
RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5th September, 2023

Present: Councillor Paddy Short (in the Chair),
Councillors Danny Cassidy (Vice Chair), Mike Booth, Scott Brerton and
Joyce Plummer, Judith Addison and Colin McKenzie

In Attendance: Councillor Marlene Howarth and Steven Smithson

Apologies: Councillors Josh Allen and Andrew Clegg

110 Apologies for absence and Substitutions

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Josh Allen and Andrew Clegg. Councillors Judith Addison and Colin McKenzie substituted.

111 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

112 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 18th July 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record. No questions were raised.

Resolved - That the minutes of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

113 Allotments Update

The Chair welcomed Councillor Steven Smithson and Ian Marfleet, Allotments Manager, to present this report.

Councillor Smithson thanked Ian for producing the thorough report. He stated that he hoped that members have had the chance to read it in detail, and he had nothing to add so was happy to move on to questions.

Councillor Smithson and Ian Marfleet responded to questions on the following:

- Current number of vacancies and number of people on the waiting list – Ian circulated a detailed table with real time data for each allotment site.
- Use it or lose it notices and potential of introducing fines as a form of enforcement – Ian informed the committee of the use it or lose it notice process and regarding fines, said that at present there is no provision within the allotment tenancy agreement or allotment policy for charging a fine for any tenant not using their allotment plot to an acceptable standard. A quick search on the internet shows no indicative use of fines on allotment sites across the UK as a result of unused plot condition
- Work undertaken to encourage allotment management groups – Whilst the Council does not actively encourage the formation of allotment associations, there is no

opposition should any group wish to accept the responsibility of self-management. There are a large number of self-managed allotment sites across the UK and one example in Hyndburn. Other allotment sites in Hyndburn have (or previously held) allotment associations.

- How the Council works with community groups to encourage allotment use - The Council does not have the staff resources to work directly with community groups although we do encourage it and there are many examples across the borough.
- Sub-letting of allotments – This is not allowed under the allotment tenancy agreement and there is no evidence that this is a problem in Hyndburn. Allotment tenants are permitted to ‘share’ an allotment plot with a partner or family member, and seek the ‘assistance’ of another person (not family) where this is necessary due to ill health or similar.
- Vandalism and theft – The Council keeps records regarding thefts but not vandalism. There have been some recent incidents but we suspect not all are reported to the Council, although we encourage allotment tenants to report.

Additional questions were asked and answered regarding vermin on allotments, the process for members of the public securing allotments and self-management of allotment sites.

The Chair stated that he was fully supportive of self-management of allotments, and suggested that this may be something the Portfolio Holders wishes to consider exploring moving forwards.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smithson and Ian Marfleet for their attendance.

114 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved - That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items, when it was likely, in view of the nature of the proceedings that there would otherwise be disclosure of exempt information within the Paragraph at Schedule 12A of the Act specified at the items.

115 Procurement of Software Services for Planning Applications Online

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Chief Planning Officer, Simon Prideaux, to present this item.

Simon explained that he had provided a detailed report in response to the scrutiny request regarding public accessing planning application details online and was happy to respond to questions from the committee. Simon responded to questions on the following:

- Any other Councils which may have had similar issues with the same software
- Reasons for period of delay prior to agreement to upgrade the software
- Reduced functionality due to the upgrade and when the Council became aware of this
- Lessons learned to ensure loss of functionality does not happen again
- Other IT systems which may become unsupported

Simon stated that the Council has been meeting its legal requirements as planning applications have been available to search online by planning application, however he is aware that this has made it difficult for members of the public and indeed Council staff. The Council and the provider are currently at the final stages of rectifying the issue and the functionality to search planning applications by address should be restored by the end of this month.

Councillor Judith Addison suggested that Councillors may benefit from training on how to use this system when it is fully restored. Simon agreed to arrange this.

The Chair thanked Councillor Haworth and Simon for attending and reporting to the Committee.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed