

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
7TH AUGUST 2023**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Seaton)
The Vice Chair (Councillor Needham)
Councillors B. Gray, Harper-Davies, Lennie,
Rattray and N. Taylor

Councillors Hamilton (Deputy Leader of the
Council, Public and Private Sector Housing) and
Charles (observing)

Director Housing and Wellbeing
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (NC)
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

APOLOGIES:

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.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

15. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS, AND OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

16. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

17. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

18. SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEME UPDATE

Following consultation with the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission, it was agreed that the Selective Licensing Scheme Update be deferred to the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission scheduled on 9th October 2023.

19. DRAFT ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2022-23

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to consider the draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23 with a view to it being recommended to Council for approval, was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with the consideration of this item.

Members felt that the Draft Annual Scrutiny Report 2022-23 looked very professional.

RESOLVED

1. That delegated authority be given to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Scrutiny Commission, to format and amend the draft report to include reference to matters raised at the meeting.
2. That it be recommended to Council that the Annual Scrutiny Report 2022/23, including any amendments made following the meeting as per recommendation 1, above, be approved.

Reasons

1. To ensure that additional and updated information is incorporated into the final Annual Report before its submission to Council.
2. To report annually, as required by the Council's Constitution, on the operation and workings of Scrutiny.

20. UPDATE ON VOID PROPERTIES

A report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to provide an update on the position in respect of voids (empty properties) at Council accommodation, the recent actions taken, in progress, and planned to reduce both the number of voids and the length of time properties stand empty, was submitted (a supplement report filed with these minutes).

The Director of Housing and Wellbeing and the Democratic Services Officer (NC) assisted with the consideration of this item.

- i. The Council had an internal voids repairs team that worked on standard voids. The team did not have the resources to complete the backlog of voids work.

Post meeting note: It was confirmed by the Director of Housing and Wellbeing that the Council had recruited three additional Joiners and one additional Plasterer to assist with voids work.

- ii. It was highlighted that there were numerous teams involved in the management process of properties (different teams were involved to identify the work, undertake the work, receive housing applications, and allocate properties) and the council had recently participated in a workshop to map out and simplify the

- process, with the aim of making it quicker. The Scrutiny Commission asked to be informed about the outcome of the workshop and how well the new procedures were working when they had been adopted.
- iii. There had been a review of the Housing Needs Service which had resulted in an increase in Allocations Officers, from 0.6 (full time equivalent) to 4 (full time equivalent) in order to increase the number of properties being let.
 - iv. The Council intended to consult with tenants on potentially declassifying some age restricted properties. Almost 20% of the Council's housing stock was restricted to applicants aged 45. Members were concerned that declassifying properties may result in lifestyle clashes with residents. The Council would look into some mitigation measures to try to prevent issues, such as increasing Anti-Social Behaviour resources and a phased implementation of declassification. Some of the Council's housing stock was age restricted to over-60s and it was highlighted that it would be beneficial if these residents were given the option to move into a different property, should they be affected by the declassification of surrounding properties.
 - v. Members requested an updated version of the table in the Appendix to the report submitted to the Scrutiny Commission on 12th December 2022, including information on the properties that had now been let, and the properties that had not been let. It was agreed that this information should also be circulated to members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
 - vi. The Council had difficulty in recruiting into roles associated with voids repairs because similar roles in the private sector offered more attractive salaries. It was highlighted that it would be possible to recruit Apprentices into the Council to support the work of the Voids Repairs team.
 - vii. Members felt that it would be beneficial to receive a regular update on the progress made in terms of the completion of work on voids and letting the properties. The Director of Housing and Wellbeing stated that this would be possible. It was highlighted that members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee would also benefit from receiving this information.
 - viii. It was thought that the sale of Council properties on the open market would enable the Council to retain the full amount of the sale price. The funds allocated through this process would be required to be spent on further rental properties.
 - ix. A further update report in six months was requested by the Scrutiny Commission.

Councillor Mark Charles attended the meeting as an observer, and with the Chair's permission, asked whether it would be possible to use money from the Capital Budget to employ additional staff to complete the required work on voids. The Director of Housing and Wellbeing stated that this had already been done, but emphasized that it was difficult to recruit into trade positions as salaries were competitive in the private sector.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission considered the update and identified any further actions to be taken.
2. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing provide information about the outcome of the void properties workshop, including the changes made and how well the new procedures were working.
3. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing provide an updated version of the table in the Appendix to the report submitted to the Scrutiny Commission on 12th December 2022, including information on the properties that had now been let, and the properties that had not been let, following the meeting. This information should also be shared with the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
4. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing provide a regular update to Councillors on the Scrutiny Commission and the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, on the progress made in terms of the completion of work on voids and letting the properties.
5. That a further update on voids properties be submitted to the Scrutiny Commission in six months (February 2024).

Reasons

- 1. To provide effective scrutiny of actions taken, in progress, and planned to improve void performance.
 2. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to understand how well the new procedures were working.
 3. To enable the Scrutiny Commission and the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee to review changes since December 2022.
 4. To ensure that Councillors are kept updated with the progress of the completion of voids works and subsequently, the letting of the properties.
 5. To ensure the Scrutiny Commission were able to properly monitor the voids properties work.

21. 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.

22. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

23. PROCUREMENT OF A VOIDS REPAIRS CONTRACTOR

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to seek approval to procure a contractor to undertake void repairs and associated works, and to request that Cabinet recommend to Council an increase in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) annual budget of £858.1k to fund both the estimated cost of the works delivered through the contract, and the officer resource needed to support the effective management of the contract and void repairs generally, was submitted (item 10a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Public and Private Sector Housing and the Director of Housing assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Council intended to undertake the procurement via framework, which would likely result in a faster procurement process. The Council would be able to select a contractor from the framework to undertake a mini-competition, knowing that checks on integrity, quality and ability to do the work had been done. Additional checks would be undertaken to provide further information on the financial stability of a contractor.
- ii. It was recommended to Cabinet that the HRA revenue budgets were increased by £858.1k on an ongoing basis. This included the value of the contract (£700k maximum) and staffing costs (£158.1k). The finances were requested on an ongoing basis, but for a finite amount of time, until the voids backlog had been addressed.
- iii. Following the selection of a contractor, it was expected that there would be a measurable increase in completed voids work by quarter 4.
- iv. Once a suitable contractor had been identified, the work undertaken would be monitored by new KPIs and a regular update report on the number of jobs complete. At this stage, it would be possible to estimate how long it would take for the Council to clear the backlog. The Director of Housing and Wellbeing agreed to share this information with Scrutiny Commission when it was available.

RESOLVED

1. That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing.
2. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing provide information on the estimated time taken to clear the backlog.

Reasons

1. The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendation set out.
2. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to understand how long it would take to clear the backlog.

24. SCRUTINY COMMISSION PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - CABINET RESPONSE

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

25. SCRUTINY PANELS

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to consider updates on the work of scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. A Scrutiny Panels workshop had been scheduled for 31st August 2023 to allow members to develop further understanding of the scrutiny panels processes, understand the topical issues at Charnwood Borough Council and to review some examples of good scrutiny panels. It was anticipated that following the workshop, there would be five or six topics for scrutiny panels identified. The Scrutiny Commission would then decide whether to approve the topics identified, at which point scoping documents would be completed by the panel Chairs.
- ii. Councillor Mark Charles was identified as the Budget Scrutiny Panel Chair for 2023-24. Following the meeting, expressions of interest in panel participation would be sought and it was highlighted that previous members of the Budget Scrutiny Panel would be favoured for participation in order to retain knowledge.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission note the progression of scrutiny panels.
2. That a Budget Scrutiny Panel for 2023-24 be commissioned, with Councillor Mark Charles as Chair.

Reasons

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

26. 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 was submitted (item 13 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Officer (NC) assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion;

- i. It was noted that the role and responsibilities of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee was outlined in the Council's Constitution. The Committee monitored the performance of the Council through a full Key Performance Indicator (KPI) report on a quarterly basis, which covered all services areas across the Council. The information received by the Committee also included some bench marking data, for data over which the Council had no control. In addition, monitoring of the Capital Plan and the HRA Revenue Budget was also within the Committee's remit.
- ii. The Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee was able to flag items for the attention of the Scrutiny Commission where there were performance issues identified (for example, the performance associated with void properties). The Scrutiny Commission were then able to scrutinise this matter in more depth.
- iii. Briefing session on the management of KPIs was being organised for the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and it was suggested that the scope for this session be broadened to include members of the Scrutiny Commission.

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 briefing session on the management of KPIs, to be scheduled for the members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee be made available for members of the Scrutiny Commission to attend.

Reasons

1. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.
2. To ensure members of the Scrutiny Commission develop more knowledge on the management of KPIs.

27. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of 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, was submitted (item 14 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. It was suggested that the 'Questions on Notice' item on the Scrutiny Commission Work Programme be removed as this was a standard item. The Questions on Notice function of the Scrutiny Commission was underused and members were unclear about the details of process. It was agreed that information on the Questions on Notice to the Scrutiny Commission be covered at the Scrutiny Panels workshop, scheduled for 31st August 2023, with a view to promote the use of the function.
- ii. The following items were identified for pre-decision scrutiny from the Key Decisions Notice;
 - Revenues and Benefits Service – Future Options (September 2023).
 - Housing Capital Programme (March 2024)
 - Local Development Scheme (March 2024)
 - Corporate Delivery Plan 2024/25 (March 2024)
- iii. The Selective Licensing Scheme Update report, which was scheduled to be considered at this meeting had been deferred to the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 9th October 2023.

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.
3. That the following items be added to the Scrutiny Commission's work programme:
 - Revenues and Benefits Service – Future Options (September 2023).
 - Housing Capital Programme (March 2024)
 - Local Development Scheme (March 2024)
 - Corporate Delivery Plan 2024/25 (March 2024)
4. That information on the process of Questions on Notice to the Scrutiny Commission be covered in the Scrutiny Panels workshop, scheduled for 31st August 2023.
5. That the Selective Licensing Scheme Update report be scheduled for the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 9th October 2023.

Reasons

- 1-3 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.
- 2&5. To ensure effective and timely scrutiny.
4. To ensure Councillors are aware of the Questions on Notice function for the Scrutiny Commission.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 4th September 2023 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.