

COUNCIL
16 January 2012
Item 9a refers

Report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission

Happy New year for 2012! As such, the Scrutiny Commission of 17th November seems a long time ago now but was a lively affair with Members speaking on nearly 60 separate occasions.

The Scrutiny Commission was presented with a paper that sought to gather views on Scrutiny's current structure and, in a new term, to scrutinise itself. The debate that followed showed an impassioned support for maintaining the current three panels, under their current names.

We all do not yet know the future shape of this Council under the Future Options proposals and it may be that in due time we need to assess again the progressive evolution of scrutiny. If such changes are to be considered again I wish to ensure that the Commission steering group, consisting of each panel Chair and their vice-Chair, have fully debated the issues and are engaged with any such proposals before they are again presented to Commission Members.

A vexatious point was highlighted by Members: that of the completed misalignment of papers coming to Executive for decision before scrutiny had a chance to offer their thoughts and recommendations. It was recommended that the 6-monthly forward plan be changed to 3-monthly to enable a better pre-alignment of reports to scrutiny and then Executive. As a response to this and one paper that caused the greatest stir among members: "New Homes Bonus model – adoption of policy" – I discussed this with the Chair of Resources and decided to bring this paper to the Resources Scrutiny meeting of 8th December. In the event: weather, illness and accidents made the meeting non-quorate but was rescheduled in time for the 19th Dec. Executive meeting to hear the recommendation. My thanks to committee members for making them available again at short notice.

Other scrutiny panels (People) have been busy hearing the views of four former Council Chairman: Councillors Dunton, Liquorish, Page and Tooley, on the role of Chairman. A number of recommendations arose from an hour of interesting debate and information. The major recommendation was to recommend a re-alignment of the chairman's budget and "ring-fence" the current allowance of £4,500. Executive members also gave their reports on the last six months of activity and included such highlights as the completing of the wet-side changing area at Market Harborough's Leisure Centre (Cllr. Pain); the significant reduction in complaints at the Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground and a much greater engagement between all interested parties (Cllr. Golding); Finally, Cllr. Dann's report ensured us of a "root and branch" ICT review. It was not mentioned in the meeting but I would like to personally congratulate Officers on the new website's design and functionality – even to the point of the website re-sizing itself when viewed on mobile devices (phones and tablet computers).

Scrutiny Places welcomed outside speakers to a debate on the council's response to registered social landlords and the placement of people in their available dwellings. This may deserve further scrutiny and it is for the Commission to declare if this will be so.

In the coming weeks Members will be presented with Executive's budget. Lets us all ensure a close scrutiny and let us be mindful that we are all responsible for steering this organisation through unprecedented choppy waters. I am grateful to the Leader and the Interim Chief Executive in how they have involved and informed ALL members during the Future Options Review and Property Review. This makes for a better scrutiny when we can make informed decisions and account for evidence-based choices.

Your Chairman,

Cllr Dr Paul Bremner