



## **Annual report from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission (2021/22)**

### **Introduction**

Following the end of the covid regulations in May 2021, the Scrutiny Commission returned to holding physical meetings. Despite the changes caused by the pandemic, I am pleased to say that I can still look back at a busy and successful year for Scrutiny.

This report, as well as covering last year, looks forward to the 2022/23 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 further dates reserved for scrutiny in case additional meetings need to be arranged. The Workplan is set at the June and November 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. As an interim measure pending the final outcome of the peer review of the Council’s Scrutiny function, additional Scrutiny meetings were approved by Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and meetings have been spread out to balance the workload for the Panels and officers.

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 2021/22**

Summary

Despite disruption at the beginning of the year, as we adapted to ways of remote working, Scrutiny managed to make up lost ground, and continued to do so with the return to physical meetings with the following headline statistics.

- 12 Scrutiny meetings held
- 35 reports considered
- 28 hours of public debate

Attendance has been high, but slightly down from the previous year which was no doubt helped by the convenience of remote meetings. Attendance at Scrutiny meetings was 80% over the year compared with 93% in 2020/21. The breakdown for the individual groups over the past two years is:

	2020/21				2021/22			
<b>Scrutiny Cycle</b>	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Commission	80%	N/A	90%	N/A	80%	N/A	80%	N/A
Performance	N/A	100%	100%	86%	71%	N/A	93%	71%
Communities	N/A	93%	100%	100%	86%	86%	86%	71%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>93%</b>				<b>80%</b>			

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Work of Scrutiny during 2021/22 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:

- Quarterly Financial Performance
- Quarterly Performance
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)
- Harborough Innovation Centre and Grow-on Centre
- Corporate Plan, and Performance Management Framework
- ICT strategy
- Flexible Use of Capital Receipts
- Revenue and Capital Budgets
- Leisure Centres working arrangements and Covid recovery
- Lutterworth Town Centre Masterplan
- Smarter Services Programme
- Lightbulb Service Delivery
- Equality Policy
- Empty Property Strategy
- Local Plan
- Community Safety Partnership – annual meeting
- Charities & Voluntary Organisations
- Registered Housing Providers
- Market Harborough Town Centre Masterplan
- HDC Covid Recovery

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 – 2021/22**

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)

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- Cllr Michael Rickman

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 Peter Critchley
- Cllr Dominic Fosker
- Cllr Robin Hollick
- Cllr Amanda Nunn (Chair)
- Cllr Mrs Geraldine Robinson
- Cllr Mrs Julie Simpson

**Looking Ahead to 2022/23**

The coming year will feature detailed proposals following the recommendations of the review of the Scrutiny Function. The hope is that innovative changes can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of the Scrutiny Function and a detailed report will be discussed at the Scrutiny Commission meeting in November.

Members must be mindful of the ever decreasing resources and financial restraints across the Council and any changes in the Scrutiny function must reflect this, and not raise unrealistic expectations.

Scrutiny Commission

The Commission on 9<sup>th</sup> June set a workplan which has prioritised the business of the Commission and balances the work of the Panels, which at present the work of the Panels stands at:

Performance Scrutiny Panel

- Quarterly Financial Performance
- Quarterly Performance
- Lightbulb Service Delivery
- Housing Enforcement Policy and Financial Penalties
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)
- Annual Performance Report – Pentana

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Communities Scrutiny Panel

- Community Safety Partnership – Annual Meeting
- Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground for the Distribution of Leicester's unmet needs
- Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Young People's Strategy
- Rural Strategy
- Leisure Procurement Strategy
- Leicestershire Waste Management Strategy
- Environmental Strategy

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- Cllr Charmaine Wood

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- Cllr Janette Ackerley
- Cllr Stephen Bilbie
- Cllr Robin Hollick
- Cllr Barbara Johnson
- Cllr Amanda Nunn
- Cllr Mrs Geraldine Robinson
- Cllr Mrs Julie Simpson

**Conclusion**

Finally, I would like to thank everyone for their input into a challenging, but ultimately rewarding, 2021/2022 year for Scrutiny, despite all the difficulties, and I look forward to working with all Scrutiny colleagues during 2022/23.

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