

SCRUTINY PANEL A

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

on Thursday, 10th March, 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Dave Shaw in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Trevor Locke,
Lauren Mitchell, Warren Nuttall and
David Walters.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Caroline Wilkinson.

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

SA.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SA.8 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14 October 2021, be received and approved as a correct record.

(During consideration of this item, Councillor Lauren Mitchell entered the meeting at 7.05pm.)

SA.9 Scrutiny Review: Selective Licensing Scheme

The Scrutiny Research Officer presented the report and reminded Members that they had first embarked on the Tenancy Support review back in September 2021. As the work evolved, Members took the opportunity to concurrently consider and respond to the Council's review of the Selective Licensing Scheme that was coming to its conclusion after the five-year pilot period.

Having worked closely with the Service Manager for Strategic Housing & Lettings and the Environmental Health Team Leader to gather information and understand the implications and benefits of extending the Scheme, Members provisionally agreed two recommendations (for consideration by Cabinet) at the Scrutiny Panel A Informal Working Group meeting held on Thursday 20 January 2022 as follows:

1. Cabinet is recommended to approve the renewal of the Selective Licensing Scheme.
2. Cabinet is recommended to explore the feasibility of expanding the Selective Licensing Scheme to other areas in the District that may meet the criteria.

Feedback from the public consultation exercise and final proposals for extension of the Council's Selective Licensing Scheme were due to be presented to Cabinet on 29 March 2022 and it was agreed that the Panel's recommendations with regard to the Scheme, would be submitted alongside the report for consideration.

Members were therefore asked to endorse the two proposed recommendations and make any final additions/amendments to the Panel's response, for encapsulation in the final Cabinet report.

A debate was undertaken, and Members considered the following:

- some concerns were raised for empty properties that fell outside the Scheme boundaries and how inequalities might emerge within the District, in relation to property standards
- the importance of the Scheme being self funding and not requiring the use of any funding from the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- the potential benefits of widening the Scheme to other areas in the District to raise standards of private sector rental accommodation
- acknowledgement that although valuable lessons had been learnt from the pilot scheme, the Scheme as a whole had more than delivered on its objectives
- a request to see the finances associated with the pilot scheme to have confirmation that the pilot was self-funding in its delivery
- concerns around the employment of two additional staff to support delivery of the Scheme and any potential duplication of support provided by the Council (in relation to tenant concerns) that was already being offered through the national housing ombudsman
- acknowledgement of the importance of good private rental property provision being available alongside Council social housing to meet the ever increasing needs of residents who require warm, secure homes for themselves and their families
- the benefits of the Council building good working relationships with private sector landlords to enable synergistic working practices to be undertaken to provide decent rental accommodation generally and to also meet the immediate needs of people presenting as homeless
- recognition that the Selective Licensing Scheme had been a success and that Council officers had worked hard to deliver the pilot scheme.

On conclusion of the debate, the Scrutiny Research Officer summarised Members' responses to the review and suggested a couple of further recommendations that would capture the views of Panel Members in relation to the Scheme's funding arrangements and support being offered to residents/tenants falling outside of the designated Scheme boundaries.

RESOLVED

that the following final recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 29 March 2022:

- a) Support the renewal of the Selective Licensing Scheme in designated parts of Stanton Hill and Sutton Central (New Cross) for a further 5 years;
- b) Explore the feasibility of expanding the Selective Licensing Scheme to other areas in Ashfield that meet the conditions for selective licensing designation;
- c) Ensure that, if approved, the Selective Licensing Scheme continues to be self-funded through the license fee structure;
- d) Ensure that the Council continues to provide available support to private sector tenants outside of designated Selective Licensing Scheme areas.

SA.10 Scrutiny Review: Gambling Harms

The Chairman introduced the new scrutiny review topic regarding Gambling Harms. The topic was added to the scrutiny work programme at the December 2021 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it was agreed that the topic had the potential to be interesting, informative and thought provoking.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) were also currently working on a project with the Gambling Commission to raise awareness and increase the involvement of elected members in overview and scrutiny roles for tackling gambling related harms. Gambling, particularly through online platforms including gaming sites, was on the rise and people were now starting to gamble at a younger age. It was acknowledged that local authorities were often on the receiving end of the resulting social issues arising from gambling difficulties (alongside partners including the NHS and Police) in the form of homelessness and anti-social behaviour (ASB) problems.

However, it needed to be acknowledged that not all gambling had negative consequences and the review would hopefully investigate how the Council could work proactively in partnership with other key organisations to assist, support and mitigate against families struggling with gambling issues such as debt management, homelessness, anti-social behaviour and even suicide.

Julian Alison, the Council's Licensing Manager took the opportunity to give an overview of the Council's current role in facilitating licensing applications and regulating gambling on premises. The Council currently had 3 bingo halls, 11 bookmakers and various public houses/premises with slot machines and consideration of any licensing applications for this type of premises would need to satisfy the three gambling licencing objectives as follows:

- preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime
- ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way
- protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

At this point Members were asked to note that the Council had no jurisdiction over any form of online licensing for gambling.

The Council's Statement of Gambling Policy included a section in relation to a local area profile in which areas of ASB within the District were highlighted and would be referred to in any licensing applications for gambling purposes. Gambling premises within Ashfield were currently subject to annual compliance checks and to date no issues/complaints had been documented from these inspections. In any event staff within these premises were always trained to take care of and support vulnerable people utilising the in house gambling facilities.

To conclude, the Licensing Manager did acknowledge that such tight controls prescribed to be undertaken by local authorities did not seem to currently extend to online gambling and any advertisements through television and social media channels.

The Chairman thanked Julian for his informative presentation and Members then proceeded to discuss the following:

- concerns surrounding loot boxes provided on gaming platforms as a potential gambling risk to children and young people and the urgent need for education within schools to combat this introduction to potential early gambling addiction
- the huge task nationally to endeavour protect young people from online gambling sites
- an early suggestion to write to the Government requesting information on how the rise in early online gambling addiction is currently being tackled
- the potential benefit of consulting with gambling company/betting shop representatives as part of the review process to ascertain what projects or initiatives are being supported to raise awareness of healthy gambling limitations
- a suggestion to consult a representative from the local Citizens' Advice Bureau to ascertain the levels of social and personal impacts of gambling
- the dangerous implications of betting advertisements now looking 'cool' and 'glamorous' whilst targeting a much younger audience already dealing with pressures to fit into society

- the rise in subtle gambling promotion via daytime television competitions
- acknowledgement that gambling addictions can ruin lives and should be dealt with as a health issue
- the realisation that many people who are struggling financially start betting to try and improve their lives for themselves and their families which has a huge impact on their mental health amongst other issues
- the objectives of the GambleAware organisation as a wholly independent body that has an agreement with the Gambling Commission to deliver the National Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms in association with the gambling industry.

RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Research Officer undertake the following in readiness for the next meeting of the Panel in June/July 2022:

- a) to formulate the Terms of Reference for the review and identify the most appropriate key witnesses to contribute to the process;
- b) to compile some background information on any local 'GambleAware' projects or initiatives within the Ashfield District;
- c) to ascertain if any Council staff in front facing roles have needed to offer advice or support to residents in relation to gambling addictions and any resulting social or personal difficulties.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Chairman.