

# Melton Borough Council Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21



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## Foreword from the Chairman of Scrutiny

This report is to inform Council of the work of Scrutiny Committee during 2020-21

Since the local elections in May 2019, we have had a new Council and a new system of Governance including a Scrutiny Committee of ten members.

The scrutiny function acts as a critical friend on behalf of the community, to improve services and decision-making inside and outside of the Cabinet. Scrutiny function belongs to the whole Council but is different from other committees in that it is Member-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 Members 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.

I have been honoured to serve as Chair since May 2019 and would like to thank all members of the Committee for their hard work and dedication, as we have worked (and learned) together. Special thanks go to Vice-Chair Cllr Rob Bindloss.

This year has been particularly challenging as we have all had to get used to different ways of working. I am proud to say that in spite of the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic we have managed to keep our work plan on track and continued to focus on important areas of Scrutiny work. Indeed, we made a decision very early on that it would be appropriate to consider Response and Recovery in relation to the pandemic and how it has impacted on the community and business owners across the Borough. This has been a major focus of Scrutiny work in 2020/21 and recognises the importance of ensuring Melton Borough Council and our external partners are providing appropriate and adequate support during these unprecedented times.

I am also very grateful to the officers in Democratic Services who have supported the work of the Committee members, in particular the Council's Scrutiny Officer, Natasha Taylor.

*Cllr Pat Cumbers*

### **Members of the Committee 2020/21**

Councillor Pat Cumbers (Chair)

Councillor Rob Bindloss (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Ronan Browne

Councillor Robert Child

Councillor Jeanne Douglas

Councillor Christopher Evans (May 20 – February 2021)

Councillor Chris Fisher

Councillor Elaine Holmes

Councillor Donald Pritchett (W.E.F. March 2021)

Councillor Rebecca Smith

Councillor Jacob Wilkinson

## Scrutiny in Melton - Overview

In May 2019 Melton Borough Council formally adopted the Executive Model of Governance and established a Scrutiny Committee to carry out the functions as listed below. The Scrutiny Committee has held 8 meetings and carried out 2 large scale reviews in the form of task and finish groups during the 2020/21 Municipal Year. Those reviews involved an additional 8 meetings. There was also a mini review following a request to add an item in relation to the Council's Sale of Land at Lake Terrace.

In summary the main functions of Scrutiny set out in [Chapter 2, Part 10](#) of the MBC Constitution are to:-

- review and scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any function.
- make reports or recommendations to Council or the Cabinet as appropriate with respect to the discharge of any function.
- recommend that a decision made but not yet implemented, be reconsidered by the Cabinet through the Call In Procedure.
- fulfil all the functions of the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee under the Police and Justice Act 2006.
- fulfil all the functions conferred on it by virtue of regulations under the National Health Service Act 2006 (local authority scrutiny of health matters).

## Scrutiny Committee (Summary of items considered)

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
<b>RECOVERY PRESENTATION</b>	23 June 2020	A presentation was provided by the Chief Executive with presentations from the Senior Leadership Team in relation to the impacts of Covid-19 on each of the three priority areas and the Council's proposed response.	Members highlighted a number of priority areas in the recovery process including Town Centre; Leisure and Tourism and Employment and Finance; Health and Community.
<b>INTERIM UPDATE REPORT - RECOMMENDATION OF THE HOUSING VOIDS TASK AND FINISH GROUP</b>	1 September 2020	To update Members on the Housing Task and Finish group's work in relation to the Housing Service's void management including the context of the Covid-19, the restructure of the Council's front facing services in April 2020 and subsequent operational changes related to void management and performance.	Members were pleased to see the improvement in void turnaround times and also considered the impact of Covid-19 on this area. The report was critical in measuring the impact of the Task and Finish Group recommendations formally approved by Cabinet in January 2020.
<b>FORMAL APPROVAL OF SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 20/21</b>	1 September 2020	To approve the work plan following the Scrutiny work shop held in July 2020.	The work plan was approved.
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE - RESPONSE/RECOVERY TASK AND FINISH GROUPS</b>	1 September 2020	To approve the establishment of two task and finish groups to review the response and recovery in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Terms of Reference and to ask Members to note the Draft Scoping Documents.	The establishment of the Task and Finish Groups was approved along with the Terms of Reference and proposed timetable.
<b>EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PROTOCOL</b>	3 November 2020	To seek the Committee's endorsement of a Protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee.	Members welcomed the Protocol stating that is good to have protocols and policies in place and that it showed the progress made by the Council since the Cabinet system was formed and the relationships between Cabinet and Scrutiny.

<b>HOUSING LANDLORD POLICIES FOR CONSULTATION</b>	3 November 2020	The Director for Housing and Communities provided a report providing Scrutiny Committee with draft Housing and Landlord Policies for consultation and feedback.	The Scrutiny Committee provided feedback and comments on the various policies for consideration in drafting the final versions.
<b>VERBAL UPDATE ON RESPONSE AND RECOVERY TASK AND FINISH GROUPS</b>	3 November 2020	The Scrutiny Chairman provided a verbal update on the work to date of the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Groups.	N/A
<b>COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE</b>	22 December 2020	To receive the Quarter 2 Performance Report from the Director for Corporate Services.	The Committee would use this report to monitor performance in order to identify items which may be added to the Scrutiny Work Plan.
<b>ESTABLISHMENT OF MELTON BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT TASK AND FINISH GROUP</b>		The Director for Growth and Regeneration submitted a report in respect of establishing a Task and Finish Group to review the Melton Business Improvement District (BID) to consider how what is working and not working and to highlight to the BID, any Suggested areas for improvement for the future to enable to the Council to understand its position on supporting the BID in the upcoming ballot.	The Committee approved the establishment of the Task and Finish Group and the associated Terms of Reference.
<b>BUDGET SCRUTINY</b>	26 January 2021	To consider and provide feedback to Cabinet on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. Note: All members were invited to this meeting.	Members provided feedback to Cabinet during the meeting and also formally provided feedback in the form of a report to Cabinet in February 2021.

<b>COMMUNITY SUPPORT HUB</b>	11 February 2021	A presentation was provided the purpose of which was to highlight the Community Support Hub Development and to update Members on the progress made to date.	Member praised the work that had been achieved, the support and understanding of the needs of people and the success they had working with agencies and partners. Members also agreed that the information provided would also be useful in the findings of the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Group (People).
<b>HOUSING STRATEGY</b>	11 February 2021	The Director for Growth and Regeneration submitted a report seeking the views of the Committee in respect of the strategic approach to managing the housing need, supply and delivery of housing in Melton prior to finalising the Housing Strategy Document ready for public consultation.	The Committee were pleased to receive the Strategy at such an early stage and to have the opportunity to influence the final document. They provided comments and a steer on the priorities and proposed actions.
<b>CRIME AND DISORDER/COMMUNITY SAFETY</b>	March 2021	To receive a report on Community Safety/Crime and Disorder.  To consult Scrutiny on Community Safety Partnership Strategy.	The Committee provided feedback on the key issues which were facing local communities in relation to Community Safety and Crime and Disorder. The Committee were pleased to be advised of the current situation, emerging issues and strategies and outcomes for alleviating crime and disorder from the Communities and Neighbourhoods Team and Leicestershire Police.
<b>SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT</b>	20 April 2021	To note the Scrutiny Annual Report and recommend for consideration and noting by Council.	

<b>PLANNING SERVICES REVIEW - PRESENTATION</b>	20 April 2021	To receive an update on the Planning Services Review from the Director for Growth and Regeneration.	
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## Portfolio Holder Presentations/ Questions

The **Portfolio Holder for Climate, Access and Engagement** provided a presentation at the 22 December 2020. The presentation set out Corporate Strategy and Priority Updates in relation to the following areas:

- IEG4 Update
- System Design
- Climate Change
- Regulatory Update
- Council Chamber AV Equipment
- Melton Deal
- Brexit
- Elections
- Constitution Review Working Group
- LGA Review
- Community Grants
- Community Lottery

The Portfolio Holder also provided answers to questions provided by Members of the Committee in advance of the meeting.

Scrutiny Committee have found these Portfolio Holder presentations useful and welcomed the opportunity to be provided with details regarding emerging issues and projects on the horizon as well as the opportunity to ask questions of the Portfolio Holder.

Scrutiny Committee have also been grateful for the attendance by Portfolio Holders at the Committee in order to present reports and receive feedback and questions from members on specific areas of the Council's business.



## Chairman's Review of Topics

Scrutiny Committee has considered a number of topics which are summarised above and has continued to deliver the Scrutiny programme as set out in the Annual Work Plan at the start of the Municipal Year.

The Committee has provided comment and feedback, as consultees, to Cabinet and Senior Officers. Scrutiny has provided input on several areas of policy development including the Council's draft Void Policy and Tenancy Management (Legal Admin) Policy and Right to Buy, Aids and Adaptation and Domestic Abuse Policies (November 2020) and the Housing Strategy (February 2021).

Scrutiny Members have also been extremely busy working on the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Groups, collating and evaluating evidence, the outcomes of which will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee early in the 21/22 Municipal Year for further referral to Cabinet.

At the January 2021 meeting all members (not just Scrutiny Committee Members) were invited to take part in feedback on the Budget Setting process. In March 2021 the Scrutiny Committee received a report on Crime and Disorder/Community Safety Partnership Strategy, fulfilling an important statutory role to consider Crime and Disorder in the Borough, to understand some of the issues involved and action being taken in an area that is of considerable significance to the residents of the Borough.

# Task and Finish Groups

## Response and Recovery Task and Finish Groups

During discussion of the Scrutiny Work plan at the Scrutiny Work shop held in July it became clear that Scrutiny members were keen to look at the local impact of the current national crisis created by the Covid-19 Pandemic in relation to the priority themes set out in the Corporate Strategy.

It was agreed that support for the local community during and in the wake of the pandemic would be critical to the recovery process and therefore it is proposed that Scrutiny evaluate and analyse the response of the Council and external organisations through the creation of two task and finish Groups. One group would focus on Helping People (Corporate Strategy Priority Theme 1 and 2) and the other group would focus on Shaping Places (Corporate Strategy Priority Theme 3 and 4). The Centre for Public Scrutiny had also indicated that the current national crisis may necessitate a tighter focus for Scrutiny on a smaller range of issues currently affecting local communities.

Establishment of the Task and Finish Groups was agreed at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 September 2020. It was agreed that the Groups would collate and analyse evidence in order to identify lessons learnt and any areas of weakness in order to provide recommendations which would inform and improve the current response to the Covid-19 pandemic and also provide a template for dealing in with any future similar emergency situation.

Both Groups met to agree a scoping document for the review and these scoping documents were shared with other members of the Scrutiny Committee. These scoping documents confirmed the timetable for the review, the objectives and also the key lines of enquiry that would make up the evidence base for the review.

Evaluation of this evidence base would clarify the issues and assist with the identification of the underlying causes. The Group, with officer support, would then move on to consider options for improvement, feasibility of options for future delivery and the way in which outcomes could be measured and monitored. This would be translated into a set of recommendations to be presented to Scrutiny Committee for approval and following review by the Chief Executive, further recommendation to Cabinet.

Both Groups have committed a considerable amount of time to undertaking evidence sessions, research and surveys and have reported the findings back to meetings which have been held bi-monthly.

The findings of the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Group (Place) will be considered by the Scrutiny Committee in June 2021. Unfortunately the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Group (People) final report has been subject to delay due to the delay in launching the Survey as a result of restrictions imposed during the pre-election period. It is anticipated that the Final Report for the People Group will be presented to the Committee in June/July 2021.

## Lake Terrace – Scrutiny Chairman’s Review

On the 11 February 2021 a request was made at the Scrutiny Committee Meeting to add an item to the Scrutiny Work Plan in relation to Lake Terrace.

Cllr Chris Evans, having become aware of allegations about senior MBC officers, requested that the allegations should be added to Scrutiny’s Work Plan and reviewed by a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group.

At the Scrutiny meeting, the Scrutiny Chairman clarified that further information and evidence would be required to add any item to the work plan. The request would be seriously considered.

Over several weeks, Cllr Cumbers and Cllr Bindloss considered a huge amount of evidence helpfully provided by the various Officers of MBC, together with written and spoken information from LCC’s Cabinet meeting held on 5th February 2021.

Cllr Cumbers will be presenting the findings and evidence from this “mini-review” in the form of a chronology accompanied by a summary of the facts and evaluative comments. The outcome of the review will be communicated to Members in April 2021.

## Scrutiny Reports to Cabinet

In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedures Rules, the Scrutiny Committee may report to Cabinet under Item 4 of the Cabinet Agenda – Matters Referred from Scrutiny Committee in Accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

The Chairman of Scrutiny has formally reported to Cabinet on behalf of the Committee on the following items:

- ✓ Melton Community Lottery – 17 June 2020
- ✓ The Budget – 9 February 2021

## Executive Scrutiny Protocol

In May 2019 the Government published Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities which promoted a formal working agreement between the executive and the scrutiny function in the form of a protocol. The guidance suggested that an Executive Scrutiny Protocol can help to define the relationship and expectations between the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the two can work together in a positive and productive way. The protocol may provide a framework, rather than a prescriptive set of rules, it “can deal with the practical expectations of scrutiny committee members and the executive, as well as the cultural dynamics”. It also stated that a protocol “can help define the relationship between the two and mitigate any differences of opinion before they manifest themselves in unhelpful and unproductive ways. The benefit of this approach is that it provides a framework for disagreement and debate, and a way to manage it when it happens.”

In order to further enhance the collaborative and partnership working between Cabinet and Scrutiny, a protocol was developed in 2020/21. The process of drafting of this document exemplified the culture of collaboration that was already in existence and which has now been given a degree of formality within the protocol. The Leader and the Chairman of Scrutiny and Officers have worked together to create a document which sets out realistic and positive expectations and aspirations in relation to the Scrutiny function.

The Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Scrutiny Officer spoke at the East Midlands Scrutiny Network meeting on 19 March 2021 to help colleagues to understand the process involved in developing a protocol. It was positive that Melton could report that they had had success in developing their protocol ahead of many other authorities.

The Protocol was approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 November 2020 and Council approved the protocol on 17 December 2020. It is now included in the Constitution and will become an important point of reference.

## Reporting

The Committee are keen to ensure that the Scrutiny function at Melton Borough Council remains outcomes focused and that following implementation, the impact of its recommendations are monitored and reported back to the Committee and all Members.

In September 2020 the Scrutiny Committee received an interim report on the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee in relation to Housing Voids which were accepted by Cabinet on 22 January 2020. The [report](#) provided some narrative against each of the recommendations and also detailed the positive work that had been taking place to improve void management and performance. In spite of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic it was clear that positive steps had been taken (Ward Members have been kept updated of progress throughout 20/21) and it is expected that a further report will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee early in the 21/22 Municipal Year.

At the 26 January 2021 Budget Scrutiny meeting, Committee members were joined by other members to consider a number of reports, to question Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers and to provide feedback to Cabinet on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. Scrutiny formally provided their response to the Budget proposals to the Cabinet meeting held on 9 February 2021 and Cabinet's response and any actions/amendments made as a result of the feedback were published and can be found at this [link](#).

The Scrutiny Committee 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.

## Scrutiny Work Plan

Scrutiny Committee reflect on the work plan at each meeting and consider any new items to be added. The work plan is developed by the Chairman and Vice Chair in collaboration with the Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee must agree an Annual Work Plan in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules and that Work Plan may contain:

- 1) Matters which inform the development of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- 2) Matters which inform the development of the Council's approach to matters not forming part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.
- 3) Holding enquiries and investigating the available options for future direction in policy development, matters of public concern and any other issues within their functions.
- 4) Call in of Key Decisions.
- 5) Requests by a member of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 6) Requests from the Council and if it considers appropriate, the Cabinet.

The Chairman has asked members to consider the following when proposing items to add to the work plan:

### **1) Scrutiny Committee Functions & Procedures Rules:**

- Which Corporate Priority the item links to ( Priorities attached for ease of reference)
- 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
- 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

### **2) Consider:**

- What?

Be prepared to provide the committee with some background information and scope of the proposed report/review.

- Why?

Be prepared to justify why the item should be considered by Scrutiny, what might be the intended outcome, why is it important in relation to the provision of services/value for money etc...?

- When?

Is the item time sensitive? What is the level of priority?

➤ Outcomes?

What value can Scrutiny add, what are likely to be the measurable outcomes, is the work already being done somewhere else?

It is hoped this guidance will ensure that Scrutiny at Melton borough Council is outcomes focused and that the value of Scrutiny can be evidenced and results measured.

The Scrutiny Committee held a workshop on 16 July 2020 to discuss the Annual Work Plan, which was attended by all Officers from the Senior Leadership Team.

- Members were asked in advance of this work shop to provide ideas for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Plan 2020/21 to the Scrutiny Chairman.
- The Senior Leadership Team also provided a presentation which provided detail of emerging priorities in relation to the Corporate Strategy.
- All ideas put forward were discussed in detail and a shortlist of items was agreed.
- The shortlisted items were plotted on the work plan in consultation with the Scrutiny Chairman and relevant Directors.
- The Work plan was shared with Cabinet and formally approved by the Committee at their meeting in September 2020.

## Training

A mini review of Scrutiny and a further training session was held in **March 2020**. This included observation and feedback of a meeting, followed by a training session covering amongst other things; an outline of scrutiny with a focus on key roles; powers and responsibilities; ways of working for effective and outcome focused scrutiny e.g. work programme, project scopes, critical friend questioning and listening; discussion around challenges; and provision of examples from meeting observation at MBC and other councils.

Bi-annual Training for Scrutiny Members is due to take place in the Autumn of 2021.

## Looking ahead

- **Annual Work Plan 2021/22**

The work plan has been regularly reviewed and discussed throughout 2020/21. A Scrutiny Member Work shop will be arranged in advance of the first meeting of the 2021/22 Municipal Year to establish priorities for the Committee.

- **Increased Media and Consultation with the Public**

The 20/21 Year saw the launch of the Response and Recovery Task and Finish Group (Place) Survey in October 2021 accompanied by a Press Release and statement from the Chairman of Scrutiny. This was the first time that Scrutiny had engaged the public in the Scrutiny process by seeking views and feedback on current issues in relation to the Covid-19

pandemic. The response to the survey was extremely positive with 327 responses being received. It is hoped that this aspect of Scrutiny will be further developed in 21/22 with the launch of the People based survey and exploration of different media to involve the public to ensure the voice of the community is heard.

In order to evidence and highlight the positive outcomes of the Scrutiny Committee and associated work, especially in relation to reviews and high profile issues, a more developed communications plan is proposed for 2021/22.

- **Scrutiny Website Page**

The development of the Scrutiny Committee website page will need to be carried over from 2020/21 to 2021/22. This too will increase the profile of Scrutiny at Melton Borough Council and provide more information to stakeholders and the community.

- **Scrutiny will engage with more people.**

Opportunities will be explored for other members (except members of the Cabinet) who have particular concerns or knowledge to be co-opted to help Scrutiny members with Scrutiny reviews.

The website page will also provide information about how members of the public can be involved, or can raise of concern.

## Further information

If you would like further information about Scrutiny, please use the contact details below:

### Scrutiny Officer

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Email: [democracy@melton.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@melton.gov.uk)

### Scrutiny Committee Chairman

Email: [pcumbers@melton.gov.uk](mailto:pcumbers@melton.gov.uk)