

Minutes of the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel



Location: Harborough Innovation Centre, Wellington Way,
Airfield Business Park, Market Harborough, LE16
7WB

Date: 13th June 2024 commencing at 6.30pm

Present:

Councillors: Anderson, James, Knight, Mahal, Nunn, Sarfas, Taylor, Whelband

Officers: D. Atkinson – Director of Planning & Regeneration
M. Bills – Neighbourhood and Green Space Officer
R. Tomlin – Economic Development Manager
R. Felts – Head of Customer Services & Community Partnerships
C. Hartley – Director of Communities
S. Hamilton – Senior Democratic Services Officer
& Monitoring Officer

1. Election of Chairman for 2024/25

The Chairman of the Council opened the meeting. He noted that the first item on the agenda was to Elect a Chairman of the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2024/25. He invited nominations, Councillor Anderson was nominated by Councillor James. This was seconded by Councillor Sarfas and there being no other nominations, Councillor Anderson was duly elected.

2. Election of Vice Chairman for 2024/25

Councillor Taylor was nominated by Councillor Sarfas. This was seconded by Councillor James.

Councillor Anderson assumed the Chair and welcomed all to the meeting. Introductions were made around the table.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Johnson and Bannister.

4. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest received.

5. Draft Community Scrutiny Panel Minutes – 16th November 2023

The minutes of the meeting on 16th November 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman after Cllr James had reassurance that all Members had been written to, to raise any items for the Panel. The Monitoring Officer reassured the Panel that this had been completed.

This was proposed by Cllr Taylor and seconded by Cllr James.

6. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing provided an update to the Panel. The Council had approved the Financial Penalties Policy for housing and non-compliance and certain housing notices or offences nationally to achieve a consistent approach for all the local authorities. The charity Justice for Tenants had been awarded government funding and it had developed a standard policy, the civil penalties calculator. This service was at nil cost to the Council, and they would review the Councils existing policy in line with the national approach and provide training and updates for staff on the toolkit.

Officers were looking at all options to increase the availability of suitable accommodation for the vulnerable residents. The works for Ploughman's Yard continued and Officers were working with the light bulbs team on the new light bulb delivery model.

The Panel was informed that the Parish Liaison meeting would be held on 27th June 2024 at 6.30pm and Neighbourhood Planning would be on the agenda, along with other items that the parishes had identified.

Interviews were currently taking place for the new Youth Engagement and Community Engagement Officers.

7. Economic Development Strategy 2024-31

The report was presented by the Economic Development Manager. The Officer reported on the refreshed Economic Development Strategy 2024-31. This provided the plan for continued sustainable economic growth with clear and obtainable objectives, measurable outcomes to allow the Council to be responsive to economic development rather than be reactive. The Strategy would run concurrent with the remaining period of the Harborough Local Plan (2011-2031) till 2031 to better align spatial and economic strategies. The Strategy identifies the significant challenges and opportunities with strong economic dimensions that Harborough District Council (HDC) faces and how the Council and its partners were going to address these. A detailed Evidence Review from early 2024 was at Appendix B of the report. The Officer went through the four HDC Corporate Plan themes which were the four goals for the Strategy, these were Economy, People, Environment and Place. A six-week consultation had taken place and the feedback would be used to amend the Strategy.

The Panel made the following comments:

- HDC was in a very rural area and there didn't seem to be much emphasis on what the rural areas had put into the economy.
- The feedback received was mainly from the key stakeholders that had been consulted throughout the work carried out. This included the Chamber of Commerce, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester residents and other businesses and organisations that were key players in assisting to deliver the Strategy. The consultation had been open for six weeks and everyone including elected members could have responded via the online consultation.
- There were less than 100 responses and the Panel commented that it seemed that not many residents had the opportunity to comment for what was a major strategy for the district. Members were reassured that the consultation had been advertised through the newsletter, social media and a press release. Officers were welcome to any other suggestions to get feedback from residents.
- Market Harborough residents were having issues with access to medical services, and this would impact other strategies referred to in the Economic Development Strategy. This was a long-term concern and would be looked in to.
- The report and appendix referred a lot to Magna Park, but it was worth noting that most of the work there was at minimum wage and done by people outside of the district and this did and would continue to impact the economic development and opportunities of the area. Officers commented that there was an opportunity for a step-change to promote the high-skilled jobs through the job clubs and social media.
- The aims for the Environment and Place goals seemed very under-whelming with respect to the decarbonisation and net-zero goals. Officers reported that the Council was there to support and offer tools to businesses to reach their net-zero targets. There were grants available to assist businesses. The Local

Plan also looked at flood risk with the lead authority and the Environment Agency. The solutions for flooding in the town centre were being considered.

- The charging infrastructure for electric cars was being investigated by a Leicestershire-wide partnership to make the rural and urban areas more accessible to generate business and having a solid infrastructure in place.
- Could the wording in the Executive Summary be reworded for the Economic Goal, boosting Magna Parks role in promoting nationwide progress towards eco-friendly logistics while enhancing its contribution to overall growth. Officers commented that they could look at this, but this was a major asset and feature in the district and was a major topic to be picked up and managed and steered the Local Plan in a sustainable way. Many conversations were in the process for more sustainable ways for Magna Park.
- Officers reported that a steering group made up of stakeholders, businesses and Council Officers from different departments were assisting in the delivery of the Strategy. The idea was to have a wide range of people to deliver the Strategy.
- It was highlighted that Artificial Intelligence would have a major impact on the economy and the loss of jobs making people more vulnerable.
- Officers commented that Councillor Page had submitted comments on the Strategy, and these would be considered as part of the feedback.

The following questions and responses were as follows:

<p>The report referred to tackling and bettering job skills, how was this going to be done?</p>	<p>This was done through job clubs and job fairs that had been put on in Lutterworth and Market Harborough, to encourage people to improve through training or through a job. The Council could work with partners such as Job Centre Plus to improve job skills and job qualifications for the residents.</p>
<p>Could the transport issues for many of the villages be looked at with an aim to improve these as this was a major concern for residents and prevented better economic development.</p>	<p>This would be made a key factor in the report and was already being considered by Officers and being discussed wider.</p>
<p>Could consideration be given to residents with mobility issues, with pushchairs and the healthy aging population in the district as they were struggling. This would have an impact on the economic development.</p>	<p>Officers would investigate this further as part of Health and Wellbeing and a healthy population.</p>
<p>How were the Council going to address “tackling affordable home”</p>	<p>Officers explained that this was an important and difficult issue for the district. There needed to be enough jobs that paid well so that people could afford houses in the district. This was an organisation-wide issue that all Council Strategies needed to work towards</p>

	through the Local Plan and understanding needs.
What were the opportunities for education for the 16–18-year-olds in the district and were these sufficient for the young adults?	Officers commented that there were no higher education opportunities in Market Harborough. This was in the Action Plan as it needed to be investigated further.

Resolved: that the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- **Received, considered and commented on the Economic Development Strategy 2024-31.**
- **Noted the four goals: Economic, People, Environment and Place, which broadly mirrored the four Council priorities which would enable the delivery of the Strategy.**
- **Noted the economic climate was volatile and unpredictable so much so that unforeseen challenges may need to be considered during the period of the Strategy.**

8. Criteria for Community Grants to Parish and Town Councils

A report was presented to the Panel on behalf of the Portfolio holder of Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism. Following the Council's decision for a capital grant scheme of £1m Parish and Town Council's across the district, a new capital grant scheme had been prepared to strengthen the working relationships between the Council and Parishes in town and through joint working. The distribution of the grants could be allocated to deliver projects and initiatives at local level. The grants would provide opportunities for parish and town councils to support their communities in delivering community projects. The opportunities were listed in the report. The proposed criteria were included in the report. The report requested that the Panel considered and commented on the scheme criteria and the process for awarding the grants before it was presented to Cabinet in July for approval.

Members of the Panel made the following comments:

- There was a concern that there would not be Member input as there was for Section 106 monies. For the ten unparished Market Harborough wards, there would be Member input, whereas in Parished areas there would be no Member input. It may be better to keep as the Section 106 monies, where Members were involved.
- There needed to be a good distribution of the grant available, to as many Parish and Town Councils, for as many community projects as possible.
- Recruitment was discussed for the Grants Officers and the Panel were informed that many interviews had taken place, and the successful applicants would be informed shortly.

The following questions and responses were as follows:

<p>When could the grant be applied for and was there a closing date for applications? Was there a maximum limit that could be applied for in one application from a parish or town council and would there be any guidance such as a flowchart to follow?</p>	<p>Officers reported that the scheme would be launched after it was approved by Cabinet in July and plenty of time would be allowed for the first grant window, possibly until late autumn. The flowchart was a great idea but grant officers were being recruited that would work directly with parish and town councils and community groups to assist with and generate the applications. Currently, up to £25k was agreed by Officers and anything above that was agreed by the Cabinet Grants Sub Committee. The way forward was a discussion for Members to have and make recommendations.</p>
<p>Would match funding be considered?</p>	<p>This was for Members to recommend but Officers felt that each case would have to be considered on an individual basis, match-funding, topping up another grant or a brand-new one-off grant.</p>
<p>Were the criteria fixed or flexible? Was the grant open to all Parish and Town Councils for community projects?</p>	<p>Officers commented that the aim was for Parish and Town Councils to work with the community to agree what a grant could be used for in the local area and then make an application.</p>
<p>Was this a one-off opportunity to apply for or would it continue every year?</p>	<p>Officers explained that this was a capital grant and was not for any maintenance, that would be for the Parish and Town Councils to take care of.</p>

Resolved: that the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel received, considered and commented on the new £1m Parish and Town Councils Capital Grant Scheme criteria and the process for awarding the grants.

9. The Future of Public Open Space Management across the District

The report was presented to the Panel by Director of Planning & Regeneration. The Panel were informed of how Public Open Spaces were managed, how they were currently and the recommendation for the future.

Members of the Panel raised the following points:

- This was a very complex huge challenge. There were some good examples, but the Council was not achieving Value for Money (VfM) for residents. Most of the management companies tended to be national companies, not using local labour and not providing VfM. The policy of 30 years was not appropriate and would not work, the 15-year policy was acceptable previously so may work. The best way to take this forward was by having maximum discussion with developers. The alternate would be a resident management company but that had issues of its own such as, property company's not handing over developments, residents having to become Directors, creating a limited company, having legal responsibilities, facing criminal law, causing further complexities. It was essential to listen to the residents and the developers for this long running project.
- Officers could explore the Council's own land as the management company did the maintenance, similar to a property management. It was worth exploring the landlord status.
- The approach taken needed to be flexible enough, taking into account future government changes. It needed to be future proofed with respect to national politicians.
- Councillor Mrs Page had submitted comments, and these would be considered.

The following questions and responses were as follows:

<p>How many sites were owned by residents on sites?</p>	<p>All but Husley Park was run by management companies, there were a mixed bag of responsibilities for residents. The land was transferred to the management company. The Council could assist to allow residents to be more involved, but only for forward looking initiatives.</p>
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Resolved: that the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

1. Considered an alternative approach to the provision of new public open space management and maintenance and made recommendations to be included in a future report to Cabinet.

2. Discussed the following questions and any other questions before providing comments to Cabinet on this report:

i) Does Scrutiny have any suggested additional topic areas for inclusion in the scope of the review?

ii) Is the suggested hierarchy of maintenance responsibilities as outlined in para 2.7 of the report appropriate?

iii) Are the risks associated with the change in policy approach appropriate? Have any risks been overlooked?

3. Commented on the report and its appendices.

10. Scrutiny Workplan 2024-25

The report was presented to the Panel by Interim Senior Democratic Officer & Team Leader. The Panel were informed of that the draft Work-plan had been populated using a combination of items previously referred to Scrutiny from various sources, officer or member-led items, and statutory items. The suggested criteria at the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on 9 May 2024 to assess topics being put forward for consideration by the respective Overview and Scrutiny Panel were as below:

- Public interest – not an individual's issue
- Performance issues
- Relevant to HDC and its objectives
- Timely – able to act in time, not covered in the last year
- Ability to make a difference/impact/influence
- Not covered by another committee or function of the council
- Resources to deliver – is there enough capacity in the council to deliver the outcomes/review

These would now be discussed at both Overview and Scrutiny Panels and agreed by the respective Chairs.

The Panel agreed the Scrutiny Workplan 2024/25 criteria.

The Panel also discussed the item on the Panel's workplan for future meetings. The items for the October meeting were discussed in detail. The Panel felt that four items would be too many and three items would receive a better discussion.

It was agreed that the Forward Work Programme would be circulated to the Panel Members to comment on.

ACTION: To circulate the Forward Work Programme to the Panel Members for comment.

The following comments were made by the Panel:

- The Panel felt that four items were too many for the next meeting as they were large items.
- The Panel commented that it was good to be seeing reports for comments before they were presented to Cabinet.

Resolved: that the Services and Communities Panel:

- 1. Agreed the Draft Scrutiny Work-plan attached at Appendix A.**
- 2. Proposed criteria (based on the above) to the Chairs of both the Service and Communities and the Corporate and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panels to agree a final set of criteria.**

3. Suggested that a joint Task and Finish Group be set up for both scrutiny panels to discuss the development of the scrutiny function, to report back to Council in December 2024.

11.To consider any urgent items

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 20:25