

Melton Borough Council Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-20



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Foreword from the Chairman of Scrutiny

This report is to inform Council of the work of Scrutiny Committee during 2019-20.

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.

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 2019/20

Councillor Pat Cumbers (Chair)

Councillor Rob Bindloss (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Ronan Browne

Councillor Robert Child

Councillor Jeanne Douglas

Councillor Christopher Evans

Councillor Chris Fisher

Councillor Elaine Holmes

Councillor Rebecca Smedley

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 7 meetings to date and carried out one large scale review in the form of a task and finish group during the 2019/20 Municipal Year. That review involved an additional nine meetings. There was also a mini review of the costs associated with Melton's Community Lottery.

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).

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

Scrutiny Committee (Summary of items considered)

Topic	Date	Brief Details	Outcome
Public Spaces Protection Order	18 June 2019	To consult Scrutiny Committee on the terms of the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in advance of the public consultation.	Scrutiny committee provided feedback on the proposed PSPO and the arrangements for the consultation
Future Options for Citizen's Advice Leicestershire	18 June 2019	To receive a report on the transitional arrangements for funding provision to Citizen's Advice Leicestershire.	Scrutiny Committee provided feedback and noted the report.
Consultation on the Corporate Debt and Income Maximisation Policy	23 July 2019	To consult Scrutiny Committee on the Corporate Debt and Income Maximisation Policy.	Scrutiny Committee provided feedback as part of the consultation.
Establishment of Task and Finish Group	23 July 2019	To approve the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review into Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation.	Scrutiny Committee approved the Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group
Community Grants Review	17 September 2019	To provide a presentation on the proposals to review the current policy for allocation of community grants.	Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on the presentation and provided a report to Cabinet in October (see below).
Update on Task and Finish Group – Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation	17 September 2019	To receive an update and note the timetable and scoping document for the review.	Scrutiny Committee noted the update.
Update on Task and Finish Group – Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation	12 November 2019	To receive a verbal update from the Chairman on the work being done to establish a robust evidence base working with officers and stakeholders.	Scrutiny Committee noted the update.
Final Report on Task and Finish Group – Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation	7 January 2020	To receive the final report, evidence and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group and to approve the recommendation to Cabinet.	Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on the report and resolved to recommend the report to Cabinet for approval of the recommendations. (See further information below)

Melton Community Lottery	7 January 2020	To provide a breakdown of the costs associated with running the Melton Community Lottery.	Scrutiny Committee provided feedback and discussed options for the continuation of the lottery. The Committee resolved to make a recommendation to Cabinet. (see below).
Service Charges	7 January 2020	To consider new charges for tenants in blocks with communal facilities to cover the maintenance and servicing of property health & safety equipment provided and the recharge of electricity to tenants using the new mobility scooter pods.	Scrutiny Committee considered the report and provided feedback on additional items that may be included. It was agreed that Scrutiny Committee would work with the Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager to develop any further feasible recommendations to Cabinet.
Budget Scrutiny	21 January 2020	To consider and provide feedback to Cabinet on the Corporate Strategy, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. Note: All members were invited to this meeting.	Scrutiny Committee considered and all other members were provided with the opportunity to provide questions in advance of the meeting and answers were provided during the meeting and appended to the minutes. The Committee and other members in attendance were able to ask questions of Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers. The Committee's feedback and comments were formally reported to Cabinet at the February meeting (see below).

Crime and Disorder/Community Safety	3 March 2020	To receive a report on Community Safety/Crime and Disorder. To consult Scrutiny on the Draft Community Safety Partnership Strategy.	Scrutiny Committee considered the report and provided feedback which would be incorporated into the revised policy following the public consultation and approval by the Partnership.
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Portfolio Holder Presentations/ Questions

The **Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity** provided a presentation at the **23 July 2019** meeting setting out the current performance, focus and challenges in the following areas:

- Town Centre, Tourism, Events and Place Promotion
- Economic Growth and Inward Investment
- Planning Policy and Housing Delivery
- Major Developments

The **Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Access and Engagement** provided a presentation in advance of the meeting on **17 September 2019**, but due to lack of time was unable to present . The presentation set out the focus of the last 12 months in relation to the Portfolio areas of responsibility listed below:

- Governance and Democratic Services
- Promoting Democracy
- Parish Council liaison & Rural Communities
- Customer access, website and telephony experience
- Resident engagement and embedding services in communities
- Equalities and accessibility
- Community grants and community lottery
- Legal
- Data Management, GDPR and FOIs
- Elections
- Member Development Champion

The **Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources** provided a presentation at the **12 November 2019** which included an overview of each of the different areas of the Portfolio listed below:

- Finance
- Human Resources
- Corporate Health and Safety
- Learning and Development
- ICT Operations
- Procurement
- Commercialisation
- Corporate Property and Assets
- Debt Management
- Workforce Strategy

Members focused on the Council's debt management processes and Corporate Debt Policy and received responses in relation to their enquiries from the Portfolio Holder and the Chief Finance Officer.

The **Leader of the Council** provided a presentation at the **21 January 2020** meeting on the Corporate Strategy setting out the Council's Mission, Vision, Values, Priorities and Key Actions for the coming 4 years.

The **Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities** provided a presentation at the **3 March 2020** meeting on the main areas of his Portfolio as listed below:

- Council housing assets maintenance and repairs
- Council housing tenancy management
- Council house lettings
- Homelessness and Housing Options
- HRA Business Plan
- Community Safety and Priority Neighbourhoods
- Inclusive Growth – tackling inequality
- Support to vulnerable people; including older people and Lifeline services
- Complex case work, early intervention, prevention and support
- Safeguarding
- Community and Public Sector partnerships
- Well-being, physical activity and leisure centre contract management
- Revenues and Benefits

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 below. The Committee has provided comment and feedback, as consultees, to Cabinet on several issues including the Public Spaces Protection Order, Future Options for Citizens' Advice Leicestershire and Corporate Debt

The Committee was also pleased to receive presentations from Portfolio Holders, who provided summaries of Portfolio responsibilities, current performance and emerging issues. Members then provided feedback.

- At the 7 January 2020 meeting the Committee considered new charges for some Council blocks.
- At the 21 January 2020 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 Corporate Strategy, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- At the March 2020 Scrutiny meeting, the Committee received a report on Crime and Disorder/Community Safety. Members asked questions and provided feedback.

Voids and Temporary Accommodation

In July 2019, Scrutiny formed its first Task and Finish Group of four members (The Chair, Vice-Chair Cllrs Browne and Holmes) to review the issue of Voids and Temporary Accommodation, which was causing multiple problems for the Council.

We held nine meetings, gathering evidence from officers and relevant organisations as well as undertaking our own research to identify good practice elsewhere.

In addition we were invited to weekly meetings where officers shared with each other their experiences during the previous week, related to Voids. The shared experiences were already leading to improvements in procedure.

Throughout our time working with Voids, I was very grateful for members' hard work and the enthusiastic co-operation of officers and others, including the Tenants' Forum Executive Committee.

We learned of the cost (financial and otherwise) to the Council, prospective tenants and the homeless when council dwellings are unoccupied for unnecessarily long periods.

We also learned that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is extremely expensive and is often outside of the Borough. This means that the homeless might be separated from friends and family and also from job opportunities and possible further assistance from the Council.

The Group produced a number of recommendations which were agreed by the Committee who also added another.

The recommendations were then considered by Cabinet who, subject to some minor amendments, approved all of the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

The Melton Community Lottery

This was added to Scrutiny's Work plan when it was noticed that the Budget Book estimated that the Lottery would cost taxpayers £39,890 during 2019-20 and was estimated to cost taxpayers £95,152 between November 2016, when the Lottery commenced and March 2020. Lottery membership was also dropping significantly. This cost was in addition to the cost to residents who had purchased lottery tickets.

At the 7th January 2020 meeting, Scrutiny unanimously decided to recommend to Cabinet that the Lottery should cease in 12 months' time unless the number of Lottery members should be at least at the same level as at 31 December 2018.

This recommendation will be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 18 March 2020.

Task and Finish Groups

Housing Management Voids and Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group

On 23 July 2019 the Melton Borough Council Scrutiny Committee approved the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to review Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation. This topic was chosen after having been raised by elected members as a response to identified issues within the voids and temporary accommodation processes both in terms of performance, costs and customer satisfaction. The number of void properties (properties without a tenant) and the period for which these properties remained empty had risen and this was having a negative impact on the Council's income both in rental and Council Tax receipts, from its housing stock. It was also felt that the cost incurred in housing people in temporary accommodation were too high, especially when there were properties which were empty, albeit waiting for repairs and improvements to be made.

On 28 August 2019 the Task and Finish Group met for their preliminary scoping meeting. At that meeting the Group were provided with some background information and performance measures on voids management and temporary accommodation processes. The Group identified issues and areas that they would like to explore further and also agreed the timetable for the review and made some revisions to the Terms of Reference. The Scoping Document for the Review and the revised Terms of Reference were presented to and approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 17 September 2019. The Group agreed they would commence the review by establishing an evidence base which would include performance statistics, review of current policy and process and draw on the experiences of customers, officers and other stakeholders. 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 in January 2020.

Following careful evaluation of the evidence, the Task and Finish Group presented a list of recommendations aimed at ensuring that alternative, more cost effective options for Temporary Accommodation were explored and void times were significantly reduced. The Group were confident that if these recommendations were accepted and implemented they would lead to better outcomes for tenants and prospective tenants and also have a positive impact on the Council's financial position.

The final report can be found [here](#). It was presented to Scrutiny Committee for approval and recommendation to Cabinet on 7 January 2020. Scrutiny Committee approved the report.

The report was presented to Cabinet on 22 January 2020 where subject to some minor amendments the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group were approved.

The final approved recommendations are listed below:

- 1) A review of the voids module within the Northgate Housing Management System is undertaken and recommendations proposed to Senior Leadership Team as to how an improved system can be implemented along with revenue expenditure required.
- 2) To consult tenants in relation to the implementation of a Golden Goodbye scheme that incentivises tenants to return their home in a good standard that in turn reduces void time and void costs to Melton Borough Council.
- 3) Subject to the outcomes of this consultation, to introduce the Golden Goodbye Scheme on a temporary basis for one year after which time continuation of the scheme to depend on the evaluation of outcomes and success factors.
- 4) The development of a framework that includes TFEC in the monthly monitoring of voids and includes a written protocol from both parties so as to clarify expectations.
- 5) To reduce, with the aim of eliminating, use of private Bed and Breakfasts by introducing alternatives with options developed by officers for consideration by Cabinet by the end of July 2020.
- 6) To review contract arrangements with contractors to ensure sufficient quality and control and explore the potential to move to a single trusted contractor to manage all aspects of voids work.
- 7) A review of the Allocations Policy by July 2020.
- 8) The development and implementation of a new Voids Policy by July 2020.
- 9) The implementation of new Tenant visits on occupation and again after 6 weeks.
- 10) To provide an interim report to Scrutiny Committee in July 2020 detailing progress against recommendations and a full report in January 2021 to evidence the impact of improvements.

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:

- ✓ [Community Grants Review – 30 October 2019](#)
- ✓ [Housing Management Voids and Temporary Accommodation – 22 January 2020](#)
- ✓ [The Budget – 12 February 2020](#)
- ✓ [Melton Community Lottery – 18 March 2020](#)

Reporting

It is currently too early to report on the outcomes of Scrutiny's work in 2019/20, however, future Annual Reports will contain further information on the evaluation of outcomes and performance indicators in relation to scrutiny recommendations made to Cabinet and/or Council. 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.

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 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.

Training

An introduction to Scrutiny Training session was delivered at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on **18 June 2019**. This session covered the legislative background, basic principles, planning work, the procedural context at MBC and an overview of the Government Statutory Guidance published in May 2019. All members were invited to this training session.

A mini review of Scrutiny and a further training session will be held in **March 2020**. This will include 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.

Looking ahead

- **Annual Work Plan 2020/21**

The work plan has been regularly reviewed and discussed throughout 2019/20. There are now a significant number of “Pending” items on the work plan. It is proposed that a Scrutiny Member Work shop will be arranged in advance of the first meeting of the 2020/21 Municipal Year to establish priorities and plot dates for some of these items and consider any additional items.

- **Scrutiny Website Page**

In order to increase the profile of Scrutiny at Melton Borough Council and provide more information to stakeholders and the community it is proposed that a dedicated Scrutiny Website page be created.

This website page will include a comprehensive description of Scrutiny and provide information about how members of the public can get involved.

- **Increased Media on Scrutiny related issues**

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 2020/21.

- **Cabinet Scrutiny Protocol**

The Scrutiny Guidance published in May 2019 suggested that “*an ‘executive-scrutiny 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, it is proposed that Melton develop such a protocol in 2020/21 for approval by Council to be included in the Constitution.

Further information

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

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