

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
5TH FEBRUARY 2024**

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

Councillor Hamilton (Deputy Leader of the Council, Public and Private Sector Housing) and Tillotson (Cabinet Lead Member for Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres)

Director Housing and Wellbeing
Head of Strategic Housing
Head of Landlord Services
Head of Economic Development and Regeneration
Head of Democracy
Head of Legal and Elections
Strategic Housing Manager
Economic Development and Regeneration Manager
Democratic Services Officer (SW)

APOLOGIES: Councillor N. Taylor

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.

96. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 8th January 2024 were approved.

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

No disclosures were made.

98. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

99. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

100. UPDATE ON VOID PROPERTY INFORMATION

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 (item 6 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 Head of Landlord Services assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. Members recognised that the issues around the high number of void properties were being addressed and there was confidence that the number would decline moving forward. Contracted repairs capacity for working on void properties had increased and the staffing issues within the lettings team were being resolved.
- ii. There was a plan to declassify some age-restricted properties and these would be released to individuals on the housing register in due course. These properties would be released on a staggered basis. When deciding which properties would be declassified first, consideration had been given to areas with the highest numbers of voids alongside other criteria including geography, levels of anti-social behaviour, and tenancy support needs.
- iii. The amount of work required to reduce the number of void properties was closely linked to staffing levels. The Council was actively addressing issues with staffing and the Director for Housing and Wellbeing agreed to circulate information on the expected number of staff needed to address these issues, following the meeting.
- iv. The Scrutiny Commission felt that it would be beneficial to receive a further update in six months (August 2024) in order to review further progress on the matter.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission notes the report.
2. That the Director for Housing and Wellbeing circulate information on the number of staff needed to address void property issues, following the meeting.
3. That a further update report be received by the Scrutiny Commission in August 2024.

Reasons

1. To provide effective scrutiny of actions taken, in progress, and planned to improve void performance.
2. To ensure the Scrutiny Commission were informed about the actions taken to reduce the number of void properties in the borough.
3. To ensure the Scrutiny Commission could review further progress made on the matter.

101. 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.

102. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

103. HOUSING STRATEGY

A Cabinet report of the Head of Strategic Housing to obtain Cabinet approval for the updated version of the Charnwood Borough Council Housing Strategy, was submitted (item 8a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

- i. It was highlighted that it was not a statutory requirement for the Council to produce a Housing Strategy, but that the Council did have responsibility to assess and meet the housing needs if the local population.
- ii. Partnership working was vital in order to deliver a suitable Housing Strategy. Working with partners in the public and private sector provided opportunities to add expertise and pace to the implementation of the strategy.
- iii. Asylum Seekers and Refugees with indefinite leave to remain were assessed for housing in the same way as other applicants. One of the aims of the Housing Strategy was to increase housing stock levels to meet the needs of a growing population. An increased housing stock would mean more opportunities to house Asylum Seekers and Refugees and other customers requiring housing.
- iv. Affordable housing on market-led developments was secured through section 106 agreements. These legal agreements between local authorities and developers were linked to planning permissions.
- v. The Leicester and Leicestershire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment Housing Distribution Paper (HENA), published in April 2022, identified the housing requirements in each local authority area in Leicestershire. The Council was required to establish a housing figure for the area, showing the

extent to which the housing need could be met and any needs that could not be met within neighbouring areas. The Council's Local Plan would contain policies and proposals that would encourage suitable developments in the right locations.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Strategic Housing.

Reason

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

104. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 27

A Cabinet report of the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration to present an updated Economic Development Strategy for the Borough for the period 2024 – 2027, was submitted (item 8b on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Regeneration and Town Centres, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration and the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. An Economic Development Strategy was not a statutory requirement and members were pleased that the Council had developed one to facilitate a stronger economy for Charnwood.
- ii. The work involved in the Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 27 covered the whole of the borough. It was recognised that there were benefits in supporting events in towns and smaller areas across Charnwood and the Council had recruited an Events Manager to maximise event opportunities.
- iii. The town of Loughborough featured heavily in the strategy as this was an area of critical mass activity, with a significant amount of business and leisure opportunity. It was highlighted that supporting the economy in the Loughborough area benefitted the Borough as a whole.
- iv. There was a trend in the number of vacant units, which tended to increase and decrease over time. The most recent figures suggested that there were fewer vacancies and so the situation was improving.
- v. The Council was working with local colleges to provide T-Level opportunities for young people. It was hoped that this would provide a positive example to local businesses to encourage a similar approach. In addition, the Careers and Enterprise Hub project, which was part of the Loughborough Town Deal, was open to the public and was supporting local people in training and skills development.

- vi. The Loughborough area had a renowned reputation for sports excellence and there were a number of developing projects in the borough that supported this. The Healthy and Innovative Loughborough project, which was part of the Loughborough Town Deal, and a number of business start-ups in areas outside of Loughborough would focus on the health and wellbeing of residents in Charnwood. There was also potential opportunities to bring more sport events into the area in the future.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration.

Reason

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

105. 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 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Democracy 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.

106. SCRUTINY PANELS

A report of the Director of Finance, Governance and Contracts to consider updates on the work of scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Democracy assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The scoping document for the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel had been circulated as an agenda supplement prior to the meeting. It was anticipated that this panel may be popular among members and that there may be more than six expressions of interest for participation in the panel (the maximum as detailed in the Council's Constitution). It was suggested that it may be

beneficial to prioritise members representing the areas of recent flooding when selecting panel membership. Following the receipt of expressions of interest, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission, the Chair of the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel and the Head of Democracy (and Monitoring Officer) would decide on the panel membership. The Chair of the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel stated a preference for in-person panel meetings.

- ii. It had been suggested that the Housing needs Scrutiny Panel commenced later in the year to enable work to start on the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel as a matter of priority. The Scrutiny Commission agreed to this approach.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Commission reviewed the progression of scrutiny Panels.
2. That the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel scoping document was approved and the panel commenced.
3. That following expressions of interest for panel membership, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission, the Chair of the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel and the Head of Democracy (and Monitoring Officer) meet to decide on panel membership.
4. That the Housing Needs Scrutiny Panel commenced in June 2024, and that the scrutiny scoping document be approved.

Reasons

- 1-4. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.
3. To ensure the most appropriate panel membership was in place.
4. To enable the Scrutinising Flooding Scrutiny Panel to commence as a matter of priority.

107. 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 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Democracy assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

It was highlighted that the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were due to review the Homelessness and Rough Sleep Strategy on 5th March 2024 and that it had also been added to the Scrutiny Commission work programme for pre-decision scrutiny on 4th March 2024. The focus of scrutiny was different for the two committees

and some members felt that as the strategy was significant, it would be beneficial for both committees to discuss it and therefore it could stay on the Scrutiny Commission work programme.

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.

108. 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 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Democracy assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. It was highlighted that there were four items identified for pre-decision scrutiny for the Scrutiny Commission meeting on 4th March 2024. There were seven items listed on the Key Decisions Notice and the commission felt that all of the items required scrutiny. It would not be possible to effectively scrutinise all seven items in one meeting.
- ii. It was suggested that the Head of Democracy discuss this with the Chief Executive and officers to see whether any of the items listed on the Key Decisions Notice for March 2024 could be deferred to support the scrutiny process. If this was not a possibility, then the Head of Democracy would liaise with Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission on prioritising the items listed.

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 Head of Democracy discuss the Key Decisions Notice with the Chief Executive and officers to see whether any of the items listed for March 2024 could be deferred.
4. That the Head of Democracy liaise with the with Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Commission on prioritising the items listed on the Key Decision Notice for March 2024, if there were no opportunities for deferral of items.

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.
- 3&4. To enable the Scrutiny Commission to properly scrutinise all of the important Cabinet items.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 26th February 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 meeting participants attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams; The Lead Member for Public and Private Sector Housing (and Deputy Leader of the Council), the Head of Strategic Housing, the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, the Head of Landlord Services, the Strategic Housing Manager and the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager. All other participants attended the meeting in person.