

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 2ND DECEMBER 2020**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

As we began the 2020/21 financial year unprecedented changes were being made across the country to tackle the coronavirus outbreak. As a country we are still going through a very difficult time and everyone has been affected in some way. The County Council has been doing all it can to support the most vulnerable in our society and staff have adapted their working practices, working tirelessly to support and protect the residents of the County. At the outset of my statement I, and I am sure my fellow scrutiny colleagues, wish to thank all staff involved in the delivery of direct services, and those behind the scenes providing support, for all their hard work.

The Scrutiny Commission and Committees have had to adapt their ways of working. The County Council has quickly adjusted and made use of the technology available to hold public meetings virtually, enabling critical decisions to be taken on the delivery of services for Leicestershire residents in a way that is both transparent and accessible to the public. The Scrutiny Commission successfully held the Council's first fully remote meeting on 8th April 2020 and that meeting was webcast live allowing the public to engage in the process whilst still following government advice to stay at home. This was at a time when many authorities had to cancel meetings and had to essentially pause their scrutiny processes. Nine months on, we continue to operate remote meetings and are likely to continue to do so for some time to come. Could I thank our IT, Committee and Member services staff for their continued efforts in supporting members. Looking ahead we hope to use the technology to undertake our first scrutiny member workshop to look at work undertaken across the Council to support communities and the role this has played during the Covid-19 crisis, as well as look at the proposed approach for reviewing the Communities Strategy.

The work of Overview and Scrutiny remains critical in ensuring that the Council's budget and performance is closely monitored, that services are delivered effectively and efficiently and that they meet the needs of local people. Recovering from COVID-19 may take considerable time, years rather than months, to address the enduring social, emotional, physical and economic consequences of the pandemic; acknowledging that some things may have changed forever.

Scrutiny has always played a critical role in the Council's budget process and will in the New Year be looking at the Council's refreshed MTFs proposals. I would like to record my disappointment that the Government has failed to meet the full costs of the pandemic having urged Council's to do what it takes. This has had a severe impact on the Council's finances. The additional resources announced in the spending review are welcomed but falls short of what is required and no doubt result in further cuts in services.

One key area of focus for scrutiny will be to ensure that the recovery from Covid has at its heart environmental considerations. Whilst I do not think they go far enough I welcome the announcements from the Government for a Green Recovery. To that end both the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee and the Commission will play a key role, beginning of course with an examination of the MTFS.

As I have said earlier this pandemic has had a significant effect on peoples emotional and mental health and I would call on the County Council and the NHS to recognise this in their future investment plans. I recognise the considerable financial pressures on this Council and the NHS, but I believe it is imperative that we address these issues or we risk storing considerable problems going forward. I am sure I speak for all Scrutiny members in supporting our Cabinet in the efforts to push the Government for additional resources.

Can I conclude by expressing my thanks to my fellow scrutiny members who have stepped up to the plate, embraced the new ways of working and for their hard work in ensuring that the business of the Council continued despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Mr S. J. Galton CC
Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission