

Saskia Heijltjes statement

The role that overview and scrutiny can play in holding an authority's decision-makers to account makes it fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy."

This quote taken from the foreword of the government report 'Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities' published in 2019 was mentioned in an induction session for new councillors on policy development and scrutiny, which I attended last week.

In the training session, there was an emphasis on our culture and the importance of scrutiny for the effective functioning of a council.

This is an opportunity for us to work together for the good of our community, questioning, discussing, and challenging each other to find the best possible solutions.

As a newly elected councillor I am excited to represent my local community and participate in democratic, intellectually rigorous, and collaborative processes such as scrutiny.

I was very disappointed, however, to find out that the Green group was excluded from critical discussions on the panel and committee allocations and not invited to take up a single seat on any of the Policy Development and Scrutiny panels.

The chairs of Policy Development and Scrutiny panels have an important role to play and decide how to respond to Council or requests from the Executive.

In the previous administration, all three panels were chaired by members of the opposition.

This time around, the administration has proposed that 2 out of the 3 are chaired by members of their own group.

This administration will recognize that this contradicts its own call for different and better representative and collaborative politics backed by its support for the Green Party motion on Proportional Representation in public office.

As newly formed Green Party group, we were especially disappointed to find out we weren't initially invited to sit on the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny panel.

We have expertise within our group and we would like to use this to help support real change and improvement in the area of climate and environment. We all recognize that, no matter how bright the team, it is dangerous to mark our own homework, at best there will be questions on motives, at worst there will be avoidable and costly mistakes.

I understand that there is a proportional system in place to determine the minimum allocation of seats on panels and committees, but why not be more welcoming to other groups to play a leading role in effective scrutiny and performance in our council?