

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21



# Foreword by the Scrutiny Commissioners

**During 2020/21 the Covid-19 pandemic has dominated our lives and we have seen unprecedented changes across the country to tackle the outbreak. This has been a very difficult time, and everyone has and continues to be affected in some way. The County Council has been working extremely hard to help and support its residents and businesses, and staff have quickly adapted their working practices to ensure the continued operation of services. County Council officers at all levels have worked tirelessly to support and protect Leicestershire residents and we wish to thank them for all their hard work.**

The challenge of overview and scrutiny has always been crucial in supporting the delivery of high quality services. This work has continued throughout 2020/21 despite difficulties arising from the pandemic.

The introduction of new, temporary legislation enabled councils to hold meetings remotely. Therefore, since April 2020 all scrutiny meetings have been held virtually and webcast live. This has allowed the public to still engage in the process whilst following government advice to stay at home. It has also ensured all critical decisions on the delivery of Council services have continued to be made in a way that is both transparent and accessible to the public with Scrutiny able to play its key role in that process.

The level of public interest in our work has continued to grow, with a record number of questions being asked at our meetings: 72 from members of the public and 39 from elected members. We hope to see this continue in 2021.

We have continued to hold our Cabinet colleagues to account for the performance and delivery of services. We are grateful for their attendance at our meetings to answer our questions. We are also thankful for the input of partners and stakeholders and, as always, for the support and advice of officers.

This particular Annual Report marks the conclusion of the activities of Overview and Scrutiny over the last four years of this Council. It is therefore the appropriate time to thank all our fellow members who have served on Committees and Review Panels during this time. We should also particularly wish to thank those members who have contributed to Overview and Scrutiny who did not stand or get re-elected in the May County Council election and this includes both Scrutiny members and members of the Cabinet who have supported our work.

This report is not a complete commentary of everything we have achieved but a summary of some key highlights of our work during 2020/21 and of what we anticipate will be undertaken during the coming year. We hope you enjoy reading it. You can find out more about our meetings [here](#) and view a meeting on the Council's YouTube channel [here](#). All scrutiny meetings are open to the public and if you would like to get involved, the scrutiny team's contact details are at the end of this report.



Simon Galton CC



Peter Bedford CC



Terri Eynon CC



Rosita Page CC

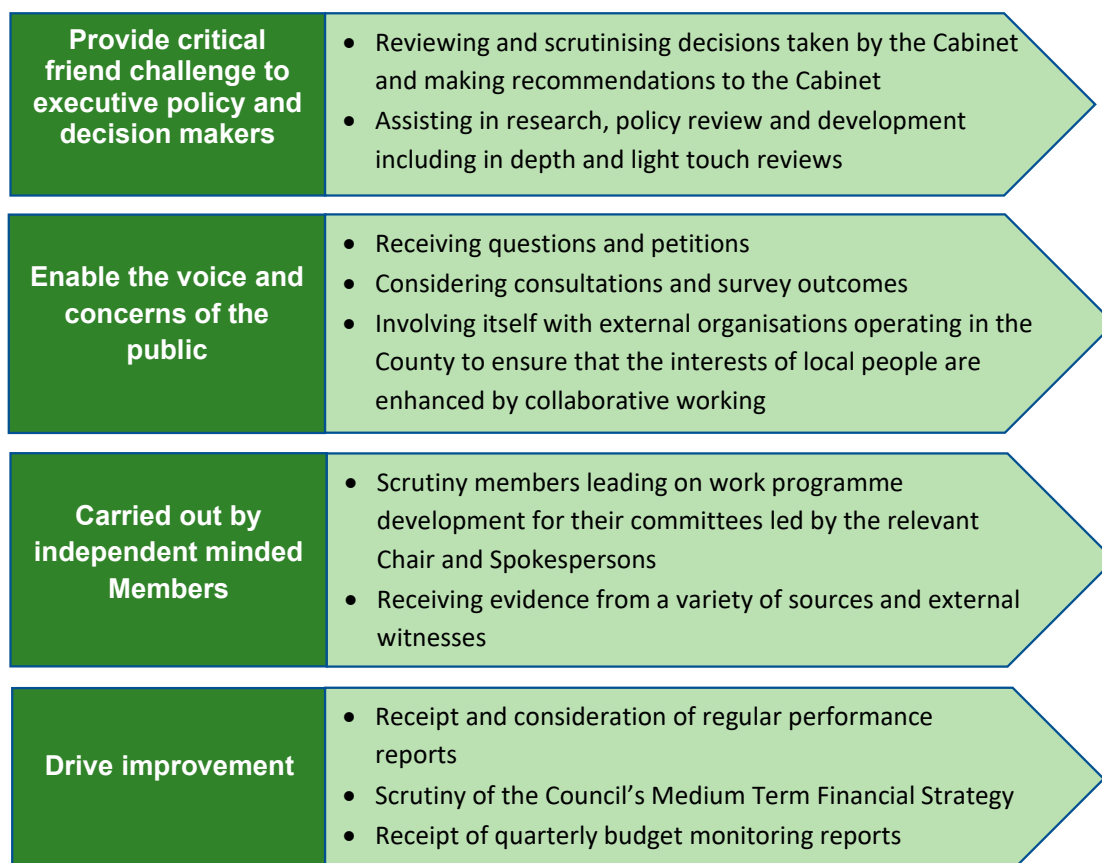
**The four Scrutiny Commissioners are responsible for leading the Overview and Scrutiny process, deciding on priority issues for Overview and Scrutiny Committees and areas that merit review by a Scrutiny Panel.**

# What is Overview and Scrutiny?

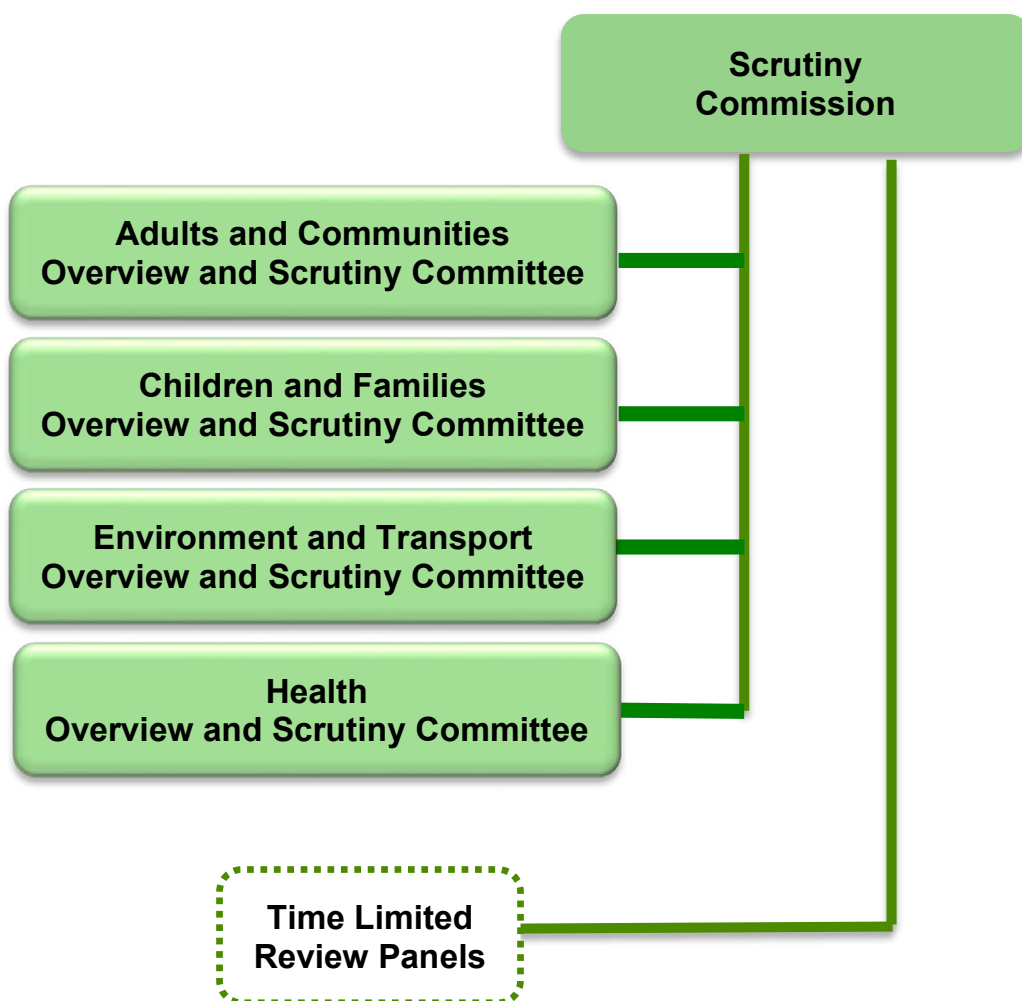
The purpose of overview and scrutiny is to hold decision makers such as the Cabinet to account for decisions they have made or are planning to make, to monitor the performance of services and the outcomes delivered for the residents of Leicestershire, and to assist the County Council and the Cabinet in the development of its budget and policy framework. As well as scrutinising the work of the County Council and the Cabinet, overview and scrutiny has an important statutory role in the scrutiny of health and crime and disorder.

Scrutiny is a statutory requirement for local authorities that, like Leicestershire County Council, operate a Leader and Cabinet (Executive) model of decision making. Overview and Scrutiny committees do not make decisions but instead monitor and influence the Council's Cabinet which does. The overview and scrutiny role, carried out by non-Cabinet members, is designed to support the work of the Council and its Cabinet.

We have embedded in our approach to scrutiny the four principles of good scrutiny developed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny as follows:



In Leicestershire all scrutiny work is carried out by the Scrutiny Commission, the lead Overview and Scrutiny body, and four service-based Committees as set out below.

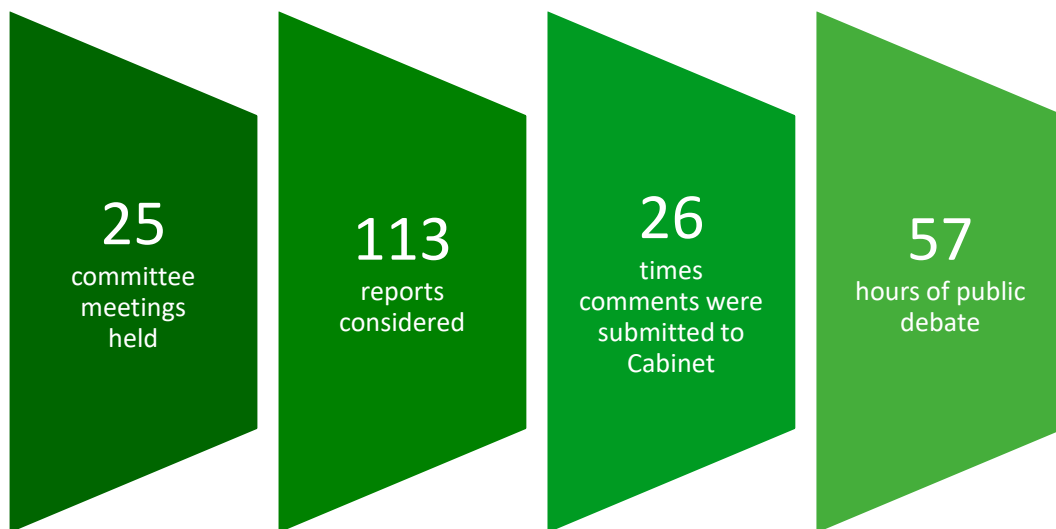


In addition to the committee-based work they carry out, Overview and Scrutiny Committees can also initiate time limited task and finish work to look at a particular issue in more detail. Scrutiny Review Panels, as they are known, are usually made up of five members and their recommendations, which may suggest a change in policy or service provision, are submitted to the relevant parent committee prior to consideration by the Cabinet.

All Overview and Scrutiny meetings are held in public. Attendance and involvement of the public is actively encouraged. This can include questions or petitions to be put at our meetings or suggestions for our work programme.

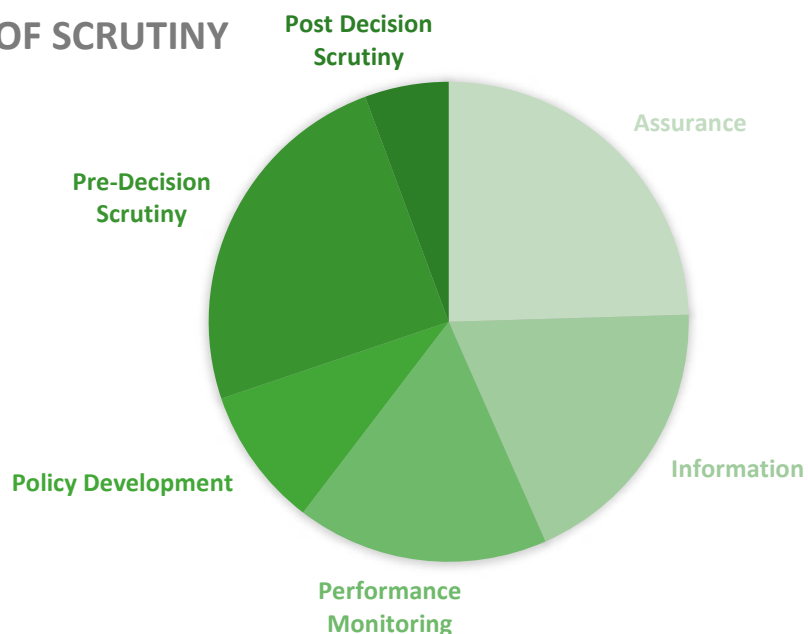
For further information about the Overview and Scrutiny process and how you can get involved please visit our website: [www.leicestershire.gov.uk/overview-and-scrutiny](http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/overview-and-scrutiny)

# Overview and Scrutiny activity in 2020/21 at a glance



The chart below provides an overview of the breadth of scrutiny work undertaken this year.

## TYPES OF SCRUTINY



The Council's webcast of Scrutiny meetings received 3,627 views.



We welcomed questions, 111 in total, on some of these subjects from both the public and other elected members.



Representatives from the following organisations have taken part in our meetings or submitted representations:

- Leicestershire Police
- Severn Trent Water
- The Local Resilience Forum
- The Environment Agency
- The NHS
- Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CCGs
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire CCGs
- District Councils
- Members of the Public affected by Flooding events
- Healthwatch
- The Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership
- Leicester City Council
- Leicester and Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board

# 1.

## The Scrutiny Commission

**The Scrutiny Commission is the lead Overview and Scrutiny body. It looks at the Council's budget and performance, as well as the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), which is responsible for economic and strategic transport matters covering the County and Leicester City. The Commission also looks at issues that fall within the remit of more than one Overview and Scrutiny Committee and acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

### Highlights

#### **Covid-19 Impact, Response and Financial Implications**

Throughout the year the Scrutiny Commission received several reports on the Council's Covid-19 response, plans for recovery and the reinstatement of services, and the financial implications for both the immediate and longer term.

There was much uncertainty in the early months of 2020 and financial pressures of up to £64m were estimated, resulting from possible losses of council tax and business rates income and extra costs for services such as home to school transport. We supported the use of reserves and a drastic reduction in the Council's capital programme to help address some of the difficulties faced. We later heard that the pandemic was having a negative effect on the Council's own commercial services which faces an uncertain future. We noted that a full review would be undertaken and we will be considering some of the implications of that in 2021.

Later in the year, despite financial pressures, we were pleased to hear that the Council had provided grants for local businesses and support for free school meals, as well as investing in IT equipment to support staff working from home, ensuring Council services continued during the national and local lockdowns.

#### **Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP)**

The Commission heard from both the Chief Executive of the LLEP and the Chair of the LLEP Board regarding the economic impact of Covid-19 and national estimates of 1 in 10 jobs being lost which could equate to as many as 50,000 job losses across Leicester and Leicestershire.

We noted that the LLEP was facilitating and coordinating efforts across the region to support SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) that dominate the Leicestershire economy. These businesses had been particularly hard hit by recent events. The Commission welcomed the SME business grants that would help them build resilience in the short to medium term. Looking to the future, we asked that the LLEP continue to lobby Government to change regulations which were over bureaucratic and excessively burdened SMEs.



We noted that the pandemic had disproportionately affected 18 to 24 year olds and discussed steps being taken by the Skills Advisory Council to respond. We specifically sought reassurance that progress made to support those with learning difficulties or mental health issues enter the job market would not be lost in the Covid-19 response.

## **Tourism (Place Marketing) in Leicester and Leicestershire**

We received an update on the work of the Place Marketing Organisation for Leicester and Leicestershire and the effects of the national and local lockdowns on the tourism sector. The Commission welcomed the work of the PMOs Inward Investment Team together with the LLEP to support local businesses. We discussed the need to raise awareness of what Leicestershire had to offer and whilst much was done through website promotions and social media, we felt this relied too heavily on people choosing to research the area. Post Covid-19, the Commission suggested that a more proactive approach was needed to reach out to new potential visitors and investors to actively encourage them to come to the area.

We questioned how funding had been split across each district area and how this had translated into increased visitors. Without quantifiable evidence to show the effect of promotional activities, it was difficult to assess where and how localities might improve their local offer. We asked that this be improved when we receive our next update in 2021.

## **Air Quality and Health**

The Scrutiny Commission welcomed the opportunity to comment on work being undertaken with partners to develop a Leicestershire Air Quality and Health Action Plan. We highlighted the disjointed approach imposed by Government across two tier authorities on this issue. We also emphasised the conflict this placed on district councils who had to balance air quality management with delivery of increased housing numbers set by Government. The Commission discussed how growth often came at the cost of air quality and how improved data could be used to support future planning decisions. However, limits on district council resources meant undertaking further monitoring would be difficult. Without support from central government, the Commission felt it would be hard for local planning authorities to give due weight to air quality when considering planning applications under current planning law. We asked that a clear explanation of these barriers and conflicting responsibilities be included in the Plan.

Despite these difficulties we agreed the County Council would need to be more direct and clear about actions required to address air quality within district council local plans, which would set the tone for future developments, and should seek to bring developers on board wherever possible.

## **Planning for the Future White Paper**

We had an excellent discussion on the Government's White Paper and commented on the Council's draft response to the consultation. We felt the White Paper was overly focused on the shortcomings of the current planning system but was silent on the failures of developers to build when planning permission was granted (land banking), an issue generally left uncontrolled.

The Commission raised concerns about plans to allocate land for growth and the automatic granting of outline planning permission to build on such land. We felt this would place

significant pressure on local plan processes and were concerned that the public did not engage in that process, instead only becoming involved when a planning application affected their immediate area. The lack of resources to undertake proper impact assessments and seek appropriate mitigations, such as highway improvements, as part of the local plan process would also have a detrimental impact on communities in the long term.

Overall, we felt there was too much focus on increasing the number of houses built and insufficient regard given to issues such as climate change and environmental sustainability, homelessness and affordable social housing. The Scrutiny Commission asked that the Council's response to the consultation be strengthened on these issues and were pleased that all our comments were taken on board by the Cabinet.

## **Draft Leicester City Local Plan 2020 to 2036**

In November the Commission considered and commented on Leicester City Council's draft Local Plan for 2020-2036. We had a full and lengthy discussion and were grateful to hear from Mr Butterworth, Head of Planning at the City Council. Whilst recognising that capacity and regeneration opportunities in the City were limited, we raised concerns about the number of houses to be redistributed to Leicestershire districts.

The Commission raised a number of questions around the potential overdevelopment of university accommodation, the impact of Covid-19 on the level of retail provision and the seemingly uneven distribution of employment facilities between the City and County (warehousing and distribution facilities attracting lower paid jobs being primarily located in the County and office space attracting higher paid jobs being focused in the City). We also discussed concerns about transport infrastructure and connections in and out of the City, and the need to ensure the City's growth plans were supported by appropriate transport interventions.

We invited Mr Butterworth to return to a future meeting as part of the next stage of the local plan consultation process.

## **East Midlands Development Corporation 'Interim Vehicle (DEVCO)' and Freeport Proposals**

The Commission looked at the proposals for the East Midlands Development Corporation and the establishment of an interim vehicle prior to a statutory corporation being created by Parliament. We supported the principle of looking at and coordinating growth developments across county boundaries and agreed the Council and its partners were treading new ground which could reap significant benefits for the area in the long term.

Given current national spending pressures we highlighted the risk of the Government withdrawing funding for the programme and questioned whether, given the Council's own financial investment into the project, an exit strategy had been put in place. We were reassured that this risk had been acknowledged and was being monitored. It was recognised that in such circumstances, Midlands Engine would reassess the scope of the Corporation and what benefits could still be achieved, as in principle, the planned approach was sound. The Government has recently announced that the Freeport bid had been successful, and we will be looking to ensure that appropriate governance structures are put in place to monitor the Board.

## **Strategic Property Energy Strategy 2020 - 2030**

We welcomed the ambitions and targets in the Council's revised Strategic Property Energy Strategy and were pleased to see that they included tangible outcomes which could be measured over time. We discussed the need for all Council policies to take account of environmental impacts, the need to work with partners and influence them to reduce their emissions, and the need to encourage developers to build more energy efficient homes to ensure housing growth in the area did not counteract the good work being done. We are pleased that the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor progress against the Plan.

We raised concerns that some of the Council's emissions had been exported to staff during the last year because of increased home working. We understood this was difficult to monitor and measure but sought reassurance that practical steps were being considered to ensure staff were supported if home working continued.

## **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

We had an interesting discussion with the Leader and Lead Member for Resources at our meeting in January. We welcomed their insight into the national economic position arising from Covid-19 and the disappointing stance of the Government not to pursue the planned Fair Funding Review or address SEN spending pressures. We noted the Cabinet's plan to levy an additional 3% precept for Adult Social Care which would generate a further £9.6m. We acknowledged that this would have a significant impact on Leicestershire's finances which had been severely affected by the pandemic and would help address the likely increase in demand for services as families struggled to cope with its effects. However, the Commission were concerned about the impact such a rise would have on Council taxpayers at this already difficult time.

We felt that, overall, the MTFS represented good financial management but recognised the uncertainties still faced by the Council and the difficulty departments would have delivering savings to meet the shortfall in future years. We supported the Cabinet in its continued pursuit of fair funding and SEN funding, without which there will inevitably be an adverse impact on services to the public.

# 2.

## Adults and Communities

**The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks at issues around adult social care and communities and wellbeing, including issues such as libraries and museums. It also has a role to monitor the work the Health and Wellbeing Board carries out in relation to integrated commissioning.**

### Highlights

#### **Covid-19 Recovery**

In September 2020, we looked at the Adults and Communities Department's interim recovery plans following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the initial proposals for longer term recovery planning in accordance with the Council's overarching Recovery Strategy.

The Director advised us of revisions to national guidance in respect of hospital discharge pathways. This affected funding arrangements for care packages and the assessment process for determining continued healthcare needs. We received assurance that determining the level of need and the most suitable care package remained the highest priority. The Director also confirmed that Home First services continued to be immediately available upon discharge and would be so until the appropriate care package had been put in place.

The Committee heard of the tireless efforts made by staff to respond to and manage the impacts of the crisis despite the significant challenges they faced, and changes made to their workplace arrangements and practices. We expressed thanks and commended their hard work and professional approach that had enabled services to continue to be provided to some of our most vulnerable residents.

#### **Care Homes Sustainability**

Given the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the care homes sector, we have been closely monitoring issues around care home sustainability.

We emphasised the additional difficulties care homes would face if Government funding provided to help manage infection control and rapid testing was not extended beyond March 2021, and if the free PPE scheme ceased at the end of June 2021. The Director acknowledged the risks to resident and staff welfare and to the overall sustainability of the sector. He advised us that it would be difficult to be certain about what support the Council could offer until the Government had confirmed its plans.

The Committee was advised that the local composition of care homes in Leicestershire was mixed which provided a level of resilience if a larger care home group were to collapse. We were reassured that, as well as keeping in regular contact with service providers, the Council also received wider intelligence from a number of other organisations (e.g. other local

authorities, the Care Quality Commission and the emergency services). They were often able to provide a good, up to date indication of any risks present, particularly regarding national organisations.

The Committee agreed the Department should continue to work closely with service providers and other authorities to monitor the situation and provide support wherever possible. We will continue to monitor the position during 2021/22.

### **Status on Support for Communities Managed Libraries**

In September 2020, the Committee received an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Community Managed Libraries (CMLs) and their medium-term sustainability. We also commented on proposed amendments to the support package on offer at that time.

Members commended the level of contingency put in place to provide additional support to CMLs in unforeseen circumstances (e.g. emergency roof repairs or boiler failure). We also welcomed the introduction of an additional one-off grant payment for 2020/21 that CMLs could apply for to support running costs where there had been a shortfall of income due to the pandemic.

The Committee looked at good practice examples of work undertaken by some CMLs and asked officers to ensure these were shared across the library network. We also requested that officers continue to take proactive action to explore further options to support CMLs beyond 2021-22, including looking at any potential alternative premises arrangements. At our suggestion, officers undertook to give further consideration to the mobile service options available to residents of the Barwell community in light of its size.

### **Technology Enabled Care**

We were informed of the results of diagnostic work undertaken to explore opportunities to maximise the use of technology enabled care (TEC) across the adult social care pathway and provided comments on the proposed way forward.

Overall, we were in support of the planned approach. However, we emphasised the need to ensure service users were able to use the technology provided. We were assured that the intended approach would be outcome focussed rather than equipment led. Assessments would be carried out to determine the level of need and capability of each individual to find the most appropriate solution for them. Staff would also receive training to increase their knowledge of the various technologies available which would aid that assessment process. We look forward to receiving further updates as the programme gets underway.

# 3.

## Children and Families

**The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks at issues around social service provision for children and families, educational attainment at schools and academies and youth support services. It also monitors the performance and activities of the Leicestershire Children and Young People's Partnership Board, the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Children's Social Care Panel and any other partnerships as appropriate that are associated with the executive functions outlined above.**

### Highlights

#### **Covid-19 Recovery**

Throughout the year, we have been updated on the Department's response to Covid-19 and its recovery plans for the short, medium and long term. We heard how the Department had reviewed its services to ensure our most vulnerable children and families remained protected and supported during the local and national lockdowns. Most had continued to operate, albeit in a different format, despite the difficulties faced and we were assured that high risk children continued to be safeguarded appropriately. We thank staff in the Department for the work they have undertaken, and families and service users for adapting to the different ways of working.

We were pleased to note the success of working virtually with families, something that would now continue as standard practice where appropriate. The Committee was, however, concerned about the effect not being at school might have on children and we have requested a separate report on this issue.

#### **Children in Need of Help and Protection**

The Committee received an overview of the Department's work in relation to children who required help and protection. We noted that performance at the front door had remained good, despite the impacts of Covid-19. We were also encouraged that the Department had been awarded some growth monies to enable it to recruit to additional social worker posts. The Committee had some concern about the increase in the re-referral rate. We noted that an audit was taking place to understand and address this and we will be receiving a further update on the results in 2021.

#### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection and High Needs Development Plan**

The Committee looked at the findings of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection of local area SEND support which was undertaken in February 2020. We

were concerned that a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was required because of two significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice (namely the absence of a clearly defined joint commissioning strategy for 0-25 SEND provision and systemic weaknesses in the quality of Education Health and Care Plans). However, we were reassured by the many strengths also identified. For example, the understanding of leaders of the services strengths and those areas requiring development, the collaborative work of providers and the early years provision. We welcomed the opportunity to comment on the draft WSOA prior to its approval by the SEND and Inclusion Board. We have subsequently been updated that very good feedback has been received from the Department for Education on overall progress made on the WSOA. Despite some delays due to Covid-19, we were also pleased to hear that it was still anticipated most actions would be completed on schedule.

The Committee received an update on the delivery of the High Needs Block Development Plan. We were encouraged by the significant progress made to date, with many of the planned new provisions being delivered on target. The unfortunate delay in the building programme for two new schools due to the pandemic was noted. We sought assurance that temporary provisions were being delivered to ensure all children had an appropriate school place to meet their needs at the start of the autumn term.

At our meeting in January 2021, we received an update on work taking place across the SEND local area in response to the national, regional and local increase in demand for EHCP (Educational Health and Care Plan) Needs Assessments. We raised concerns that eight complaints had been taken up by the Local Government Ombudsman on behalf of parents, seven of which had been upheld. The Director provided reassurance and detailed the changes to processes and practices that had been made to ensure such issues did not reoccur. This will be an area we continue to monitor.

## **Defining Children and Family Services for the Future Programme**

The Committee has looked at proposals to redefine Children and Family Services for the future with support from external consultants, Newton Europe. In November 2020 we looked at the outcome of an overall diagnostic assessment of the Department and in January 2021 we received an update on the detailed assessment of Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care. We noted the opportunities identified which could produce a net annually recurring benefit of approximately £9.3m over the next four years. The financial challenges faced by the Department are clear and this was therefore good to hear. We raised concerns that whilst seeking efficiencies would be key, focus should always be on delivering positive outcomes for children and families. The Director confirmed this would be the case.

We were reassured that Newton Europe had proven experience of working with public service organisations. We welcomed representatives of the company to one of our meetings where they provided us with further detail on the scope of the work planned. We were informed that work was now entering a pilot phase to test the new ways of working. Over the coming year we will monitor progress and outcomes achieved.

## **Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2022**

We were provided with an update of how the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been implemented since its launch in 2019 and the impact it had achieved thus far. We

acknowledged the importance of the role of elected members as corporate parents and agreed that this should be emphasised to any newly elected members after the County Council elections in May.

### **Children's Innovation Partnership (with Barnados)**

We received an update on the progress of the Children's Innovation Partnership, in particular the residential design brief. We were pleased to note that properties had now been identified and the intention to have two ready for occupation by the end of 2021. It was pleasing to see the financial savings expected to be delivered of between £800,000 - £1m each year. It was also positive that young people who had an interest in design would be identified to work as part of the team to inform the decoration of the buildings.



# 4.

## Environment and Transport

**The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks at the Council's performance against its Environment Strategy, issues around roads and road safety, sustainable transport and waste treatment and recycling. It also acts as the Council's Flood Risk Management Committee.**

### Highlights

#### **COVID-19 Recovery Updates**

The Committee received regular updates regarding actions taken by the Department in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its recovery plans for the longer term. We were pleased that by our September meeting most functions within the Department had resumed, albeit with Covid-19 safety measures in place. We commend officers for their hard work in keeping critical services going throughout.

We requested a report on the impact of the pandemic on School Transport and were assured that, despite limited guidance from Government, the Department had developed a comprehensive 'back to school' plan following the first lockdown, notwithstanding Leicestershire being one of the first counties to start the new school year.

Of key importance to residents was the reopening of Recycling and Household Waste sites from 18 May 2020 using an on-line booking system. We were pleased to note that the system had worked well and had prevented long queues, a significant problem that other authorities had experienced. We requested that the Department consult Members further before any long-term decision was made regarding continuation of the booking system.

We noted the extra cost pressures to the Department due to Covid-19 had been estimated at £6.5million. While there had been areas of savings, extra transport costs (especially related to SEN transport), delays in construction of major projects and increased waste disposal costs had all resulted in additional spending which the Committee is monitoring.

#### **Capital Programme and Works Programme 2021/22.**

A consequence of the pandemic was the pause in the delivery of the capital maintenance programme at the start of the first lockdown. We were pleased that working procedures were quickly reviewed and all maintenance programmes quickly restarted with the exception of surface dressing, such funding being reallocated to alternative restorative treatments such as patching.

It has been clear to us for some time that the decade of underfunding for highway maintenance has resulted in the deterioration of road lining and road studs across the County. We nevertheless welcomed the allocation of an additional £500,000 Government funding, in addition to the Council's original allocation of £1.045m to support the continuation of this

important work. Despite these additional resources being made available, demand remains several times the figure budgeted, thus we support further work by the Council to lobby and bid for more funding to address the deterioration.

In that vein we debated the focus of the capital programme on major road schemes, as opposed to maintaining and improving the existing highway network. The development of Sustainable Urban Extensions, for example, has been promoted by highlighting their close proximity to existing town and urban centres. This in practice should reduce the need for significant additional road schemes as residents would use existing transport networks and local facilities, yet capital schemes such as the A512 were still being developed. We were advised that such schemes were developed to mitigate the impact of future growth and improve the network, though residents may not always see it this way.

## **Road Casualties**

Throughout the year we have monitored road collisions via quarterly performance reports and the Annual Road Casualty Reduction report. During our discussions we expressed concern about the data quality of reported traffic casualties due to changes in the way they are recorded by the Police, which may have resulted in the underreporting of collisions. We were assured by Leicestershire Police that a group had been put in place to address and resolve the problem.

We became troubled by the slight increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured, despite the reduction in traffic on Leicestershire roads. We understand that anecdotally there are more individuals walking and cycling, and that the reduction in traffic on the road, linked to COVID-19, had resulted in increased reports of speeding. We understand that such trends were being considered nationally by Government and we will continue to monitor the situation. We hoped that Council initiatives such as the Community Speed Watch and Speed Enforcement Initiatives would continue to be helpful and welcomed the recent consultation with Members.

## **Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities**

As part of our consideration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Environment and Transport Department we considered in-depth the financial challenges being faced by the Council regarding increases in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transport demand. We noted that growth reflected the continual increase in client numbers and costs arising from increasingly complex needs presented by some service users. We welcomed a joint briefing with our Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee colleagues which set out the expected 10% growth in the service, as well as a 3% increase in transport costs. The briefing provided us with an in-depth understanding of the process of Education, Health and Care plans for those children with SEND and the Council's statutory duties in this regard.

We supported work and initiatives by the County Council to continue to look at how growth could be contained over the duration of the MTFs and expansion of local SEN provision as well as national lobbying regarding the overall cost of SEN provision and transport to Government.

## **Cycling and Walking Strategy**

Members had apprehensions to the proposed introduction of pop-up cycleways. Early on in the pandemic Government had allocated £334,000 to the Council to encourage more people to walk and cycle. As a result, the Council had acted quickly to allocate road space for temporary cycle lanes. We felt that these had not been positively received by all motorists. Going forward we understood that for further allocations of funding, the Government had made it clear that there needed to be appropriate consultation and support within communities for local schemes. Accordingly, we fully support the development of a Cycling and Walking Strategy, as it will allow the Council to bid for any future funding made available by Government in a planned way.

Throughout our discussions we emphasised the importance of separating cyclists and pedestrians where feasible, as we felt shared use caused pedestrians to feel unsafe, while cyclists often felt unsafe on roads. It was further suggested that behaviour programmes need to be set up to look to strengthen the confidence of cyclists and pedestrians on our network. The Committee will be pleased to see the outcome of the ongoing consultation and the draft Cycling and Walking Strategy at a later date.

## **Environmental Performance Report 2019-20 and Greenhouse Gas Report 2019-20**

We welcomed the Environmental Performance Report 2019-20 and Greenhouse Gas Report for 2019-20. We were pleased to note the Council had reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 67% since 2008-9 and was on track to reach Net Zero in its Carbon emissions by 2030. We were pleased to note that the emissions in Leicestershire considered to be under the Council's influence had further reduced as a result of the decrease in the use of coal and gas and an increase in the use of renewables. However, there is still some way to go and so the performance indicator remained rated amber. We were assured that the Council would be addressing the indicator as part of its wider approach to carbon reduction via the Tranche 2 Roadmap that would be developed over the year and focus on the Council's unmeasured emissions and wider Leicestershire emissions.

We also continued to monitor the five outstanding environmental risks, three of which linked to drainage at Recycling and Household Waste sites. We are assured that dialogue was continuing with the Environment Agency regarding improvements and that planned works had been scheduled, but that such works would take time to implement due to the nature of the excavation works and capital financing required.

# 5.

## Health

**The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee looks at the planning and provision of health services in the County and the work of the Council's Public Health Department. It also scrutinises the activities of the Health and Wellbeing Board.**

### Highlights

#### **Covid-19 Response**

We received regular updates from the Director of Public Health regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in Leicestershire including details of which localities had high infection levels, the availability of Covid-19 testing in the County and proposed locations for testing sites. We scrutinised the clarity of messages that were being disseminated to the people of Leicestershire regarding keeping safe from Covid-19 and social distancing and considered how these messages could reach people of all areas and demographics. We recognised the significant pressure placed on Public Health staff and commended them for their support and work.

#### **Public Health Services and Strategies**

During the year we have scrutinised the work of the Council's Public Health Department including the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Service and proposals for recommissioning the Substance Misuse Service.

We gained assurances that the Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Service would meet the needs of male victims as well as female, questioned how the service's performance would be measured and monitored, and requested that further work be undertaken to manage perpetrators and prevent the abuse happening in the first instance.

As the footprint of the Substance Misuse Service was changing so that the City of Leicester would no longer be covered by the Service, we raised concerns that the benefits of partnership working would be lost. The Director provided some reassurance that this would not be the case and that partnership working would still be the priority for all.

In June 2020 we looked at the Council's Sexual Health Strategy for the next three years. We were reassured that the Strategy linked with other relevant strategies relating to, for example, substance misuse and domestic violence, and took into account trends such as the increased use of dating apps and potential changes in people's behaviour during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. We were pleased that consideration was already being given to what sexual health messages could be disseminated post covid-19, particularly to hard to reach groups perhaps using social media.

In November 2020 we looked at the proposed new Healthy Weight Strategy for Leicestershire. We were interested in the proposed 'family approach' to be adopted

rather than focus being on individuals and we were reassured that although the weight management service was only available to those significantly overweight, there was a strong focus on prevention targeted to all. We raised concerns about the impact the Covid-19 lockdown might have had on people's weight and noted the Government had now made weight management more of a priority, especially as this affected the severity of Covid-19 symptoms.

Members made suggestions for making the types of food purchased by the public healthier such as liaising with commercial retailers to reduce the level of advertising and the promotion of unhealthy foods. We also highlighted the need for mental health support to help manage food addictions. Whilst such support was available for patients eligible for bariatric surgery, we acknowledged there was an onus on individuals to want to make changes and seek help as was the case for any addiction.

### **Community Services in Ashby de la Zouch**

During the year the Committee continued to scrutinise the Clinical Commissioning Groups' (CCGs) plans for redesigning Community Services in Leicestershire and their proposals for six Community Hubs based in Coalville, Melton, Hinckley, Loughborough, Market Harborough and Enderby in Blaby District. Due to public interest we paid particular attention to the services available for residents of Ashby de la Zouch and how accessible those services are. The Committee is aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the CCG's proposals for Community Services and we look forward to considering the new proposals in more detail at a future meeting including the plans for Hinckley and Lutterworth.

### **Primary Care Estates Strategy and Section 106 (Developer Contributions)**

Members sought reassurances from the CCGs that in the coming years the necessary health infrastructure would be in place to cater for expected population growth and new housing developments in Leicestershire. We noted work taking place towards the Primary Care Estates Strategy and the introduction of a uniform, streamlined process across all CCGs for claiming Section 106 funding, making the best use of available space and giving in-depth consideration to where new premises should be built. We gained assurances that in future there would be more joint working between health partners and local authorities in regard to planning health infrastructure and identifying need. We will review the final version of the Primary Care Estates Strategy document at a future meeting.

### **Mental Health Liaison Service**

At the request of a member the Committee scrutinised Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) with regards to the liaison mental health services available within emergency departments and general hospital wards designed to meet patients' urgent mental health needs. We particularly focused on the Psycho-oncology service and gained reassurances that patients currently accessing this service would not see a reduction in quality. We noted that there would be some changes to the service, though LPT were expecting to increase the offer for people with psycho-oncological needs, not reduce it.

## **Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire**

The Committee considered reports from Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire (Healthwatch) in relation to patients' experiences of health services in the County and used these reports to hold health providers to account for performance.

During the year the Committee looked at a Healthwatch Special Project regarding the patient experience of accessing and using Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services. The Committee questioned LPT on the Project's findings and was pleased to find that LPT had already put an action plan in place to address the issues raised. LPT specifically provided reassurance that waiting times and crisis response times were now much better, the triage process had also been improved and urgent call backs were now taking place within 2 hours and face to face assessments within 24 hours. We were pleased to note that NHS Improvement had provided intensive support and been impressed by the new CAMHS waiting list management system put in place to determine the minimum level of contact patients required whilst awaiting treatment; a system it now wanted to expand nationally.

The Committee also considered a report from Healthwatch regarding the experience of patients with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) using dental services in Leicester and Leicestershire. As a result of the findings in that report the Chairman requested that NHS England who run dental services submit a report to the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee in response.

## **Joint Health Scrutiny**

Members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee have also attended meetings of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee where issues such as the health system's response to the Covid-19 pandemic were covered in depth. The Committee also fed into the consultation regarding the University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) acute and maternity services reconfiguration and spent some time considering the impact of the potential closure of the Melton Birth Centre. As part of the Joint Committee members received a report regarding errors in the UHL accounts and the UHL Trust Board's decision not to agree the 2019/20 annual accounts as 'true and fair'. Members gained assurances that the errors in the accounts could not occur again because the policies and control procedures at UHL had been strengthened, a training programme for the finance team had been put in place, and an external Finance Improvement Director was now holding UHL to account.

# 6.

## Scrutiny Review Panels

**Scrutiny Reviews represent an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny Members to delve deeper into a particular subject or issue to find out more, speak to the individuals responsible and recommend any ways in which things might be improved at a level of scrutiny not always possible within the time limits and formal setting associated with Committee meetings. These reviews can be light touch or in depth and its recommendations are usually reported to the Cabinet.**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only one previously agreed scrutiny review was undertaken this year – the Flooding Scrutiny Review Panel as detailed below. To ensure departments could focus their resources on the Council's response to the pandemic, no new scrutiny reviews were added to the work programme during 2020/21. The Flooding Review Panel was delayed, but still undertaken given the impact of flooding has had and is likely to continue to have on Leicestershire residents.

### Flooding Scrutiny Review Panel

We set up a Scrutiny Review Panel to consider the role of the County Council as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and its links with other Risk Management Authorities (RMAs). The Panel met on five occasions and heard from representatives of the Environment Agency, Severn Trent Water, the Local Resilience Forum, district councils and local residents.

Key recommendations and findings that arose from the panel were as follows:

- The title of LLFA conferred onto the County Council by Government, was deceptive due to the lack of powers available to the Authority to force others, including other RMA's, to carry out works necessary to alleviate flooding, even when such works were identified through Section 19 investigations.
- The Council needed to do more to communicate its roles and responsibilities clearly to residents to help manage their expectations.
- We recognised that even with significant long-term investment in flood risk management by both the LLFA and other RMA's, all flood risk would not be resolved, especially considering the impact of climate change. To combat this, we felt more could be done to communicate with local communities and residents on what they could do to mitigate risk themselves.
- Evidently those most affected by flooding were often those that had previously never experienced a flooding event before and so were unfortunately ill prepared. We therefore concluded that the Council needed to refresh and revamp its communication messages and look at how the Council and Elected Members could highlight the role communities, riparian owners and members of the public could play themselves through programmes such as the Flood Warden Scheme, developing flood risk plans and by signing up to the Environment Agency's Flood Risk alerts.

We are delighted that the Cabinet approved all of the Panels 25 recommendations and further agreed to lobby Government to strengthen the legislation to enable the County Council as the LLFA to require relevant agencies to complete mitigating measures arising from Section 19 Investigations.

We would encourage residents to read the full report which can be viewed [here](#).



# 7.

## Looking Ahead to 2020/21

**A key area of focus for the future will inevitably be the impact of the Coronavirus 19 pandemic including on services and the Council's finances.**

**We will continue to keep a close eye on the budget pressures facing the County Council, particularly those relating to SEND and children's social care. Given its size, we will also be monitoring closely the delivery of the Capital Programme.**

The following topics will also be considered:

### **Scrutiny Commission**

In 2021 we will continue to monitor the Council's financial position and the true impact of Covid-19 as this becomes more apparent as we open up in line with the Government roadmap. We will focus on growth and how the Council can seek to influence and manage this to ensure infrastructure requirements do not place an unmanageable burden on the Council's capital programme. We will be considering the Council's Infrastructure Policy and the implications of the Government's allocation of increased housing numbers to the Leicester City which will inevitably increase its unmet housing need to be passported to the County. This will have huge implications for district council local plans, and for the County Council as the main infrastructure provider.

We will continue to look at the work of partners such as the LLEP and the new Board overseeing the development of the Freeport. We will also be interested to hear from the Place Marketing Organisation about the work it has done to help the tourism sector move out of lockdown. We will also welcome feedback on the work of the Police and Crime Panel following the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May.

### **Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Looking ahead it is expected that we will need to continue to monitor and feed in to Covid-19 pandemic recovery plans and monitor the issues around care homes sustainability.

Along with our usual oversight of performance and complaints we are also planning to consider the implications of the Council signing up to Unison's Ethical Care Charter and Residential Care Charters, have an opportunity to provide further comments and feedback on future plans for short breaks and supported living services and receive a further update on the Adult Social Care Target Operating Model to ensure it is continuing to meet its objectives.

### **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

In the coming year we will continue to receive progress updates on a range of issues, including the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, the Defining Children and Family Services for

the Future Programme and the Written Statement of Action arising from last years OFSTED inspection. We will also be looking at the wider Impact of Covid-19 on children and pupils missing out on education.

### **Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

In 2021/22 it is clear that now more than ever we need to remain focused on the Council's response to the climate emergency and look forward to exciting work streams such as the Tranche 2 Climate Reduction Road Map that will focus on the Council's unmeasured emissions and wider Leicestershire emissions it will look to influence. Furthermore, we will at the Council's strategic approach to biodiversity and how we can address historic problems with biodiversity within Leicestershire. We look forward to receiving the refresh of the Flood Risk Management Strategy and the inclusion of the Flooding Scrutiny Review Panel comments and recommendations, as well as further reporting on Section 19 Investigations and the actions undertaken by Risk Management Authorities.

### **Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

In the coming year we will consider the 0-19 Healthy Child Programme known as 'Healthy Together', the Governance of the new Integrated Care System for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and the Primary Care Networks, and take a further look at mental health, eating disorders and suicide.

The Joint Committee will consider the analysis of the UHL Acute and Maternity Services Reconfiguration consultation feedback, review progress UHL have made with management of their accounts and look at mortality rates for mothers from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds.

# Overview and Scrutiny Members 2020/21

## The Scrutiny Commission

Tom Barkley CC  
Peter Bedford CC  
David Bill MBE CC  
Bill Boulter CC  
Dr Terri Eynon CC  
Dr Kevin Feltham CC  
Hilary Fryer CC  
Simon Galton CC (Chairman)  
Dan Harrison CC  
Rosita Page CC  
Alan Pearson CC  
Terry Richardson CC  
Michael Wyatt CC

## Adults and Communities

Linda Broadley CC  
Bill Crooks CC  
Tony Gillard  
Dan Harrison CC  
Jewel Miah CC  
James Poland CC  
Terry Richardson CC (Chairman)  
Amanda Wright CC  
Maggie Wright CC

## Children and Families

Dr Paul Bremner CC  
Dr Kevin Feltham CC  
Hilary Fryer CC (Chairman)  
Jeffrey Kaufman CC  
Canon Carolyn Lewis (co-opted)  
Peter Osborne CC  
Ted Parton CC  
Brenda Seaton CC  
Sean Sheahan CC  
Geoff Welsh CC  
Maggie Wright CC

## Environment and Transport

David Bill MBE, CC  
Bill Boulter CC  
Dan Harrison CC  
Max Hunt CC  
Jonathan Morgan CC  
Alan Pearson CC (Chairman)  
Les Phillimore CC  
James Poland CC  
Janice Richards CC

## Health

David Bill MBE CC  
John Coxon CC  
Dr Kevin Feltham CC (Chairman)  
Amanda Hack CC  
Dr Sarah Hill CC  
Jonathan Morgan CC  
Joe Orson CC  
Rosita Page CC  
Ted Parton CC

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21  
Democratic Services  
Chief Executive's Department  
Leicestershire County Council

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