

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
11TH SEPTEMBER 2023**

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

Councillor Ashcroft (Lead Member for Finance,
Customer and Support Services and Revenues
and Benefits)

Director of Customer Experience
Head of Finance
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

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.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the previous meeting were approved.

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

No disclosures were made.

30. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

31. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

32. 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.

33. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

34. CAPITAL PLAN AMENDMENT REPORT

Councillor Lennie arrived at the meeting at 6:05pm.

A Cabinet report of the Head of Finance to consider and approve changes to the 2023-2026 Capital Plan and its financing, was submitted (item 7a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Finance, Customer and Support Services and Revenues and Benefits and the Head of Finance assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Capital Plan Amendment report included an audit trail, highlighting the initiation of each of the capital projects requesting funds.
- ii. There had been a £50k allocation for 'Garages' as part of 'Stock Maximisation'. The Head of Finance provide more detail on how the £50k was spent, following the meeting.

Post meeting note: The Director of Housing and Wellbeing confirmed that the £50k would be used for major repairs and improvements to garages and garage sites.

- iii. The Replacement Hardware Programme had been increased from £45k to £90k in 2023/24, for the purchase of laptops and headsets for the new councillors and replacing existing equipment for returning councillors. Members felt that £90k was a large amount to cover this request. The Head of Finance and the Democratic Services Manager agreed to provide a breakdown of this expenditure, following the meeting.

Post meeting note: Of the additional £45k funding, £19k was allocated for new laptops for the 29 new councillors, and £16k was allocated for the replacement of laptops for returning councillors (scheduled for November 2023). This amounts to £35k. The remaining £10k would be used to support the replacement of laptops for staff.

- iv. It was recommended that a virement of £60.2k in 2023/24 from the Sheltered Housing Improvements budget to the Delivery of Stock Condition Survey and Associated Costs budget be made. This was surplus budget that would be used to fund HRA (Housing Revenue Account) schemes. Members highlighted that there had recently been a housing stock survey conducted and questioned the need for a further survey. The Head of Finance agreed to provide more information on this following the meeting.

Post meeting note: The Director of Housing and Wellbeing stated that the stock condition survey and the associated works was complete. It was substantively completed last year (although not 100% which was why there was an accrual). It included an energy study, an asset performance evaluation, and an updated HRA business plan. These items were fed into the Asset Management Strategy considered last financial year. The updated HRA Business Plan was

considered earlier this year by the Housing Management Advisory Board and would be brought forward to Cabinet. The sheltered housing improvement budget was typically used for one off large capital items at sheltered housing (eg heating system).

v. Members felt that the report was well presented and easy to understand.

RESOLVED

1. That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Finance.
2. That the Head of Finance provide more detail on how the £50k allocation to 'Garages', as part of 'Stock Management', was spent, following the meeting.
3. That the Head of Finance and the Democratic Services Manager provide a breakdown of the £90k requested to purchase laptops and headsets for the new councillors and replace existing equipment for returning councillors, following the meeting.
4. That the Head of Finance provide more information on the virement of £60.2k in 2023/24 from the Sheltered Housing Improvements budget to the Delivery of Stock Condition Survey and Associated Costs, including the need for another housing stock survey, following the meeting.

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 the £50k allocation to 'Garages', as part of 'Stock Management', was spent.
3. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to understand how the £90k allocated for the purchase of laptops and headsets for the new councillors and replacing existing equipment for returning councillors, was spent.
4. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to understand the requirement for the virement of £60.2k in 2023/24 from the Sheltered Housing Improvements budget to the Delivery of Stock Condition Survey and Associated Costs.

35. EXEMPT - REVENUES AND BENEFITS - FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY

An exempt Cabinet report of the Director of Customer Experience was considered under item 13 of the agenda.

36. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - CABINET RESPONSE

A report of the Cabinet was considered setting out its responses to the recommendations of the Commission on pre-decision scrutiny items, was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

RESOLVED that the Cabinet's responses to the Commission's recommendations be noted.

Reason

The Commission was satisfied that it added value where appropriate and welcomed the Cabinet's consideration of the Commission's views and recommendations as part of its decision making process.

37. SCRUTINY PANELS

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to consider updates on the work of scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Director of Customer Experience, the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Officer assisted with the consideration of this item. The Scrutiny Commission considered each scrutiny panel suggested at the Scrutiny Panel workshop. The following summarises the discussion on each suggestion:

1. Utilising Council Assets (Garages) – There was an item relating to this topic on the agenda for the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee for their meeting on 12th September 2023. It was agreed that this topic would remain on the list of suggested panels, and that following the meeting of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, the Scrutiny Commission would reassess this.
2. Housing Needs – It was agreed to progress this topic as a formal panel. Councillor Maynard would be approached to Chair the panel.
3. Public Transport – Members were unsure about the level of influence they would have on this topic, as it would involve a number of external partner organisations. It was agreed that this topic be undertaken as an express panel, with a number of partners involved in order to highlight issues and fact-find.
4. Climate Change and Emergency – This topic was due to be discussed at the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee, and a Cabinet report would be submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet in October and would be available for pre-decision scrutiny for the Scrutiny Commission. In addition, members were due to receive a briefing on this topic on 27th September 2023. It was agreed that this topic would not form a scrutiny panel at this time, but that it would be looked at in the future, once the Climate Change Strategy and Plan were implemented.

- 5& 6 Dementia Friendly Council and Loneliness – It was agreed that members receive an all member briefing on this topic to allow members to understand the current situation and learn about how dementia friendly the council was. This topic should remain on the list of suggested panels, and the Scrutiny Commission would reassess this topic following the member briefing.
7. HMOs (Housing of Multiple Occupation) – It was highlighted that the Scrutiny Commission were due to receive a report to update on the Selective Licensing Scheme at their next meeting, and that this would provide more information about the need for HMOs. It was suggested that an all member briefing be scheduled to provide more information on HMOs. It was agreed that this topic would remain on the list of suggested panels, and the Scrutiny Commission could reassess the topic following their review of the Selective Licensing Scheme report.
8. Brownfield Sites – It was agreed that the Scrutiny Commission should receive a briefing note on brownfield sites, to include information on how brownfield sites were recognised and to what extent the council can have control over whether they were built on. Following the receipt of this briefing note, the Scrutiny Commission could reassess the topic. It was suggested that a further topic could include the use of empty commercial premises as part of this briefing, however, the Director of Customer Experience confirmed that the council had no control over the use of empty commercial premises, and that the council did attempt to make contact with the owners of empty commercial premises to encourage use. Therefore, the Scrutiny Commission agreed that it was not appropriate to explore the empty commercial property topic further.
9. Litter Picking – Members had different experiences of the council’s contractors’ support with regards to supplying equipment to community groups for litter picking. It was suggested that the equipment provided may depend on the availability of equipment at that time. Members felt that the online reporting form did not work well and that there was a requirement to change this. It was agreed that the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission contact the Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment) and the Information Technology Delivery Manager to highlight the concerns of the Scrutiny Commission about the online reporting form. It was agreed that there was not a need for a scrutiny panel on this topic.
10. Tackling Substance Misuse – It was agreed that Charnwood NPA Commander Inspector David Stokes be invited to provide an all member briefing, focussing on substance misuse in the borough and the ways that this was being tackled. Following this, members would decide whether a panel was appropriate.

A further scrutiny panel topic was discussed following an email to the Democratic Services Manager from a councillor. The topic was about Contracted services in relation to the welfare of residents. It was highlighted that the Scrutiny Commission regularly scrutinised Cabinet reports about the contractors used by the Council, through pre-decision scrutiny. It was also highlighted that the performance of contractors was measured through KPI monitoring at the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee. It was possible for the council to require contractors to ensure their staff were regularly fully trained in customer service and that contractors could be

penalised if they did not provide the expected standard of customer service. The Scrutiny Commission were satisfied that the council did have a good control over contracted services and that performance was regularly monitored, and therefore decided not to progress with this topic.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny Panels.
2. That the Scrutiny Commission considered the scrutiny Panel suggestions made at the scrutiny workshop held on 31st August 2023.
3. That the following scrutiny panels were approved:
 - Housing Needs (formal). Councillor Maynard as Chair (to be confirmed)
 - Public Transport (express) Chair to be confirmed.
4. That the following topics be added to the table of scrutiny panels as 'suggested', for reconsideration;
 - Utilising Council Assets (Garages)
 - Dementia Friendly Council/Loneliness
 - HMOs
 - Brownfield Sites
 - Tackling Substance Misuse
5. That all member briefing sessions be arranged for the following topics:
 - Dementia Friendly Council/Loneliness
 - HMOs
 - Tackling Substance Misuse
6. That a briefing note be requested on Brownfield Sites, to include information on how brownfield sites were identified and to what extent the council can have control over whether they were built on.
7. That the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission contact the Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment) and the Information Technology Delivery Manager to highlight the concerns of the Scrutiny Commission with regards to the online reporting form for litter.

Reasons

- 1-3. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny and enable panel work to commence.
4. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to reassess topics following the receipt of more information.

5&6. To ensure that members receive more information on topics for potential scrutiny panels and to ensure all members to be provided with more information on these topics.

7. To ensure the concerns of the Scrutiny Commission were raised and to make officers aware of the issues faced by councillors and members of the public.

38. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources enabling the Commission to review and agree the scrutiny work programme, was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission review the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Work Programme and make any amendments the Commission feel necessary.
2. That the Scrutiny Commission agree 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.

39. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Governance and Human Resources to review its own work programme, including considering the list of forthcoming Executive Key Decisions in order to schedule items for pre-decision scrutiny, was submitted (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

- i. The Scrutiny Commission added the following items to their work programme:
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) - Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan – October 2023
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) - Review of the Planning Enforcement Plan – October 2023

- (Pre-decision scrutiny) – Economic Development Strategy 2023-27 – December 2023
- (Pre-decision scrutiny) – Charnwood Grants Strategic Partners (2024/25 – 2025/26) – January 2024

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 for pre-decision scrutiny:
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) - Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan – October 2023
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) - Review of the Planning Enforcement Plan – October 2023
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) – Economic Development Strategy 2023-27 – December 2023
 - (Pre-decision scrutiny) – Charnwood Grants Strategic Partners (2024/25 – 2025/26) – January 2024

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. To ensure effective and timely scrutiny.

40. EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED that members of the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest of disclosing the information.

41. EXEMPT - REVENUES AND BENEFITS - FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY

An exempt Cabinet report of the Director of Customer Experience was considered for pre-decision scrutiny (exempt item 7b on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Finance, Customer and Support Services and Revenues and Benefits, the Director of Customer Experience and the Customer Experience Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. A summary of the Commission's discussion on this matter is provided in the exempt minute (Scrutiny Commission Minute 41E. 2023/24).

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 6th November 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.
3. The following participants attending the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams: The Leader member for Finance, Customer and Support Services and Revenues and Benefits, the Director of Customer Experience and the Head of Finance. All other participants attended the meeting in person.