

MINUTES of a meeting of the CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillor R Boam (Chairman)

Councillors E G C Allman, D Bigby, A J Bridgen, G Hoult, V Richichi (Substitute for Councillor B Harrison-Rushton), S Sheahan and N Smith

Portfolio Holders: Councillors A C Woodman

Officers: Mr A Barton, Mr C Colvin, Ms E Kenyon, Mr J Knight, Mr C Lambert, J Marshall, Mr M Murphy, Mr P Sanders, Mrs B Smith, Mrs R Wallace, Miss E Warhurst and Mr P Wheatley

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors B Harrison-Rushton, A C Saffell and M B Wyatt.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

None received.

4. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021.

It was moved by G Hoult, seconded by Councillor N Smith and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

5. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Committee's work programme and Cabinet's Executive Decision Notice.

A Member informed the Committee that a scoping form had been submitted in relation to the Renewable Heating Grant error which had previously been reported to the Audit and Governance Committee. It was hoped that a report on the matter would be presented at a future meeting and a task and finish group be established to investigate further.

A request was made to receive the following report before consideration at Cabinet in September:

'The Recovery of our Leisure Centres and the Partnership Contract with Everyone Active'

A Member asked that officers closely monitor the number of evictions due to the potential increase now that the eviction moratorium had ended and report to Committee any issues. The Strategic Director confirmed that this was being monitored and information had been circulated to Members earlier that day. Members were informed that this area would be reported regularly as part of the quarterly performance reports going forward.

By affirmation of the meeting it was

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RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The future work programme be received and noted.
- b) Consideration be given by the Chairman to the proposed items for the work programme.

6. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Director presented the report to Members.

A discussion was had on the benefits of continuing the Scrutiny Cross Party Working Group. Members were in agreement that the group should not be disbanded, and it should be used to monitor progress of the scrutiny function with the next meeting in approximately 4 months' time.

In relation to the training package delivered the previous year, some Members felt that due to the virtual delivery it was not as successful as it could have been.

A Member referred to a consultation process undertaken with Committee Members the previous year in relation to the scrutiny function and asked for some information on the outcome. The Strategic Director explained that the consultation was part of the review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, the final report would be provided outside of the meeting for information.

Councillor S Sheahan moved recommendation one within the report and that the Scrutiny Cross Party Working group should be continued. It was seconded by Councillor D Bigby.

RESOLVED THAT:

The annual report be noted ahead of its submission to Council at its meeting on 22 June 2021.

RECOMMENDED THAT:

The Scrutiny Cross Party Working Group be continued.

7. ZERO CARBON UPDATE

The Head of Community Services and the Climate Change Programme Manager gave a presentation to Members highlighting the progress made so far on the Council's zero carbon aims. The Portfolio Holder also spoke in support.

A Member referred to another Local Authority in the north of the country who were utilising unused mines to generate power and asked if this was something that could be done in the District. The Head of Community Services reported that although this was deemed unsuitable in the past, it was something that was currently being investigated and early conversations were being held with the Coal Authority.

A Member expressed opinions on biodiversity and the loss of natural habitats, officers were asked if this was being considered due to the proximity of the National Forest. The Climate Change Programme Manager reported that there was a wider environmental group across the region, led by Leicestershire County Council, which would look at these matters. She agreed to discuss the matter further with the Member outside of the meeting.

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At the request of a Member, clarification was given on the position of the food waste collection trial and the process involved in recycling the waste. The Head of Community Services reminded Members that NWLDC was the only council in Leicestershire collecting food waste and it should be celebrated. The emerging plan was to roll the programme out to the whole District in the future.

A Member expressed concerns that there was not enough reduction of carbon footprint in the first two years to achieve the future targets. It was felt that the report did not contain enough context as comparison figures of the current position and current target position were not included, therefore it was difficult to see what was required. Other comments were also raised on the major work required to reduce the carbon footprint of council homes. The Head of Community Services explained that the plan was currently in its early stages with more data measurement was required. Members would receive more information going forward with a clear map to present the challenges ahead in meeting the Council's carbon reduction aims.

In response to a comment from a Member in relation to the change to a renewable energy supplier and the affordability for tenants, the Head of Housing explained that tenants had their own choice of energy supplier and it was not something the Council could enforce. The aim was to engage with tenants to inform, educate and encourage them to consider renewable energy. It was also confirmed that void properties were not currently changed to the Council's preferred energy supplier, but it was being considered.

A Member commented on the influence that could be made through the Local Plan and urged Local Plan Committee Members to seriously consider what could be done to impose good targets for the Carbon Footprint on new houses built in the District.

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions and confirmed that comments made would be presented to Cabinet when it considers the report.

8. CORPORATE ACCOMMODATION

The Strategic Director gave a presentation to Members.

Members understood the problems with the current building and acknowledged the work required to raise the standard and become more energy efficient. They also agreed on the importance of retaining Stenson House due to its heritage within the area.

The majority of Members were in support of the location of Customer Services into Coalville Town Centre as it would provide better access for the public, but a suggestion was made that other customer service hubs be considered for other areas such as Ashby and Castle Donington to make services more accessible throughout the District.

Some questions were raised in relation to the support to be provided to Members as there were concerns that they would be based in a different building to officers. The Strategic Director reassured Members that they would be included in all plans and as a customer, would be engaged throughout the process. He felt it was important to listen to Members' needs and would be consulting on all aspects including the refurbishment of Stenson House to form the Civic Hub.

Although generally positive about the proposals, there were some strong views in relation to the accessibility of officers to Members as they were often unable to make contact, and this had become much worse since officers were working remotely due to the Pandemic. There were concerns that if services were split across several buildings, and officers were to continue to work remotely, the service to Members would decline. The Strategic

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Director reported that the way of working due to the Pandemic had proven that officers did not need to be co-located anymore and the future working model, that staff were currently being consulted on, meant that 50 percent of staff would be able to work in the new accommodation at one time, so it would not be a fully remote workforce. It was confirmed that Members would be briefed on the new working model in the coming weeks.

Comments were made on the level of service provided to customers as part of the proposals and the possible confusion due to the split across three separate buildings. A further comment was made on the current amount of time it took to navigate through the customer services options when calling the service line as it was a very lengthy process which led to abandoned calls. The Strategic Director explained that the public would be encouraged to visit the Coalville Town Centre office if they needed to make contact in person and there would be a bigger focus on digital connectivity. The front office would need to have as much knowledge as possible to assist the public and appointments with specific officers would be available if the issue could not be dealt with in person, on the phone or online. The Strategic Director also confirmed that officers were currently working on a new customer services strategy that would hopefully be presented to Members in the autumn.

During discussion, a Member raised concerns that the proposals to reduce accommodation size were being put forward too soon as other large companies were now taking the decision to bring staff back into offices rather than continuing to work remotely. The Strategic Director explained that consultation with staff on the future working model had received a positive result and it had been confirmed that services could continue to be delivered remotely. He added that the proposals would also reduce the current running costs associated with the building and hence helping to achieve the savings set out in the budget.

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions and confirmed that comments made would be presented to Cabinet when it considers the report at its meeting on 27 July 2021.

9. THE COMMUNITY HUB

The Head of Housing introduced the report, followed by a presentation to Members by the Leisure Services Team Manager and the Community Hub Lead Officer

Members spoke in support of the work undertaken and congratulated the team for the impact they had made on the community throughout the Pandemic.

10. 2020/21 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development presented the report.

During discussion, several questions of clarity were sought and answered by officers from the relevant service area.

In response to a question in relation to retail units in the District, the Head of Economic Regeneration agreed to provide more information on the number of units in Ashby compared to Coalville outside of the meeting.

A question was raised regarding the number of council homes sold under the Right to Buy Programme, the Head of Housing reported that it was approximately 45 homes and would confirm outside of the meeting.

Some concern was raised that zero trees had been delivered to local communities, especially considering the climate change agenda. The Head of Community Services

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explained that due to the Pandemic, Public Health guidelines restricted contact with the community and therefore this service had been paused. The intention was to continue this service later this calendar year once the restrictions had been lifted and there were no concerns that targets could not be reached going forward.

A discussion was had on the large increase in the amount of fly tipping, and it was acknowledged that this was a problem across the country which had been exacerbated by the Pandemic. The Head of Community Services reported that work was being undertaken in this area with the street cleansing team, community groups such as the “Wombles” and litter pickers to make improvements. He also assured Members that enforcement was still a priority, and the budget was in place for cameras to be erected to detect fly tipping. The Council would continue to push forward and would prosecute offenders when caught.

In response to a question regarding the council spend on agency staff, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the overspend was entirely as a result of additional support required to run critical services during the Pandemic. There were a number of staff that were shielding or unable to work during the lockdown periods and therefore additional agency staff were brought in on that basis.

A comment was made on the target to seek external funding as it seemed to have been met by filling in the application forms rather than securing the funding itself. It was suggested that Scrutiny monitor how the targets are set more carefully. A request was also made for future reports to include an approximate figure on expected funding as well as the actual figure of funding received, for comparative purposes.

A request was made to receive a copy of the options appraisal for Moira Furnace as the report stated that it had been completed. The Strategic Director agreed to speak to the relevant officer and provide further information outside of the meeting.

In response to a comment made on the drop in figures in relation to the call centre statistics, the Strategic Director agreed to provide further narrative to Members outside of the meeting.

It was moved by Councillor N Smith, seconded by Councillor E Allman and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted and comments made by the Committee be presented to Cabinet when it considers the report at its meeting on 27 July 2021.

11. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN REVIEW - 2021/22 AND 2022/23

The Chief Executive presented the report.

As a result of Member discussion on the Council Delivery Plan review, the following comments were made:

Support was given to the proposed Ward Member profiles as part of the performance management, Members felt this would be a valuable source of information.

Support was also given to the proposed Annual ‘State of North West Leicestershire’ exercise to provide Members with a summary of contextual information such as skills, employment and health.

Officers were asked to ensure that the customer friendly short version of the Delivery Plan concentrate on the important facts.

The targets for tackling obesity were acknowledged but it was felt that it could be expanded further, particularly health and fitness. The Chief Executive explained that the Council was working closely with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to develop a health place plan which would identify what could be done collectively to improve the health of people in the District. She confirmed that a workshop was being organised across all partners to develop this plan and Members would be briefed on this in more detail in due course.

Concerns were raised that there was not a carbon reduction target within the proposed plan and, as it was clear from the statistics in the earlier item on the agenda that the Council was behind on its aims, it was felt that there was a need for a target of this nature. The Head of Community Services explained that as planning was in the early stages, it was important to carry out the necessary research and feasibility studies to acquire baseline figures before targets could be put in place. He assured Members that although he was taking a cautious approach, the next 6 to 12 months would see movement going forward.

In relation to the target to increase tourism, it was commented that this was minimal, and it was possible to achieve more. The Chief Executive explained that the tourism sector was one of the hardest hit in the pandemic and considerable work had been undertaken to assess the impact. It was felt that the 2 percent target was an aspirational one when considering the current position of the sector. Members were also reminded that the baseline figures used would be pre-pandemic.

In response to a question regarding the time period for the proposed plan, the Chief Executive confirmed that it was a two-year plan that would go as far as early 2023, this would allow for a further review following the District Elections in May 2023.

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions and confirmed that comments made would be presented to Cabinet when it considers the report.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9.04 pm

Chairman's signature