

**POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP
13TH NOVEMBER 2018**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Seaton)
The Vice-chair (Councillor K. Harris)
Councillors Brookes, Gerrard, Hamilton, Hunt,
Murphy, Paling, Parton, Shepherd and Smith

Councillors Taylor (Cabinet Lead Member for
Communities, Safety and Wellbeing) and Mercer
(Cabinet Lead Member for Housing)

Strategic Director of Housing, Planning &
Regeneration and Regulatory Services
Head of Landlord Services
Head of Neighbourhood Services
Children, Families and Partnerships Manager
Principal Officer Tenancy and Income
Management
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (MH)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Vardy (Cabinet Lead Member for
Planning, Inward Investment and Tourism
Strategy) for item 8 on the agenda

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.

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

21. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

The following disclosures of interests were made:

- (i) by Councillor Parton – personal interests in item 6 on the agenda, Draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2024, and item 7 on the agenda, Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022, as a member of Leicestershire County Council including its Child Protection Panel;
- (ii) by Councillor Seaton – personal interests in item 6 on the agenda, Draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2019-2024, item 7 on the agenda, Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022, and item 8 on the agenda, Housing Development Company, as a member of Leicestershire County Council;

- (iii) by Councillor Shepherd – personal interests in item 6 on the agenda, Draft Children and Young People’s Strategy 2019-2024, item 7 on the agenda, Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022, and item 10 on the agenda, Work Programme which included reference to the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan, as a member of Leicestershire County Council.

22. DECLARATION OF THE PARTY WHIP

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

23. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY PROCEDURE 11.17

No questions had been submitted.

24. DRAFT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY 2019-2024

A report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services, providing the Group with an opportunity to consider the draft Children and Young People’s Strategy 2019-2024, was submitted (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Cabinet Lead Member for Communities, Safety and Wellbeing, the Head of Neighbourhood Services and the Children, Families and Partnerships Manager assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) There was specific guidance regarding which roles required a DBS check. Ensuring that the guidance was followed was usually an HR function as part of the recruitment process. That was different to the Council’s ongoing safeguarding responsibilities. It was not the Council’s responsibility to ensure that external organisations had undertaken appropriate DBS checks.
- (ii) The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation had not caused difficulties regarding information sharing because there were overriding duties regarding reporting safeguarding concerns relating to children.
- (iii) The Council had commented on the recent review of Early Help services conducted by Leicestershire County Council. Any impact of those changes would relate to preventative work rather than social care services and would not affect how the Borough Council performed its safeguarding functions.
- (iv) Consultation on the draft strategy had been through discussions at meetings of the various forums and groups on which the Council was represented. The main areas for discussion were whether the structure and objectives of the strategy were correct and identifying the needs to be addressed. Details of those meetings and the partners with which the Council worked on those forums and groups could be provided as part of the report submitting the strategy to the Cabinet for approval.
- (v) The target for reducing the number of children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) was set by Leicestershire County Council. The level in Charnwood was consistently below the target and the number of Charnwood wards that were among those in the county

with the highest level had reduced. There was good co-operation in this area of work by academies and Loughborough College.

- (vi) Information was provided regarding the support that was provided by the Council to voluntary and community sector groups.
- (vii) Information was provided regarding the arrangements for meetings of the Joint Action Group.

The following comments were made by members of the Group:

- (i) The strategy document could be made shorter and less repetitive. That would also make it more accessible for children.
- (ii) The progress that had been made in relation to reducing the number of young parents was welcomed. There had also been some progress in reducing levels of obesity but they were still very high.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that it be noted that officers would look at the length and format of the strategy document and including information about the consultation process and responses to it, including details of the meetings at which the strategy had been discussed with partners and the partners with which the Council worked, when preparing the final version of the strategy and report for submission to the Cabinet.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To acknowledge the issues raised by the Group and how they would be dealt with.

25. TENANCY SUPPORT POLICY 2019-2022

A report of the Head of Landlord Services, enabling the Group to review the draft Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022, was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Cabinet Lead Member for Housing, the Head of Landlord Services and the Principal Officer Tenancy and Income Management assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) The Council made use of an incremental approach when dealing with tenants' rent areas. When an account went into arrears it would trigger contact to be made with the tenant, initially to determine whether the tenant had unmet support needs or was not making all the claims for benefits that he or she was entitled to.
- (ii) The Council benchmarked its performance against other housing providers but it could learn from the approaches that were adopted in other sectors.

However the sanction of disconnecting a utility was different to taking away a person's home.

- (iii) If the actions of tenants were causing problems for neighbours then they would be contacted by a Housing Officer as that was a potential breach of their tenancy agreement. Action by the Tenancy Support Team to help address the issue could take place alongside any further enforcement action that was necessary.
- (iv) While certain individuals might benefit from accommodation designated for people aged 55 or over at a younger age, the Council would have to follow its policies when making allocations.
- (v) The Council's Tenancy Support Team and Universal Credit Officer were funded through the Housing Revenue Account and could only provide support to the Council's tenants. The Council had undertaken a modelling exercise and had concluded that employing an officer to assist tenants who received Universal Credit would be financially beneficial. Some tenants who received Universal Credit would have their rent paid directly to the Council, for example if they lacked capacity or were more than eight weeks in arrears.
- (vi) To date those tenants receiving Universal Credit who were in arrears had also been in arrears prior to switching to Universal Credit. The introduction of Universal Credit had had an impact on the Council. The overall level of arrears and the workload for officers had increased. However the Council had put in place extra resources to cope with that.
- (vii) It was noted that Loughborough Library would be closed for a number of months. The Council provided computers in its reception area for customers to use to complete online forms. Officers visiting tenants had tablet devices so they could offer similar assistance in tenants' own homes.

The following comments were made by members of the Group:

- (i) A change could be made to section 3.2 of the policy to make it clear that safeguarding procedures were already in place and did not need to be newly developed.
- (ii) It would be helpful if further examples of the organisations with which the Council worked were included in section 10.2 of the policy.
- (iii) It was important that customers using the computers in the Council's reception area felt that their privacy was being protected. That could be achieved by looking at the layout of the area to prevent overlooking, providing separate rooms for people to use or attaching privacy filters to computer screens. Reference was also made to privacy filters for councillors' mobile computing devices.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that it be noted that officers would look at making it clear that safeguarding procedures were already in place and did not need to be newly developed and including further examples of the organisations with which the Council worked when preparing the final version of the policy;

3. that it be noted that the Head of Landlord Services would raise the issue of the privacy of customers using the computers in the Council's reception area with the Head of Customer Experience and report the outcome of those discussions to the Chair of the Group.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To acknowledge the issues raised by the Group and how they would be dealt with.
3. To acknowledge the issues raised by the Group and how they would be dealt with.

26. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

A report of the Strategic Director of Housing, Planning & Regeneration, and Regulatory Services, providing the Group with information regarding the potential for establishing a Leicestershire Collaborative Housing Company or developing a Local Housing Company for Charnwood, was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Strategic Director of Housing, Planning & Regeneration, and Regulatory Services assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) If established, the Borough Council would be the sole shareholder of the company and would set the company's objectives. The company would have its own directors and would operate at arm's length from the Council using its own business plans and policies to deliver those objectives. The Council would be able to scrutinise the actions of the company. The Council could loan the company money and receive interest or other returns on that investment.
- (ii) There was a range of options for what the company's objectives could be. Properties could be built to be sold or for market rent and the proceeds from that could be used to subsidise the development of affordable housing, which could take a number of forms. Properties that were developed by the company would be outside the Housing Revenue Account and would therefore not be subject to the right to buy. Some councils that had established companies had used them to build properties outside their local area.
- (iii) Providing land was available the company could be used to deliver housing anywhere in the Borough in response to identified needs. The Council did not own significant areas of land that could be developed and one option could be to work with the developers of the sustainable urban extensions identified in the Core Strategy.

- (iv) Consultants would be used to assist the Council with setting up the company. It was estimated that the cost of that would be less than £10,000.
- (v) In the long term it was uncertain whether the use of a company would result in additional houses being provided but the use of one could speed up the delivery of housing.
- (vi) The establishment of companies by councils was a recent development and the majority of those that had been set up had yet to be used to develop housing. However, the Council could learn from the experiences of Councils that had set up companies.

The following comments were made by members of the Group:

- (i) The establishment of a company was an exciting initiative that could provide an opportunity for the Council to act more flexibly in responding to housing needs in the Borough.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that it be noted that reference to the Group's enthusiasm for the establishment of a Housing Development Company, in that the establishment of a company was an exciting initiative that could provide an opportunity for the Council to act more flexibly in responding to housing needs in the Borough, would be included in the report to the Cabinet on the matter.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To record the views of the Group and how they would be dealt with.

27. PROGRESS WITH PANEL WORK

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, providing an update on the current position with scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

RESOLVED that the current position with scrutiny panels be noted.

Reason

To ensure that the Group was aware of the current position with scrutiny panels.

28. WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, enabling the Group to consider its work programme and propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions

and amendments as appropriate, was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

RESOLVED

1. that the changes made by the Scrutiny Management Board to the Group's work programme be noted;
2. that the following items be deleted from the Group's work programme:
 - Tenancy Strategy and Policy
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation Accreditation Scheme
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy;
3. that the current position with the Group's work programme and the Notice of Key Decisions and Decisions to be Taken in Private be noted.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the decisions made by the Board.
2. The items, or items that had superseded them, could not be scrutinised within the timetable provided by the schedule of the Group's meetings and meetings of the Cabinet, but could be considered by the Overview Scrutiny Group instead.
3. To make the Group aware of the current position with its work programme and matters due to be considered by the Cabinet.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 21st January 2019 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 Policy Scrutiny Group.