

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Tuesday, 22 February 2022
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor R. Child (Chair)

Councillors J. Wilkinson (Vice-Chair) P. Chandler
 J. Douglas C. Evans
 M. Glancy E. Holmes
 J. Illingworth P. Posnett MBE

Officers Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
 Director for Growth and Regeneration
 Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer

Minute No.	Minute
50	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE An apology for absence was received from Councillor Steadman.</p>
51	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2022 were approved.</p>
52	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST A personal interest in respect of Councillor Posnett, was noted as being on record for any matters which related to Leicestershire County Council.</p>
53	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chair introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited Members for comments.</p> <p>A discussion ensued regarding the Asset Development Programme Phase 1 and specifically the decision to appoint a consultant team. Members agreed that assets need reviewing and it was noted that further discussion would occur at the upcoming workshop on the Asset Development Programme. Members agreed with the suggestion that a report should be presented to the Committee outlining all the monies the Council has spent, and committed to spend, on consultants.</p> <p>It was noted that a report on outstanding debt would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee at the beginning of the 2022/23 Municipal Year.</p>
54	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 The Committee agreed that the topics relating to Climate Change and the Town Centre Masterplan should be added to the work programme. A Member stated that the topic of climate change is one of the most important issues that humanity is facing and that the Council needs to address the issue to ensure the organisation is doing all it can to assist.</p> <p>Members were informed that a workshop on the Asset Development Programme would be taking place on Wednesday 23 March. It was confirmed that the Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer would be contacting the Committee to ask whom would like to participate.</p> <p>Regarding the Health, Leisure and Wellbeing workshop, it was confirmed that this would be taking place in May. A Member commented that they were disappointed with the presentation they had received from the consultant on the issue the month prior, as it did not address the real issues affecting residents.</p>
55	<p>UPDATE ON ALLOTMENTS The Director for Growth and Regeneration introduced the report. In doing so, Members were informed that the tenancy turnover rate was low and that, at the</p>

time of the meeting, there were only 10 vacant plots, although they require remedial work before they can be leased out again.

The Committee was informed that debt write offs are relatively low, with only 50 since 2015 which is approximately less than 10% of all monies owed.

Members' attentions were drawn to a list of suggestions that should be considered when assessing the future of the allotment service within the Borough.

During the debate, the comment was raised that the allotment service has recorded a profit for the past six years but when factoring support costs into the equation, the service recorded a loss each year.

It was noted that fencing improvements are expected to cost the Council approximately £50k, however the suggestion was made that if the sites were self-managed by allotment associations, then the Council would not have all the staff costs associated with running them and they would be able to recoup the fencing costs over a number of years. Another Member supported the idea of exploring the viability of self-managed allotment associations, although it was recognised that getting allotment holders to take on the responsibility was difficult due to various issues, one example being vandalism.

A Member expressed that they were disappointed by the report because: the fencing costs quoted appeared to be inflated; there was no mention of the allotment competition the Council used to hold; no mention was made of the Council's relations with allotment holders and the report doesn't mention whether Officers have asked other allotment holders to relocate so that raised beds could be installed. In response, the Director for Growth and Regeneration stated that the fencing costs are estimated and will be subject to a procurement process, although it was confirmed that currently there is no budget allocated for fencing. It was also confirmed that the Council currently hasn't got the resources to run an allotment competition. In relation to the Council's relations with allotment holders, it was confirmed that the Council have received no complaints regarding allotment services in the past three years. Regarding the raised beds suggestion, Members were informed that a call for relocation would be made to assess the potential for such development.

A discussion ensued regarding the fencing repairs in which Members commented that the fencing should be high security fencing to protect the allotments from vandalism and that the repairs could have cost less if they were done more regularly. In response, the Director for Growth and Regeneration stated that the Corporate Assets Team was created in April 2020 to provide focus on such general fund assets. A condition survey, which had been recently carried out, identified the repairs. The repairs were not considered urgent or a health and safety risk and therefore no budget allocation had been made for these works in the 2022/23 financial year.

In response to Members seeking reassurance that the allotments wouldn't be used

for housing development, the Director for Growth and Regeneration stated that the sites are statutory allotment sites and can't be used for housing development unless Council decides, at a meeting, to decommission them and proceed through a thorough legal process.

The outstanding debt of the allotment service stands at £822, with approximately 50 different debts written off over the last few years. The concern was raised that with 10% of tenants paying in arrears, that the Council would struggle to obtain payment at the end of their tenancy.

Support was expressed for shorter term tenancies, as the Council might be able to regain the tenancy more quickly especially if an allotment holder allows their site to fall into disrepair. In response, the Director for Growth and Regeneration stated that current leases are for an indefinite period but that shorter term tenancies would be explored.

56	URGENT BUSINESS There was no urgent business.
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The meeting closed at: 7.28 pm

Chair