

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2020

Present: Councillor D Harrison (Chairman)

Councillors K Merrie MBE, C C Benfield, T Eynon, B Harrison-Rushton, G Hault, M B Wyatt and M D Hay (Substitute for Councillor J Geary)

In Attendance: Councillors R Canny, J Legrys and A C Saffell

Portfolio Holders: Councillors R Ashman and R D Bayliss

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mrs T Bingham, Mr T Delaney, Mr C Elston, Mr C Lambert, N Picksley and Mrs R Wallace

**24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Geary.

**25. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor T Eynon declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7 – Review of Discretionary Rate Relief, as a volunteer at Hermitage FM which received rate relief.

**26. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

None.

**27. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2019.

It was moved by Councillor T Eynon, seconded by Councillor G Hault and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2019 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**28. MIDLANDS ENGINE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

A presentation was given to Members by Mr K Harrison, Director – Development Corporation Programme, detailing the proposed three sites and the development corporation proposition.

At the request of the Chairman it was agreed to circulate the presentation slides to all Committee Members.

Councillor C Benfield raised concerns regarding the level of growth considering the Council's movement towards zero carbon. He also commented that the Midlands area was 25 percent less productive than the rest of the UK and was therefore interested in how the promised improvement in productivity would actually work. Mr K Harrison reported that the growth was not for growths sake and new sustainable methods would be investigated. He added that the key was to improve transport links across the Midlands as they would benefit the jobs being created.

Chairman's initials

Councillor K Merrie raised concerns that promises were constantly made regarding connectivity and green methods of transport but unfortunately it never materialised. Mr K Harrison assured Members that there was a Midlands Connect Team involved which had identified a number of key investments as part of the project which would create a strategy to address these issues.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure then went on to present the report to Members which provided supporting information on the proposition to establish a Development Corporation.

In response to a question from Councillor M Hay regarding keeping Members informed, the Head of Planning and Infrastructure explained that the plan was to create a Member working group to be regularly consulted on the progress over the next two years. He referred Members to recommendation c) of the report.

Councillor T Eynon raised concerns that there was no mention of any housing to match the jobs being created, therefore she questioned how it would align with the climate emergency when it was assumed that people would travel to the sites by car.

Councillor C Benfield raised concerns that the statement of intent was not detailed enough as it did not include how the objectives would actually be met. He would also like to see the appointed member representatives have some influence or control over the project rather than just to oversee it. Mr K Harrison explained that the statement of intent was a set of shared aspirations which would be used as a guide to shape the project going forward, therefore more detail would be available in due course.

Councillor B Harrison – Rushton asked for assurance that local communities would be involved as the northern parishes would be directly affected by the project. Mr K Harrison recognised the need for community engagement and confirmed that work would also be undertaken with local authorities in relation to planning, employment and housing going forward.

With the agreement of the Chairman, Councillor A C Saffell – Ward Member in Castle Donington, addressed the Committee. He commented that the current infrastructure in Castle Donington was lacking and the traffic flowing through the centre due to growth in the area had a big impact on the village. He asked Members to be cautious as an inadequate infrastructure would damage local businesses. He concluded that it was essential that the right kind of housing be built to suit the employees that the businesses were attracting.

With the agreement of the Chairman, Councillor R Canny – Ward Member in Castle Donington, addressed the Committee. She felt it was important to have a steer in the direction of the project as Castle Donington was already struggling with the current amount of growth. Her main concern was connectivity and how freight was to be transported. She felt that encouragement was required for freight to use specific freight lines rather than lorries on the already swamped roads, especially as there was air quality issues in the area.

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure reported that connectivity was one of the main issues for officers and a number of workshops had been attended with specific concerns raised on the matter. He added that a consultant had been commissioned to look at the issues.

The Strategic Director explained that the report before Members was a generic report which was being submitted to the other Local Authorities involved and welcomed all

comments made. He added that the priority area was the impact on communities and recognised the importance of consultation.

With the agreement of the Chairman, Councillor R Ashman – Planning and Infrastructure Portfolio Holder, addressed the Committee. He stated that the Committee could request him to attend and provide an update at any time. He would be happy to do so.

It was moved by Councillor G Hault , seconded by Councillor B Harrison-Rushton and

RESOLVED THAT:

- a) The Statement of Intent which has been agreed by relevant Local Authority Chief Executives and which sets out the shared aspirations of the Local Authorities for the Development Corporation Proposition be endorsed.
- b) North West Leicestershire's participation and involvement in the establishment of a suitable interim delivery structure created to undertake development activities in advance of the establishment of a statutory locally led Development Corporation be endorsed.
- c) The setting up of a Member Working Group to be regularly consulted on the progress of the Development Corporation work over the next two years during the period of the interim delivery vehicle be endorsed.

RECOMMENDED THAT:

- d) The report be endorsed by Cabinet.

## **29. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY**

The Head of Housing and Property highlighted key points of the report and introduced the Repairs and Maintenance Manager, who provided further details on the proposed changes to the policy.

Councillor R D Bayliss, Housing and Customer Services Portfolio Holder, was invited to address the Committee by the Chairman and spoke in support of the policy.

Councillor M B Wyatt commented that in the past, some tenants had been told that issues with the quality of repair work was the fault of the contractor not the Council. He asked if going forward contractors would be chased and penalised. The Head of Housing and Property reported that contractors were now used infrequently as repairs were completed by council employed staff in the majority cases. On the occasion that contractors were used and complaints were received, the appropriate investigation and action would always take place.

In response to a question from Councillor M B Wyatt, the Head of Housing and Property explained that there would be flexibility in the policy for tenants that could not physically carry out the maintenance they were responsible for and this would be assessed on an individual basis.

Following some confusion on the expectations of tenants to carry out monthly tests for smoke and CO detectors, the Head of Housing and Property explained that the test consisted of pressing the button on the alarms to ensure they were working. Any problems should then be reported so that replacements could be made. He added that it was not practical for repair operatives to test all the alarms for every property each month, however an annual test was undertaken as part of the heating servicing contract.

Chairman's initials

In response to a question from Councillor M Hay, the Repairs and Maintenance Manager stated that there was still a set timescale for undertaking a repair, however there was now more flexibility with operatives and tenants availability taken into account. Overall the new policy has reduced the target times from 28 days to 20 days for tenant choice repairs and from 90 days to 60 days for other jobs, so work would be done quicker.

Councillor T Eynon commented on the importance of ensuring that staff were clear on the instances when a tenant could request support with repairs that should be their responsibility. She also asked that it be made clear in the tenants' handbook too.

In response to a question from Councillor C Benfield, the Repairs and Maintenance Manager explained that smoke and CO alarms were not always attached to a property's electric mains in the first instance but any faulty battery operated alarms were replaced to electric mains alarms. There were no current plans to complete a programme of mains powered replacements for all properties.

Councillor C Benfield raised concerns for vulnerable tenants who could not test the fire alarms and the risk of a death due to a fire because of an untested faulty alarm. The Head of Housing and Property explained that Support Officers did visit our most vulnerable tenants periodically and previous procedure was to carry out tests to alarms. He would however check that this was still common practice as it was important.

It was moved by Councillor G Hoult, seconded by Councillor T Eynon and

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted.

### **30. REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY**

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

At the request of Councillor G Hoult, the Head of Finance gave further clarification in relation to mandatory relief.

In response to a question from Councillor C Benfield, the Head of Finance confirmed that there was a rate relief application available for empty business properties and agreed to circulate further information to all Committee Members.

A discussion was had on Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs), sports clubs that could register as CASC's and sports/social clubs and their eligibility for rate relief. The Head of Finance explained that each of these groups were given a different rate of award based on their CASC or charitable status, qualifying conditions around inclusion of all members of a community and ability to make a profit. The Head of Finance agreed to circulate further information to all Committee Members.

It was noted that all comments would be reported to Cabinet when considering the item.

### **31. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the future work programme and Executive Decision Notice.

Members were encouraged to complete a scoping form when submitting an item for the work programme.

**Councillor B Harrison - Rushton left the meeting at 7.38pm**

**Councillor M B Wyatt left the meeting at 7.53pm**

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.08 pm