

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission

At 7.00 pm on Tuesday 4th October, 2022

Held in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby

Present:-

Members

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury (Chair)

Councillor Valerie Anslow

Councillor Robin Carter

Councillor John Currall

Councillor Jim Hakewill

Councillor Philip Irwin

Councillor Zoe McGhee

Officers

David Watts – Executive Director for Adults, Communities and Wellbeing

Geoff Kent – Assistant Director of Customer Services

Guy Holloway – Assistant Chief Executive

Paul Gault – Democratic Services Manager

Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

34 Apologies for non-attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Mark Dearing, Andy Mercer, Gill Mercer, Geoff Shacklock, Kevin Watts and Lee Wilkes.

35 Members' Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations of interest were made.

36 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

There were no requests to address the meeting.

37 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed.

38 Consideration of any matter referred to the Commission for call-in

It was confirmed that a valid call-in request had been received in relation to the Executive's decision on Green Waste: Future Service Provision made at their meeting on 27 September 2022. The date of when the call-in request would be considered would be advised shortly.

39 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2021/22

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Assistant Director of Customer Services which presented the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Letter to the Council for 2021-22.

The LGSCO was the final stage for complaints about councils and social care after the Council's own complaints procedure had been exhausted. Each year an annual letter was issued that covered the complaints that had been received relating to each council and their outcome. The LGSCO had received 55 complaints in respect of NNC in 2021/22, which compared to 91 in respect of all the sovereign councils the previous year.

During the year, the LGSCO investigated both those cases that related to NNC as well as concluding several investigations into complaints which had been made in previous years which related to the five sovereign authorities.

The following number of complaints received by the LGSCO during the year, broken down by service area, was:

Service Area	Number
Adult Care Services	6
Benefits and Tax	8
Education and Children's Services	16
Environmental Services and Public Protection & Regulation	5
Highways and Transport	3
Housing	8
Planning and Development	9
Total	55

Of the 55 complaints made to the LGSCO, three were investigated with two of the cases being upheld. Summaries of the upheld cases were included within the report and both related to benefits and tax.

During discussion, the following principle points were noted:

- i. Members welcomed the report and felt that it would be useful to compare it to next year's report to identify any trends.
- ii. In response to a question about how payments for maladministration were calculated, the Assistant Director advised that there was a range of what payments should be and it was dependent on the issue. The calculations may take into account any expenses accrued pursuing the complaint, the financial effect, inconvenience and stress caused.
- iii. Complainants to NNC were advised at the end of our process of their right to make a complaint to the LGSCO. The LGSCO received more enquiries than they investigated as it was not always appropriate for them to do so, for example due to legislation or other statutory complaint processes. The LGSCO provided an independent view on a complaint.

- iv. Learning was an important part of the process and where necessary ongoing training was put in place. Training was also given to staff on complaints handling and this included admitting when we had made a mistake or got things wrong. However, there was also learning when we had got things right.
- v. It was noted that some of the complaints which related to the former Northamptonshire County Council related to adult social care charging and in one case an undercharge had been written off. The Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Wellbeing advised that since reorganisation NNC had been robust around charging but sometimes things did go wrong. Internal Audit also looked at some cases to provide assurance.

RESOLVED:

To note the content and recommendations of the LGSCO's annual review letter and the outcomes of its investigations completed in 2021-22 that relate to the Council.

40 Performance Indicators Report 2022/23 (Period 4)

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the Council's performance across a wide range of services, as measured by performance indicators. The report provided a summary of the performance of Council services and further detail including trend lines and exception reports.

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- An explanation was requested as to what a 'tracking' indicator was, as there now appeared to be a lot more within the report. In response, officers advised that a tracking indicator was one where we may not be able to influence the outcome so a target was not set as it may be difficult to meet, for example, exclusions from school. However, these types of indicators were important. Within Adult Social Care they were used to check what demand for a service was and where setting a target may lead to behaviours we did not want. The Assistant Chief Executive undertook to find out from the Executive Director for Children's Services about the education tracking indicators and what they meant.
- Number of rough sleepers (AFL12) - It was noted that there was a large increase in the number of rough sleepers, however this could mean only 1 or 2 people.
- Number of electric vehicle charging points and number of electric vehicles per charge point (GSE04/05) - It was noted that information relating to these indicators was not included in the information pack. The Assistant Chief Executive undertook to look at those indicators further as they may be new indicators and would get timescales for reporting. Members also requested a breakdown of how many vehicles used the current charging points.
- Vacancies – Members enquired how the data was used to see how the Council was progressing on vacancies. In response, officers advised that the vacancy information was part of a bigger picture and should be looked at alongside service and financial performance. Once the data was properly cleansed then it would provide more focussed information. It may be more useful for scrutiny to show

trend data for vacancies. We also needed to understand why staff left the Council. It needed to be acknowledged that we may never be in a position to have a fixed headcount as a number of services may see peaks in demands when staff were needed. It also needed to be noted that not all vacancies were covered by agency staff and fixed term contracts were also often used. There were often issues trying to recruit to certain areas including carers and the trades. The budget scrutiny process would look at salary budgets to assure themselves that they were correct and could meet delivery of services.

- Total number of households living in temporary accommodation (AFL17) – it was important to understand how many households were in temporary accommodation both in and outside of North Northamptonshire.

The Chair encouraged members to provide, where possible, questions on performance in advance of the meeting so officers were able to provide full responses at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

41 Executive Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Commission received the Executive Forward Plan which showed the key and significant decisions the Executive would be making over the next few months.

The following comments were made in relation to the Forward Plan:

- Knuston Hall – there was not a lot of description in the Forward Plan about what the decision actually was. A clearer description about what the Executive were being asked to consider was needed.
- The Case for Social Housing – this was a decision the Commission should look at before a decision is made, especially as Social Housing is on our work plan.
- Street Lighting Upgrade – this was also a decision which the Commission should look at.

RESOLVED:

To note the Executive Forward Plan.

42 Scrutiny Work Plan and Future Meetings

The Scrutiny Commission received the Scrutiny Work Plan, details of future meetings and other information relevant to the management of the Scrutiny Commission.

The following comments were made in relation to the work plan:

- The Case for Social Housing Executive Decision – to be added to the work plan for the next meeting.

- Children's Trust and Spend – it was suggested that a working group be set up to look at the Children's Trust compared to our close neighbours, including examining whether the issues affecting the Trust were a trend for other authorities or just affecting Northamptonshire.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the Scrutiny Work Plan and items for future consideration.
- (ii) To note the items being brought to future meetings.
- (iii) To note the progress of the Task and Finish Groups.

43 Close of meeting

The Chair thanked members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Chair

Date