

Nottingham City Council

Communities and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 5 June 2024 from 2:04pm to 4:10pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Imran Jalil (Chair)
Councillor Samuel Gardiner (Vice Chair)
Councillor David Mellen
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Andrew Rule

Absent

Councillor Faith Gakanje-Ajala
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor AJ Matsiko

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Eddie Curry - Head of Green Spaces and Natural Environment
Beth Hanna - Migration Operations Manager
Councillor Corall Jenkins - Executive Member for Communities, Waste and Equalities
Mary Lester - Strategic Director of Operational and Resident Services
Councillor Sam Lux - Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure and Culture
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Kate Morris - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Claire Smith-Harris - Future Parks Accelerator Programme Project Manager
Colin Wilderspin - Interim Director of Communities

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Faith Gakanje-Ajala - personal reasons
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora - unwell
Councillor AJ Matsiko - unwell

2 Declarations of Interests

None

3 Appointment of the Vice Chair

Resolved to appoint Councillor Samuel Gardiner as the Vice Chair of the Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year.

4 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meetings held on 3 April 2024 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

5 Refugee Resettlement and Homes for Ukraine

Councillor Coral Jenkins, Executive Member for Communities, Waste and Equalities; Colin Wilderspin, Interim Director of Communities; and Beth Hanna, Migration Operations Manager, presented a report on work being done by the Council for the resettlement of refugees and the delivery of the Homes for Ukraine programme. The following points were raised:

- a) The Council provides support to refugees seeking sanctuary from war and human rights violations through the Homes for Ukraine programme, and Afghan and worldwide refugee resettlement programme, and the Home Office-led Asylum Dispersal Scheme. The team leading this work is relatively small, but the service has had an important impact for residents as part of growing social cohesion to make Nottingham a welcoming city where everyone can make a life for themselves.
- b) The Homes for Ukraine programme began in March 2022. The Council matches Ukrainian guests with potential hosts and then works to ensure that they have access to healthcare, English language learning, schools, welfare and exceptional needs funding. The Council continues to engage with both the guest and the host and, if problems arise that cannot be resolved, an alternative placement will be sought. Activity is underway to potentially commission specialist services to support Ukrainians in finding employment and so develop independence in their own accommodation. There has been a strong focus on the health and wellbeing of Ukrainian guests, and the Ukrainian Cultural Centre has been fundamental in helping to deliver the support offer.
- c) Refugee resettlement has been coordinated by the Council as part of a wider partnership approach with many of the Nottinghamshire Local Authorities and other agencies since 2015. Following the closure of all Home Office bridging accommodation from the end of August 2023, a great deal of work has been needed to ensure that refugees do not become homeless – particularly as they are not eligible for social housing. Individual integration and support packages are in place, particularly for people living through significant trauma. Work is also underway to commission provision for developing English language and employment skills. The partnership carries out a great deal of activity to bring together stakeholders and carry out education in response to any hate speech towards asylum seekers and refugees.
- d) The Council has also been part of the Home Office asylum dispersal process for over 20 years. This provides accommodation and support via a Home Office-contracted provider while individual asylum claims are assessed.
- e) The Council receives ring-fenced funding to deliver these schemes from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Home Office. To ensure that services provided are as effective and efficient as possible, a joint Migration team has been brought together under one manager to provide cross-team learning and support. A great deal of work is being done to improve coordinated access to data so that support can be delivered in a targeted way, including through the seeking of additional small grants.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- f) The Committee asked how the Homes for Ukraine and refugee resettlement and dispersal schemes differed, and what work was being done to ensure that the people affected would be able to live independent lives. It was reported that each of the schemes had their own timelines and funding streams, but that the Council sought to manage them in a coordinated way. Funding is primarily from the Government to support individual communities and groups on the basis of very strict criteria and monitoring requirements. Currently, the new need for the Homes for Ukraine scheme is decreasing each year. Hosts receive a single payment that is not affected by the number of people that they support.
- g) It was explained that Ukrainians are being supported into work where possible, but this does not impact on their individual welcome payment (which are now all being made on time now that initial challenges in relation to the Council's current emergency Spend Control processes have been overcome). A great deal of activity is underway to help Ukrainian guests transition into sustainable, independent living in their own accommodation. Similar processes are also in place to support the refugees and asylum seekers coming through the other schemes.
- h) The Committee queried whether there was any clash between the need for Homes for Ukraine hosts and for foster homes for children in the Council's care. It was explained that any potential conflicting demand between Homes for Ukraine and foster care needs was likely to be limited, given that most of the Ukrainians requiring support were adults, and initiatives were underway to help them become independent.
- i) The Committee asked how well the service was performing in the context of the current needs and available resources, and how performance and outcomes were measured. It was set out that the current service offer is strong, and that everything possible is being done to further improve the support available. A full quarterly reporting mechanism is in place and a new, high-level data dashboard is being produced. Performance is assessed on the basis of individual case outcomes, access to education and work, and transition to an independent life. A clear system of risk analysis is in operation so that potential issues can be identified at an early stage and mitigating action taken appropriately. A regular monitoring process is underway, and exit interviews are carried out to ensure that direct learning can be taken from people's experiences to continue to improve the service. Two previously separate teams are now working together to ensure a coordinated process to securing available funding and delivering an efficient and effective service.
- j) The Committee asked what work could be done to ensure that people served instructions to quit Home Office accommodation on short notice would not become homeless. It was reported that a great deal of partnership activity takes place to guard against refugees and asylum seekers being made street homeless, and that a database has been established to help forecast and plan for peaks in people leaving Home Office accommodation.

- k) The Committee recorded it thanks to host families, the voluntary sector and Council officers for their continued hard work and dedication in giving support to Nottingham's refugee communities, and noted that a formal 'thank you' event was being planned for later in the summer.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Communities, Waste and Equalities, the Interim Director of Communities, and the Migration Operations Manager for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that the 'myth buster' information leaflet is circulated to the Committee.**
- 2) To request that the datasets demonstrating service delivery performance are shared with the Committee.**
- 3) To recommend that consideration is given to the way in which communications with the public deliver a balanced view and include positive outcome stories.**

6 Nottingham Greenspace Strategy

Councillor Sam Lux, Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure and Culture; Mary Lester, Strategic Director of Operational and Resident Services; Eddie Curry, Head of Green Spaces and Natural Environment; and Claire Smith-Harris, Future Parks Accelerator Programme Project Manager, presented a report on the development of the Nottingham Greenspace Strategy. The following points were raised:

- a) The Greenspace Strategy has been developed to align with the Strategic Council Plan's vision for Nottingham as a Healthy, Safe, Clean, Green, Proud and Ambitious city, and the intention is for it to be formally adopted during September. Building on the work of the previous 'Breathing Spaces' initiative over the last ten years, the Strategy aims to improve and sustain the city's green and blue infrastructure, protect and enhance local habitats and biodiversity, engage citizens to encourage participation and volunteering, and provide a more financially sustainable delivery model for Nottingham's green space and natural environment. The Strategy will also complement the wider regional environmental initiatives being developed by the East Midlands Combined County Authority. The Strategy will require a whole-Council approach to be delivered effectively, and it supports other significant initiatives such as developing health and wellbeing, delivering carbon neutral objectives and ensuring a child-friendly city.
- b) A key element of the new Strategy is to achieve sustainable investment going forward, so a great deal of engagement is underway with stakeholders and community groups on developing an effective partnership approach to deliver best value. More widely, a Nature Recovery Strategy is in place for the whole of Nottinghamshire as part of achieving national requirements for biodiversity net gain, so close work is taking place with the Council's Planning team to ensure that

the Greenspace Strategy is properly embedded in how the city's built environment is developed.

- c) National funding is available through the Future Parks Accelerator Programme to support the Council in exploring new ways to manage green space sustainably. A long-running consultation process began during the Coronavirus pandemic, with in-depth conversations taking place over the last two years. There are a large number of green assets in the city, which has 128 parks, 12 local nature reserves and a wide range of outdoor play areas and sports facilities. When surveyed, resident satisfaction rates in relation to the city's open spaces have been high, and the input received has been used to inform ongoing service improvement and develop the new Greenspace Strategy.
- d) A 'natural capital' account has been produced so that the city's green assets are given an actual value in terms of the benefits that they provide, particularly in the context of health, wellbeing and carbon offsetting. A national set of measures have been developed so that performance indicators can be benchmarked against other equivalent areas to demonstrate the outcomes of the Strategy in a clear way.
- e) The Strategy aims to create a 'Greener, Healthier and Happier' Nottingham. To ensure the effective targeting of resources to achieve the greatest impact, work is being carried out to establish what areas of the city have the lowest levels of access to green space, so that key initiatives can be implemented to improve this. The city's green space as a whole requires a great deal of maintenance, so a careful balance needs to be struck between sustaining what exists effectively whilst also investing to reduce inequality of access.
- f) Activity is taking place to create a resilient, climate-positive city environment, with open spaces that support effective climate change mitigation. An important focus is to ensure that the people experiencing the greatest levels of health inequality can access nature and open space easily, and that the green space within their communities is enhanced. As part of this, a significant volunteer programme is in place to ensure that the ownership of green space is shared across the city. A great deal of work has been undertaken to expand volunteer capacity in a way that is fully reflective of the city's wide range of communities and groups, supported by a Green Guardians scheme.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- g) The Committee asked how Nottingham compared to other cities in relation to the level of tree canopy cover. It was reported that the city has an average level of tree cover when compared to other cities – though some otherwise urban Local Authorities can also have areas of forest or similar within their boundaries. Work is underway to establish where the areas of lowest tree cover are in the city, so that initiatives can be implemented to develop it further. The Council has three dedicated Trees Officers, with two Park Rangers and a strong base of community support, including a volunteer tree-planting programme.
- h) The Committee asked what the intended duration of the Greenspace Strategy would be, and how it would be ensured that partners and stakeholders across the

city were actively invested in its delivery. It was explained that the Strategy is intended to cover a 25-year period, but it will need to be reviewed and re-framed as it progresses. There is a strong focus on developing active buy-in to the Strategy by key stakeholders to achieve a direct commitment to and ownership of green space across the city. To date, close engagement has been carried out with the Nottingham Green Partnership on the development of the current Strategy.

- i) The Committee queried how the urgent need to deliver change to ensure environmental sustainability would be balanced against the requirement to ensure financial sustainability in the currently challenging context. It was set out that the new Strategy must be fully financially sustainable in what it sets out to deliver. In order to preserve and develop the current green assets, a strong level of partnership working across the whole city is required to achieve the needed investment for the delivery of real environmental change. Property developers will need to contribute to delivering environmental sustainability, and consideration is being given to the creation of a habitat land bank within the city that can be used for this purpose.
- j) The Committee queried whether the recruitment of voluntary Green Guardians was being used to replace work carried out previously by directly employed Council staff. It was explained that significant work is being done in the recruitment of volunteers and Green Guardians to ensure that they come from all of Nottingham's communities, as the Council needs as many people as possible to engage actively in achieving a biodiversity net gain. As a result, the work carried out by volunteers and Green Guardians goes beyond the level of service that would be provided by the Council, so is not replacing activity that should be carried out by paid staff.
- k) The Committee sought assurance that the Strategy was deliverable, and that it was being driven by the clear need to achieve environmental sustainability. It was reported that the objectives of the Strategy have been developed to be both realistic and deliverable. However, they are nevertheless ambitious, and stretch goals are in place. There is a strong focus on growing new ways of funding, including through requirements on developers to achieve a net gain in biodiversity, and on enhancing citizen participation. Although the city's green spaces can and will be used for public events that will generate revenue, work is always done to ensure that the environmental impacts of these events are mitigated and offset where required. Careful consideration has been given to how the Strategy can deliver sustainable environmental change through a financially viable model. It is an important aspect of the Strategy that everyone should be able to access a green space within 15 minutes' walk.
- l) The Committee asked how learning from others had been used to inform the development of the Strategy. It was explained that discussion had been carried out with a range of other Local Authorities on the development of sustainable cities, and particular learning had been taken from Councils that had introduced a 'land bank' initiative already. Projects for community food growing have also been investigated, as there are opportunities for this to take place on various disused sites or areas earmarked for development, but where the work start date is still some time away.

- m) The Committee asked what the level of response to the green space satisfaction surveys had been, and how people had been made aware of the surveys. It was reported that the survey was carried out online, so a range of data is available and can be shared. Communications activity was carried out around the city's green spaces to raise awareness, including through face-to-face engagement.
- n) The Committee asked how residents accessed the city's open-air tennis facilities, and how children and young people were engaged with on the development of outdoor activity spaces. It was set out that the hard-surface tennis courts needed to be accessed by signing up for an annual membership. Everything possible is done to keep membership fees as low as possible, with opportunities for free coaching and summer schools. Consultation is carried out with young people specifically on the development of relevant projects like pools and skate parks, with a particular focus on engaging in schools.
- o) The Committee asked what balance should be struck between the need to preserve and develop green space and the requirement for new house building in the city. It was explained that residential house building needed to be focused on the redevelopment of brownfield sites, with new open space to be created as part of projects. Work is being carried out on street greening initiatives, particularly within residential housing estates.
- p) The Committee asked what the primary risks were to the effective delivery of the Strategy. It was reported that the primary challenges would be in the meeting of the national requirements for biodiversity net gain, while going further to establish a suitable habit land bank in the city. Engagement is beginning on how this could be achieved, including with Natural England, but there is risk regarding whether a viable business case can be developed that the Council would be able to implement.
- q) The Committee queried how it would be communicated effectively that some areas of green space were being left to grow wild, rather than it appearing that they were being abandoned and neglected. It was explained that a great deal of communication, education and engagement work was required to explain what intentional wilding is intended to achieve and why it is important. This is a particularly important role for volunteers in engaging with their particular communities.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure and Culture, the Strategic Director of Operational and Resident Services, the Head of Green Spaces and Natural Environment, and the Future Parks Accelerator Programme Project Manager for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that details of the free tennis access for young people are circulated to the Committee.**
- 2) To request that the number and a breakdown of responses to the satisfaction survey carried out are circulated to the Committee.**

- 3) To recommend that consideration is given to the balance within the Nottingham Greenspace Strategy between the need to ensure best value financially and the need to achieve environmental gains.**
- 4) To recommend that consideration is given to the options for a programme suitable for Nottingham that would be similar to the 'Incredible Edible' project and, if appropriate, to consider the use decommissioned garage sites in particular as spaces available to be used.**
- 5) To recommend that consideration is given to the development of a habitat land-banking scheme designed to increase and promote biodiversity across the city.**
- 6) To recommend that SWOT and PASTEL analyses are carried out to support the development of the Strategy.**
- 7) To recommend that consideration is given on how best to educate citizens around the benefits of wild flowers and long grass areas within the city.**

7 Work Programme

The Chair presented the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year. The following points were discussed:

- a) A report on the Committee's Terms of Reference, the Council's structure for the Overview and Scrutiny function and the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol will be brought to the next meeting, to set out the Committee's purpose, objectives and terms of operation so that it can work efficiently and contribute effectively to the good governance of the Council.
- b) The Committee requested that the Community Centre Review item was brought forward on the Work Programme from the September meeting to the July meeting, to be swapped with the Streets for People item.

Resolved to agree the proposed Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

8 Dates of Future Meetings

The Chair explained that, due to the calling of the General Election on 4 July 2024, it was proposed to defer the meeting scheduled originally for 3 July 2024 to 24 July 2024.

Resolved to meet on the following Wednesdays at 2:00pm:

- **24 July 2024**
- **4 September 2024**
- **6 November 2024**
- **8 January 2025**
- **5 March 2025**