

## **Scrutiny Commission Statement to Annual Council – 12 May 2026**

Good scrutiny is an essential part of the Council’s governance framework and is integral to decision making. Scrutiny Commission fulfils the statutory responsibilities placed on local authorities to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken and plays a vital role in influencing services and shaping policies and plans that affect our residents and businesses.

Scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge.
- Amplify the voice and concerns of the public.
- Be led by independent objective Members.
- Drive improvement in public services.

Scrutiny has a range of statutory functions, which form the foundation of its work. Scrutiny may consider any issues that affects ‘the area or the area’s inhabitants’, scrutiny also has the power to:

- Access information from multiple sources
- Require the attendance of the Executive and senior Officers to be held to account or give evidence.
- Require a response to its recommendations.
- Call-in the decisions of Executive Members.

### **Scrutiny 2025/26**

#### **Scrutiny Commission**

Over the year Scrutiny Members have contributed to policy development, reviewed, and scrutinised Cabinet Executive decisions. Scrutiny Commission has also considered the following work topics:

**Kerbside Waste Collection Policy and Food Waste Provision** – Scrutiny endorsed extending the ‘no side waste’ rule to include cardboard, meaning all cardboard must go inside the recycling bin. The change supports safer collections. Capacity concerns were noted; residents can request larger bins or buy additional capacity where needed.

Members noted the food waste kit for households and welcomed confirmation that assisted collections will be available for vulnerable residents.

Scrutiny asked for stronger promotion of composting guidance and clear communications to residents about the new arrangements. Members also requested that food waste performance measures be shared with the Corporate Performance Working Group for ongoing monitoring.

## **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**

Scrutiny invited all non-executive Members to consider the draft proposal '*The Case for Three Unitary Councils in a Future Leicestershire & Rutland*'. The North, City, South proposal responds to the Government's instruction to reorganise and reduce the number of councils in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. It proposes three equally-sized unitary councils to deliver all council services to residents.

Commission Members provided a collective response for Cabinet to consider before the final proposal was submitted to Government. Scrutiny Commission has also requested early involvement in the next stage of LGR and Devolution once the Government has announced its chosen proposal including:

- a clear blueprint for implementation.
- an understanding of actions already taken by councils to share resources and align policies and terms.
- details of the learning and development being provided to staff to prepare them for the merger.

It is crucial that Scrutiny can make a meaningful contribution to the development of future plans and implementation of LGR. LGR was also considered as part of the budget work outlined below.

**Budget 2026/27** - In January a comprehensive overview session provided background and context to the Council's draft budget proposals, setting the scene for robust scrutiny and questioning of Cabinet Executive Members.

- Council Tax - Scrutiny Members held an in-depth discussion on the proposal to increase council tax by 2.99%. The debate reflected a balance between recognising the financial pressures faced by residents and the significant budgetary demands on the authority.

Several Members highlighted that households continue to experience cost of living pressures, including rising food, energy, and housing costs. They emphasised that even a modest percentage increase in council tax can have a noticeable impact on already stretched family budgets. Some Members argued that the Council should explore further internal efficiencies, spending

restraints, the use of reserves, or alternative council tax options before placing additional financial burdens on residents.

Other Members acknowledged that unlike previous years, the council has received a three-year settlement, providing a degree of stability beyond 2026/27. However, uncertainty remains in the later years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation presents further risk. and uncertainty around the future funding levels. Members recognised that demand for council services is likely to increase and that adequate funding is required to protect services.

- Hardship Reserve – Scrutiny Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that appropriate funds and schemes are available to mitigate potential hardship arising from the current economic climate. In light of the ongoing cost of living crisis Members encouraged Cabinet to ensure the reserve remains sufficient to support residents in need. Scrutiny would welcome the opportunity to examine the level and effectiveness of support provided through the council tax support and discretionary housing payment schemes. Scrutiny looks forward to prioritising this work following Annual Council and working with Cabinet Members and Officers.
- LGR - Members acknowledged that the Council is operating in a period of significant change and considerable uncertainty until the chosen proposal is confirmed later in the year. Scrutiny noted there is a small but notable risk of delay to LGR, which could affect the Council's future priorities and spending plans.

A key issue raised was the Council's legacy and long-term ambition. Members asked Cabinet Members to set out their intended portfolio legacies and urged early discussions and plans so these ambitions can be embedded within future plans. Members also noted that further limits on using reserves, while prudent, could reduce the Council's flexibility to deliver a meaningful legacy.

Scrutiny recognises ongoing recruitment and capacity pressures. LGR raises further concerns regarding the Council's ability to manage the transition without placing additional pressure on the existing workforce.

Scrutiny recommends that Cabinet establishes a clear legacy plan without delay. This should include the creation of a cross party legacy working group, ensuring that Members from across the Council can contribute to shaping and safeguarding the Council's long-term legacy

Scrutiny will continue to provide rigorous, constructive challenge to ensure the Council remains sustainable, drives improvement and protects the most vulnerable.

- Housing and Homelessness - Scrutiny acknowledges that rising homelessness and increased demand for temporary accommodation present the biggest risk to the Housing and Homelessness service. The proposed budget included £500,000 for homelessness prevention, which has broad cross-party support. However, Members consider this amount is only a short-term fix, and that actual costs are likely to exceed this by year-end. Scrutiny welcomes the assurances that if need and opportunity arose more funds would be made available.

To fully understand the scale and nature of the pressures, Scrutiny looks forward to examining the overall cost of homelessness, the balance between government and council funding, service user data and actions aligned with the homelessness strategy later in the year.

- Utilisation of Reserves – Members were broadly supportive of making more ambitious use of Council reserves to enable bold and innovative projects that deliver meaningful outcomes for residents. Portfolio Holders were asked to reflect on their legacy within their areas of responsibility, with changes to devolution, Scrutiny encouraged Cabinet to be more proactive and imaginative in future plans. Scrutiny welcomes the opportunity to be involved in shaping and challenging its future proposals.
- Community Services - Scrutiny is supportive of the work of the Community Services team and the work they do in prevention, including working with young people on healthy relationships, domestic abuse and sanctuary schemes. Scrutiny would welcome a further update on this important work later in the year.

Scrutiny thanks Portfolio Holders for their comprehensive overviews of budget priorities and challenges and commends officers for their work on the budget planning process.

### Task & Finish and Working Groups

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman led meetings which considered the following:

**Review of Cabinet Lead and Support Members** – Scrutiny questioned the Leader and the Chief Executive about the purpose of the Cabinet Lead and Support Member roles and the value they add. While some roles are high profile (for example, the Youth Council Lead), Members noted that two additional roles have been introduced, increasing the total to five. Lead Members receive an allowance of £1,500 and Support Members receive £750 per year.

A Task and Finish Group was established to review the effectiveness and value of these roles. Ahead of its first meeting, all Lead and Support Members were asked to complete a questionnaire. Scrutiny Members were also provided with a schedule of

current roles, including the relevant portfolio holder, the allowance payable, and the role profile.

The questionnaire covered seven areas: understanding the role in practice; time and commitment; delivery and outcomes; value for money; working with the portfolio holder; working with officers; and overall reflections, including what has worked well and what should change.

Scrutiny thanks the Cabinet Lead and Support Members for attending the meeting and presenting their feedback from the questionnaire.

Scrutiny determined that further work is required on this review and will continue to examine this following Annual Council before presenting its findings to Cabinet Executive.

**Corporate Performance Working Group (iPlan)** – iPlan is used to monitor service planning, project management, risk management and progress against the Blaby District Plan.

#### Overview and concerns raised

For the second consecutive year, Scrutiny has raised concerns about the quality and completeness of information recorded in iPlan. Last year, Scrutiny advised Cabinet that insufficient data was being entered. At the end of 2025, Scrutiny paused its review of performance measures to allow further discussions with senior officers about the challenges faced by the Working Group.

#### Internal Audit findings

This year, the Council's Internal Audit service issued a limited assurance opinion and identified the following issues:

- Actions and measures should link to the strategic themes within the Blaby District Plan.
- A more robust and consistent process should be implemented for monitoring iPlan performance data.
- Targets, status and values should be recorded for each measure and project to ensure consistent and effective monitoring.

#### Response and next steps

Scrutiny notes the officer responses set out in the Internal Audit report and the work underway to address the issues raised. Scrutiny have extended an invitation to the Portfolio Holder and look forward to welcoming them to attend a future Scrutiny meeting to examine the effectiveness of iPlan together.

Since the budget meeting in January, Scrutiny has been given access to a wider set of measures, which it will consider at its meeting on 6 May 2026. Scrutiny thanks senior officers for enabling this and the continued support of the Business Systems, Performance & Information Manager.

**Health and Wellbeing of Staff** – Phase 2 of Scrutiny’s examination into staff sickness levels and mental health support began by considering data presented by officers including a questionnaire sent to all staff. Scrutiny looks forward to examining the results of the survey and considering actions being put in place to support our officers.

Non-executive Members also took part and were consulted on the following work topics:

- Examination of Capital Programme Projects 2026/27
- Annual Complaints Report
- Lightbulb
- Health and Leisure Services

### Scrutiny Work Programme

All non-executive Members were invited to attend a Scrutiny Workshop to share and discuss topics that they would like Scrutiny to consider for inclusion in the Work Programme. We encourage Member’s feedback and suggestions for work topics throughout the year, to ensure that Scrutiny are considering priorities that are valuable and produce worthwhile outcomes. Additionally, all non-executive Members are invited to express their interest in chairing a task and finish group.

### Number of Meetings held

Over the course of the year Members took part in 21 meetings.

### Working with Scrutiny effectively

Effective scrutiny depends on open and constructive engagement between Scrutiny, Cabinet Members and officers. Providing timely, accurate and comprehensive information enables informed discussion, meaningful challenge and well-evidenced recommendations.

Early sharing of information also supports better preparation, reduces duplication, and enables Scrutiny to focus on the most significant risks, impacts and outcomes for residents. Clear explanations of options, assumptions, financial implications and performance data allow Members to add value to the decision-making process.

Scrutiny Commissioners will continue to work constructively with the Leader, Cabinet Members and senior officers to support effective information sharing and positive working relationships.

Scrutiny is supportive of pre-decision scrutiny as it provides an opportunity for Members to influence decisions, challenge assumptions and assess risks associated with the implementation of those decisions. Scrutiny welcomes this continued approach in the new municipal year.

We would like to thank all colleagues for their contribution to the work of Scrutiny Commission and its Work Groups this year.

### A tribute to Geoff Welsh

In closing, Scrutiny would like to pay tribute to Geoff Welsh, a former Councillor and Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission, who sadly passed away on 9 April 2026.

Geoff was one of our longest-serving District Councillors, having served as a Member of the Council from May 1995 until his departure on 7 November 2023. He was Chairman and a Commissioner of the Scrutiny Commission from its inception in May 2000. He led many successful working groups and, under his stewardship, Scrutiny was one of only three public bodies shortlisted for the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Awards in the 2010 Scrutiny Team of the Year category, with our work being Highly Commended.

Geoff was a true champion of scrutiny, dedicating many years of service to strengthening accountability and improving outcomes for residents.

Cllr. Nick Brown - Scrutiny Commission Chairman  
Cllr. Neil Wright – Scrutiny Commission Vice-Chairman