

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON

30 August 2022

7.30 - 10.06 pm

PRESENT

Committee Members

Councillor Tony Edwards (Chair)
Councillor David Carter (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Colleen Morrison
Councillor Daniella Pritchard
Councillor Matthew Saggars

Also Present

Councillor Joel Charles
Councillor Alastair Gunn

Officers

Hannah Criddle, Governance Support Officer
Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director - Corporate Services
James Gardner, Assistant Director - Regeneration
Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment
Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support
Suzanna Wood, Housing Development and Regeneration Manager

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nick Churchill, Stacy Seales and Lanie Shears.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor David Carter declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 12 as a site rep for Harlow Allotment Association.

14. MINUTES

Councillor Tony Edwards suggested that the following wording be added to minute 8 b):

“It was agreed that the following items would not be progressed as part of the Committee’s work plan. The reasons are also noted below

- a) Online Gambling – It was noted the Government was currently considering the introduction of legislation on this matter. Any review would follow the legislation

- b) GP Practices – It was noted the relevant scrutiny authority for this was Essex County Council. The Director of Communities and Environment would speak to Councillor Carter about the discussions which are already taking place between the Council and the CCG.
- c) Parking Permits – This would be dealt with by the Parking Steering Group
- d) Hate Crime – This was to be incorporated in pre-scrutiny of the Community Safety Strategy. The Director of Communities and Environment would speak to Councillor Griggs about the actions the Council is already taking.
- e) Veolia Contract – It was noted that this already forms part of the Audit and Standards Committee’s audit tracker. Relevant information would be supplied to Councillor Vince.
- f) Garage e-charging – This would be incorporated into the emerging Garages Strategy.”

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2022 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the inclusion of the above wording.

15. **MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor David Carter noted that he had not yet received details of Police Officers assigned to his ward as agreed at the last meeting. It was agreed that officers would chase for this information.

16. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None.

17. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

None.

18. **RESPONSES OF THE CABINET TO REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Committee noted that its Annual Report was agreed by Full Council on 28 July 2022.

19. **HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULTS WITH A MODERATE/SEVERE LEARNING DISABILITY - UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee received an update report on the implementation of recommendations following the review on housing and accommodation requirements for adults with a moderate/severe learning disability.

Councillor Colleen Morrison suggested that the Council considered offering British Sign Language (BSL) provision for those in the community who struggle to complete forms that are written in English. Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment, advised that the Council could arrange for BSL to be made available where needed.

In response to questions raised, James Gardner, Assistant Director Regeneration, agreed to speak to Housing to determine whether the Housing Register form and tenancy agreements were available in “easy read” version. The Committee noted that the Council was having ongoing discussions with Essex County Council to see whether the Council can assist with identifying sites for supported living places. Officers agreed to contact Essex County Council to confirm where the 60-unit care scheme would be located as mentioned in paragraph 3.2 of the attached report and how many units would be available at the former Westfield Primary School as mentioned in paragraph 4.1.

RESOLVED that:

- A** Opportunities are actively explored to meet the needs of those living in the District with a moderate/severe learning disability as detailed in the ECC Needs Assessment.
- B** Scrutiny Committee to receive a further report to review progress in 12 months’ time.

20. **COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY**

Councillor Joel Charles, Portfolio Holder for Business and Community Resilience, attended the meeting to present the Community Safety Strategy.

In response to questions raised, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) for the Council’s work on community safety would be developed to align with the Corporate Plan. Councillor Charles explained that the Action Plan for the Community Safety team would also align with the targets and objectives of the Safer Harlow Partnership. Councillor Charles confirmed that, should the strategy be approved at Cabinet in September, a six-week consultation period would begin. Once the consultation had finished, officers would be able to start to consider KPI’s. The Committee welcomed this proposal.

Councillor Charles also noted that the Council promotes the J9 initiative at the Domestic Abuse forum and during Domestic Abuse awareness week. Councillor Charles advised that he was keen to raise further awareness surrounding the subject and work with Essex Police to do more targeted work in Harlow.

The Committee noted that Councillor Ash Malik was the Council's representative on the Safer Harlow Partnership. Cllr Charles agreed to explore the possibility for additional Councillors to be assigned to each priority sub group.

Councillor Charles also congratulated the Community Safety team for how they professionally conducted business during two recent emergency fire incidents.

21. **CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY**

Councillor Alastair Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Governance, attended the meeting to discuss the Climate Change Strategy.

In response to questions raised, Councillor Gunn advised that he had recently received the report commissioned from an external company, therefore, it was likely that the Climate Change Strategy would be ready later in the year. The shorter term target would be to set the strategy within the next couple of months, the medium term to set staging posts and the longer term target to achieve net zero by 2050.

With regard to encouraging private house owners to make changes, it was noted that the Council had a leadership role. Councillor Gunn noted that the Council had to meet targets on its housing stock, however, there would be the opportunity for HTS to have a key role in the supply chain and build on workforce skills.

Councillor Gunn explained that the Councillor Parking Steering Group had also been meeting regularly to consider parking challenges around the town and how EV charging points could be incorporated into various sites. Councillor Gunn confirmed that EV charging points would be installed in two council car parks by the end of the municipal year. Councillor Gunn also advised that the Steering Group would also be looking at garage assets to see whether there are any opportunities with these sites. It was noted that Essex County Council was also working on an EV Charging Point Strategy.

The Committee members requested that further SMART short and medium term goals (one year/three year) be drawn up to allow progress in this area to be monitored.

The Committee raised concerns over the potential cost of living and energy crisis. Councillor Charles noted that Rainbow Services continued to

run the Community Hub and there would be a future announcement on the Community Hub shortly.

22. **COUNCIL HOME WORKING - INITIAL REPORT**

The Committee received a report on council home working.

In response to questions raised, Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director Corporate Services, confirmed that a three month review on home working had been carried out in July following the hybrid system being introduced in April 2022. It was noted that council staff performance continued to be monitored with regular management interventions and targets.

The Committee raised resident concerns about call wait times for Contact Harlow, however, it was noted that this was due to staff vacancies and increased volume and complexity of calls received in general.

RESOLVED that the:

- A Committee notes the practices and changes implemented to enhance service delivery and effects on staff from introduction of homeworking during the pandemic and beyond.
- B Further work be undertaken to develop a post pandemic Home Working Policy.

23. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee received a report summarising its work plan for 2022/23.

The Chair noted that there wasn't any allotment review update report on the work plan. Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment, confirmed that an allotments report could be brought to the Committee in February 2023. He also noted that Cllr Shears would like to be involved in this work.

Councillor David Carter requested that it be minuted that he understood that there was due to be both a paddling pool and splash park at Staple Tye, however, only a splash park had been installed. Councillor Carter requested information on the Cabinet report and decision from officers.

RESOLVED that the work plan be noted.

24. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

25. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE