

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Introduction

To be supplied by the Chairs of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Scrutiny in North Northamptonshire

Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic process of North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and enables those members who are not part of the Executive to engage with and influence the decision-making of the Council. The North Northamptonshire model of governance is a hybrid model where the Executive has established Executive Advisory Panels, which support and encourage cross party involvement in developing policy. In a traditional scrutiny model, this would be considered to be “pre-decision scrutiny” but this new NNC hybrid model does not diminish from the important role that scrutiny has in keeping key policies under review, monitoring performance and reviewing the Forward Plan to identify those items that it feels it needs to look further into.

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

The terms of reference of both committees are set out in the Scrutiny Procedure Rules in the Council’s Constitution¹.

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.

Scrutiny Work Plan

For Scrutiny members to be at their most effective, to have an impact and to make a tangible difference to the work of the Council, a work plan has been agreed which outlines the areas of work which is expected to be scrutinised over the coming months/year by or on behalf of the Scrutiny function and any Panels/Task and Finish Groups convened for review work. This work plan is a live document which allows the flexibility to accommodate any short-term issues which may arise during the year.

¹ [Scrutiny Procedure Rules](#)

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 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.

Report of the Scrutiny Commission

The membership of the Scrutiny Commission during 2021/22 was:

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
Councillor Ken Harrington (Sub)
Councillor Ian Jelley (Sub)
Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood (Sub)
Councillor Lyn Buckingham (Sub)
Councillor Peter McEwan (Sub)
Councillor Sarah Tubbs (Sub)

The Scrutiny Commission has met six times during the year and full details of the reports and minutes of those meetings can be found [here](#).

The specific items which have been considered at meetings of the Commission include:

- Scrutiny Work Planning
- Review of the Planning Service
- Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review
- Performance Indicators 2021/22
- Corporate Plan Indicators 2022/23
- Forward Plan
- Assets Rationalisation and Use Scrutiny Panel
- Draft Transformation Plan 2022-2025
- Major Highways Capital Works
- Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22

Scrutiny Reviews

Several more detailed scrutiny reviews, which are undertaken outside of the formal meeting structure, have been established during the year.

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 Full 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.

Membership:

Councillor Zoe McGhee (Chair)
Councillor Valerie Anslow
Councillor Robin Carter
Councillor King Lawall
Councillor Anne Lee
Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor Kevin Watt

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

Agreed recommendations:

To be added following Scrutiny Commission meeting on 17 May 2022.

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.

Membership:

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Robin Carter
Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Simon Rielly

The Scrutiny Panel has met once, to review its scoping document and to consider how to take this work forward.

Report of the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee

The membership of the Scrutiny Commission during 2021/22 was:

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
Councillor Matt Binley (Sub)
Councillor William Colquhoun (Sub)
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz (Sub)
Councillor Clive Hallam (Sub)
Councillor Anne Lee (Sub)
Councillor Jan O'Hara (Sub)
Councillor David Sims (Sub)

The Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee has met seven times during the year and full details of the reports and minutes of those meetings can be found [here](#).

The specific items which have been considered at ordinary meetings of the Committee include:

- Capital Approval Process
- Scrutiny Work Planning
- Budget Monitoring 2021/22
- Capital Monitoring 2021/22
- Budget Strategy Process 2022/23
- Revenue and Benefits Performance
- Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23
- Performance Indicators 2021/22
- Northamptonshire Children's Trust Budget Monitoring
- Budget 2022/23

Budget Consultation

At its meeting on 2 November 2021, the Committee agreed the Scrutiny arrangements for the budget setting process for 2022/23. 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](#).

Response from the Executive:

The Executive will provide a full written response on each aspect of the recommendations.

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.

What has Worked Well?

To be supplied by the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

Challenges for Scrutiny in 2022/23

To be supplied by the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.