

Annual Scrutiny Report 2022-23

Charnwood Borough Council

Introduction from the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2022-23

Councillor Brenda Seaton



The 2022-23 Council year saw a return to usual council business following the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been great to get back into the meeting room, speaking to colleagues face-to-face and discussing agenda items around the table. I am very pleased with the strong work of the Scrutiny Commission, and I have enjoyed the strengthening of the interpersonal relationships we have as a committee since the return of in-person meetings.

At the Council, we acknowledge the advantages of using technology in order to support meetings, and therefore we have continued to utilise hybrid meeting equipment in some of our meetings. This means that officers and guest speakers are able to join meetings using Microsoft Teams, improving convenience and the work-life balance of Council colleagues. This improves the scrutiny function of the Council because officers and guests are sometimes better able to attend meetings if they are able to do so remotely.

In 2022-23, the Scrutiny Commission has again proven that their work is vital and invaluable to the Council, the Cabinet and to the communities we serve. Our work programme has been full and varied this year. We have had a big impact on the functions of the Council by making a lot of significant observations, asking critical questions and commissioning work and reports for further inquiry where we see it is necessary. Some of my scrutiny colleagues and I have attended a regional scrutiny networking event and I feel as members responsible for scrutiny functions, we have done an excellent job in ensuring the services provided by the Council are appropriate and reflect the needs and requirements of our communities.

Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission's work in 2022-23 included;

- Continuing to adopt and embrace new and innovative ways of working, such as hybrid meetings technology
- Assessing the relevance and requirements of existing work programme items as priorities change
- Commissioning a Budget Scrutiny Panel for 2022-23
- Updating the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Work Programme with relevant items, including the scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership.

- Responding to the 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 recommendations of scrutiny panels and referring these to Cabinet
- Continually reviewing the progression of scrutiny panels, supporting their work and discussing any issues encountered by panels
- Considering and scheduling work programme items suggested by other committees and panels (website procurement contract, suggested by the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel)
- Reviewing Glyphosate-based herbicides in open spaces, playgrounds and parks
- Reviewing the bulky waste collection charges
- Reviewing fly tipping in Charnwood
- Reviewing Internal Anti-Social Behaviour Review

Pre-Decision Scrutiny

In addition to these activities, the Scrutiny Commission conducted pre-decision scrutiny on a range of items selected from Cabinet agendas, in order to provide observations, comments and suggestions to Cabinet. The items selected for pre-decision scrutiny this year have included:

- Shepshed Town Centre Public Realm Improvement Project
- Amendments to the Annual Procurement Plan (resulting in a briefing note being prepared for members, detailing the intended procurement of services for audio visual equipment installation at the Town Hall)
- Procurement of Environmental Services
- Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy
- Cost of Living – Support to Communities and Businesses (resulting in the recommendation of printed materials for distribution to include the support available and further updates to the Scrutiny Commission)
- Feasibility Studies for Carbon Reduction
- Charnwood Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order 2022
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund 'Future Charnwood Investment Plan' – Programme of Delivery
- Review of Sheltered Accommodation – St Michael's Court, Thurmaston
- Local Development Scheme
- Corporate Delivery Plan
- Charnwood Enterprise Zone – Request for Forward Funding (Exempt Item)

Details of the scrutiny we have undertaken can be found in the minutes available [online](#).

It is clear that the Scrutiny Commission has provided critical friend challenge to the Council and the Executive, to highlight public concerns and to ensure public services are delivered effectively and efficiently. The members of the Scrutiny Commission are extremely passionate about their roles and I am very pleased with what we have achieved over the past year. I feel that this crucial function will be even more advantageous in the coming year, as the Council and our communities are likely to face some formidable challenges with the ongoing national issues such as the cost of living and the impacts of the ongoing war in Ukraine. The Council is committed to doing everything it can to support residents and businesses, and through the powerful influence of scrutiny, we will ensure this support is valuable and effective for all our residents.

**Councillor Brenda Seaton, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission
2022/23**

Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Mark Charles



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 2021-22.

At its meeting in September 2022 the Committee acknowledged the challenges in obtaining detailed responses to its questions and agreed a mechanism by which additional questions asked during the meeting could be answered after the meeting and responses published on the Council's website.

Throughout the year the Committee has consistently scrutinised and questioned Council officers on matters relating to improving rent losses on void properties, the delay in repairs, replacements and upgrades to council owned housing stock and the slippage in completing Disability Facilities Grants.

During its consideration of the Climate Change Strategy the Committee highlighted concerns regarding the delays in completing stock condition surveys and housing stock improvements. It has also requested further information to support its scrutiny of car parking in the Borough and received three verbal updates.

The Committee are continuing to closely monitor the development of a car parking strategy and the matter continues to be on its work programme. The Committee has highlighted issues for which it has sought Senior Leadership input, in particular; uncollected rent arrears and the high cost of re-housing residents in B&Bs, capacity issues in various Services and what actions were being taken to reduce the impact, use of contractors, redevelopment of garage sites, and consideration of electric car charging points and the potential impact of the County Council's Sustainable Travel Plan on the car parking review.

At its meeting in December 2022, the Committee welcomed the Vice-chair of the Audit Committee to present its views on the Capital Plan position. It considered the highlighted underspends and concerns regarding undelivered projects and was reassured that Cabinet were monitoring the situation closely and the implementation of a strategic leadership review board would focus on the delivery of projects.

An additional function of the Committee is to act 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 December 2022 meeting and considered how significant issues with substance misuse in the Borough had impacted on crime.

It raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour and the importance of a coordinated response by all parties and the costs for processing Community Triggers and the impact on resources. It recognised the significant collaborative work of the Police and Borough Council in community safety.

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

Scrutiny Panels

The Scrutiny Commission can establish scrutiny panels in order to undertake reviews on specific topics. Panels are designed to make swift conclusions and recommendations based on evidence and research.

A 'standing panel' can be established to reflect a necessity to monitor a critical issue. For example, a Budget Scrutiny Panel is commissioned each year to scrutinise the Council's draft budget, before Cabinet and Council approval.

Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Matthew Brookes



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 met four times and reviewed a variety of documentation and interviewed a number of witnesses, both internal and external to the Council.

The final report of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel, including recommendations and observations, was submitted to the Scrutiny Commission in July 2022. The Commission acknowledged the valuable and thorough work of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel, supported the recommendations outlined in the final report, and noted the observations of the panel, all of which can be found on the [Council's website](#).

The report of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel was considered by the Cabinet in October 2022. The Cabinet thanked the panel for the scrutiny undertaken and after considering the report, made the following resolutions:

1. that, in respect of Panel recommendation 1, members are invited to be involved in the testing and feedback stage of the development and implementation of the new website;
2. that, in respect of Panel recommendation 2 members are offered and encouraged to participate in the Digital Champions initiative to enable the further development of their digital skills further as required allowing greater support to residents;
3. that, in respect of Panel recommendation 3, members be offered further digital skills training to increase awareness and confidence in the use and services available online to the Council's customers;

4. that four observations of the Panel set out in the report be noted.

I am pleased that the work undertaken by the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel has resulted in some positive actions and has highlighted some important considerations to be aware of moving forward. It is vital that the customer remains at the forefront of all of our work at the Council and that we are constantly considering the needs of customers across the Borough.

Councillor Matthew Brookes, Chair of the Digital Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Waste Management Scrutiny Panel

Former Councillor Emma Ward



Further to the summary of work to date included in the Annual Scrutiny Report 2021-22, the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel concluded its work in 2022-23 with its report being submitted to Cabinet in December 2022.

The report was the culmination of several months' work by officers, who the Chair would like to take the opportunity to thank, and members across the Chamber. The objective was to come up with ideas on how to firstly increase the Council's recycling rates, which have sadly failed to reach target, and also to reduce the amount of waste that entered the residual waste stream. As part of the process, the Panel examined the Council's own data on waste collection and undertook comparisons with other similar authorities, to look at the higher and lower performing areas and where Charnwood stood against them.

The draft Leicestershire Resources and Waste Strategy 2022-50 was published during the Panel's work and that also fed into its recommendations.

The Panel engaged with several key stakeholders during the process, including the Council's waste collection contractor Serco, tenant members of the Housing Management Advisory Board, local environmental campaign groups, relevant voluntary sector organisations and a representative of Loughborough University. The Panel made 13 recommendations in its report, all recommended for approval by the Head of Service and split between those that would be the Council's responsibility to action and actions that should be community-led.

All will hopefully encourage Charnwood residents to reduce, reuse, repurpose, repair or recycle more.

On 15th December 2022, the Cabinet resolved that officers draft an action plan to provide details on how and when the recommendations would be delivered. It is hoped that actions can be progressed as soon as possible.

Former Councillor Emma Ward, Waste Management Scrutiny Panel Chair

Budget Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Mark Charles



Following approval of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 10th October 2022, a Budget Scrutiny Panel was set up to undertake scrutiny of the Council's draft budgets. The panel met three times to discuss the financial position of the Council, the approach to budget setting, the anticipated draft budget, the government financial settlement and some specific budget elements, such as the Commercialisation Reserve.

The final report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel, including one recommendation and two observations, was submitted to the Scrutiny Commission in January 2023. The Commission acknowledged the work of the Budget Scrutiny Panel, supported the recommendation outlined in the final report, and noted the observations of the panel, all of which can be found on the [Council's website](#).

The report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel was considered by the Cabinet in February 2023. The Cabinet thanked the panel for the scrutiny undertaken and after considering the report, made the following resolution:

- that additional dashboard-style reporting of financial information for members be developed for the 2023/24 financial year.

The work of the Budget Scrutiny Panel this year has been particularly important, due to increasing pressures of Council budgets and the many challenges faced by not only the Council, but residents of the Borough.

The Council is doing everything it can to support residents, whilst balancing the books. A dedicated webpage has been created, which includes advice and information about saving energy and the financial support available to members of the community. The Council has also provided £37,000 in grant funding to partner organisations, such as Age UK Leicestershire and Rutland and Citizen's Advice Charnwood, as part of its Charnwood Community Action campaign.

In addition, the Council has organised two 'Cost of Living and Wellbeing Roadshows', supported by organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the Trussell Trust. Our scrutiny has helped to ensure the Council's funds are used in the most appropriate ways, ensuring that residents are receiving value for money and assurance that the Council is using its limited financial resources wisely.

Councillor Mark Charles, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel 2022-23

Reflection and Looking Ahead

Membership of the Scrutiny Commission and Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee changed following the May 2023 elections.

A Scrutiny Best Practice workshop was held on 30 May 2023 which provided a practical introduction to effective local government scrutiny.

A Scrutiny Panel workshop is being organised for August 2023 to improve understanding of the importance of task and finish working to successful scrutiny.

The workshop will also enable members to draw up a list of potential topics for scrutiny panels that reflect local needs and priorities and prioritise topics for scrutiny that have the most impact or benefit.

Get involved

There are many opportunities for members of the public to get involved in the work of scrutiny. The Council's scrutiny members would welcome more public participation in scrutiny meetings. You can find out more about upcoming meetings, and find 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 www.charnwood.gov.uk/currentconsultations

More information

If you would like to suggest a topic for scrutiny to investigate, 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