting in January 2023, followed by the Council meeting in February 2023. The new recommendations would come into effect in the new municipal year.

REPORT 2: THE SCRUTINY WORK-PLAN

The Chairman introduced the workplanⁱ and highlighted that the draft business case for the Strategic Partnership would be discussed at the additional Scrutiny Commission meeting on the 21st November 2022.

Following a question regarding the scrutiny of the District welcoming refugees from Ukraine to the District, it was confirmed that Leicestershire County Council is delivering this programme, and all the Leicestershire Districts are following an agreed practice. Member questions on this issue can be addressed to Councillor Mrs Page or Councillor King.

Following discussion, the Scrutiny Commission

RESOLVED: that the draft Scrutiny Work-plan be approved.

MATTERS OF SPECIAL URGENCY

There were none.

The Meeting ended at 8.15 p.m.

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