



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th January,
2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sid Khan (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, Jane Spilsbury and Monica Stringfellow

Also Present:

Councillor Craig Warhurst – Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers:

Guy Revans, Judith Willis, Jonathan Elger, Claire Jones and Ishrat Karimi-Fini

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

54. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Marshall.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

56. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 30th November 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

Chair

the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30th November 2023 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

57. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers registered to speak at this meeting.

58. HOUSING TENANCY AGREEMENT - CONSULTATION RESULTS

The Committee received a briefing paper concerning the results of consultation with council housing tenants on the new tenancy management policy and tenancy agreement. It was highlighted that as part of the consultation, which ended at the start of December 2023, 10 Tenant Roadshows were organised over the summer months, giving tenants the opportunity to discuss the Tenancy Management Policy and new tenancy terms directly with officers. Feedback was also received from tenants via a dedicated resident consultation email inbox, and via post. It was ensured that feedback sent to the resident consultation inbox was directly responded to by officers. A sample of responses provided by tenants was included at Appendix A to the briefing note.

It was noted that a key theme in tenants' feedback were concerns expressed by many tenants with security of tenure. Officers underlined that this was not affected in any way by the new tenancy terms as secure rights were a provision set out in law. To alleviate concerns expressed as part of the consultation, officers answered all queries relating to tenants' rights and ensured that in the final letter that went out with the new terms, it was stated as clearly as possible that secure rights were not affected in any way.

Additionally, officers reported that as a result of consultation responses from, changes were made to Tenancy Agreement around provisions relating to pets and storage of mobility scooters.

After the officer presentation, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- Total response rate to the consultation – Over 200 tenants had responded to the consultation in total. There were over 140 direct, face-to-face conversations with the tenants, and around 50-60 tenants responded via email or through a phone call. There were also a couple of cases in which home visits were arranged to enable tenants to provide a response.

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- Choice of locations for the Tenant Roadshows – Officers noted that this was the first year of doing the road shows and there were some locations which were more successful than others in terms of numbers of tenants attending. Woodrow Shopping Centre was cited as a location where there was a lot of engagement, while in Headless Cross and Stanley Park, for example, there was a lot less engagement.
- Total number of council tenants in Redditch and engagement on tenancy changes – It was noted there were 5,724 council tenants in Redditch and all received a formal letter advising about the proposed tenancy management policy and tenancy agreement and the consultation on these. There was also a second notice letter which also included reassurance that any changes to tenancy policy would have no effect on the tenancy status (e.g. secure tenancy rights).
- Engaging with tenants who had difficulty understanding and/or responding to tenancy agreement – It was noted that the Council currently did not hold a lot of tenants' protected characteristic data such as disability or literacy requirement/support needs. However, housing officers cover all patches and were available for informal conversation with tenants throughout the consultation and were on hand to provide support with understanding the tenancy agreement if asked. It was stated that a new housing system was in the process of implementation which would provide a facility for recording this type of data.
- Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – Members requested that they be provided with copies of the EIA carried out for the consultation.
- The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement addressed the Committee and noted that the tenancy management policy and tenancy agreement are complex documents and with this in mind a summary of the changes proposed was included in the letter sent to tenants. The Portfolio Holder also highlighted that in response to feedback from tenants, areas of tenancy agreement relating to pets and mobility scooters were amended in the final agreement version.
- It was noted that a sample of tenants' consultation comments and officer responses were included in the papers for the meeting, relating to main concerns of residents – assurance about secure tenants' rights, provisions relating to pets, and those relating to mobility scooters.
- Law on tenancy succession and removal of joint tenant from social housing tenancy agreement – It was noted that these legal provisions had been set out more clearly in the new tenancy agreement, giving clarification to tenants. It was

noted that Councillors were provided with information on these provisions as part of the Member presentation on Housing in November. Members could also approach officers directly with queries on social housing legislation.

- Social Housing Repairs and adjudication of costs for repairs between the tenant and the Council – It was noted that there was an obligation on the social landlord to undertake a yearly cycle of repairs. Tenants had been provided with an online booklet which set out what repairs the landlord (the Council) was responsible for and what were the responsibilities of the tenant. In terms of terminology used in the tenancy agreement, terms were used which were recognised in courts and social services in cases of proceedings. In terms of a repair request, an assessment by a housing officer would take place before a repair was undertaken. If the tenant was not satisfied with the assessment, they could escalate the issue through the complaints process.
- Reasonable costs for major repairs to be borne by tenant – It was noted that what repairs were deemed ‘reasonable costs’ was defined in the fees and charges of the Council’s Social Housing Re-chargeable Repairs Policy. In the case of major works that needed to be undertaken and cost was rechargeable, the tenant might approach the Council to agree suitable repayment terms.

RESOLVED that the paper be noted.

59. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - REDDITCH PLAY AUDIT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Cultural Services and Parks Manager presented the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members were advised that the Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy had been undertaken as a result of the Leisure and Culture Strategy. The audit was an opportunity to ascertain the current situation of play provision in Redditch and how future play provision could improve the overall accessibility of play provision in Redditch.

It was reported that there were currently forty-two play areas across the Borough. Of these forty-two, nine had a remaining expected life span of up to three years. The proposals contained in the report for the play areas included the following:

- The creation of two new neighbourhood level play spaces.
- The upgrading of three play spaces from Local to Neighbourhood provision.

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- The upgrade of a further seven Neighbourhood play spaces and nine local play spaces.
- The decommissioning of six existing play spaces that were at 'end of life'.
- Investment in a further twenty-seven play spaces, that were currently in good condition, but needed upgrading within the next ten years.

During the presentation of the report, it was noted that the inequality of provision had been mapped and assessed in detail through computer based mapping (GIS). Furthermore, it was explained that play areas needed to comply with national standards in order to satisfy risk management procedures and to comply with the Council's insurers requirements.

The Cultural Services and Parks Manager outlined the financial implications contained within the report and that £100,000 of the 2023/24 play area requirement had already been accounted for in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024-25 to 26-27 (Tranche 1) proposals. The Play Investment Strategy set out the costs of the capital programme for the play areas investment over the 10-year period with cost of circa £10,000 in year 1 rising to £145,000 requirement to finance the works by year 10.

Following the presentation, Members considered the report and the following areas were discussed in detail:

- Concerns about the state of play sites at locations (e.g. Dale Road and Dolphin Road) and the inclusion possibility of consultation with residents on the repair and/or decommission – Officer explained that the locations above were identified as having a 1-3 years lifespan left but if immediate safety concerns were identified then decommissioning would start earlier. In terms of the proposed investment in creating a play area at Abbeydale Park (Terry's Field), it was explained by the officer that the area had been looked at robustly as part of that exercise, with the Council's Community Safety Team engaged, and it was judged that anti-social behaviour in that area had reduced to allow for play area to be developed. Residents would be consulted on the type of equipment to be used.
- Willow Trees Community Centre play area – Officers explained that it was the understanding of officers that this play area was not under Redditch Council land management. However, the Officer undertook to check the agreement with regard to land management of that location.

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- Rationale behind replacing local play areas (specific toddler offer) with larger neighbourhood-level play areas – It was explained that from the Council’s perspective maintenance of smaller local spaces was logistically onerous on the Council as compared to larger, neighbourhood-level play areas. The investment cost of maintaining some local play areas also compared unfavourably with the neighbourhood play areas. It was further noted that the play area audit study had shown that there existed adequate (as defined by national standards) provision of play areas within 5-minute and 10-minute distance within the Borough.
- Assessment of play area locations – It was noted that working out suitability of access to play sites within an area were based primarily on the number of children living in that area, which was then also compared with walking distance (how many households were within 5-minute / 10-minute walk distance of a play area). It was noted that routes for safe access to play areas, for example, easy accessibility to play areas that avoided major roads for pedestrians to cross, were also accounted for in the plans and were looked at as part of tender documents put forward by the Council.
- Annual Maintenance Cost for Play Areas in Redditch – It was noted that the annual maintenance cost for play spaces was approximately £65,000 of which 58 per cent was staff time for inspections and maintenance and 42 per cent equipment and materials. The Officer explained that the inspections were carried out generally by Council officers and this allowed the Council to save money where officers had been able to identify and resolve issues with play equipment directly through inspections rather than going to a contractor. There was one full-time officer doing play area inspections in the Council, in addition to a team leader providing support.
- Proportion of play spaces directly visited as part of the audit versus proportion assessed through a desktop exercise – Officers undertook as an action to check records and provide figures on this to Members.
- Contingency allowance on cost estimates – Officers undertook to check if the 10 per cent contingency allowance on cost estimates for each play site was inclusive of the 5 per cent inflation allowed for as stated in the report or was the inflation included on top of the contingency allowance.
- Some Members expressed concern about play areas in Matchborough and Ipsley wards and asked about the rationale behind the proposed closure of Eathorpe Close play area, aimed at younger children, which would mean that Matchborough had no facility for younger children, while maintaining Mil Hill and Matchborough Rocks play areas

which were aimed at older children. A query was also raised regarding the quality of provision at Matchborough Rocks. It was agreed that the queries would be forwarded to Portfolio Holder for Leisure.

- Responsibility for choosing play area sites to be closed – The Cultural Services and Parks Manager explained that the Strategy was commissioned by Community First Partnership who assessed provision in the Borough through computer based mapping (GIS) and databases. In addition, they consulted and worked with Council Officers and Portfolio Holders to determine which sites could be appropriate for decommissioning. It was highlighted that the targeting exercise was robust and no specific area was targeted through decommissioning decisions; rather these were based around the remaining lifespan and maintenance state and costs involved in retaining the play areas.
- Some Members expressed disappointment that Ward Councillors and residents were not consulted with respect to decisions around play area closures.
- Proposed new play area at Crabbs Cross – Some Members were pleased at this proposal and commented that it represented a positive step for the ward. It was noted that once a contractor had been appointed, any design proposals for this play area would be consulted on with relevant ward Members and residents.
- Net loss of the number of play area facilities in the Borough – Disappointment was expressed by some Members that the report proposed that six play areas be decommissioned and only two new play areas created as, which represented a net reduction in play offer. It was noted by Officers that the Investment Plan aimed to increase overall accessibility and coverage of play areas for the Borough.
- Capital Investment in play areas and the number of play areas falling into disrepair – It was reported that while day-to-day maintenance of play areas in the Borough had generally been good, the capital investment to date had not been adequate. The Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy included before Members aimed to put in place a 10-year capital investment programme that addressed this issue and ensured that play areas could be upgraded on a regular basis.

During discussion of this item, two recommendations were proposed with respect to reviewing the criteria of the Redditch Play Assessment to ensure that play facilities in every ward were fit for purpose and amending the Redditch Play Audit and Investment

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Strategy be based on any outcomes of the Redditch Play Assessment criteria review.

It was debated whether this could be amended to read that a review be undertaken of the six existing play spaces that were at 'end of life' and proposed for decommissioning.

At the end of discussion, the recommendation as proposed was seconded and on being put to the vote it was

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1) The criteria of the Redditch Play Assessment (Appendix 1) be reviewed to ensure that play facilities in every ward are fit for purpose and provide for the needs of children of all ages and young people and families.**
- 2) The Redditch Play Audit and Investment Strategy (Appendix 2) is amended accordingly to ensure that the strategic purpose of 'living independent, active and healthy lives' is front and centre.**

[Following conclusion of this item at 8.27pm, the meeting was adjourned. The Committee reconvened at 8.32pm]

60. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

It was requested that the following Executive Committee item be added for pre-scrutiny by Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Termination of shared service arrangement: North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (for 1st February Overview and Scrutiny)

Members were advised that the item on the Executive work programme on Future Plans for Auxerre House was postponed from the 6th February Executive meeting and as such would not be available for pre-scrutiny at the moment. Members would be advised of future dates for this report once known.

It was requested that the following item be added to the work programme of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (a sub-committee of Overview and Scrutiny):

- Non-domestic rate – discretionary rate relief policy.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme as detailed in the preamble above.

61. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The items from the Executive Committee Work Programme were added to the Overview and Scrutiny's Work Programme as was agreed under the previous item (Minute No. 60).

RESOLVED that subject to the preamble above the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.

62. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on the Task Groups and Working groups were provided as follows:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group, Councillor Kane

Councillor Kane provided a summary of the meeting of Budget Scrutiny Working Group which took place on 2nd January 2024. It was noted that the main actions requested from Members of the Group at that meeting related to holding further discussion on the possibility of linking housing revenue account targets to performance standards in housing repairs and an action for officers to provide a response as to the rationale behind a proposed increase of 20 per cent in dial-a-ride charge. No recommendations were made at this meeting for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group, Councillor Holz

Councillor Holz reported that the first meeting of Performance Scrutiny for the 2023-24 municipal year was now confirmed and was going to take place on Monday 8th January 2024. An update on Carbon Reduction Strategy would be considered at this meeting.

c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group, Councillor Khan

Councillor Khan reported that the next meeting of the Task Group was due to take place on Wednesday 10th January 2024. It was noted that a mobile (pop-up) recycling site in Stirchley was visited by some Task Group members in December to gather details on Birmingham City Council's mobile recycling scheme.

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RESOLVED that the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update be noted.

63. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

There was no external scrutiny bodies update as the Council's representative on external scrutiny bodies, Councillor Marshall, had submitted her apologies.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.50 pm