

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Forest Room, Stenson House, London Road, Coalville, LE67 3FN on THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Councillor T Eynon (Chair)

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

In Attendance: Councillors R Johnson, J Legrys and P Moulton; Miss C O'Neil (guest from Gatherwell), Mr P Wright (guest from Gatherwell)

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr C Elston, Mr J Gaynor, Knight, Mr J Knight, Mr P Sanders, Mrs E Trahearn and Mr T Devonshire

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

27. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

29. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023.

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

RESOLVED THAT:

Subject to amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

30. COMMUNITY LOTTERY SCHEME

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

Several Members questioned the set up costs, projected sales figures, what feedback from other local authorities who were engaged in such schemes had been solicited, and how the money spent on each ticket was distributed.

Officers, with assistance from the representatives from Gatherwell, gave the following advice. There was a one-off £5000 budgeted for an External Lottery Manager to cover most of the initial set up costs, administration and applications for necessary licences; sales were projected to be around 12000 a year once the scheme was up and running; money from each ticket was split 40p to selected good cause, 20p to the Council's grant fund, and 18p to Gatherwell, plus 18p allocated to cash prizes and 4p is a VAT element. As for consultation, other local authorities such as Blaby and Charnwood had been approached and they had suggested that their lottery schemes had been successful. Member nevertheless requested more clarity in the Cabinet report on financial details such as projections for the first five years of the scheme, and the nature of VAT costs.

Chairman's initials

A couple of Members inquired about the procurement process, how transparent it had been, and how rigorous it had been when looking for alternative providers and considering value for money. The Head of Community Services advised that the Legal and Finance Teams had been heavily involved in the crafting of the Lottery Scheme and had considered these issues thoroughly. Ultimately Gatherwell was the specialist provider in this area, and this necessarily impacted the nature of the procurement process. Furthermore, this was an annual contract so would be regularly reviewed, and the outcomes of the Scheme would be regularly reported to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

A Member expressed some concern that the Lottery Scheme would promote gambling, at a time when problem gambling was recognised as a growing social issue in Britain.

The Head of Community Services advised that problem gambling was something which Gatherwell would be responsible for robustly mitigating. A representative from Gatherwell then set out the mechanisms in place to do so, and explained for Members why this sort of scheme was low risk when it came to problem gambling: the vast majority of players had a standing monthly direct debit, the average number of tickets purchased per week was 1.8, and there were stringent rules in place with regards to how many tickets players could buy in a certain time frame.

Several Members inquired about how this would be promoted and tickets would be sold, how new and in particular smaller charities would be signed up and how this would impact on Officer's time. In response, Officers and a representative from Gatherwell advised that the process was largely digitalised, with a phone line for those also available for less technologically literate residents, and that it was an easy to use platform which actually democratised charity funding for smaller charities. The incentive structure operated to reward charities who maximised their own promotion of the scheme. They also advised that the aforementioned External Lottery Manager provided by Gatherwell would be providing lots of support, but some NWLDC staff time would be required. Members suggested that an impact assessment be carried out at the end of year 1, to appraise the actual impact on local charities, and that greater clarity on the impact on staffing within the Community Focus Team be provided in the Cabinet report.

A Member suggested that the proposition was broadly sound, the risks and start-up costs were low, and that the scheme would soon become self-sustainable. Furthermore, if there was displacement of existing donations it would be good to displace funding from national to local causes.

A Member asked whether Lottery funding would be factored into grant requests, and the Head of Community Services advised that no, the two were separate, and grants would follow the standard grant funding process, though the grant fund would be increased by this scheme.

The Chair set out some of her concerns, that the scheme could allow the reduction of funding currently offered through the Council's grant scheme, that the startup funding for the scheme was insufficient, that it could create a negative perception amongst residents of the District, she also echoed the concerns around burden on staff time raised by other Members, and she suggested that funding conditions should include that registered charities had spent all previous money from the Council in approved way, as had been the case in the Lottery Scheme enacted by Sevenoaks Council. She then invited the Portfolio Holder to speak.

The Portfolio Holder said that this was an easy way for charities to raise money, that the more active they were in marketing it the more they would receive, and most crucially the money would remain within the District.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments, which would be presented to Cabinet on 27 February.

31. GRANT REVIEW

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

A couple of Members sought assurances about how effectiveness was quantified and how outcomes were measured, even when this information was not presented to the Committee. The Head of Community Services advised that grant outcome measures were targeted quite specifically to each grant, from the largest to the smallest grants which they gave out. He added that if Members wished he could bring another report to the Committee on the largest grants, or ask for representatives of those charities to attend a Community Scrutiny meeting.

A Member queried the value of signposting and asked whether the solution to problems, rather than advice on who could solve problems, was measured as an outcome, and how was this quantified. In response, the Community Focus Team Leader advised that that signposting people to appropriate solutions was a valuable part of a wider approach to problem solving.

The Chair noted that Members had previously requested the Grant Review reports present more narrative impact data, oriented around specific case studies, especially for the smaller grants, and she reiterated this request.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments.

32. NWL LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN AND STRATEGY

The Head of Community Services presented the report, with support from the Leisure Services Team Manager, and the Health and Wellbeing Team Leader.

A discussion was had amongst several Members about specific routes within the plan, at Moneyhill and Nottingham Road in Ashby, and local issues which they felt arose from these routes. In response, the Health and Wellbeing Team Leader advised that this was a flexible and emerging document which would be frequently reviewed in light of new information; the specifics of particular routes could also be examined in greater detail later in the process. The Leisure Services Team Manager echoed this and added that Members should approach the two of them to discuss specific changes to particular routes.

The Chair emphasised the importance of a holistic transport strategy with a clear purpose for the district as a whole, which factored in planned future developments such as the Ivanhoe Line. The Leisure Services Team Manager concurred, and advised that the document, in tandem with the proposed Local Plan, provided a framework to ensure that new developments link in to and contribute to the existing network. Furthermore, this document was vital to attain funding from Central Government.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments.

33. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNING ENFORCEMENT - UPDATE

The Head of Planning and Infrastructure presented the report, with support from the Planning Enforcement Team Leader.

The Chair noted some of the previous problems with Planning Enforcement and the harm scoring procedure. In response, the Head of Planning and Infrastructure said that the new harm scoring procedure and enforcement plan was currently in the draft stage. He also said that now the Team was fully staffed they had reduced reliance on agency staff, compared to 2022, and were hoping to end the use of them entirely once new Team Leader was settled in.

A Member felt the targets were unclear. The Head of Planning and Infrastructure advised that there was quite an irregular pattern to enforcement cases, so it was hard to set effective targets, but they were intending to present enforcement reports to the Planning Committee bi-annually moving forwards.

A Member detailed some problems he had been aware of with regards to getting long-standing enforcement issues resolved, and he suggested that this was an emotive issue of significant public concern. He asked whether Officers now believed that the system in place now would demonstrate to residents that Officers and Members were taking concerns on board. In response, the Planning Enforcement Team Leader set out some of the reasons that cases remained open for some time, and the mechanisms open to officers to deal with enforcement matters which would be set out within the Local Enforcement plan.

Members requested an improved line of communication between Officers and the public on the nature of the planning process and available enforcement mechanisms. A Member specifically suggested a digital dashboard similar to the one used to report pot holes at Leicestershire County Council. The Head of Planning and Infrastructure said that he would look in to the suggestion. More generally, the Planning Enforcement Team Leader advised that the current plan has a flowchart which sets out the process, and which they planned to update and maintain; time scales varied but he concurred that it was important that residents felt they had not been forgotten about. Communication with the public was something that they were certainly working on.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments.

34. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to items on the Work Programme.

The Strategic Director of Place advised the Committee that Leicestershire County Council would be providing information on the topic of highways, potholes and footpaths.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chair closed the meeting at 8.34 pm