



Corporate Overview Group

Tuesday, 22 September 2020

Consideration of the Future of Scrutiny

Report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. This report provides information relating to the operation of scrutiny over the last 16 months with a view to informing debate at the Corporate Overview Group leading to a recommendation to Cabinet about the future of scrutiny.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Overview Group endorse the 'transitional arrangements' for scrutiny to be the permanent arrangements as currently stated in the Council's Constitution.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. An independent review of scrutiny was undertaken in late 2018. This led to a revised model for scrutiny being introduced in May 2019 following the Borough Council election. A review of this new model has now taken place and has found high levels of satisfaction with the current model.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1. Between September 2018 and February 2019, a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements was undertaken. This was done with independent assistance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and reported to Council in March 2019. The reasons for undertaking a review at this point were: growing frustration of scrutiny members, continuing financial pressures the authority is experiencing, the desire for greater transparency and accountability, and the growing need to ensure resources and councillors' skills are utilised more flexible and responsively.
- 4.2. The review found that scrutiny at Rushcliffe was doing well but could 'always do better'. Additionally, the CfPS felt that there was lots of activity at scrutiny but its focus could be better placed and that the Executive ambition could be better supported or enhanced by the scrutiny function. Strengths identified by the CfPS included: high levels of officer support and engagement; task and finish groups are effective and satisfying for councillors; and both councillors and officers are well engaged and positive about their role. However, they also identified a number of areas for improvement, including: a shared

understanding about the purpose of scrutiny; routine and repetitive work programmes; lack of understanding or visibility of the Council’s corporate strategy; no, or limited, consideration of the forward plan, corporate strategy, MTFs or other key documents in setting the work programme; limited, or no, public democratic accountability; and limited use of the provisions in the Constitution for holding the Executive to account.

- 4.3. The CfPS report suggested a new model for scrutiny at Rushcliffe centred around a single 15-member Scrutiny Overview Group (as commonly seen in unitary and county councils) which commissioned multiple task and finish groups to investigate topics and concerns. To minimise risk and ensure continuity, a transitional model was proposed and agreed for a period of 12-18 months. The transitional approach also enabled any new councillors, following the 2019 Borough Council Elections, to become familiar with the operation of the Council, receive training in scrutiny and for new ways of identifying topics to scrutinise to bed-in.
- 4.4. The transitional model was approved at Council in March 2019 and consisted of a Corporate Overview Group and three themed scrutiny groups. Terms of reference and membership for these groups was agreed at Annual Council in May 2019 and the groups were operational from 1 June 2019.
- 4.5. A change champion, also the Chair of the Corporate Overview Group, was appointed to oversee the changes recommended in the CfPS report to revitalise scrutiny at Rushcliffe and also to respond appropriately to new statutory guidance published in May 2019 (Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities).
- 4.6. During the first 12 months of the new arrangements, 12 meetings of scrutiny groups were held and 51 items were discussed. It was decided to be too early to review the transitional arrangements following the first year of operation and a review was scheduled for September 2020 (16 months into the new arrangements and giving Councillors time to reflect back on the effectiveness of scrutiny since 1 June 2019 before making recommendations to be considered at Council prior to Annual Council in May 2021).
- 4.7. This document summarises scrutiny activity at Rushcliffe during the last 16 months and includes both officer and councillor reflections on that period.

Structure

- 4.8. The current scrutiny structure consists of four scrutiny groups, with the Corporate Overview Group managing the work programme for the other three groups which are themed around Governance, Growth and Development, and Communities. The following table provides key information about the four groups including membership, numbers of meetings held in the last 16 months and an overview of the items considered.

Corporate Overview Group – six meetings held between June	Seven members Five Conservative and Two	Each meeting considers: Implementation of Change, Feedback from Scrutiny Group
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2019 and September 2020 (including September)	Labour Independent Change Champion plus Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of other scrutiny groups	Chairmen, Consideration of the Work Programmes including any new items for scrutiny, and Finance and Performance Monitoring Additional items included: Corporate Strategy, Health and Safety Annual Report, Customer Feedback Annual Report, Diversity Annual Report, Options for Public Engagement in Scrutiny, Effect of Covid19 on Performance.
Governance Scrutiny Group – six meetings held between June 2019 and September 2020 (including September)	Nine members Six Conservative, one Labour, one Liberal Democrat, one Independent Chairman from the ruling group, Vice Chairman from the opposition	Items considered: Annual Fraud Report, Capital and Investment Strategy, Statement of Accounts, External Report to those Charged with Governance, Risk Management Progress, Internal Audit Quarterly Updates, Annual Audit Letter, Asset Management Plan, Treasury management Update, External Audit Strategy, Constitution, Impact of Covid19 on Risks
Communities Scrutiny Group – four meetings held between June 2019 and September 2020	Nine members Six Conservative, one Labour, one Liberal Democrat, one Green Party Chairman from the ruling group, Vice Chairman from the opposition	Items considered: Community Partnerships Review – Positive Futures and Young, Carbon Management Plan Development, Public Spaces Protection Order Review, Review of Community Facilities in West Bridgford, Litter, Dog Fouling and Fly-tipping Part One, Waste Resources Strategy, Fireworks, Rushcliffe Equality Scheme
Growth and Development Scrutiny Group – four meetings held between June 2019 and September 2020	Nine members Six Conservative, one Labour, one Liberal Democrat, one Independent Chairman and Vice Chairman from the ruling group	Items considered: Abbey Road Redevelopment, Business Support Offer, Supporting and Promoting Economic Vibrancy in Town Centres, Management of Open Spaces, Approached to Assisting with Economic Recovery in the Borough, Customer Service and Digital Transformation, Planning Enforcement

Training

- 4.9. Two specific training events were held during 2019 for members of scrutiny. In the first instance, an introduction to scrutiny session was held in June 2019 as part of the induction of new Councillors following the 2019 Borough Council Election (returning Councillors were also welcome). This provided a general

overview of scrutiny, its purpose, the legislation behind the arrangement, and how scrutiny is run at Rushcliffe. It also provided Councillors with the opportunity to use the scrutiny matrix and learn how items were selected for the work programme.

- 4.10. A second, more advanced, training session was held a month later in July 2019. This included a presentation from each scrutiny group Chairman to outline the terms of reference for their group and the items on the work programme for the coming year. The second half of the session was run by Dr Stephanie Snape, on behalf of East Midlands Councils, which provided a very in-depth and interactive overview of scrutiny including the newly published statutory guidance.
- 4.11. Seven councillors and officers also attended the Annual Scrutiny Conference in October 2019 – the first event of its kind run by East Midlands Councils marking 20 years since the introduction of scrutiny.
- 4.12. An individual councillor also attended an East Midlands Councils' run event entitled Advanced Finance Scrutiny in November 2019.

Change Champion

- 4.13. An independent Chairman of the Corporate Overview Group was appointed in May 2019 to oversee the change outlined in the March 2019 Council report. As well as chairing the Corporate Overview Group meetings, the Change Champion has attended events including the CfPS Symposium on the new statutory guidance for scrutiny in London in June 2019, and two East Midlands Scrutiny Network meetings during 2019. These were both opportunities for the Change Champion to talk to members of scrutiny in other organisations as well as to hear current best practice advice from her peers.

Scrutiny Items Considered

- 4.14. Over the 16-month period of this review, the scrutiny groups have considered 74 items (see Appendix A for details). Some of these are standing items and reviewed by specific groups on a rolling cycle; others are in-depth scrutiny investigations considered on more than one occasion.
- 4.15. The CfPS review highlighted a number of weaknesses in scrutiny at Rushcliffe including how items were selected for scrutiny, how much of the work programme was cyclical and repetitive, and how the Council's key documents (Corporate Strategy, MTFs, and Forward Plan) had little influence on what was considered at scrutiny. The CfPS review also commented upon weak links between Cabinet and scrutiny which may be hampering the delivery of Cabinet ambitions.
- 4.16. To address these concerns, each Corporate Overview Group meeting considers the work programmes over the next few meetings for all of the groups, taking into account the Corporate Strategy, MTFs, and Forward Plan;

the Group also considers topics for scrutiny submitted by both officers and councillors for inclusion in a work programme.

- 4.17. Of the 74 items considered at scrutiny over the review period:
- Eighteen originated with officers
 - Eight originated with councillors
 - Forty-eight are standing items mainly considered by the Corporate Overview and Governance scrutiny groups.
- 4.18. Additionally, of the 74 items considered at scrutiny over the review period:
- Four were scrutinised as a result of a Cabinet recommendation
 - Three were scrutinised as a result of a Council motion
 - Six items scrutinised were linked to the Corporate Strategy.
- 4.19. On nine occasions, the Governance Scrutiny Group received presentations from the internal or external auditors – no other groups received presentations from external speakers. In December 2019, the Cabinet portfolio holder for business and transformation attended the Governance Scrutiny Group at the Chairman's request to contribute to the scrutiny of the Asset Management Plan.
- 4.20. Both Councillors and officers are required to complete a scrutiny matrix to outline a topic they would like to be considered for scrutiny. The matrix summarises the issue of concern as well as the key lines of enquiry for any review. The matrix was simplified part way through the review period as a result of Councillor feedback. These matrices can be submitted at any time and are considered at each Corporate Overview Group meeting.

Feedback from Officers

- 4.21. Scrutiny at Rushcliffe is supported by the four Executive Managers, the Service Manager for Finance and Corporate Services and the Democratic Service Team. Other officers attend scrutiny as requested to present reports and provide information. Officers participating in, or supporting, scrutiny feel that significant improvements have been made and that under the new arrangements, agendas are more dynamic, scrutiny is more robust, and participation levels are higher.

Feedback from Councillors

- 4.22. All Councillors were given the opportunity to contribute their views on the current model of scrutiny by Councillor T Combellack. She asked six questions via email; these are listed below with a summary of the eleven responses received (ie only 25% of Councillors and, therefore, presumably 75% are satisfied with the current arrangements) . Within these responses there was little commonality. Full responses by question are listed in Appendix B .

- 4.23. Given the range of areas discussed, and little feedback from the majority of Councillors, the conclusion drawn is that the existing system and structure remains (and this is recommended to Cabinet). We will should always look to continue to refine and improve the scrutiny process including relevant comments made by Councillors as summarised below.

How do you feel about the current model of scrutiny at RBC?

- A number of Councillors commented that they could not compare the new structure to the old as they were new Councillors.
- A number of Councillors felt that it should be elected officials who are scrutinised and not the officers as they are the ones who can be democratically deselected. These included the observation that a member of the Cabinet attended scrutiny last year and that this should be a more regular occurrence.
- Four Councillors felt that the depth of scrutiny was limited by officers writing the reports and doing the presentations on work they have also been involved in delivering – amounting to a lack of independence.
- One Councillor would like to see the Chair and Vice Chair positions alternated each year.
- One Councillor felt very strongly that the current model, when compared to the previous one, leaves ‘normal’ Councillors under-utilised and under-worked due to the reduction in the number of meetings.
- One Councillor felt that the current model of scrutiny has not been given enough time to demonstrate whether it is comparatively better than previous arrangements due to the slow introduction of meetings and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- One Councillor felt that there should be a publicised way for the public to raise items and to offer evidence (written/oral) on scrutiny items.
- One Councillor felt that having the meetings available on YouTube has been a benefit in that residents can look and listen to the meetings, even at a later date, and hear how items of interest and concern to them are being handled.
- One Councillor feels that the current model of scrutiny feels very much like scrutiny on rails – meaning Councillors are stuck to the track set out in the work programme with very little ability to change the programme.
- One Councillor suggested that scrutiny still spends much of its time looking at officer reports and not at Cabinet decisions.
- One Councillor questioned whether dialogue with partner agencies and performance review matters had been removed from the programme.

Do you know how to get items considered for a scrutiny group work programme?

- All but one respondents understood the need to complete a scrutiny matrix and submit it to the Democratic Services team – the remaining councillor said he knew who to ask if he needed to.

- A number of Councillors indicated that the new form is better but one suggested changing the name from matrix to request.

Do you feel there are any barriers to getting an item considered for a scrutiny group work programme?

- One Councillor stated that the same people doing the work also report to scrutiny creating a potential conflict of interest.
- A number of Councillors stated that it is now much easier and more transparent to get items considered for scrutiny; however, it was also noted that the process seems to take a long time as all items are considered by the Corporate Overview Group before being put on the programme.

Do you feel that you have sufficient knowledge and understanding about scrutiny to fully participate?

- The majority of Councillors felt that they had sufficient knowledge and understanding about scrutiny to fully participate.
- A number positively mentioned the training provided last year and most stated that more experience is what they needed at the present time.

Do you have any observations to make about the frequency, timing and content of scrutiny meetings (bearing in mind the challenges and resource constraints the Council faces)?

- One Councillor suggested that whilst the quality of reports is excellent there is a danger that long reports, supported by long and detailed presentations can reduce the amount of time left in meetings for Councillors to actually discuss the pertinent issues. Furthermore, other Councillors commented that occasionally the reports and presentations were so comprehensive that it left very little for Councillors to scrutinise and question.
- Two Councillors felt that there were too few scrutiny meetings and too little officer resource devoted to scrutiny. Another felt that more use could be made of Councillor time to scrutinise but that the officer resource is lacking. Another Councillor felt that better attendance and engagement could be achieved by varying the day and time of scrutiny meetings.
- One Councillor was under the impression that the current pandemic had reduced the number of scrutiny meetings.
- Another felt that the same subjects were reviewed every year as they were before the change.

Is there anything else you would like the review of scrutiny to take into account?

- One Councillor pointed out that in their view officer presentations were unnecessary if the report has been read before the meeting leaving more time for Councillor questions and allowing Councillors to lead the debate.
- One Councillor would like to see more of public engagement in scrutiny discussions.
- One Councillor would like to see people using the correct process for triggering scrutiny debate rather than using council meetings to force the issue.
- One Councillor would like to input into other scrutiny groups where you have a particular interest in the topic.
- One Councillor suggested that the topics up for debate at scrutiny should be advertised in Councillors Connections and representations / comments invited from all Councillors.
- One Councillor stated that the review undertaken by the CfPS suggested that the change in structure should shift the focus on to scrutinising topics with members of the Cabinet rather than officers – this isn't happening.
- Given the choice, one Councillor would scrap the Cabinet and Scrutiny model in favour of a committee-based system where he feels more involved and finds the meetings more relevant and interesting.

5. Risks and Uncertainties

- 5.1. Both Councillors and officers are satisfied with the functioning of the transitional arrangement, therefore no-change is a viable way forward.
- 5.2. Changing the model of scrutiny at Rushcliffe again risks further disruption and delay to the Council's ability to scrutinise activity and topics of concern.

6. Implications

6.1. Financial Implications

The are no direct financial implications arising from this report

6.2. Legal Implications

The requirement for local authorities to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. This report demonstrates compliance with the legal requirements.

6.3. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications in this report.

6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no Section 17 implications in this report.

7. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Delivery of effective scrutiny is an essential element of delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy and underpins all of its Corporate Priorities.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Overview Group endorse the 'transitional arrangements' for scrutiny to be the permanent arrangements as currently stated in the Council's Constitution.

For more information contact:	Peter Linfield Executive Manager - Finance and Corporate Services Tel: 0115 9148439 plinfield@rushcliffe.gov.uk
Background papers available for Inspection:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix A – Scrutiny Work Programmes Appendix B – Full Consultation Responses from Councillors

APPENDIX A

Corporate Overview Group

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
22 Sep 2020 7.00 pm	Implementation of Change – Scrutiny	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen	Councillors	Standing Item
	Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Financial and Performance Management	Financial Services Manager / SM – F&CS (Officers)	Standing Item
	Customer Feedback Annual Report	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Consideration of Future of Scrutiny	SM – F&CS (Officer)	New Item (recommendation from Cabinet)
7 Jul 2020 7.00 pm	Health and Safety Annual Report	Health and Safety Advisor (Officer)	Standing Item
	Implementation of Change	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Finance and Performance Management Q4	Financial Services Manager / SM – F&CS (Officers)	Standing Item
	The effect of Covid-19 on current performance levels	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Officers (responding to current situation – no matrix completed)
25 Feb 2020 7.00 pm	Options for Public Engagement in Scrutiny	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Councillors (scrutiny matrix submitted)
	Implementation of Change	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Feedback from Scrutiny Chairman	Councillors	Standing Item
	Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Finance and Performance Management Q3	Financial Services Manager / SM – F&CS (Officers)	Standing Item
19 Nov 2019 7.00 pm	Diversity Annual Report	Human Resources Manager (Officer)	Standing Item
	Implementation of Change	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen	Councillors	Standing Item
	Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Finance and Performance Management Q2	Financial Services Manager / SM – F&CS (Officers)	Standing Item
3 Sep 2019 7.00 pm	Implementation of Change	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
	Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Consideration of Requests for Scrutiny for Councillors	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Finance and Performance Monitoring Q1	Financial Services Manager / SM – F&CS (Officers)	Standing Item
	Customer Feedback Annual Report	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Corporate Strategy Update	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Councillor Request (no matrix completed)
20 Jun 2019 7.00 pm	Health and Safety Annual Report	Health and Safety Advisor (Officer)	Standing Item
	Implementation of Change	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Creation of Work Programmes	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Corporate Strategy 2019 - 2023	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Officers (no scrutiny matrix completed and Cabinet recommendation)
	Finance and Performance Monitoring Q4	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item

Governance Scrutiny Group

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
29 Sep 2020 7.00 pm	Statement of Accounts 2019/20	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Internal Audit Progress Report – 5 month update 2020/21	BDO - External	Standing Item
30 Jul 2020 7.00 pm	Internal Audit Report Q4 2019/20	RSM - External	Standing Item
	Internal Audit Annual Report 2019/20	RSM - External	Standing Item
	Constitution Update	MO (Officer)	Standing Item
	Annual Governance Statement	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Annual Capital and Investment Strategy Report 2019/20	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Impact of Covid19 on Risk	SM – F&CS (Officer)	Officers (responding to current situation – no matrix completed)
	Fraud Annual Report 2019/20	EM – F&CS (Officer)	New Item (no matrix completed)
6 Feb 2020 7.00 pm	Internal Audit Progress Report	RSM - External	Standing Item
	External Audit Strategy	Mazars - External	Standing Item

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
	Internal Audit Strategy	BDO - External	Standing Item
	Treasury Management Strategy	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
3 Dec 2019 7.30 pm	Internal Audit Progress Report	RSM - External	Standing Item
	Treasury Management Update	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Asset Management Plan	EM – T (Officer)	Officers (no matrix completed)
17 Sep 2019 7.00 pm	Internal Audit Progress Report	RSM - External	Standing Item
	Annual Audit Letter	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Risk Management Update	EM – T (Officer)	Standing Item
	Asset Management Plan Update	EM – T (Officer)	Officers (no matrix completed)
23 Jul 2019 7.00 pm	Annual Fraud Report	RSM - External	Standing Item
	External Auditor's Report To Those Charged With Governance 2018/19	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Statement of Accounts 2018/19	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item
	Risk Management Progress Report	EM – T (Officer)	Standing Item
	Capital and Investment Management Outturn 2018/19	EM – F&CS (Officer)	Standing Item

Communities Scrutiny Group

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
27 Aug 2020 7.00 pm	Fireworks	Community Development Manager (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and Council motion)
	Rushcliffe Equality Scheme	Human Resources Support (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and Cabinet recommendation)
23 Jul 2020 7.00 pm	Litter, Dog Fouling and Fly Tipping (Part One - Fly Tipping)	Environmental Health Manager (Officer)	Councillors (scrutiny matrix completed)
	Waste Strategy	SM - Neighbourhoods (Officer)	Officers (no matrix completed)
9 Jan 2020 7.00 pm	Review of Community Facilities in West Bridgford	SM -T (Officer)	Councillors (scrutiny matrix completed)
	Carbon Management	Community	Officers (scrutiny matrix

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
	Plan Development and Review	Development Manager (Officer)	completed – following Council motion and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
3 Oct 2019 7.00 pm	Community Partnership Review - Positive Futures and YouNG	Community Development Manager (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
	Carbon Management Plan Development and Review	Community Development Manager (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed – following Council motion and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
	Public Space Protection Order Review	Environmental Health Manager (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed)

Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

	Items Considered	Who	Originated From?
25 Aug 2020 7.00 pm	Abbey Road Developer Presentation	Developer – External EM – T (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
	Planning enforcement policy – part one	SM – Communities (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed)
15 Jul 2020 7.00 pm	Open Spaces	EM - C (Officer)	Councillors (scrutiny matrix completed)
	The Council's Wider Approach to Assisting Economic Recovery in Rushcliffe	SM -T (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and Cabinet recommendation)
7 Jan 2020 7.00 pm	Business Support Offer	SM -T (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
	Supporting and Promoting Economic Vibrancy in Towns and Villages	SM -T (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
15 Oct 2019 7.00 pm	Abbey Road - Depot Redevelopment	EM – T (Officer)	Officers (scrutiny matrix completed and linked to new Corporate Strategy)
	Community Infrastructure Levy	Principal Planning Policy Officer (Officer)	Councillors (scrutiny matrix completed)

Full consultation responses from Councillors

How do you feel about the current model of scrutiny at RBC?

As a newly elected Councillor I don't really have much to compare it to. If I consider previous forms of scrutiny I have been involved with I think there is a tension between scrutinising the Cabinet (say strategic direction or major investment decisions) and scrutinising delivery. In much of my previous experience one group of "officers" would be working on the scrutiny (most likely from a different organisation or body) and a different group on the programme or activity being scrutinised thus creating a distance between the two. This process pretty much means those doing the work (the delivery) are the same people scrutinising it - albeit with oversight from elected members. So it is a different model. I think this works better for some areas of the Council's operations than for others.

It is generally OK but I am not convinced that the system allows enough in-depth scrutiny. On the other hand there are items where it is difficult to assess what the issues are that need scrutinising within a subject.

All seems OK although I was not around for the previous method

As a model it works well but I do feel that it is a case of the Conservative Party marking its own homework and if we had more members from opposition parties we could scrutinise Cabinet's decisions differently. I would also like to see Chair and Vice Chair positions alternated each year or some sort of succession planning given to Vice Chairs. I also feel that Cabinet members should attend Scrutiny when it applies to their portfolio. It should be the elected official who is scrutinised and not the officers as they are the ones who can be democratically deselected.

I feel that the current model, when compared to the previous one leaves 'normal' Councillors under-utilised and under-worked. The reduction in number of committees has seen a loss of 'bums on seats' so there is less for us to do, less input to have. The fact that COG is made up of the committee chairs/VCs concentrates input in them further resulting in even less input from the other Councillors. My view is thus that the scrutiny model leaves backbench Councillors with not enough to do.

Given the slow introduction of meetings and the pandemic, I don't feel the current model of scrutiny has been given enough time to demonstrate whether it is comparatively better than previous arrangements or any other arrangement.

I guess I imagined that scrutiny would be a more outward facing process and that the councillors would be more involved, somehow. I do think there should be a (publicised) way for the public to raise items via their ward members, and to offer evidence (written/oral) on scrutiny items. Better publicity to the public that items are being scrutinised. Also that we should be inviting people in to give evidence. It all feels a bit - the officer writes a report and gives a presentation then the members ask a few questions before signing it off. Rather than an enquiry that the members are

truly engaged in - deciding what to consider and the questions to ask, researching, interviewing, surveying, reporting, making recommendations for change. I'm not clear why some items are split into part 1 and part 2 and what is supposed to happen in between.

I only have experience of a couple of Growth and Development scrutiny meetings so far and nothing to compare with so it is hard to give a reasoned response. Although we had some good training sessions at the start of our time on the council, they were a bit out of context at that time. I think maybe a further training/discussion/q&a session may be relevant now. I am unsure of what happens after the work has been accepted. Is it handed over to officers to investigate? Is there contact made with individuals in the community with more knowledge and concerns to allow them to have input into the process? What is the role of the members of the group once the topic has been accepted as an area of work? Are they allowed to ask questions, provide further information etc. I would welcome clarity of roles and responsibilities here both to aid the process and also to be sure of not taking a wrong step. Having the meetings available on YouTube has been a benefit in that residents can look and listen to the meetings, even at a later date, and hear how items of interest and concern to them are being handled. For example, Dave Mitchell's background report on green space charges clarified the history of the charges and how the current situation has arisen and so was very useful to everyone concerned.

My feedback on the current scrutiny arrangement is based on my year spent on the Governance Scrutiny Group. I feel this committee may be the most extreme example but it felt very much like scrutiny on rails. By which I mean we were stuck to the track set out for us in the work program. It may well have also been due to my inexperience as a councillor but it certainly felt that the opportunity to ask questions was limited by the scene set out in front of me. Sometimes this scene was very complex (annual finance review) and those setting the scene were such experts in the field there appeared to be little to check and scrutinise as a lay person. However, by contrast when I read on how to do "good scrutiny" the agenda is set more by the individual members of the committee, who have statutory powers to look at whatever they please within the council. Documents like the "Good Scrutiny Guide" (CfPS <https://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfPS-Good-Scrutiny-Guide-v5-WEB-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>) and "A Councillor's Workbook on Scrutiny" (LGA https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2064_Scrutiny%20for%20councillors_03_1.pdf) tell a story of acting as a critical friend and gathering evidence by looking at sources of data from within the everyday workings of the council, rather than just reports. As a recommendation I believe asking all Scrutiny Members and interested parties (aspiring Scrutiny Members!) to read and carry out the Challenges in the Councillor's Workbook would go some way to improve member engagement in scrutiny. The external scrutiny review from two years ago seemed to suggest that we look too much at officer reports and not enough at council decisions - and I think this has continued. I know of one instance where a cabinet member attended scrutiny this last year and I believe this should be a more regular occurrence. Not for knuckle wrapping, but for genuinely open conversation about how decisions are made, how the actions are then carried out by officers, and what measures are in place to ensure they are effective.

Good and relative.

I think that I don't have sufficient overview to compare and contrast the previous groups with the current ones. Have some dialogue with partner agencies and some performance review matters fallen by the wayside?

Do you know how to get items considered for a scrutiny group work programme?

Yes.

Yes

I have not yet, although I will find out if necessary

Yes

Yes

My understanding is that I complete a scrutiny matrix form and send it to democratic services.

Yes, and the new form is better.

Yes, thanks to Tina's help in understanding what to do. However, maybe terminology could be changed to make it more user-friendly. Calling it a matrix does not convey the idea that it is a request form to complete.

A reminder would help.

I think that you have been clear about how to get items considered. I think we Cllrs need to be reminded perhaps each year or half year!

Do you feel there are any barriers to getting an item considered for a scrutiny group work programme?

I can't cite particular examples but the tension I refer to at point 1 might lead to the impression that if the same group of people are gate-keeping what can go forward for scrutiny as are providing the information to the scrutiny panel are also doing the delivering there is at least the possibility that there may be a perceived conflict in the process. Issues such as resources etc are important and may be a legitimate barrier to some more extensive or time-consuming matters.

Now the matrix is simplified, the process is more understandable and less bureaucratic than it was.

No

No

My experience of using the matrix application was that it was overly bureaucratic and officious. Having fewer committees means it takes longer to get matters, that may time-pressing matters, onto the relevant agenda as needs to go through COG first before getting onto the relevant committee.

A process that requires the overview committee to consider an item and then waiting for a scrutiny group to consider it will always be a slow and unresponsive way to address any issue.

It's the timetable really - capacity issue I suppose. I don't think any of the ones I have raised have been rejected though.

I have only tried this once and my request was accepted and is now part of the work programme. So far, I haven't been aware of any barriers but I hope that if requests are turned down a proper explanation for the reasons will be given with the opportunity for the proposer to challenge the decision or make appropriate changes.

No

Do you feel that you have sufficient knowledge and understanding about scrutiny to fully participate?

Yes

Yes

Not yet, but I am gaining experience all of the time

Yes

Yes

I've been an active participant in training programmes. I'm willing to continue to continuously improve my knowledge to better serve the residents who elected me.

I'm not on any of the scrutiny groups. I would probably feel OK to participate if I was. Maybe there needs to be more opportunity for councillors not on the groups to get involved, e.g. more invitations to provide evidence and/or opportunity to ask questions.

Yes I think so if it concerns a topic that I am familiar with. Less so if it is a topic I have little knowledge about.

Getting there.

Yes I understand how scrutiny works. Much also hinges on the inclusivity of the Chair which is good in Community Scrutiny. Don't know about others.

Do you have any observations to make about the frequency, timing and content of scrutiny meetings (bearing in mind the challenges and resource constraints the Council faces)?

I think they are largely okay, there may be some scope where the subject is complex or time consuming for interim reports to be sent out to group members rather than a hold a meeting but this is a small point or save everything for the next meeting. I would say that whilst the quality of what we receive in terms of reports etc (in my experience in any event) is excellent there is a danger that long reports, supported

by long and detailed presentations can reduce the amount of time left in meetings for the members to actually discuss the pertinent issues. "Death by Powerpoint" is a cliché but I think it applies here sometimes. A long report should need only a short presentation (we should assume members have read it) maybe just highlighting the key questions, a more succinct report may justify a more comprehensive presentation. Too much information just means that members may not be able to pick through it to the bits that really matter.

Unfortunately, that is the issue, which is difficult to countermand, i.e. if more resources were available then the meetings could be more frequent. It is a question of the priority given to scrutiny. Some Councils devote more resources to it, some less. Ideally, it would be better if there were, say, 6 mtgs a year. That does not necessarily mean more topics, but maybe better comprehensive follow-ups to get to the nub of an issue. If scrutiny resulted in something being improved or made more efficient then it may help save the Council money.

No

No

Further to comments above re feeling under-utilised I would be happy to meet more regularly with fuller agendas. We had the diversity policy on the last communities agenda. This was an almost complete waste of time as very little had been done on it prior to the meeting. Now it needs to come back to a future meeting. Effect is we wasted an agenda 'slot' on it that should have been used for something else.

My understanding is that the meeting arrangements have been shifted significantly because of the pandemic. I still feel many scrutiny items are the process of being "seen" to review the same subjects each year rather than a process of challenging actual issues of poor performance and concern.

No

Nearly half of my tenure as a councillor so far has been under exceptional circumstance so it is hard to make a judgement about frequency and timing. However, I do think that scrutiny is a vital part of the council work so maybe should be frequent, e.g. every couple of months with regular updates concerning any work going on even if it is not on the agenda for discussion at a particular meeting. If the meetings were more frequent maybe there could be the option for holding them on different days and at different times to allow everyone a chance to attend at some time if they are normally constrained by work, family or other council commitments. For example, they often clash with Parish Council meetings that I would like to be able to attend. Again, the YouTube recordings are invaluable.

3/4 weeks. Matters that will help to improve resident's quality of life.

Is there anything else you would like the review of scrutiny to take into account?

I think there are different kinds of scrutiny - strategic direction and ongoing relevance of strategies, addressing identified problems, delivery and performance, these may require slightly different approaches and may elicit different outcomes. You might conclude a strategy is no longer entirely relevant or needs tweaking and this would be a longer term outcome and a different process perhaps than identifying why a particular service is not hitting its targets. Perhaps some communication of the potential different types of scrutiny and desirable outcomes could be included in the induction or terms of reference of the committees. Hope that makes sense!

Too much time is taken up with officer presentation which leaves less time for scrutiny within a meeting. A 5 min presentation is plenty, highlighting a few points within the report that is submitted with the agenda. There is no need for officers' presentation to take 20-30 mins. Better for the questions to prompt answers from officers, rather than a long discourse. Better to have a 2-way conversation. Hopefully, that will allow for shorter meetings, as it is for Members to decide the issues to be addressed. It may be that an officer is spending a long time talking about something which is not being questioned. Maybe interim informal conversations between officers and chairmen between meetings may help focus a future conversation to ensure it is relevant to the issue requested.

No

I would love to see more of public engagement in our discussions and I think there are many interest groups that would like to be involved. I don't think there is an obvious point at which this can be offered up. When can these suggestions be made?

No

Why councillors (with employees enabling them) use council meetings to trigger scrutiny debate rather than the process of requesting scrutiny discussion. Also, demonstrate what the new system has achieved as an improvement that makes it better than the previous system

Possibly provide the opportunity to have input into other scrutiny groups if you are not a member but have a particular interest in any topic. This is perhaps more relevant to minority parties who may not have representation on a particular group.

I feel that if scrutiny is to work it might be helpful to have a request for input from all councillors on particular matters and some summary of what is to be decided in the Councillor's Connection. (I do think hard decisions are required from this process).

I have no other comments except that the new system was expounded by the review team as shifting to scrutinising topics with Cabinet Members rather than officers. I took that to mean taking some pressure off officers to produce full reports. I'm not sure how realistic this was or how far our process should shift.

I have given this subject much thought over the last couple of years and I believe that I have given the new arrangement a reasonable opportunity to bed in, albeit impacted by the new appalling normal of video meetings, which I cannot get

comfortable with. I have to say, on balance, I would scrap the Cabinet and Scrutiny model. Perhaps, I am biased working within a Committee based system in two other local authorities, Notts CC and Bingham TC, but I find the process more satisfying overall and interestingly, where there is a comparison on a like for like, eg, finance matters, I feel more involved and relevant. It is worth noting, our colleagues at Newark & Sherwood DC reverted back to a Committee system a few years ago and have recently rejected an attempt by the Leadership to re-introduce a Cabinet model. I'm not sure it would take a gargantuan effort to change the system, however, whether the more fundamental agenda of creating one or more Unitary Authorities would make this issue irrelevant, remains to be seen.