

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on THURSDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2025

Present: Councillor T Eynon (Chair)

Councillors M Ball, D Bigby, M French, K Horn, S Lambeth, E Parle, L Windram, J G Simmons (Substitute for Councillor P Lees) and C Beck (Substitute for Councillor M Blair-Park)

In Attendance: Councillors J Legrys and P Moul

Portfolio Holders: Councillors T Gillard, A C Woodman and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr T Devonshire, Ms J McGarry, Mr A Cooper, Ms J Rochelle, Mr P Sanders, Mr D Scruton, Mr B Walford, Mr T Stanyard, Mr P Collett, Mr P Ashmore and Mrs A Harper

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Blair-Park and P Lees.

58. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

60. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024.

It was moved by Councillor E Parle, seconded by Councillor S Lambeth and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

61. HOUSING POLICIES

The Head of Housing presented the report.

The Chair thanked Officers for holding a workshop with Members before presenting the report to the Committee. At the workshop Members had broadly supported the proposed changes.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Property and Customer Services to address the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder concurred with the Chair's comments, and felt the well-crafted report was evidence of the value of all-Member workshops in the process of policy formation.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to the Cabinet on 25 March.

Chair's initials

62. TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Head of Community Services presented the report, with support from the Parks Team Leader.

Members commended the above average tree coverage within the district but felt the aims of the strategy were quite modest in the targeted expansion of tree cover. The Head of Community Services accepted this, but noted that the Council was developing action plans for each site they owned, though this process was considerably more advanced with trees at sites in the General Fund portfolio compared to the Housing Revenue Account portfolio. The management of trees under the Housing Revenue Account portfolio was also complicated by the division between trees the Council were responsible for, and those which were the responsibility of Council tenants.

Members asked about the various situations where trees might need to be cut down, such as sprawling roots and blocking light. Concern was expressed that the proposed responses to these challenges were possibly flawed and sometimes potentially contravened building regulations. Members also asked whether in such circumstances the policy was to replace trees with local species.

Officers advised that the strategy was to save trees and expand coverage, but also provide a clear framework for when trees should and shouldn't be cut down. Officers accepted the concerns of the Committee and confirmed that the relevant sections of the report would be refreshed before it was presented to the Cabinet. The policy was to replace trees with local species as had been done when the Whitwick and Coalville Leisure Centre had been built a couple of years ago and the Hermitage Ecopark. With reference to the High Hedges legislation, Officers also clarified the distinction between high hedges and trees which blocked light at a property and associated enforcement powers.

In response to a Member, the Head of Housing clarified that there was currently no central database detailing tree coverage at sites within the Housing Revenue Account. She stressed that auditing the sites and creating an accurate database was a complex and bespoke piece of work which would require collaboration between the Parks Team, the Housing Service, and external experts. Her team was also currently responding to other pressures, such as clearing the repairs backlog and responding to significant regulatory changes, and so whilst she recognised the importance of the audit, it had to be balanced against competing priorities.

The Chair asked about the synergy between the Tree Strategy, the Local Plan and the work of the Planning Enforcement Team. Officers advised that the tree strategy was an aspirational document, and Planning Enforcement were responsible for responding to trees being removed without appropriate consent.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change to address the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder said that increasing coverage was a key aim and the 20% target was a minimum aspiration which he wanted to exceed. He encouraged Members to approach the Portfolio Holder or officers if they had specific plots in their wards where they wanted trees planting.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to the Cabinet on 25 March.

63. COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE

Chair's initials

The Head of Community Services presented the report with support from the Environmental Health Team Manager and the Community Safety Team Leader.

Members asked about 'safe spaces'. Officers advised that whilst this did not fall within the purview of the report before the Committee, this was a key priority of the Licensing Team and a list of where these were located within the district could be found on the Leicestershire County Council website.

Members asked about the composition of the partnership and whether elected Members were involved. Officers said that the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Community Services sat on the body, but it was primarily an officer body, with its terms of reference set by central Government and where confidential cases were discussed.

The Chair requested anonymised case reviews in future iterations of the report. The Head of Community Services said they could be provided but would be extremely anonymised.

Members noted that the wards within the report did not correspond to current North West Leicestershire District Wards. The Community Safety Team Leader agreed to make sure that in future reports they did correspond, and to share the map used for the current report with the committee.

Members asked about the Prevent programme and Officers advised that this was exclusively focused on preventing radicalisation. Officers worked very closely with partners to carry out their obligations under the Prevent programme.

The Environmental Health Team Manager encouraged Members to report any anti-social behaviour, safeguarding or mental health concerns they had regarding residents.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments.

64. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND AWARD 2025/26

The Senior Economic Development Officer presented the report.

The Senior Economic Development Officer clarified for Members that the application criteria for UKSPF was the same as in previous years, but simplified. Officers also encouraged prospective applicants to discuss potential applications with them before formally applying.

Members asked several procedural questions. The Senior Economic Development Officer advised that desk-based analysis was currently being undertaken by external experts, site visits would take place in February, and stakeholder consultation in March. He also clarified that guidelines currently allowed for UKSPF projects funded between April 2022-March 2025 to be completed, and confirmed that Officers were confident that all of the 2022-2025 funding allocation would be spent by the end of the financial year in March.

The Strategic Director thanked the Officers involved and said the Economic Regeneration team had learnt lessons from the last allocation which they would apply to this round of funding.

The Chair asked about how the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion were applied to the process, both in judging the merits grants and getting disadvantaged groups to apply. The Senior Economic Development Officer advised that The Communications Team and the Community Focus Team would promote the application process, and such groups were strongly encouraged to apply.

Chair's initials

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to the Cabinet on 25 February.

65. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to any items on the Committee work programme.

The Chair advised that date had been agreed for an additional meeting of the Committee, to discuss the Future of Waste Services. She added that an all-Member workshop will be held at 5pm on Thursday, 27 March, led by Eunomia Consultancy and supported by the Strategic Director of Communities, the Strategic Director of Resources and the Head of Community Services. The workshop would be immediately followed by a meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee at 6:30pm for formal consideration of the Future of Waste Services. The report would then be presented to Cabinet on 22 April 2025.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.11 pm