

**HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

held at

The Council Chamber

Symington Building, Adam & Eve Street, Market Harborough, LE16 7AG

on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Commencing at 6.30pm.

Present:

Councillor Nunn, Chairman

Councillors: Bilbie, Mrs Ackerley, James, Hollick, Johnson, Mrs Robinson, Mrs Simpson

Performance Panel Councillors Joining Remotely: Critchley, Frenchman, Mahal, Rickman, Wood

Officers: D. Atkinson- Director of Planning & Regeneration, S. Baldwin-Democratic Officer, C. Zacharia- Team Leader for Planning Enforcement, C. Pattinson - Director of Governance and Law & Interim Monitoring Officer (remote)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTIONS**

Cllr Mrs Page offered her apologies.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were none.

**3. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 be signed by the Chairman as a true record.**

#### 4. SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT

The Director of Governance and Law & Interim Monitoring Officer presented the Scrutiny Review Report to the Panel. She highlighted and explained that the three options set out in the report for the future structure of Scrutiny are;

- i. Leave the arrangements as currently operating;
- ii. Enhance the existing arrangements with a third panel and the recruitment of a part time scrutiny officer;
- iii. Remove the Scrutiny Commission, bolster officer support for the scrutiny function and:
  - a. Increase the number of panels to three; or
  - b. Retain two panels

The Director of Governance and Law recommended that HDC adopt option 3(b). She explained the various intricacies of the structure and frequency of meetings and how this could be altered and facilitated. She described the aim to re-invigorate and re-focus Scrutiny with task and finish panels which are more flexible and responsive and supported by directorate officers, thus reducing the impact on the Democratic Services team. The goal is to improve the impact of the scrutiny function at HDC.

The Chair invited the Panel to ask questions and comment on the report. (Please see a summary of these at Appendix A of these minutes.)

After the discussion, the Chair asked the Panel to comment on the future structure of Scrutiny by reference to the options set out on page 13, point 11 of the Report:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Cllr Ackerley</b>	None of the options are necessarily preferred going forward. We need two or three Scrutiny Panels, a Scrutiny Commissioner that works with both Chairs and allocates the work to the Panels, and that sets up the Task and Finish Panels.
<b>Cllr Mrs Robinson</b>	Agreed with Cllr Ackerley, Task & Finish Panels are important to bring back.
<b>Cllr Hollick</b>	Focus and clarity are the two most important objectives. The preference is option iii (b) but prior to this, it has to be decided what the focus of the two panels will be rather than leave this to the two Chairs. The Members need to understand their role.
<b>Cllr Bilbie</b>	Training is crucial. Members should be committed to their role or panels will not function correctly. The Panels need to be made up of Members with the correct skills and knowledge. The Task & Finish Panels would be beneficial.
<b>Cllr Mrs Simpson</b>	Training and updates are important. Scrutiny is not currently used to the best of its ability and there is a feeling that the Scrutiny is not taken on board. Option iii (b) is preferred. The flexibility of the

	input from individuals from both panels to ensure the correct skill set is crucial. A Scrutiny Officer is vital.
<b>Cllr Johnson</b>	Option iii (b) is preferred however one group should meet and decide on the allocation of work to the most relevant panel to ensure balance of work, timeliness of scrutiny and effectiveness.
<b>Performance Panel Member</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Cllr Rickman</b>	In favour of two panels. Issues need to be brought to Scrutiny before Cabinet in order for Scrutiny to have influence. Portfolio Holders have been invited to scrutiny meetings and have attended, which has been helpful. Does not agree with the reduction in the number of Scrutiny meetings being proposed, some items take longer to scrutinise. If the Panels work together this would be more productive. After discussion with CP, highlighted that the option to have more meetings than those proposed was not included in the report. The preferred option is iii (b).
<b>Cllr Frenchman</b>	The Scrutiny panel should generate its own work and have the authority to determine how this is facilitated. Not having reports 'to note' will make the best use of time in meetings possible. Option iii (b) is preferred but with bi-monthly meetings to ensure the work is done and the workload is decided by all.

The Chair summarised the comments made and concluded that the overall preferred option of the Panel for the future structure of Scrutiny was;

**iii. Remove the Scrutiny Commission, bolster officer support for the scrutiny function and:**

**b. Retain two panels**

but emphasised the Panel agreed that:

- there should be a review of allocation of work and panel membership;
- there be flexibility with meetings and the option to call extra meetings of the Scrutiny Panels should this be required, with extra dates being provisionally set in the first instance;
- more Members should be on the Scrutiny Panels;
- Task & Finish Panels are preferred to keep Scrutiny focussed; and
- members be provided with ongoing scrutiny training in addition to induction training.

It was therefore;

**RESOLVED that the comments and recommendations of the Panel be noted and forwarded to Cabinet.**

## 5. REPORT 1: DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES UPDATE

The Director of Planning presented the report and explained that it was being presented for the Panel to scrutinise a factual process of how new public open space proceeds through the planning process and how this is made clear to the Public. He explained that the proposal is to publish this on the HDC website alongside the Open Space Strategy. He also informed the Panel that the report included information on the Local Enforcement Plan Review where they were being asked to scrutinise how the Council have handled the recommendations made from the Planning Committee around landscaping, as a part of the Hursley Park development in May 2022. He highlighted the three recommendations made in the report, the three points of discussion provided and invited to Panel to comment.

The Chair read out an email sent from the Chair of the Planning Committee to the Panel regarding this report in which he stated that he was happy that all of the actions had taken place and queried whether the strategy presented in the report would prevent future issues such as those that previously arose with the Hursley Park development. The Director of Planning addressed this query. The Panel asked for clarification on some of the wording in the report and commented.

It was therefore;

**RESOLVED that the comments of the Panel on the Development Management Services Update Report be noted.**

## 6. URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

The meeting finished at 7.55pm.

## APPENDIX A

### Scrutiny Review Report- Discussion Points

**Key : C-** Comment  
**Q-** Question

<b>Member</b>	<b>Questions/Comments</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Cllr Bilbie</b>	<p><b>Q:</b> If a Panel is not working, how do we address if we have got the correct Members for that Panel?</p> <p><b>C:</b> A Selection of the correct Members for Scrutiny Panels needs to be addressed.</p>	<p><b>Chair:</b> This falls to the group leaders to select the Members for the Committee.</p> <p><b>CP:</b> The skill-set of the Members selected for the Panels and Task &amp; Finish Panels would be within the conversation of the Panel itself. Joint meetings are an option, but this is the benefit of Task and Finish Panels where it is not necessary to call formal meetings.</p>
<b>Cllr Ackerley</b>	<p><b>C:</b> All members of the Council should be in the Cabinet or on a Scrutiny Panel so that they all feel like they all have an input in decision making. This should be reflected in the timing of issues that go from Cabinet to Council in that Scrutiny Panels should look at the issue prior to it going to Cabinet so that all views can be reflected.</p>	None.
<b>Cllr Frenchman</b>	<p><b>C:</b> With training and good management, it can stimulate an interest in Members to be involved in Scrutiny. Task &amp; Finish Panels are helpful as they are issue focussed.</p>	None.
<b>Cllr Johnson</b>	<p><b>C:</b> Agreed all Members should be involved in decision making. Reports were also historically allocated as 'urgent' or 'later' for scrutiny. The Chairs would then decide which panel it was applicable to. Reports were also historically allocated as 'urgent' or 'later' for scrutiny. The Chairs would then decide which panel it was applicable to.</p> <p><b>Q:</b> If there is no Scrutiny Commission, how can we be sure the Members are the correct individuals to decide on the workplans? How can we be sure the issue would go to both Committees?</p>	<p><b>Chair:</b> The report refers to the importance of the two Chairs of the Committees working closely together to develop the workplans and it is important that they stick to the remits of their own panels so as to avoid duplication.</p> <p><b>Cllr Ackerley:</b> Historically, the Scrutiny Commissioner, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of</p>

		the Panels met to decide on the work-plan and then allocated this to the Panels, as well as set-up the Task & Finish Panels.
<b>Cllr Mrs Simpson</b>	<b>C:</b> The Task & Finish Panels were very helpful in that they were so focussed. It was also helpful that previously Portfolio Holders were questioned at meetings which does not happen so much currently. Scrutiny has lost its way. The opportunity to reflect and make changes is timely.	<b>Chair:</b> This is a point that we are trying to reinstate and bring back.
<b>Chair</b>	<p><b>Q:</b> Referring to page 13, point 11, iii, what does “bolster office support” mean?</p> <p><b>Q:</b> What does the dedicated Scrutiny Officer resource entail and how this would be of benefit?</p>	<p><b>CP:</b> To be able to call on, not just Democratic Services Officers for their support, but also the skills, knowledge and experience of the other Officers. The more self-service that these Panels can be after training, the more effective they will be.</p> <p>The number and timing of meetings across the board that we have are under review as well as the ability within the constitution to decide this, to ensure the meetings are held when we require them and how they relate to each other to make them more effective, objective and impactful.</p> <p>A dedicated Scrutiny Officer would ensure that meetings are arranged, reports are written and for the coordination of site visits, however there is concern as to whether this is proportionate for an authority the size of HDC and/or whether the Council are able to utilise the resources the authority already retains in order to facilitate this.</p>