

MINUTES of a meeting of the CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Room 101, Old Council Offices, Whitwick Road, Coalville, LE67 3FJ on TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2023

Present: Councillor S Lambeth (Chair)

Councillors D Bigby, M Blair-Park, M Burke, K Horn, J G Simmons (Substitute for Councillor M Ball), A Morley, S Sheahan and J Windram

In Attendance: Councillors J Legrys, A Barker and T Eynon

Portfolio Holders: Councillors M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr A Barton, Mr G Hammons, Mr M Murphy, Ms K Hiller, Mr P Sanders, Mrs C Hammond, Mr P Wheatley, Ms J Marshall and Mr T Devonshire

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Ball and R Morris.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

It was announced that a question had been received but after the relevant deadline; it was agreed that this would be dealt with outside of the meeting.

4. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2023.

It was moved by Councillor J Simmons, seconded by Councillor D Bigby and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 March 2023 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

5. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the inclusion of any items on the work programme. The plan of forthcoming Cabinet decisions and the current work programme were set out in the agenda for information.

In response to a Member inquiry about the status of the Task and Finish Group on damp and mould as agreed at Cabinet on 25 April 2023, the Strategic Director of Communities said that the most appropriate procedure to facilitate setting it up would be via a scoping document. He added that members should note that a housing repairs performance follow up was scheduled for Scrutiny Committee on 23 November and would discuss this matter.

It was agreed that the Task and Finish programme would be considered by the Work Programming Group.

In reference to the minutes of Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 8 March 2023, and their discussion of 'Succession' for tenants of council housing, and the lack of reference to this

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on the Work Plan, the Strategic Director of Communities explained that this was currently being drafted and would be brought to Committee in due course.

It was agreed that an update on the meeting of the Scrutiny Work Programming Group would be followed up on with the Democratic Support Officer who had been in attendance.

6. PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2022/23

The Strategic Director of Resources presented the report.

In response to a Member's concern that inflation was eroding the organisation's capital position, the suggestion that it may be particularly desirable to act speedily in this environment, and an inquiry into what readily available projects which benefitted the community were open to the organisation, the Strategic Director of Resources concurred that speed was of crucial importance in the current inflationary moment. He added that capital governance processes had been improved so that more robust proposals were coming forward around scheme delivery and timings. He also added that he would inquire with Team Managers about any speedy and readily available projects.

In response to a Member question about whether the unspent money could have been invested in a more lucrative manner if this underspend had been known at the time, the Strategic Director of Resources cautioned that throughout the last financial year interest rates were raising and returns on investments were similar over a few months, a year, or two years; the organisation, he stated, would not have seen much uplift. The Strategic Director then advised that the organisation focused on making sure investments were relatively liquid and low risk when managing the Capital Fund.

In response to inquiries from a member about whether underspending was a longer term pattern, and the effects this had on services, The Strategic Director of Resources advised that he had not been employed at the organisation too long so would have to qualify his comments, but noted that there was a pattern of underspending. The Strategic Director also advised that the framework within which he operated was agreed by Members. The Council were looking, he added, to spend the unspent funds on the same sorts of things, but in the following financial years. The organisation was also investigating how money could be better spent in medium term schemes.

The Strategic Director of Communities advised that there were procedural changes underway in the Housing repair services, they were suffering resource deprivation but were working to rectify this. The new budget recognised that financial and delivery capacities would be more accurately considered moving forward.

In response to the expression of concern from Members regarding inflationary pressures and the risk of housing stock becoming dilapidated, the Strategic Director of Communities advised that reports regarding such concerns would be returning to scrutiny.

The Strategic Director of Resources advised that the accuracy of the forecasts and the effects of procedural reforms would become evident in the quarterly finance reports.

In response to a Member inquiry about the possibility of accelerating the growth of the organisations housing stock, in the face of the budgetary latitude to do so and the demand for housing in the district, the Strategic Director of Communities set out the organisation's historical approach to housing strategy asset management. He then advised that a new medium-term strategy was being developed, and would come before members later this year.

In response to a procedural question from a Member, the Strategic Director of Resources explained that it would be the decision of the Council which guided them on how to split between new-build and strategic maintenance.

Following a discussion on the wording of the recommendation, it was agreed by affirmation of the meeting that the word 'endorsed' be replaced with the word 'noted'.

It was moved by Councillor Bigby, seconded by Councillor Lambeth and

RESOLVED THAT:

The Provisional Outturn Report for 202/23 approved by Cabinet as detailed at Appendix A be noted.

7. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Director of Communities presented the report.

It was noted that members of the Labour group had called in the Private Sector Housing Policy which had been discussed at Cabinet on 27 June.

During discussions, a new Member to the Committee commended the thorough and illuminating report.

The Chair thanked Members for their contributions on the Annual Scrutiny Report ahead of its submission to Council.

8. PROPOSALS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Strategic Director of Communities presented the report.

In relation to the timeframe for implementation, several Members suggested that the changed political context meant that it was now perhaps preferable to wait until May 2024 to see if changes were still required before formally establishing the Scrutiny Commission

A Member suggested that the Scrutiny Commission should be expanded to six members and the Chair should always be a member of the largest opposition group.

Both comments were noted.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments.

9. ZERO CARBON ANNUAL UPDATE

The Head of Community Services presented the report.

In response to a Member question about how the organisation could further improve its already comparatively excellent recycling rate of approximately 46%, the Head of Community Services advised that an emphatic focus on food waste could take them up to between 50 and 60%. There was also a need to focus on containers; and then national Government policy also had to be considered. He went on to advise that it would cost circa £1.5 million to do these improvements to food waste recycling. Central Government grants to fund this had been promised but at the time of the meeting were not yet forthcoming.

In response to a member question about the Council's electric vehicle strategy, the Head of Community Services advised that Council owned land had been phase one and the next phase would be the housing stock, but this was all constrained by what the Council owned. The Climate Change Programme Manager explained that there were six sites. The most recent planned scheme was a solar hub to be based on London Road, Coalville.

In response to a Member question about how Zero Carbon factored into procurement decisions, the Head of Community Services suggested there was more to be done but this was a work in progress. The Council intended to accentuate the focus on environmental sustainability and integrate it into all organisational procurement moving forward.

In response to a question about the failure to attain a previous government decarbonisation grant, the Strategic Director of Communities advised that the Council still had not had a response as to why they had not attained the grant, even though a response from national Government had been requested several times. This would be chased.

In response to a Member question about retrofitting housing stock, the Strategic Director of Communities returned to the earlier discussions concerning the management of the Council's housing stock. There was also, they added, the need to factor in public opinion on decarbonisation investments and there was a need to educate some residents. The 2030 task was not underestimated and required a wholesale and holistic change going forward.

In response to a Member question about utilising mine water, the Head of Community Services advised that this was a specialist and potentially quite tricky endeavour, and further work was planned to investigate both the possibilities and risks of the process.

In response to a Member suggestion that there was a requirement to make the new Leisure Centre in Coalville more environmentally sustainable, the Head of Community Services advised that there are Solar panels, amongst a variety of environmental features, and there was a latent possibility in the design of the Leisure Centre to retrofit it to make it more environmentally sustainable at a later date. It was noted that making all the district's leisure centres more sustainable was a priority.

In response to a question about how the electric vehicle charging point roll out data was being collated, the Head of Community Services advised Members on the strategy going forward and how it was monitored.

In response to an expression of concern from a Member that the earmarked reserve had three quarters of it spent already, and a significant amount of that on staffing, the Head of Community Scrutiny advised that this spending had all been processed through Cabinet and previous Scrutiny Committees; as for staffing, this was a budget which encompassed three years of expenditure.

In response to a suggestion from a Member that the infrastructure should be put in place for electric vehicles whenever new car parks were developed moving forward, the Head of Community Services advised that the organisation was endeavouring to embed Zero Carbon into everything people do.

The Chair thanked members for their comments which would be presented to Cabinet when it considers the report on 25 July 2023.

10. DEVELOPING A NEW COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

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

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In response to a question about what the plan might look like, the Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development advised that it was still at an early phase of development, but the aim was for a concise strategic plan rather than one which was overly specific. It was confirmed that operational level plans would be more detailed.

It was agreed, following a suggestion from a Member, that political groups be consulted on the draft Council Delivery Plan prior to the next meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a procedural question, the Strategic Director of Communities advised Members on the procedure of producing the plan and where the Scrutiny Committee was located within this process. The process of assessing risks to the Council Delivery Plan and budget setting was also explained.

In response to Member concerns that KPIs were being removed from the new Council Delivery Plan, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development assured the Committee that KPIs would continue in the Delivery Plan, but there may not be as many.

A Member felt that Zero Carbon progress was lacking focus in this report and how this was measured must feature. They were also concerned that building 10 Council houses a year was inadequate and at least matching right to buy losses should be the minimum aim. Furthermore, some metrics had been significantly exceeded and thus suggested they were too low. The Strategic Director commented that the Council is not the only supplier of social housing, and this should be considered in the round of total supply.

A Member commended the sections of the report which focused on the Newmarket which they felt were indicative of good work being produced.

It was moved by Councillor Morley, seconded by Councillor Simmons and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The decision of Cabinet in signing off the Quarter 4 Performance Report be noted.
2. Political groups to be consulted on the draft Council Delivery Plan ahead of the next meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.12 pm

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