

PRINCIPAL SELECT COMMITTEE

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

on Thursday, 28th September, 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Kier Barsby in the Chair;

Councillors Jodine Cronshaw, Julie Gregory,
Warren Nuttall and Phil Rostance.

Apology for Absence: Councillor John Smallridge.

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

In Attendance: Councillor John Wilmott.

PS.4 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

PS.5 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2023, be received and approved as a correct record.

PS.6 No Mow May Campaign

Councillor Julie Gregory advised Members that she had raised the topic of 'No Mow May' earlier in the year and had requested Committee to include it on the Work Programme for consideration by Members.

In her opinion, the 'No Mow May' campaign at Ashfield could have seen improvements in its execution and there had been inadequate promotion by the Council prior to it taking place during May 2023. The majority of Ashfield residents were not aware it was happening, and many complaints had been received during the campaign in respect of untidy areas of land and safety concerns regarding visual splays at road junctions as grassed areas became overgrown.

Having spoken with the Council's Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods it became clear that the Environmental and Waste Services Team were currently undergoing a restructure review coupled with the implementation of a new digital case management system. Due to the disruption, the teams were taking a predominantly reactive approach to their workloads and changing priorities which was leaving little time for planned approaches to campaigns/initiatives throughout the year.

The new, digital case management system once fully implemented would allow all works on the District to be tracked with data captured in real time. This would then allow the teams to be better co-ordinated with a more proactive approach to scheduling and prioritising works and resolving complaints.

In respect of the 2024 'No Mow May' campaign, it had been agreed that cutting mazes in areas to be left unmown would be the preferred approach. This method would therefore still allow for green spaces to be adequately liberated, providing spaces for nature whilst tackling pollution and locking away atmospheric carbon below ground.

It had also been agreed that a suitable awareness campaign would be rolled out prior to May with signage being displayed in prominent areas.

To conclude Members were advised that children's play areas, earmarked road junctions and football pitches across the District would still be tended and mown throughout the 'No Mow May' campaign.

Following the presentation, the Chairman thanked Councillor Gregory for her report and welcomed this new approach of individual Members taking a lead on review topics. It was acknowledged that should any other Members wish to embark on a similar exercise, the Scrutiny Research Officer would be more than happy to offer support and guidance as required.

A discussion ensued and Members debated the following:

- a suggestion that the locational search facility on the Council's website in respect of bin collection dates could be extended to offer dates for when grass cutting is programmed to take place
- concerns regarding the visual aspect of mazes being cut into green spaces and issues with weeds proliferating in May following April being a traditionally wet month
- agreement that it would be helpful for Members to alert the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods of any green space areas within their wards that are causing issues and require cutting.

To conclude, the Scrutiny Research Officer also commended Councillor Gregory for her work on the 'No Mow May' review topic and made some suggestions for suitable recommendations to be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

RESOLVED that

a) the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

- to consider using a maze cutting approach to designated areas of green space and enhanced wildflower planting as part of the Council's commitment to the 'No Mow May' campaign for 2024;

- to ensure that a suitable awareness campaign is rolled out in April 2024 to ensure Ashfield residents are aware of the 'No Mow May' campaign and its potential impact on local areas;
 - for Council to commit to ensuring the ongoing maintenance of children's play areas, road junctions and football pitches during the 'No Mow May' campaign for 2024;
- b) it be agreed that an evaluation and feedback report be submitted to Committee following 'No Mow May' in 2024 to enable Members to assess the success, or otherwise of the campaign.

PS.7 Ashfield District Council - 50 Year Anniversary

The Scrutiny Research Officer introduced the item and informed Members that on 1 April 2024, Ashfield District Council would be commemorating its 50 year anniversary.

The District Council was formed on 1 April 1974, under the Local Government Act 1972, by the merger of Urban Districts of Hucknall, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield and parts of Basford Rural District, namely the parishes of Annesley & Felley and Selston.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had suggested that the milestone should be marked in some way and so the item had been included on the agenda to ascertain Members ideas and suggestions for celebrating the event. SLT had acknowledged that this milestone might not be of particular interest to Ashfield residents but more for employees and Members to mark and celebrate the occasion.

The Chairman decided to take the idea around the table and asked all Members and officers present at the meeting for their ideas and suggestions for marking the event as follows:

Ideas/Suggestions

- to organise an event for Officers, Members, past Members and past Chief Executives with slideshow and refreshments
- a celebratory item to be included on the Council meeting agenda scheduled for 15 April 2024
- celebratory signs to be erected at all the Council's market site including showcase stalls with special offers available on the anniversary day
- memory videos/photos to be posted on the Council's website
- publicity comprising all the Council's achievements over the past 50 years (i.e. new leisure centres and Robin Hood line)

- 'Do you remember?' interviews with older, local residents including a special feature on couples married for 50 years or more
- a one day promotional offer of 1974 prices at all the Council's leisure centres
- a promotional 'then and now' publicity campaign with a 1974 fancy dress day at Council facilities across the District on the anniversary date
- magnetic vehicles signs for the Council's fleet stating 'Proudly serving Ashfield for the last 50 years'.
- celebratory afternoon event amalgamated with the Council's 2024 staff recognition awards for all employees.

Following the discussion, the Chairman thanked everyone for their enthusiasm and great ideas and suggestions for marking the historic event.

RESOLVED

that all the ideas/suggestions for marking the 50 year anniversary of Ashfield District Council, as formulated at the meeting, be relayed to the Council's Senior Management Team and Civic Office for further consideration.

PS.8 Select Committee Co-optees

The Scrutiny Research Officer presented the report and asked Committee Members to consider the options relating to the appointment of non-voting co-opted members to the Principal Select Committee and/or the Inward and Outward Focus Select Committees.

Members were advised that the item had originally been submitted to the Committee back in October 2022, but Members at that time thought it would be prudent to leave the decision to new Members of the Committee following the District Elections in May 2023.

The outcome of a recent Audit of the Council's scrutiny function had raised a recommendation that there had not been a recent discussion regarding the potential added value of appointing non-voting co-opted members to the Council's scrutiny committees and that it would be prudent to visit the matter as soon as possible.

With that in mind, Members were advised as to the rules and possible benefits of appointing non-voting co-opted members to committees and a detailed discussion took place.

RESOLVED

that having considered the potential benefits of appointing non-voting co-opted members to the Council's scrutiny committees, it was decided to not pursue this option at the present time and to continue to invite expert witnesses to meetings as and when required.

PS.9 Select Work Programme

The Scrutiny Research Officer gave an update on progress of the Select Work Programme for 2023/24 and asked Members to consider two further topics suggested by Councillor Lee Waters, for possible inclusion on the Work Programme going forward:

1. Public Toilets in Town Centres

Many residents had been in contact with Members, particularly in Hucknall, regarding the possible provision of new public toilets in town centres and whether any of the Town's funding could be utilised to provide the capital investment to build them.

Members discussed the suggestion and acknowledged the previous anti-social behaviour issues experienced in relation to public toilets (and the subsequent repair costs) and the lack of mainstream funding to maintain any new facilities going forward. As an alternative it was suggested that indoor toilet provision could be provided to the public by working in partnership with other local businesses/facilities in the area.

2. Reinstatement of Community Funding for Councillors

A request to reinstate a community fund for individual Members to distribute had firstly been submitted as a motion to Council but this had been refused due to a lack of any financial assessment. It was then subsequently submitted as a potential Work Programme topic for Members' consideration.

During deliberations, the Committee raised concerns regarding the reputational implications of agreeing to such a fund at this present time due to recent allegations in the press against certain Members.

In addition, Cllr. Phil Rostance also asked if a further topic could be added to the Work Programme in respect of an analysis of the Council's current property assets with a view to considering the repurposing or sale of any unused properties, once an inventory had been established.

RESOLVED

a) that the following three topics suggestions for adding to the Select Work Programme for 2023/24, be declined at this present time

- Public Toilets in Town Centres
- Reinstatement of Community Funding for Councillors
- Inventory of Council Property Assets;

b) as a result of a) above, delegated authority be granted to the Scrutiny Research Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee, to consider the merits/suitability of each potential topic further and if warranted, a report be submitted back to Committee for further consideration.

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Chairman.