

# **Annual Scrutiny Report 2023-24**

**Charnwood Borough Council**

# Introduction from the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission 2023-24

## Councillor Shona Rattray



It has been a busy and exciting year for scrutiny this year. Following the elections in May 2023, we had many new committee members across the scrutiny structure, which meant fresh and different views, ideas and opinions. New committee members wasted no time getting up to speed with all things scrutiny.

We attended a scrutiny member development session early on, which covered choosing topics for scrutiny and asking the right questions. We then participated in a scrutiny workshop, where members discussed scrutiny panels and came up with some excellent ideas to explore further. We have worked through packed work programmes this year, making sure we provide a good level of challenge to the Cabinet and contributing towards the excellent service delivery our residents expect.

## Scrutiny Commission

The Scrutiny Commission's work in 2023-24 included;

- Assessing the relevance and requirements of existing work programme items as priorities change
- Commissioning a Budget Scrutiny Panel for 2023-24
- Commissioning a Public Transport Scrutiny Panel and a Housing Needs Scrutiny Panel
- Responding to the flooding crisis in the borough with urgency, and commissioning a Flooding Scrutiny Panel
- Commissioning a number of member development sessions on topics such as HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupation), Tackling Substance Misuse, Support available to residents and Anti-Social Behaviour reporting.
- Overseeing the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.
- Continuing to scrutinise the Key Performance indicator KI 11 - % Rent Loss from Void Properties to monitor progress
- Monitoring the Council's response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis by receiving six-monthly updates
- Scrutiny of the Internal Anti-social Behaviour Review

- Continuing to monitor the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel outcomes to ensure the recommendations of the panel were delivered appropriately
- Continuing to monitor the Selective and Additional Licensing Schemes following implementation.

## 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 included;

- Procurement of a Voids Repairs Contractor
- Capital Plan Amendment Report
- Revenues and Benefits – Future Service Delivery (Exempt)
- Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- Review of the Planning Enforcement Plan
- Changes to the Constitution
- HRA Business Plan and Capacity Update
- Regeneration Prospectus (Exempt)
- Asset Management Strategy (AMS) 2024 to 2030
- Corporate Strategy 2024 – 2028
- Declassification of Properties Designated for Allocation to people aged over 45 Years
- Charnwood Grants Strategic Partners 2024/25 to 2025/26
- Housing Strategy
- Economic Development Strategy 2023-27
- Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-25
- Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Housing Capital Programme
- Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework
- Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Assets Review
- Workforce Development Strategy
- Biodiversity Improvements – Changes to Mowing Arrangements
- Towards a Corporate Biodiversity Strategy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024 – 2028
- Procurement of a Contractor to Deliver Flood Damage Reinstatement Works

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 important in the coming year, as the Council and our communities continue to face financial challenges. 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 to all our residents.

**Councillor Shona Rattray, Chair of the Scrutiny Commission**  
**December 2023 – May 2024**

# Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee

## Councillor Sarah Maynard



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 Performance Report 2022-23.

The revenue monitoring position and capital plan reports are also considered on a quarterly basis and detailed information for costs was requested at its meeting in March 2024.

Throughout the year the Committee has consistently scrutinised and questioned Council officers on matters relating to improving rent losses on void properties, meeting the local housing need and reviewing age restricted and sheltered accommodation.

It has welcomed assurances from officers that increasing resources and funding within the Housing Team have improved the situation. It has also identified the car parking strategy, recruitment processes and council asset management as requiring more detailed scrutiny. The Committee are continuing to closely monitor the development of a car parking strategy and the matter continues to be on its work programme.

A recent internal Audit recommended that how the council monitors the receipt and expenditure of monies secured under s106 agreements be scrutinised, the Committee received its first annual monitoring report at its meeting in November 2023. Members queried large sums of s106 receipts not being allocated and requested additional information regarding how funds were allocated to different providers / organisations.

During its consideration of the Climate Change Strategy the Committee highlighted possible conflicts between other council strategies and the Climate Change Strategy, noting that 70% of land identified in the Local Plan was building on green spaces.

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 (CSP) Update at its November 2023 meeting and considered how significant issues with substance misuse in the Borough had improved. It raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour, the increase in certain types of crime, and the loss of Falcon Support Services and noted the challenges facing the CSP confirming support provided by partner agencies and the importance of crime reporting processes.

The Committee also scrutinised the Council's Homelessness and Reducing Rough Sleeping Strategy where it identified further concerns for funding of Falcon Support Services but was encouraged that the Borough Council was meeting some of the funding shortfall.

## **Councillor Sarah Maynard, Chair of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee 2023-24**

# 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.

## Public Transport Scrutiny Panel

### Councillor Sarah Maynard



The Scrutiny Commission approved the Public Transport Scrutiny Panel scoping document at their meeting on 11th September 2023.

We recognise the importance of public transport and its impact on social inclusion, economic growth and the reduction in environmental pollution. The panel aimed to examine the current provision of public transport in the Borough and look at ways to potentially improve the current provision.

The panel issued two surveys to help us to understand the current provision of public transport across the Borough and help us to identify any gaps. We engaged ward Councillors, Town and Parish Councils and residents' groups in Loughborough in the survey.

In addition to this, we spoke to public transport providers that offer services in Charnwood to help understand their concerns and constraints. We also plan on interviewing council officers about Section 106 powers and opportunities to consult on public transport plans.

The panel aims to conclude their work in July 2024, and will make recommendations and observations, based upon the research we have done, and the information we have received from our internal and external witnesses.

Public transport is a very important service in our communities, and I feel that we have done a lot of good work to examine the issues faced by residents and public transport providers. I am very pleased with the passion of my fellow panel members, and I look forward to producing some good recommendations and observations for the Scrutiny Commission and the Cabinet to consider.

### Councillor Sarah Maynard, Chair of the Public Transport Scrutiny Panel

# Flooding Scrutiny Panel

## Councillor Leigh Harper-Davies



The Scrutiny Commission approved the Flooding Scrutiny Panel scoping document at their meeting on 5th February 2024 and the first meeting of the Panel was on 12th March 2024.

At this meeting the Panel received a presentation from the Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment providing the background to how water courses were managed by different agencies within the Borough. It also considered its scoping document and agreed a work programme for future meetings.

At its second meeting the Panel reviewed the recommendations from the previous Scrutiny Panel in 2014 and sought updates from officers. It received information about prevention, response and recovery processes and prepared questions to ask representatives from the Environment Agency invited to its next meeting.

It was keen to understand ways in which residents could be warned in sufficient time to act before flooding and how signage for flooded roads could be improved within the Borough.

The Panel are looking forward to its third meeting where it will review the Leicestershire Flood Risk Strategy, consider a flooding scenario from start to finish to understand processes and triggers for action in detail and meet representatives of the Environment Agency.

The Panel aims to conclude their work in October 2024, and will make recommendations and observations, based upon the research it has done, and the information it has received from internal and external witnesses.

I welcome the opportunity to work with the Flood Resilience Forum partners to improve the approach to flooding incidents providing reassurance to the residents in the Borough that procedures in place are effective and efficient, particularly in light of recent flooding events in January 2024, and look forward to producing some good recommendations and observations for the Scrutiny Commission and the Cabinet to consider.

## Councillor Leigh Harper-Davies, Flooding Scrutiny Panel Chair



# Budget Scrutiny Panel

## Councillor Mark Charles



Following a decision of the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 7th August 2023, a Budget Scrutiny Panel was set up to undertake scrutiny of the Council's draft budgets for 2024/25.

The Panel met in October and December 2023 and January 2024, looking at the financial position of the Council, the planned approach to 2024/25 budget setting, the draft budgets 2024/25 and the provisional financial settlement from the Government.

The Panel's report was considered by Scrutiny Commission in January 2024 and then by Cabinet in February 2024.

The Budget Scrutiny Panel did not have any recommendations it wished to put forward in respect of the draft budgets 2024/25, but did conclude as follows:

*The Panel notes that due to the impact of higher interest rates on monies invested and the ability to use Business Rates Pool income in future years, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy working balance is at £4.1 million not £2.8 million. This is a much stronger financial position than was previously expected.*

*Whilst many councils appear to be financially struggling, it is good to see that Charnwood will be able to budget with a limited use of reserves that have been built up over many years of shrewd fiscal management.*

*There are potential risks on the horizon, particularly within the housing benefits subsidy and we wait to see what changes can be made to assist the General Fund through additional income or cuts in expenditure.*

At its meeting in February 2024, Cabinet noted the above conclusions, thanking the Panel for its work in respect of the matter.

## Councillor Mark Charles, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel 2023-24

# Looking Ahead

## 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](#)
- Asking a question on notice on any agenda item. Email Democratic Services for more information, [democracy@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:democracy@charnwood.gov.uk)
- Looking out for consultations, surveys and requests for evidence by registering at [www.charnwood.gov.uk/currentconsultations](http://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](mailto:democracy@charnwood.gov.uk)