



Charnwood

APPENDIX 2

# Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21

## Scrutiny Commission

### Introduction from the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission

The 2020-21 Council year has been unlike any other. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on all areas of the Council was remarkable and the role of scrutiny was no different. For a temporary period Committee meetings were postponed until legislation was passed allowing Council's to run virtual meetings. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) issued guidance to Councils, concerning the challenges associated with carrying out scrutiny during the Covid-19 pandemic. Following this, the Commission met virtually for the first time on 1st June 2020 and considered a temporary structure for the delivery of scrutiny during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following was agreed (Scrutiny Commission min ref 5, 2020/21);

***“RESOLVED***

- *that the current cycle of directorate-based Scrutiny Committee meetings and Scrutiny Panel work be suspended for six months until 30th November 2020 with a review in September or October 2020;*
- *that option 1 as set out in the report of the Head of Strategic Support be applied, using the Scrutiny Commission with existing membership and monthly cycle of meetings as the temporary single Scrutiny function;*
- *that a single substantive agenda item for each meeting concentrate on one of the recovery cells; organisational recovery, economic recovery and community recovery;*
- *that the relationship between the Scrutiny Commission and the Audit Committee be strengthened as set out in the report;*
- *that the Council actively promote the use of ‘Questions under Scrutiny Committee Procedure 11.16’ as set out in the Constitution.”*

This would ensure that the Council satisfied CfPS guidance, that the Council maintained robust and member-led scrutiny proportionate to the constrained resources that the Council had during the Pandemic and that the scrutiny function at the Council was able to effectively scrutinise the Council's approach to recovery.

## Scrutiny Commission

Following the review of the temporary scrutiny structure in October 2020 (Scrutiny Commission minute reference 60, 2020/21), it was agreed that the arrangements continued until a further review in March 2021. In addition, at that meeting the Commission agreed to allow Directorate-based Scrutiny Committee members to highlight important items from the respective Scrutiny Committee work programmes for consideration at Scrutiny Commission meetings. This would ensure that members involved in the wider scrutiny structure continued to maintain a voice within the Council's scrutiny function. At its meeting on 8th March 2021, the Scrutiny Commission again reviewed the scrutiny structure as the Chief Executive had made changes to directorates and the services that fall within them, and so the original scrutiny structure pre-pandemic was no longer relevant. The review was timely in light of the ongoing pandemic and the significant ongoing financial challenges faced by the Council. The following was agreed, subject to Full Council approval on 26th April 2021 (min ref 134 22020/21):



### ***'RESOLVED***

*That it be recommended to Council that, with effect from the 2021/22 civic year:*

- 1a. The Scrutiny Committee structure be amended to consist of the following two standing scrutiny committees, with the responsibilities, functions and membership as set out in Appendix B, with the amendment that membership of the respective committees:*

*Scrutiny Commission (Membership 7)  
Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee (Membership 9); and*

- 1b. Delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution that may be required.*
- 2. That it be noted that the Monitoring Officer will request that the Independent Remuneration Panel consider the special responsibility allowances for the Chair and Vice-chairs of the two committees, and that appropriate recommendations will then be made to Council to amend the Scheme of Member Allowances accordingly.*
- 3. That a workshop be scheduled following the Council meeting on 26th April 2021 to allow members of the Scrutiny Commission to develop and align their work programme to reflect the new scrutiny structure. This would then be reported back into the Scrutiny Commission for transparency.'*

## Scrutiny Commission

Despite the significant and prolonged challenges experienced throughout the pandemic, the Council has made every effort to adapt and maintain a valuable and constructive scrutiny function. This is evident in the detail of the Scrutiny Commission's work in 2020/21, which included;

- Innovating the use of a virtual meetings platform quickly and before many other Councils, in order to ensure scrutiny could continue throughout the pandemic.
- Trialling and testing of new software in order to provide the most appropriate virtual meetings experience.
- Intensive training of members and officers in a short space of time to familiarise virtual meetings protocols. Members were engaged in this process and embraced the challenge.
- Incorporating an inclusive structure, allowing for members of the wider scrutiny function to participate through members of the Commission.
- Enabling the opportunity to scrutinise work programme items from the three paused directorate-based scrutiny committees.
- Encouraging public participation in virtual meetings through live streaming (resulting in 217 YouTube views of Scrutiny Commission meetings as at 17th February 2021.)
- Continuous and thorough scrutiny of the Council's Covid-19 recovery efforts, including the Community, Economic and Organisational recovery cells.
- Developing stronger links with the Audit Committee through regular Chairs' and Vice Chairs' meetings and routine reporting at Committee meetings.
- Routine review of it's own agenda and work programme to reassess the impact of the pandemic and to ensure Council resources were being used most effectively
- Reviewing the work of the Children and Families Wellbeing Service.
- Reviewing the work of the Generating Commercial Income scrutiny panel
- Scrutiny of the implications of the pandemic on the Council's IT service
- Scrutiny of the retrospective review of Commercial property purchases
- Scrutiny of the five year housing land supply update (resulting in the recommendation that Parish Councils which have adopted Neighbourhood Plans be informed of the implications of the five-year housing land supply update in relation to potential development applications in their areas).
- Review of the Budget Scrutiny Panel report
- Scrutiny of the Bulky Waste Collection Charges review
- Scrutiny of the planning fee income – revenue impact

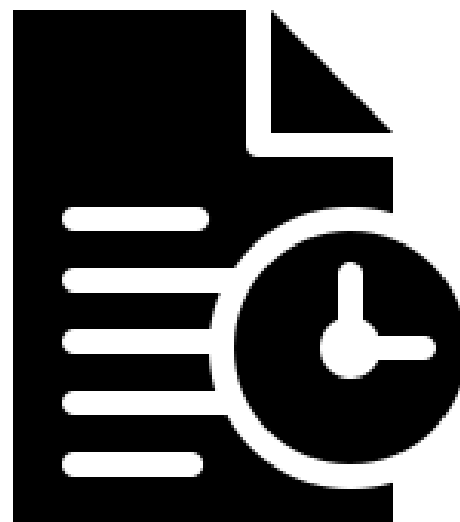
## Scrutiny Commission

In addition to these fundamental achievements, the Scrutiny Commission continued to conduct effective pre-decision scrutiny of selected items from Cabinet agendas on a monthly basis throughout 2020/21. This included;



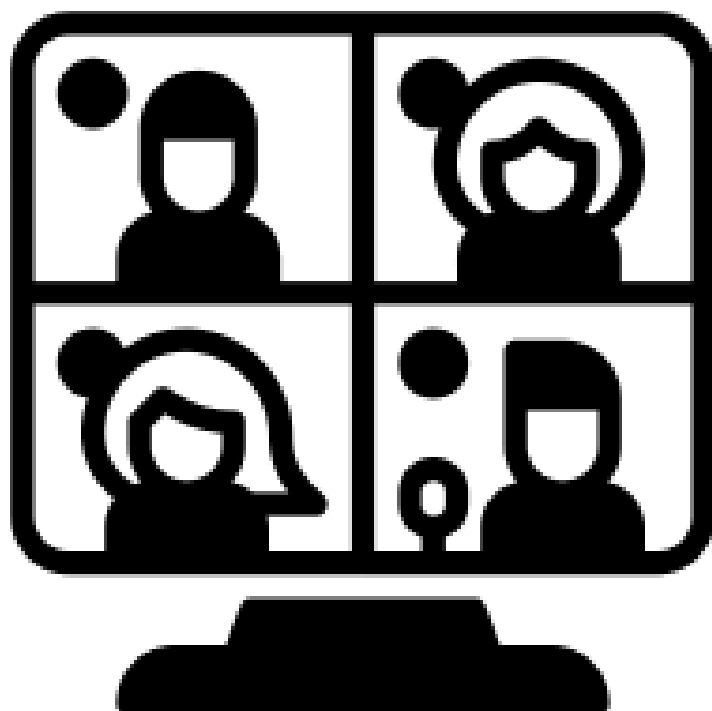
- Leisure Centre Contract Recovery and subsequent updates
- Capital Plan Outturn Report 2019/20
- General Fund and HRA Revenue Outturn 2019/20 and Carry Forward Budget
- Enterprise Zone Update
- Options for the 2020 Loughborough Remembrance Parade, Loughborough Fair, Loughborough Christmas Lights Switch on and Town Hall Pantomime
- Annual Health and Safety Report 2019-20
- Charnwood Community Lottery Review (resulting in the recommendation that the Head of Neighbourhood Service reviewed the way in which the Council communicates to its lottery supporters on its impact within the community)
- Public Space Protection Order (PSPO Loughborough Town Centre resulting in the recommendation that the reasoning in recommendation 2 of the report included a clearer rationale for the requirement of the delegated authority)
- Changes to the Procurement Service
- Commercialisation Position Statement
- Review of the Community Safety Partnership
- Shepshed Town Centre Public Realm Improvement Project
- Building Control Alternative Service Delivery Project
- Discretionary Private Sector Licencing Scheme
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2020-2024
- Bedford Square Gateway Public Realm Project
- People Strategy 2021-24
- Loughborough Business Improvement District (BID) 3rd Term
- Future Arrangements for the Delivery of Planned Works, Voids and Associated Works
- ICT Strategy 2021-23
- Corporate Delivery Plan 2021-22.

## Scrutiny Commission

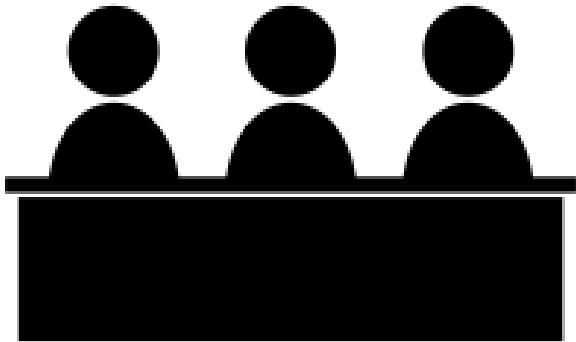


The importance of robust scrutiny has been highlighted during the 2020/21 Council year. The challenges faced have been unprecedented and all areas of the Council have been required to adapt quickly to meet the needs of the services provided. Existing practices which would usually require little scrutiny have been affected by the pandemic, meaning the remit of scrutiny at the Council has increased. Our role on the Scrutiny Commission has ensured that these new initiatives and ideas are appropriate and deliver the most effective outcomes. I am profoundly proud of what we have achieved and overcome in the past year and appreciate the true commitment and dedication and of my fellow committee members in delivering quality scrutiny. We have scrutinised a remarkable diversity of topics, details of which you can find in the minutes and recordings available [online](#). I feel that the Scrutiny Commission has added real and genuine value to the work of the Council and in the response to the pandemic and it's recovery, ensuring our residents have been supported and informed throughout and I am confident that this will continue. The structure of the scrutiny function will change during the 2021/22 Council year and I look forward to seeing how services can be influenced and improved further by the transparent and thorough scrutiny valued by the Council.

***Councillor Brenda Seaton, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2020/21***



## 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.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Scrutiny Commission decided to temporarily pause all scrutiny panels, with the exception of the Budget Scrutiny Panel.

## Budget Scrutiny Panel

Following a decision of the Cabinet at its meeting on 13th February 2020 and a decision of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 10th August 2020, a Budget Scrutiny Panel has undertaken scrutiny of the Council's draft budget for 2021/22.

The Panel met between September 2020 and January 2021 to accord with the Council's timetable for setting its Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021-23 and General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budgets and Council Tax 2021/22.

The Panel's deliberations focused on the proposed revised Budget 2020-21 and the revised Capital Plan 2020 to 2023. They also considered the previous Panel's report and the 2019-20 outturn accounts to inform its scrutiny.

# Budget Scrutiny Panel

The Panel recognised the significant impact that the Coronavirus pandemic had on the Council's finances and in particular noted the uncertainties in the 2021/22 budget with regard to Government Settlement payments and unknown factors such as the New Homes Bonus and Business rates reductions. The Panel were particularly concerned with the use of reserves to meet the identified shortfall. The Panel made several recommendations, including in summary:

- A review of the scrutiny committee structure going forward as the directorate organisation had changed. As this recommendation was within the Scrutiny Commission remit it was considered by the Commission at its meeting on 11th January 2021 and was not put forward as a recommendation to the Cabinet at its meeting in February;
- A method to estimate savings made directly as a result of scrutiny;
- The need for regular monitoring of income from Commercial Investments as its income was considered crucial in maintaining safe and appropriate levels of reserves;
- Highlighting concerns regarding the use of underspend to balance the budget and understanding what financial stresses would trigger action regarding budget performance;
- The need for a more detailed breakdown of overall numbers within future budgets and continuity of Panel membership to encourage greater understanding of Council finances;
- An analysis of potential austerity reductions over a 5-year period be undertaken to support planning local services,
- That Building Control fees overspend be monitored considering the new Building Control Service and ensuring an effective advertising campaign is undertaken for the new service.

The Panel's report was considered by the Scrutiny Commission in January 2021, with the Commission resolving to submit that report to the Cabinet when it considered that General Fund and HRA Budget 2021/22 at its meeting on 11th February 2021. 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.

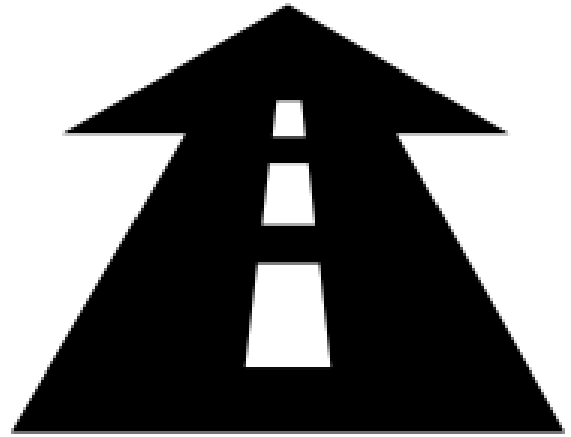
***Councillor Leon Hadji-Nikolaou, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel***



## Reflection and Looking Ahead

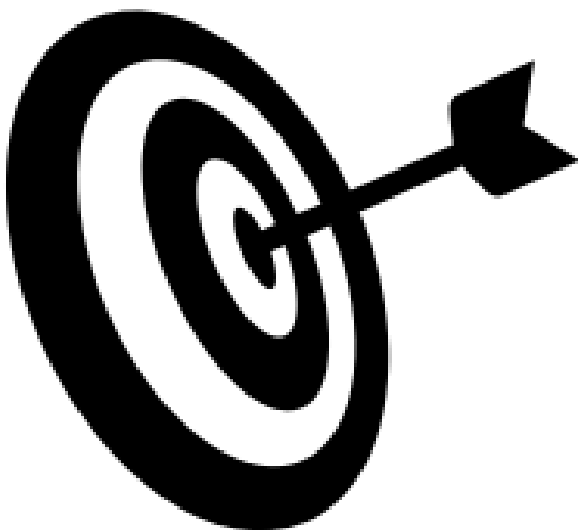
The Scrutiny function has been in place since the implementation of the Local Government Act 2000, its practices have been interpreted widely and with varying degrees of effect nationally.

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 2020-21 Council year has been unlike any other. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on all areas of the Council was remarkable and the role of scrutiny was no different. For a temporary period scrutiny meetings like all committee meetings were postponed until legislation was passed allowing Council's to run virtual meetings.

During the Pandemic the Council maintained robust and member-led scrutiny proportionate to the constrained resources and the scrutiny function was able to effectively scrutinise the Council's approach to recovery. This style of approach was strongly advocated by Centre for Public Scrutiny and Governance (CfPSG) and the Local Government Association (LGA).



At its meeting on 8th March 2021, the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the scrutiny structure as the Chief Executive had made changes to directorates and the services that fall within them, and so the original scrutiny structure pre-pandemic was no longer relevant. The review was timely in light of the ongoing Pandemic and the significant ongoing financial challenges faced by the Council.

## Reflection and Looking Forward



Subject to Full Council approval with effect from the new civic year 2021/22 the *Scrutiny Committee structure will be amended to consist of two standing scrutiny committees:*

- *Scrutiny Commission (Membership 7)*
- *Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee (Membership 9)*

Task-and-finish' scrutiny panels will continue on the same basis with up to four running at any one time, including the Budget Scrutiny Panel.

Following the Annual Council meeting when the annual appointments are made, a work programme workshop will be held to map out the new scrutiny work programme and task and finish panel topics. Scrutiny members will also be offered development opportunities

on how to use scrutiny effectively and how it can be focussed on the most appropriate and important topics.

Overall, there are many challenges ahead and the new structure is being seen as a catalyst for making a real difference to the lives of local people.

***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 more public participation in scrutiny meetings. You can find out more about upcoming meetings, and view recordings of previous meetings on the [Council's website](#). You can get involved by;

- Observing 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](#)
- Asking a question on notice on any agenda item. Email Democratic Services for more information, [democracy@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@charnwood.gov.uk)
- Suggesting a topic for Scrutiny to consider by getting in touch with the Democratic Services team either through email [democracy@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@charnwood.gov.uk)
- Raising issues with your local Ward Councillor and requesting that Scrutiny considers this as part of a Councillor Call for Action, or that it should be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme
- Looking 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](mailto:democracy@charnwood.gov.uk)