

SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2024

Present:

Councillor Neil Baker (Vice-Chair) (in the Chair)

Councillor Kathy Clegg
Councillor Ross Shipman

Councillor Carol Lacey

Also Present:

J Dethick	Director of Finance and Resources & (Section 151 Officer)
J Wells	Corporate Finance Manager / Deputy S151 Officer
A Bashir	Improvement Officer
P Kerry	Trainee Accountant
J Hayden	Senior Scrutiny Officer
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer

SSC/ Apologies for Absence **28/2**

4-25 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michelle Emmens, Mark Foster, Derrick Skinner, Christine Smith and Mick Smith.

SSC/ Declarations of Interest **29/2**

4-25 No Declarations of Interest were submitted.

SSC/ Minutes of Last Meeting **30/2**

4-25 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Services Scrutiny Committee held on 17 September 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

SSC/ Performance Management **31/2**

4-25 The Improvement Officer presented a report setting out progress on the strategies underpinning the Council Plan objective 'A great place to access good public services' for the period ending 30 September 2024.

Members were updated on progress under the following objective sub-categories in Appendix 1 of the report:

- 1) Assist and influence other public partners to improve their services in the District.
- 2) Continually improve Council services to deliver excellence and value for money.

Members referred to the paragraph in Appendix 1 on the Leadership and Empowerment staff survey, which read "95% of respondents at line manager and

team manager level feel that they are involved in making decisions that affect their work”, and asked if officers had assessed how non-management staff felt about the subject. The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that the subject of management was one of the topics covered in the Staff Survey that was issued to staff.

Members asked why Appendix 1 seemed to suggest there could be improvement of the complaints performance. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that frontline services such as Streetscene do get complaints, but also compliments. The review due to be undertaken aims to resolve the processes to ensure complaints are dealt with in specific timescales.

Members shared a few examples of residents having their bins missed from the weekly bin collection service on certain streets, and that often when they report it they are told that the Council are not aware of any missed bins. The Improvement Officer agreed to pass this on to the Assistant Director of Streetscene.

RESOLVED – That the report was noted.

SSC/ Medium Term Financial Plan

32/2

4-25

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on revisions to the 2024/25 budget, that was due to go to Full Council in January 2025 for approval.

Members referred to the Police & Crime Commissioner election and why it was showing as a variance in Appendix 2 to the report that was submitted to Cabinet. The Corporate Finance Manager explained that this showed as a variance because the full extent of the money spent would not have been known during the budget setting.

Members referred to Appendix 4 to the report that was submitted to Cabinet, and asked what ‘fuel island project’ involved. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that the depot at Eckington is near a river and often gets flooded, so this referred to a new type of barrel for fuel that prevents flood water entering the tanks.

The Committee discussed the current refurbishment work for the main reception at Mill Lane, and asked where this appeared in the Appendices. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that this came within the Mill Lane refurbishment budget, so was not in the Appendices.

Members stated that ‘investment in parking solutions’ used to appear in the Appendices, but did not appear on this occasion. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that the car parking solutions budget now formed part of the wider regeneration budget for housing and parking solutions and would be sought at the time of exploring regeneration options.

RESOLVED – That the report was noted.

SSC/ The Council's Financial Resilience

33/2

4-25

The Corporate Finance Manager delivered a presentation to Members about the

Council's financial resilience. The presentation gave detail on:

- Current financial climate
- Warning signs (financial difficulties)
- Lessons from S114 Notices at other Councils
- The Council's financial resilience
- Usable Revenue Reserves
- Council Tax

Member discussed usable revenue reserves and asked how many of reserves were actually usable. The Director of Finance and Resources advised that whilst all were usable, a large number of the reserves were grants or approved for a specific purpose so ring-fenced. The Resilience Reserve and General Fund balance are not ring-fenced so can be used for any purpose.

The Director of Finance and Resources explained that the Council's Financial Resilience was measured by the use of analysis and benchmarking. Members agreed that they would like to have a deeper look at the Financial Resilience in general and how it's measured. The Director of Finance and Resources stated that she would discuss this with the consultants who work with the team and arrange a future presentation to the committee

RESOLVED – That the presentation was noted.

SSC/ **The Relationship between NEDDC and Rykneld Homes**

34/2
4-25

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report to provide an oversight of the relationship between the Council and Rykneld Homes.

Members were informed that Local Authorities have to comply with housing standards and have been working with Rykneld Homes on the governance arrangements, and this has resulted in a stronger relationship. The Director of Finance and Resources also advised that there was a formal contract in place between the Council and Rykneld which ran for 5-year periods, and the contract was last reviewed in 2021.

Members referred to the chart in paragraph 2.7 of the report and asked what the 'Council Client Team' meant. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that this was a group of officers, and their role was to have an oversight of the work being undertaken by Rykneld Homes.

Members referred to paragraph 1.7 of the report and enquired what the meaning behind the 'tenancy standard' was. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that it was the regulator of social housing consumer standard and is a way of ensuring tenants have accountability over tenancy services.

RESOLVED – That the report was noted.

SSC/ **Housing Inspectors Report**

35/2
4-25

The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report to provide an update on the recent inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The Committee was informed that the conclusion of the inspection was the Council being granted a C2 grade after the Regulator for Social Housing considered all four of the consumer standards. C2 was the second-highest of the four grades. The judgment highlighted several areas of good practice as well as a couple of improvement areas, including stock condition surveys and categorising and learning from complaints. Members were informed that Rykneld Homes already had a lot of this work underway before the inspection.

The Director of Finance and Resources informed Members that the next step was to work with the Regulator towards a C1 grade and Rykneld Homes have this in progress.

Members asked if Rykneld Homes had their own tenancy agreements in place. The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that all tenants have an agreement with the Council which Rykneld Homes manages on the Council's behalf.

RESOLVED – That the report was noted.

SSC/ Cabinet Business

36/2

4-25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented a digest of Cabinet decisions taken since the last Committee meeting on 17 September 2024. The digest set out key information for each decision.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer also presented Members with the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 15 October 2024 – 15 November 2024.

Members asked why there was a requirement for additional funding for the Whiteleas Avenue housing development. Members were informed that the Council had to pay the contractor more for the roads.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ Initial Reflections on the Government Budget

37/2

4-25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that there were a number of things to make Members aware of in light of the Government's recent Autumn Budget, and pointed them to the DCN Briefing that had been circulated at the meeting.

The Committee were informed that the Senior Management Team were working through the information and incorporating it into the Medium Term Financial Plan which would be presented to Members in due course.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ Policy Development

38/2

4-25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that there were no major policies for Members to consider.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ **'Horizon Scanning'**

39/2

4-25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer updated Members on potential significant changes in the Council's operating environment, including changes to national legislation and regulation.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that there was nothing to bring to the attention of Members.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ **Work Programme**

40/2

4-25

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented the draft Work Programme 2024/25 for the Committee to consider.

RESOLVED - That the Work Programme 2024/25 be approved.

SSC/ **Additional Urgent Items**

41/2

4-25

None.

SSC/ **Date of Next Meeting**

42/2

4-25

The next meeting of the Services Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on 25 February 2025 at 10am.