



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Overview & Scrutiny annual report 2023-24

Introduction

Welcome to Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council's Overview & Scrutiny annual report for 2023-24.

Following the elections in May 2023, the overview & scrutiny function benefitted from several new members, including a new chair and vice-chair to work with the remaining vice-chair who was continuing in the role.

The overview & scrutiny function consists of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance & Performance Scrutiny. The function is led by a minority group member who chairs the Scrutiny Commission. Two vice-chairs are appointed from the majority group and the largest opposition group. This arrangement helps to ensure that scrutiny's work is free from party politics and able to effectively scrutinise the Executive. One of the vice-chairs is chair of Finance & Performance Scrutiny.

As a new triumvirate, we have had a strong start to our term, starting to shape the function to meet future challenges by:

- raising the profile of scrutiny amongst councillors, officers and the public
- strengthening the role of overview & scrutiny in policy development
- working more closely with the Executive whilst acting as a critical friend
- considering matters which are of most importance to the public.

In July 2023, the work of the new overview & scrutiny function began with a training event and workshop for all non-Executive members which considered matters of importance to the public, members and officers which were then prioritised in order to inform the work programme for 2023 to 2027. Creation of a work programme to cover the four-year term of office is a new concept and is assisting in planning future reviews to spread workload.

This report aims to measure progress against the work programme, set out the achievements of the overview & scrutiny function and consider how the function will adapt to meet future challenges.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank fellow overview & scrutiny councillors for their hard work and commitment, Executive members for their support and attendance and officers for supporting the function. We look forward to continuing to work together to build on our successes in the coming year.

Councillors Chris Lambert, Miriam Surtees and Paul Williams Chair and Vice-chairs of the Scrutiny Commission



Councillor Chris Lambert
Chair of the Scrutiny
Commission



Councillor Miriam Surtees
Vice-chair of the Scrutiny
Commission and Chair of
Finance & Performance
Scrutiny



Councillor Paul Williams
Vice-chair of the Scrutiny
Commission

Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission covers a varied range of work in either items requested by members or those brought by officers to seek support, showcase positive work or provide information. The Scrutiny Commission's work in 2023-24 included:

- Detailed work to develop a work programme which met expectations of stakeholders and supported the aims within the corporate plan
- Consideration of the Environmental Improvement Programme and schemes recommended for approval under the programme
- Scrutiny of the proposed changes to the Parish & Community Initiative Fund to reflect the council's priorities in relation to climate change
- A discussion on the Planning Policy Member Working Group in order to raise awareness and encourage engagement
- Updates on the Hinckley Crematorium project following requests of members for information on progress of this key capital project
- Receipt of the annual infrastructure funding statement to inform members of developer contributions
- A review of work undertaken to fulfill the aims of the Economic Regeneration Strategy
- Analysis of planning appeal performance including the financial implications and the impact of appeals
- Scrutiny of the annual position in relation to affordable housing delivery
- Receiving an update on key achievements arising from the borough's voluntary & community sector (VCS) partnership arrangements
- Understanding the work undertaken by the authority in response to the cost of living crisis to raise awareness and enable members to signpost residents to services
- An update on the safe spaces project – a countywide project to support those struggling with hoarding
- Consideration of allocation of grants as part of the Parish & Community Initiative Fund
- Agreeing the scope for future scrutiny reviews including:
 - Review of adoptions of infrastructure on new developments
 - Review of housing matters with a view to reduce homelessness
 - Preparedness of utility companies for future growth.

Pre-decision Scrutiny

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council has traditionally favoured pre-decision scrutiny of items due for decision by the Executive. Providing comments and recommendations on reports before a decision is taken by the Executive reduces the need for call-in of decisions and ensures that decisions can be implemented expediently after the Executive has made its decision. The Scrutiny Commission also occasionally considers reports that are due for consideration by Council to allow for debate in a less formal forum and to enable comments to be considered and incorporated at an earlier stage. The following pre-decision scrutiny has taken place during 2023-24:

- Young People's Strategy 2023 – 2026
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Budget reports
- Pay policy statement
- Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and Damp & Mould policy.

Finance & Performance Scrutiny

Finance & Performance Scrutiny's key roles are monitoring performance of services and financial performance. It receives reports from frontline services annually, as well as quarterly performance and financial monitoring reports. In 2023-24, Finance & Performance Scrutiny considered:

- The performance management framework along with quarterly and annual performance and risk management updates
- Quarterly financial outturn reports and the annual outturn for 2023/23
- Treasury management quarterly reports
- Quarterly business rates and pooling updates
- Quarterly sundry debt reports
- Frontline service reviews for:
 - Housing
 - Planning
 - Street Scene Services
 - Hinckley Leisure Centre.

Reviews

The Scrutiny Commission may undertake reviews into matters that are of interest to the community or support the council in achieving its objectives. During 2023/24, three reviews were scoped:

- Review of adoptions on new developments
- Review of housing matters with a view to reduce homelessness
- Preparedness of utility companies for future growth.

The Scrutiny Commission can establish scrutiny working groups, task & finish groups or panels in order to undertake reviews on specific topics. These groups are provided with an agreed scope and are designed to undertake a time-limited review including undertaking research as appropriate. It was agreed that the housing review and the review of adoptions on new developments would be undertaken by task & finish groups and the review of utility companies' preparedness for future growth would be undertaken by the full Scrutiny Commission.

Housing Task & Finish Group

At its meeting in December 2023, the Scrutiny Commission agreed the scope of a review into housing matters due to concern about the shortage of social housing and the levels of homelessness. The scope was agreed as:

- Understand the pathways that people use to access housing and the barriers
- Develop a strategy to increase the availability of private rented accommodation
- Lobby government for more funding for affordable housing, in particular making it easier for councils to increase their own housing stock
- Consideration of how empty homes can help with the housing shortage.

It was agreed that the review would take place by way of task & finish group, membership of which would roughly follow the political balance.

Meetings of the group took place on 14 March, 8 May, 1 August and 5 September with a final report currently being prepared for the Scrutiny Commission.

Adoptions of infrastructure Task & Finish Group

In October 2023, the Scrutiny Commission agreed the scope of a review which would cover adoption of open space, adoption of roads and the role of management companies in relation to new developments. The review is due to commence in autumn 2024.

Review into preparedness of utility companies for future growth

At the meeting of Council on 30 January 2024, the following motion was approved:

"The main service suppliers for water / sewage, electricity and gas be called upon to provide assurance that they have the resources and infrastructure in place to provide for existing households and business premises and future housing, warehousing and business developments".

The Scrutiny Commission subsequently agreed to take responsibility for the review, inviting Cadent Gas, National Grid and Severn Trent Water to a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission. A representative of National Grid attended the Scrutiny Commission meeting on 9 May and representatives of Severn Trent Water attended on 29 August where they informed members of their work to prepare for future demand.

A date for Cadent Gas to attend is yet to be confirmed.

Previous reviews

The above programme builds on successful thematic reviews of recent years including reviews of the in-house refuse collection service, healthcare provision in Hinckley, reconfiguration of health services across Leicestershire, the garden waste service, NHS dental services within the borough and a review of the council's planning service which was instrumental in identifying weaknesses and making significant improvements in the service.

Scrutiny of the budget

Scrutiny of the annual budget prior to decision by Council is an important part of overview & scrutiny. This work is undertaken at a joint meeting of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance & Performance Scrutiny in late January or early February and involves consideration of the following reports:

- General fund budget
- Housing revenue account budget
- Fees & charges
- Capital programme
- Treasury management strategy and prudential indicators.

Community Safety Partnership

Since the Blaby District and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Community Safety Partnerships joined together formally in 2016/17, a Joint Community Safety Partnership Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting has taken place annually. Membership consists of the Scrutiny Commissions of both authorities and the venue and chairing alternates between Blaby District Council and Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council. The meetings receive annual crime figures and updates on prevention work and are well attended by the local police.

Looking to the future

Having planned a four-year work programme in 2023, the overview & scrutiny function has plenty of work planned! The work programme is, however, a living document which is reviewed at each meeting and updated, with requests for reports and reviews added regularly.

During 2024-25 the housing review will be concluded, with recommendations being submitted to the Executive or Council as appropriate. The review of adoptions on new developments will take place by way of task & finish group, and the review into preparedness of the utility companies for future growth will come to a conclusion. In addition, the following reviews are planned:

- Digital poverty / cashless society
- Bus services / public transport
- Healthcare: lack of GPs and dentists, services at Hinckley Hospital
- Housing associations.

As part of the Audit Committee self-assessment, work is being undertaken to ensure the audit and the overview & scrutiny functions complement each other. To this end, the chair of the Scrutiny Commission has been a member of the Audit Committee since its inception, but we are looking at ways of strengthening the link. Another aspect of the work involves reviewing the risk management functions of Finance & Performance Scrutiny to ensure it supports the Audit Committee's responsibilities in relation to risk management but avoids duplication. This work will be concluded during 2024-15.

More information

If you would like to suggest a topic for the Scrutiny Commission to review, would like more information about the overview & scrutiny function or require this document in a different format, please contact:

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