

**MINUTES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday 17 July 2017

Councillor Meredith Lawrence (Chair)

Councillor Paul Feeney	Councillor Helen Greensmith
Councillor Bruce Andrews	Councillor Barbara Miller
Councillor Sandra Barnes	Councillor Marje Paling
Councillor Tammy Bisset	Councillor Stephen Poole
Councillor Kevin Doyle	Councillor John Truscott
Councillor Roxanne Ellis	

Apologies for absence: Councillor Alex Scroggie

Officers in Attendance: J Robinson, H Barrington and H Lee

Guests in Attendance Councillors J Clarke and M Payne

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS.

Apologies were received from Councillor Alex Scoggie.

2 TO APPROVE, AS A CORRECT RECORD, THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 MAY 2017

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the above meeting, having been circulated, be approved as a correct record.

3 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

None.

4 PROGRAMME OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER ATTENDANCE

The Committee welcomed John Clarke, Leader of the Council and Michael Payne, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resources and Reputation to discuss a range of issues relating to their areas of responsibility. They were accompanied by the Chief Executive, John Robinson.

Councillor Clarke provided information on a range of issues identified by Members

- **Have there been any business contingency, emergency planning or business continuity strategies developed? For example to respond to drought or changes in the economic climate.**

In total there are over fifty Local Resilience Forum plans covering Business Continuity and Emergency Planning requirements. The Councils emergency plan received a complete re-write in January 2017, and Emergency Planning on call arrangement was revived and training delivered to all senior managers in 2017.

Flooding is one of Gedling's greatest risks and we have specific emergency plans for dealing with flooding, this is scheduled to be reviewed in June 2018.

In the event of drought the Local Resilience Forum has plans for water supplies, which were activated recently for the Severn Trent Water shortage in June 2017.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Members should be included in training as members of the community may look to them for assistance
 - It would be useful to have an information pack which contained relevant contact details in the event of an emergency
 - Lessons need to be learnt from the actions of the authority responsible for the Grenfell fire response
 - The first 12 – 24 hours are critical in any emergency and the need for good communications with the public was paramount
 - Members would find it useful to be informed about police incidents in their ward
 - It is vital to build relationships with other organisations and to work together to provide coordinated responses to emergencies.
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- **In relation to building and developing relationships with partners at a local, regional, national and international level. What relationships have been formed, at what level and what benefits have been derived?**

Gedling has a large number of partners and is involved in a wide range of partnerships for many different reasons. At a local level we are in

partnership with the police, health, housing associations, local businesses and an array of voluntary and community groups. This helps to improve people's lives and the challenges presented by homelessness, anti-social behavior, unemployment, debt and housing growth can't be addressed by any single organisation operating on its own. We also provide services to other Councils for example payroll as a means of generating income in addition to operating as a landlord to a wide range of organizations, partly to generate rental income and partly to improve access to services.

At a regional level we are active within the arena of the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, the main purpose of which is to ensure that the priorities of Gedling are taken into account in the allocation of funding. Gedling secured the largest allocation (£10.8 million) for a transport scheme for the Gedling Access Road. The Leader also sits on two Executive Boards of East Midlands Councils and the Chief Executive is the East Midlands lead for the national Syrian Resettlement programme and also is the Modern Slavery Lead for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. At a national level, the Leader is a member of the National Council for the Association of Public Service Excellence and the Deputy Leader is the Chair of the Local Government Information Unit and the Deputy Chair of the LGA Labour Group. These high profile positions raise the profile of Gedling and provide access to best practice. Internationally we are a partner with a number of countries to deliver the ERASMUS programme, which aims to generate additional apprenticeships and share good practice. The authority is always looking to establish new relationships and although we are no longer involved in Twinning arrangements seek to work co-operatively with other countries.

Members were concerned the withdrawal of the County Council financial support for unaccompanied child migrants could have an adverse effect on the resettlement of Syrian refugees, they were reassured that this would not make any difference to the number that Gedling will assist to resettle. Members expressed their disappointment that the withdrawal of County Council funding appeared to have been taken without any discussion; it needed cross party discussion with the City, districts, East Midlands Council's and Government Ministers.

It was noted that Councillor Wheeler's contribution to the Health and Wellbeing Board has been significant but the loss of borough representatives on the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee was a disappointment.

- **To enhance the building, and maintaining, of positive relationships between elected Members and employees could a target be set advocating a reply times.**

When a Member passes a query or a question to a service area, it is expected that the relevant officer will respond promptly. A target has never been set but is an arrangement that generally works well. However, as services are under increasing pressure and it may not always be possible to react as quickly as people would like. If there is a constant problem Members should raise this with the relevant Director or Chief Executive.

Members commented that that if a quick response is not possible a holding email to indicate receipt of the email and a date when a response would be available would be helpful. The usefulness of a visit to the Contact Centre to enable Members to learn how it operated was suggested.

- **L1006 Working Days lost to sickness. What measures are being considered that may have a positive impact? Should a target figure of nine days be considered? What are the main reasons for absence?**

A number of measures to address this issue are being considered and should have a positive impact. Following discussion at SLT a report went to the last meeting of the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee in May. This outlined some specific measures to tackle this issue including:

- Continuation of case management meetings designed to review how long term absences are being managed. Meetings are attended by relevant directors, service managers and HR
- A review of monthly sickness information
- Introduction an employee assistance programme
- Introduction access to 'fast track' physiotherapy support
- Introduction into our policy the themes of the 'Dying to Work Charter'
- Review of the policy to limit the period of absence
- Review of trigger points.

Further consultation will take place with Trade Unions before approval. The target level of ten days has been set as a performance indicator for 2017/18, but based on the year outrun 2016-17 of around 11.7 days this represents a challenge. Absence rates were high last year due in part to a high number of long term absences. There has been an improvement in the first two months of this year with an outrun of 11.38 days for April/May, however it will be necessary to replace the higher levels of

absence over the last 12 months with very low levels of absence during quarters 2-4 in order to meet a target of nine days at year end.

In the last financial year the causes of the three highest rates of absence with depression/anxiety (20.6%), recovery from surgery (16.6) and muscular/skeletal problems (16.3%)

Councillor Payne then provided information regarding a range of questions identified prior to the meeting.

- **L1057 Are there any plans to increase the target when the current target has been exceeded.**

This performance indicator needs to be looked at in conjunction with L1052 Percentage of calls to the contact Centre answered (or call back made) The reason for this is that customer service advisers are moved from telephones to booths in order to deal with demand. The targets set in the Gedling Plan for 2017/18 seek to maintain current standards, which do not reflect any lack of ambition but recognition of the financial challenges facing the Council.

- **LI017 Percentage of Business Rates collected: noting that the percentage collected for 2016/17 is at 98.71% and is slightly below target of 98.90%, can the Deputy Leader give the balance owed in monetary terms, and explain what measures are taken to recover it.**

This is the second highest collection rate in Nottinghamshire District Councils. The collection of business rates within Gedling is difficult because it has significant number of smaller businesses, whereas other districts have the advantage of collecting from large organisations. Despite this there has been a high collection rate of 98.71%. The target is a challenging one and at the year-end performance fell short by 0.29% or £32,000. Any balances remaining are recovered in subsequent years. The total amount uncollected in respect of 2016/17 was £292,000 (compared to a 100% collection rate). Business rate arrears for all previous years total £488,000. There is still uncertainty what is happening to business rate revenue in the future.

- **LI016 Percentage of Council Tax collected: noting that the percentage collected for 2016/17 is at 98.40% and is slightly below target of 98.50%, can the Deputy Leader give the balance owed in monetary terms, and explain what measures are taken to recover it.**

This is the third highest collection rate in Nottinghamshire. The target set is ambitious and it was missed by 0.1% or £45,000. The 98.4% is the collection rate within the year against Council Tax that was raised; any remaining balances are collected in subsequent years using effective recovery procedures reminders, magistrates court, enforcement agencies etc. The total amount uncollected in respect of 2016/17 was £1,1300,000 (i.e. compared to 100% collection rate). The total council tax arrears for all previous years total £3,093,000

The team that deals with this issue has lost staff but has remained very effective. Members commented that the closure of small businesses in the borough must have affect collection rates.

- **How does the council ensure it gets the best deal when negotiating developer contribution**

Where contributions are due, discussions take place as early as possible and are negotiated in accordance with our adopted planning policies and guidance. In reality the process does not always work as well as it should. There are a number of factors which complicate the process for example where the Council owns the land or where there is a need to agree priorities with other departments or authorities.

- **Please explain what is being done to create a stronger commercial and entrepreneurial culture?**

Officers are working on a new approach which will redefine the way in which we work. This has four themes, digitalisation, agile working, demand management and commercialisation. Underpinning these themes are a set of Service Manager led working groups that will deliver change and improvement for the Council.

A draft strategy has been produced which focusses on four key areas of activity:

1. Strengthening the Council's commercial culture
2. Increasing income from Council services through trading, charging and investment
3. Increasing external funding to the Council
4. Increasing capital and revenue income through housing development and economy/employment growth.

This new approach has been discussed with Service Managers, income generation areas identified and income generation targets set. Project teams are working on business cases for pet cremations, a parks and street care company and options for housing development. A sales and

marketing manager is to be recruited. Surplus plots of land have been identified and assessed for suitability for housing or sale.

Concern regarding the effect on some proposals could have on small business in the borough was expressed.

The Leader was asked about the opening of Gedling Country Park. The ward councillor expressed concern that she was not invited to the opening and had not even been made aware it was taking place. This developed into a discussion regarding how members could be informed about activities taking place in their ward and speaking to the media at events. This is an area that could be included in future work programme.

RESOLVED TO:

- Thank Councillor Clarke and Payne for an interesting and informative discussion; and
- note the information provided.
- Arrange a visit to the Contact Centre for interested Members.

5

COUNCIL PLAN 2016/17: OVERVIEW OF QUARTER 4 AND YEAR END PERFORMANCE

The Director of Organisational Development and Democratic Services presented a report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting, informing the committee about the position against Improvement Actions and Performance Indicators in the 2016/2017 Gedling Plan.

The report gives figures for actions and indicators and a presentation provided additional information.

A number of mechanisms are used to find out how well the authority is perceived by the public and how it is doing in relation to other organisations. This includes:

- **A mystery shopper exercise.** An exercise ran from November 2016 to January 2017 and four categories were tested, calls, e-mails, letters and visits. Customer service performance for all calls scored excellent. All e-mails were replied within one day. Letters responses were courteous and friendly, premises accessible. and staff courteous and friendly. This exercise also included back office services.
- **An internal Services Survey.** This indicated that 79% of services have improved or maintained standards and 87% were satisfied with the way teams communicate with their customers.

- **Examining complaints.** There were more compliments and fewer complaints in 2016/17. 80% of compliments were about staff and 20% related to events. When a complaint is received remedial action is taken.

Examples of encouraging indicators include:

- **Minor and other planning applications determined within eight weeks**
- **Increased Bonington Theatre attendance**
- **The response to Individual Registration canvasses up to 98% against 93% target**
- **26 work experience placements**
- **Customer satisfaction with overall customer service up to 94% against a 85% target**
- **The level of anti-social behaviour has fallen.**

There continue to be performance concerns and challenges relating to:

- **Sickness absence**
- **Housing Benefit administration**
- **Housing needs.**
- **Housing Empty homes.**

During discussion the following points were highlighted

- **Sickness absence had been improving but is starting to increase. Absence of one or two members of staff in a small team and long term absence can have a big effect on the statistics. There is a policy of managing sickness absence, managers monitor rigorously with the aim of returning staff to work as soon as possible, all staff have a back to work interview when returning.**
- **The reduction in staffing levels allied with not filling vacant posts will have an effect on some services.**
- **Stress is not always work related. The authority will refer to a counselling service if required.**
- **Housing Benefit claims need to be processed as quickly as possible and processes are currently under review.**
- **The lack of house building remains a concern, the speed of housing growth and number of affordable houses did not meet target. The issue surrounding stalled sites is being addressed, however progress is slow, and this is an increasingly frustrating area. There has been some progress on the Teal Close development.**
- **An officer has been engaged specifically to look at bringing properties back into use.**

Councillor S Barnes left the meeting at 7.40

RESOLVED to:

- **Note the progress against actions and performance indicators against the 2016/19 Gedling Plan.**

6

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

COMPLETED SCRUTINY REVIEWS 2015/16

- **Obesity**

Progress on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Obesity review that relate to Leisure Services, will be available at the September Committee.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS 2016/17

- **Elderly Persons Working Group**

The final report and recommendations arising from the Elderly Persons working group were discussed and, subject to minor alterations to the recommendations, agreed. It was decided that any changes to the recommendations could be approved by the Chair of the working group.

- **Income Generation Working Group**

The final report and recommendations arising from the Income Generation working group were discussed and agreed.

- **The Gedling Councillor Standard**

Members were informed that this working group would commence in September. Councillor Greensmith agreed to join the group.

SCRUTINY IN COMMITTEE

Members were informed that Councillor Peter Barnes, Portfolio Holder for Environment would be attending the September Committee. A request for questions and areas to be examined will be circulated prior to the Committee.

Councillors Truscott, Greensmith and Feeney left the meeting at 8.00pm

PROPOSED REVIEWS 2017/18

The Committee discussed and agreed to establish two new reviews:

- Improving the effectiveness of scrutiny

This review will consider the effectiveness of the Committee, exploring different mechanisms for holding the Executive to account, examine ways to effectively monitor performance and develop a mechanism for selecting topics for review.

- Promoting the transparency of the Council

Members will examine options available to increase interest and transparency of Council committees.

Councillors Lawrence, Paling and R Ellis agreed to be included in the working group.

A request for Members for both these working groups will be sent to committee members and the wider membership of the Council.

INFORMATION UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS ITEMS AT COMMITTEE

Members requested that Councillor Collis, the Council's Policy Advisor for the armed forces be invited to the next meeting to discuss actions taken by the Council to support the signing of the Community Covenant.

Councillor Miller raised the problem of uncollected contaminated bins and it was agreed that the service manager for refuse be contacted to find out what could be done to improve this problem.

Councillor Lawrence informed the Committee that he is now the Chair of the East Midland's Council Scrutiny Network. He briefly discussed the last meeting and asked that a publication from the Centre for Public Scrutiny be circulated to members of the Committee.

RESOLVED to:

- **note the information relating to the Obesity review.**
- **agree the Income Generation and the Elderly Person's reviews and submit to Cabinet, requesting a response for the November Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- **establish working groups to consider the effectiveness of scrutiny and the openness of the Council.**
- **invite Councillor Collis to discuss the Armed Forces Community Covenant.**

- **request information regarding the collection of contaminated refuse bins.**

7 ANY OTHER ITEM WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT.

None.

The meeting finished at 8.10 pm

Signed by Chair:
Date: