

POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP – 5TH FEBRUARY 2019

Report of the Head of Strategic Support

ITEM 11 WORK PROGRAMME

Purpose of the Report

To enable the Group to consider its work programme and propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate.

Background

The Scrutiny Management Board agreed the Scrutiny Work Programme at its meeting held on 23rd January 2019 and the section covering the Group is attached as Appendix 1.

Management of Public Open Space

At that meeting the Board also considered the Cabinet's response to the recommendations initially made by the Group regarding the management and adoption of open space.

At its meeting on 15th November 2018, the Cabinet considered recommendations made by the Board on behalf of the Group in respect of the Management of Public Open Space, along with officer advice and recommendations in response. The Chair of the Group attended the Cabinet's meeting to present the recommendations. The following minute extract sets out the Cabinet's decisions in respect of the matter:

"54. MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Considered a report of the Head of Strategic Support presenting the recommendations of the Board following its consideration of the recommendations of the Policy Scrutiny Group relating to the management of open spaces (which arose during the Group's consideration of the Open Spaces Strategy) along with officer advice in response (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

Councillor Seaton, as Chair of the Policy Scrutiny Group, presented the recommendations of the Board. The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces presented the officer advice and recommendations in response.

The Head of Strategic Support assisted with consideration of the report.

Following consideration of the report, the Leader thanked Councillor Seaton and the Policy Scrutiny Group for its recommendations in respect of the matter. The Cabinet also considered whether the issue should be monitored in the future and the best way of doing so, concluding, following advice from the Chief Executive, that scrutiny could do so via the usual mechanisms.

RESOLVED

1. *that, in respect of Board Recommendation 1, it be noted that the fact that developers could choose not to offer open spaces for adoption by the Council, and the increasing use of management companies to manage open space on developments as an alternative to adoption by the Council, were of concern to the Policy Scrutiny Group;*
2. *that, in respect of Board Recommendation 2, it be noted that the Policy Scrutiny Group had identified the following particular issues with the operation of the management company model in addition to its general concerns:*
 - *the service charges that were levied by management companies could be significant for local residents affected by them;*
 - *there could be a lack of transparency in the way in which service charges were increased;*
 - *there was no consideration of ability to pay when service charges were levied;*
 - *there was evidence that maintenance work was of low quality in some cases;*
3. *that, in respect of Board Recommendation 3, at the next quarterly meeting of the Leader/Chief Executive/local Members of Parliament, the Leader raises again, on behalf of the Cabinet and the Policy Scrutiny Group, the issues identified above, to include sharing the report considered by the Cabinet at this meeting.*

Reasons

- 1.&2. *To note areas of concern which the Board wished to draw to the Cabinet's attention.*
3. *To support the Policy Scrutiny Group's wish that Cabinet seek to influence Government policy so that a change in the law could be considered to require developers to offer areas of open space to local authorities for adoption, while noting that issues around the management company model had been raised at a previous quarterly meeting between the Leader, Chief Executive and local Members of Parliament."*

The Scrutiny Management Board noted the Cabinet's decisions and reasons but did not indicate at its meeting how it considered scrutiny might monitor the issue in future, as suggested by the Cabinet.

Privacy in the Council's Main Reception Area

During consideration of the Tenancy Support Policy at the Group's previous meeting, the issue of privacy in the Council's main reception area was raised. The Group considered that it was important that customers using the computers in the Council's reception area felt that their privacy was being protected. That could be achieved by reviewing the layout of the area to prevent overlooking, providing

separate rooms for people to use or attaching privacy filters to computer screens. Reference was also made to privacy filters for councillors' mobile computing devices. Following the meeting the Chair of the Group has been in correspondence with the Head of Customer Experience. Work is being commissioned to move the computers in the reception area to a quieter, more private area and privacy filters for computer screens have been ordered.

Changes to Work Programme and Forthcoming Key Decisions

Following the previous meeting of the Group the Chair and Vice-chair agreed to schedule or reschedule items in the Group's work programme as follows:

- Zero Waste Strategy (to be scheduled for after publication of the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy) – 5th February 2019
- Customer Services Strategy – 9th April 2019
- Housing Acquisition Policy – 9th April 2019
- Local Plan – moved from 5th February 2019 to to be scheduled as the stage in the process anticipated in the work programme had not yet been reached.

An updated version of the Notice of Key Decisions and Decisions to be Taken in Private was published on 16th January 2018, and a copy is attached as Appendix 2.

Actions Requested

1. To note the Cabinet's response to the recommendations initially made by the Group regarding the management and adoption of open space and the observations made by the Scrutiny Management Board on that response.
2. To note the actions that have been taken regarding privacy for customers in the Council's main reception area.
3. To note the changes made by the Chair and Vice-chair of the Group to the Group's work programme.
4. To note the current position with the Group's work programme and the Notice of Key Decisions and Decisions to be Taken in Private, and to consider any changes that the Group wishes to make, or recommend that the Scrutiny Management Board makes, to its work programme.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the decisions made by the Board.
2. To acknowledge how a matter that had been raised by the Group at its meeting on 13th November 2018 had been dealt with.
3. To acknowledge the decisions made by the Chair and Vice-chair of the Group.
4. To make the Group aware of the current position with its work programme and to consider any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Work Programme

Appendix 2 – Notice of Key Decisions and Decisions to be Taken in Private

Background Papers: None

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