



North West Leicestershire District Council

Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

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Foreword

This report provides a summary of work done by scrutiny at North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) during 2024/25 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 the public can get involved.

The principal purpose and power of a scrutiny committee is to influence the policies and decisions made by the Council and to improve its service to the public. Each 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.

NWLDC operates two scrutiny committees. One looks inwards to examine the council's corporate objectives including its budget and its performance compared to its Council Delivery Plan.

Another committee focuses on issues that impact on the wellbeing of the community. This committee examines issues such as the performance of our leisure centres, the management of waste services, the provision of social housing, the enforcement of planning regulations, community safety and air quality.

There is also an overarching Scrutiny Working Group which takes an initial look at relevant issues, works with senior officers to decide what needs to be prioritised and ensures members are properly informed at the meeting.

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 acting as critical friends to the ruling Cabinet.

In the last year we have worked hard to make sure that all the council's plans and policies are clear and realistic. Where we have had concerns, we have made recommendations to Cabinet so that performance can be improved in the future. This document is a record of our progress.



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 council's and combines 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
Carbon Zero

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 [on the NWLDC website](#)
- 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

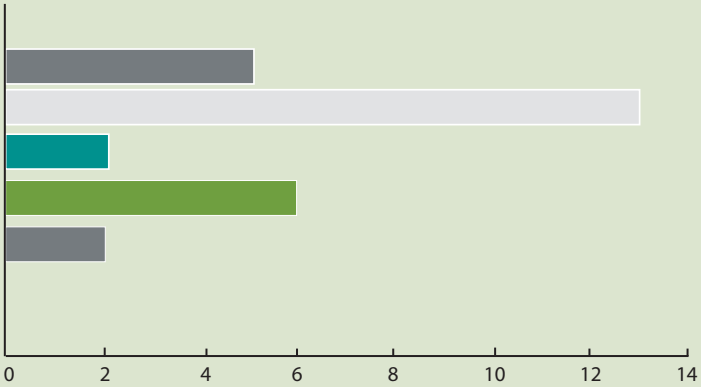
What has scrutiny been doing?

Each scrutiny committee is made up of 10 members, four of which sit on both Corporate and Community Scrutiny Committees. In total there are 16 members out of the 38 elected to represent the district who take part in scrutiny.



Reports received into scrutiny: 28

- For information and update: 5
- Pre-Cabinet review: 13
- Policy reviews: 2
- Performance reviews: 6
- Scrutiny process: 2
- Task and finish group recommendations: 0



| | |
|--|--------------|
| Committee meetings held | 9 |
| Corporate Scrutiny Committee | 5 |
| Community Scrutiny Committee | 4 |
| Hours of pubic debate | 14hrs 36mins |
| Recommendations submitted to Cabinet | 5 |
| Recommendations were accepted by Cabinet | 5 |

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 considers 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 2024/25 the group considered nine work requests which resulted in:

- One report
- Two requests were incorporated within already scheduled reports
- Two information papers were provided
- Two ongoing requests for further scoping/ consideration during the civic year 2025/26
- Approval of the formation of a Task and Finish Group to carry out work during the civic year 2025/26.

Information papers

'Information papers' are for the Work Programming Group to consider, rather than full reports to the committees, when this approach is deemed appropriate.

In 2024/25, the group received two information papers:

- Air Quality and Zero Carbon
Outcome: no further report was required for Committee; the paper was shared with the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change.
- Improving Customer Contact Project
Outcome: agreed that the Communications Team Manager would bring an update to the Scrutiny Work Programming Group at the midpoint of the project for further scoping.

Annual report

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

| Membership | Attendance | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|------|
| | 17 Jul 24 | 2 Oct 24 | 11 Dec 24 | 5 Mar 25 | % |
| Lee Windram | 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 | N | 75% |
| Paul Lees | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Set out below are the key topics the Corporate Scrutiny Committee has scrutinised in 2024/25. 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:

- Requested a range of clarifications and further information outside of the meeting on specific lines and proposals contained within the draft budget.
- Noted the potential challenges associated with agency staffing, post deletions, pay awards, and the projected medium term budget shortfall.
- Welcomed the proposed plans to work with a 'registered provider' to mitigate problems associated with homelessness within the district, as contained within the 2025/26 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget.

Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review

The committee scrutinised the feedback from the June 2024 LGA Peer Review visit and considered the post-review Action Plan which had been drafted by the Chief Executive, before this was presented to the Cabinet in December 2024.

The committee:

- Commended the positive findings and welcomed the wide basis of consultation.
- Probed both the value and the limitations of the peer review method.
- Discussed engagement with local businesses and communications with staff members and residents.

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.

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
- Expressed concern at the rise in customer complaints
- Questioned staffing plans and budgets and requested a report for more information
- Questioned the performance reporting process.

Council tax discounts and exemptions

The committee scrutinised proposed changes to council tax discounts and exemptions regarding empty homes in December 2024, ahead of the approval of a new policy by Cabinet in January 2025. All formal recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet.

The committee:

- Recommended to Cabinet that second homeowners pay a 100% surcharge on their Council Tax from day one.
- Recommended that the six-month 50% Council Tax discount for major repairs and charge full council tax from the point of ownership be removed.
- Recommended to the Cabinet that the proposed removal of the one month 100% council tax discount for empty, unoccupied and unfurnished properties be rejected.
- Recommended that the Council charge Properties Empty for one to five years, twice standard council tax (200%); those Empty five-10 years three times the standard council tax (300%); and those Empty 10 years or more four times the standard council tax (400%).

Task and finish groups

The Committee established no Task and Finish Groups in 2024/25.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Committee meetings held | 5 |
| Reports considered | 18 |
| Recommendations submitted to Cabinet | 5 |
| Recommendations accepted by Cabinet | 5 |
| Comments submitted to Cabinet | 0 |
| Hours of public debate | 8 hrs 26 mins |
| Questions submitted by public | 0 |

| Membership | Attendance | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------|
| | 23 May 24 | 29 Aug 24 | 5 Dec 24 | 7 Jan 24 | 13 Mar 25 | % |
| Simon Lambeth (Chair) | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Mike Ball (Deputy Chair) | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Catherine Beck | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Murrae Blair-Park | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | 80% |
| Morgan Buke | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Kenny Horn | N | N | Y | Y | N | 40% |
| Alison Morley | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | 80% |
| Ray Morris | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | 80% |
| Sean Sheahan | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Jake Windram | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |

Community Scrutiny Committee

Set out below are the key topics the committee has scrutinised in 2024/25. All agendas and full details of the committee's agendas can be found [on the NWLDC website](#).

Future of Waste Services

As part of the consultation process for the proposed changes to waste services, a meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee was held on Thursday, 27 March 2025 to scrutinise the proposals in depth, ahead of their approval by the Cabinet on Tuesday 22 April 2025.

The Committee:

- Scrutinised how staffing arrangements would change due to the proposed changes to the services.
- Scrutinised the possible impacts which the proposed local government reorganisation would have on the proposed changes.
- Welcomed the synergy between the Committee, Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change on how to proceed.

Tree Management Strategy

The committee was asked to review the draft Tree Management Strategy on 6 February 2025, ahead of its presentation to the Cabinet on 25 March.

The committee:

- In the course of discussion suggested several tweaks to certain policies within the strategy, which were taken up by officers when the final iteration of the report was presented to the Cabinet.
- Requested a Housing Revenue Account Tree Management Strategy be presented to the Committee, once the required survey work had been carried out, to complement the work before them which primarily focused on the Tree Management Strategy within the General Fund Budget.
- Asked about the synergy between the Tree Management Strategy, the Local Plan, and the work of the Planning Enforcement Team.

District-Wide Regeneration Framework

The District-Wide Regeneration Framework was considered by the committee on 19 September 2024, ahead of its approval by the Cabinet on 22 October 2024.

The committee:

- Suggested that the document needed a clearer project pipeline and stronger governance structures, though they accepted they had been presented with only the iteration.
- Considered how the document fitted with other strategic considerations regarding the provision of infrastructure, such as the Local Plan process and the ongoing campaign to reopen the Ivanhoe Line.
- Requested that an annual report be presented to the Committee each year to scrutinise the ongoing progress of the District-Wide Regeneration Framework.

Health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of the community is an important matter for the committee and several reports have been received in 2024/25 for consideration.

The committee:

- Reviewed an update report on air quality and requested that the Scrutiny Work Programming Group further scope the links between air quality and the council's Zero Carbon targets.
- Received an update on the effectiveness of council leisure centres which was broadly welcomed and commended as a thorough report which detailed demonstrable success.

Task and finish groups

The committee established no Task and Finish Groups in 2024/25.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Committee meetings held | 4 |
| Reports considered | 10 |
| Recommendations submitted to Cabinet | 0 |
| Recommendations accepted by Cabinet | 0 |
| Comments submitted to Cabinet | 0 |
| Hours of public debate | 6 hrs 12 mins |
| Questions submitted by public | 0 |

| Membership | Attendance | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|
| | 27 Jun 24 | 19 Sep 24 | 6 Feb 25 | 27 Mar 25 | % |
| Dr Terri Eynon (Chair) | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Murrae Blair-Park (Deputy Chair) | Y | N | N | Y | 50% |
| Mike Ball | Y | Y | Y | N | 75% |
| Dave Bigby | N | Y | Y | N | 50% |
| Marie French | Y | N | Y | Y | 75% |
| Kenny Horn | N | Y | Y | N | 50% |
| Simon Lambeth | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Paul Lees | Y | Y | N | Y | 75% |
| Elizabeth Parle | Y | Y | Y | Y | 100% |
| Lee Windram | 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

