

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

Meeting of the Council on 29th January 2025

Enhancing Scrutiny at Bolsover District Council: A Strategic Review for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Performance and Governance

Report of the Director of Governance and Legal Services

Classification	This report is Public
Contact Officer	Thomas Dunne-Wragg, Scrutiny Officer

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

To establish a new cycle of meetings for Scrutiny committees with effect from the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2024, Bolsover District Council invited the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to provide Member training on best practice and the essentials of effective scrutiny. During the training session, feedback was provided by a governance and scrutiny consultant from CfGS which highlighted areas of improvement for the current Scrutiny function. The feedback focused on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Scrutiny process, ensuring that it better supported decision-making and contributed to high-quality outcomes.
- 1.2 The current structure of the Council's Scrutiny function consists of four committees: three thematic committees and one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Each of these committees meets bi-monthly, totalling around 24 meetings per year. This frequency was deemed excessive by CfGS and it was recommended that for a District Council of Bolsover's size, the number of committees should be reduced to no more than three, ideally even fewer, with each committee meeting no more than quarterly.
- 1.3 CfGS also recommended that Scrutiny agendas should consist of no more than two high-quality items per meeting, as opposed to the current practice where some meetings have over six substantive agenda items. The goal was to ensure that Scrutiny meetings are focused and produce meaningful outcomes rather than being seen as a "classroom presentation"

2. Details of Proposal or Information

2.1 The cycle of Scrutiny meetings held during 2024/25 was agreed at Council in March 2024 and is set out in Appendix 1.

2.2 In light of the feedback received, and in consultation with the Director of Governance and Legal Services, the Scrutiny Officer undertook a review of the current Scrutiny function. This review aimed to explore options for restructuring the Council’s Scrutiny function, including:

- Adjusting the frequency of meetings.
- Ensuring a more focused and high-quality scrutiny process.
- Considering the potential of reducing the number of Scrutiny committees in the future.

2.3 As an initial step, the following changes are proposed:

- The three thematic committees will reduce their meeting frequency from bi-monthly (6 meetings per year) to quarterly (4 meetings per year). This will decrease the total number of meetings but improve the quality of the scrutiny process.
- The Finance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee will retain its current meeting schedule as per its constitutional duties, which include reviewing performance reports, the budget, treasury strategies, and corporate plans.

2.4 There are no changes proposed to the terms of reference or membership of the committees as currently set out in the Council’s Constitution. It is proposed that the meetings for the 2025/26 be scheduled on the basis of the following draft cycle based roughly on the four annual quarters (detailed further in **Appendix 2**):

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4
Climate Change and Communities	30 th June	14 th October	3 rd February	14 th April
Customer Services	16 th June	29 th September	8 th December	23 rd March
Local Growth	8 th July	28 th October	8 th December	23 rd March

2.5 Additionally, it was agreed that Scrutiny agendas will be refined to focus on no more than four high-quality items per meeting, ideally between two to three key items per agenda. This will allow for more significant reviews and detailed discussions on fewer topics, leading to better scrutiny outcomes.

2.6 It should be noted that although the thematic committees will meet quarterly for statutory 'formal' meetings, the 'informal Part B' sessions, where each committee conducts in-depth deep-dive review work, will continue to be held after each formal meeting. In addition to these four 'informal' meetings per year, the

committees may meet for additional non-statutory 'informal' meetings on an ad-hoc basis, depending on the progress of ongoing review work and whether additional meetings are required to complete the work.

3. Collaborative Approach to Scrutiny

- 3.1 A notable development in the Council's Scrutiny function is the collaboration between the Local Growth Scrutiny Committee and the Customer Services Committee. These two committees are working together on a deep-dive scrutiny review of a topic that overlaps their respective remits. This collaboration is an example of how reducing the number of committees can lead to more impactful, larger-scale projects that benefit from focused, cross-committee work.
- 3.2 The success of this joint project demonstrates how, by consolidating the number of committees, Scrutiny can focus on higher quality, more in-depth work rather than spreading resources too thinly across multiple committees. The aim is to replicate this model in the future as part of the restructuring.

4. Alignment with National Best Practice

- 4.1 The review and subsequent proposed changes align with the guidance provided in the April 2024 Statutory Guidance issued by the Government on best practice for Scrutiny within local and regional governance frameworks. This guidance emphasises the need for high-quality, effective Scrutiny that adds value to decision-making processes.
- 4.2 CfGS and the Government's best practice advice both stress the importance of quality scrutiny work that leads to actionable recommendations and improvements to Council services and governance frameworks.

5. Next Steps

- 5.2 With the approval of these proposed changes, the following steps will be undertaken:
- **Implementation of the new meeting cycle** for the 2025/26 municipal year, ensuring that committees meet on a quarterly basis, with refined agendas focusing on two to four key items.
 - **Ongoing evaluation** of the restructured Scrutiny process to ensure that it continues to meet the objectives of improving efficiency, effectiveness and quality of outcomes.
 - **Further collaboration** between committees where appropriate to enhance the depth and scope of scrutiny projects.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 The review of the Scrutiny function at Bolsover District Council has highlighted the need for a more streamlined, focused approach to Scrutiny. The reduction in the number of meetings and the concentration on high-quality agenda items will improve the efficiency of the process, resulting in more impactful Scrutiny work that better supports the decision-making processes of the Council.

6.2 Council is invited to approve the proposed changes to the Scrutiny function, including the reduction in the number of committee meetings, the adjustment to quarterly meetings and the refinement of agendas for the 2025/26 municipal year.

7. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

7.1 The Council is required within legislation and by the provisions within its constitution to establish the scrutiny function and committees. It could continue to schedule the same number of meetings for the 2025/26 municipal year and forward, but this is not recommended. The review of scrutiny identified a number of areas for improvement to reduce the number of meetings but also make these more focused and efficient.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Council approves the recommendation to changes to the meeting schedule and number of scrutiny meetings as outlined in paragraph **2.3** and **2.4** with effect from the Municipal Year 2025/26.
2. That Council notes that the meeting dates for these committees will be included in the proposed calendar of meetings 2025/26 scheduled to be submitted to the meeting of Council in March 2025.

Approved by Councillor Duncan McGregor, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Performance and Governance

IMPLICATIONS:

<u>Finance and Risk</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: N/A		
On behalf of the Section 151 Officer		
<u>Legal (including Data Protection)</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: N/A		
On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council		
<u>Staffing</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Details: N/A		
On behalf of the Head of Paid Service		

Equality and Diversity Impact and Consultation

Yes No

Details:

N/A

On behalf of the Information, Engagement and Performance Manager

Environment

Yes No

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details:

N/A

DECISION INFORMATION:

<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies:</p> <p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an Executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more wards in the District or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue (a) Results in the Council making Revenue Savings of £75,000 or more or (b) Results in the Council incurring Revenue Expenditure of £75,000 or more.</p> <p>Capital (a) Results in the Council making Capital Income of £150,000 or more or (b) Results in the Council incurring Capital Expenditure of £150,000 or more.</p> <p>District Wards Significantly Affected: <i>(to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the District)</i> Please state below which wards are affected or tick All if all wards are affected:</p> <p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i></p> <p>If No, is the call-in period to be waived in respect of the decision(s) proposed within this report? <i>(decisions may only be classified as exempt from call-in with the agreement of the Monitoring Officer)</i></p> <p>Consultation carried out: <i>(this is any consultation carried out prior to the report being presented for approval)</i></p> <p>Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>All <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment, Housing

This proposal aligns with all four of the Council's corporate ambitions: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing. By improving the governance and Scrutiny framework, the Council can ensure that services across these areas are more effectively reviewed and enhanced. Scrutiny plays a critical role in ensuring accountability, transparency and continuous improvement in Council operations, which in turn supports better outcomes for customers, drives economic growth, fosters a sustainable environment and enhances housing services.

Through more focused and efficient Scrutiny processes, the Council can achieve greater alignment with its corporate ambitions, ensuring that decision-making is informed by thorough analysis and that recommendations lead to tangible improvements across all service areas.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

Appendix No	Title
1	Current Scrutiny Meeting Schedule 2024/25
2	Proposed Scrutiny Meeting Schedule 2025/26

Background Papers

(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers).

Statutory guidance - Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities. Published 22 April 2024.

[Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK](#)