

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
8TH JANUARY 2024**

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

Councillor Miah (Leader of the Council), 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 Transformation, Strategy and
Performance
Head of Strategic Housing
Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and
Environment
Democratic Services Manager
Communities and Wellbeing Manager
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

APOLOGIES: Councillor 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.

81. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 11th December 2023 were approved.

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

No disclosures were made.

83. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

84. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

85. 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.

86. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

87. CORPORATE STRATEGY 2024 - 2028

A Cabinet report of the Chief Executive to present the Corporate Strategy for 2024 – 2028, was submitted (item 7a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Head of Transformation, Strategy and Performance assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Council had previously experienced some staff shortages in Customer Services which had meant that there were longer wait times for calls to be answered at times. These issues had been resolved and call waiting times had been reduced significantly, to around six minutes on average (this was during the busy period). The Council was always aiming to improve wait times for customers.
- ii. Public service organisations experienced staff retention issues due to higher rates of pay in the private sector. The Council did undertake exit interviews with staff and there were no clear patterns indicated. Staff leaving the organisation were doing so for a variety of personal reasons and therefore, it was difficult to put measures in place to increase staff retention. The Council was looking at initiatives involving interns and apprentices, which would enable recruits to develop through the organisation.
- iii. The Corporate Delivery Plan 2024/25 would include further operational detail on how the Corporate Strategy would be delivered. This was due to be submitted to Cabinet in March 2024 and identified as a pre-decision scrutiny item.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Chief Executive.

Reason

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

88. DECLASSIFICATION OF PROPERTIES DESIGNATED FOR ALLOCATION TO PEOPLE AGED OVER 45 YEARS

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to seek Cabinet approval for the declassification of 1071 homes (around 20% of the Council's entire stock), which are currently restricted for allocation to those applicants aged 45 years and over, was submitted (item 7b on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Public and Private Sector Housing, the Director of Housing and Wellbeing and the Head of Strategic Housing assisted with the consideration of this item. An additional supplement was provided at the meeting, following a request from a member of the Committee. The additional information detailed the number of properties in each area considered for the declassification, and how many properties there were ready to let. This information was attached to the minutes as an appendix. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. Without actioning the recommendations, the Council could be challenged by individuals on the Housing Register who did not qualify for a property assigned to those aged 45+. The Council's Equalities Officer had been consulted and it was confirmed that there was a requirement for proportionate justification for continuation of a 45+ category in order for the Council to avoid risk of challenge. There did not appear to be a proportionate justification given that the properties in question did not have features which made them particularly suitable for people aged 45+.
- ii. The Council was in an anomalous position, with significantly more properties with age restrictions of 45+ than other local authorities.
- iii. There was no proposed change to the Council's stock of properties assigned for residents aged 60+, which were designed for residents of that age range.
- iv. There was a void property backlog, which the Council was working to resolve. The Scrutiny Commission had received updates on this issue and were due to receive a further update on this in February 2024. Voids from each classification were handled in the same way.
- v. There were mechanisms built into the housing allocations policies and procedures to support suitable allocations. Applicants who were unsuitable to be a tenant, for example where they had been responsible for anti-social behaviour or were unable to adhere to the terms of a tenancy agreement, would not be accepted onto the housing register or considered for an offer of accommodation until they had demonstrated a significant change in their behaviour. Suitability assessments were completed for all allocations by the housing needs team, in consultation with the landlord services team, taking into account the suitability of the accommodation for the applicant and the suitability of the applicant for the accommodation. These processes would help to minimise the risk of a clash in lifestyles in areas where properties were to be declassified.
- vi. The declassification process would take effect in Summer 2024, following an appropriate communications process and the recruitment of an additional ASB Officer and an additional Tenancy and Estate Management Officer to support

the changes. The declassification would be carefully managed and would take effect gradually in a phased approach, and as properties became vacant.

vii. It was recognised that some residents may be concerned about the declassification of properties and it was suggested that the declassification of properties be discussed at the Charnwood Housing Resident's Forum. It was intended that calls to the Council in relation to the declassification of properties be filtered into a dedicated queue, to be addressed by officers. The Council had a well-resourced Tenancy Support team which would help to minimise issues.

viii. Members felt that the report was very clear and easy to understand.

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.

89. CHARNWOOD GRANTS STRATEGIC PARTNERS 2024/25 - 2025/26

A Cabinet report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing to put forward proposals for the Strategic Partner Grant Scheme funding for 2024/25 and 2025/26, was submitted (item 7c 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. The allocation of £9,537 to be confirmed in the recommendations to Cabinet would be awarded to Living Without Abuse.
- ii. The Falcon Centre had a Service Level Agreement with the Housing service at the Council. Allocating further funding to the Falcon Centre would mean removing funding from another organisation. Organisations in receipt of a Strategic Partner Grant were not able to apply for Community Grant funding.
- iii. The transport service provided by Syston Volunteer Centre did not align with the requirements of the Strategic Partner Grant funding allocations. It would be possible for the Syston Volunteer Centre to apply for Communities Grant funding.

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.

90. 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.

91. SCRUTINY PANELS

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

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

- i. Following consultation with the Head of Strategic Housing, the scoping document for the Housing Needs Scrutiny Panel required some changes to reduce the scope of the panel. In addition, it was highlighted by the Head of Strategic Housing that there were a number of policies being renewed which could have an impact on the work of the panel. It was anticipated that the scoping document would be submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for approval.
- ii. At a recent Urgent Member Briefing related to the recent flooding events in the Borough, it was suggested that a scrutiny panel on Flooding be commissioned. There had been a Flooding Scrutiny Panel undertaken in 2014, and the report of the scrutiny panel had been circulated to members outside of the meeting. Members agreed that there was a need for a further Flooding Scrutiny Panel, and that this panel should commence at the earliest opportunity in order to allow the Council to prepare for any future flooding events.
- iii. The Scrutiny Commission agreed that Councillor Harper-Davies, having Chaired the 2014 Flooding Scrutiny Panel, be appointed as Chair of the Flooding Scrutiny Panel.
- iv. The Democratic Services Manager and the appointed Chair of the Flooding Scrutiny Panel would meet as soon as possible to complete a scoping

document, which would then be circulated to the Scrutiny Commission for comments and approval via email to ensure panel work could commence prior to formal approval of the scoping document at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission.

- v. Members would be invited to participate as a panel member and potentially would also have an opportunity to participate in the panel work by providing information on the impact of the flood in their wards.
- vi. It was suggested that Parish and Town Clerks be informed that the Flooding Scrutiny Panel had been commissioned and that they may want to discuss this at their next parish or Town meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny Panels.
2. That a Flooding Scrutiny Panel be commissioned, with Councillor Harper-Davies as Chair.
3. That the Democratic Services Manager meet with the Chair of the Flooding Scrutiny Panel (Councillor Harper-Davies) to draft a scoping document for the panel. The scoping document should be circulated to members of the Scrutiny Commission by via email for comments and approval.
4. That an email be circulated to the Parish and Town Clerks to inform them of the Flooding Scrutiny Panel and to ask them to consider discussing this at their next parish or Town meeting.

Reasons

1. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.
2. To ensure the Council could prepare for any future flooding events.
3. To ensure panel work could commence as soon as possible.
4. To enable Parish and Town Councils to consider the impact of flooding in their area, and any other flood related discussions.

92. BUDGET SCRUTINY PANEL

A report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel to enable the Commission to consider any recommendations and observations of the Budget Scrutiny Panel was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Councillor Seaton assisted with the consideration of this item as a Budget Scrutiny Panel member. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel (Councillor Charles) communicated via email that he would like to thank the members and officers involved in the Budget Scrutiny Panel. He went on to say that whilst the Council would face financial challenges in the year ahead, it was in a strong position to face these challenges.
- ii. Members acknowledged the relatively strong financial position of the Council and thanked members and officers for their work in scrutinising the Council's upcoming budgets.

RESOLVED that the Budget Scrutiny Panel report be approved for submission to the Cabinet at the next available meeting.

Reason

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

93. WASTE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE

A report of the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to update the Scrutiny Commission on progress against the actions 5, 6 and 9, recommended by the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel, and agreed by Cabinet on 13th December 2022 was submitted (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. It was suggested that Parish and Town Councils could become involved in the actions associated with Recommendation 9 (support the establishment of a scrap store/library of things/other similar initiatives). An email communication could be circulated to Parish and Town Clerks or an item could be added to the next available Parish Clerks Liaison meeting agenda to highlight this. It was recognised that residents in the villages across the Borough may not want to use this service in Loughborough and would prefer something more local.
- ii. There were a number of initiatives nationally that deliver a similar service described in Recommendation 9. Many of these operated on a locker system and did not rely heavily on staff or volunteers.
- iii. It was highlighted that there had been an initiative introduced at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council which enabled residents to rent a large bin for one week. It was suggested that this could be an effective way of dealing with excess waste following the University term. The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment agreed to include information on the progress of this initiative within the next Waste Management Scrutiny Panel update report.

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report are noted.

2. That a further update report, detailing the progress of Recommendations 5, 6 and 9, be scheduled for six months' time. This report should also include information on the progress of the new large bin initiative introduced by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

Reasons

1&2. To ensure that progress is made against the agreed actions.

2. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to understand more about the progress of the large bin initiative introduced by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

94. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Director of Finance, Governance and Contracts enabling the Commission to review and agree the scrutiny work programme, was submitted (item 12 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.

95. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Director of Finance, Governance and Contracts 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 13 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

The Scrutiny Commission did not add any items to their work programme.

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 next available meeting of the 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 following meeting participants attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams; The Deputy Leader of the Council, Public and Private Sector Housing, the Head of Strategic Housing and the Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and Environment. All other meeting participants attended the meeting in person.