

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 NOVEMBER 2023

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Mistry (Chair), Lawrence, Ms Livesey, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs New, Mrs Parker, Rabin and Mrs Timms

Officers:

Mannie Ketley (Chief Executive), Mike Connell (Chief Officer – Communities, Homes, Digital and Communications), Michelle Dickson (Chief Officer – Communities and Homes), Claire Preston (Chief Officer – Operations and Traded Services), Henry Biddington (Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present:

Councillors Poole (Leader), Ms Watson-Merret (Portfolio Holder for Operations and Traded Services) and Willis (Portfolio Holder for Communities, Homes, Digital and Communications)

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 were approved and signed by the Chair.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillor Mrs Brown.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 5 of Part 1 – Digital Exclusion Motion -Councillor Lawrence (non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology, a founder partner and sponsor of the Digital Poverty Alliance).

18. DISCUSSION WITH THE OPERATIONS AND TRADED SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER ON THE TOPIC OF PROPERTY REPAIRS

The Chief Officers and Portfolio Holders for Operations and Traded Services and Communities and Homes attended the meeting for the discussion on property repairs with a particular focus on void properties.

Officers informed the committee of the process for how voids were dealt with.

The first step in the process was for an empty property to be surveyed and a decision taken on what level of works were required. This could be minor, standard or major works.

Major works would involve repair works that take some time such as overgrown gardens or dealing with dry rot. The average number of voids that require major

works was 15% but the service was currently experiencing higher levels of 50%. Once the agreed works have been completed the property is passed to Housing Services for allocation in line with the current council policy and procedures.

There was a contractor/client relationship between the two service areas, and this had recently been more formalised through an SLA. Regular meetings were held between the repairs and housing teams to understand where the priorities lay, and which properties needed action. Regular meetings were also held to analyse the key performance indicators, identify interventions and opportunities for improved services.

Some of the issues being faced that affect void turnaround timescales included the condition of properties being returned by outgoing tenants and an abundance of additional affordable housing supply (1200 new affordable homes in the last 5 years). Additional resources have recently been approved by Council for the Housing Services Team (the landlord function). These will enable annual property checks to be carried out and it was hoped that this proactive intervention, along with the reintroduction of estate inspections would result in an improvement in the condition of properties. A report was due to be submitted to Council in December regarding a stock condition survey and a rolling programme of inspections for future years. The surveys will verify the condition of the stock and provide a further opportunity to identify issues early on.

A void property may not necessarily meet the needs of those on the waiting list. The law is clear on the need to ensure that any offer of a home is both reasonable and meets the needs of the customer. Customers also have the right to refuse any home that they are offered.

A review of the Allocations Policy was taking place via an external consultant. A consultation exercise with councillors and stakeholders would take place prior to a draft policy being reported to Council in early 2024.

There were challenges in relation to the occupancy of rural housing due to a number of barriers including lack of transport and local facilities.

Some properties were harder to let, such as older people's properties, and opportunities to designate those will be considered.

The committee raised a number of questions which were answered by officers. Officers undertook to provide further information on the exact numbers of voids and labour rates and provide a copy of the process map for voids.

RESOLVED THAT – the Chief Officers and Portfolio Holders for Operations and Traded Services and Communities and Homes be thanked for attending the meeting.

19. DIGITAL EXCLUSION MOTION

The Committee received a report regarding a motion from Council on the topic of digital exclusion (Part 1 – agenda item 5).

The Chief Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Digital and Communications were present to present the report and answer questions.

Digital exclusion was taken seriously, and it was reported that a meeting had been held with the proposer of the motion, Councillor Edwards.

The committee considered the draft one-page strategy and agreed that the language used should be refined and further consultation with stakeholders and comprehensive data should be included.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) a task and finish group be established; and
- (2) delegated Authority be granted to the Chief Officer Legal and Governance in consultation with members of the Scrutiny Committee to finalise the one-page strategy to detail the objectives of the Task and Finish Group.

20. COMMUNITY SAFETY MOTION

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) regarding a motion from Council on the topic of community safety.

The Environmental Health and Community Safety Manager presented the report and answered questions from the committee.

The Committee acknowledged the current work being carried out by the Rugby Community Safety Partnership to deter knife crime and the carrying of knives. It was agreed that there was a danger of duplication, and no further action was required by scrutiny at this time. However, the Committee would continue to maintain a watching brief.

RESOLVED THAT – no further scrutiny action be taken. The topic of community safety would remain on the work programme to maintain an overview.

21. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report and a table listing future work programme topics, items due to be scheduled and outlining the current position of reviews (Part 1 – agenda item 7).

The review of Managing Arrears of Council Tax had been omitted from the work programme but was still ongoing.

The Committee were invited to submit any items for inclusion in the work programme to the Chair.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

CHAIR