

Minutes

Meeting name	Cabinet
Date	Wednesday, 14 October 2020
Start time	4.00 pm
Venue	This meeting was held remotely

Present:

Chair Councillor J. Orson (Chair)

Councillors L. Higgins (Vice-Chair) R. de Burle
A. Freer-Jones A. Pearson

Observers Councillor P. Cumbers
Councillor C. Evans
Councillor J. Douglas

Officers Chief Executive
Director for Housing and Communities
Director for Corporate Services
Director for Growth and Regeneration
Director for Governance and Regulatory Services and Monitoring
Officer
Assistant Director for Planning and Delivery
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (CR)

Minute No.	Minute
115	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>
116	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2020 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p> <p>The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2020 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chair.</p>
117	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>Councillors Orson and Pearson each declared an interest in any items relating to Leicestershire County Council, due to their roles as a County Councillors.</p>
118	<p>MATTERS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES</p> <p>No items had been referred from Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.</p>
119	<p>CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE</p> <p>Andrew Cotton, Director for Housing and Communities introduced the report, the purpose of which was to update Cabinet on the Council's Health and Safety activities and provide assurance that the risks and responsibilities relating to the Covid-19 outbreak continued to be actively and appropriately managed.</p> <p>Mr. Cotton advised that the report focused on higher risk areas/areas of particular relevance. He highlighted health and safety relating to the Council's housing stock, which had been overseen by the Housing Improvement Programme Board. Work had continued on fire safety actions (impacted by Covid-19 lockdown) and gas safety was at 100% compliance. This had been a significant achievement during lockdown.</p> <p>Mr. Cotton advised that the results of the recent staff survey, which reflected the change in working practices during lockdown and the importance of ensuring the wellbeing of staff working from home was detailed at paragraph 5.15 of the report. A majority of people had been successfully working from home and the general well being of employees was good.</p> <p>Mr. Cotton highlighted that in relation to Covid-19, a risk based, robust approach to service delivery, sensitive to the needs of service users had been developed, in line with Government guidance. In view of the recent announcements on the 3 tiered response to Covid-19, the Council continued to monitor and manage risks appropriately, while continuing to deliver services, maintaining the balance in a positive and proactive way.</p>

Councillor Ronnie de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Resources advised that the Council's health and safety responsibilities exceeded those of the average work place. The Council used the 'plan, do, check and act model' and undertook a programme of continuous performance monitoring. It was important that all staff understood their health and safety responsibilities and the Council provided for this through mandatory training, its Whistleblowing Policy and surveys.

During discussion, the following points were noted:

- Members thanked officers for their work, commenting that the report was comprehensive.
- Members noted the Council's wide ranging health and safety responsibilities, highlighting that Covid-19 had extended these responsibilities further.
- The results of the 2 key questions from the staff survey, as detailed at paragraph 5.17 of the report were very good.
- 100% compliance of gas certification was an excellent achievement. Ensuring safe housing with monitoring and minimal intrusion was key.
- Education and training to support and promote safety was vital to protect staff and the public.

Cabinet

- 1) **NOTED** the content of the report;
- 2) **APPROVED** the proposed actions and continued improvements

Reason for the decision

Health and Safety is taken seriously by the Council and it adopts an approach of active and proportionate management of risk. The Council seeks to not only meet its statutory and regulatory requirements but to foster a culture of continuous improvement. As shown by the unprecedented challenge posed by Covid-19, the Council needs to be responsive to manage emerging risks and changing guidance.

The arrangements contained within the report provide a framework for building on existing good practice and continuing to strengthen the Council's management of health and safety risk. Health and Safety is a statutory requirement that all Members and Officers in the Council must give a high priority and embed in all decision making.

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MELTON COUNTRY PARK UPDATE

Pranali Parikh, Director for Growth and Regeneration introduced the report, the purpose of which was to update Cabinet on the project and on other activities relating to the Country Park, outlining the next steps for the construction of the path and seeking approval for additional funding required to complete the project.

Ms. Parikh advised that the Country Park was a much loved asset. The Council

had undertaken work to deal with encroachment issues, grounds maintenance improvements, repair and maintenance issues and a study on the impact on ecology and wildlife near access points at park.

Ms. Parikh highlighted that the design and construction of the path had been proposed and approved 18 months ago. Cabinet approval for an £8k increase for the works was sought. This would be funded through S106 monies and grant funding. Contractors had been appointed and the Council would work with adjoining landowners for access to undertake the work. The work would be undertaken in early 2021 and would take 4 – 6 weeks to complete.

Ms. Parikh confirmed that the Council was preparing a repair and maintenance programme, as part of the management plan for the Country Park. If approved, the work could be carried out in 2021. A similar planned maintenance approach was being considered for the café and visitor centre. This required some investment and long term options for the building and future long term use needed to be considered.

Ms. Parikh advised that concerns had been raised about the bridge at the Park, particularly in winter, due to its slippery surface. Approval from the Environment Agency was required to enable a detailed survey to be undertaken. The estimated cost of works was £40k and if approved the work could begin in 2021. In the meantime, the Council would consider an improved and enhanced maintenance programme to ensure that the surface is useable throughout the year.

Ms. Parikh confirmed that the Council had received grant funding to undertake the assessment and provide a business case for the leisure offer within Melton. As part of this, 30k had been set aside to undertake a masterplan for the Country Park, which would look at establishing the Country Park as a destination for leisure activities.

Ms. Parikh highlighted that Councillors Glancy and Higgins had been passionate about engagement with stakeholders and user groups for this work. Discussions with these groups would be held to scope out the project details for the work.

Councillor Leigh Higgins, Portfolio Holder for Growth and Prosperity (and Deputy Leader) thanked those who had helped to inform the report, particularly Jane Wilson (Friends of the Country Park), the Persimmon Residents Group, Councillors Glancy, Lumley, Posnett and Wilkinson. He thanked the Council for ensuring the Park remained open, enabling its use and enjoyment. However, there was still much work to be done to promote use of this asset. He highlighted that the Council had been very successful with gaining Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) grant funding and this was positive for leisure facilities in and around the town.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Members thanked Councillors Glancy, Higgins, Lumley, Posnett and

Wilkinson for their work.

- Members welcomed the development of a masterplan for this valued asset but acknowledged that caution should be exercised as funding for 2021 would be restricted and significant budget decisions would need to be made.

Cabinet

- 1) **NOTED** progress made so far and the next steps;
- 2) **APPROVED** the increase of £8k in the Capital Programme for the construction of the path in the Country Park, with the project being funded from s106 monies and grant funding.

Reason for the decision

The construction of the path has been approved by the Council and has been raised as a priority by the ward members for the last two years.

Concluding the construction of the path will enhance connectivity and accessibility to the park for visitors and local residents. It will improve footfall and allow the benefits of the park to be shared more widely.

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PLANNING SERVICES REVIEW UPDATE

Pranali Parikh, Director for Growth and Regeneration introduced the report, the purpose of which was to seek the agreement of Cabinet to implement a series of changes to practice and approach to the delivery of the Development Management Service, following the findings of the Planning Review and recommend measures to address the recruitment and retention of staff and to develop and enhance the skill and experience present within the Planning team.

Ms. Parikh advised that much work had been undertaken and the second stage of work would be implemented over the next year and assessed to identify further improvements. The Council had taken in to account the impact of Covid-19 and changes to Planning legislation and was ready to implement the proposals detailed in the report.

Ms Parikh highlighted the main themes for change and drew Members attention to the financial implications table at paragraph 9.5 of the report, advising of a change to the proposal resulting in the software being funded from existing budget and the training cost being covered from the next year's budget. This would allow implementation of the new process which required the software sooner.

Councillor Leigh Higgins, Portfolio Holder for Growth and Regeneration (and Deputy Leader) advised that the Review had been comprehensive and had engaged officers, Members and stakeholders. The Chair of Planning Committee had advocated for the Review and Planning Committee had significant input. He thanked current and former Councillors who had contributed to the work and

highlighted that the community, ward councillors and developers were working together on planning applications. Stakeholders and residents were taking ownership and helping to shape applications and benefit their communities.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- Members noted that the Review had been complex and thanked the Chair of Planning Committee, councillors and officers for their work.
- The reduction in bureaucracy, streamlined process and increased level of stakeholder engagement was welcomed. It would improve efficiency and provide a more transparent, enhanced service.
- The recruitment and retention of skilled staff would be improved through the associated changes to develop in house expertise and incentivise the team.

Cabinet:

- 1) **ENDORSED** the response to the Planning Services Review;
- 2) **NOTED** that the Chief Executive would use delegated authority to effect changes to the staffing establishment, resulting in an increased cost of £12k in 2021/22, rising to up to £48k in the future; provision to be made as part of the 2021/22 budget for this increased cost.

Reason for the decision

The proposals within the report and recommendations seek to respond to the most significant aspects of the Planning Services Review in 2019 and make the most impact on the performance of the Development Management Service. The implementation of these recommendations will improve customer and stakeholder relationships and engagement and provide clarity of roles and responsibilities and an improved level of responsiveness.

It is formulated against the backdrop of increasing complexity of applications and the issues that they raise and rising customer expectations. It is intended to radically change the manner in which the service is delivered so that the customer experience is more positive and rewarding.

The proposals designed to delivery tangible outcomes are underpinned by a suite of performance measures that are designed to address the staffing and resource issues which have hindered the service in recent years. A series of measures are proposed to assist in the recruitment and retention of staff, to enhance skill and experience levels within the Planning team and to engage better with stakeholders and Members towards finding solutions to issues arising. Coupled with improved performance, these will lead to better outcomes and an improved customer journey, displaying greater certainty and coherence.

The meeting closed at: 5.00 pm

