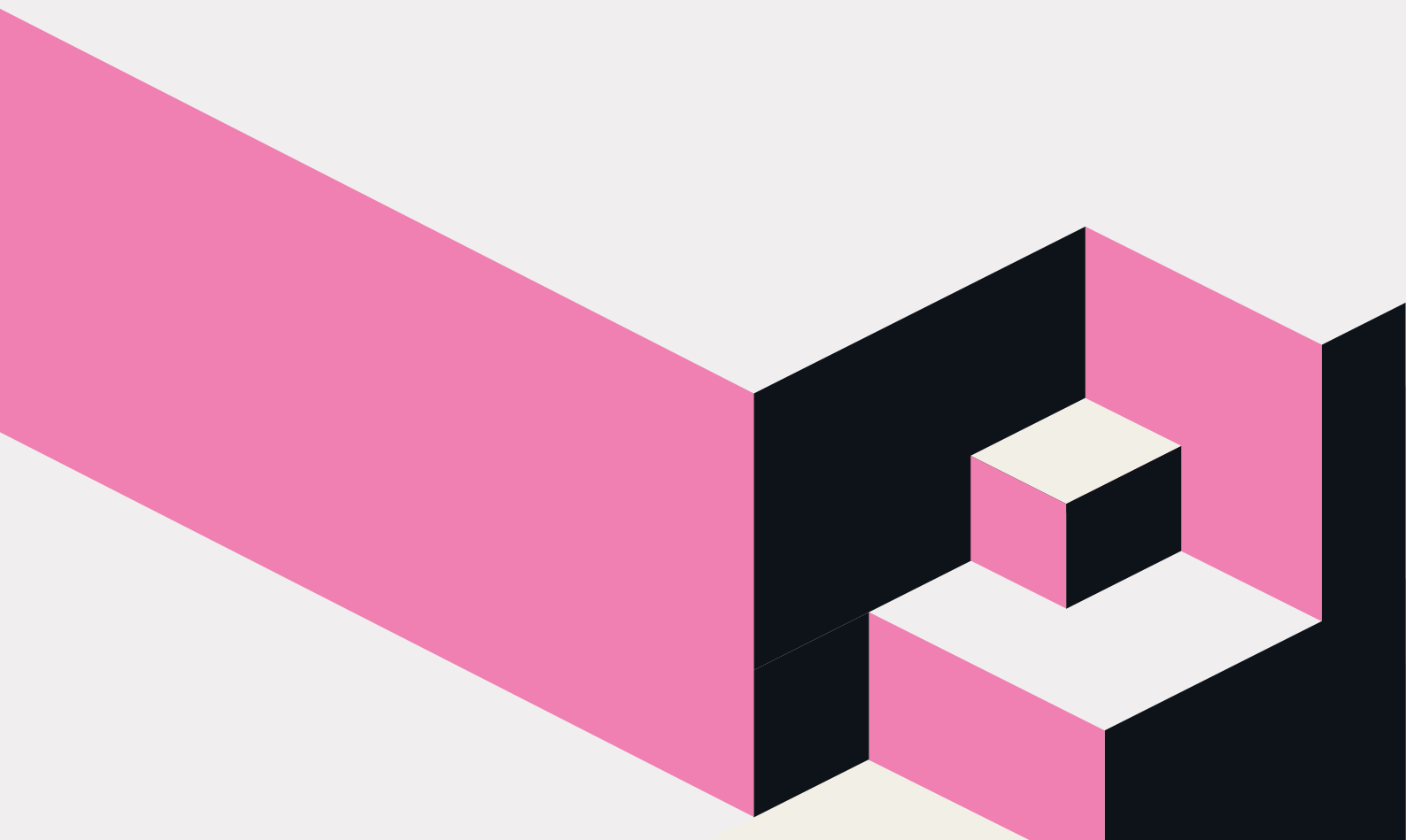




North
Northamptonshire
Council

SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2021/22



INTRODUCTION



Cllr Wendy Brackenbury
Chair, Scrutiny
Commission



Cllr Mark Pengelly
Chair, Finance & Resources
Scrutiny Committee

We are pleased to present the first Scrutiny Annual Report for North Northamptonshire Council.

North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) came in to being on 1st April 2021 following local government reorganisation. Since the local elections in May 2021, we have implemented a new system of governance. The importance of strong scrutiny which would have a real impact on the Council and its residents was at the heart of the governance model.

The Scrutiny function acts as a critical friend on behalf of the community, to improve services and decision-making inside and outside of the Executive. The Scrutiny function belongs to the whole Council but is different from other committees in that it is councillor-led and evidence-based, with most of Scrutiny's Work Plan being decided by committee members, responding to concerns of elected members and the public.

Scrutiny calls for councillors with investigative minds who are prepared to challenge, when they have 'done some homework' and are able to justify the challenge in accordance with the Constitution. We have been honoured to serve as Chairs since May 2021 and would like to thank all members of the committees for their hard work and dedication.

This year has been particularly challenging as we transform as a new Council, and we continue to embed services as a new authority.

As Chairs of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee we have worked well together and would like to thank our Vice Chairs, Members and Officers who have been instrumental in helping with the Scrutiny function. We look forward to a busy year in which scrutiny continues to play its vital role as part of the success of North Northamptonshire Council.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES

Scrutiny Commission



Councillor Wendy
Brackenbury (Chair)



Councillor Kevin Watt
(Vice Chair)



Councillor Matt Binley



Councillor Robin Carter



Councillor John Currall



Councillor Mark Dearing



Councillor Jim Hakewill



Councillor Philip Irwin



Councillor John McGhee



Councillor Gill Mercer
(from January 2022)



Councillor Elliot Prentice
(until January 2022)



Councillor Simon Rielly



Councillor Geoff
Shacklock



Councillor Lee Wilkes

Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Mark Pengelly
(Chair)



Councillor Richard Levell
(Vice Chair)



Councillor Valerie Anslow



Councillor David
Brackenbury (until
September 2021)



Councillor Scott Brown



Councillor Jim Hakewill



Councillor Ken
Harrington



Councillor Larry Henson



Councillor Ian Jelley



Councillor David Jenney
(until November 2021)



Councillor King Lawal



Councillor Steven North
(from September 2021)



Councillor Malcolm Ward

SCRUTINY IN NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Prior to transition, NNC approved a governance model and Constitution which was legally a Leader and Executive model but is referred to as "hybrid arrangements".

Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic process of NNC and enables those members who are not part of the Executive to engage with and influence the decision-making of the Council.

The model of scrutiny adopted by the Council is of two committees:



An overarching **Scrutiny Commission** who can establish task and finish groups to complete work on the agreed work plan. This means that not only does the Commission take on its own substantive work, it also provides co-ordination of several task and finish groups for matters that have been identified as important within the organisation.

This model of fewer committees and more task and finish groups, focussing on specific pieces of work, is intended to reflect a modern and flexible approach to Scrutiny which shows clear outcomes and impact.

The Executive created Executive Advisory Panels, which support and encourage cross party involvement to develop policy and provide advice and recommendations to the Executive to support their decision making. The Panels do not take away from the legitimacy of Scrutiny or the important role that it plays. They do not prevent Scrutiny from looking at issues that are important to residents and that it can make an impact on. Instead, they support the inclusive decision-making culture that the Council wants to achieve, and scrutiny will continue to review matters that require the different skills of Scrutiny and should quite rightly be considered by it.



A Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee to specifically scrutinise and monitor the finances of the Council.

Scrutiny Commission Terms of Reference

- To review and scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any function (other than those outlined in the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee terms of reference).
- To ensure that Scrutiny directly responds to corporate and public priorities, is used to drive service improvement, provides a focus for policy development and engages members of the public, key stakeholders and partner agencies. They should do this by ensuring that they review key documents at each meeting and regularly reviewing their workplan, following which they should set up Task and Finish Groups on behalf of the Commission.
- To make reports or recommendations to Council or the Executive as appropriate with respect to the discharge of any function (other than those outlined in the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee terms of reference).
- May recommend that an executive decision that is either a Key Decision or a decision which has been entered onto the Forward Plan made but not yet implemented, be reconsidered by the Executive through the Call In Procedure.
- To fulfil all the functions of the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee under the Police and Justice Act 2006.
- To fulfil all the functions conferred on it by virtue of regulations under the National Health Service Act 2006 (local authority scrutiny of health matters).
- Provide responses to Councillors Call for Action.

Finance and Resources Committee Terms of Reference

- To review and scrutinise regular monitoring reports on:
 - a. The Revenue Budget; and
 - b. The Capital Programme
 - c. The Housing Revenue Account
- To develop a budget review process and ensure that budget proposals are subject to rigorous challenge.
- To consider organisational performance for corporate support services (ICT, legal, financial and HR services)
- To consider reports on issues identified and on which further information has been requested.
- To make reports or recommendations to Council or the Executive as appropriate.
- May recommend that a Key Decision or a decision which has been entered onto the Forward Plan made but not yet implemented, be reconsidered by the Executive through the Call In Procedure.

In May 2019, the Government published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities which is and continues to be considered in administering scrutiny.

SCRUTINY WORK PLAN



The Scrutiny Work Plan is owned by the Scrutiny Commission. The Scrutiny Commission Chair and Vice Chair are responsible for setting the Annual Work Plan for Scrutiny and in doing so it shall consult with other parts of the Council as appropriate, including the Executive.

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The Work Plan is a living document and is reviewed at each meeting of the Scrutiny Commission. It is informed by any concerns raised by members, public and/or stakeholders, the Council's Risk Register, the Forward Plan and published decisions.

In adding items for review to the Work Plan, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Commission shall consider;

- Which Corporate Priority the item links to?
- If the item is of significant community concern?

- If the issue is significant to Partners and/or Stakeholders?
- What the added value is of doing the work? (It must have an impact)
- What evidence there is to support the work?
- If the Scrutiny work can be completed within a proportionate time to the task identified?
- If the work is being done somewhere else?
- What will be achieved?
- If the Council has the resources to carry out the work effectively?

The Scrutiny Commission responds as soon as possible to requests from the Council and the Executive to review particular areas of Council activities. Indeed, this has been the case with a request from Council on Levelling Up and the Executive on Maintained Nurseries Funding.

Scrutiny Conference

To develop the Work Plan, members of both scrutiny committees agreed that a North Northamptonshire Scrutiny Conference be organised to facilitate the drafting of the Work Plan. The Conference was facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and members welcomed the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive who showed their support for an effective and impactful Scrutiny function.

Prior to the Conference, a survey was opened to understand the important issues that North Northamptonshire wanted Scrutiny to include in its Work Plan. It was sent to various contacts including stakeholders, partners and staff and was also regularly pushed out on the website and social media. The survey was also sent by the Scrutiny Chairs to all NNC members to ensure that there was engagement with a wide range of elected members, including the Executive.

The results of the survey were presented at the Conference to assist members in identifying key topics to include in the Work Plan. Most responses received were from those people working or living in North Northamptonshire. It was also noted that around 50% of respondents were either "not aware" or did not provide a substantive response to if they were

aware of what the Scrutiny function was. The Scrutiny Chairs are keen therefore that greater promotion of Scrutiny is undertaken, particularly considering that Scrutiny should be a public facing function.

Members were asked in advance of this workshop to provide ideas for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Plan 2021/22 to the Scrutiny Chairs.

Members identified the key issues that they considered were important to include on the Work Plan and a simple scoring methodology was used to prioritise the topics into a long list of topics. Following the conclusion of the Conference, this list of topics was sent to all Scrutiny members to identify specific outcomes. As many of the topics identified were generic and wide ranging, it was important to narrow them down and understand what outcomes members wanted to get from scrutinising them.

Any topics added to the Work Plan will be expected to have outcomes which add value to the services delivered by the Council and its partners and/or improve the quality of lives of North Northamptonshire residents. Topics were categorised into being one off items or reviews depending on what Scrutiny wanted to achieve from their input.

The Work Plan was formally approved by the Scrutiny Commission at their meeting on 23 November 2021.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

SUMMARY OF ITEMS

CONSIDERED IN 2021/22

The Scrutiny Commission held six meetings and established three task and finish groups during the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

The task and finish groups involved an additional nine meetings. The reviews were in relation to Outside Bodies, Levelling Up Communities and Assets Rationalisation and Use.

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
Performance Indicators 2021/22	All meetings	Consideration of the Council's performance across a wide range of services.	Identified areas of future work for the Scrutiny work plan.
Executive Forward Plan	All meetings	Consideration of the Executive's Forward Plan.	Identified areas of future work for the Scrutiny work plan.
Scrutiny Work Planning	22 June 2021 24 August 2021	Introduction to work planning to assist development of work plan.	Development of work plan. Establishment of Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel.
Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review	24 August 2021 23 November 2021, 25 January 2022 and 17 May 2022	Setting up a Scrutiny Review Group following motion from Council. Update on the work of the Scrutiny Review Group.	Establishment of Scrutiny Review Group.
Review of the Planning Service	23 November 2021	Update on the work that has been done and continued to be undertaken to review the planning service within North Northamptonshire.	Identified areas of future work for the Scrutiny work plan.
Scrutiny Work Plan	23 November 2021	Considered draft work plan for Scrutiny.	Agreed the Scrutiny work plan for 2021-2023.
Assets Rationalisation and Use	25 January 2022	Consideration of initial scoping document for a possible scrutiny review.	Establishment of Scrutiny Panel.
Draft Transformation Plan 2022-2025	29 March 2022	Development of the draft Transformation Plan.	Comments made and considered by the Executive.
Major Highways Capital Works	29 March 2022	Introduction into how major highways capital works were prioritised.	Identified need to invite the new contractor to a future meeting.

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
Corporate Plan Indicators 2022/23	29 March 2022	To review and provide feedback on the proposed Capital Plan Performance Indicator set for 2022/23.	Comments made and considered by the Executive.
Scrutiny Annual Report	29 March 2022	To consider the draft Scrutiny Annual Report.	Annual Report agreed to be forwarded to Council.
Northamptonshire Children's Trust – Performance and Inspection Readiness	17 May 2022	To scrutinise the Children's Trust's Annual Self Evaluation.	Comments and challenge made.
Integrated Care Systems	17 May 2022	To consider the progress in establishing an Integrated Care System across Northamptonshire.	Comments made on progress.

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

SCRUTINY REVIEWS

Outside Bodies Scrutiny Panel

The purpose of this review was to ensure that appointments to Outside Bodies on behalf of the Council are regularly reviewed and add value to the organisation and to ensure that proper governance is adopted in relation to appointments.

Membership:

- Councillor Jim Hakewill
- Councillor Ian Jelley
- Councillor David Jenney
- Councillor Simon Rielly
- Councillor Geoff Shacklock

The Panel met once and considered whether the Council should make appointments to the organisations on the Outside Bodies list. The Outside Bodies were also categorised into Key Strategic Partnerships and Community Partnerships. Those identified as Key Strategic Partnerships are appointed by the Leader of the Council and Community Partnerships appointed by Council.

A review of Outside Bodies will be undertaken each year by a Scrutiny Panel. Those Members appointed to Outside Bodies will also be asked to complete an annual review submission to assist the Scrutiny Panel in their review.



Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review

The following motion was agreed at Council in July 2021:

“North Northamptonshire Council notes that Kingswood in Corby, Avondale Grange in Kettering, and Queensway in Wellingborough are among the neighbourhoods identified across the country by an All-Party Parliamentary Group as ‘left behind’. This motion calls for the Scrutiny Commission to review the underlying data and associated report relating to areas highlighted as “left behind”. Working with our communities and partners to propose an approach on the way forward, including learning from the Big Local Programme in Kingswood, in order to develop a plan on how we can level up - as per the government’s levelling up agenda - those left behind neighbourhoods here in North Northamptonshire in an appropriate and agreed timeframe. This may involve specifically targeting health inequalities, youth unemployment and new skills, and improving housing in these areas.”

In response, the Scrutiny Commission established a Scrutiny Review Group, from which there was at least one member from each of the wards which covered the neighbourhoods mentioned in the motion.

The agreed outcomes of the Review are to:

1. Tackle issues of direct relevance to local people;
2. Engage with a wide range of people, drawing

them together and building consensus around developing levelling up plans;

3. Consider how approaches could challenge the accepted ways of doing things and act as a champion for developing a culture of improvement in multiple areas;
4. Deliver a positive impact on the geographical areas identified as “left behind” and on associated population indicators and performance; and
5. Arrive at clear conclusions to deliver tangible outcome improvements through clear recommendations to develop a Levelling Up plan.

Membership:

- Councillor Zoe McGhee (Lead Member)
- Councillor Valerie Anslow
- Councillor Robin Carter
- Councillor King Lawal
- Councillor Anne Lee
- Councillor Paul Marks
- Councillor Kevin Watt

The Scrutiny Review Group has met on six occasions and has also held walks and community meetings in each of the three neighbourhoods.

The Scrutiny Review Group is due to report back to the Scrutiny Commission early in 2022/23.

Asset Rationalisation and Use

As part of the Scrutiny Work Plan, in January 2022 the Scrutiny Commission established a Scrutiny Panel to consider the Council’s assets and ensure that they were being utilised appropriately.

The agreed outcomes of the Review are to:

1. Gain an understanding and awareness of the asset management challenges and priorities for the Council’s estate;
2. Provide assurance over the current and developing management arrangements;
3. Support the development of a clear roadmap for the next steps in developing the Council’s Asset Strategy;
4. Support the delivery of the Council’s carbon reduction plan.

The Scrutiny Review Group is due to report back to the Scrutiny Commission during 2022/23.

Membership:

- Councillor Wendy Brackenbury (Lead Member)
- Councillor Jon-Paul Carr
- Councillor Robin Carter
- Councillor John Currall
- Councillor Gill Mercer
- Councillor Simon Rielly

The Scrutiny Panel has met twice, to review its scoping document and to consider how to take this work forward. The Scrutiny Panel will also undertake site visits to a number of the Council’s assets to understand how they are being utilised.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

SUMMARY OF ITEMS

CONSIDERED IN 2021/22

The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee has held seven meetings and established one task and finish group during the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

The task and finish group involved an additional eight meetings.
The review was in relation to the Budget 2022/23.

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
Budget Monitoring 2021/22	All meetings	Consideration of the Council's budget monitoring position.	Comments and challenge made.
Capital Monitoring 2021/22	All meetings	Consideration of the Council's Capital position.	Comments and challenge made.
Performance Indicators 2021/22	All meetings	Consideration of the Council's performance across a wide range of services.	Identified areas of future work for the Scrutiny work plan.
Capital Approval Process	13 July 2021	Consideration of the proposed new Capital Approval Process.	Comments made.
Scrutiny Work Planning	13 July 2021	Introduction to work planning to assist development of work plan.	Issues identified for the Work Plan.
Budget Strategy Process 2022/23	2 November 2021	Overview of the budget strategy for 2022/23.	Agreed the scrutiny process for the proposed budget 2022/23.
Revenue and Benefits Performance	2 November 2021	Performance of the Revenue and Benefits Team between April to September 2021.	Set up an informal Council Tax Summons Process Sub-Group to examine issues regarding Council Tax summonses.
Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23	2 November 2021	Consideration of the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23.	Recommendation to the Executive to continue the current Scheme.

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
Northamptonshire Children's Trust Budget Monitoring	30 November 2021	Scrutiny of the Children's Trust Budget.	Comments and challenge made.
Budget 2022/23	1 February 2022	To consider reports from the Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups.	Recommendations made to and considered by the Executive.
Corporate Plan Indicators 2022/23	5 April 2022	To review and provide feedback on the proposed Capital Plan Performance Indicator set for 2022/23.	Comments made and considered by the Executive.
Scrutiny Annual Report	5 April 2022	To consider the draft Scrutiny Annual Report.	Annual Report agreed to be considered by Council.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY REVIEWS

At its meeting on 2 November 2021, the Committee agreed the scrutiny arrangements for the budget setting process for 2021/22. The process was to meet with the Executive members and officers of each directorate in eight task and finish groups (two per directorate) in January 2022. The initial four meetings included summary presentations

which set out the activities each directorate undertook, and which went on to explain the budget numbers which were included in the draft budget report which was presented to the Executive on 23 December 2021. The Committee were able to ask questions and request additional information to be supplied at the four follow-up meetings.

A detailed submission on the budget was submitted to the Executive on 10 February 2022 which referenced several aspects of the draft budget and made a number of recommendations. The detailed submission can be found here.

CALL-IN

The scrutiny committees have a key power to review decisions of the Executive which have been made but not yet implemented. Any key decision and/or a decision which has been entered onto the Forward Plan is subject to call-in.

There have been no call-in of Executive decisions during the year.

SCRUTINY REPORTS TO EXECUTIVE

In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedures Rules, the scrutiny committees may report to the Executive. The Chair of the Scrutiny Commission has not formally reported to Executive on behalf of the committees; however, the Chairs of both committees have attended Executive regularly and have kept an active dialogue with the Leader of the Council and Executive Members. This has included Executive Members attending meetings of the committees.

REPORTING

The committees are keen to ensure that the Scrutiny function at NNC remains outcome focused and that following implementation, the impact of its recommendations are monitored and reported back to the committees and all Members.

Scrutiny has established four Task and Finish Groups during 2021/22. Scrutiny are committed to reviewing actions in relation to recommendations/feedback provided through meetings and reviews to ensure that the positive impact of the Scrutiny function can be evidenced.

Following a number of budget workshops, the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee formally provided their response to the Budget proposals to the Executive meeting held on 10 February 2022.

TRAINING

All new Members to the scrutiny committees received induction training. Induction training was delivered on 16 June 2021.

The Chairs have agreed that more comprehensive training for Scrutiny Members should take place in the autumn of 2022, and this is also being considered by the Member Development Working Group.

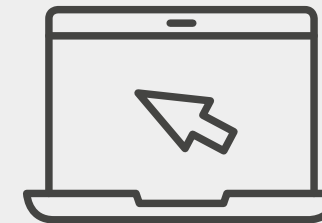
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AHEAD



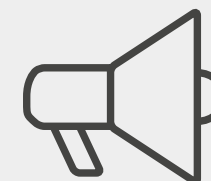
Annual Work Plan 2023/24

The Work Plan has been regularly reviewed and discussed throughout 2021/22 but was only approved mid-way through the municipal year. A Scrutiny Workshop will be arranged in advance of the first meeting of the 2023/24 Municipal Year to establish priorities for the committees.



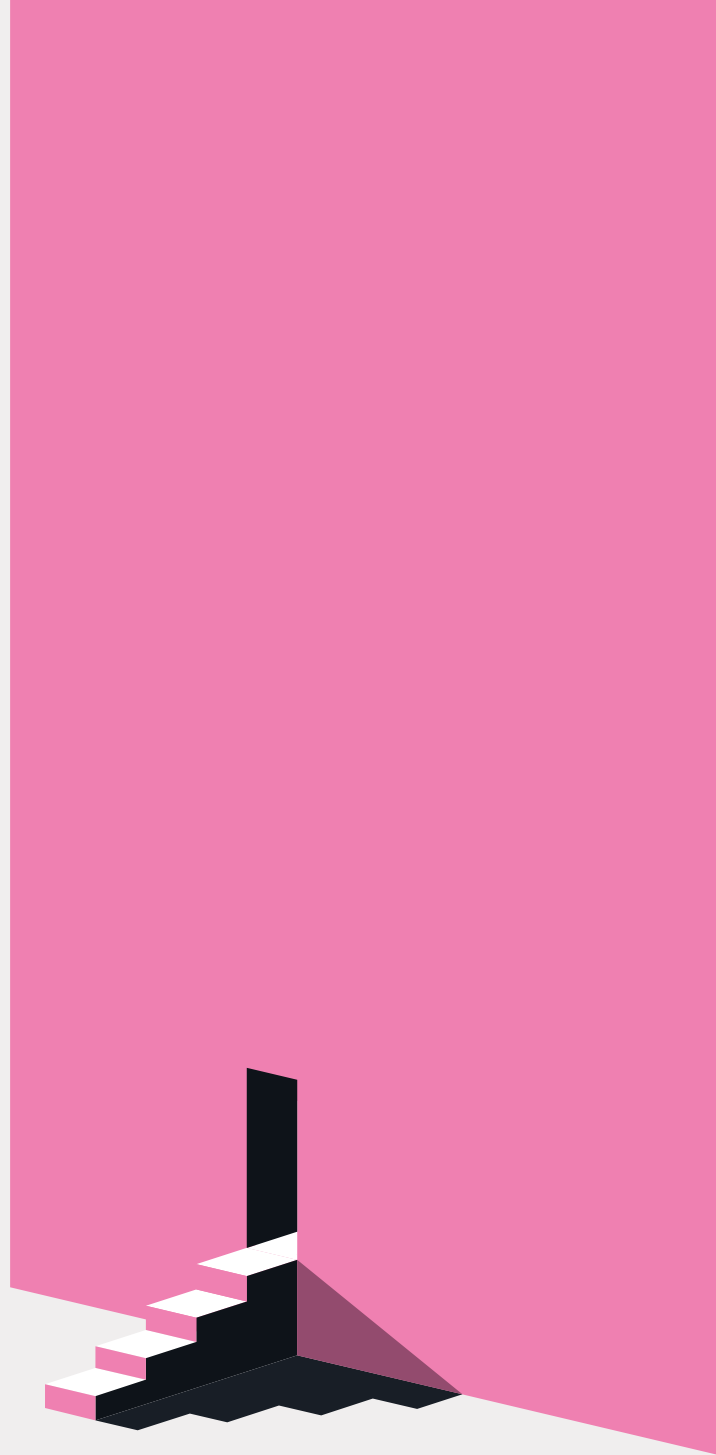
Increased Media and Consultation with the Public

The survey for the Scrutiny Conference identified that there was work required to improve public knowledge of scrutiny. It is hoped that this aspect of scrutiny will be further developed in 2022/23 with the exploration of different media to involve the public to ensure the voice of the community is heard.



Additional Resource

Whilst the scrutiny function has received excellent support throughout the year, the Democratic Services Team have undergone a re-structure and the importance of dedicated and specialist advice and support has been recognised and will be implemented.



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