



Charnwood

APPENDIX 1

Annual Scrutiny Report 2019/20

Scrutiny Commission

Introduction from the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission

Following a detailed review by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) of the scrutiny function at the Council, a new scrutiny function based around the Council's directorate structure was approved by Council in February 2019 and came into effect at the start of the 2019/20 civic year.

Detailed information on the Scrutiny Commission's purpose can be found in Section 11.1 of the Council's Constitution. The Commission consists of seven members selected on a politically balanced basis and performs a number of roles including setting, managing and controlling the scrutiny work programme and coordinating scrutiny generally, identifying items to review from forthcoming Cabinet agendas in order to make recommendations to the Cabinet, establishing and overseeing scrutiny task-and-finish panels, based upon the requirements of the Council and its residents, and determining their scope and considering councillor 'call for actions'.

During 2019/20, the Commission:

- Reviewed the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities and modified the Council's Scrutiny Protocol as a result.
- Requested an amendment to the contract agreements made by the Council, requiring contractors to supply information to scrutiny, or to appear before the Commission, where appropriate.
- Continually reviewed the scrutiny work programme for timely and effective scrutiny, to ensure important decisions are acknowledged in good time and to eliminate duplication.
- Reviewed the process of the Draft Local Plan 2019-36 consultation, and the consultation responses when these became available.
- Welcomed Cabinet Lead Members and Officers to assist with the consideration of agenda items to ensure Commission members are presented with information sufficient for effective scrutiny.

As part of Cabinet pre-decision scrutiny, during 2019/20 the Commission scrutinised:

- The Charnwood Dog Control Public Space Protection Order 2019
- Bulky Waste Collections, recommending that the review period for the implementation of the bulky waste collection charge be undertaken in 6 months instead of 12 months' time
- The Corporate Plan – Annual Report 2018-19
- The Shared Internal Audit Service with North West Leicestershire District Council and Blaby District Council
- The Transformation Programme, recommending that the Commission becomes more involved in the project
- The Funding Bid for Shepshed Public Realm Improvements, recommending that the Planning Service consider the timings of future development initiatives. They also recommended an improvement in the way that proposed planning work was communicated to residents
- The Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2024
- The Virement – Planning and Regeneration Service
- The Disposal of Land Holding Known as Plot 5 Weldon Road, Loughborough
- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy 2019-2022
- The Corporate Plan 2020-2024
- The Private Sector Licencing Scheme, recommending that the Housing Planning, Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee review the Private Sector Licencing Scheme Update report, when available
- The Design Supplementary Planning Document
- Charnwood Grants Strategic Partners 2020/21 – 2021/22.

Scrutiny Commission

In addition, the Commission has supported the work of scrutiny groups by:

- Continually monitoring the new scrutiny framework, and the relationship between committees, in order to ensure timely and effective scrutiny, and to identify any issues not previously considered
- Suggesting research sources to scrutiny panel Chairs, sharing knowledge and offering advice and guidance on topics where appropriate
- Reviewing and approving the report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel and requesting that the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee monitor progress against the recommendations on a quarterly basis
- Adding the Scrutiny Tracker onto its work programme in order to monitor the recommendations of the scrutiny bodies and to ensure these are being actioned
- Approving and monitoring a number of task and finish scrutiny panels, including 'Generating Commercial Income', 'Digitisation and Transformation of Services', 'Funding for Small Businesses', 'Waste Services and Waste Management', 'Child Mental Health and Obesity', 'Combatting Loneliness' and 'Promoting Tourism in Charnwood'.



The Scrutiny framework, and the Scrutiny Commission itself, remains a relatively new function at the Council and over the past year, Members and Officers have worked hard to support the processes involved. I feel the work of the Commission has had an important impact on the services that the Council provides, providing constructive challenge, amplifying the concerns of residents, encouraging transparency and demonstrating accountability, and this is evidenced in the work of the Commission set out in the minutes, which you can find [online](#). I am confident that the Scrutiny Commission will continue to add value and further improvements in the year ahead.

Councillor Shona Rattray, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2019-20



Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

The Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee's areas of work are set out in detail in Section 6.1 of the Council's Constitution. All services delivered by the Corporate Services Directorate are within the Committee's scrutiny remit, including finance and budgets, property and asset management, revenues and benefits, information and communication services, customer services, corporate projects, democratic services and mayoralty, support services (legal, HR, audit, insurance, elections and land charges), and emergency planning/community resilience.

Following a review of the Council's scrutiny structure, the Committee has been in operation for its first year during 2019/20. In doing so, it has welcomed attendance at its meetings by relevant Cabinet Lead Members, alongside officers, to assist its scrutiny. The Committee has agreed that the Chair and Vice-chair will review the Committee's work programme, pending availability of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and the Corporate Delivery Plan 2020/21 (Business Plan), the aim being to ensure that scrutiny reflects the priorities of the Council, is more effective and prioritised, and that the Committee can be a better critical friend.

Pending the outcome of the above review of its work programme, the Committee has worked to monitor the Council's revenue and capital position during 2019/20, considering the 2018/19 outturn position for both, and subsequently discussing the revenue monitoring position at periods 4, 7 and 9 in 2019/20. There has also been a focus on Performance Monitoring, looking at performance information in respect of the 2016-20 Corporate Plan objectives and key performance indicators within the Committee's remit at Quarter 4 2018/19 (year end) and Annual Report, and at Quarter 1, 2 and 3 2019/20. Following a request of the Chair and Vice-chair, the Committee has also been updated on the financing of the purchase of fleet as part of the Environmental Services Contract and has asked the funding ratio and reason for that be reported to it, once decided.

During the above scrutiny, the Committee has discussed many issues and requested various clarification, further information or assurances, detailed in the minutes of its four meetings during 2019/20, available [here](#).



Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee

During the above scrutiny, the Committee has discussed many issues and requested various clarification, further information or assurances, detailed in the minutes of its four meetings during 2019/20, available [here](#). Particular examples include:

- Seeking reassurance that the new planning service structure and its financing were sufficient given the large overspend in the service in 2018/19 and also informing the Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee of that concern;
- In response to a pattern of significant underspend over recent years, recording its intention of being a better critical friend to the Council in respect of a realistic and deliverable capital programme moving forward;
- Following a decision of the Scrutiny Commission on 3rd June 2019, deciding that budget scrutiny warranted a separate scrutiny panel to ensure a focused, detailed and comprehensive consideration, rather the Committee itself undertaking that scrutiny, and proceeding on that basis.
- Noting that the Committee hoped to involve the public in its work;
- Supporting the Council's continued aspiration to improve the Percentage of Council Tax Collected performance and acknowledging the importance of that;
- Requesting explanation of how finding budgeted for managed savings (Managed Savings Budget Non Salaries, £300k) in 2019/20 was in hand;
- Requesting the position with late in year virements of budgets be checked, to ensure that the Council was working to avoid those, where possible;
- Asking for information on the work being undertaken to increase numbers of Flood Wardens in the Borough.
- Inviting the Head of Planning and Regeneration to discuss additional planning fee income not being realised in 2019/20, given the revenue impact of the matter and the Committee's role in scrutinising the revenue position;
- Considering a useful scope for the Digitisation and Transformation of Services Scrutiny Panel for subsequent agreement by the Scrutiny Commission.
- Recommending to the Scrutiny Commission that scrutiny of the Council's draft budget continues to be undertaken via a Budget Scrutiny Panel in 2020/21, with an additional, earlier Panel meeting in June to commence budget scrutiny at an earlier stage and to consider the previous year's outturn position (the Panel being an appropriate body to do that having scrutinised the original budget).

Councillor Geoff Parsons, Chair of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee 2019-20

Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee

The Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee was set up in June 2019 following the Scrutiny Review completed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. It was decided that scrutiny would operate a directorate-based system and this new committee is led by the Strategic Director for Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services who is the Lead Officer for the Committee.



The Committee has met on a quarterly basis over the year to scrutinise different topic areas and to review the Council's performance in key areas.

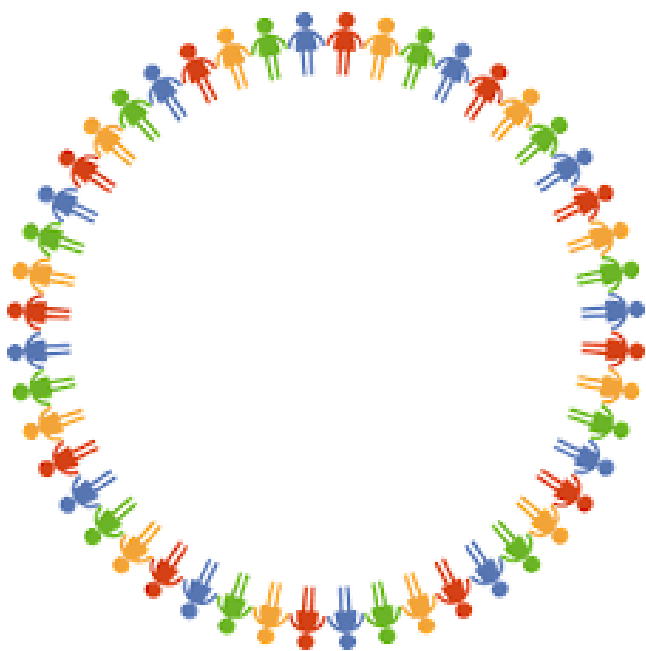
The Committee also discussed the following topics:

- Five Year Housing Land Supply – the Committee monitored the level of housing available as part of the Council's commitment to the five-year housing land supply as prescribed by central government. The supply level remained over five years which the Committee was pleased with and would continue to monitor.
- Climate Change Strategy – the Committee scrutinised how the strategy had been implemented. They discussed how environmental programmes could be publicised to schools to improve engagement in environmental issues. The Committee resolved to carry out further investigation into the school's programmes.
- Housing, Homelessness and Empty Homes Strategy – the Committee undertook scrutiny of the strategy delivery and commented on the action plans in place. There was praise for the Council's Lightbulb project as it was receiving a high level of satisfaction from residents and proving to be a success. The Committee also questioned the new guidelines for providing housing assistance and how the Council were helping rough sleepers.
- Universal Credit Implementation – the Committee received an update on the progress of the implementation and how it was affecting tenants and rent arrear levels. The Committee ensured that the resources were in place to support tenants through the migration and reach as many tenants as possible.

Councillor Daniel Grimley, Chair of the Housing, Planning and Regeneration and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee.



Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee



The Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee reviews services falling within the Neighbourhoods & Community Wellbeing Directorate by scrutinising performance, policies and relevant outside bodies. Since its inception the Committee has met four times.

It also has an additional function acting as the Council's crime and disorder committee by scrutinising the discharge of crime and disorder functions by the Council and other agencies through the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee receives a Community Safety Partnership Update at least every six months and in September 2019 considered the reduction in the total for 'all crime' in the first quarter of 2019/20 was very encouraging, whilst recognising that further work was required, for example tackling 'County Lines' drug related issues. At a further update in March 2020, the Committee welcomed the introduction of a Youth Joint Action Group and implementation of a drug strategy and appreciated that the reduction in the total for 'all crime' remained stable.

The Committee receives performance reports on a quarterly basis to monitor progress against agreed targets. To date it has scrutinised six performance and business plan indicators that have not met its targets with support from officers and Cabinet Lead Members.

It has also considered the following matters:

- Charnwood Community Lottery – the Committee noted that there was an opportunity for ward councillors to support the promotion of the lottery to good causes and that safeguards were in place to discourage gambling.
- Charnwood Grants Scheme – the Committee welcomed the number of grants being awarded across the Borough and felt that although the scheme was easy to understand, the number of different grants could be confusing.
- Leisure Provision and Performance – the Committee considered that the success of the Town Hall should be balanced against the Council's current financial climate. The Lead Member was asked to review steps being taken to reduce the overheads of the venue and manage its subsidy to improve income. The Committee noted that the Leisure Centre Contract was under review prior to it coming up for renewal.
- Improving Waste and Recycling Performance – the Committee understood that improving its performance in this area was challenging, but that it was in line with national trends. If the Government chose to mandate food waste collection from 2023 it was possible that the Council could improve its performance further by implementing this collection, although it was noted that the Council was already working to further improve its current collection rates.
- Children and Families Wellbeing Service – the Committee welcomed partnership working with the County Council in this matter and appreciated clarification regarding how the two councils interacted to support Leicestershire children and families.

Councillor Jewel Miah, Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Panels

Scrutiny panels can be established in order to undertake short, sharp scrutiny reviews and ensure members can swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations, perhaps over the course of a couple of months or less;

Longer-term task and finish reviews are also possible, with perhaps six or seven meetings spread over a number of months when scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail.

A standing panel' reflects a necessity to keep a watching brief over a critical local issue, for example Budget Scrutiny Panel.



Budget Scrutiny Panel

Following a decision of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 3rd June 2019 and a decision of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 25th June 2019, a Budget Scrutiny Panel has undertaken scrutiny of the Council's draft budget for 2020/21. The Panel met between September 2019 and January 2020 to accord with the Council's timetable for setting its Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-23 and General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2020/21.

The Panel's deliberations focused not only on the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-23 and the draft General Fund and HRA Budget 2020/21, but also on the approach taken by the Council to budget setting and more detailed analysis of the General Fund budget 2019/20, to better understand gross expenditure and budget challenges. The Panel also considered the draft Capital Plan 2020/21 to 2022/23.

Budget Scrutiny Panel

The Panel recognised the budget pressures and the uncertain funding climate facing the Council and highlighted the determined effort that was required in respect of the Council's finances moving forward. The Panel's made several recommendations, including in summary:

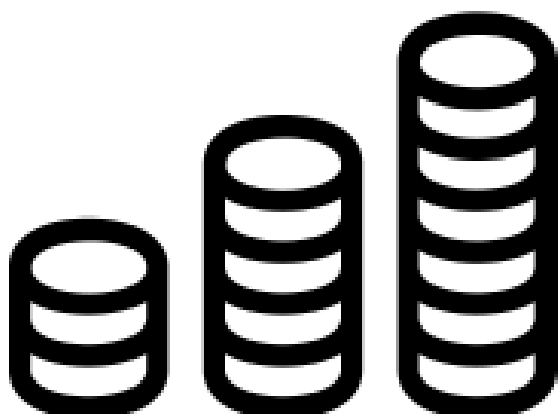
- The need for greater clarity of the direction of travel to assist scrutiny and the possibility of a longer budgetary timeframe to allow for the scale of change required;
- The importance of transformation to realising savings and increased income;
- The need for significant effort to effectively communicate the budget position to all;
- That suggestions for reduction in controls from staff would be welcomed;
- That investment amounts be matched with returns and at the level required;
- Ensuring appropriate skills and culture change;
- Several matters in 2019/20 that impacted on the 2020/21 budget, detailed in the Panel's report;
- That HRA loan liabilities and repayment timeframes were, at present, being adequately planned for;
- The continued issue of annual underspend on the Capital Plan.



The Panel's report was considered by the Scrutiny Commission in January 2020, with the Commission resolving to submit that report to the Cabinet when it considered that General Fund and HRA Budget 2020/21 at its meeting on 13th February 2020. A copy of the Panel's report can be seen [here](#) and sets out the recommendations made by the Panel and a foreword by the Chair.

Councillor Geoff Parsons, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel

Commercialisation Scrutiny Panel



Following a decision of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 14th October 2019 it was resolved that the Panel to scrutinise how the Council could generate commercial income be a formal Panel.

The Panel met four times between November 2019 and March 2020 to undertake scrutiny on ways in which the Council could generate commercial income.

The Panel's deliberations focused not only on the proposed investment in commercial property, but how the council could generate commercial income from existing assets, creating the commercialisation mindset within the Council, streamlining the decision making process and allowing for appropriate scrutiny, and future commercialisation opportunities.

The Panel made 16 recommendations and 4 observations. It identified a need for all assets owned by and Services provided by the Council to be assessed to identify revenue and sale opportunities. It recommended that the Council considered its commercialisation strategy to include upskilling of staff, methods implemented by which opportunities were monitored and a limit set by which decisions over a certain monetary value were available for pre-decision scrutiny. In particular, the Panel was keen to recommend that for future commercial property investment decisions, the Council considered its own overall strategic objectives, and purchased some properties within the borough. It was also keen to encourage the Council to consider other investments beyond commercial property, in the longer term.

The Panel's report will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission in April 2020, with the Commission resolving to submit that report to the Cabinet. A copy of the Panel's report can be seen [here](#) and sets out the recommendations made by the Panel and a foreword by the Chair.

Councillor Paul Baines, Chair of the Commercialisation Scrutiny Panel

Reflection and Looking Forward

The Scrutiny function has been in place since the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000, its practices have been interpreted widely and with varying degrees of effect nationally.

Essentially overview and scrutiny exists to ensure the Council's Executive is publicly held to account for its decisions and actions, and to promote open and transparent decision-making and democratic accountability. It has a wide remit to explore how the Council and its partner organisations could improve services for the residents of Charnwood. When evidence shows there could be a better way of doing things, overview and scrutiny can make recommendations for change.

The Parliamentary Select Committee report into Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government, published in December 2017, made interesting and timely reading. The Select Committee gathered a range of evidence from councillors, civil servants and scrutiny officers, and put forward a number of recommendations about how the scrutiny function could be improved and championed within local authorities. A review of the Select Committee's report shows that Charnwood Borough Council was already compliant with many of the recommendations put forward; providing assurance that the Council's scrutiny arrangements were reflective of best practice.

However, Members recognised that there was room for improvement in terms of impact and the areas for development identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in February 2018 were fully evaluated by members of the Scrutiny function and Cabinet.

One significant change identified was to the structure of the scrutiny committees with the aim of making them more outcome focussed. Full Council on 25th February 2019 approved a new scrutiny structure based on service directorates, overseen by a Scrutiny Commission Committee. This new structure will come into effect immediately after the May 2019 elections and was a catalyst for making a real difference to the lives of local people.

Members were also keen to review how the public can be better involved in the Scrutiny process, recognising that this is an area for improvement.

Following the elections in May 2019, members were offered training on effective questioning and listening skills which is vitally important for effective scrutiny. Likewise members were offered development opportunities on how to use scrutiny effectively and how it can be focussed on the most appropriate and important topics.

Members involved in the revised scrutiny structure have embraced their role and shown dedication in delivering quality scrutiny. The training and development will continue where needed and officers will endeavour to support the process. I look forward to observing the new structure in action!

Karen Widdowson, Democratic Services Manager

Get Involved!

There are many opportunities for members of the public and representatives of organisations to get involved in the work of Scrutiny. The Scrutiny Members would welcome an increase in the number of people attending either to watch the meeting in action or ask a question on notice. Meetings are usually held at 6.30pm and details of location can be found on the [Council's web-site](#).

- Attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committees and standing panels, except in instances where confidential information is to be discussed. Details of these meetings are on our website, [here](#)
- Ask a question on notice on any agenda item. Email Democratic Services for more information, democracy@charnwood.gov.uk
- Suggest a topic for Scrutiny to consider by getting in touch with the Democratic Services team either through email democracy@charnwood.gov.uk
- Raise issues with your local Ward Councillor and request that Scrutiny considers this as part of a Councillor Call for Action, or add it to their Scrutiny Work Programme
- Watch out for consultations, surveys and requests for evidence by registering at <https://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/currentconsultations>

More Information?

If you would like to suggest a topic for scrutiny to look into, would like more information about scrutiny, or need this information in a different format, for example large print, audio or braille, please contact:

Democratic Services
Telephone: 01509 634785
Email: democracy@charnwood.gov.uk