

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
12TH DECEMBER 2022**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Seaton)

Councillors Hamilton, Parton, K. Harris and
Murphy

Councillor Harper-Davies (Cabinet Lead Member
for Community Support)

Councillor Mercer (Cabinet Lead Member for
Private Housing)

Councillor Charles (Chair of Finance and
Performance Scrutiny Committee)

Director of Housing and Wellbeing
Head of Governance and Human Resources
Head of Regulatory and Community Safety
Head of Strategic Housing
Democratic Services Officer (EB)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Ranson

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.

56. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 14th November 2022 were approved.

57. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

58. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

59. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

60. UPDATE ON INTERNAL ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REVIEW

A report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing was submitted to provide an update on the outcomes of the internal ASB service review and what has changed because of the review. (Item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Community Support attended remotely and the Director of Housing and Wellbeing and the Head of Regulatory and Community Safety attended to assist with the consideration of the item. The following Summarises the discussion:

- A review on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) had taken place to assess what was working well and what wasn't, and the Council continued working with partners to achieve better outcomes.
- An external consultant had been engaged to undertake the review and met with a wider range of stakeholders. It had been important to get an objective external view.
- The Council was working to action ASB reports more swiftly and managing the way it engaged with offenders to more effectively reach the best outcomes.
- The departments were working well together. The outcomes had been positive.
- A refinement of the job title 'ASB Facilitator' would take place so that it more accurately reflected the role.
- The corporate project across the Council consisted of three major workstreams:
 - The first workstream looked at the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Council's role within it. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 required Authorities to have strategies in place for the reduction of crime & disorder within their areas. There had been a focus to involve more input from across the CSP, the local police commander had presented data and a workshop had taken place so that the partners understood their roles.
 - The second workstream looked at the reporting and recording of ASB, taking a wholesale view on how it was reported. New ASB-specific webpages had been completed along with a guide for customers so that all the information was now in one place. The online reporting form had a triage process so that officers could focus on medium and high risk cases. The guide provided information on how to approach incidents of ASB, which agency to report them to, and whether the Council could help and how to report to the Council if it could. The majority of data-entry in this system was done by customers online, however, existing reporting mechanisms were still in place. This new system had reduced demand in the Customer Contact Centre. Low-risk ASB reports were subject to an automated response providing information and advice on how to approach it, however, cumulative low-risk cases of the same nature would escalate in risk.
 - The third workstream focussed on case management and the risk assessment process that determined what action was taken. Training had taken place and there had been reviews of risk-management structures. The new process encompassed issues such as repeat victimisation, the vulnerability of the victim and hate-based ASB. Mandatory action was to be taken if the risk-level was high. The ASB

management system was known as Sentinel. Further training-needs had been identified.

- A new post had been established to support the use of data and this would be recruited to over the following months.
- If a customer was reporting ASB to members, they were to be directed to the guide so that they could enter the details themselves and the record would come through.
- The Director of Housing and Wellbeing would consider ways to enable anonymous reporting when reporting on behalf of someone else, however, it was noted that cases were difficult to action if reported anonymously.
- The website would be improved to outline the new Community Safety Plan, when approved, and the partners involved and priorities going forward. Members would be consulted when developing the draft plan.
- When the 'ASB Facilitator' was appointed, members would be made aware.
- Officers worked through the Joint Action Group (JAG) to discuss specific cases. The JAG largely worked with Council staff, the Police, Probation Service and Social services. A group of people were engaged to work with repeat offenders and to get them on the right track.
- The ASB review had meant that the ASB Scrutiny Panel had not needed to go ahead.
- In terms of key changes, regarding reporting and recording, whilst the information had previously been dispersed across the Council website (in different departments), it had now been brought together in one place. Previously customers had mostly reported by telephone, but the new system allowed the majority of reports to be made online. Previously the systems used to capture data had not necessarily been consistent across services, there was now a cleaner mechanism. Previously officers had needed to select what they thought the level of risk was, the new system had a series of questions that outputted the risk rating. Previously there had not been as much work across departments on ASB whereas now there was a cross-service board looking at ASB. The new system had ensured officers could prioritise on high-risk cases as capacity had been released.
- Northgate was the name of a Regulatory Services back-office system that was being updated, potentially with the system linking in with Sentinel as and when required. Sentinel was specific to medium and high-risk ASB reports whereas Northgate was a more general environmental health and licensing system.
- A review of the CSP Terms of Reference was being undertaken, dovetailing with the new Community Safety Plan. The aim of this was to make the Terms of Reference simpler so that partners could be brought in as necessary without the need to update the Terms of Reference.
- The Housing Management Advisory Board had been updated as part of the process and Councillors would be updated.
- The 3-month post review that had been undertaken to track success, review live actions, and ensure that outstanding actions are completed, had concluded. Ongoing actions and improvements were being overseen by the strategic group to move forward.
- In terms of tracking progress of ASB reports, the 'ASB Facilitator', once recruited, could be an initial point of contact and could then field to the appropriate department.

- Hate incidents depended on the individual case but were generally considered high-risk.

RESOLVED

1. that the Commission noted the report.
2. that the report return to Scrutiny Commission in 6-months time.
3. that the job title of 'ASB Facilitator' be refined.
4. that training be provided for Councillors.
5. to check the position of anonymity when reporting ASB on behalf of someone else.

Reason

- 1&2. To support effective scrutiny of the matter.
3. To more accurately reflect the role.
4. To ensure that Councillors knew the process and could assist with reporting and track progress.
5. To explore the possibility of allowing anonymous reports when reporting on behalf of someone else.

Councillor Brookes and the Head of Strategic Housing joined the meeting remotely during the consideration of this item.

The Lead Member for Community Support left the meeting via hybrid-link following the conclusion of this item.

61. VOID PROPERTY INFORMATION

A report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing was submitted to provide the void property information requested by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 4th April 2022 (minute number 125 2021/22). (Item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Chair of Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee attended remotely to assist with the discussion.

The Lead Member for Private Housing and the Director of Housing and Wellbeing assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- Due to a combination of unfavourable circumstances, including the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a backlog of void properties, and it appeared as though some voids in sheltered accommodation were unlikely to ever be let. Therefore a strategy was being formed on how to work through this backlog.
- One part of the strategy was the replacement of bedsit accommodation in St Michael's Court with bungalows.
- Regarding voids in repair, there had been pressures on resources caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and a challenging labour market.

- Action was being taken to bring performance back on track. The major number of voids ready to let this year was now at pre-pandemic levels.
- The Chair of Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and suggested that it could be linked with the underspend in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget.
- Regarding the possibility of selling void properties within sheltered accommodation, it was necessary to consider the use of the blocks and housing need and options. Sale of property was just one option. Sale of land had been considered for St Michael's court.
- Regarding the possibility of selling void properties within the general needs accommodation, there was a demand for housing stock within the waiting list. Some properties were considered for sale where there were significant structural issues which carried a degree of risk. Housing was remedied and repaired rather than sold where possible. There was a current exercise looking at the performance of assets which looked at which were performing well and which were costing the Council and it was suggested that this could be used to inform the disposal strategy and the acquisition strategy. If properties were sold through the Right to Buy then the Council could not keep all of the money from the sale. The Director of Housing and Wellbeing would need to check the position in respect of disposals.
- With regard to properties 'awaiting shortlist', these depended on allocations resources and officer time and training. A lot had been done on voids in repair and another contractor had now been engaged so it was thought that the number of voids in repair would decrease. In terms of allocations, it would take time to work through the backlog. Rigorous performance information was available and this could be brought back to the Scrutiny Commission.
- In response to a recommendation that performance monitoring should include Key Performance Indicators to reduce the backlog a metric could be applied to this and the Team Leader had been written to proposing to set out an appropriate target of lets per week in order to get a reduction in voids. Current tracking was taking place on a week-by-week basis of the number of voids in repair (standard and major) and the number of voids coming through.
- There were a small number of properties that required structural works and monitoring and so could not be re-let quickly.
- Regarding age-based lettings, there had been reduced demand for age-restricted lettings and as such it was being considered to lower the age criteria. In response to a suggestion by the Chair that allocations could be made on mobility rather than age, it was suggested that a paper would come to the Housing Management Advisory Board with a recommendation on this before being put through the rest of the governance process. With regards to choice-based lettings, if people did not meet the age-criteria then they could not bid, however, if there was lower demand then properties could be directly allocated to people who did not meet the criteria but would be suitable.
- With regard to a query on demand for bungalows. There had been some bids, however, there had also been refusals based on aspects such as steps or gardens.
- It was hoped that more officers would be recruited to increase resources, however, it would take time to train people.
- The majority of properties 'awaiting shortlist had been advertised and bids had been received. Officers needed to review the shortlist in terms of priority and

- suitability and checks needed to be carried out. Bidders were advised if there were delays and advised once a decision was made. Progress was being made with getting properties allocated.
- The Chair requested that when the report returned to Scrutiny Commission, that progress on properties awaiting shortlist was shown in terms of showing which allocations had been made.
 - The need to avoid duplication with reports to Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee (FPSC) was highlighted. This was not a serious concern at this point as FPSC were looking at performance more generally and the Scrutiny Commission were looking at Voids specifically.
 - In terms of how long applicants had to wait on decisions, it depended on the individual property, how long ago the property was bid on and when the property was ready. Due to the large number of applicants, there were not enough resources to contact every bidder, however, messages were put out when there were delays.
 - Bidders were made aware that factors other than the bidding position, such as the individual needs of the tenant, were taken into account in allocations.
 - Information was available to customers on the Council website including Frequently Asked Questions. Staff were also equipped with information to disseminate to customers.

RESOLVED that the issue return to Scrutiny Commission with information showing the issues that had come off the list and with Key Performance Indicators.

Reason

To ensure the Scrutiny Commission progress the issues identified by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee in the most appropriate way.

Councillor Murphy left the meeting during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Brookes and Councillor Shepherd left the meeting via hybrid-link following the conclusion of this item

62. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF ANY SPECIFIC FINANCIAL MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET

There were no items of this nature on the Cabinet agenda for the Commission to consider.

63. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

There were no items identified for pre-decision scrutiny from the Cabinet agenda.

64. SCRUTINY COMMISSION PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - CABINET RESPONSE

There were no pre-decision scrutiny items at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.

The Lead Member for Private Housing left the meeting during the consideration of this item.

65. PROGRESS WITH PANEL WORK

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to review the progression of scrutiny panels was submitted. (Item 11 on the agenda files with these minutes).

The Lead Officer assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- The report from the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel would go to Cabinet on Thursday 15th December 2022, presented by the Panel Chair.
- The Loneliness Scrutiny Panel had not yet concluded.
- The Tourism Scrutiny Panel would commence in 2023.
- It was necessary for all Scrutiny Panels to conclude before the election on 4th May 2023.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny panels.

Reason

To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.

66. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to enable the Commission to review and agree the Scrutiny Work Programme. This includes reviewing the changes made by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and adding items to their work programme. (Item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Officer assisted with the consideration of this item.

It was noted that as Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were not specifically considering voids, the Scrutiny Commission could consider a detailed report on voids at the meeting on 6th March 2023.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Work Programme and make any amendments the Commission feel necessary.
2. That the Scrutiny Commission agreed that the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Work Programme be updated in accordance with the decisions taken

during consideration of this item and any further decisions taken during this meeting.

Reasons

1&2 To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.

2.To ensure that the information contained within the Work Programme is up to date.

67. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head Governance and Human Resources was considered, to enable the Commission to consider its work programme and forthcoming Key Decisions and decisions to be taken in private by the Cabinet in order to schedule items for pre-decision scrutiny. (Item 13 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Officer assisted with the consideration of this item.

In response to a query from the Chair, it was explained that the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy were annual strategies, but the Scrutiny Commission could consider them if they so wished.

It was noted that updated key decisions would come through to the Scrutiny Commission.

If members wished an item to come to Scrutiny Commission they were to contact the Democratic Services Officer and copy in the Chair.

RESOLVED

1. That forthcoming Executive Key Decisions or decisions to be taken in private by the Executive, set out in Appendix 2 to the report, and scheduled scrutiny of those matters, be noted.
2. That the Commission's current work programme be noted.

Reasons

- 1. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny.
 2. To ensure effective and timely scrutiny, either to provide Cabinet with advice prior to it taking a decision or to ensure that the Council and external public service providers and partners were operating effectively for the benefit of the Borough

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the next meeting of Full Council 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 Scrutiny Commission.
3. The Head of Strategic Housing, Councillor Brookes, Councillor Popley and Councillor Charles and Councillor Harper-Davis joined the meeting remotely.
4. The Cabinet Lead Member for Public Housing observed the meeting.
5. Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee Members Councillors Fryer and Shepherd addended remotely to observe the item on Voids information.