

Nottingham City Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 11 May 2022 from 2.01 pm - 3.39 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Samuel Gardiner (Chair)
Councillor Georgia Power (Vice Chair) (Minutes 1-7)
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Corall Jenkins
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Sajid Mohammed (minutes 6-8)
Councillor Anne Peach (minutes 4-8)
Councillor Angharad Roberts
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Vice Chair)
Councillor Merlita Bryan

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Beth Brown – Head of Legal and Governance
Lucy Lee - Head of Customer Service
Councillor David Mellen – Leader of the Council
Councillor Adele Williams - Portfolio Holder for Finance
Laura Wilson – Senior Governance Officer
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Carol McCulloch – other Council business
Councillor Merlita Bryan – other Council business

2 Declarations of interests

None.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting will be available at the next meeting.

4 Terms of Reference

Councillor Sam Gardiner, the new Chair of the Committee, set out his aims for scrutiny, including the committee creating recommendations for officers to follow through and deliver responses to form a corporate feedback loop, and also to scrutinise policies.

Resolved to note the committee's Terms of Reference.

5 Establishment of the Overview and Scrutiny Call-In Sub-Committee

Councillor Sam Gardiner, Chair of the Committee, introduced the report detailing the reasons why an Overview and Scrutiny Call-In Sub-Committee is required, its Terms of Reference and membership.

Resolved to:

- 1) establish the Overview and Scrutiny Call-In Sub-Committee;**
- 2) note the Terms of Reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Call-In Sub-Committee, approved at Council on 9 May 2022;**
- 3) note the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Call-In Sub-Committee, as follows, approved at Council on 9 May 2022:**

Councillor Sam Gardner (Chair)
Councillor Carole McCulloch (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Georgia Power (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Corall Jenkins
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Anne Peach
Councillor Andrew Rule
Councillor Cate Woodward

6 Together for Nottingham Plan - Progress update by the Leader

Councillor David Mellen, Leader of the Council, was in attendance to provide the regular update on the progress of the Together for Nottingham Plan.

Highlighted points and responses to committee members' questions included the following:

- a) the Leader holds regular meetings with the Portfolio Holder responsible Finance to examine and discuss progress within the four-year medium-term financial plan;
- b) phase 1 and 2 of the plan are in operation with phrase 3 in preparation;
- c) culture and performance management have been examined to ensure that all roles are fit for purpose;
- d) the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) issues, whereby funds which should only have been spent on council house tenant services and nothing else were wrongly used for the broader benefit, are being addressed and, once replenished, the HRA will be ring fenced with new financial operation control arrangements now in place including requiring three lead officers to sign off any housing revenue budgets;
- e) whilst the Council is keen to resolve the historical failure regarding the HRA, it is anticipated that repayments will be completed for the start of this municipal year. It is not

possible to just pay back the funds to HRA as the council has to get a licence and ensure all detail is exact, but the details of repayments can be circulated;

- f) a new focus has emerged following a meeting of the Executive Board, where it was decided to move away from the Nottingham City Homes arm's-length management model for management of council housing, and bring management back in-house. This route has already been taken by many local authorities;
- g) the Leader has sent a letter to all Nottingham City Homes tenants and the Chief Executive has sent a letter to all staff assuring them that, whilst they may be concerned that they will be impacted by these changes, they are unlikely to see any change in day-to-day services. Staff will transfer across to the City Council in what is hoped will be an improved process;
- h) Kevin Lowry, Interim Director of Housing, will manage the transfer back to the City Council as he has previously managed arm's-length management companies and has experience in social housing. Committee members should be assured that robust financial structures will be established;
- i) staff turnover and difficulty recruiting is a national issue. The Council needs to ensure that it is considered an attractive employer. Whilst forward funding cannot be guaranteed, it is vital to ensure that staff are in place and retained;
- j) to date there has been no response from the Minister to the latest Improvement and Assurance Board report or its addendum regarding the HRA issues;
- k) progress of the Together for Nottingham Plan is tracked and monitored using a RAG rating system. Most are still Red and Amber as the Council is on a journey of improvement;
- l) investing in and maintaining IT staffing and systems is vital to the performance and security of the Council.

Resolved to request that

- 1) the timeframe for the HRA repayments is circulated to Committee members;**
- 2) the senior leadership team remain conscious of the importance of IT infrastructure and resources;**
- 3) consultation and information sharing continues with Nottingham City Homes residents and staff during the process of bringing housing services back in-house;**
- 4) the RAG rated performance monitoring of the Together for Nottingham Plan is circulated to Committee members.**

7 Customer First Transformation

Councillor Adele Williams, Portfolio Holder for Finance, and Lucy Lee, Head of Customer Service, were in attendance to provide an update on the Customer First Transformation Programme.

The following points were highlighted and responses provided to committee members' questions:

- a) the Customer First Transformation Programme (CFTP) directly feeds into the Together for Nottingham Plan and is focused on streamlining customer contact to be as effective as possible for citizens whilst achieving savings;
- b) the CFTP applies to all areas of the council and aims to improve customer satisfaction, provide accessible information for all residents, including identifying barriers and overcoming them. Transformation is progressing well;
- c) consultation has found that 94% of citizens are happy to use digital communication channels, but alternatives still need to be made available to ensure easy access for all citizens;
- d) the issues on which citizens contact the council have been analysed and taken into consideration with the streamlining of communications and the aim to simplify access and remove avoidable and wasted contact;
- e) there has been a 20% increase per year for the past five years of customer engagement, and whilst staffing has not increased by 20%, broader engagement options have been developed and expert staff will be recruited to help deliver improved outcomes;
- f) feedback and suggestions from councillors and residents on what they feel is most important when contacting the City Council, and their experiences, is welcomed. Identifying any areas where customers feel the system doesn't work including with regard to ward councillor case work, is important to enable further improvement;
- g) it's not always possible, for the customer contact areas within the council to direct customers to the required contact, but being able to direct the customer to where information is available is important;
- h) staffing numbers will be rationalised, but a reduced facility to engage in person, particularly for older citizens and those with English as an additional language will remain as a one size fits all approach is not appropriate and there is a legal requirement for the Council to be accessible;
- i) the transformation process is proactive rather than responsive;
- j) 80% of customer calls will be put through to one of two levels of expert staff: front door and more bespoke service;
- k) the journey that a customer call takes is being mapped from start to conclusion and with the proposed changes, in addition to an improved, more efficient customer experience, significant savings can be achieved;
- l) it is acknowledged that some customer calls regard multiple issues so the system will be cross-cutting to enable this;
- m) the new communications system will enable a much smoother process for maintaining customer records and significantly reduce the need to need to transfer information between systems;

- n) different technologies have been considered but as 'apps' are very expensive they are not considered necessary at this time. Members should be assured that the digital technology used will be accessible and appropriate for mobile devices such as tablets and mobile phones;
- o) with regard to savings from staff reductions, an example is that 2 departments each employed 16 call takers and a supervisor with only 18% of enquiries being made digitally. With the new systems and improved digital access it is anticipated that staff numbers can be halved;
- p) one of the challenges so far has been the lack of buy-in from staff and customers who are reluctant for change, but work is ongoing to address this.

Members of the committee welcomed the progress to date and level of detail provided and requested that the governance structure, baseline data, the proposed outcomes and progress monitoring plans be circulated.

Resolved to request that

- 1) **more consultation is carried out with Councillors on the proposed changes;**
- 2) **an illustration/visualisation of the new contact process is circulated to members of the Committee;**
- 3) **the governance structure, baseline data, the proposed outcomes and progress monitoring plans be circulated to members of the Committee;**
- 4) **protected characteristics remain at the forefront when assessing the impact of proposals.**

8 Work Programme

Councillor Sam Gardiner, Chair of the Committee, introduced the work programme, and proposed to make the following changes:

- a) move the Selective Licensing item from the July meeting to the September meeting;
- b) cancel the proposed meeting in July and replace it with a meeting in August to enable the Libraries Transformation item to be considered prior to a decision being taken at Executive Board.

Resolved to revise the work programme for the next few months as follows:

- 8 June 2022 - Asset Rationalisation
2022-23 Work Programme**
- 3 August 2022 - Together For Nottingham Update from the Leader
Libraries Transformation
2022-23 Work Programme**

**7 September 2022 - Selective Licensing
Work Programme**

9 Dates of future meetings

As part of the work programme discussion above, the Committee decided to replace the meeting proposed for 6 July 2022 with a meeting on 3 August 2022 to enable the Libraries Transformation item to be considered prior to a decision being taken by Executive Board.

Resolved to meet at 2pm on the following Wednesdays:

2022

8 June

3 August

7 September

5 October

9 November

7 December

2023

4 January

8 February

8 March