

**POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP
21ST NOVEMBER 2017**

PRESENT: Councillor Seaton (Chair)
Councillor K. Harris (Vice-chair)
Councillors Brookes, Hamilton, Jones, Paling, Parton,
Shepherd and Smith

Head of Culture and Leisure
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing
Team Leader – Regeneration and Economic Development
Town Hall Manager
Group Accountant (IA)
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (MH)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Gaskell, Murphy and Rollings

The Chair stated that the meeting would be recorded and the recording made available on the Council's website. She also welcomed Councillor Hamilton to his first meeting.

21. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2017 were confirmed and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

22. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

The following disclosure was made:

- (i) Councillor Shepherd – a personal interest in item 7, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy Review – Progress Report, as a member of Leicestershire County Council.

23. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations of the existence of the Party Whip were made.

24. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.17

No questions had been submitted.

25. POLICY ASPECTS OF THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2014-2044 AND THE HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2014-2019

A report of the Head of Landlord Services and the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing, enabling scrutiny of the progress to deliver the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2014-2044 and the Housing Asset Management Strategy 2014-2019, and in particular the policy elements of the Plan and the Strategy, was submitted (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing and the Group Accountant assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) The graph shown as chart 1 on page 2 of the report had been produced in 2015. It had been expected that the Council would need to borrow additional money to fund refurbishment work to the housing stock. It had not proved necessary to obtain further borrowing as the refurbishment had been funded through existing revenue funding. Funding for the Business Plan came from tenants' rents, service charges and grants.
- (ii) Assumptions had been made regarding the number of additional staff that would be required to support the roll out of Universal Credit in the Borough, and the effect it would have on reduced rates of rent collection.
- (iii) One of the reasons why there were a significant number of vacant garages was that they were often located in blocks at a distance from people's homes and people preferred to park outside their homes. If there were proposals to redevelop a garage site there would need to be consultation with the current occupiers.
- (iv) The Council was still waiting for the Regulations from the Government that would set out what lengths of fixed-term tenancies could be considered by the Council and whether there would be any exceptions for vulnerable groups. The Council would prepare a policy once the Regulations had been received in accordance with the local context.
- (v) At the end of a fixed-term tenancy the Council would have to review the tenant's ability at that time to find alternative accommodation. Eviction was always a last resort but could be appropriate in cases of non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour.
- (vi) Further information about the Council's objectives in terms of the energy efficiency of homes could be found in the Home Energy Conservation Act progress reports produced by the Council and published on the Council's website.
- (vii) Work on energy efficiency was focussed on improvements to properties. Work on fuel poverty was focussed on reducing the costs of energy for tenants. That could include ensuring that they

were on the best value energy tariffs, and collective tariff switching schemes were currently being reviewed.

- (viii) A briefing for councillors had been provided following the agreement of the current version of the Business Plan in 2014. A further briefing would be provided when a revised version of the Plan was agreed. Work had begun on updating the Business Plan but it could not be concluded until confirmation of the Government's intentions in a number of areas had been received. The changes to rents brought in by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 had been highlighted in the annual budget reports.
- (ix) Receipts from right to buy sales could be used to provide part of the funding for additional properties. New properties could be delivered either through building or acquisition. In the case of the redevelopment of the Riversdale sheltered housing scheme, for example, receipts from right to buy sales could only be used to make a contribution to increasing the number of properties from 25 to 29.

Members of the Group commented that scrutiny of performance against the various targets identified in the report could be monitored by the Performance Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED

1. that the report be noted;
2. that further information be provided to members of the Group regarding the Council's objectives in terms of the energy efficiency of homes and what had been achieved in terms of saving money for tenants through the work of the Council's Financial Inclusion Officers;
3. that the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chair and Councillor Parton, identify potential performance indicators or actions from among those identified in the report that could usefully be scrutinised by the Performance Scrutiny Panel;
4. that, should suitable performance indicators or actions be identified, these be reported to the Scrutiny Management Board with the suggestion that scrutiny of them be added to the work programme of the Performance Scrutiny Panel.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To provide the Group with further information about the matter.
- 3.&4. Although the Group was satisfied with the current position, it might be appropriate for further monitoring to take place.

26. REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REVIEW
– PROGRESS REPORT

A report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration, providing an update on the review of the Regeneration Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy (Local Growth Plan), was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Team Leader – Regeneration and Economic Development assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) The Council had engaged consultants to produce a report on the state of the local economy. Consultants had been used because they were able to access and analyse a large number of data sources. They would also pose questions about what issues the Council could look at in more detail.
- (ii) The Council engaged with businesses across the Borough. However, it was recognised that to date its engagement had been with only a small number of businesses. The Council was seeking to widen its engagement and to be more responsive to the needs of businesses. It had recently developed the InCharnwood branding and had taken part in the Leicester Business Festival.
- (iii) The Council was looking to develop its list of business contacts and already had links with representative bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses. Experience suggested that face to face contacts were more effective than correspondence by letter at promoting engagement between the Council and businesses.
- (iv) Many of the Council's activities could help businesses. However, there was a lack of awareness by businesses of what the Council's role was in facilitating economic development. In addition, the direct outcomes of some of the work that the Council did could take a long time to realise.
- (v) Much of the Council's work in this area was done in partnership with other organisations and the Council would achieve less if it worked in isolation. The Council could bring financial resources and better value for money for projects through economies of scale and leveraging in additional funding. In addition the Council could choose to offer targeted support and had a significant role in terms of its powers in relation to planning.
- (vi) The intention was to have three or four key performance indicators that could measure the impact of the Council's activities. Data on unemployment were easy to obtain but it would be difficult to demonstrate the direct impact that the Council's activities had on that measure.

- (vii) The Council's approach was to seek to help all businesses, irrespective of their size. The Council could consider what types of support were felt to be the most appropriate.
- (viii) It was important that any skills gaps were identified and that work was done in conjunction with Loughborough College and Loughborough University to address them. That was likely to be a key area where the Council could make a contribution.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the information received.

27. PROGRESS WITH PANEL WORK

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, providing an update on the current position with scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item and stated that reference had been made at the previous meeting of the Group to a potential panel on registered social housing providers. During the scoping of the potential remit of the panel it was identified that there were alternative mechanisms in place through two forums to address concerns regarding registered social housing providers. It was therefore concluded that a panel was not necessary.

In response to a question, the Democratic Services Manager stated that although both of the forums had met, one was not yet fully established.

RESOLVED

1. that the current position with scrutiny panels be noted;
2. that further information be provided to members of the Group regarding whether there were any issues with the functioning of the two forums.

Reasons

1. To ensure that the Group was aware of the current position with scrutiny panels.
2. To provide the Group with further information about the matter.

28. WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, enabling the Group to consider its work programme and propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate, was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager, the Head of Leisure and Culture and the Town Hall Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

In accordance with Scrutiny Committee Procedure 11.10(a), Councillor Parton has requested that the Group consider whether an item should be included in the Group's work programme regarding the programming and bookings policy at Loughborough Town Hall. The Head of Leisure and Culture and the Town Hall Manager provided the Group with information regarding the current procedures that were in place.

The Chair reminded members of the Group that they had been asked to provide comments regarding the layout of the forthcoming Homelessness Strategy.

RESOLVED

1. that the changes made by the Scrutiny Management Board to the Group's work programme be noted;
2. that the current position with the Group's work programme and the Notice of Key Decisions and Decisions to be Taken in Private be noted;
3. that the information provided by the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing in respect of the following items which were to be scheduled in the Group's work programme: Tenancy Strategy and Policy, Houses in Multiple Occupation Accreditation Scheme, and Houses in Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy, be noted;
4. that no further action be taken in respect of scrutiny of the programming and bookings policy at Loughborough Town Hall;
5. **that it be recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board** that the following items be added to the Group's work programme:
 - Planning Enforcement Policy – scheduled for 6th February 2018;
 - Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy – scheduled for 6th February 2018.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the decisions made by the Board.

2. To make the Group aware of the current position with its work programme.
3. To acknowledge the information received.
4. Having been provided with information by the Head of Leisure and Culture and the Town Hall Manager regarding the current arrangements for programming and bookings at Loughborough Town Hall, the Group was satisfied that those arrangements were appropriate.
5. To enable the policies to be scrutinised in a timely manner prior to their consideration by the Cabinet.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 22nd January 2018 unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on 15th December 2017.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Group.