

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Tuesday, 18 October 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) S. Atherton
P. Chandler J. Douglas
C. Evans P. Posnett MBE
T. Webster

In Attendance Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services – Cllr R. Browne

Officers Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
Director for Growth and Regeneration
Housing Asset Manager
Regeneration Manager (via remote link)
Senior Tourism and Events Officer
Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer
Democratic Services Officer (CT)

Minute No.	Minute
31	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Glancy and Holmes.</p>
32	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held 27 September 2022 were approved.</p>
33	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST A personal interest in respect of Councillor Posnett was noted as being on record for any matter which related to Leicestershire County Council.</p> <p>Councillor Webster declared a personal interest in relation to Minute Number 37 as he is the Town Warden for Melton Town Estate.</p>
34	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chairman introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited members comments.</p> <p>The Chairman asked if the issue of homelessness could be included as it is likely to become more of an issue with the current cost of living crisis. The Committee unanimously agreed to add the topic onto the Work Programme.</p>
35	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 The Chairman announced that the Debt Management Report that was due at the meeting taking place in November has been delayed. The Committee will have an additional meeting to look at this topic. After a short discussion, Members agreed that the additional meeting would take place on 11 January 2023.</p> <p>The Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive) apologised for the delay and explained that the team had prioritised responses to Covid and the cost-of-living crisis. The team had just employed an interim manager who would be working on the report to get it completed for the meeting in January.</p> <p>Members were given a brief outline of the position in relation to Council Tax and NNDR collection and also rent arrears and collection. A new Income and Sustainment Officer post has been filled and they will be actively working with tenants with debts. Members were informed that a briefing note would be circulated covering the points raised following the meeting.</p> <p>A Member asked if the Council Tax and NNDR figures could be shown in the report separately. A question was also asked whether any Portfolio Holders had written off any debts in the last 3 years. A member commented that the debt collection does appear to be out of control and needs looking at. Members would like to know whether the legal section has the resources to manage the court cases, as required. The Committee felt this is an area where historically the Council have been poor.</p>

The strategic collaboration with Harborough District Council was discussed. The plans will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in November when they will have opportunity to scrutinise them. Members unanimously agreed to add the topic on to the Work Programme.

In response to a query on whether the plan will have been agreed by the time it is presented to Scrutiny, Members were assured that the Scrutiny Committee will have opportunity to look at the plan and make their comments.

The Chairman requested that the business plan papers be hand-delivered on the day they are published. The agenda is due to be published on 11 November 2022, however as work continues there could be alterations after this date, however Members will be advised of changes verbally at the meeting. It was also confirmed that Harborough District Council Scrutiny Committee will receive the plans at the same time, as they would be published on the same date.

A Member raised the question on whether other collaborations the Council have in place will be included within the report. In response, the committee were informed that this is already being considered. Comments were made that some collaborations do not seem to work well particularly in the more rural areas.

Following a request on whether the Leader of Harborough District Council would attend the meeting in November alongside our Leader, it was confirmed that this would be investigated.

The Chairman asked if the committee felt that the meeting on 22/11/22 should concentrate on the business case as The Leader was also due to make his annual report on this date also. Following a short discussion, it was agreed that the Leader's Annual Report would be deferred from the November meeting to a later date.

36

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA)

The Housing Asset Manager presented the HRA Asset Management Plan, which is a 5-year capital programme plan. After explaining what the Asset Management Plan is and going through the content of the plan, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions that had arisen.

A Member asked about whether the replacement of storage heaters could be escalated as it was becoming a big issue for tenants with the recent energy price increases and the inefficiency of them to run.

Concerns that 20% of housing stock is below decent homes standard were raised. The Committee was informed that this issue is covered in the plan and the aim is to get rid of the backlog within the 5 years, by this point all homes will meet the required standard.

In response to the question on how many rooms at Gretton Court require showers, Members were informed that a business plan and budget is in place and the intention is to upgrade properties as they become void. All properties once void will have the shower installed before they are re-let. Comments were also made about concerns for increased need for accommodation for the elderly in the coming years.

The comment was made that residents who look after their properties tend to be penalised as they do not get new bathrooms/kitchens replaced as often as those who have not looked after them. In response, the Committee were informed that age determines when replacements are made, but the condition does have to be considered if it is beyond repair.

The comment was made that the business plan was good and well written, however concern was raised that it was too long and there needs to be greater prioritisation. Members were advised that the plan included all actions that need to be done, they have been put into priority order and the list will get reduced as some items will be combined.

Members raised the issue about aluminium windows being replaced, and they were informed that the business plan commits to replace half this year and the remaining the following year and therefore all aluminium windows will be replaced by March 2024.

A discussion ensued on the budget and the Committee were informed the budget is £5.7m which includes the new build programme. It was confirmed that to date £600,000 has been spent. Procurement for contracts are in place and by the end of the year the full budget will have been spent.

Following a question on why the Council does not install solar panels on roofs, Members were informed that fifty properties have had solar panels installed and this was done with funding. The Council continues to seek investment and grant funding is being sought for this and other energy efficiency technologies.

In response to a question on whether there are any benchmark figures to compare against other social housing, the Committee was informed that work with Savills has said we are higher than average, and that the benchmarking data has been included in the action plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Landlord Services clarified the following:

- The plan needs to be robust so can be delivered.
- The Council now have good staff in place to deliver the plan and systems will be put in place to ensure everything is done correctly.
- The Council are still picking up legacy issues from 2019 and that is why the plan needs to be robust.
- The Council are aware of need to look at energy efficiency as this is a concern for most tenants. There is a need to ensure that all homes are properly insulated. Concerns are also taken into consideration, e.g., air source pumps cost more to run than gas boilers.

- The Council's decent homes standards is higher than other councils.
- Several strategies have now been approved and there would be more going forward. The Council would be able to know what can be done for tenants, and tenants will know what they can expect.
- The Council will need support from Leicestershire County Council to support housing the elderly and to ensure there are enough care homes.

The Housing Asset Manager then resumed the report regarding storage heaters. He asked members whether they thought council should prioritise efforts to reduce bills rather than looking at zero carbon at this moment in time.

Following a suggestion from the Housing Asset Manager, Members agreed that the Council should prioritize tenants' wellbeing and help them to reduce cost in the current economic climate over the carbon zero agenda. Members also agreed that the plans to change all storage heaters in homes within the next five years should be brought forward. The majority will be replaced by gas boilers and the new boilers being installed are Hydrogen ready if this becomes available.

RESOLVED

The Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet that the Council:

- 1. works within the remit presented.**
- 2. prioritises reducing tenants' bills over the zero-carbon agenda.**
- 3. removes all remaining storage heaters from Council-owned properties as soon as possible, and**
- 4. continues to prioritise the insulation of properties.**

(Cllr Ronan Browne left the meeting at 7:52pm and did not return.)

37

TOURISM IN THE MELTON BOROUGH AREA

Members were given a joint presentation by the Director for Growth and Regeneration and the Senior Tourism and Events Officer which gave an overview of the Council's Tourism Service and what actions they are taking to increase tourism to the Borough.

The Chairman thanked them for their comprehensive report and asked Members for any questions or feedback.

Members said that they had been talking to tourists visiting the town on several occasions and they had been asked what is there to see or do in the area as they had not been able to find any information as there is no tourist office in the town. Members also said that although the events at the Stockyard are well attended it does not attract them into the town centre as the location is outside of the town centre. It was explained to Members that resources have been spent to make the town centre more attractive and new signs and maps have been installed, there are maps in the Market Place, top of Nottingham Street and in three car parks. There are stands with leaflets displayed showing local attractions and the heritage trail, they are outside the church and Dickenson & Morris. Information is also available

from the council offices, the library, and the Museum. There is information available online under Discover Melton, where there is a borough wide attractions map to promote business throughout the Borough.

Members said all the empty shops do not make the town look attractive and something needs to be done about it. Also, there is a shortage of accommodation in the Borough which discourages visitors. It was mentioned that Eye Kettleby Lakes gets excellent reviews so should be promoted more as a leisure stay.

Members were advised that the town centre has had investment to make improvements, also Melton in Bloom has been encouraged to help make it more attractive, work is in progress with The Bell Centre project and BID are working to encourage more short-term businesses into the town centre with pop up and temporary shops. Work is being done with the town estate about revamping the Market.

The lack of accommodation was acknowledged as an issue, it is difficult to solve as unless hotel operators are willing to come into the area, the Council cannot do anything about it. Other options are being looked at with council owned buildings. A Member commented that Parkside would be an ideal hotel.

A Member said that the map on the website showing attractions in the Borough was out of date and did not reflect the number of places to eat, as only a few were shown. There needs to be an up-to-date comprehensive map. Members were advised that any place can be added with written permission from the business. It was pointed out that members had been asked when the site was developed to advise of any business that potentially could be included. A member mentioned that Churches are not included but was advised that they are all included on the map.

Members made some suggestions such as Heritage walking tours, to promote the history of the town. It was also suggested that a caravan to promote attractions in Melton and the area could be present on market days. Another suggestion was to include tourist information with the council tax bills when they are sent out as would not cost anything to post. A member also mentioned that the MP has applied for Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but this is not mentioned in the report, and it should be promoted. Another suggestion was to have a presence at the Christmas Tree Festival and give out the leaflets to encourage people to return to the town to visit other attractions.

A member asked if the money received from UKSPF could be spent on the town centre and not the Stockyard and it was confirmed it would be spent on the town centre.

A member asked about the KPIs and if they were monitored as to the impact the campaign had done. Members were advised that figures were in the presentation pack and are monitored regularly.

	<p>The Chairman thanked everyone for their comments and said they would be presented to the Cabinet.</p> <p><i>(Cllr J Wilkinson left the meeting 8:35pm and did not return.)</i></p>
38	<p>URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>There was no urgent business.</p>

The meeting closed at: 8.58 pm

Chair