

# Minutes

<b>Meeting name</b>	<b>Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Tuesday, 7 January 2020</b>
<b>Start time</b>	<b>6.30 pm</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH</b>

## Present:

**Chair** Councillor P. Cumbers (Chair)

**Councillors**

R. Bindloss (Vice-Chair)	R. Browne
R. Child	J. Douglas
C. Evans	C. Fisher
E. Holmes	R. Smedley
J. Wilkinson	

**Observer** A. Hewson

**In attendance** A. Freer-Jones, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Access and Engagement

**Officers**

- Deputy Chief Executive & Director for People & Communities
- Director for Growth and Regeneration
- Director for Governance & Regulatory Services
- People Manager
- Corporate Services Manager
- Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager
- Democratic Services Manager
- Democratic Services Officer (CR)

Minute No.	Minute
34	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b> There were no apologies for absence.</p>
35	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b> Councillor Bindloss declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 (Melton Community Lottery), as an employee of the Learning Hub, which was a recipient of lottery funding and would leave the meeting during consideration of this item.</p> <p>Councillor Browne declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, as the Secretary for the Cricket Club, which was a recipient of lottery funding.</p> <p>Councillor Cumbers declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, as a Trustee for Shop Mobility, which was a recipient of lottery funding.</p> <p>Councillor Freer-Jones declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5, as a Member of the Rotary Club, which was a recipient of lottery funding.</p> <p>The Director for People and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive) declared an interest in agenda item 5, as a Director of the Learning Hub.</p>
36	<p><b>Final Report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group - Housing Voids and Temporary Accommodation</b> Councillor Pat Cumbers, Chair of Scrutiny Committee introduced the report, the purpose of which was to detail the findings of the review carried out by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group for Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation. The Task and Finish Group had proposed a number of recommendations, which were presented for the Committee's approval and further recommendation to Cabinet.</p> <p>Councillor Cumbers noted that this had been Scrutiny's first Task and Finish Group. Members of the Group had invested a lot of time and effort into the review, which had been invaluable. She thanked Group members and officers involved in the review for their time and contribution.</p> <p>The Director for Growth and Regeneration, Pranali Parikh added her thanks to the Committee and Group members for their work, which had been extremely helpful and useful. The Group had gathered comprehensive information, insight and a good evidence base for the proposed recommendations. She also highlighted the work undertaken by officers in her team to review and improve housing voids management, noting that both officers and Members had worked towards the same objective and the timing of the reviews worked very well.</p> <p>Mrs. Parikh referred to the 'Summary – Void Analysis', which had been circulated to Members at the start of the meeting, highlighting that there had been an</p>

improvement in the average void turnaround in December 2019. She anticipated that further updates to Members would show a consistent improvement.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- i. It was not possible to confirm at this meeting when the remaining 30 voids would be available to let but currently, the average void turnaround time was 14/15 day and officers aimed to accelerate this as much as possible.
- ii. Members reiterated the importance of dealing with this issue swiftly. Thorough reviews had been undertaken by both officers and the Group and it was time for action.
- iii. The Housing Revenue Account was in a healthy condition to support an improved voids performance.
- iv. Benchmarking with other councils would be useful to determine the scale of the Council's problem and what 'good practice' could be adopted. Officers at North West Leicestershire District Council had provided extremely constructive information about how they improved their Housing Voids performance.
- v. The Council having better maintenance of its housing stock and encouraging tenants to look after their properties would ensure a quicker void turnaround time.
- vi. Members of the Group agreed that they had been able to undertake an effective review. Council tenants and officers had provided feedback and North West Leicestershire District Council who were now one of the better performing councils had been an excellent authority to speak to.
- vii. There were issues with the Council's contractor, as referred to in the report. Councillor Browne informed the Committee that he had reviewed the contract and found it to be robust but it needed to be managed better.
- viii. The visits referred to at paragraph E3 of the report, were not reflected in the proposed recommendations but should be added, as this could be an important key to improvement to ensure that views and feedback from tenants were collected and used to develop further improvements.

Councillor Douglas proposed that an amendment be made to the recommendations in the report adding the recommendation below:

'To implement new Tenant visits on occupation and again after 6 months'.

The Committee were in favour of this amendment.

### **RESOLVED**

Scrutiny Committee **APPROVED** and **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet the Final Report of the Task and Finish Group for Housing Voids Management and Temporary Accommodation, subject to the addition of the recommendation detailed above.

## Review of the Scrutiny Annual Work Plan and the Forward Plan

During discussion the following points were noted:

### Forward Plan

- i. A Member highlighted 'Asset Disposal', noting that this was an exempt item and commenting that consideration of offers to purchase land owned by the Council should be open, to enable others to bid and ensure that the Council received best price for its assets.
- ii. A Member asked for the item 'Granting Access over Council Land' to be clarified. The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services explained that items which may require an executive decision were added to the Forward Plan at an early stage as a 'marker' to ensure compliance with statutory requirements regarding notice of decisions. If these items came to fruition, further information would be provided to Members. If not, the items would be removed from the Forward Plan.

### Work Plan

- i. Crime and Disorder would be considered by the Committee on 3 March. The local Police Inspector and Policing Team had been invited to attend the meeting and an invitation would also be extended to the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- ii. Councillor Cumbers and the Democratic Services Manager had recently reviewed the Work Plan. It was suggested that the Committee may wish to attend a 'workshop' in advance of the first Scrutiny Committee meeting of the new Municipal Year 2020/21 to prioritise the items which were currently pending and add any new items. This would then form the basis of the Scrutiny Work Plan for 2020/21.
- iii. The Cattle Market Income Stream would be added to the Work Plan (Consideration of the income would be the main focus). The Income Stream was reported quarterly to Cabinet and Members were concerned about the predicted deficit and pressure on Council funds (and were eager to receive actual figures instead of estimates). The Council was in receipt of the actual figures but these needed to be processed. Members would be provided with figures to Quarter 3 as soon as possible. It was noted that the Council was in the process of recruiting to 2 vacant asset management related posts, including 1 responsible for managing the Cattle Market contract. Currently the Regeneration Team were covering the monthly contract meetings but these vacancies meant that there would be an issue in supporting a significant review. Facts and figures i.e. the drop in income could be reported but the reasons for this would involve wider considerations.

**Councillor Bindloss left the meeting during consideration of the next item of business**

### **Melton Community Lottery**

The Committee received a report on the Melton Community Lottery from the People Manager.

Councillor Alison Freer-Jones, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Access and Engagement provided a brief overview of the report, the purpose of which was to provide a breakdown of the costs associated with running the Lottery.

Councillor Free-Jones noted the considerable work that the People Manager had put into writing the report and ensuring that issues raised by Members had been addressed. She also thanked the Committee for considering this item.

Councillor Freer-Jones commented that it was extremely worthwhile for the Council to help community groups to raise money for their initiatives through the Lottery. There had been a downturn of ticket sales but she hoped that this could be improved upon and that the Council could make a success of the Lottery.

Members discussed the additional information and recommendations, proposed by the Chair, which had been circulated at the start of the meeting. The Chair confirmed that these were suggestions for the Committee to consider and discuss further.

A brief summary of the Chair's suggested recommendations is provided below:

- **That Cabinet consider ending the Lottery, as soon as possible.**

#### Reasons

- i. The Budget Books indicated that since 2016, the Lottery had resulted in a large expenditure chargeable to Council Tax
- ii. Membership was expected to be approximately 2000 to date. However, current membership was 293 and this continued to decrease

- **That Cabinet consider continuation of the Lottery for a period of 12 months, in order to establish whether it is possible to raise a similar income to that which was predicted in 2016 when the Lottery started.**

#### Reasons

- i. Other local authorities were raising substantial amounts, which supported their Good Causes. This Council should be able to do the same.
- ii. A successful lottery would enhance the Council's reputation and the reputation of Melton as a good place to live.
- iii. A successful lottery (with a minimum of annual ticket sales of £88,400, resulting in £53,040 to Good Causes) could make a significant difference to the Council's financial position.
- iv. Many small Good Causes, such as local sports clubs across the Borough were already raising useful amounts to help cover their costs, which helped to keep residents active and assist social cohesion.

- **That a full assessment be made on the viability of continuing the Lottery. An Action Plan to be put in place should continuation be found viable, assistance be provided to help ‘Good Causes’ to increase ticket sales and that the management and administration Lottery costs be fully charged to the Lottery, in accordance with Council policy, as stated in the Budget Book.**

Reason:

- There was a need for the smaller Good Causes to receive more help, information etc.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- The £5k cost to the Council to support the Lottery (as estimated in the Business Case, detailed at Appendix A of the report) was sufficient. However, during the first and second years of the Lottery, the Council had incurred unforeseen support costs i.e. for the Lottery’s ‘first birthday’ and in making arrangements for a new Licence Holder. Support for the Lottery usually included raising and authorising monthly invoices, Regulatory Returns to the Gambling Commission and other financial work, which was undertaken annually. Ad hoc administration was also required when a new Good Cause registered.
- Members acknowledged the Council’s conflicting priorities, capacity and resource issues but emphasised that good quality promotion was vital to increase Lottery membership, drive ticket sales, increase revenue and ensure the success of the Lottery.
- Members noted that once the downturn had been identified in 2018, it had been agreed to implement a Task and Finish Group to review the performance of the Lottery. There had been several attempts to implement the Group but the People Manager had been unable to secure enough Member support to begin this review at the time. However, additional staffing costs had been allocated to the budget in anticipation of this review, which had distorted the support costs for that year. The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services suggested that the previous governance system may have contributed to lack of engagement in reviewing this area.
- Currently, the Lottery was not cost effective due to the fall in membership numbers. However, it did contribute to the ‘Community Grants pot’
- Members noted that the report focussed on charges rather than performance but highlighted that the success of the Lottery depended greatly on appropriate funding and support.
- Part D1 of the Business Case, which detailed project management and delivery was highlighted. The Lottery budget had remained the same since it started in 2016 and no additional staff had been recruited to support the Lottery at that time. Instead, the additional support work had been absorbed into the workloads of those already employed by the Council.
- During discussion it was noted that the Lottery was of benefit to small causes and the importance of active promotion during any period of

continuation was reiterated.

[The meeting adjourned at 19:50]

[The meeting reconvened at 20:00]

Following discussion, Councillor Child proposed the recommendation below, which was seconded by Councillor Browne.

**RESOLVED**

Scrutiny Committee **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that

- 1) The Lottery should cease unless in 12 months time the numbers, through active promotion by all parties are at least at the same level as at 31 December 2018 i.e. 448 (this figure represents the highest number of members recorded).
- 2) A report be presented to Scrutiny after 12 months to review and make a recommendation to Cabinet.

**Councillor Bindloss returned to the meeting**

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**Service Charges**

The Committee received a report on Service Charges from the Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager.

Albert Wilson, Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager provided a brief overview of the report, the purpose of which was to enable the Committee to consider new charges for tenants in blocks with communal facilities to cover the maintenance and servicing of property health and safety equipment provided and the recharge of electricity to tenants using the new mobility scooter pods.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- i. All charges were Housing Benefit eligible, so those on benefit would not be placed into hardship through the charge.
- ii. The charges would help enable the Council to increase income, which could be reinvested in its housing stock i.e. through repair and maintenance work.
- iii. It was vital that the Council provided a well managed housing service, ensuring that tenants were safe and occupied good quality homes.
- iv. Scooter costs were not included in the report. These would be individually charged, rather than through the rent setting process.
- v. The high figure for St John's Court, as detailed at Appendix A of the report was due to the number of units having been averaged for ease of managing on a property to property basis.
- vi. The fire risk in relation to mobile scooter pods resulted from storing the scooters in communal areas. It was safer to use specific storage space with

electrical points. The proposition was still being consulted on, so further details were still being determined.

- vii. The HRA Business Plan was being developed. This would be an interim plan and once all data had been obtained on the stock condition, a long term business plan would be developed. One element of this was Housing Revenue Account finances, which impacted on costs, as well as rent levels and borrowing capacity.
- viii. Members suggested that additional items, such as lifts, legionella, fire risk and asbestos assessments etc. be included in the charges for the new financial year. Members felt that the additional income from these service charges should be obtained as soon as possible to relieve pressure on this budget. The Director for Growth and Regeneration advised that some of the items could be included but it would not be possible to incorporate all suggestions, further work was required and timescales for setting the budget for 2020/21 were now short. Those not included in 2020/21 would be considered for 2021/22. The Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager would discuss this with the service area and would confirm with Members. The Director for Governance and Regulatory Services highlighted that the setting of charges needed to be evidence based to ensure they could be justified should enforcement action become necessary.

**RESOLVED**

Scrutiny Committee **CONSIDERED** the report and **AGREED** that Councillor Browne would work with the Housing and Neighbourhoods Manager to develop feasible recommendations to be presented to Cabinet. These recommendations would be electronically circulated to Members of the Committee in advance of being forwarded to Cabinet.

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**Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at: 8.42 pm

Chair