

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

on Thursday, 17th June, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Andrew Harding in the Chair;

Councillors Chris Baron, Jim Blagden,
Will Bostock, Dale Grounds (Vice-Chair),
David Walters and Lee Waters.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors .

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

In Attendance:

OS.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 February 2021, be received and approved as a correct record.

OS.3 Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/2022

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services welcomed everyone to the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the new municipal year and reminded Members that the Council's Scrutiny Workplan, as submitted, was revised and refreshed annually with new topics for review as required.

The report also provided Members with an overview of ongoing review topics and enabled them to submit suggestions for new topics which could originate from a variety of sources including global and national issues, local ward difficulties or particular requests from local residents.

The Workplan was predominantly Scrutiny Member led but the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Cabinet Members would also, on occasion, submit topics for discussion and possible inclusion on the Workplan should issues become apparent and require further examination.

Members were also requested to give some thought to their review

suggestions as topics that encompassed too wide a remit would often leave limited room for Cabinet to accept the recommendations and effect real change. It was imperative that the time spent on reviews was worthwhile to ensure any recommendations considered by Cabinet were robust and could provide real value, benefit and progression to the Council, the District and its residents.

Ongoing Topics

Play Park Inclusivity

The review in relation to play park inclusivity had commenced at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in March 2021 but as a result of officers having to juggle differing priorities due to Covid-19, it had been agreed that the review would be held in abeyance and resurrected as soon as practicable.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Dale Grounds, advised Members that progress in relation to the review had been moving forward and he was presently working with officers regarding the provision of additional, fully accessible, play equipment at the Council's play parks. It was suggested that the Council's Service Manager for Place and Wellbeing, Sarah Daniel and the Council's Place and Projects Officer, Will Kent, be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to present an update in relation to this topic.

Veterans and Service Personnel

The Scrutiny Research Officer advised Members that following 3 productive meetings, the Committee were now due to present their recommendations for this review to the Cabinet on 19 July 2021. The review had been extremely worthwhile with assistance from Mark Leek, a public representative for the Armed Forces and Gillian Welch, the Council's Senior Community Engagement Officer, who had worked tirelessly to enable the Council to achieve the MoD Bronze and Silver Employer Recognition Award through the Defence Employee Recognition Scheme.

The review had been extremely positive which had resulted in a strong set of recommendations being ready for presentation to Cabinet in July.

Tenancy Support

Scrutiny Panel A had already held a scoping meeting which had been attended by the Council's Service Manager, Housing Management & Tenancy Service, Nicky Moss and the Service Manager, Strategic Housing & Lettings, Phil Warrington who informed Members on a variety of tenancy support provisions including the Money Management Team, Tenancy Sustainment, prevention of eviction and homelessness.

At the meeting it had become evident that there were potentially some wider support issues that would be coming to the fore for the Council once the temporary ban on housing evictions was lifted in September 2021. It was anticipated that this could result in many tenants becoming homeless and looking to the Council for additional support with rehousing and accessing benefits etc.

A further informal Working Group meeting had been held in March 2021 to consider the matter further and the review was now due to recommence at the

next Scrutiny Panel A meeting on 15 July 2021, with continued involvement from key Council Offices and external partners.

Members took the opportunity to discuss the current position with regard to tenancy support as follows:

- concerns surrounding growing rent arrears at the Council
- acknowledgement that many tenants facing eviction were struggling with long term financial difficulties which had been exacerbated by the pandemic
- the increase in use of payday loans and their contribution to deepening financial difficulties for tenants
- the extensive debt management services being offered by the Council to assist tenants
- concerns surrounding an increase in redundancies following cessation of the national furlough scheme and its impact on Council services
- acknowledgement that many private landlords were now struggling due to unpaid rent and an inability to evict non-compliant tenants and a suggestion that the Council could potentially offer some support to private landlords too
- the exemplary work of the Council's Housing Teams throughout the pandemic
- a suggestion to mailshot Ashfield tenants to raise awareness of the Council's services and support for debt management issues.

Climate Change

This topic had initially been suggested for review during the last municipal year and notwithstanding extensive discussions with Members, it was proving a difficult task to narrow down the remit for the review from such a wide-reaching, global topic.

A further review had been included on the Scrutiny Workplan in relation to 'Waste and Recycling' and it had been mooted that this topic could form part of the 'Climate Change' review. However having considered the remit of each topic in more depth, Committee were advised that both topics would be better as stand-alone items due to their complexity and recent developments in both areas.

Crime and Disorder

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with current legislation, were required to hold a 'Crime and Disorder scrutiny meeting annually to consider pertinent issues affecting the District. Due to the pandemic this meeting had not been held in 2020 but would be resurrected for the next municipal year.

The meeting would be a one-off desktop exercise to enable the Council to

consider any priority crime and disorder issues and Members were asked to consider potential areas for discussion in anticipation of the meeting being held in October/November 2021.

New Topic Suggestions

£62.6 million Towns Fund Award

A suggestion was made that a scrutiny review could be undertaken to ensure that every opportunity is made available to local businesses (of all sizes) to tender for contracts and play a part in the development of Kirkby and Sutton following Ashfield securing £62.6 million as part of the Government's Towns Fund award. This would also facilitate the engagement of many local workers through the creation of job opportunities, thus enabling the Ashfield economy to continue to grow and thrive post pandemic.

Litter Enforcement via Outside Contractor

Members had recently been informed that following commencement of the 12 month pilot scheme with a private contractor to provide additional support for environmental crime enforcement regarding littering and dog fouling offences, £75,000 worth of fines had been collected in the first month and over 100 fly tipping offences had been identified. It was suggested that Members could benefit from learning more about the pilot scheme and their methods of enforcement and issues of fines.

To enable Members to further consider both potential topics for inclusion on the Workplan, it was suggested that appropriate officers be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to furnish Members with additional information to enable informed decisions to be made.

Previously Suggested Topics

Buying Local

The topic of 'Buying Local' was put forward for potential inclusion on the scrutiny work programme following a motion submitted to Council in February 2021 that was debated and duly endorsed regarding the Council's commitment to buying from and utilising local services post Brexit.

The Chairman of the Covid-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel who was also a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee suggested that this item would be better reviewed by the Panel as their remit was predominantly the recovery of local businesses and reinvigorating the local economy following the pandemic.

Roadside Memorials

The topic of 'Roadside Memorials' was put forward for potential inclusion on the scrutiny work programme following an incident in Kirkby regarding a group of motorcyclists paying tribute to a friend/relative that had died on Diamond Avenue. The event had caused problems on the highway and the Police were eventually called in to intervene.

Due to the popularity of roadside memorials increasing over the last few years, growing numbers of councils were attempting to define their responses to the tributes by developing comprehensive written policies.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services advised Members that the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) had welcomed the potential inclusion of this topic on the Scrutiny Workplan and had wished to see the remit widened to consider protocols for cemetery kerb sets alongside roadside memorials.

Member briefly debated the issue and expressed their deep concerns at reviewing such emotive and sensitive topics. It was also reiterated that there were already enforcement powers in existence to deal with highways issues as a result of attendance at roadside memorials and these should be dealt with by the Police and responsible authorities as required.

RESOLVED that

- a) the update regarding ongoing review topics from the 2020/2021 scrutiny work programme, be received and noted;
- b) to enable further consideration of potential 2021/22 Scrutiny Workplan topics, the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to undertake the following:
 - to invite the Council's Community Safety Manager to the next available meeting of the Committee, to advise Members on progress in relation to the Litter and Dog Fouling Enforcement Pilot Scheme currently being undertaken by an external contractor;
 - to invite the Council's Director of Place and Communities and Assistant Director, Place and Wellbeing to the next available meeting of the Committee, to advise Members in relation to the recently confirmed £62.6 million from the Government's Towns Fund and any potential for ensuring that opportunities are available to local businesses to tender for contracts and play a part in the development and improvement of Kirkby and Sutton town centres as agreed;
- c) the 'Buying Local' topic be added to the 2021/22 Scrutiny Workplan and assigned to the Covid-19 Recovery Scrutiny Panel for review;
- d) it be reaffirmed that the 'Waste and Recycling' topic and the 'Climate Change' topic be facilitated as two separate Workplan reviews;
- e) having been considered for possible inclusion on the 2021/22 Scrutiny Workplan, the Roadside Memorials topic be duly declined.

The meeting closed at 8.18 pm

Chairman.