

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Abbey Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2024

Present: Councillor T Eynon (Chair)

Councillors M Blair-Park, M Ball, M French, K Horn, S Lambeth, P Lees, A Morley, E Parle and L Windram

In Attendance: Councillors J G Simmons and J Legrys

Portfolio Holders: Councillors M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Ms K Hiller, Ms C Proudfoot, Mr P Sanders, Mr T Devonshire, Mrs A Harper, Ms A Morgan, Ms J Rochelle, Mrs M Scott and Mr D Scruton

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

36. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

37. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

38. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024.

It was moved by Councillor M Blair-Park, seconded by Councillor M French, and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

39. UPDATE ON ZERO LITTER AND LAUNCH OF LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Head of Community Services presented the report, with assistance from the Environmental Protection Team Manager.

A Member asked about the possibility of bus shelters and road signs being cleaned as part of the plan. The Head of Community Services concurred that cleanly street furniture was important to neighbourhoods and said that detailed considerations of this matter could be added in to the plan at the ward level.

A discussion was had about the communication strategy for the plan. The Head of Community Services advised that this plan gave added emphasis to communications, which were under the direction of a dedicated Officer, and entailed an extensive strategy which encompassed much more than simply social media.

A discussion was had about enforcement. The Environmental Protection Team Manager advised that there had been a number of successful prosecutions and fines given out, aided by tips from the public; there was also a steady stream of staff coming forward with

Chair's initials

evidence, although a more concerted effort to further engage staff could nevertheless be made. She added that there must be an awareness that this could involve people being asked to go to court as witnesses, but the excellent NWLDC Legal Team gave support to anybody who was requested to do so.

Following from this was a discussion about problems with littering on the A42. Members were extremely concerned with the proliferation of rubbish, how this compared to other districts, and the reputational damage it might be causing. Members also wanted to know whether an increase in the provision of bins on that stretch of road could help to mitigate the problem, or whether cameras and surveillance could be utilised.

The Head of Community Services advised that he shared the concerns of Members, but noted that this was a very dangerous place to litter pick and somewhere he would be extremely uncomfortable with volunteers operating. He felt this might be quite an expensive issue to mitigate; would entail public anti-littering education as part of a holistic, district-wide strategy; alongside a discussion with Highways about utilising cameras and surveillance; as well as, where appropriate, new bins by the side of the road on a trial basis. He was intending for something to be added into the 2025/26 budget to help to address the steeper slopes alongside the laybys.

Members commended the work of volunteer litter groups and cautioned against the risks of a perception arising that the Council was farming out the cost of dealing with litter to community groups. The Head of Community Services also praised the work these groups did and advised Members that they were partners who the Council tried to assist wherever possible, with equipment, advice and whatever else they could.

The Chair expressed a few thoughts. She had spoken beforehand to local litter pickers and advised the Committee that they had expressed concern at the increasing difficulty of procuring equipment, now the process was digitised. She wanted to see greater engagement between the Community Scrutiny Committee and these local volunteers. She also felt that the data presented within the report could be better contextualised and explained.

The Head of Community Services said that he would be open to inviting volunteers before the Committee as part of future performance monitoring for Love Your Neighbourhood. He was receptive to the Chair's concerns with regards to the presentation of data.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder to speak.

The Portfolio Holder said that the scheme was a response to the effects of service cuts over a span of years. He was keen to make the district cleaner and greener, correct unnecessary cuts, and create a successful, voluntary partnership between the Council and civil society within the district.

The Chair suggested that there was a need for the Community Scrutiny Committee to monitor the performance of the campaign annually and the Head of Community Services concurred.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to the Cabinet on 23 April.

40. HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Housing presented the report, with assistance from the Housing Management Team Manager and the Housing Strategy and Systems Team Manager.

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A discussion was had about the changes to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. Members asked about how hate crimes were tracked, whether they were distinguished from anti-social behaviour, whether there was a specific hate crime officer, and how performance in this area was benchmarked.

Officers advised that there was no specific hate crime officer and accepted that work needed to be undertaken to prevent underreporting, although they did note that resources were stretched in this area. They also set out the range of benchmarking which was undertaken, and added that ONS data did not suggest that the data presented was an outlier for comparable, not overly diverse districts, with regards to the prevalence of hate crimes.

Members then discussed the Repairs and Decants policies. They asked for clarification on the proposed administration fee and where it had been derived from, and how debts were recovered in the context of the national 'cost-of-living' crisis.

Officers advised that the envisaged update to the fees and charges schedule aimed to make the policy as equitable as possible, this necessarily involved striking a balance between different types of tenants and also must include consideration of budgetary exigencies. The policy was written to fit most cases, with the expectation that exceptional issues could be subject to the complaints process and would be seen to by the Head of Service. With regards to debts, officers tried to be reasonable and were aware that using external agencies to chase debts risked being overly punitive.

With regards to Decants policy, Members asked for greater clarity, asked whether there was any possibility of ward Member involvement in the process, and what legal options were available to Officers in extreme cases. Officers advised that the Decant strategy depended on the time necessary for relocation. Officers tried hard to move tenant to preferred location, but this was dependent on what was available. The reason for decanting, especially when related to safety, played a part in where they moved. When people wanted to downsize permanently this could be facilitated through the allocations policy. The Team tried to work consensually with tenants but in extreme circumstances an injunction could be applied for to ensure work was carried out.

After this discussion Members were of the opinion that the aspect of the Decant policy pertaining to permanent and voluntary downsizing could be made clearer, and Officers concurred.

A discussion was then had about the Compensation Policy. The Chair was concerned that in some circumstances tenants were unaware that they could claim compensation. The Head of Housing advised that discussions around compensation should commence as soon as things began to go wrong. The new proposal that compensation be proactively paid without being requested, in certain circumstances, came directly from the Ombudsman's recommendations.

Members asked about communication with tenants more generally. Officers advised that the Repairs handbook was produced in close conjunction with tenants, the Tenants handbook less so, but both documents were anyhow scheduled for review. There was also a quarterly newsletter.

A discussion was had about adding a recommendation with regards to the issue of recording hate crimes.

It was moved by Councillor A Morley, seconded by Councillor S Lambeth, and

RECOMMENDED THAT:

Chair's initials

Cabinet consider the following wording to be added to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy: NWLDC will ensure it has a mechanism in place to identify hate crimes as a specific category, and that it will respond, advise and signpost those identified accordingly.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to the Cabinet on 23 April.

41. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to any items on the Work Programme.

The Chair commended the approach to surveying the thoughts of residents regarding the Future of Waste Services Review.

A Member wanted a report brought before the Committee discussing the provision of off-highway HGV parking within the district. Discussions with local voices in that sector had indicated that the district was under resourced in this regard. The Strategic Director of Place said that Officers would go away and consider this, in conjunction with the Scrutiny Work Programming Group, which included both scrutiny chairs.

A Member was concerned about what they felt was the Council's long term inability to communicate adequately with residents and solve problems residents faced. The Chair said that she would present the issue of communications to the Scrutiny Work Programming Group.

Another Member echoed the theme of concern with communications and felt the value of enforcement, across services, must be emphasised to residents.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.05 pm