

Nottingham City Council

Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 19 February 2024 from 10:03am to 11:52am

Membership

Present

Councillor Sam Harris (Chair)
Councillor Sarita-Marie Rehman-Wall
(Vice Chair)
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Michael Savage

Absent

Councillor Kevin Clarke
Councillor Adele Williams

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Jay Hayes - Portfolio Holder for Housing
Councillor Angela Kandola - Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Planning
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Councillor David Mellen - Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration and Communications
Sajeeda Rose - Corporate Director for Growth and City Development
Damon Stanton - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Geoff Wharton - Consultant Strategic Director of Housing

29 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Kevin Clarke - personal reasons

30 Declarations of Interests

In the interests of transparency in relation to item 5 (Council Tenant Engagement), both Councillor Sarita-Marie Rehman-Wall and Councillor Michael Savage declared that they are Council tenants.

31 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

32 Preparedness for the East Midlands Combined County Authority

Councillor David Mellen, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Regeneration and Communications; Councillor Jay Hayes, Portfolio Holder for Housing; Councillor Angela Kandola, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Planning; and Sajeeda Rose, Corporate Director for Growth and City Development,

presented a report on the Council's preparations for the establishment of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (CCA). The following points were raised:

- a) A great deal of learning has been taken from how the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has operated, as it has facilitated the delivery of significant regeneration and development in its area. However, the mix of rural and urban areas within the East Midlands CCA is both diverse and unique, providing different challenges to those experienced in Greater Manchester, which is made up of ten urban Local Authorities. As part of increasing investment in key areas in the East Midlands, work has been carried out with the Local Authorities across the region to find common ground to achieve the best outcomes for both Nottingham and the East Midlands as a whole. In the future, further opportunities for 'deeper devolution' may also be possible.
- b) The establishment of the CCA will involve the transfer of powers currently exercised by central Government to the East Midlands region. The structure of the CCA is being established and it will have an executive Mayor, who will be elected in May 2024. It is important that as much as possible is done with the public to increase awareness of this election and why the CCA is important for the East Midlands area. The CCA will have a Cabinet, of which the leaders and deputy leaders of the four constituent unitary and upper-tier Local Authorities will be members. District and Borough Councils will be represented on the Cabinet, in addition to representation of the wider business community. The CCA will be set up as a new Local Authority, supported by professional officers, and there is a shadow team already in place assisting with its establishment. Initial strategies and governance processes are being developed and the Council is engaging with these.
- c) The CCA will have a focus on key areas and themes such as transport, housing and land, adult skills and carbon net zero targets. A significant amount of funding will be available, estimated to be around £4 billion to be distributed over a period of time. Regional funding is increasingly coming through Combined Authorities rather than directly from central Government. The CCA will be able to access a £1.14 billion devolved investment fund, with at least £38 million per year over 30 years; a new City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement of over £1.5 billion; devolution of the adult education budget worth around £50 million; an East Midlands investment zone for growth worth £160 million; £18 million early investment in housing and carbon net zero; and £17 million for the building of new homes on brownfield land.
- d) Some transitional arrangements from the constituent Local Authorities to the CCA will be required, particularly in the context of transport, which is currently led by each of the individual Local Transport Authorities. This will take place over a two-year period as the region establishes a plan to move into the CCA arrangements. There will also be alignment of some of the Council's key strategies and plans, such as the Economic Plan (for developing the right adult skills across the area) and the Housing Strategy. These will be put forward to the CCA to outline the challenges and opportunities within Nottingham. The CCA will be a Transport Authority, but not a Highways Authority – so the responsibility for funding and carrying out highway maintenance will remain with the unitary and upper-tier Local Authorities.

- e) In relation to the housing and land theme, there is an early brownfield land fund to support the unlocking of sites for housing. Preparation is being done to take advantage of this early funding, including identifying key sites in the context of the draft Housing Strategy, and steps will be taken to ensure that the Council's priorities are aligned with any strategy produced for the wider regional context of the CCA. There are challenges for developing new housing in Nottingham, but there will be focus on accelerating some of the larger sites that have the greatest potential, which could deliver around 1,000 homes. Work is also underway to identify other smaller sites that could contribute to the development of more affordable housing. Given the Council's current financial context, it was unlikely that it would be able to progress these developments without support from the CCA. The Housing Revenue Accounts of the constituent Local Authorities will remain separate.
- f) The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will transfer over to Combined Authorities from 2025 onwards. The Council has used some of the early funding available to acquire six properties for use as part of a portfolio to secure long-term tenancies and ease pressure on demand for temporary accommodation, as well as a contributing to the Council's rolling programme of social housing retrofit.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- g) The Committee welcomed the anticipated investment in transport across the CCA area as a whole, but sought assurance that this would not take investment away from Nottingham's well-developed local transport services. It was explained that there is a strong transport service in the city, but that more investment is needed in many other areas within the CCA. Overall, a significant number of people who work in the city do not live within it, so it is important that transport links are strengthened with areas outside Nottingham so that people can get to their place of work in the city easily. East Midlands Airport is a major employment hub for the wider area, but it has relatively poor transport links to the city, other than by car. As such, it is important that transport links are good throughout the CCA area so that city residents can access employment opportunities across the region more easily. The £1.5 billion of investment funding could make a significant impact in this area.
- h) The Committee asked how the Council will ensure that Nottingham achieves the right level of investment from the CCA. It was explained that it will fall to each member of the CCA to put their cases forward on measures that will not only bring benefit to their area, but also to the region as a whole. The Council is doing a great deal of preparatory work to secure investment by having clear plans in place to deliver its strategic priorities. The cities of Nottingham and Derby play a large part in driving the wider economy, so there is a strong case for investment in them. The Council will now be making cases on a local basis for projects that will benefit Nottingham and the CCA region, rather than making bids into a national funding pool that are subject to higher levels of competition. A draft Regional Investment Strategy is also being produced by staff supporting the establishment of the CCA and is being fed into by the constituent Local Authorities. Once a Mayor is in post, this Strategy will be formalised and will outline the CCA's investment priorities.

- i) The Committee asked how the CCA would implement carbon net zero targets, including developing the skills required in the workforce to deliver them. It was reported that making funding cases for net zero activity on a regional basis, rather than on a national one, could give access to greater funding and allow the area to invest more effectively in its own priorities. As net zero activity increases, there will be more demand for skills in the workforce such as in retrofitting and installing heat pumps. The initial focus of the CCA will be on developing skills in adults (18 year old and above), but the Council will continue to work on building needed skills amongst young people before they enter the workforce.
- j) The Committee asked whether there was potential to expand both the tram and Nottingham City Transport (NCT) bus networks as part of the CCA. It was explained that the CCA will have greater opportunities to develop potential extensions of the tram network. Land has been set aside for possible expansion, but any future delivery will depend on a robust business case being developed. NCT is a commercial service and any future expansion would need to be considered in this context. A Joint Planning Board is in place with the other Local Authorities in the Greater Nottingham area to seek to develop transport networks in a cross-boundary context going forward.
- k) The Committee asked how the Council would spread awareness about the upcoming Mayoral election, as well as informing citizens about the requirements to present identification when voting. It was explained that branding and communications material for the CCA have been developed and work is underway with partners and stakeholders to increase awareness – it will be particularly important that the District and Borough Councils in the CCA area help to spread information to their local communities. Communications materials will be sent to every household in the CCA area to outline the Mayoral candidates and explain the CCA in more detail.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holders and officers for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that an overview of the general structure of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (CCA) is provided to the Committee, including how the Council will be represented in decision-making at the CCA level.**
- 2) To recommend that the Council continues to work to identify the future workforce skills needs in the city and develop a vision for how investment in skills at all ages could ultimately be supported through the CCA.**
- 3) To recommend that all possible communications and engagement is carried out, working in collaboration with the relevant partners and stakeholders, to inform Nottingham people why the establishment of the CCA is important and encourage them to vote in the upcoming first Mayoral election in May.**

33 Council Tenant Engagement

Councillor Jay Hayes, Portfolio Holder for Housing; Sajeeda Rose, Corporate Director for Growth and City Development; and Geoff Wharton, Consultant Strategic Director of Housing, presented a report on the Council's proposed approach to tenant engagement as part of the new governance arrangements for social housing and how the Council will ensure that tenants are involved effectively in decision-making. The following points were raised:

- a) Nottingham City Homes (NCH) was brought back in-house during April 2023 and, since then, the Council has had direct responsibility for housing management and maintenance services, and acting as the corporate landlord with a tenant and leaseholder involvement function. The new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has strengthened the role and rights of tenants in regard to their influence over the services provided by their landlord. The measures proposed by the Council reflect this increased role for tenants to ensure they are at the heart of shaping the service.
- b) Under the NCH partnership agreement with the Council, NCH was responsible for ensuring tenants' empowerment, involvement in key decisions and monitoring services. The NCH Board had tenant representation as part of its constitution, as well as an 'Arms-Length Management Organisation Board' made up exclusively of tenants and who linked directly to the NCH Board structure.
- c) The Council is working to implement its own version of the previous arrangements and further empower the voice of tenants. There will be a new Housing Assurance Board (HAB), which will be made up of 10 Council tenants and 2 leaseholders, along with the Portfolio Holder with the remit for social housing. Work has been done to ascertain the issues and review the complaints raised by tenants regarding the previous NCH service. There had been some concerns that tenant representation under NCH could be largely self-selecting and did not encompass a wide enough range of opinion, so the Council will be looking to ensure that the people on the HAB are as representative as possible to ensure the broadest range of opinion. This will allow better scrutiny of the service.
- d) The Council has received independent advice on best practice and has commissioned a third party to survey a wide range of tenants to ensure that they have a voice and that their views are incorporated into its governance arrangements. In 2023, Housing Services commissioned a review of the tenant engagement structure and impact, and this was undertaken by the Tenant Participation Advisory Services (TPAS), which made a number of recommendations for service improvement. These recommendations will be implemented and will allow the Council to meet the statutory requirements – which will be overseen by the new Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), which will exercise a proactive inspection regime.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- e) The Committee sought assurance that the Council was ensuring that its duties to all tenants under the Equalities Act were being upheld. It was explained that it was a major priority to ensure that tenants of all backgrounds and ages were

involved in the new engagement model. Learning has been taken from NCH's prior performance and the issues identified from the survey will be investigated further. This could include establishing a tenant working group alongside the HAB to look at particular challenges in more detail or, if necessary, a service improvement plan will be implemented.

- f) The Committee asked how the backlog in repairs to the Council's housing stock would be managed. It was set out that the recently approved Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan outlines an increase to the budget for repairs and maintenance, as well as improvements to IT systems to ensure that required repairs are now managed more efficiently. This will be supported through the ring-fenced HRA, rather than through the Council's General Fund. There will be an investment of £3.7 million for a full stock condition survey to understand where problems exist and target repairs. There are clear safeguards in place to ensure that the HRA is used properly.
- g) The Committee sought assurance that the specialist complaints department needed within Housing Services was being resourced effectively, and that work will be done to reduce the need for complaint and the risk of arising litigation. It was reported that the experienced complaints team has been drawn from NCH and will be funded from the HRA, but will be managed as part of the Council's overall corporate structure, ethos and culture. A great deal of work and investment is being done to achieve better outcomes, going forward.
- h) The Committee considered that the proposed HAB meetings should be as accessible to as wide a range of people as possible, and accommodating of those who are unable to attend meetings during the day due to work. It was set out that it is vital for trust to be built with tenants as part of the new approach. Existing engagement structures such as the Tenant Academy, events, and community and task and finish groups will remain in place. The proposed higher-level engagement will help to build on this work to make tenant engagement more meaningful and reflective, especially in the context of the new regulations. The Council will be looking to assess the tenant survey, act upon the recommendations from TPAS and ensure that tenants are further involved in its governance structure with the creation of the HAB.
- i) The Committee asked when it is likely that the Council would be inspected by the new regulator. It was explained that as the RSH is a newly established regulator that will start its assessment processes from April 2024. It is currently unknown what an inspection would look like, and the Council would be given no advance notification of an inspection – though a desktop self-review has been completed and submitted to the RSH. The RSH is likely to be most interested in those landlords that are not self-aware or seeking to improve services, rather than ones that show good self-awareness and have proactive improvement plans in place. The RSH is beginning on a 'fresh start' basis, as this is a completely new area of regulation.
- j) The Committee queried how the new engagement systems would be championed by effective Housing Patch Managers at the local level. It was explained that the Council recognised that Patch Managers are a key conduit for tenant engagement

and that work is underway on a service re-design to ensure that Patch Managers are accessible, flexible and give feedback in a timely way.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To recommend that the statistics in relation to the themes and resolution of tenant complaints is fed into the proposed Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Structure at the appropriate point, to help identify and address wider issues in a collaborative way to improve the experience of all tenants.**
- 2) To recommend that particular consideration is given to how younger and working tenants can be supported in participating effectively in the proposed Involvement Structure, and how the types, styles and timings of participation options can be made engaging and accessible to them.**
- 3) To recommend that it is ensured that tenants can engage with Housing Patch Managers easily and accessibly, and that the Patch Managers are trained and supported in delivering the proposed Involvement Structure effectively at the local level.**

34 Responses to Recommendations

The Chair presented the latest responses received to the Committee's previous recommendations from the relevant Portfolio Holders. The following points were raised:

- a) In relation to the response of the Portfolio Holder for Skills, Growth, Economic Development and Property to the Committee's recommendation regarding the Council's Asset Management Programme that "the formal framework for considering the balance of community benefit, wider service impact and best value when assessing the potential disposal of a property asset is completed as soon as possible, to inform and support effective decision-making", the Committee requested confirmation as to when the development of the Social Value Model would be completed.

The Committee noted the response to its previous recommendations by the Portfolio Holder.

35 Work Programme

The Chair presented the Committee's current Work Programme. The following points were raised:

- a) The Committee's final meeting of the 2023/24 municipal year will be held on 15 April 2024 and is scheduled to consider the development of the new Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.