

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7PM, ON
TUESDAY, 4 JANUARY 2022
ENGINE SHED, SAND MARTIN HOUSE**

Committee Members Present: Councillors G. Casey. (Chair), J. Allen, M. Haseeb, K. Knight, O. Sainsbury (Vice Chair), N. Sandford, B. Tyler and I. Yasin

Officers Present: Adrian Chapman – Service Director, Communities and Partnerships
Sean Evans – Head of Service, Housing Needs
Clair George – Head of Prevention and Enforcement Service
Sarah Scase – Housing Needs Operations Manager
David Beauchamp – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Councillor Steve Allen – Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities
Councillor John Howard – Cabinet Advisor for Housing, Culture and Communities
Dr. Pat Carrington – Assistant Director, City Culture Peterborough
Kitran Eastman – Managing Director, Peterborough Limited

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor C. Fenner, Councillor John Fox and Parish Councillor Neil Boyce.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest or whipping declarations were received.

38. MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

39. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

There were no requests for call in to consider.

40. PORTFOLIO HOLDER PROGRESS REPORT – HOUSING, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities, accompanied by the Cabinet Advisor for Housing, Culture and Communities, the Head of Service, Housing Needs, the Head of Prevention and Enforcement Service and the Head of Think Communities. The report allowed the Committee to scrutinise the work being undertaken under the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Communities, Councillor Steve Allen, that falls within the remit of this Committee.

It was noted that a supplementary addendum had been published in relation to the Key Theatre and Werrington Leisure Centre. This had been circulated to Committee members and published on Council's website.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members referred to section 4.2.4 of the report and asked if the Vaccine Confidence work had successfully increased Peterborough's low vaccination rates. Officers responded that there was a direct correlation between Vaccine Confidence Work and vaccination rates across first, second and booster doses. Work would continue indefinitely in low-uptake areas.
- Members asked if the Council was receiving Government funding for its vaccination and general COVID-19 work and if this work was generating any budget pressures. Officers responded that the Council had received generous financial support during the pandemic to offset the Council's loss of income (e.g. reduced parking revenue). The Council had successfully bid for an additional £485k.
- Booster dose take up in Peterborough was 43%.
- Members asked if the use of one-off funding such as this was sustainable. Officers responded that all COVID-19 funding was accompanied by risk assessments which took into account the impacts of the funding ending. New funding was used for addressing immediate priorities rather than offsetting 'business as usual' spend. The Think Communities programme would embed a community and voluntary-sector-led approach in the long term beyond initial funding periods.
- Members asked how the Council was engaging rough sleepers with the vaccination programme. Officers responded that £18k had been awarded for this. Work had been undertaken to assess the vaccination status of rough sleepers and rates were higher than expected although further work was required. Mobile vaccination initiatives would be employed and the Council had also received £150k to support rough sleepers into accommodation.
- Some rough sleepers did not engage with the support offered, sometimes due to substance misuse issues or not being ready for accommodation. Different local partners employed different methods of engagement and a 'person-centred' approach was employed.
- Members requested information on how the Council engaged with homeless people who did not have Settled Status. Officers responded that the funding mentioned above was available to everyone. A good reconnection package was in place to either support people to return to their home country with dignity and respect or support them if they wanted to stay. Employment agencies had been brought in to hotels during the pandemic. When people refused offers of support, Home Office intervention and Immigration Enforcement might need to be employed and the Council had previously worked with the Home Office to offer a reconnection package.
- Members asked what the key challenges for the portfolio were in 2022. The

Cabinet Member responded that there were significant financial challenges and many of the services in this portfolio were not statutory. Housing Allocations, Think Communities and litter picking were also areas of focus, including the possible development of a Litter Picking Strategy. The Cabinet Advisor added that this strategy needed to include everyone, from volunteers to businesses. Officers had worked to identify the relevant groups and develop a community approach to tackling the issue.

- Noting that the Council had previously organised waste roadshows for schools, Members requested that the Head of Think Communities liaises with education partners regarding developing waste and recycling education programmes in schools.
- Officers commented that litter was an indicator of whether communities were functioning well and was therefore an important issue to tackle. Members requested that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships provides the Committee with a briefing note on the timeline for the development of a Litter Picking Strategy.
- Members raised concerns regarding overflowing bins in Paston, with residents feeling their area was being neglected, and asked if the Prevention and Enforcement (PES) team only worked in the City Centre. Officers responded that the team did work across the whole City using a tasking list but there was a need to prioritise work in areas with the greatest problem. Officers would highlight the problem raised with the Safer Peterborough Partnership's (SPP) Problem Solving Group.
- The Cabinet Member commented that educating people was key to reducing litter. Getting schools involved was a key part of this.
- Members commented that if people did not think the Council cared about them, then they would not care for the Council. The idea was raised of making people responsible for particular areas.
- Capital expenditure on land defence (e.g. from car cruising and illegal traveller sites) was not a statutory service. However, there was legislation in place that the Council used to defend land and it was prudent for the Council to do so via the placement of concrete blocks and more expensive measures if required. There were few pieces of land left that could be encroached upon.
- Members suggested that land defence measures should include features to encourage biodiversity and tackle the climate emergency, such as earth bunds. The Cabinet Member agreed with this suggestion.
- The Cabinet Member stated that the approach needed to be 'Not what the Council could do for you, but what you could do for your community'.
- Members request that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communicate investigates how to help residents volunteer to look after public spaces, e.g. by providing equipment.
- Members praised a member of the community in Paston who had taken over responsibility for looking after a piece of public space and had planted wildflowers and shrubs. It was also noted that the Nene Park Trust had the 'Park Accelerator Fund' in place to bring parks out to the community as well as improving existing parks. These were examples of activities that the Council should be encouraging.
- Members commented that residents had reported fly-tipping to the Council but nothing had been done and asked what the process was for actioning such reports. Officers responded that officers would contact the resident, take evidence and issue a fixed penalty notice if possible.
- It was noted that it cost the Council £2000 to issue a £400 fine for fly-tipping.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to

1. Consider and scrutinise this report and endorse the approach being taken under the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Communities.
2. Request that the Head of Think Communities liaises with education partners regarding developing waste and recycling education programmes in schools.
3. Request that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships provides the Committee with a briefing note on the timeline for the development of a Litter Picking Strategy.
4. Request that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communicate investigates how to help residents volunteer to look after public spaces, e.g. by providing equipment.

41. CITY CULTURE AND PETERBOROUGH LIMITED ANNUAL REPORT

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities, accompanied by the Assistant Director, City Culture Peterborough, and the Managing Director, Peterborough Limited. The report presented highlights from the past 12 months for the services operated by these organisations alongside updates on Peterborough City Council's other Culture and Leisure activity.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Concerns were raised over the use of Urgency Procedures in the Cabinet Member Decision Notice (CMDN) to close the Key Theatre, given that its financial issues were already widely known. The Cabinet Member responded that Urgency had been needed in order to approve the Phase 1 Budget before the deadline and issue redundancy notices. It was hoped a new operator would be found. The Closure of Werrington Leisure Centre was temporary.
- Members asked why issues regarding Peterborough's theatres had not been examined as part of the development of the Cultural Strategy. The Cabinet Member responded that the decision had been necessary to progress the Phase 1 Budget, although it was a difficult one to take. The Chair echoed these comments and stated that it was important to attract theatre-goers into the City and ensure Peterborough's Theatres were not competing for the same audiences.
- Negotiations regarding the Key Theatre had been underway since September and the decision had been taken because of financial losses.
- The Assistant Director, City Culture Peterborough added that they had been obliged to open discussions with staff and trade unions as soon as a redundancy risk was known. The appropriate term was 'proposed closure', not closure'. The consultation would conclude in January 2022, after which final decisions would be taken and it was hoped the theatre could continue to operate. Every effort was being made to make the process seamless and to assist staff under employment law.
- Members asked why earlier notice of the risk of closure had not been given, to enable consultation with staff and trade unions and the input of the Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet Member responded that he did not receive real time figures from the operator and financial issues had come to light as a result of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) review. The Assistant Director, Peterborough City College responded that they were now seeing the true costs and the previous figures provided by Vivacity had not taken into account the true overheads. After the work of management accountants and financial analysts had been taken into account, a future conversation could take place regarding budgets.
- Members referred to section 4.3.3 of the report and asked if there had been good uptake for online classes during lockdown and if these could return in the future if restrictions were reintroduced. Officers responded that uptake had been variable. Live Facebook events attracted between 3 and 10 people at any one time. YouTube videos had attracted greater viewership. These events would return in the event of another lockdown.
- Proposals to develop leisure facilities in Werrington were currently on hold. The current facility presented a challenge due to it being interlinked with Ken Stimpson Community School. Proposals had been raised to separate it but were not acceptable to the school. Having the facility only open to the public in the evening and at the weekend was problematic and the Council was happy to discuss future options with the school. The Cabinet Member commented that community facilities needed to be open and in use, not closed and restricted.
- Members commented that the change in management of the Ken Stimpson

school when it became an academy might provide opportunities for a different outcome for Werrington Leisure Centre.

- Members raised concerns that the pandemic might have resulted in a shortage of trained lifeguards. The Managing Director, Peterborough Limited responded that this was indeed the case; with a lack of people undertaking training during the pandemic. There was also a driver shortage. However, Peterborough Limited had applied for Apprenticeship Levy Funding to kick start careers, e.g. by offering a Duty Manager Apprenticeship. Peterborough Limited was keen to be an employer that looked after its staff, e.g. by limiting zero-hour contracts. Peterborough Limited had to staff multiple sites across the City, unlike private operators.
- Vivacity Premier Fitness was still in operation and was one of the best performing leisure sites.
- Members referred to section 4.2.3 of the report and requested more information from the Head of Environmental Partnerships and the Culture and Leisure Development Manager on proposals to install gated access controls at Central Park and Lter Parks tennis courts.
- Members referred to section 4.2.4 of the report and requested that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities provides the Committee with information on the amount of funding that is being delivered from the Parks Accelerator fund for Peterborough and how the funding for future parks will benefit Nene Park Trust and other parks in the City.
- The Cabinet Member commented that a key conclusion Members should draw from this meeting is that the temporary closure of Werrington Leisure Centre was a short-term issue that could be alleviated by tackling staffing problems. The recent upheaval might encourage greater engagement by residents and the school in ensuring community uses of the facility were maintained. With regards to the Key Theatre, previous losses had been hidden and it was important to ensure good use of public money. The Cabinet Member aspired that the facility be subject to a commercial agreement and that it became profitable and self-sustaining. The Chair echoed these comments.
- Members referred to section 4.2 of the addendum in the previous agenda item, raised concerns over the time taken to recognise the financial issues faced by the Key Theatre and requested that the Assistant Director, City Culture Peterborough provides the Committee with a more detailed breakdown of the finances of City Culture Peterborough.
- There was some debate over whether the information above could be provided due to City Culture Peterborough being a Private Limited Company.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to

1. Scrutinise, note and comment on the annual reports from City Culture Peterborough and Peterborough Limited regarding Culture and Leisure services.
2. Request more information from the Head of Environmental Partnerships and the Culture and Leisure Development Manager on proposals to install gated access controls at Central Park and Lter Parks tennis courts.
3. Request that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities provides the Committee with information on the amount of funding that is being delivered from the Parks Accelerator fund for Peterborough and how the funding for future parks will benefit Nene Park Trust and other parks in the City.
4. Request that the Assistant Director, City Culture Peterborough provides the Committee with a more detailed breakdown of the finances of City Culture Peterborough.

42. TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION STRATEGY

Following a request from the Assistant Director (Housing) and with the agreement of the Chair, this item was deferred to a future meeting so that it could be developed further before being considered by the Scrutiny Committee.

43. ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities accompanied by the Head of Service, Housing Needs and the Housing Needs Operations Manager. The report presented the Committee with the updated Common Housing Allocations Policy following a period of public consultation which was undertaken between 31st August 2021 to 22nd November 2021.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members raised concerns that 154 responses did not represent good engagement with the consultation. Officers responded that the consultation period had been longer than required with communications work undertaken to promote it.
- Members asked if this level of response was higher or lower than expected. Officers responded that it appeared to be lower than expected, despite publicity via social media and the press and efforts to make the process user-friendly and to reach out to the Council's partners. One contributory factor was the necessity of virtual workshops
- Members asked for information on the process for imposing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) behaviour injunctions and determining who should receive one. Officers responded that it would be for the individual housing association to decide. Officers applied a test to consider what threshold of behaviour would be necessary to obtain possession via the County Court (for behaviour in and around the property) or apply an ASB Injunction (for behaviour in the Community). The latter option was rarer and the Council worked with colleagues in the Prevention and Enforcement (PES) to obtain these. The Council would liaise with housing providers regarding evictions.
- Members asked why applicants in Band 1 would only be given a single offer of accommodation. Officers responded that these people would have the highest need of being rehoused so the system was designed to do this as quickly as possible, while still maintaining choice-based letting. If the offer was not suitable for the client's needs, it would not count as an offer.
- The Annual Lettings Plan was an addition to the Allocations Policy that enabled the Council to respond to particular issues, e.g. by giving priority to particular group at risk of homelessness. It also enabled the Council to take into account other projects in Peterborough. For example, supported accommodation was only effective if suitable move-on provision was available. A certain number of 'golden tickets' were available for those in supported accommodation to move on urgently. A Supported Accommodation Pathway model was being developed to replace the Annual Lettings Plan. Under this model, any client in supported accommodation who was ready to move on would appear before a panel containing representatives from the Council and its housing association and supported accommodation partners to agree a consensus and provide them with a priority move to social housing. This would remove the need for the 'golden tickets'.
- Members asked if clients could request transfers between different local authorities. Officers responded that individuals could look at the national 'Homeswapper' and Housing Exchange websites to view available social housing

elsewhere and enable a mutual exchange between different areas. In addition, if a person's housing association had a presence in other local authority areas, they could apply for a transfer directly with them. Finally, a person could apply to the local authority they wished to move to. In Peterborough, General Needs housing stock was limited but there was good availability of sheltered housing and non-residents were still encouraged to apply for this.

- Members raised concerns regarding the condition of St. Michael's Gate and sought assurance that people were able to move on from there. Officers responded that St. Michael's Gate was temporary accommodation. A person might move from a hostel to St. Michael's Gate and on to an offer of permanent accommodation. There might be a wait for some types of property (e.g. five-bedroom houses) but not for others. St. Michael's Gate was still a valuable resource with high demand, which was expected to reduce. A vision for these properties would be included within the Temporary Accommodation Strategy due to be presented at the next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee. Work was underway with Stef and Philips to replace fencing.
- Members praised the readability of the report and the quality of the consultation responses.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to endorse the final draft of the policy along with the summary of responses to the consultation, which concluded on the 22nd November 2021 prior to presentation to Cabinet for onward presentation to Full Council for approval prior to adoption.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to review the final draft of the policy along with the summary of responses to the consultation, which concluded on the 22nd November 2021 prior to presentation to Cabinet for onward presentation to Full Council for approval prior to adoption.

44. COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING START TIME 2022/23

The Chair and the Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which invited Members to agree the start time for all Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2022-23

Following a brief discussion, the Committee **UNANIMOUSLY** agreed upon a start time of 7pm.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to agree a start time of 7pm for all Growth, Environment and Resources Scrutiny Committee meetings for the Municipal Year 2022-23.

45. MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which enabled the committee to monitor and track the progress of recommendations made to the Executive or Officers at previous meetings.

There were no further comments by members.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the responses from Cabinet Members and Officers to recommendations made at previous meetings as attached in Appendix 1 to the report.

46. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Chairman introduced the report which invited members to consider the most recent version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and identify any relevant items for inclusion within the Committee's work programme or to request further information.

There were no further comments by members.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to consider the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions

47. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which gave members the opportunity to consider the Committee's Work Programme for 2020/21 and discuss possible items for inclusion.

The Chair invited Members to bring any suggestions to the Committee's Group Representatives. It was noted that the draft agenda for the 8 March 2022 meeting was substantial and would need to be reduced at the Group Representatives Meeting.

Members commented that the Committee could hold extra meetings and request briefing notes if required.

48. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9 February 2022 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget
8 March 2022 – Communities Scrutiny Committee

CHAIRMAN

7pm – 8.49pm