

PLACE AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS SCRUTINY PANEL

Day: Tuesday
Date: 9 June 2020
Time: 6.00 pm
Place: SKYPE meeting

Item No.	AGENDA	Page No
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2.	MINUTES To approve as a correct record, the Minutes of the proceedings of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel held on 10 March 2020.	1 - 4
3.	ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME The Panel to discuss the role of scrutiny amidst Covid-19 and to agree work priorities for 2020/21.	5 - 6
4.	CHAIR'S UPDATE The Chair to provide a verbal update on planned activity and future priorities for the Panel.	
5.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING To note that the next meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel will take place on Tuesday 28 July 2020.	
6.	URGENT ITEMS To consider any additional items the Chair is of the opinion shall be dealt with as a matter of urgency.	

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Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel **10 March 2020**

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.45pm

Present: Councillors Glover (Chair), Mills (Deputy Chair), Alam, Billington, Bowden, J Fitzpatrick, P Fitzpatrick, A Holland, Hollinshead, Lewis, Naylor, Pearce, Robinson, Sharif, Sweeton.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Bowerman, Chadwick, Choksi.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel held on 7 January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

38. RESPONSE TO OMBUDSMAN FOCUS REPORT – HOUSING BENEFIT

The Panel welcomed Ilys Cookson, Assistant Director, Exchequer Services; and Tracey Watkin, Service Unit Manager, to provide a service response to a Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) focus report that provides shared learning and insight from complaints related to Housing Benefit.

The response provided information on the Council's role in administering Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Ms Cookson informed members that a total of £73 million was paid to claimants in 2018/19, with over 43,000 determinations (decisions) made in respect of new and existing claims. A total of 245 appeals were made in 2018/19, with none resulting in a complaint to the ombudsman.

The focus report identified a number of common issues with regards to the processing of Housing Benefit claims. Information was provided on work of the service to reflect on each of the identified issues.

- Failing to identify appeals
- Failing to process appeals
- Delays in processing appeals
- Failure to act on new evidence or change of circumstances
- Overpayment recovery while an appeal is outstanding

It was reported that the workload for all Exchequer Services is closely monitored on a daily basis, which ensures that appeals are considered and managed within the appropriate time limits.

Ms Cookson informed members that the Council currently administers the recovery of overpayments in line with Housing Benefit regulations. In view of recommendations made by the ombudsman to delay recovery until a time limit for appeal has elapsed or an appeal is determined, the current process will be reviewed on a case by case basis as the decision could result in some claimants having to repay significant arrears.

The focus report included a number of suitable questions to encourage local accountability. A separate service response was provided against a number of key questions.

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive overview and self-assessment. It was encouraging to hear that the service has developed a number of internal processes to identify

issues at the earliest opportunity and that positive steps are taken to support claimants to prevent overpayments and arrears. Panel members were pleased to hear that the authority has had no recent cases found against it by the ombudsman.

Resolved: That Ms Cookson and Ms Watkin be thanked for attending the meeting.

39. HOUSING STRATEGY

The Panel welcomed Gregg Stott, Interim Assistant Director, Development and Investment; and Patrick Nolan, Head of Major Programmes, to receive information on the development of a Housing Strategy for Tameside.

The presentation provided an update on proposals to develop and deliver a comprehensive Tameside Housing Strategy 2020-2025. The strategy will also need to align itself with wider priorities to deliver the Corporate Plan. As a strategic provider the Council has statutory duties that include social care and reducing homelessness.

Mr Stott advised that the authority will take the strategic lead on development to unlock inclusive growth, with a long-term view to support sustainable housing solutions to meet the future needs of residents by promote effective neighbourhood management and place-based programmes.

The Panel heard how a previous housing needs assessment and Greater Manchester priorities will feed into a new 5 year strategy informed by local need, affordability, facilities and structured growth. The strategy will also take stock of future requirements across directorates such as Children's and Adult Services.

Future development will require a focus on long-term sustainability, integrated decision making as a Strategic Commission and investment to unlock opportunities for social and economic growth. Detail was provided against a list of priorities.

- New housing supply to meet population growth
- Delivering for an ageing population
- A range of affordable housing
- Specialist and supported housing
- Improving standards in the private rented sector
- Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping

It was reported that the Council has significant land assets which have the capacity to deliver a significant number of new homes over the next 5 years. Examples were provided of recent housing projects that highlight the Council's role as a strategic enabler and the future need to create dedicated plans for place making and town centres.

The Panel asked about the Council's ability to improve land availability and options to release sites for more strategic development.

Mr Stott advised that this is currently a work in progress with efforts to deliver a broader strategic asset management plan. This includes an assessment and review of the Council's land assets. The strategy will strengthen existing partnerships and provide opportunities to engage the market and developers to test the appetite of delivery plans.

Questions were asked about the link with the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework and development of a Local Plan.

Mr Stott advised that future arrangements can be made to ensure the Scrutiny Panel remains best placed and suitably informed to feed into associated projects.

Resolved: That Mr Stott and Mr Nolan be thanked for attending the meeting.

40. CORPORATE PLAN SCORECARD

The Panel received headline indicators as a quarterly update on the Corporate Plan Performance Scorecard. The Chair advised members that information and data detailed within the scorecard will be reviewed on a regular basis and where necessary used to inform future work priorities for the Panel.

41. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY 2019/20

The Chair presented a summary of Scrutiny activity and oversight undertaken during the 2019/20 municipal year. Detail was provided on the updates received, in-depth reviews, budget briefing sessions, consultation responses and the shared learning from reports of the ombudsman.

42. GREATER MANCHESTER SCRUTINY

The Chair provided a verbal update on recent activity of the Greater Manchester Housing, Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The most recent meeting was held on 13 February 2020, with the following topics discussed:

- Greater Manchester Housing Strategy Implementation Plan
- Town Centre Update
- Five Year Environment Plan

Regular Scrutiny update emails will continue to include a link to all public papers for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Scrutiny Committees.

43. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair reported that a further progress meeting on Improving Quality and Standards in the Private Rented Sector was held on 13 January 2020. The working group met with Gary Mongan, Regulatory Services Manager and Jack Gould, Project Manager for Housing Growth to receive information specific to future development stages and timescales.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Panel will remain suitably informed to review future scheme proposals and consultation.

44. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that this is the last meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel for the 2019/20 municipal year.

45. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

CHAIR

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SCRUTINY ACTIVITY AND WORK PROGRAMMES – 2020/21 & 2021/22

Tameside Scrutiny Panels are required to publish an Annual Work Programme of planned activity. The programme of work will cover a two year rolling period that is to be reviewed, updated and agreed on an annual basis.

The annual work programmes will aim to reflect priority issues across the Council, Strategic Commission and external partners. Work will continue to improve the flexibility, responsiveness and reporting methods of all scrutiny activity undertaken.

Each year a range of emerging topics and issues may require the attention of Scrutiny. It is therefore important to ensure efforts are best placed to support and influence effective decision making, with the added focus on improving outcomes for residents and communities.

Role of Scrutiny during COVID-19 (Guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny)

In order to address the significant and far-reaching impacts of COVID-19, Scrutiny must adapt accordingly to consider appropriate matters with a keen eye on recovery, as well as community and economic resilience. Scrutiny work priorities will remain under continuous review throughout this period.

Guidance published by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) is aimed at managing some of the challenges associated with carrying out governance roles such as a Council's Scrutiny function during COVID-19. Councillors are encouraged to plan and conduct scrutiny in a way that is timely, supportive and proportionate.

Maintaining a form of effective scrutiny in the current crisis is critical for several reasons:

- Decisions will be made which are likely to have an impact on the lives of residents and the places they live.
- The Council and its partners should be trying to draw on the perspective of a broad range of stakeholders in response to the crisis.
- Scrutiny activity does not take the Executive and senior officers away from the task in hand. Councillors have a vital role in feeding into and supporting the response to communities and the scrutiny provides a mechanism for this work to feed into overall strategy.
- The crisis will not be ending any time soon.

It is expected that the current crisis will involve a consolidation of scrutiny's usual role, with a tighter focus on a smaller range of issues. Overall this involves a shift to recognise that scrutiny can respond accordingly by undertaking:

Outreach – to get an understanding from local communities about the kind of issues and challenges experienced.

Support – oversight of the system response to COVID-19. Understanding and supporting the Council and its partners as they grapple with an unprecedented situation, providing assistance with complex issues and resolution of challenges faced.

CfPS advice

Scrutiny should consider how well partnerships are working; oversee the systems that contribute to smooth effective decision making and bring influence to find positive solutions. Scrutiny should not try to second guess the response or seek to 'oversee' it as the response will be moving fast and acting accordingly.

Scrutiny activity in Tameside

Work has been undertaken to develop a list of topics for consideration. Discussions from the meetings held in June 2020 will directly inform the final programme and planned updates 'check and challenge' for the year ahead. The Annual Work Programmes are to be reviewed and signed off at the next meeting of Overview Panel on 27 July 2020.

The topics listed below present a range of subject areas whereby COVID-19 is thought to have had a direct or indirect impact on service delivery and/or accessibility. There are a range of options available to each Scrutiny Panel as to how activity is planned and undertaken, with a further need to consider timescales and future reporting. The Chair will work closely with panel members in order to determine the best approach for how activity will be undertaken.

Scrutiny activity will continue to adopt a combination of approaches to review service and performance updates, respond to formal consultations, focus reports of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and areas in need of more in-depth review. This includes a responsibility for:

- Research and insight to a particular issue
- Review of decisions and recommendations
- Engagement and consultation – to provide responses to pre-decision activity
- Consideration of decisions and reports from the Ombudsman

Plans remain in place to keep scrutiny members informed on the range of engagement and consultation activity taking place both within the Council and across partners. Where deemed appropriate, the wider development of scrutiny may include project support and service development work undertaken at the request of the Executive as a critical friend.

Topics for consideration

Integrated Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital response to Covid-19 and plans to bring routine back on stream • Primary care response to Covid-19 and plans to support increased diagnosis of conditions • Impact on Schools / education (re-opening) • Care home resilience now and post Covid-19 • Adapting Care at Home while living with Covid-19 • Safeguarding and welfare of children and families – stress / pressure in households • Lockdown impact on mental wellbeing and programme of supporting provision • Mass testing / Test and Trace – how it will work / how it will be managed • The Panel to receive regular updates during the year regarding new and emerging areas
Future consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's mental health • Early years provision
Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of Covid-19 and lockdown on the economy • Adapting public transport to meet the needs of the re-opening economy while maintaining social distancing • Building on Clean Air at a local level – initiatives to seize opportunity around walking and cycling • Waste and Recycling – behaviour / fly tipping • Where next for key development sites – e.g. Godley Garden Village • The Panel to receive regular updates during the year regarding new and emerging areas.
Future consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving quality and standards - private rented sector and empty properties • Community Safety Partnership / Strategy
Cross Panel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the community on their experiences of Covid-19 • Humanitarian response to Covid-19 (learning for the future) • Balancing council and public sector budgets • Financial and economic impact on individuals and families