

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
2ND APRIL 2024**

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

Councillors Miah (Leader of the Council), Ashcroft
(Cabinet Lead Member for Finance, Customer &
Support Services, Revenues and Benefits)
(Treasurer of the Labour Group), A. Gray (Cabinet
Lead Member for Waste, Open Spaces and
Leisure facilities) and Jadeja (Cabinet Lead
Member for Planning)

Director Commercial and Economic Development
Head of Assets and Property
Head of Transformation, Strategy and
Performance
Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and
Environment
Head of Legal and Elections
Group Leader, Plans Policy & Place Making
Senior Ecological Officer
Learning and Organisational Development
Coordinator
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Seaton and B. Gray

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.

124. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 4th March 2024 were approved.

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

No disclosures were made.

126. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

127. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

128. 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.

129. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

130. ASSETS REVIEW

A Cabinet report of the Director of Commercial and Economic Development to set out the direction of travel regarding Council accommodation and seeks approval of a Capital budget to engage suppliers to develop and deliver a programme of works, was submitted (item 7a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Leader of the Council, the Director of Commercial and Economic Development, the Head of Assets and Property assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The newer part of Southfields Offices had been constructed in the 1980s and initially had a life expectancy of approximately 25 years. This time frame had been surpassed due to the careful maintenance undertaken to preserve the building. It was anticipated that further updates and maintenance would prolong the building for another 25-30 years. The new build option that the council had previously considered would have a life expectancy of approximately 35-40 years, but would have costed the council significantly more.
- ii. The £500k requested would be used to facilitate the development and planning of the programme of works required. The full cost of the improvement programme would be known after a programme of works had been developed and would be subject to Cabinet and Council approval. It was expected that a budget of approximately £6m would be required.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Director of Commercial and Economic Development.

Reason

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

131. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A Cabinet report of the Head of Transformation, Strategy and Performance to approve the Borough Council's Workforce Development Strategy 2024 – 2028, was submitted (item 7b on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Finance, Customer and Support Services, Revenues and Benefits, the Head of Transformation, Strategy and Performance and the Learning and Organisational Development Coordinator assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The council prioritised recruitment and retention of good officers. Salary benchmarking was undertaken with East Midlands Councils to ensure salaries were in line with those in similar local authorities in Leicestershire and surrounding areas. There was also a network of HR Managers that Charnwood was involved in in order to benchmark further. The council was actively promoting the benefits of working in local government and at Charnwood Borough Council specifically.
- ii. The council had introduced agile working plans which were unique to each service and team. Staff were engaged to discuss service delivery and how agile working could be done. There were some challenges associated with agile working but these were managed well by individual services. Following the introduction of agile working at the council, staff surveys had indicated that this way of working was preferred. It was also highlighted that agile working was a key factor in recruiting new staff as it was seen as a desirable advantage.
- iii. Staff vacancies affected some service areas more than others and the council was trying different initiatives to fill vacancies, including career grading posts and the offer of apprenticeships.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Transformation, Strategy and Performance.

Reason

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

132. BIODIVERSITY IMPROVEMENTS - CHANGES TO MOWING ARRANGEMENTS

A Cabinet report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to consider introducing a three-year pilot scheme of mowing changes at sixteen locations for the purpose of improving biodiversity. The pilot scheme will reduce the mowing frequency from ten cuts per annum to two cuts per annum at sixteen locations to improve biodiversity, was submitted (item 7c on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Waste, Open Spaces and Leisure Facilities and the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The pilot scheme would be run over a two year period in order to allow biodiversity to improve over time. It was expected that a one year pilot would not be a long enough time scale to allow biodiversity to improve. It was possible that the council could monitor the increase in biodiversity over the two year pilot period. Following the two year pilot period, it would possible that the council may decide to extend the initiative to further sites across the borough.
- ii. The council had an obligation to improve biodiversity and it was recognised that a balance was important. It was expected that the initial pilot scheme would not be favoured by some residents, but the council would communicate the purpose of the pilot scheme to residents and erect signage to re-establish the expectation of how open spaces were managed.
- iii. The council would ensure that the sites included in the pilot scheme were carefully managed, despite the reduction in mowing. It would be obvious to members of the public that the increase in vegetation was deliberate and site parameters would be maintained to ensure boundaries were not overgrown.
- iv. The pilot scheme would affect only a very small amount of open space owned by the council. It was recognised that the pilot scheme may deter people from using the open spaces as they had done before, although there were other areas within localities that members of the public could use instead.
- v. It was possible that the council could use a flowering lawn mix on the selected sites to improve the look of the sites, although this would have to be carefully considered as some flowering lawn mixes affect the quality of the grass.
- vi. The council had received funding to work with an ecology consultant. The sites were chosen based upon the advice of the ecology consultant, as these were considered to be the most appropriate sites.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment.

Reason

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

133. TOWARDS A CORPORATE BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

A Cabinet report of the Head of Planning and Growth to approve the First Considerations Report, was submitted (item 7d on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Planning, the Group Leader Plans, Policy and Place and the Senior Ecological Officer assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The council intended to use all of the £875k in offsetting payments secured under Section 106 legal agreements which were in the process of being disbursed for biodiversity projects. Some of this money had already been spent and officers at the council were leasing with parish and town councils to identify appropriate projects for the funding. It was expected that the funding would be exhausted and projects would be completed within 5 to 7 years. There was a risk that the money may not be spent if appropriate projects were not identified.
- ii. There was a significant amount of governance surrounding the use of Section 106 monies to ensure it was used towards the intended purpose. There were new legalities in place that meant that the council needed to employ new mechanisms in order to receive money from developers, which was anticipated to take some time.
- iii. There was an opportunity within parishes and towns to create new public open spaces and there was a degree of flexibility on the projects delivered. Members were encouraged to highlight areas within their wards which could benefit from funding for projects to increase biodiversity.
- iv. It was suggested that the Communications team at the council could become involved in the promotion of the scheme, using a discrete and targeted approach to engage landowners in the borough.
- v. It was suggested that a peer to peer approach would be beneficial, to enable parish and town councils to discuss projects undertaken in their localities, the challenges faced and best practice advice. This may encourage more participation in the scheme.
- vi. It was suggested that positive examples of the use of funding be communicated to parish and town councils to encourage further ideas or projects.
- vii. Schools within the borough could benefit from the funding available. There was often a significant amount of open space available on school premises and biodiversity was included on school curriculums.

RESOLVED

1. That the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Growth.
2. That the Senior Ecological Officer consider engaging the council's Communications team in the scheme.

Reason

1. The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should approve the recommendations set out.
2. To encourage more participation in the scheme from parish and town councils.

134. CABINET RESPONSE TO PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

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.

135. 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

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

The meeting of the Public Transport Scrutiny Panel scheduled for 27th March 2024 was cancelled due to the lack of officer availability. This meeting would be rescheduled in due course.

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny Panels.

Reason

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

136. 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).

The Head of Legal and Electoral Services 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.

137. 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).

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

Two items which had originally been scheduled to be submitted to this Scrutiny Commission had been deferred and were expected to be submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission;

- Cost of Living Update
- Selective and Additional Licensing Scheme Update

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 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 meeting participants attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams; The Director of Commercial and Economic Development, the Head of Assets and Property and the Learning and Organisational Development Coordinator.