

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13 January 2015 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Falp (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Blacklock, Boad, Mrs Bromley, Ms Dean, Mrs Grainger, Gill, Mrs Higgins, Kinson OBE, Weed and Wreford-Bush.

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Gallagher, Shilton and Vincett.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Copping, Guest and Illingworth.

79. **Substitutes**

Councillor Weed substituted for Councillor Edwards.

80. **Declarations of Interest**

Minute number 85 - Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) - Wednesday 14 January 2015

Councillor Weed declared an interest in Executive Item number 3 – Housing Appeals and Review Panel because she was a Council tenant.

Minute number 84 - Update on Tenant Involvement Strategy

Councillor Weed declared an interest because she was a Council tenant.

81. **Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder Update**

The Committee considered a report from the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Shilton, giving an update on his portfolio, followed by a Question and Answer Session. Councillor Shilton informed the Committee that:

- Any issues with residents parking were now administered by Warwickshire County Council;
- He had spoken with Warwickshire County Council and he had been informed that the on street enforcement services was improving;
- He was not sure of the precise costs for removing graffiti because it was part of the fast response team contract, but he promised to circulate this to the Committee via email;
- There was a potential issue with the capacity of the Green Space Team because the Council were taking more open space on board and for this reason consideration was being given to expanding the team;
- It was very difficult to ensure good behaviour in the Glasshouse and unaccompanied teenagers going into the premises, especially because the restaurant was not open. At present officers were reviewing a way forward and the signage was simply in place to make it easier for the Ranger to ask people to leave;
- He would check to ensure that signage was in place in the Glasshouse informing people that CCTV was in operation;

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- there was no truth in the rumour that the maintenance of on street parking machines had been stopped by WDC as we were not getting the on street enforcement contract. However, service had been affected by staff morale with the loss of the contract.
- He had been informed today that only two on street parking ticket machines in the County, were not working but that there was no formal contract to maintain the machines at present;
- the impact of the reduced costs received for recycled waste was nil because the Council received a set fee from Sita as part of the contract;
- at present, the department were 11 Rangers short and this had impacted on service delivery and because they needed to be trained before starting work, they would not be in place until January;
- The Bowls parking came under a contract managed by Cultural Services and currently it was not possible for the Rangers to be used for this service because this would stretch them too thinly by managing specific events;
- Sita employed staff to door knock and challenge behaviour of residents who were not recycling and the Council still had some officer time allocated for this work as well; and
- At present further work was being undertaken on reporting and resolving of missed collections;

The Committee thanked Councillor Shilton and the Head of Neighbourhood Services for the information they had provided.

(Councillor Shilton left the meeting after he had finished answering questions.)

82. Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 14 January 2015

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 14 January 2015.

Item number 7 – 2014 National Bowls Championships

The Committee passed their congratulations to all involved on a well organised national event and welcomed that the issues were being investigated and responded to.

83. Housing & Property Services Holder Services Portfolio Holder Update

The Committee considered a report from the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services, Councillor Shilton, giving an update on his portfolio, followed by a Question and Answer Session. Councillor Vincett informed the Committee that:

- the team needed to look at improved communication with private landlord tenants so they know that we can help them;
- the current cleaning contract was not working well and officers were investigating options and ways to improve this;

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- the Council was continuing to work with Waterloo Housing. This was going well but officers were working on other schemes away from this agreement which they recognised as well;
- The details of current aids and adaptations would be emailed to Committee;
- rent areas trend for last six months April 3.18% now 3.51% on average April to now was 3.35%. Considering that during this time there had been staffing problems within the team this was very good performance;
- voids were stated as 0.6% in the 2013 Business Plan and 0.7% in April 2014, and assured the Committee that the current actual rate would be emailed to the Committee;
- officers were looking at our current shared door entry system with a view to replacing all of them. This would be able to provide remote access, on request, through a cloud based system. The potential cost was just under £200,000 but would also cover housing blocks without entry system to make more secure for tenants overall; and
- for downsizing, there were specific situations when we could not help but in most cases we would try to enable a move to help people.

The Committee thanked Councillor Vincett and the Head of Housing & Property Services for the information they had provided.

84. Update on Tenant Involvement Strategy

The Committee considered a report from Housing & Property Services that set out the tenant involvement structures that were currently in place and the plans being developed for a new approach to encouraging tenants to be better able to contribute to the Council's landlord services.

The Council's existing Tenant's Panel was formed in 2010. The panel was open to all tenants of Warwick District Council and had a committee made up of a chair, vice chair and secretary who were voted in annually by members of the Tenant's Panel.

When the Tenant's Panel was initially formed, its main focus was on monitoring the delivery of the department's Service Improvement Plan. The Tenants Panel had evolved since its formation, and had shown a desire to be involved in the shaping of the service and in holding the landlord service to account.

A number of sub-groups from the Tenant's Panel were set up to focus upon specific elements of the service including: Repairs, Tenancy Management and Complaints. The purpose of these groups were to have an in depth look at the service, what was working well and what needed to be improved and to report findings back to the Tenants Panel.

In July 2013, following the Tier 1 redesign, Housing & Property Services arranged a facilitated away day with all senior managers in the department with a number of tenant panel members. From this, a three year Action Plan was devised which was designed to allow the managers and tenants to work together to develop a pathway to develop future tenant involvement.

Over the past 18 months, the department had been working with tenants in a number of ways to involve them in the service, examples included:

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- a successful open day at the pump rooms in September 2013 which attracted a record number of tenants.
- a planned estate walkabout programme involving tenants, councillors, Neighbourhood Services and Housing & Property Services staff which had been able to improve the way issues of importance to local communities were understood and managed.
- expanded our social media presence including opening Facebook and Twitter accounts as a way to reach out to more and different tenants.
- promoted the Environmental Improvement Project in which Tenant Panel members had been involved in the decision making for allocating budgets to community projects and improvements.
- developed actions plans for each of the sheltered schemes in relation to improving participation, especially in light of the changes that had been implemented as part of the Tier II redesign.

In October 2014, Housing & Property Services and members of the Tenant's Panel Committee reviewed the current state of tenant engagement. The results of this review suggested that the current arrangements were not working effectively, with a particular concern over the lack of involvement by a representative range of tenants, unrealistic expectations and inconsistent communication and engagement by Housing & Property Services.

As a result of the review, Housing & Property Services were looking at how to involve more tenants in shaping the service and create a two way communication between officers and their clients. This was to enable constant and wide ranging feedback on how services were experienced and ways in which the Council managed its housing. To do this, officers would need to develop practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council's landlord services that accounted for the different forms of contribution people could wish to make. This could include:

- Being enabled to make an instant response to the quality of repairs and maintenance works.
- Forming time and task limited project groups to explore specific areas of interest.
- Taking a long term formal commitment by becoming a formal member of the Tenant's Panel.
- Practical ways in which both tenants and officers could use contributions to improve services, for example evidencing feedback to contractors on their performance.
- Attending drop-in and fun-day events.

Housing and Property Services were already trialling new ways to target and direct communications more specifically to tenants so that the Council engaged more effectively on matters that were important to them. In early 2015, Housing & Property Services would be trialling localised newsletters which moved away from one big printed publication three times a year for all tenants and leaseholders. This was to be replaced by a shortened, more regular, focused newsletter to target audiences. The newsletters would be localised to where people lived, for example a slightly adapted newsletter for each town, one for rural locations and one for tenants living in sheltered schemes.

The Service Improvement Team was responsible for facilitating and supporting the contribution and involvement structures. The Service

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Improvement Manger who joined the service in January 2015 would lead on developing practical and responsive ways for tenants to contribute to the Council's landlord services by:

- Reference to the Tenant's Action Plan
- Consulting with tenants
- Working with the Housing Advisory Group
- Exploring and exploiting best practice
- Learning from past successes and failures

This would include developing and implementing a project plan that by March 2017 meant the Council would have the culture and processes embedded so that tenants were:

- Involved in ways that were most appropriate to and convenient for individuals
- Experience an environment where people were confident and able to provide honest, constructive feedback which was fed into the systems and processes which would ultimately improve services for all tenants

The Committee welcomed the report but reminded the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service that there was also a need to improve communication with councillors, to enable them to get involved and help with the process of tenant engagement.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(Councillor Vincett left the meeting after he had finished answering questions.)

85. Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 14 January 2015

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 14 January 2015.

Item number 3 – Housing Appeals and Review Panel

It was with regret that the Committee recognised that this met the Councils statutory requirement and that these changes must be made because they felt there was value in retaining councillor involvement in the appeal process for those items removed from the HARP process.

The Committee welcomed the agreement from the Portfolio Holder for, and Head of, Housing & Property Services that they would ensure that the correspondence for HARPs, especially with applicants and tenants, was put into plain English.

They also welcomed that Housing & Property Services officers would ensure that the tenant would be directed to their Ward Councillor about appeal matters and that Ward Councillors would be notified about appeals regarding applicants or tenants in their Ward.

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Item number 5 – Convictions & Cautions Policy

The Committee welcomed the report, but asked that officers include the normal enforcement steps (i.e. gentle reminder, warning letter etc) underneath the table of offences.

Item number 9 - Council's Strategic Approach to Sustainability and Climate Change

The Committee welcomed the report and looked forward to updates on this through the Portfolio Holder statements.

86. Public and Press

Resolved that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following two items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

The full minutes of Minute 87 and 88 would be contained within a confidential minute which would be considered for publication following the implementation of the relevant decisions. However, a summary of the decision was as follows:

87. Task & Finish Group Scoping Document – St Mary's Lands

The Committee considered scoping document, from Councillors Mrs Bromley and Kinson, for a potential task and finish group. This was a confidential document because there were unresolved legal and commercial issues with some of the organisations it referred to.

Members of the Committee suggested to the Councillors who had brought the paper forward that they may wish to consider revising the scope into specific areas which might make the work of any future task and finish group more manageable.

Resolved that it would be premature to progress the matter because of the outstanding issues and that the scoping document should be re-presented at a future date.

88. SEV Task & Finish Group – Final Report

The Committee considered a report that was a culmination of the work undertaken by the Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEV) Task & Finish Group, following District wide consultation on the location of SEV's within the District.

The Committee was asked to note the work undertaken by the Task & Finish Group (T&F) and the results from the District wide consultation,

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attached at Appendix 1, and agreed to a report being submitted to the Executive.

The report contained the views of the Task and Finish Group on the survey and detailed the proposed changes to the existing policy, at Appendix 2 to the report.

Appendix 3, to the report, detailed the advice provided by Counsel following the request from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2014 and Appendix 4 detailed the views of the Health and Community Protection Team on the impact of the proposals.

The Committee noted the advice that the final decision on the Policy would be a matter for Council to determine.

Resolved that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the review of the policy be undertaken, paying due regard to the views of Counsel;
- (3) the Task and Finish Group and officers involved be thanked for all their efforts to bring this to a conclusion.

89. Executive Agenda (Non-confidential items and reports) – Wednesday 14 January 2015

The Committee considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 14 January 2015.

Item number 4 – Council procedure Rules

The Committee asked that:

- (1) Procedure rule 9(1) be amended to reflect in the main body that questions can be directed to portfolio holders about their specific remit; and
- (2) Procedure rule 13(1) be amended to enable that any Councillors can call for the motion to be in to be writing but the chairman takes the final decision.

90. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

91. Comments from the Executive

The Committee considered a report from Democratic Services which detailed the responses the Executive gave to the comments the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made regarding the reports submitted to the Executive in December.

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Resolved that the report be noted.

92. Review of the Work Programme & Forward Plan

The Committee considered its work programme for 2014/15 and the latest published version of the Forward Plan.

Resolved that the report be noted.

93. Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee Minutes & Update

The Committee's attention was drawn to the two sets of Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee minutes for the meetings held on 15 December 2014.

The Committee was given a verbal update from the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee outlining the work of the Committee so far, as set out in the minutes of the meeting.

Resolved that the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee minutes dated 15 December 2014, be noted.

94. Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board

The Committee considered a report from the Deputy Chief Executive updating them on the work of Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board.

The Council had appointed two Member Children's Champions and part of their remit was to promote awareness amongst elected members of the child safeguarding and welfare issues and the activities and processes undertaken by this Council. As part of their regular dialogue with the officer Children's Champion, they had requested that the Scrutiny Committee receive a report on the role of the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board and how this Council contributed to its work.

The Deputy Chief Executive (BH) explained that there would be an end of term report which would give an opportunity for the new committee to look at the detail and way forward.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(The meeting finished at 9.00 pm)