

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 DECEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Mahoney (Chair), Mrs A'Barrow, Cade, Eccleson, Gillias, Mrs New, Mrs O'Rourke, Picker and Roodhouse

Officers:

Mannie Ketley (Executive Director), Aftab Razzaq (Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager/Monitoring Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2020 were approved.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) concerning a summary of scrutiny review topics for consideration by the Committee.

The Committee reviewed the items carried forward from the 2019/20 work programme considering the feedback provided by officers. The following outcomes were agreed:

Review of Housing Voids – this topic did not require attention in the foreseeable future but would be kept on hold as a possible future item.

Review of Attendance Policy – staff attendance was an operational matter. It was noted that a past issue had been addressed by management and it was agreed that this topic should not be progressed.

Self-Build Plots – this was referred to the Planning Services Working Party.

Air Quality Monitoring – this was referred to the Climate Emergency Working Party.

Reviews of Litter and Fly Tipping – these were referred to the new working party due to meet in the New Year.

Minimising Waste and Improvements in Recycling Levels, and an annual report on the Waste and Recycling Service – these topics fell within the Resources and Waste item further down the agenda.

As agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 2 November 2020, the Senior Management Team had been consulted on suggestions for possible reviews based on the key priorities and objectives that fell under the four overarching pillars for recovery. The Committee considered each of the topics. During discussion the following points were made:

Digitalisation

The Committee discussed where value could be added and identified the following areas that could be incorporated into a review:

- How the organisation communicates with residents.
- Exploring different channels of communications.
- Identifying key stakeholders.
- Access to the internet for council tenants.
- Internet access in sheltered accommodation. How are residents able to access virtual medical appointments or healthcare?
- Better use of social media as a way of engaging with residents such as SMS.
- Educating residents on how to access information. Not everyone has a smartphone.

The Executive Director informed the Committee that work on a Digitalisation Strategy was already in progress. A better understanding of that work and its aims and objectives would allow the Committee to narrow down the focus of the review.

The Committee supported a review on Digitalisation to be carried out by a task group, subject to receiving a briefing paper from officers prior to the next meeting detailing the work currently in progress in relation to digitalisation.

Health and Wellbeing in the Community

Members highlighted a range of points that could be explored including:

- The mental health of Council tenants and wider community.
- The effects of Covid-19 on residents who may have lost jobs or been furloughed meaning they have suffered a loss in income.
- An understanding of the work carried out by the Rugby Place Partnership and its recommendations.

Health and social care were primarily Warwickshire County Council (WCC) or external health agency functions. However, there may be elements that fell within the corporate priorities that could benefit from scrutiny. Members commented that the Council had a duty of care for the health and wellbeing of residents. It invested in grant programmes and received funding from WCC to invest in health and wellbeing initiatives.

An initial piece of work could be carried out on managing arrears to look at how the Council is approaching council tax and council tenant rent arrears in the context of the current pandemic situation.

A more strategic piece of work on health across the Borough would be a larger longer-term review.

It was agreed that a scoping document on the topic of managing arrears would be drafted and circulated to the Committee prior to the next meeting.

It was important for the Committee to build its knowledge. Additional information on the local situation in Rugby from the Citizens Advice Bureau may be helpful.

Officers would continue work on the wider topic of dept prevention and financial inclusion. A paper on the longer-term topic of health and wellbeing would be brought back to the Committee after the New Year.

Member Development

Members commented that training needs differed depending on the individual councillor and there were enough in-house skills for 1-1 training to be carried out with officers.

Each political group has its own training co-ordinator to support member development. Officers could engage with each of these on training requirements.

The Council is a member of the Local Government Association (LGA) and could make better use of the training resources and material they provide for councillor development. Each councillor should have the ability to access that resource.

Officers undertook to provide a short briefing paper setting out the approach to training and development on a direct officer/member liaison and group support basis and detailing the LGA resources. This would identify if the topic should be considered further for review.

Crime and Disorder

Additional work on the consequences arising through Covid-19 related to crime and making community safety more strategically relevant would be encompassed as part of the statutory annual overview.

Resources and Waste

There was a need for a better understanding of the government proposals, particularly with regard to the separation of food waste collection. Currently, the Council collects comingled waste.

The Warwickshire Waste Partnership were looking to work closely with borough and district councils and also the new MRF project. It was important to know all the facts.

It was agreed that a short briefing paper detailing the new national guidelines and what detail may be forthcoming from government in the New Year should be circulated for the next meeting.

Forward Plan

The Committee considered the list of public topics listed or scheduled for inclusion in the Forward Plan during January – April 2021. It was noted that the Economic Strategy would be subject to consultation and submitted to Cabinet at a later date.

It was agreed an item linked to the Homelessness Strategy should be included on the agenda for the next meeting. Members expressed an interest in the future arrangements for the homeless that were housed during the Covid-19 crisis.

Finance and Performance data would be included on the agenda for the Committee meeting due to be held on 8 March 2021.

The Committee discussed past Motions considered by Council. The Legal Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that actions put in place would be followed up by the Senior Management Team and Members would be updated accordingly.

It was important that actions were followed-up and it was agreed that Motions would be included as a standard item on future meeting agendas.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the following papers be circulated to committee members prior to the next meeting due to be held on 25 January 2021;
 - (i) a briefing paper detailing the work currently in progress in relation to the Digitalisation Strategy.

- (ii) a draft scoping paper on the topic of managing arrears.
 - (iii) a short briefing paper on member training and development.
 - (iv) a short briefing paper detailing the new national guidelines for resources and waste including what may be forthcoming from government in the New Year.
- (2) a report on the wider topic of health and wellbeing be brought back to the Committee after the New Year;
 - (3) an item on the future of the homeless housed due to Covid-19 be included on the agenda for the next meeting; and
 - (4) a standing item on Motions be added to future meeting agendas.

CHAIR