

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

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

on Tuesday, 28th January, 2025 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Dave Shaw in the Chair;
Councillors Paul Grafton, Sarah Lewsey,
Trevor Locke, Gordon Mann and Lee Waters.

Apology for Absence: Councillor Will Bostock.

Officers Present: Caitlin Allsopp, Sophie Bird, Mike Brown,
Lynn Cain, Mike Joy, Phil Warrington,
Stacy White and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor Helen-Ann Smith.

EC.8 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

EC.9 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 October 2024, be received and approved as a correct record.

EC.10 Trees Strategy and Maintenance

The Chairman welcomed Caitlin Allsop, the Council's Junior Improvement Analyst for Performance & Improvement and Mike Brown, the Interim Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods, who were in attendance to give Members an insight into the Council's current Trees Strategy and Maintenance Project.

The Council was currently in ownership of an estimated 27,000 trees located within parks, woodlands, and various municipal green spaces within the District. Following commencement of the project in June 2024, historical data and mapping of trees was currently continuing with a view to providing a single source of information in relation to tree assets once completed.

To date over 2,000 trees had been mapped onto the Council's graphical information system (GIS) and following an initial pilot exercise, taking selected areas to the north, south and centre of the District, 461 trees had been inspected. These areas were the Council offices (and car park) at Urban Road, Kirkby, Sutton in Ashfield Cemetery and Titchfield Park, Hucknall.

Following the pilot mapping exercise, remedial, removal and emergency works had been carried out to trees as required.

It was estimated that continuance of the project by the Neighbourhoods Team, with support from Policy and Performance, would result in:

- all Council owned trees being mapped on one system
- all Council owned trees to have been surveyed by 2027 and plotted into a risk matrix advising on timelines for inspections as required
- completion of a Trees Strategy and Maintenance Policy which would be fit for purpose and would cover all Council owned trees included TPOs and housing trees.

The Environmental Team were currently out mapping all the trees within Ashfield, using 'Whitespace' software to map the exact locations for transferring to 'Map That'. The work was 80% completed and would hopefully be finalised by March 2025. April 2025 would see a cycle of inspections being scheduled although it had not yet been determined whether the work would be undertaken in house or from an external service provider.

Following the presentation Members discussed the matter and sought further information in relation to the following:

- dealing with vandalised trees or trees blown over due to adverse weather conditions
- disposal methods for diseased trees
- bird nesting protection
- pollarding requirements
- replacement trees, potential funding streams, species selection and costs
- staffing requirements for maintenance of trees going forward
- engaging local community groups.

To conclude the Chairman thanked both officers for their attendance and the insightful overview of the Council's Trees Strategy and Maintenance Project and its progress.

RESOLVED that

- a) the content of the report, be received and noted;
- b) the condition and associated costs of trees maintenance, for the 461 trees inspected as part of the sampling exercise undertaken, be acknowledged;
- c) the proposed next steps in the project, to ensure that the Council has a robust tree management plan and a prioritised inspection and maintenance schedule in place, be also noted;
- d) the Junior Improvement Analyst for Performance & Improvement be invited back to a future meeting of the Committee to present the draft Council Trees Strategy (once developed) and to enable Members to assist with the selection of local tree species for inclusion in the policy as required.

EC.11 Selective Licensing Mid Term Review

The Chairman welcomed Phil Warrington, the Council's Assistant Director for Strategic Housing, Stacy White, Team Manager Environmental Health (Residential) and Sophie Bird, Selective Licensing Officer who were in attendance at the meeting to present a mid-term review of the Council's Selective Licensing Scheme.

Much work had been completed in the first two years of the five-year Selective Licensing Scheme which enabled the Council to require private landlords to register and licence their properties within designated areas. An initial Scheme had run the five years' previously in the Stanton Hill and Sutton Central areas.

Triggers to enable a Selective Licensing Scheme to be designated included high levels of disrepair in an area, bad landlords, high turnover of tenants and high incidences of anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Following commencement of the Scheme, landlords were required to pay a fee of £350 for a licence to rent out properties within the designated area. This enabled the Council to manage and improve the following:

- housing standards
- management practices
- incidences of disrepair
- cases of damp and mould
- number of empty homes
- partnership working.

Lessons had been learnt from the initial five-year scheme including the need to focus more on the good landlords offering them an effective advice, help and support service for the £350 licence fee.

Since commencement of the Scheme, 670 applications for licence had been approved and it was pleasing to note the high levels of compliance that had been evidenced whilst the housing inspections had been undertaken. Any landlords failing to provide the necessary certificates for electrical safety or dealing with Category 1 or 2 hazards, were offered support and guidance by Council officers to rectify these matters promptly. Additional information had also been provided to both landlords and tenants on a range of issues (for both internal and external areas) including guttering, waste on land, location and provision of bins and general tidiness.

In respect of enforcement notices, only seven civil penalties had been issued and one prosecution carried out. Over one thousand surveys had been sent out to elicit feedback on the Scheme and overall data was indicating that the first two years of the Scheme had been a success. However, it was noted that incidences of ASB were still high in the designated areas.

To conclude, Members were advised that the next steps included a focus on high-risk landlords, building on effective partnership working, assisting with measures to reduce ASB and bringing empty properties back into use.

Following the presentation Members discussed the matter and sought further information in relation to the following:

- how long a valid licence lasts
- criteria and possibility for designating additional areas
- empty homes turnaround timelines
- impact of new legislation.

To conclude the Chairman thanked the officers for their attendance and the informative presentation regarding progress of the Council's Selective Licensing Scheme.

RESOLVED

that the presentation and update be received, noted and welcomed.

The meeting closed at 8.21 pm

Chairman.