

North West Leicestershire District Council

Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

Contents

Foreword

What is scrutiny? 4

The principles of good scrutiny 4

Why scrutiny is important... 4

Scrutiny's role... 5

What scrutiny looks like in North West Leicestershire 5

Public involvement in scrutiny 6

What has scrutiny been doing? 7

Scrutiny Work Programming Group 8

Corporate Scrutiny Committee 9

Community Scrutiny Committee 12

Where to get further information / who to contact? 14

Foreword

This report provides a summary of work done by scrutiny at North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) during 2023/24 and provides an opportunity to reflect on this work. It also provides a general overview of how scrutiny operates, the impact it has and how public can get involved.

The principal purpose and power of a scrutiny committee is to influence the policies and decisions made by NWLDC in connection with the provision of public services. The scrutiny committee gathers evidence on issues affecting local people and makes recommendations based on its findings. It reviews what the council has actually done and compares this to its stated objectives.

The scrutiny committees are politically balanced so that they can include as many viewpoints as possible. This year both committees have been chaired by members of the opposition. We believe that opposition members play a valuable role as critical friends to the ruling Cabinet. It is our job to challenge decisions so that the public get the best value from their district council.

It can be difficult to know whether or not a new policy or project has actually worked. How can we measure success? We believe that NWLDC should set targets for itself and be able to say if they have been reached. These targets are called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). They should tell you if the plans are likely to work and, when a project is finished, if it actually did work.

In the last year we have worked hard to make sure that all the council's plans and policies have clear, realistic and sensible KPIs. Where these have not been in place we have made recommendations to Cabinet so that they can be considered in the future.

This document is a record of our progress so far.



Cllr Terri Eynon
Chair of Community Scrutiny
Committee



Cllr Simon Lambeth
Chair of Corporate Scrutiny
Committee

What is scrutiny?

“The role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an authority’s decision-makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. Effective scrutiny helps secure the efficient delivery of public services and drives improvements within the authority itself. Conversely, poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership, and service failure.”

Overview and Scrutiny: Statutory Guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities – by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) published 2019

Scrutiny is an important part of the council’s decision-making process and allows members who are not Cabinet members to look into areas of local concern and critically examine decisions taken by the Cabinet to benefit local people.

Scrutiny committees cannot make decisions but can make recommendations to Cabinet and other decision-making bodies of the council. Scrutiny can also look at services provided by other organisations and as such can invite them into committee meetings for discussions.

Principles of good scrutiny

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny established four key principles of scrutiny, these are:

- 1 Provides critical friend challenge to executive policy and decision makers**
Constructive, robust and purposeful challenge.
Non-aggressive to create optimum conditions for investigative evidence based process.
- 2 Enable the voice and concerns of the public**
Meetings conducted in public and are webcast.
Innovative, public communication, consultation and feedback.
- 3 Be carried out by independent minded councillors**
Councillors actively engage in scrutiny function to drive improvement.
Areas are reviewed in an a-political atmosphere.
- 4 Drive improvement in public services**
Promotes community well-being and improves quality of life.
Strategic review of corporate policies, plans performance and budgets.

Why scrutiny is important....

Scrutiny is a strategic function of the authority and is a central part corporate governance. It is therefore an important element in decision-making. It also provides councillors that are not in decision-making roles an opportunity to be a ‘critical friend’ to the Cabinet and publicly hold them to account in relation to the decisions they are making.

The scrutiny role...

The main tasks of the committees are:

- **Performance monitoring** – The council has to meet corporate priorities set out in the Council Delivery Plan and report against those indicators. Scrutiny can examine any aspect of the council's performance, including services that it delivers through partnerships with other organisations.
- **Holding the Cabinet to account** - Decisions made by the Cabinet but not yet put into practice can be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committees and challenged.
- **Policy review and development** - Scrutiny can propose new policies or review existing policies and recommend changes to the Cabinet.
- **External scrutiny** - Any issue directly affecting the residents of North West Leicestershire can be scrutinised by the committees, including services provided by another organisation.

It is through demonstrating the value and impact that effective scrutiny can have in supporting councils and other organisations to deliver better, more cost-effective services, that scrutiny is a valued element of local democracy.

What scrutiny looks like in North West Leicestershire

The scrutiny work is carried out by the two committees – the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and the Community Scrutiny Committee, with an informal Scrutiny Work Programming Group programming the work. Below is a list of areas of responsibility for each scrutiny committee. Each committee can receive reports and comment on matters of policy or items of business of a similar nature to those listed.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Asset management
Estates and property
Review of Constitution
Communications
Customer services
Finance
Human resources
Equalities
ICT
Legal services
Revenue and benefits
Shared services

Community Scrutiny Committee

Business / economy
Planning and building control
Tourism
Partnerships
Community safety
Leisure
Health and wellbeing
Waste services
Stronger and safer communities
Environmental health
Licensing
Environmental protection
Statutory crime and disorder committee
Strategic housing – housing strategy
Housing management
Economic development
Regeneration

The scrutiny committees can set up special working parties called task and finish groups when they need to undertake a detailed, in-depth investigation into a particular issue. The work is done by a small group of councillors appointed from the membership of the scrutiny committee. Work takes place for a set period and it is time limited. These focused task and finish groups make recommendations to the parent scrutiny committee before being considered by the Cabinet.

Further information can be found on NWLDC website regarding the scrutiny committee structure and terms of reference at [Part 3, section D of the council's Constitution](#).

Public involvement in scrutiny...

As the scrutiny committees are actively working on matters that affect the residents of North West Leicestershire, involvement of the public is encouraged in the following ways:

- Accessing agendas/work programmes: All work either planned or already done by the scrutiny committees is publicly available on the NWLDC website (unless in relation to a confidential matter). All meeting dates and corresponding information can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).
- Attending meetings: Members of the public can attend any public meeting of the scrutiny committees. Details of meeting dates can be found on [the NWLDC website](#). If you are interested but are unable to attend in person, the meetings are also available to view online both live and after the event. Links to meetings can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).
- Asking a question: Each meeting of the scrutiny committees allows for public questions to be asked at the beginning of each agenda. Information on how to submit a question can be found [here](#).
- Submitting a petition: Scrutiny Committees can receive petitions relating to an area that the council has authority over. It can be submitted by anyone who lives, works or studies in North West Leicestershire and can be submitted in writing or as an e-petition on the NWLDC website. Further details can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).
- Identifying issues which a scrutiny committee might look at (via officers or committee members)
- Contributing to consultations and surveys

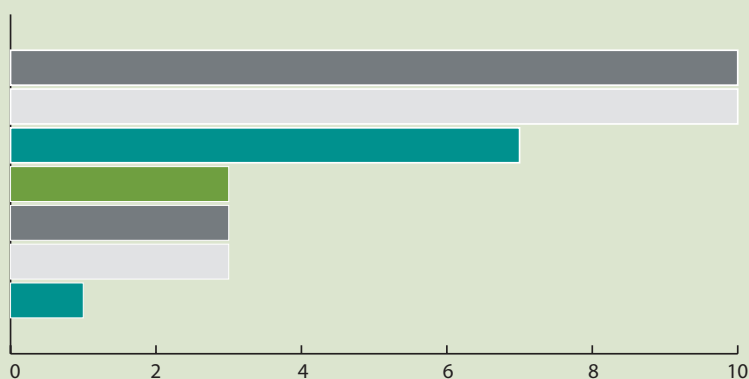
What has scrutiny been doing?

Each scrutiny committee is made up of 10 members, five of which sit on both Corporate and Community Scrutiny Committees. In total there are 15 members out of the 38 elected to represent the district that take part in scrutiny.



Reports received into scrutiny: 34

- For information and update: 10
- Pre-Cabinet review: 10
- Policy reviews: 7
- Performance reviews: 3
- Scrutiny process: 3
- Task and finish group recommendations: 1



Committee meetings held	11
Corporate Scrutiny Committee	6
Community Scrutiny Committee	5
Hours of public debate	17hrs 53mins
Recommendations submitted to Cabinet	11
Recommendations were accepted by Cabinet	7

Scrutiny Work Programming Group

The Scrutiny Work Programming Group is an informal group, made up of councillors and officers, that has been in operation since early 2022 and was established to manage the growing workloads of both committees and to help shape the scrutiny function moving forward. The group's key role is to:

- Consider requests for inclusion on the work programmes of each scrutiny committee;
- Consider whether there are other ways of receiving information
- Consult with members of scrutiny committees, senior officers, Cabinet members for horizon-scanning on policy development
- Look at the corporate priorities, Council Delivery Plan and Cabinet forward plan and identify key issues / topics for investigation / inquiry
- Consider events and decisions in the council's calendar which could require an input / consultation via scrutiny
- Review any follow-up work required after previous scrutiny

Due to the cross overs with scrutiny, the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee along with the lead officer attend each of the Scrutiny Work Programming Group meetings to discuss closely linked matters.

Work programming

The group reviews the work programmes for both scrutiny committees at each meeting, ensuring that workloads are appropriate and identifying future items from the Cabinet's Executive Decision Notice.

Work requests

The group consider any requests for items received from members and if it is felt that value would be added by scrutinising, they determine the best route to take, whether that be a task and finish group, report to committee or information paper. In 2023/24 the group considered 21 work requests which resulted in:

- Four reports
- Ten requests were incorporated within already scheduled reports
- Four information papers
- Three have discussions and scoping still ongoing

Information papers

This year a new approach was introduced to help manage the workloads of the committees - this led to the introduction of information papers' for the group, rather than full reports to the committees when appropriate. In 2023/24, the group received three information papers:

- Download Festival Investigation Update

Outcome: no further report required for Committee

- Ivanhoe Line Update

Outcome: matter was considered by Community Scrutiny Committee

- Section 106 Agreements and Health

Outcome: no further report required for Committee, Information Paper was circulated to all scrutiny members

Annual report

The group were involved in shaping the Annual Scrutiny Report prior to consideration by both scrutiny committees and Council.

Membership	Attendance				
	6 Jul 23	6 Sep 23	6 Dec 23	20 Mar 24	%
Morgan Burke	N	N	N	N	0%
Terri Eynon (Chair of Community SC)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Simon Lambeth (Chair of Corporate SC)	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Paul Lees	Y	Y	N	Y	75%

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Set out below are the key topics the Corporate Scrutiny Committee has scrutinised in 2023/24. All agendas and full details of the committee's work can be found on the [NWLDC website](#).

Council's budget setting

The committee thoroughly examined the draft budgets for 2024/25 as part of the budget consultation process and it was acknowledged that the council was facing a range of financial pressures and challenges. The committee:

- Recommended that all work on the Stenson Square project be paused pending further assessment
- Recommended that the cut in grant to Ashby Museum not be taken forward, this was taken on board and implemented
- Asked for further information from officers on several budgetary matters for clarification purposes
- Suggested that the final HRA budget include proposed fleet replacement for future years
- Recommended that Cabinet review the new housing supply programme.

Council Delivery Plan

The committee was involved in the development of the Council Delivery Plan and was consulted twice during the drafting process both in the early stages and prior to consideration by Cabinet and approval by Council. The committee:

- Submitted its views on the draft Council Delivery Plan for consideration by Cabinet
- Suggested that political groups be consulted on the plan prior to the draft document being presented back to the committee, which was taken on board and implemented.
- Challenged the choice of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used.
- Questioned the form and content of the plan.

Performance monitoring

One of the roles of scrutiny is to examine and monitor the council's performance by using the priorities as set out in the Council Delivery Plan. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee looks at the overall performance and the financial performance on a quarterly basis.

Due to the change in political leadership at the NWLDC elections in 2023, the approval of the Council Delivery Plan was delayed and therefore performance information was not available until the end of quarter three 2023/24. The financial performance continued to be reviewed on a quarterly basis and comments fed back to the Corporate Portfolio Holder.

The committee:

Submitted its views on the quarterly financial performance updates

- Sought clarity on several financial matters
- Questioned staffing plans and budgets and requested a report for more information
- Challenged the performance reporting process.

Housing services

The committee have been regularly scrutinising the Housing Repairs Service following performance concerns raised by members in recent years. In 2023/24 the committee received a performance update and set up a task and finish group to look specifically at damp and mould issues. The committee:

- Welcomed the work undertaken to date and progress made
- Shared concerns about staffing resources
- Requested a further update in 2024/25.

Task and finish groups

Damp and Mould Task and Finish Group

In 2023/24 the committee established one task and finish group to look at the work currently being done to tackle mould and damp issues in council-owned properties.

The group made several recommendations that were endorsed by Corporate Scrutiny Committee and presented to Cabinet. The report detailing the work and recommendations of the group in full can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).

The group made the following recommendations that were all agreed by Cabinet:

- A stand-alone policy on damp and mould be produced
- Steps be taken to improve the documents provided to tenants about damp and mould based on best practice
- NWLDC participates in benchmarking of damp and mould cases, and associated repairs and works, and to proceed to procure a preferred contractor
- The Housing Service be instructed to scope a specification to use external contractors to supplement the inhouse workforce capacity to specifically address mould and damp cases.

Committee meetings held	6
Reports considered	19
Recommendations submitted to Cabinet	9
Recommendations accepted by Cabinet	6
Comments submitted to Cabinet	5
Hours of public debate	9 hrs 36 mins
Questions submitted by public	0

Membership	Attendance						
	11 Jul 23	31 Aug 23	23 Nov 23	4 Jan 24	20 Feb 24	21 Mar 24	%
Simon Lambeth (Chair)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Mike Ball (Chair)	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	33%
Dave Bigby	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	83%
Murrae Blair-Park	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	83%
Morgan Buke	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	83%
Kenny Horn	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	50%
Alison Morley	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Ray Morris	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	50%
Sean Sheahan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Jake Windram	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%



Community Scrutiny Committee

Set out below are the key topics the committee has scrutinised in 2023/24. All agendas and full details of the committee's agendas can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).

Ivanhoe Line

Following the debate on a motion to Council on the progression of the Ivanhoe train line, the matter was brought to the committee for further discussion. A representative from the Campaign to Reopen the Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) attended the committee meeting following an invitation from the chair, to assist with further lines of enquiry.

The committee:

- Acknowledged the ongoing work of Network Rail, CRIL and officers
- Acknowledged the phased strategy to reopen the line as appropriate at the moment
- Noted that a further report on the issue would be brought to the committee in due course
- Requested that the portfolio holder keep the committee updated on the progress on regular basis.

Kegworth Project

The committee were asked to review the progress of the Kegworth Project which involved the culmination of a number of funding streams to provide several improvements in Kegworth. NWLDC has been working alongside the Kegworth Parish Council to deliver the project.

The committee:

- Acknowledged the history of the project and welcomed comments from the ward members
- Submitted its views for consideration by Cabinet
- Recommended that NWLDC ask Leicestershire County Council to review parking enforcement in the area once the project is completed to ensure maximum benefit from the parking scheme is attained. This was taken on board and will be implemented.

Planning enforcement

Following concerns from the committee on the effectiveness of planning enforcement due to outstanding unresolved historic enforcement cases, a report was initially received in September 2022 and a further update on the latest position was provided in 2023/24. The committee were keen to ensure that NWLDC has a Planning Enforcement Team that was fit for purpose.

The committee:

- Welcomed and provided comments on the progress made to date
- Acknowledged the proposed process to report on planning enforcement to the Planning Committee bi-annually
- Requested an improved line of communication between officers and the public on the nature of the planning process and available enforcement mechanisms.

Health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of the community is an important matter for the Committee and several reports have been received in 2023/24 for consideration. The committee:

- Reviewed the proposals for the creation of the Hermitage Recreation Ground Ecopark, comments were fed back to Cabinet
- Received an update on the effectiveness of our leisure centres which was welcomed. The committee requested that future reports include more data profiles to demonstrate the effectiveness of the schemes
- Provided comments on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and Strategy.

Task and finish groups

The committee did not establish any task and finish groups this year.

Committee meetings held	5
Reports considered	15
Recommendations submitted to Cabinet	2
Recommendations accepted by Cabinet	1
Comments submitted to Cabinet	5
Hours of public debate	8 hrs 17 mins
Questions submitted by public	0

Membership	Attendance					
	13 Jul 23	28 Sep 23	7 Dec 23	8 Feb 24	4 Apr 24	%
Dr Terri Eynon (Chair)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Murrae Blair-Park (Deputy Chair)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Mike Ball	N	Y	N	Y	Y	60%
Marie French	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	80%
Kenny Horn	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Simon Lambeth	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Paul Lees	N	Y	N	Y	Y	60%
Alison Morley	Y	N	N	Y	Y	60%
Elizabeth Parle	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%
Lee Windram	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	100%

Where to get more information

If you would like more information about how to get involved or suggest a topic for scrutiny review, you can contact the Democratic Services Team on 01530 454512 or memberservices@nwleicestershire.gov.uk
You can also contact the Scrutiny Committee Chairs directly:

Councillor Simon Lambeth
Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee
simon.lambeth@nwleicestershire.gov.uk

Councillor Terri Eynon
Chair of Community Scrutiny Committee
terri.eynon@nwleicestershire.gov.uk

