



Charnwood

ANNEX

Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22

Scrutiny Commission

Introduction from the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission

At the start of the 2021-22 Council year, the national position on the Covid-19 pandemic was starting to look a lot brighter. After a year of new procedures, recovery updates and online meetings, committee members were able to meet in person again with additional safety precautions. Instead of concentrating on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's services, the Scrutiny Commission has been able to review a wider range of topics this year. In addition, the Council installed hybrid meeting equipment, allowing officers to attend meetings through a virtual platform, which is an entirely new approach to anything we have done before. The return of the standard Scrutiny Commission agenda and a more conventional approach to scrutiny has enabled the Scrutiny Commission to examine a variety of issues and continue to review items from the Cabinet's forward programme of work. The scrutiny function at the Council remains as strong, effective and influential as ever and we have added some valuable insight to council services and decision-making processes this year.



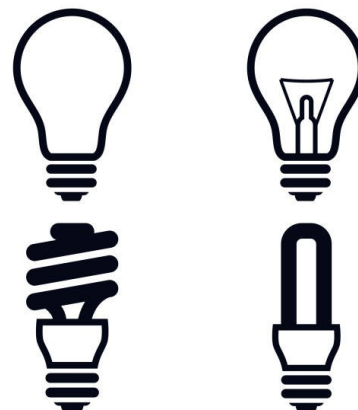
Councillor Brenda Seaton, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2021/22

Returning to the standard pre-Covid Scrutiny Commission agenda has allowed members to commission a number of scrutiny panels this year covering topics such as Waste Management and Digital Transformation. In addition, at the meeting of the Full Council on 26th April 2021, it was resolved that a Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee be established, following a review of the scrutiny structure. This was a significant and necessary change in order to ensure the council's scrutiny function continues to operate successfully and delivers valuable outcomes.

Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission's work in 2021/22, included;

- Adapting to new and innovative ways of working
- Participating in a scrutiny workshop, designed to allow members to schedule important items for scrutiny
- Agreeing a new scrutiny structure to recommend to Full Council
- Identifying new ideas for scrutiny panels, reviewing scrutiny panel scoping documents, scheduling time frames and monitoring panel progress
- Commissioning the Budget Scrutiny Panel for 2021-22
- Approving a temporary suspension of the aspect of the Constitution which stated that members chairing scrutiny panels must be a Chair or Vice-Chair of a scrutiny committee. This was made permanent following the next Constitution review.
- Updating the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Work Programme with relevant items, including asking the committee to review the Community Safety Partnership annually in line with legislation.
- Responding to concerns of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and scheduling further scrutiny of Key Performance Indicator KI 11 - %Rent Loss from Void Properties.
- Reviewing the Charnwood Grant Applications process.
- Review of the Bulky Waste Collection charges, including scheduling of further scrutiny in November 2022 and requesting further information on civil litigation cases and costings of the scheme.
- Reviewing an update on the work recommended by the Commercialisation Scrutiny Panel.



Scrutiny Commission

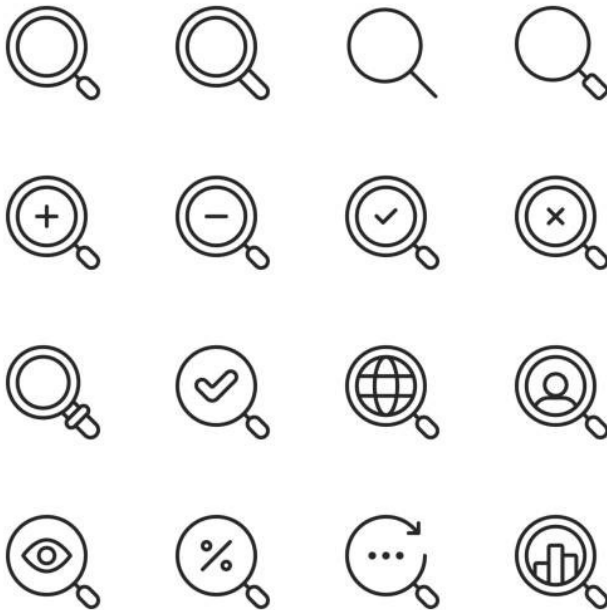
In addition to these fundamental activities, the Scrutiny Commission conducted pre-decision scrutiny on a range of items selected from Cabinet agendas, including;

- Authority to Advertise and Award an Asset Management Contract
- Pre-Submission Charnwood Local Plan (2021-2037)
- Nanpantan Cemetery
- Additional and Selective Licensing Scheme – Licensing Conditions
- Charnwood 2030 Carbon Neutral Plan
- Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Incident Policy 2021-25
- Feasibility Work on Southfields Extension Car Park
- Motion on Notice Referral – Glyphosate-Based Herbicides in Open Spaces, Playgrounds and Parks and requesting an update for October 2022.
- Pets Policy 2021-25
- Loughborough Business Improvement District (BID) Third Term
- Charnwood Grants – Round Two 2021/22 Charnwood Community and Community Facilities Grant Applications
- The Introduction of Revised License Conditions for Permanent Residential Mobile Home Sites
- Charnwood Grants – Strategic Partners (2022/23 – 2023/24)
- Leisure Centre Contract 5 Year Extension
- Loughborough Town Deal
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act: Policy and Review of Use in 2021, including a recommendation that best practice research be incorporated into the new review, and that a briefing note outlining the procedure be circulated to members.
- Active Together Physical Activity Framework 2022-31
- Private Sector Housing Licensing Schemes
- Authority to Sell Council Owned Land
- Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-23

Scrutiny Commission

Over the past year the Scrutiny Commission has made every effort to act as a critical friend to the council and the Executive, to raise public concerns and to ensure public services are delivered effectively and efficiently. Details of the scrutiny we have undertaken can be found in the minutes and recordings available [online](#). The members of the Scrutiny Commission are very passionate and enthusiastic and take their roles very seriously. I am very proud of the work we have achieved over the last year, and how well we have moved on following the Covid-19 pandemic. I am looking forward to seeing what outcomes we can produce and what we can achieve in 2022/23!

Councillor Brenda Seaton, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2021/22



Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel

At its meeting on 8th March 2021 the Council's scrutiny committee structure was reviewed by the Scrutiny Commission and the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee was created with its meetings held on a quarterly basis. The first meeting of this Committee was held as a hybrid meeting on 22nd June 2021 where it agreed its Terms of Reference.



Councillor Mark Charles, Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee 2021/22

The Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee's key roles are to receive regular performance and financial monitoring reports and identify areas of underperformance or where performance could be improved. To date it has scrutinised four performance monitoring reports with support from officers and Cabinet Lead Members, including the Annual Report 2020-21. In the Committee's view the performance delivered by the Council during that year was outstanding considering the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Before its meetings the Committee has identified key areas of performance for scrutiny and has scrutinised the following:

- Net additional homes provided
- Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)
- % rent loss through void properties
- Progress of Sheltered schemes
- Age criteria for acceptance into certain properties
- Household waste sent for reuse recycling and composting
- Residual household waste per household
- Community safety

Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel



At its meeting on 1st March 2022 the Committee requested that the Scrutiny Commission schedule a review of Key Performance Indicator KI11 (% rent loss) as it considered there were unresolved issues that would benefit from further scrutiny.

It 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 received a Community Safety Partnership Update at its November 2021 meeting and considered in depth reasons why there had been an overall increase in crime and that the position in the family group was worse. There was a considerable issue with substance misuse in the Borough and this had impacted on crime but members were of the view that good work was being done in difficult circumstances.

It has also considered the following matters:

- Delivery of the Climate Change Strategy – reviewed the tree planting data to offset CO2 emissions, planned move of offices for the Council, electric charging points and communication strategy with the public.
- Carbon Neutral Strategy – considered progress with building of new premises, and the Council's position on the national Climate Emergency Score Card and what could be done to improve its score.
- Decent Homes Contract Update - considered progress on future arrangements for delivery of planned works voids and associated works.

Councillor Mark Charles, Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Panels



Scrutiny panels can be established by the Scrutiny Commission 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;

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

Non-executive members of the council participated in a scrutiny workshop this year, which included identifying topics for scrutiny panels. In addition, members received training on running scrutiny panels and creating effective recommendations.

Panel work at the council was rejuvenated following the pandemic, and members and officers have been working together to produce constructive outcomes.

Budget Scrutiny Panel

Following a decision of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 13th September 2021, a Budget Scrutiny Panel has undertaken scrutiny of the Council's draft budget for 2022/23. The Panel met between October 2021 and January 2022. The Panel's deliberations focussed on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the revenue position for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, and The Draft Capital Plan 2022/23 to 2024.



Councillor Jewel Miah, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel 2021/22

Budget Scrutiny Panel

The Panel recognised the challenges faced by the Council and the work that had been undertaken to keep the Council's finances resilient in uncertain times. The Panel had worked with uncertainty over the Government Financial Settlement, which was not made public until shortly before the Panel's final meeting, but nonetheless looked closely at the Council's finances and how the budget could be approached under a number of different scenarios based on different predicted outcomes of the settlement, the Panel also monitored the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. Once the settlement was released, the Panel made some observations based on its implications for the Council and the key risks involved which were as follows:

- (i) Key risk areas include:
 - The need to deliver on 2021/22 savings, including salary increases.
 - Risks surrounding the final and future grant settlement figures,
 - The impact of the environmental bill on garden waste collection
 - The need to monitor commercial rents.
 - Inflationary risks.
 - Contractual cost risks.
 - The impact of Omicron and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Interest rates and the effects a rise in rates would have on the wider economy, particularly in terms of business rates and council tax collection. Whilst treasury management would give the Council more income, borrowing would cost the Council more.
- (ii) Whilst not having officers in their posts creates savings, it means that services are not being delivered.
- (iii) The Council needs to be mindful of the financial pressures faced by its residents.

It was suggested that the next cycle of meetings of the Panel consider reviewing the use of Council Garage land and the land to be considered for Council housing/building. At the meeting of Scrutiny Commission on 10th January 2022 it was further suggested that the next cycle of meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Panel consider the budget implications of void properties and car parking charges.

The Panel's report was considered by the Scrutiny Commission in January 2022, with the Commission resolving to submit that report to the Cabinet at its meeting on 10th February 2022. A copy of the Panel's report can be seen [here](#) and sets out the observations made by the Panel.

Councillor Jewel Miah, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel

Waste Management Scrutiny Panel



Following the Scrutiny Commission's approval of a scrutiny scope document in October 2021, a Waste Management Scrutiny Panel has been working to consider the Council's waste management performance and how that might be improved, particularly in terms of its recycling rates and given also that waste minimisation is now so important.

The Panel held its first meeting in November 2021 and hopes to conclude its work in June 2022, having been on occasion delayed by Covid-19.

Councillor Emma Ward, Chair of the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel



Waste Management Scrutiny Panel

Scrutiny has been focused on the key tasks listed in the scrutiny scope document, which have included considering the proposals in the Environment Bill regarding waste management and the changes it will necessitate, examining the Council's waste and recycling data and benchmarking against other authorities, looking at those leading in waste management and how their practices might be applied in Charnwood and investigating new research, technology and methods that could help improve recycling rates. Groups and organisations were contacted that may be able to work in partnership with the Council on waste reduction projects, including Transitions, Men & Women in Sheds, Less Waste Leicestershire and Leicester Fixers.

The Panel added to its scope consideration of the pledges and collection options in the draft Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-50, with a view to submitting a Panel response to the consultation on that.

At its meeting in May 2022, the Panel will discuss barriers to recycling and how to overcome them, to include the outcome of informal engagement on this with stakeholders such as students, those living in flats and the Council's waste contractor. Panel members also hope to have the opportunity to visit the Casepak Materials Recycling Facility in Leicester before concluding the scrutiny exercise in June 2022 and agreeing the Panel's report and recommendations.

Councillor Emma Ward, Chair of the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel

Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Matthew Brookes, Chair of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Following approval of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 28th June 2021, a Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel was set up to ensure that any current projects connected to the IT Strategy and Customer Services Strategy were progressing in a timely and effective manner and to provide further ideas for how to transform services. The panel was also interested in increasing accessibility to council services, helping to raise customer satisfaction levels.

The panel first met on 28th February 2022 and held subsequent meetings on 29th March 2022 and 27th April 2022. The panel is due to conclude at their next meeting.

The panel have reviewed a variety of documentation, such as the council's Corporate Strategy 2020-24, the Customer Services Strategy 2022-25, the Information and Communication Technology Strategy 2021-23, Lloyd's Bank Digital Skills Report 2021 and the Lloyd's Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2021. They have also interviewed witnesses including Paul Ward, Head of IT and Digital at Coventry City Council, Mike Roberts, Communications Manager and Richard Bennett, Head of Planning and Regeneration at Charnwood Borough Council. The final report of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel, including recommendations will be submitted to the Scrutiny Commission following the conclusion of the panel.

The panel have recognised that some of their initial ideas were not viable options for the council to implement but have explored some new concepts. The following summarises the outcomes of the panel's meetings so far;

- There was not a need for an app to allow members of the public to access the council's services.
- There was a significant amount of work being undertaken at the council already in terms of digital transformation. This was a theme that had been introduced into all service areas.
- Some residents within the Borough were not digitally active, and the council would need to continue to provide services accessible to these members of the community.
- The council had a 'digital champions' scheme. The panel felt that this could be extended and that members could be used to support digital inclusion in the Borough.

Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel



I am pleased with the work undertaken by the panel at this stage, and I feel that we have had valuable insight into digital transformation at the council, and also outside of the council. We have looked at best practice and learnt lessons from other local authorities, which is invaluable. Throughout the work of the panel, we have kept our customers in mind and tried to ensure that the way services are delivered at the council is appropriate for our customers. We anticipate that our panel will be complete at the next meeting, and I look forward to offering some recommendations to the Scrutiny Commission, to further improve the experience of our customers.

Councillor Matthew Brookes, Chair of the Digital Transformation 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 2021-22 Council year saw a return to in-person meetings and to more standardised practices within the scrutiny function at the council. After a difficult few years during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was great to have scrutiny councillors and officers back in committee rooms together to resume business as usual. The council has installed hybrid meeting equipment, meaning that some attendees are able to join meetings through Microsoft Teams, which makes scrutiny committees even more efficient.

In the past year we have introduced the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and a number of scrutiny panels, which have all added a great deal of value to council services. I am pleased with the outcomes of these meetings and with the substantial amount of work that members and officers have put into ensuring strong and effective scrutiny at every meeting. The new scrutiny structure has been a catalyst in making a real difference to the lives of local people.

Looking ahead, the scrutiny committees have some excellent opportunities for influential and interesting scrutiny. In addition, there are already a number of new scrutiny panels lined up to explore topics such as combatting loneliness and tourism in Charnwood. Whilst the council's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing, there are still many challenges ahead and I am confident that our scrutiny committees and panels will be key in the development of policies and procedures to further strengthen our council.

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
- Suggesting a topic for Scrutiny to consider by getting in touch with the Democratic Services team either through email 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



Charnwood