

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2024

Present:

Councillor Michael Durrant (Vice-Chair) (in the Chair)

Councillor Graham Baxter MBE
Councillor Pam Jones

Councillor Richard Beech
Councillor Kevin Tait

Also Present:

D Thompson	Assistant Director of Planning
K Eastwood	Assistant Director - Environmental Health Service
K Drury	Information Engagement & Performance Manager
C Hixon	Housing & Public Health Team Manager (Environmental Health)
J Hayden	Senior Scrutiny Officer
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer

CSC/ Apologies for Absence

19/2

3-24 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Fawcett, C Renwick and P Windley.

CSC/ Declarations of Interest

20/2

3-24 None.

CSC/ Minutes of Last Meeting

21/2

3-24 RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CSC/ Draft Notes of the Local Plan Review Working Group

22/2

3-24 The Assistant Director of Planning presented the draft notes of the Local Plan Review Working Group meeting on 1 November 2023. As part of the decision made by Council to establish the Working Group, the terms of reference indicated that the notes of the meetings would be shared with Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet on a quarterly basis for their information.

The Working Group had been informed that although the Council's Local Plan was adopted two years ago, it had been prepared in line with the provisions of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Since that time, the NPPF has had numerous changes including the introduction of the national design guide, the standard method for calculating local housing need and an increased emphasis on climate change. In response, officers had undertaken a desk top review of the

Local Plan, which utilised the PAS assessment tool to identify if an early update of the Local Plan was likely to be necessary. The review suggested that the local plan was working well overall with the exception of two areas of concern.

The areas of concern related to housing and employment land delivery. The current NPPF does provide a degree of protection in relation to speculative development up to November 2026 (up to the point where the Local Plan is 5 years old). Given the proposed changes to the plan making process that are anticipated to be introduced in late 2024, the Working Group has concluded that there isn't sufficient time to undertake the necessary Review under the current system. On that basis, the Working Group has agreed an Action Plan for the updating of the evidence base around strategic policies including housing, employment, biodiversity and flood risk.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

CSC/ Damp and Mould Implications

23/2

3-24

The Assistant Director of Environmental Health and the Housing & Public Health Team Manager delivered a presentation to Members about damp and mould in private sector housing. Members were informed about how damp and mould was caused, national figures and regulation.

Members asked if letters were sent to private landlords in situations where the private tenant had contacted the Council about a damp and mould issue. The Assistant Director of Environmental Health explained that the first step was to advise the tenants to contact the landlord, and if the landlord fails to address the issue the Council would then intervene by making contact with the landlord.

Members enquired if de-humidifiers were supplied to tenants. The Housing & Public Health Team Manager explained that de-humidifiers were the choice of the tenant, so the Council did not supply de-humidifiers.

Members shared anecdotal evidence of tenants being afraid to report damp and mould to the Council, and asked if this was part of a larger issue. The Assistant Director of Environmental Health explained that Environmental Health carried out a tenant survey and a large number of tenants said they would not report any damp and mould issues, so officers were considering ways to make this easier.

Members enquired what the timeframe was before using enforcement on private landlords. The Housing & Public Health Team Manager told the Committee that if officers receive a complaint, it will be replied to in 3 days depending on complexity.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

CSC/ Performance Management

24/2

3-24

The Information, Engagement and Performance Manager presented a report with progress on the strategies underpinning the Council Plan objective "A great place to live well" for the period ending 31 December 2023.

The Information Engagement & Performance Manager explained some of the progress areas in Appendix 1, including pest control, food hygiene, Licensing, enforcement, temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, Enforcement patrols in town centres to tackle littering and dog fouling, and a new and upgraded public realm with CCTV as part of the Clay Cross Town Deal application.

RESOLVED – That progress against the Council Plan “A great place to live well” objective was noted.

CSC/ **Residents Survey**

25/2

3-24

The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained how the Council undertook a Residents Survey in November 2023 to help further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services. A total of 3,269 responses were received and the results were being reported to each Scrutiny Committee.

Members asked how the Senior Scrutiny Officer arrived at the 4 suggested areas for further consideration. The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that they were only advisory, but they were arrived at by identifying the lowest performers in the survey, and aligning those to the Communities Scrutiny Committee remit for consideration as part of a future Work Programme.

Members asked if there was a geographical breakdown of the survey replies. The Information, Engagement and Performance Manager explained that there was a geographical breakdown in the full survey report, and further work was being undertaken on geographical clusters.

The Chair felt that the suggestion ‘Activities for older children’ could be accepted and possibly incorporated with ‘activities for younger children’, and available community activities should be considered further by the Committee. The Senior Scrutiny Officer stated she would include this as part of the future Work Programme.

The Chair also felt the suggestion ‘affordable housing’ should also be considered by the Committee. The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that a draft affordable housing strategy was being produced by officers, so running the draft past the Committee once it was finished would give Members the opportunity to consider the issue.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

CSC/ **Cabinet Business**

26/2

3-24

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented a digest of Cabinet decisions taken since 29 June 2023. The digest set out key information for each decision.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that every other Scrutiny Committee felt the Digest was too long, so for future Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings, only those decisions taken since the last round of Scrutiny meetings would be shown.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

CSC/ 27/2 **Work Programme**

3-24 The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented the draft Work Programme 2023/24 for the Committee to consider.

Members were informed that one of the topics in the Work Programme for the 8 May 2024 meeting was an update on the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee were also advised that the Work Programme identified that the Police and Crime Commissioner would be invited to the meeting to speak on ASB.

Members pointed out that the Police and Crime Commissioner Election would take place on 2 May 2024, so the Chair agreed to include the topic in the Work Programme for 2024/25.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Community Safety Partnership be added to the agenda for May.
- (2) That the invitation to the Police and Crime Commissioner be deferred to the 2024/25 Work Programme.
- (3) That the Work Programme 2023/24 be approved with the agreed amendments.

CSC/ 28/2 **Additional Urgent Items**

3-24 None.

CSC/ 29/2 **Date of Next Meeting**

3-24 The next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 8 May 2024 at 10.00 am.