



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Overview & Scrutiny annual report 2024-25

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Introduction

Welcome to Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council's Overview & Scrutiny annual report for 2024-25.

In 2024-25, the overview & scrutiny function benefitted from stability within the lead triumvirate due to the continuation of the chair and vice-chairs in their roles. Having been appointed following the elections in May 2023 – two of them new to the positions, the function has gone from strength to strength and has some valuable work.

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.

We have continued to work positively as a triumvirate and 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 has assisted in planning future reviews to spread workload. We have continued to focus on matters raised at the workshop to inform our agenda in 2025-26.

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 need to 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 overview & scrutiny 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

The role of overview & scrutiny

The terms of reference for overview & scrutiny are set out in part 2e of the council's constitution.

1.1 Within their terms of reference and with the aim of improving services to the public and on their behalf, the Scrutiny Commission and Finance & Performance Scrutiny will:

- Review and / or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the council's functions, as an internal 'critical friend'
- Make reports and/or recommendations to Council and/or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions
- Exercise the right to call-in for decisions made but not yet implemented by the Executive, or executive decisions delegated to individual Executive members or officers
- Approve an annual work programme
- Put in place a system to ensure that referrals to the Executive, either by way of report or for reconsideration, are managed efficiently within the terms of the constitution
- Appoint, where appropriate, a group to review a specific topic on a task and finish basis

2.1 The specific responsibilities of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance & Performance Scrutiny are:

- Assisting Council and the Executive in the development of its budget and policy framework by in depth analysis of policy issues
- Conducting research and consultation on analysis of policy issues and possible options
- Considering and implementing mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy options
- Questioning members of the Executive, committees and the senior leadership team about their views and professional opinions on issues and proposals affecting the area
- Reviewing and scrutinising the decisions made by and the performance of the Executive and officers both in relation to individual decisions and over a period of time
- Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas and monitoring the eventual effectiveness of decisions taken and comparing to original forecasts
- Ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies
- Ensuring effective scrutiny of the risk management processes of the council including corporate and service risks
- Making recommendations to Council, the Executive or appropriate committee as an outcome of the scrutiny process
- Liaising with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
- Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of other public bodies operating in the area and inviting reports from them
- Questioning and gathering evidence from any person, with their consent
- Co-opting non-council members to assist in the scrutiny of specific issues on which they might have expert knowledge
- Considering "Councillor Calls for Action" and petitions as referred under the petitions scheme
- Preparing and presenting an annual report to Council.

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 2024-25 included:

- Attendance of **Severn Trent Water and National Grid** to support the review of utility companies pursuant to a motion of Council
- A review of work undertaken to fulfill the aims of the **Economic Regeneration Strategy**
- Commenting on **the annual infrastructure funding statement** to inform members of developer contributions and provide a basis for the scrutiny review into adoption of infrastructure
- An update on **tenant involvement and scrutiny** as part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Housing Customer Standard as required by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Scrutiny of the annual position in relation to **affordable housing delivery**
- Scrutiny of the **budget strategy** and budget proposals for 2025/26 before consideration by Council
- Receiving an update on **key achievements arising from** the borough's voluntary & community sector (**VCS**) **partnership arrangements**
- Updates on the **Hinckley Crematorium** project following requests from members for information on progress of this key capital project
- Information on the negotiations which resulted in **Cineworld** in Hinckley remaining open despite the closure of five other branches nationally
- Receipt and review of initial feedback and recommendations from the **corporate peer challenge**
- An update on work undertaken in relation **to children and young people**
- 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
- Consideration of recommended allocations of the parish and Hinckley community initiative fund and the community equipment grant, along with proposed amendments to the scheme
- Agreeing the scope for the forthcoming scrutiny review **into digital poverty and the cashless society.**

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 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 2024-25:

- Voluntary and community sector partnership update and commissioning outcomes 2023/24
- Cost of living update
- Children and young people update
- HRA investment strategy
- Cultural strategy
- Rural strategy
- Sustainable procurement policy
- People Strategy
- Lease of a new depot site
- Medium term financial strategy
- Budget reports
- Pay policy statement.

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 2024-25, Finance & Performance Scrutiny considered:

- The performance management framework along with quarterly and annual performance and risk management updates
- Quarterly financial outturn reports
- Treasury management quarterly reports
- Quarterly business rates and pooling updates
- Quarterly sundry debt reports
- Fly tipping data
- Management of void housing properties
- Performance of the corporate property portfolio
- Frontline service reviews for:
 - Housing
 - Planning
 - Street Scene Services
 - Environmental 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 2024-25, four reviews were scoped or underway:

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

In addition, a review into healthcare took place at a single meeting in February in which representatives of the health sector provided a presentation on local primary care networks and GPs, NHS dental services, the new community diagnostic centre in Hinckley and the future of Hinckley Hospital.

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 had been 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. The format of the Digital poverty review has not yet been agreed.

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.

Meetings of the task & finish group commenced during the 2023-24 year and continued into 2024-25. A final report was presented to the Scrutiny Commission on 12 December 2024 with the following resolution arising from the report:

(i) Officers be recommended to:

- a) Share information between the revenues and the housing services including a list of empty properties, the size of the properties and any second homes where the own also lived in the borough;*
- b) Continue dialogue with local landlords and their representatives with a view to seeking to work together to relieve pressure on the homelessness service;*

(ii) The Executive be recommended to:

- Consider providing additional staffing to investigate empty properties and bring them back into use;
- Consider increasing capacity and expertise within the relevant team to benefit from opportunities to acquire S106 properties;
- Lobby government in relation to:
 - a) Section 106 sites: relating to affordable housing, engagement with registered providers, community infrastructure and viability
 - b) Right to buy: restricting the sale of council properties to support the council in retaining its housing stock
 - c) Empty properties: funding to assist with bringing empty properties back into use
 - d) Officer capacity and funding: funding for staffing to progress housing initiatives and requesting additional financial support for developing and acquiring council housing
 - e) General: promoting a more coordinated approach to housing-related policies across government departments

(iii) A review of the action undertaken following the consideration of the recommendations be added to the overview & scrutiny work programme for 2025/26.

The Executive considered the relevant recommendations at its meeting on 8 January 2025. The Executive supported the principle of additional staffing to investigate empty properties and bring them back into use, subject to consideration during the budget setting process. In relation to the recommendation to increase capacity and expertise to benefit from opportunities to acquire S106 properties, it was requested that officers consider utilising existing expertise. The Executive agreed to lobby government as recommended by the Scrutiny Commission.

Adoption 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. Meetings of the task & finish group took place on 20 January, 3 March and 10 April. Further meetings are planned and it is anticipated that the work will conclude by winter 2025.

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 2024 where they informed members of their work to prepare for future demand. Contact has been made with Cadent Gas, however a date for attendance is yet to be agreed with Cadent.

Digital poverty and cashless society

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 25 July 2025, a proposed scope for the digital poverty review was agreed:

- Access to council services
- Scrutinising provision of external services including other tiers of local and national government, and banking
- Access to healthcare
- Economic opportunities
- The move to a cashless society.

Members indicated that the review should be undertaken by the full Scrutiny Commission, rather than by way of task & finish group.

Finalising the scope of the review was delegated to the chair, taking into account the capacity of members given the other ongoing and forthcoming reviews.

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. The Scrutiny Commission will be reviewing progress following the planning service review during 2025-26.

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 and involves consideration of the following reports:

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

Scrutiny of the 2025/26 budget took place at a joint meeting on 30 January 2025

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.

The 2024/25 meeting took place on 19 February 2025, hosted by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council.

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. The chair and vice chairs meeting regularly to reprioritise items and manage available officer and member capacity to address any emerging issues, such as local government reorganization.

Reviews

During 2024-25 the adoption of infrastructure review will be concluded, with recommendations being submitted to the Executive or Council as appropriate. The digital poverty and cashless society review will commence and the review into preparedness of the utility companies for future growth will come to a conclusion. In addition, the following reviews are planned:

- Bus services / public transport
- Housing associations.

The Scrutiny Commission will maximise opportunities to use task & finish groups in order to undertake deep dives into specific topics to support decision making and constructive challenge to decision makers. This will build on successes of previous reviews undertaken by way of a task and finish group.

Audit Committee self-assessment

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 2025-26.

Corporate peer challenge

The Local Government Association corporate peer challenge took place in December 2024. It involved a team of senior local government councillors and officers undertaking a comprehensive review of key financial, performance and governance information gathered from meetings with staff, councillors, partners and stakeholders. The feedback received from the peer challenge was extremely positive and reference was made to the overview & scrutiny function, along with some suggestions for building on the work of the scrutiny bodies:

- Continue to use different mechanisms such as task and finish groups to build on previous successful reviews and support decision making
- Clearly and publicly redefine the roles of the Executive, scrutiny and audit
- Make clear and publicly available the role of the overview & scrutiny function in the call-in process and broader scrutiny work.

An action plan has been agreed which addresses all recommendations made by the review team, including the recommendations and broader suggestions in relation to overview & scrutiny.

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:

Democratic Services

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Borough Council**