

**PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL  
9TH OCTOBER 2018**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Fryer)  
The Vice Chair (Councillor Bebbington)  
Councillors Campsall, Forrest, Gerrard, Hunt and  
Paling

Councillor Mercer (Cabinet Lead Member for  
Housing)

Head of Finance and Property Services  
Head of Landlord Services  
Head of Planning and Regeneration  
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing  
Head of Strategic Support  
Sustainability Officer  
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Huddlestone

The Chair stated that the meeting would be recorded and the sound recording subsequently made available via the Council's website. She also advised that, under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting, and the use of any such images or sound recordings was not under the Council's control.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 21st August 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed subject to the amendment of minute 14.4 whereby the action was erroneously allocated to the Head of Customer Experience and has been subsequently allocated to the Head of Strategic Support.

19. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTEREST

No disclosures of pecuniary and personal interests were made.

20. DECLARATIONS - THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations of the existence of the Party Whip were made.

21. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.6

No questions had been submitted.

22. GENERAL FUND AND HRA REVENUE MONITORING

A report of the Head of Finance and Property Services regarding General Fund and HRA was submitted (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Finance and Property Services attended the meeting to assist the Panel with the consideration of this item, the Lead Member for Finance and Property Services sent his apologies.

In response to issues raised by the Panel the Head of Finance and Property Services and the Head of Landlord Services stated that:

- the agreed salaries budget was based on the assumption that council staff posts were fully filled throughout the year. The Managed Vacancy Savings figure of 2% of the total salary budget reflected the assumption that some council staff posts could be vacant for part of the year resulting in a saving.
- the void percentage for garages related to empty properties not being utilised which could be due to a variety of reasons. Garage sites were being reviewed to determine the best options for investment.
- The void percentage for central heating, council tax and communal facilities related to empty properties within the Council's sheltered accommodation. Some of the properties were void because they could be difficult to let and the Council was paying the costs for the empty properties. Further clarification regarding the empty accommodation and its costs could be provided by the Head of Landlord Services.

It was noted that period 4 related to months April to July.

**RESOLVED** that the information in the report of the Head of Finance and Property Services be noted.

#### Reason

The Panel were satisfied with the information provided.

### 23. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2017-2022 UPDATE

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing providing an update on the delivery of the Empty Homes Strategy 2017-2022 and the continued actions to deliver the priorities was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing attended the meeting to assist the Panel with the consideration of this item.

In response to issues raised by the Panel the Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing stated that:

- the Empty Homes Event to be hosted in October 2018\*\* was a public event to which all councillors would be invited. Owners of empty homes were being invited by letter and there were over 400 home owners invited. The event would be publicised by adverts posted on the Council's website and the Council's Twitter feed. Key rings and post-it notes would be provided at the event for people to take away and councillors could be supplied with leaflets

and posters on what assistance was available from the Council to bring empty homes back into use.

*\*\*Post meeting note: this event will now be held in November.*

- in addition, a poster would be placed in John Storer House. Every opportunity was being taken to promote the empty homes approach taken by the Council and new ideas regarding promotion were welcomed.
- the majority of actions in the progress report were described as being 'continuous' which meant they were in progress towards the Strategy target to bring 50 empty properties into use each year until 2022.
- three options were being considered for the Tenant Finder Scheme. It was hoped there would eventually be four schemes in total to offer: tenant finder (basic), private sector leasing, tenant finder plus and tenant premium which would also provide a repair service. The Service was working in partnership with Landlord Services to move forward with these schemes and launch as many as possible at the event.
- this was the first annual review of the strategy, for the council year of 2017-18 although the strategy itself ran from 2017 to 2022. An annual review would be undertaken to ensure the targets were being met and to continue to highlight the work being undertaken.

**RESOLVED** that the information in the report of the Head Strategic and Private Sector Housing be noted and a further update be provided annually.

#### Reason

The Panel were satisfied with the information provided.

#### 24. HOUSING STRATEGY 2015-2020 UPDATE

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing attended the meeting to assist the Panel with the consideration of this item.

In response to issues raised by the Panel the Lead Member for Housing, the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing and the Head of Landlord Services stated that:

- the housing acquisition policy included acquiring properties on the open market but also included development land options. Modular homes which were considered significantly cheaper than what was available on the open market could also be considered. Currently there was £1.2million left of the budget to spend by March 2019.
- rough sleepers that were located in the Borough, that the Council were notified of through partner agencies or to itself had been engaged with, seen by officers and provided support through the Rough Sleepers project. A Rough Sleepers count was being arranged to monitor rough sleepers across the Borough. This event had taken place in the last two years and one rough sleeper had been

- found in the first year. There was a vacancy for a councillor to participate in this year's event.
- the lightbulb project was a County wide initiative providing a holistic assessment of an individual's needs to determine the support that could be offered. 170 individuals were currently on the waiting list, with the number of referrals between 17-20 per week. The Council were working in partnership through the project to reduce the number of people on the waiting list and the oldest case was from the end of June.
  - with respect to Credit Union facilities there was an existing arrangement with Clockwise and the Council had recently entered into a service level agreement. The Borough Council was the most successful in their area of operation in encouraging people to sign up to rent accounts. Largely to the efforts of the Financial Inclusion team the Council were being considered as a good practice case study and were using the clockwise rent accounts as a tool to encourage tenants to pay rent rather than progress to the next stage of the rent arrears process.

Due to the depth of discussion regarding this item, Councillor Fryer declared a personal interest in this matter as a Leicestershire County Councillor.

- the scheme was being promoted as a successful way to prevent tenants falling into rent arrears through articles in the tenants magazine, and proactively discussing with tenants when discussing their rent arrears.
- the Affordable Housing Delivery Paper would not be presented to all councillors; it was being considered through a Cabinet Member briefing that had been arranged.
- with respect to the local Housing Needs Surveys for Woodhouse Eaves and the Wolds parishes, a date could not be provided for the refresh during 2018-2019 as negotiations were ongoing with Midland Rural Housing.

Member of the Panel raised concerns with respect to this progress update report and the Empty Homes progress update report (item 7), that many of the completion outcomes were defined as 'continuous' and that it would be preferable for specific dates to be included in the updates provided in future.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the first action on page 26 be updated to state that the Affordable Housing Delivery paper would be presented to selected members and not all members;
2. that the Housing Strategy Progress report be updated where possible with dates for the action to completed;
3. that the information in the report of the Head Strategic and Private Sector Housing be noted.

## Reasons

1. the Panel wished the action to accurately reflect the progress made on this action.

2. Members of the Panel wished to see tighter and smarter completion criteria where possible to support their performance scrutiny of the matter.
3. The Panel were satisfied with the information provided.

25. HOUSING RENT ARREARS AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT

A report of the Head of Landlord Services was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Landlord Services attended the meeting to assist the Panel with the consideration of this item.

In response to issues raised by the Panel the Lead Member for Housing and the Head of Landlord Services stated that:

- the increase of rent arrears and court cases by £72k was caused by a number of factors, which in some instances was caused by the introduction of universal credit, but delays in housing benefit processing could also be a factor in the arrears cases.
- the number of people in the Borough on universal credit has been static, but this had recently increased to 287 by the end of September. It was difficult to identify who was in receipt of universal credit, but the average debt owed by people on universal credit was higher than those not on universal credit.
- the current arrears as a percentage of the annual rent debit reflected the current rent arrears for week 23 as a figure of the projected rent collected over the year.
- the predicted rent arrears of 4.08% was determined by assessing the total exposure to risk for the Council considering that as £6million income was from housing benefit. Comparative data from other Local Authorities was also used to estimate the end of year arrears. It was not expected to rise significantly from the predicted 4.08% as there was a pattern to rent arrears debt over the year as indicated by the chart on page 38 of the agenda. It was noted that the introduction of universal credit could alter this trend.
- regarding the concerns whether the Council could face a large debt at the end of the year, these were alleviated by the increase to the bad debt provision by the Council and contingencies in the HRA fund to account for potential increases in universal credit debt.
- with the introduction of universal credit the manner by which the Government paid the money to the Council had changed. The Council continued to assess the level of debt on a weekly basis as this enabled the risk to be closely monitored. Assessing the impact of this change in payment methods would take time.
- claimants who were unable or reluctant to use online accounts to claim universal credit were supported by the Financial Inclusion team.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair wished to congratulate the actions being taken by the team to prepare the Council and its tenants for the introduction of universal credit.

**RESOLVED** that the information in the report of the Head of Landlord Services be noted.

Reason

The Panel were satisfied with the information provided.

26. DELIVERY OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

A report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Sustainability Officer attended the meeting to assist the Panel with its consideration of this item. The Lead Member for Planning was unable to attend but provided officers with a statement which was read to the Panel.

The Panel requested that the amber items were clarified and in response to issues raised, the Head of Planning and Regeneration, the Head of Strategic Support and the Sustainability Officer stated that:

- with respect to encouraging environmental education, primary schools within the Borough had been contacted but not enough schools had yet booked onto the Enviro Detective sessions to be able to deliver the programme. This was mainly due to trying to fit the topic into an appropriate stage of the national curriculum. Schools would be encouraged to sign up to the Pledge during the sessions.
- the target to increase the household recycling rate to 50% had been difficult to achieve for several years due to the change in waste packaging, the mix of waste being recycled and the reduction in weight. The Waste Strategy and targets were under review.
- the Charnwood Borough Council Flood Plan was anticipated to be signed off within the next few weeks. It had been challenging obtaining detailed information from the Environmental Agency and changeover of staff within the Council had delayed matters.
- experts from the County Council were starting a review of the Borough Council's Business Continuity Plans on 5th November 2018. The LGA peer challenge had recommended a fundamental review of the Council's risk management framework which was ongoing and an update would be provided to the Cabinet in December.

It was noted that although the Council was supporting energy reduction measures it was limited in what it could achieve. More work was required on a global level.

**RESOLVED**

1. that the Head of Regulatory Services provides the Panel with additional information regarding the monitoring of air quality within the Borough particularly in relation to schools;

2. that the information in the report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration be noted.

#### Reasons

1. The Panel wished to understand further where and how the Borough Council monitored air quality and whether this information could be forwarded to schools and potentially Parish Councils regarding air pollution in their area to incentivise their participation in the Council's environmental education programmes.
2. The Panel were satisfied with the information provided.

#### 27. WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support was submitted to enable the Panel to consider its work programme and to propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic Support attended the meeting to assist the Panel with its consideration of the item.

#### **RESOLVED**

1. that it **be recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board** that the Customer Services Strategy and the Housing Acquisition Strategy be added to the Panel's Work Programme and scheduled for the Panel's meeting on 22nd January 2019;
2. that the Head of Landlord Services be requested to clarify further the remit of the Customer Engagement Strategy and whether it pertains to the Landlord Services only and that this information be added to the Work Programme item at its meeting on 20th November 2018;
3. that the Panel's consideration of the Charnwood Lottery which commenced on 4th September 2018 be rescheduled from the Panel's meeting on 19th February 2019 to its meeting on 18th June 2019;
4. to note the current position with the Panel's Work Programme.

#### Reasons

1. As the Panel considered its scrutiny of the Zero Waste Strategy at its meeting on 21st August had been beneficial it wished to continue with reviewing strategies and policies by scrutinising a further two strategies. The Panel had queried whether there were alternative options for acquiring properties other than on the open market as reported in the Housing Strategy Progress report (item considered earlier during the meeting) and wished to understand the Council's criteria for acquiring housing in detail. With respect to the Customer

- Service Strategy, members considered scrutiny of the matter would be useful as the strategy was now approximately half-way through its period of operation.
2. The Panel considered scrutinising the Customer Engagement Strategy but wished to further understand its scope, before scheduling its review.
  3. to enable the Panel to monitor the performance of the Charnwood Lottery which commenced on 4th September 2018 six clear months after commencement of the scheme.
  4. To make the Panel aware of the current position with its Work Programme.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 5th November 2018 unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on the fifth working day following publication of these minutes.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Panel.