

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13 October 2015

Present: Councillor I Gartside (in the Chair);
Councillors D Cassidy; J Daly; T Holt; M Hankey; M James;
N Parnell and C Preston.

Public in attendance: 2 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Also in attendance: Councillor Shori– Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing.

Councillor S Walmsley – Cabinet Member for Resources and Regulation

Apologies for absence: Councillors Briggs , O'Brien and Tariq.

OSC.367 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

OSC.368 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 29 July 2015, be agreed as a correct record.

OSC.369 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

- Mr Rob Trueblood attended the meeting to request that the Committee look to evaluate the success of the Sculpture Centre and the criteria used to measure its performance to date.

During discussion of this issue Councillors Holt and James highlighted that a full evaluation was premature at this stage due to the relatively short time the Centre had been open. The Committee agreed that an initial update on the Sculpture Centre be provided to the January 2016 meeting of this Committee in advance of any potential review.

- Mrs Brenda Headley highlighted the concerns about welfare reform, particularly with regard to the effect on rent arrears of Universal Credit. Claire Jenkins, Head of Customer Support and Collections, acknowledged the issue and highlighted the ongoing work with Six Town Housing, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Welfare Reform Board.

OSC.370 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

Councillor Walmsley, Cabinet Member for Resources and Regulation, and Claire Jenkins, Head of Customer Support and Collections, provided the Committee with an update on the welfare reforms introduced since 2013, including:

- Universal Credit
- Under Occupation Charge
- Council Tax Support
- Bury Support Fund

The report included details of the benefits and initiatives above along with the effects on Six Town Housing and the actions undertaken to mitigate against the effects of the reforms. Appended to the report were details of the main changes arising from the 2015 Welfare to Work Bill along with a number of case studies highlighting scenarios and agreed actions.

Questions and comments were invited from Members of the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- In response to a question from Councillor Daly, the Head of Customer Support and Collections explained that despite the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme the Authority still had rent arrears as the DHP's are not limited to Local Authority applications and can be applied to Housing Association and privately rented properties.
- Councillor Cassidy enquired about the steps being taken by Six Town Housing to identify those in receipt of Universal Credit. The Head of Customer Support and Collections reported that work was ongoing by Six Town Housing to contact and engage with tenants.
- In response to a question from Councillor Parnell concerning the private rented sector, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Regulation highlighted the virtues of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme but stressed that uptake is limited due to the voluntary nature of the scheme.
- With regard to the issue of high rents in the private sector, it was acknowledged that this was ultimately driven by supply and demand forces. The Cabinet Member highlighted the need for an affordable stock of houses for purchase to enable tenants to move out of the rental market.
- The Cabinet Member highlighted the potential impact of cuts to tax credits and stressed the importance of early intervention to assist in management of finances. The Cabinet Member referred to the pro active steps taken to mitigate against the effects of welfare reforms including the launch of a Debt Strategy.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

OSC.371 CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT – APRIL 2015-JUNE 2015

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing submitted a report informing Members of the Council's financial position for the period April 2015 to June 2015 and provided a projection of the estimated outturn at the end of 2015/2016.

Questions and comments were invited from Members of the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- The Chair, Councillor Gartside, noted the plan to appoint a Marketing Officer in respect of Civic Venues and acknowledged that the projected £130k overspend was an improving figure.
- Councillor Daly suggested that the Council could achieve increased capital receipts for the sale of land, if that land was sold with planning permission. It was suggested that the Council should have a development arm to maximise potential revenue. The Deputy Leader explained that he had requested Officers to examine potential brown field sites which may offer the opportunity to invest and build with a view to increasing the level of housing stock in the borough.
- Councillor Daly referred to new high quality leisure facilities that had been built in Kirklees Council which had the effect of increasing participation and regenerating local sites.

It was agreed:

That the report be noted.

COUNCILLOR I B GARTSIDE
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 8.25pm)