

**SCRUTINY COMMISSION
11TH JANUARY 2021**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Seaton)
The Vice Chair (Councillor Hamilton)
Councillors Bolton, Hadji-Nikolaou, Brookes,
Grimley and Ranson

Councillor Bokor (Cabinet Lead Member for
Loughborough), Harper-Davies (Cabinet Lead
Member for Community Support and Equalities)
and Smidowicz (Cabinet Lead Member for
Strategic Support)

Strategic Director; Environmental and Corporate
Services
Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces
Head of Strategic Support
Head of Leisure and Culture
Learning and Organisational Development
Coordinator
Democratic Services Manager, Democratic
Services Officer (SW) and Democratic Services
Officer (NC)

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.

102. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 7th December 2020 were approved.

103. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

104. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

105. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions were submitted.

106. AUDIT UPDATE

It was highlighted that a meeting had taken place on 8th January 2021 between the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Commission and the Audit Committee as advised by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny during the Covid-19 pandemic (Scrutiny Commission 1 June 2020, min ref 5 2020/21). It was agreed that the regular meetings of the group would continue and that members of the Audit Committee would have an opportunity to raise any issues to be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration, at each of their meetings.

107. 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.

108. CABINET ITEMS FOR PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The following items were identified for pre-decision scrutiny from the Cabinet agenda for 14th January 2021.

109. PEOPLE STRATEGY 2021-24

A Cabinet report of the Strategic Director of Environmental and Corporate Services to seek approval of the Council's new People Strategy was considered for pre-decision scrutiny (8a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Strategic Support, the Strategic Director of Environmental and Corporate Services and the Improvement and Organisational Development Co-ordinator attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The Council had carefully considered the needs of staff members and would ensure flexible arrangements were in place, allowing for working patterns that would suit the circumstances of each individual. It was acknowledged that home working was not always practical, although generally improved the work-life balance of the workforce. The Covid-19 pandemic had meant that agile working practices had been employed quickly and had allowed the Council to develop an idea of how best to undertake modern ways of working.
- ii. The Council had considered the effect of home working on mental health and had devised a number of initiatives to help alleviate any negative impact, including the encouragement of regular virtual meetings. The Council would work proactively in order to ensure the needs of staff members were considered as a priority and the practices detailed in the People Strategy 202-24 would ensure employees were able to highlight concerns where appropriate.
- iii. An individual Equality Impact Assessment was not suitable for the People Strategy 2021-24 in its entirety as the scope was too broad. However, Equality Impact Assessments would be undertaken to actions in the People Development Plan where appropriate.

- iv. The increase in home working had meant a reduction in sickness levels amongst staff and this was due to the previous office culture and the open plan nature of the office environment.
- v. There were no risks identified which were associated with the implementation of the People Strategy 2021-24 in its entirety, although a risk management matrix would be utilised in order to assess the risks of individual actions in the People Development Plan where appropriate.
- vi. The Council would review the recruitment process and this included the potential use of CVs, as opposed to online application forms in order to assess candidates. It was acknowledged that recruitment across various sectors was changing and that many organisations were now using CVs as a means of identifying suitability of candidates.
- vii. The Covid-19 Pandemic had had a significant impact on the development of the People Strategy 2021-24 and would likely continue to impact it following the implementation of the strategy. The apprenticeship opportunities that had previously been available had been affected, in that there was difficulty in meeting the training requirements of new apprentice, given social distancing measures, home working practices and the virtual working environment. The apprenticeship schemes would last for 2-3 years and the current climate was not suitable for the Council to commit to this.
- viii. The new behavioural framework developed would reflect the modern working environment and the expectations of Managers associated with this. It would focus on measuring the needs and productivity of staff working remotely and the new Management Charter would enable Managers to develop new skillsets in order to support this.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Strategic Director of Environmental and Corporate Services.

Reason

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

110. LOUGHBOROUGH BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) 3RD TERM

A Cabinet report of the Head of Leisure and Culture to seek the Council's commitment to supporting the process as outlined in the recommendations was considered for pre-decision scrutiny (item 8b on the agenda filed with these minutes.)

The Lead Member for Loughborough and the Head of Leisure and Culture attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion.

- i. The current process was preferable as the ballot would require a demonstration of the intent to utilise funds. The collection of levy funds was substantial over the five-year period and the consideration of additional charges for the development of the business plan, for example, would potentially discourage businesses voting in a ballot.
- ii. It was not possible for the Council to undertake the business consultation internally as the process required independence and neutrality in order to avoid bias.
- iii. The Council had waived the collection of the BID levy fee during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to support local businesses. The BID had since developed new strategies in order to overcome these issues and had now collected a substantial proportion of the levy (£200k, compared to a usual collection of £230k).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Commission supports the recommendation as set out in the report of the Head of Leisure and Culture.

Reason

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

111. SCRUTINY COMMISSION 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 (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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.

112. BUDGET SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT

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

The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Panel, the Head of Strategic Support and the Democratic Services Manager were in attendance and assisted with the consideration of the item. The following summarises the discussion:

It was proposed by Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Bolton, and resolved that the proposal set out in recommendation (i), for all Councillors to participate in the scheduled review of the scrutiny structure by the Scrutiny Commission in March 2021, be amended in that the Head of Strategic Support be requested to consult with all members of the existing four standing directorate based scrutiny committees rather than with all councillors. It was considered that consulting those councillors currently serving on scrutiny committees was more appropriate, noting that any scrutiny proposals would be reviewed by full Council at a later date, when all councillors would have an opportunity to consider any recommended changes to the scrutiny structure.

RESOLVED that the Budget Scrutiny Panel report be submitted to Cabinet at its meeting on 13th February 2020, except that Cabinet should not be required to consider recommendation (i), as this has been dealt with by the Scrutiny Commission.

Reason

The Commission, having carefully considered the report, felt the Cabinet should receive the report of the Budget Scrutiny Panel. Members of the directorate-based scrutiny committees will be consulted on the review of the scrutiny structure by the Scrutiny Commission in March 2021, and therefore Cabinet need not consider that recommendation.

113. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support to enable the Commission to review items from the paused Scrutiny Work Programme. This includes items for discussion highlighted by members of the Directorate-based Scrutiny Committees (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

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

The Commission added the following item to their work programme:

- i. Planning Fee Income 2019/20- Revenue Impact (Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee, July 2020) – 8th February 2021.

RESOLVED

1. That the Commission reviewed the Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes.
2. That the Commission reviewed the items previously selected from Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes.
3. That the Planning Fee Income 2019/20 item selected from the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be added to the agenda of the Scrutiny Commission for its meeting on 8th February 2021.

Reasons

- 1-3. To ensure timely and effective scrutiny of the matter/subject.

114. BULKY WASTE COLLECTION CHARGES REVIEW

A report of the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces to review the introduction (in October 2019) of charges for all bulky waste collections was selected from the Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme (item 11a on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Lead Member for Community Support and Equalities and the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces and assisted with the consideration of this item. The following summarises the discussion:

- i. The hardship scheme operated by the Council uses detailed criteria in order to determine the suitability of the charge. Since the introduction of the charges, 70 applications had been received and 22 cases had been granted exemption from the charges. It was highlighted that the number of applications for exemption due to hardship had decreased since the implementation of the charge.
- ii. It was acknowledged that fly tipping had not increased significantly and that the charge was generally accepted by residents.
- iii. The scheme had generated a substantially higher income than originally anticipated. The first full year of the scheme had generated £135k, which was substantially higher than the projected income of £60k and the costs for the scheme were currently being met. It was considered that Covid-19 had impacted upon the figures for the first year of the scheme, as there had been an increase in home waste as a result of more residents spending more time at home. The figures outlined for the first year of the scheme could change in subsequent years.

RESOLVED that the Commission noted the report.

Reason

To ensure that that the Commission reviewed the risks and benefits from the introduction of bulky waste collection charges 12 months after their implementation and discussed the impact of Covid-19 on the service, along with mitigation measures.

115. SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support to enable the 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 (item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with the consideration of this item. The following changes were made to the Work Programme;

- i. Enterprise Zone Forward Funding – Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (pre-decision scrutiny) to be added to the work programme (8th February 2021).
- ii. Corporate Delivery Plan 2021/22 (pre-decision scrutiny) to be added to the work programme (8th March 2021).
- iii. Charnwood Local Plan Pre-Submission Consultation and Submission (pre-decision scrutiny) to be added to the work programme as an additional meeting in March 2021.
- iv. Air Quality Review and Assessment Report 2019 (currently to be programmed) to be scheduled for 6th April 2021.
- v. Children and Families Wellbeing Service Update (currently to be programmed) to be removed from the 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.
3. That the work programme be updated in accordance with the items highlighted.

Reasons

- 1&3. 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 18th January 2021 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.