

MINUTES of a meeting of the CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Board Room , Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2023

Present: Councillor N Smith (Chairman)

Councillors V Richichi, J G Simmons, E G C Allman, D Bigby, G Hout, M B Wyatt

Portfolio Holders: Councillor R Bayliss

Officers: Mr A Barton, Mr G Hammons, Miss E Warhurst, Ms K Connell, Mr C Elston, Ms R Haynes, Mr P Sanders, Ms L Stavely, Mr B Walford and Mr P Wheatley

76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor A C Saffell and Councillor S Sheahan for whom Councillor D Everitt acted as substitute.

77. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no interests declared.

78. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The were no questions received.

79. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2023.

A member noted that it had been incorrectly stated at the previous meeting that the cost of using the public conveniences in Ashby de la Zouch had been raised in line with inflation. After further investigation it was found to be much higher than the cost of inflation and it was agreed to note the discrepancy in the minutes of this meeting.

It was moved by Councillor D Bigby, seconded by Councillor M Wyatt and

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4 January 2023 be an accurate record of proceedings.

80. 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.

A member stated that they would like to see the authority's policy on "Succession" for tenants of council housing considered at a meeting of Scrutiny, in particular the policy itself, how it is implemented and how to avoid mistakes. It was agreed that the succession policy could be included for consideration in a future workplan subject to a scoping form. The Head of Housing would contact the member to assist. .

81. 2022/23 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Organisation Development Team Leader presented the report.

A member noted that it was good to see footfall in the Newmarket had increased, despite the current economic climate.

A member commented that he had been disappointed to see that tarot reading had been included in the programme of events at the Newmarket and that he felt the food on offer there had been generally unhealthy food, and that this did not sit well with the council's Health and Wellbeing initiative. Officers responded that the tarot readings had been part of a wider programme of events, designed to satisfy a broad spectrum of customers. The views of members on this type of issue would be reported to the team organising events. It was noted that traders are supporting the economy of the town. A member commented that on a recent visit to the market, both stall holders and staff had been friendly and helpful and that overall the feedback he had received on the day had been positive.

Officers agreed that it would be a good idea to promote healthy eating more readily and also agreed that this would be something they would look to do in future, but highlighted that in terms of the Health and Wellbeing agenda, by acting as a social hub for events such as "Knit and Natter" and the activities put on for children that this would promote wellbeing in terms of mental health. It was also noted that a more traditional market would be instated in the town soon when the outdoor market space was ready.

A member raised concerns about the £1m underspend in housing repairs and wished to know how the underspend had happened given that so many repairs were required and also noted that less than half of the planned capital projects had been delivered. Officers replied that there hadn't been the opportunity to undertake housing repairs during the Covid 19 pandemic and that this had contributed to the underspend. With regard to the capital projects not being delivered, officers noted that some projects had slipped and been reprofiled to future years. Members were also referred to the Housing repairs item elsewhere on the agenda.

A member asked if the £3.5 million underspend from the HRA Net Zero Budget would be carried forward and officers confirmed that the HRA capital programme, including Net Zero Budget, had been fully reviewed and reset as part of the Budget process for 2023/24. Any carry forward requests from 2022/23 would be considered by Cabinet at the end of the financial year.

A member requested an update on the Marlborough Square project and officers confirmed that the Section 278 approval had been received and that a revised price for materials was expected by the end of March 2023, at which point a decision could be made on whether to wait or order them earlier.

A member asked whether the Freeport had been approved yet and officers advised that it still needed to be considered by Government and had therefore not yet been approved.

A member questioned why only 600 jobs had been achieved against a target of 1,000 and suggested that this could be due to an increase of robotics replacing manual labour. However an officer highlighted that the authority could not influence technological changes in industry and that robotics led to higher paid, more skilled jobs in terms of programmers and repairs.

A member raised concerns that there had been no increase on council owned housing in terms of achieving net zero carbon but officers advised that this had been because it was

not a rolling target and that the target had been achieved as set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan.

A member asked whether there would be solar panels installed on the leisure centres and officers replied that the new leisure centre already had solar panels and that a feasibility study was being carried out as to the suitability of solar panels for Ashby leisure centre, in the hope of rolling this out next year.

A member asked about the plans for Wolds Court in Moira and was advised that it was under consideration whether to enlarge the footprint however this was currently out to spec with a design consultant. It was anticipated that this would arise for consideration by Planning at the end of next year.

A member asked what could be done about the litter on the A42 and officers advised that the council already arranges a litter pick in the laybys. A debate was had regarding the merits of schemes whereby plastic returns are rewarded with a cash incentive or money off vouchers for shopping.

A member felt that following bin collections, there was an unacceptable amount of waste left in the street which had blown around and not been picked up. Officers advised that if used properly, recycling receptacles should not shed waste but noted that the service collection was being reviewed and that feedback from customers who had used the drawer system had been positive.

A member stated that they would like to see more recycling bins in town however officers informed the meeting that people don't use them in the way that they are intended and they invariably end up filled with mixed waste.

RESOLVED THAT:

The report be noted and comments be provided for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 28 March 2023.

82. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Economic Development and Regeneration Team Manager presented the report and outlined some of the projects which North West Leicestershire District Council had been allocated by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

It was moved by Councillor G Hoult, seconded by Councillor V Richichi and

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The acceptance of the £2,414,817 grant and £20,000 of development Grant from UK Shared Prosperity Fund be recommended to Cabinet.
2. Authority be delegated to the Strategic Director (Place) in consultation with the Business and Regeneration Portfolio Holder to review and amend the NWL investment plan project proposals set out in this report where required to respond and adapt to the changing economic environment and/or local needs.
3. Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Business and Regeneration Portfolio Holder to submit the required formal reporting to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

83. REPAIRS PERFORMANCE

The Interim Head of Housing presented the report and highlighted that the repairs team is currently running at a 23% vacancy rate which had applied pressure on the council's ability to deliver.

It was noted that mould and damp have been a particular issue and that around 500 cases had been identified which the department were now targeting. A particular area which needed to be addressed was the way in which repairs are categorised and targeted. It was highlighted that the new Head of Housing will be joining the authority in April and that she has a strong background in repairs and maintenance.

A member stated that he felt the quality of service had declined in recent years and officers responded that issues had been identified in the journey of repairs which were now being looked at. Solutions could involve upskilling front line staff to ensure the correct operatives are allocated to repairs jobs and to ensure that information is recorded accurately within the system.

In respect of member concerns around Park View sheltered housing, officers advised the meeting that emergency repairs had been carried out and that internal roof tiles had been removed to enable monitoring of the leak. It was confirmed that a budget had been approved to replace the roof of the sheltered schemes. The impact of Covid 19 was highlighted and members were assured that the council is working hard to catch up with repairs which had fallen behind as a consequence.

A member outlined some individual cases in council owned homes which had concerned him, and officers advised that the number of Housing Officers had been increased recently with two specialist officers employed to undertake tenancy audits, which would involve making referrals and carrying out inspections. It was noted that some of the problems which had been faced are resultant of cutbacks in social care more than a housing problem, and these more complex issues had been detracting from resources.

A member requested that Councillors be enabled to access the repairs system in order to see whether tenant problems had been logged or dealt with and officers advised that this should be possible and would allow members to be more aware of what cases were in their 'patch'.

A member enquired as to how the understaffing issue had arisen and was advised that there had been problems nationally in recruiting to these industries as set out in the report.

A member asked why component replacement as a metric had risen so steeply and was advised that it is just the way the metric is displayed, and although it had been related to spend it was not a direct correlation.

A member suggested that a specific timescale be provided to give Scrutiny committee an update and it was agreed that 6 months would be a reasonable time to allow for investigative work to be carried out.

By affirmation of the meeting, it was

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The report be noted and commented on by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.
2. An update report be added to the future workplan in approximately six months.

Chairman's initials

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.30 pm