

SCRUTINY PANEL A

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 12th September, 2019 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor David Walters in the Chair;

Councillors Dale Grounds (substitute Member for Councillor Trevor Locke), Rachel Madden and Warren Nuttall.

Officers Present: Rachel Newton and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor Tony Brewer.

SA.4 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SA.5 To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 4th July, 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4th July, 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SA.6 Scrutiny Review: Community Engagement

The Chairman introduced the item and invited the Scrutiny Research Officer to present the report. The Panel were advised that the purpose of the report was to provide further information around community engagement and an update on the progress of the developing Community Engagement Strategy.

At the last meeting of the Panel Members had discussed the various types of engagement and the most effective ways of utilising the different channels of interaction with local residents and groups. The Council has many different methods that it uses to undertake community engagement. They include surveys, consultation, open public meetings, Place Based Working Schemes, Petitions, Citizens Panels and Youth Forums.

Each channel was found to have its own merits for the specific topic it was exploring, however, not all approaches were suitable to support the inclusion of all residents. Members were concerned about the inability of certain groups to engage with the Authority due to barriers such as illiteracy, innumeracy and other difficulties with written and digital mechanisms.

A discussion took place around the role played by Elected Members whilst out in their respective Wards, it was agreed that face to face contact is an invaluable way in which to encourage local residents to involve themselves in consultation on local issues. However, some Members had previously reported that they felt under informed about events or initiatives taking place within the District, regular Group meetings have now been arranged which provide updates in order to address this.

In the past display screens had been placed at the council offices to support the dissemination of information by means of an audiovisual platform. Members felt that the reintroduction of the screens should be explored and further that the introduction of larger, mobile screens sited at events, funded through the regeneration fund would be a positive move towards meaningful engagement and assist in limiting communication barriers.

The Scrutiny and Research Officer advised the Panel that a number of other local authorities had undertaken to live stream their meetings, it was possible to link into the existing Auditel system and offer this at Ashfield. In the past the live streaming to social media had been received positively and did achieve an increase in meaningful contact between residents and the Authority.

In addition to the above the possibility of holding meetings off site across the District should be explored to support community working and engagement by making the meetings more accessible to local residents who may not have transport in order to attend meetings held at the council offices.

RESOLVED that

- a) the information contained within the report be noted; and
- b) the platforms for engagement discussed at the meeting be explored and the findings reported back to the next meeting of this Panel.

SA.7 Scrutiny Review: Commercialisation and Income Generation

The Chairman introduced the item and invited the Scrutiny Research & Support Officer to present the report. The Panel were advised that Commercialisation and Income Generation was added to the Scrutiny Workplan for 2019/20 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The key areas identified as those of interest were:

- Ashfield District Council's main source of income generation;
- Gaining a greater understanding of the Council's commercial property investments;
- How Ashfield District Council will help reduce its budget funding gap, partially through income generation.

The core funding sources responsible for generating income to the Authority are Council Tax, Business Rates, Revenues Support Grant (RSG), New Homes Bonus and Investment Properties.

Discretionary services are provided by the Authority and account for further income generation, the Panel felt that they had the potential to be developed further by reviewing efficiency and through enhanced promotion.

Members discussed the purchasing of commercial property and were in support of receiving a report from the Service Manager, Commercial Development providing a detailed analysis of the process and budgetary effect that the acquisitions have made and are expected to achieve in the coming years.

The Scrutiny Research & Support Officer took Members through the Terms of Reference for the Commercialisation and Income Generation Review, ensuring that they were happy with the proposed process.

RESOLVED that

- a) the information contained within the report be noted;
- b) the Terms of Reference as appended to the report be adopted;
- c) as part of the review process, the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Streets, Parks and Town Centres and the Service Manager, Commercial Development be engaged to provide the Panel with a more detailed understanding of income generation falling within their respective remit.

The meeting closed at 11.04 am

Chairman.