

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
4TH MARCH 2024**

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

Councillor Hamilton (Deputy Leader of the
Council, Public and Private Sector Housing) and
Blackshaw (Cabinet Lead Member for
Communities and Neighbourhoods)

Chief Executive
Director Housing and Wellbeing
Head of Strategic Housing
Head of Landlord Services
Head of Legal and Elections
Transformation and Improvement Manager
Communities and Wellbeing Manager
Strategic Housing Manager
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

APOLOGIES: None

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.

109. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 5th February 2024 were approved.

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

- i. By Councillor Lennie – in respect of item 7a on the agenda (Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-25), as a member of Shepshed Town Team.

111. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

112. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

113. 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.

114. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

115. CORPORATE DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25

A Cabinet report of the Chief Executive to propose the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-25, was submitted (item 7a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Chief Executive, the Director of Housing and Wellbeing and the Transformation and Improvement Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The relocation of the CCTV Control Centre to the Beehive multi storey car park was to consolidate assets. Eventually the ICS building could become vacant and the Council would have options to repurpose the building.
- ii. It was intended that the delivery of a portfolio of projects would promote Charnwood Borough Council as a key employer to enable it to retain and attract a strong and committed work force.
- iii. There had been a Car Parking Strategy started, which had so far focussed on the Council's current assets and fees and charges in relation to car parking. The Car Parking Strategy was still in development and it was expected that a draft would be completed by March 2024, and a completion date had been set for early 2025.
- iv. The Green Fleet Review was exclude waste vehicles, and would include all over vehicles in the Council's fleet.
- v. The Domestic Abuse Policy was a regulatory expectation and would impact a number of areas across the Council, including Landlord Services, Housing Needs and the Community Safety team.
- vi. It was suggested that the Council should encourage more market traders to engage with the specialist markets to be held. It was expected that the increased participation of market traders would encourage more traders to attend. The Chief Executive agreed to discuss this with the Markets team at the Council.
- vii. It was highlighted that a lot of the work associated with the 'Economy and Growth' section of the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-25 would be focussed in the Loughborough Area as there was a significant amount of work associated with the Loughborough Town Deal being delivered. It was suggested that more work to support parishes and highstreets in other areas of the Borough would be welcomed.

- viii. There was an existing budget that the Loughborough Mela was able to access and organisers had been advised that they were able to bid for funding through the community grants process. An annual amount had been requested; however, this would need to be weighed in the future against other pressures.
- ix. The new major summer event would bring something new to the Borough to attract more visitors. There was a desire to increase commerciality to avoid financial strains on the Council's budgets.
- x. It was suggested that the Council considered the resettlement requirements of Asylum Seekers in future Corporate Delivery Plans. It was recognised that there were ongoing challenges and that the Council was limited, but would do as much as possible to support Asylum Seekers. The Council had an internal Ukraine group which looked at the support offered by the Council and a lot of the work required to rehome Asylum Seekers had been undertaken by existing teams within the Council. There had been no additional financial resources provided by Government to support this work. The Council also funded Equality Action Charnwood as a Strategic Partner, to provide advice and support to Asylum Seekers in need of resettlement.
- xi. The Council's Bereavement Services provided by North West Leicestershire District Council were due to end, and therefore the Council wanted to implement new arrangements for the delivery of an in-house Bereavement Service from September 2024. The change in service arrangements would not affect service users. It was possible that the service could be outsourced to other local authorities.
- xii. The way that Council Tax collections were recorded were incremental and were built up from quarter to quarter.
- xiii. Data on air quality was collected on the Ashby Road area and by Loughborough University, which were in close proximity to the incinerator. The Air Quality Strategy was intended to be Borough-wide and would likely include air quality in the Shepshed and Stonebow areas. The Chief Executive agreed to enquire about this with officers and feed back to members following the meeting.
- xiv. It was difficult to collect data on the percentage of Charnwood residents that were email subscribers. The Transformation and Improvement Manager agreed to liaise with the Communications Manager to see if this data was available, and would feed this back following the meeting. The Transformation and Improvement Manager highlighted that the Council was running a digital inclusion project which would support members of the public with channel shift. It was emphasized that the Council's services were accessible to everyone and were not entirely digital.
- xv. The delivery of football infrastructure across the Borough would use existing Council assets.

Post meeting note: The Head of Contracts (Leisure, Waste and Environment confirmed that the delivery of football infrastructure would most likely be on Council land. The projects that the Council had in development were on Council owned assets, or land that was leased to the Council.

RESOLVED

1. That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Chief Executive.
2. That the Chief Executive discuss increasing participation of market traders at the specialist markets scheduled throughout 2024/25.
3. That the Chief Executive enquire about the Air Quality Strategy data collected, specifically whether data was to be collected in the Shepshed/Stonebow area, which was in close proximity to the incinerator, and feed back to members following the meeting.
4. That the Transformation and Improvement Manager liaise with the Communications Manager to see if there was data available on the percentage of Charnwood residents that were email subscribers to the Council's communications, and if available, to feed this information back following the meeting.

Reasons

1. The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.
2. To create a more diverse offer in terms of market traders at the specialist market events scheduled.
3. To inform members of the intentions of the Air Quality Strategy, in terms of the location of data collected.
4. To inform members of the percentage of Charnwood residents subscribed to Council communications via email.

116. HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to bring the new Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy to Cabinet for approval. The policy sets the framework for the delivery of all aspects of the repairs service to include repairing responsibilities and the delivery of planned, cyclical and responsive repairs, was submitted (item 7b on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Public and Private Sector Housing (and Deputy Leader of the Council), the Director of Housing and Wellbeing and the Head of Landlord Services assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. Members felt that the report was clear and accessible to customers.
- ii. The Handyperson service was free and had been introduced as the Council had acknowledged that the support offered to vulnerable tenants needed to be flexible. Members praised the introduction of this service and recognised the benefit to tenants. This would be publicised as part of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy once adopted.
- iii. Tenants received information on the Customer Repair Responsibilities when signing a tenancy agreement. In addition, tenants received a Repairs Handbook, which detailed this information.
- iv. The timescale for adaptations was six months. The Council had a separate policy for adaptations.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing.

Reason

The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.

117. HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to update the housing revenue and capital programme for 2024-25 following the identification of new amounts needed to dry, clean and repair properties following flooding in the borough in January 2024, and the mobilisation of a programme to increase the amount of work undertaken at major voids, was submitted (item 7c on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

It was highlighted that the cost of the work to be undertaken as a result of flood damaged should be fully recoverable from the Council's insurance policies.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing.

Reason

The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.

118. SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to consider the Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework, was submitted (item 7d on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Public and Private Sector Housing (and Deputy Leader of the Council), the Director of Housing and Wellbeing, the Head of Strategic Housing and the Strategic Housing Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. Members welcomed the Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework and felt that a review of the sheltered accommodation was beneficial.
- ii. It was acknowledged that the budget provisions associated with Recommendation 3 of the report involved a lot of investment. £200k of the investment outlined was to gain specialist external support for due diligence and to ensure the Council chose the most appropriate options. The costs associated with decommission Block A of Fielding Court would depend on the option chosen, and may not meet the £200k allocated.
- iii. Riversdale Court in Birstall had been a popular sheltered accommodation unit. If there was further demand for this type of property then the Council would consider this when making recommendations on the types of property required in the future.
- iv. The Council would engage with current and potential tenants through focus groups and direct communication in order to consult on and inform about proposed changes to sheltered accommodation.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing.

Reason

The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.

119. SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to enable Cabinet to consider the arrangements for voluntary and community sector grants for the year 2024/2025, was submitted (item 7e on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

- i. It was emphasised that grants were open as before, and that there had been two aspects added to the criteria for grants, referencing the cost of living and the Council's Climate Change Strategy. The criteria for grants was applied to give weight to applications. Organisations did not necessarily have to fulfil every criteria. The additional criteria would not automatically exclude existing Member Grants groups.
- ii. The ring fencing of £30k from the Community Grants sum for 2024/25 was for community groups. It was recognised that for some smaller groups, decisions were much more time critical and that it would be beneficial to alter the process slightly, as recommended in the report. The recommended process would allow smaller community groups to receive smaller funds quicker, without compromising the necessary due diligence and checks against eligibility criteria. Members could still nominate and support local groups to access funds through the grants process.
- iii. The Grants Panel was made up of officers and Chaired by the Communities and Wellbeing Manager. The purpose of the panel was to ensure due diligence by checking applications against the eligibility criteria. Applications were scored by panel members individually and an average score was identified. The final score for an application could be amended if further information was received to improve the strength of the application. The Grants team provided support to complete applications if required.
- iv. Members Grants were introduced a number of years ago to enable members to support projects in their wards. Research had been undertaken which highlighted that some other Councils administered member grants schemes and the Council chose to develop a scheme.
- v. Some organisations (such as The Bridge) had Service Level Agreements with the Council to provide services, and were funding through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. The Citizen's Advice Bureau were a Strategic Partner of the Council, and received funding through the Strategic Partner Grant. The Citizen's Advice Bureau also received funding from the Homelessness Prevention Grant to provide services on behalf of the Council, to reduce homelessness. The additional funding of £25k to the Citizen's Advice Bureau was to increase capacity and to enable them to support more residents.
- vi. The Citizen's Advice Bureau reported to the Council on a quarterly basis, detailing the services accessed by residents by ward. The Communities and Wellbeing Manager agreed to share this report with members following the meeting.
- vii. It was suggested that the list of voluntary sector organisations which the Council provides funding to, and the services offered, be circulated to members following the meeting.

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 Communities and Wellbeing Manager share the quarterly Citizen's Advice Bureau report with members following the meeting.
3. That the Director of Housing and Wellbeing circulate a list of voluntary sector organisations which the Council provides funding to, and the services offered, following the meeting.

Reasons

1. The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.
2. To enable members to see the Citizen's Advice Bureau services accessed by members of the public by ward.
3. To ensure members were aware of the organisations and services being funded by the Council.

120. 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 Head of Legal and Electoral Services 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.

121. SCRUTINY PANELS

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

The Head of Legal and Electoral Services and the Democratic Services Officer assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Scrutiny Commission asked that the Dementia Friendly Council/Loneliness member briefing was circulated to members again.

- ii. Officers were now able to draft a briefing note for members on Brownfield Sites following the conclusion of the Local Plan Hearings. Members asked for this briefing note to be circulated as soon as was reasonable.
- iii. It was highlighted that there was a new NPA Commander in Charnwood and so it would be appropriate to schedule in a member briefing on Substance Misuse in Charnwood.
- iv. With regards to the HMO member briefing, a date had been scheduled for 3rd April 2024. It was suggested by officers that the HMO briefing be split into two stages. The first stage (the briefing to be held on 3rd April 2024) focussed on the planning and licensing aspects of HMOs. The second stage (to be scheduled) would be focussed on the anti-social behaviour, parking and waste management aspects of HMOs. Members agreed with this approach and felt that it would be beneficial to hold the second session before the end of the university term so that newer members were informed about how to deal with issues regarding waste following university term. It was highlighted that the first session should include information on the demand for HMOs, and whether the supply of HMOs was equivalent to the demand.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny Panels.
2. That the Dementia Friendly Council/Loneliness member briefing be recirculated to members.
3. That the Brownfield Sites briefing note be completed and circulated as soon as was reasonable.
4. That the HMOs briefing session be delivered in two stages. Stage one to look at planning and licensing of HMOs (and the supply and demand of HMOs). Stage two to look at parking, anti-social behaviour and waste. Stage two would ideally take place before the end of the university term.

Reasons

- 1-4. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.

122. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

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.

123. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Democracy to enable the Scrutiny Commission 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).

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 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.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 22nd April 2024 unless notice to that effect is given to the Head of Democracy 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 attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams: The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Public and Private Sector

Housing, the Lead Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities, the Head of Strategic Housing and the Strategic Housing Manager.