

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL - TUESDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2018

Report Title	ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT
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Purpose of report	To present on an annual basis the items and reports considered by Policy Development Group (PDG) and to gauge its impact on Council business, and its effectiveness.
Council priorities	All
Implications:	
Financial/Staff	There are no financial implications associated with this report. Part of the remit of PDG is to highlight any financial implications relating to any of the reports it considers that have not been addressed.
Link to relevant CAT	None
Risk Management	Corporate risks are mitigated through effective scrutiny of future strategies, policies and other proposals by PDG.
Equalities Impact Screening	Part of the remit of PDG is to highlight any equalities implications relating to any of the reports it considers that have not been addressed.
Human Rights	None
Transformational Government	After effective scrutiny and feedback has been provided by PDG, better policies and strategies can be put forward for future adoption by NWLDC.
Comments of Head of Paid Service	Report is satisfactory
Comments of Section 151 Officer	Report is satisfactory
Comments of Monitoring Officer	Report is satisfactory
Consultees	None

Background papers	Report to Policy Development Group, 19 September 2018
Recommendations	THAT THE ANNUAL REPORT BE RECEIVED AND ENDORSED

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 As part of the process of improving the effectiveness of scrutiny at the Council, a report has been prepared setting out the issues and reports that PDG has considered in 2017/18. This can also be used to gauge PDG's impact on Council business, and its effectiveness.

1.2 This report was considered by PDG on 19 September 2018.

2.0 ISSUES AND REPORTS CONSIDERED

28 JUNE 2017

Director of Health Public Health Annual Report 2016

2.1 Mike Sandys, Director of Public Health for Leicestershire County Council gave a presentation to the Committee detailing the key findings within the annual report and proposals to improve the health and wellbeing in Leicestershire in the future.

2.2 Members raised questions around air quality, prevalence of diabetes and rates of breast feeding, and the report was duly noted.

Update Report on s106 Contributions to Health

2.3 The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members, which outlined that £1,122,000 of s106 was currently available to spend on health initiatives, and introduced Mr I. Potter, Deputy Chief Operator for the West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Mr Potter gave a presentation to the Committee detailing the work undertaken to secure Section 106 contributions, how they were spent within the District and current proposals. Mr Potter explained that there were strict guidelines on how Section 106 money could be spent so it could not be put into other general funds. The Head of Planning and Regeneration added that Section 106 Contributions were used to address specific issues caused by a development, therefore the money could only be used for the specific purpose as agreed by all parties.

2.4 Members indicated their concerns about the delays in committing expenditure and ensuring the monies were spent effectively on projects which would benefit local people. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the authority tried to be as flexible as possible and could agree to release money in stages rather than wait until completion, helping to move projects forward. Mr I Potter stated that it was important to have a good working relationship with the Council and to have regular discussions on how improvements could be made with officers and GPs.

2.5 It was recognised that whilst some progress appeared to be taking place in committing expenditure, there was room for further improvement. The report was duly noted.

Review of Planning Committee Scheme of Delegation

- 2.6 The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members, highlighting the proposed changes to the Planning Committee scheme of delegations to improve the openness of decision making. The proposals are summarised below:
- To make it clear that Prior Notification, Prior Approval, extended Permitted Development, Conservation Area Trees, Non Material Amendment, and limited other mechanisms are delegated to the Director of Services;
 - To amend the DEL1 trigger to 10 objections to an application that is recommended to be granted planning permission; and
 - To amend the trigger for automatic call-in of applications submitted by officers and members within the last 5 years to make it clear that this applies only to the applicant and not agents or others, and to amend the subject to be current and not previous officers and members.
- 2.7 After a full debate, the Head of Planning and Regeneration stated that he was happy to look into everything that had been put forward by Members. As the general feeling from the discussion was that Members did not support the current recommendations, the Chairman asked the Head of Planning and Regeneration to reconsider the proposals and discuss them with Members of the Planning Committee before bringing the report back to the Policy Development Group in September 2017. This way forward was agreed by the meeting.

The Balance of the Economy in North West Leicestershire

- 2.8 The Head of Economic Development presented a report outlining how the Business Focus team are creating the first of an annual Economic Profile of North West Leicestershire that will bring together the key economic statistical information into a single document.
- 2.9 The creation of an Economic Profile of North West Leicestershire was identified as a key task by the Business Focus team and has been included within the 2017/18 Business Focus Team Plan. Furthermore, the Economic Profile will also respond to the request made by PDG in January 2017 to research the structure of the North West Leicestershire economy to ensure that it was well-balanced.

The Economic Profile will be published in three different formats:

- A stand-alone, basic fact, one page summary
 - A glossy promotional summary
 - A detailed economic profile including chapters on employment, business, demographics and town centres.
- 2.10 Members welcomed the report as it was good to understand what was happening with the economy locally – questions were raised around working with local colleges on skill shortages, the gap in earnings, and underemployment. The report was duly noted.

Future Work Programme

- 2.11 Some Members felt that it was unfortunate that due to the scheduling of the meetings, the Policy Development Group seemed to be unable to scrutinise big cabinet decisions such as the leisure services review, and the Council Delivery Plan. Officers were asked to look into the meeting schedule to ensure significant decisions were considered by the Policy Development Group prior to Cabinet. The Interim Director of Resources took the comments on board and agreed to look into the matter further.

3.0 23 AUGUST 2017

Update on the Leisure Project

- 3.1 The Chief Executive gave a presentation to update PDG on the Leisure project and the plans moving forward. This was in advance of future consideration by Cabinet on whether to proceed with building a new leisure centre and sourcing a new provider to run the leisure service.
- 3.2 A full debate took place on the merits of the leisure project and the Chief Executive responded to a full range of questions and queries relating to site location, effect on Coalville, transport implications, impact on staff, the financial model, tax benefits, corporate savings and future use of the Hermitage site. Please see the minutes for further information.
- 3.3 It was agreed that all comments made by PDG be noted and passed to Cabinet for their consideration.

Call-In of Cabinet Decision of 25 July 2017 entitled: Asset Management - London Road Car Park (Restricted Item)

- 3.4 The Interim Director of Resources presented the report to Members, highlighting the decision taken by Cabinet on 25 July 2017 and addressing each of the reasons put forward for the call-in as attached. He reminded Members that a call-in was not about the merits of the decisions themselves, but whether the decisions had been made properly in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
- 3.5 Members discussed the report before them and expressed concerns over the decisions that had been made. It was resolved that
- a) Cabinet be asked to reconsider its decision in the light of comments from the Policy Development Group.
 - b) Delegation be given to the Chairman to provide the written comments for consideration by Cabinet on behalf of the Policy Development Group.

Future Work Programme

- 3.6 The Chief Executive stated that Quarterly Performance reports would be brought to future meetings.

4.0 20 SEPTEMBER 2017

Community Focus Grants

- 4.1 The Head of Economic Development presented the report to Members, highlighting the processes and a summary of the grants awarded. She informed Members that as suggested, groups that were currently applying for grants had been informed of the possibility of being invited to attend a Policy and Development Group meeting to talk about their activities and how the monies awarded had been spent. The Community Services Portfolio Holder addressed the meeting and explained that she undertook visits to the community groups and there were photographs taken which were used in the press and social media.
- 4.2 Members expressed their support for how the grants scheme supported community groups and the report was duly noted.

Annual Report

- 4.3 The Interim Director of Resources presented the report to Members highlighting the work of PDG over the previous year and the proposed changes to the meeting schedule. In response to a question, the Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that there was a provision within the Council's Constitution to co-opt individuals to the Policy Development Group with non-decision making powers. It was required for assistance in making decisions or if the committee needed particular expertise. This was not a new addition to the scrutiny procedure rules but as it was rarely used Members may not have been aware of it.
- 4.4 Members believed there had been an improvement in the level of scrutiny since the process had previously been questioned and thanked officers for the report. The Work Programme will continue to be updated to include more items making up the Council's Policy and Budget Framework including: the Council Delivery Plan, the End of Year Report, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and quarterly performance reports. It was agreed to increase the scheduled number of PDG meetings from four to six. In line with the current Constitution, additional meetings can still be arranged if required
- 4.5 It was agreed the annual report for presentation to council on 21 November 2017 be noted.

Update to the Council's Constitution

- 4.6 The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report, drawing Members attention to the proposed changes regarding the increase in the number of Policy Development Group meetings (see above), key decisions and contracts. It was explained that a contracts register was available for public viewing. Some Members commented on the length and complexity of the Constitution although it was explained this was sometimes unavoidable due to the need to respond to new legislation.
- 4.7 The proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution, as detailed within the report, were approved to be considered by Council on 21 November 2017.

5.0 10 JANUARY 2018

Developing the Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 5.1 The Financial Planning Team Manager presented the report and referred Members to appendix one which outlined the current financial issues facing the Council to be addressed through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Members requested further figures and information to be presented at the next meeting of PDG.

Draft Revenue Budget Proposals General Fund and Housing Revenue Account

- 5.2 PDG was invited to scrutinise the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals and provide any comments for Cabinet to take into account when it agreed final recommendations.

Draft Capital Programmes 2018/19 – 2022/23

- 5.3 PDG was invited to scrutinise the Capital Programme proposals and provide any comments for Cabinet to take into account when it agreed final recommendations.
- 5.4 The various financial reports were noted and agreed that the several comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

Draft Council Delivery Plan

- 5.5 The Head of Legal and Support Services presented the report to Members, including a draft copy of the 2018/19 Council Delivery Plan, drawing Members attention to the new format to enhance the key points and for clarity of reading, and inviting comments. Questions and issues were raised around the Local Plan, support for local businesses, accessibility of services, anti-social behaviour, local housing company and the design of properties.
- 5.6 It was agreed the report be noted and the comments made be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

Contract for the Provision of Community Engagement Activities - Building Confidence in Coalville Project

- 5.7 The Head of Economic Development presented the report, drawing Members attention to the key achievements throughout the contract. She welcomed the 'Coalville Heroes', Deana Wildgoose and Julia Burkin to the meeting and thanked them for all the hard work and energy that had gone into the project.
- 5.8 Several Members also put on record their appreciation of the good work carried out in the local community. It was agreed that the outputs and outcomes achieved via the contract for the provision of community engagement activities for the Building Confidence in Coalville Project be noted.

Joint Strategic Growth Plan Consultation

- 5.9 The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the report to Members, highlighting the key features of the draft growth plan. He reported that the consultation would run for 12 weeks and would include two consultation events within the district, the first being in Ashby. It was noted that Members did not have a physical copy of the draft plan due to the timing of the consultation and unfortunately the online document had still not been

released. It was agreed that an all Member briefing be arranged to look into the draft growth plan in more detail at a later date when the consultation has commenced.

- 5.10 Members raised questions around the old Coalville to Burton railway line, affordable housing targets, and highways improvements before noting the report. A pointed discussion took place between a number of Members, in response to a comment from the Chairman, regarding Planning Committee decisions and affordable homes, which due to its political nature was not relevant to the item being considered

Review of Housing Policies

- 5.11 The Head of Housing presented the report to Members, detailing the revisions to the Allocations Policy and the Former Tenants Arrears Policy and explaining that policies were periodically reviewed and updated to provide officers with the best framework for delivering services. Members raised questions on the former policy around the operation of the choice based lettings system, the use of technology and ensuring access for all to the bidding system.
- 5.12 It was agreed that the comments made be fed into Cabinet when considering the report on 6 February 2018.

6.0 12 FEBRUARY 2018

Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 6.1 The Chief Executive addressed the meeting and thanked Members for attending the rescheduled meeting to fully consider the Medium Term Financial Strategy which detailed a new way of setting the budget by covering a five year period. It also promoted financial self-sufficiency and a clear direction for the Council. The Head of Finance informed Members of a change of wording to the recommendation within the report as follows:

‘It is recommended that Policy Development Group comment on the Medium Term Financial Strategy before it is presented to Council on 27 February for endorsement.’

- 6.2 The Head of Finance reported that the new Medium Term Financial Strategy encouraged Members to adopt a long term approach in considering actions to address future deficit years and self-sufficiency targets in respect of the General Fund, and consider financing or alternative actions to address the long range forecasts for the Housing Revenue Account, as well as the medium range five year forecasts for the Capital Programme. She referred Members to further information regarding funding versus budgeted expenditure, General Fund in-year position forecast, Self-Sufficiency Reserve illustration, Self-Sufficiency target forecasts and illustration of savings to be achieved to 2023.
- 6.3 A full debate took place and Members raised questions around how the Self-Sufficiency Fund would operate, the long term position of the HRA, housing stock numbers, policies on council fees, taxes and charges, recycling income, housing maintenance expenditure and the new homes bonus. Please see the minutes for a full summary. Some Members commented they would have appreciated the attendance of the Portfolio Holder to deal with the more political questions. The report was noted.

Housing STAR Survey Report

- 6.4 The Strategic Director of Housing and Customer Services presented the report to Members and highlighted the headline results of the tenants’ survey which is conducted every 2 years. Satisfaction levels had improved in the majority of areas since the survey

was last conducted in 2015, although improvements were still required regarding communication and keeping tenants informed as well as completing repairs first time. There would also be focus on managing complaints in a better manner and continuing the existing programme of car parking improvements, as the latter remained an important issue for tenants.

- 6.5 Members raised questions around responding to tenants' views, anti-social behaviour, dealing with complaints and the repairs service. The Strategic Director of Housing and Customer Services explained that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel had been investigating the complaints process and a report would be considered by Cabinet in March containing all of their findings and recommendations which would be put into practice. He reported that the main issue was with repairs and maintenance, and improvements had already been put in place to complete more jobs first time. He also added that there was a dedicated repairs officer to oversee complaints and further monitoring to ensure any follow up work took place.
- 6.6 The report was duly noted.

7.0 SUMMARY AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- 7.1 PDG has discussed and scrutinised a higher number of issues compared to 2016/17 which is a reflection of the increased frequency of meetings required to manage the workload. All of the issues considered are of critical importance to the Council. As a matter of course, PDG's comments are considered by officers, Cabinet and full Council as appropriate.
- 7.2 As well as meeting more frequently, PDG are now considering Quarterly Performance Reports and the Council Delivery Plan in a structured manner prior to them being considered by Cabinet.
- 7.3 The effectiveness and influence of PDG was demonstrated by the calling in of one Cabinet decision which was then subsequently reversed.
- 7.4 The Work Programme will continue to be updated to include core items such as the Council's Policy and Budget Framework including: the Council Delivery Plan, the End of Year Report, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and quarterly performance reports.
- 7.5 Although the Council will continue to try and improve the scrutiny process, it is apparent from the above report that PDG is operating effectively, has provided full challenge to the proposals coming before it, and has demonstrated real influence over important issues.