

Scrutiny Introductory Report – 2023-24

What is scrutiny?

The term ‘scrutiny’ means ‘**examine carefully, rummage through odds and ends.**’ In the context of local government Scrutiny’s role is to research and examine policies and decisions to assess whether they could be improved or strengthened to deliver better services for residents and visitors to Tamworth. Scrutiny is often referred to as the Council’s ‘critical friend’, its purpose is to provide constructive criticism in order to continually seek improvements to services, secure better decisions and realise better outcomes.

Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
- Drive improvement in public services.

Scrutiny committees cannot make decisions but can offer recommendations to cabinet and officers to be considered when making their decisions.

What Scrutiny at Tamworth Council looks like?

There are three main overview and scrutiny committees and this year each Committee welcomed a new Chair. The Committees’ role is to hold the Executive to account and support the work of the Executive and the performance delivery of the Council as a whole. These are shown diagrammatically below:



Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny

- Quarterly performance reports
- Leisure
- Voluntary Sector
- Non HRA Housing
- Disability Service
- Social Care
- Elderly and Vulnerable People Services



Infrastructure Safety and Growth Scrutiny

- Infrastructure
- Education
- Employment/Inward Investment
- Town Centre
- Open Space and Play
- Public space protection orders



Corporate Scrutiny

- Forward Plan
- Corporate Plan
- Major Council led projects
- Investment Strategy
- HRA Function
- Local Authority Trading Company's activity and Performance



These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Executive and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery. Overview and scrutiny committees also monitor the decisions of the Executive.

Scrutiny Committees can 'call-in' a decision which has been made by the Executive but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Executive reconsider the decision. They may also be consulted by the Executive or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

There is a further committee which meets up to twice a year; the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee. That Committee's purpose is to consider the budget proposals being put forward by the Executive and make any comments or recommendations. The committee is made up of all non-Executive members of the Council/

The Council's Procedure Rules state that each of the three main Scrutiny Committees should meet at least 4 times a year. During 2022/2023 the Scrutiny Committee met an average of 8 times.

Within each Scrutiny committee there can be a number of focussed working groups. Each Committee has a work plan detailing the matters being considered by the committee and future items.

Each Scrutiny Committee decides its workplan for the upcoming year, however throughout the year further items can be added to the plan, this can be through items being identified from the forward plan or by the agreement of committee members.

Training for Members

The Council provides induction and ongoing training which is open to all members. This covers areas to help familiarise Councillors with each service area / directorate of the Council, as well as training aimed to support Councillors in carrying out their roles on Committees; Planning, Licensing, Audit & Governance as well as Scrutiny training. As well as the Committee focussed training, training sessions are provided in person, or on TEAMS and in some cases, through online modules on safeguarding, equality & diversity, treasury management, and on the member code of conduct. Additionally, where specific topical areas are identified within the year further training and briefings are provided, as well as Councillors being sign-posted to support available through the Local Government Association.

This year the Council invested in Scrutiny training from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Two sessions were run, one for Chairs and Vice-Chairs and one for Scrutiny Committee Members (non-committee Members were also invited to the training.)

A one stop portal is available to Councillors where key training and other resources can be found; known as 'Memberzone'