

**SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE – ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
COMMUNITIES**

Thursday, 13th July, 2023

Present:-

Councillor Flood (Chair)

Councillors Bagley
Dyke
Hollingworth

Councillors Jacobs
Ogle
Twigg
Innes (Cabinet
member for
Housing)

*Matters dealt with under the Delegation Scheme

**1 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

No declarations of interest were received.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Wheeldon and Niblock.

Councillor Yates was absent.

3 HOUSING UPDATE

The Service Director – Housing presented a report to the Committee detailing an update on Decent homes, voids, and repairs.

An overview of successes within Housing was given, including 100% performance on gas servicing, 93% positive customer feedback on the repairs service, significant investment in homes and neighbourhoods, The HRA Capital Programme approved by Cabinet in February 2023, Stock condition survey completed and an investment plan in development, all underlying issues have been reviewed enabling them to be addressed through the housing transformation plan, a new board, directorate plan

and performance monitoring regime, and strengthened tenant engagement.

An overview of challenges within Housing was given, including rents being capped meaning that the affordability of the HRA business plan is under significant pressure, increasing disrepair claims and damp/ mould issues, challenges with the IT system, customer complaints increasing, and still dealing with the impact of the pandemic on rents and voids.

It was noted that in terms of the Decent Homes Standard, which was a target set by Government in 2004, the Council has a 'decency' target for its stock of 100% and is currently at 99.7%. It was reported that 100% would be achieved during 2023. It was reported that the new standard and definitions from government are still awaited. In terms of next steps, all aspects of the latest Housing Capital Programme (re-roofing, re-pointing, improving insulation and the replacement of PVC-U Windows) have begun. An overall decarbonisation plan is being developed this year to ensure that the Council's Climate Change Strategy objectives are achieved by 2050. This includes solar panels, extensive insulation programmes, sheltered housing schemes and the installation of Worcester boilers which can convert to hydrogen if this proves to be a suitable alternative to gas. Most homes are currently performing at Band C, but some are below this and newer homes are higher.

It was reported that the area of Voids was a challenge. Significant transformation is required to the overall process including housing management, void repairs, and allocations. There are currently 285 'management' voids requiring remediation activity. A Voids Management Group has been established to identify and drive improvements and ensure accountability. There have been staff engagement sessions to discuss potential solutions, and these have yielded a huge amount of information. 10 of the voids have been outsourced to an external contractor with a view to increasing this number depending on the cost and performance outcomes to achieve 'quick wins'. There is also now improved communication between the Void Repairs Team and Gas and Electrical teams. Further housing management activity is planned i.e., termination visits. A monthly progress report to the Strategic Housing Board is planned and the relet standard is to be reviewed with tenant scrutiny members. A transformation project manager will also be recruited for a fixed term, to lead on all void improvement activity work.

It was reported that there were several current challenges with responsive repairs, with 1,866 overdue repairs. There are system issues, however, where many of these will have been completed but not closed off, and the number includes duplicated jobs and no access cases. The contributing factors towards the increasing number of repairs were reported as rising numbers of disrepair claims, damp and mould awareness, stock condition survey findings and tenancy visits by Housing Officers which have identified more repairs. Resources have now been concentrated in the areas of highest need. A new performance management framework has been implemented to help identify where changes are needed to drive up improvement. Increased employee engagement giving clear messages with regards to performance and budget constraints. The call centre staff are now based in the depot with responsive repairs to improve communication and increase efficiencies. In the future additional staff will be recruited including a damp and mould technical officer. Repair standards are to be clarified with tenants to manage expectations about which repairs the council is responsible for carrying out and timescales around this.

It was noted that the key responsibilities for the coming year were for the actions described for voids and repairs to be delivered, to progress with wider housing transformation activity, to plan further tenant scrutiny activity to co-design service improvements, to prepare for inspection from 2024 onwards, and to develop a new 30-year HRA business plan and Housing Strategy.

Members asked if some repairs are classed as multiple jobs due to the different aspects of the work entailed. The Service Director - Housing confirmed that this was the case and was part of the reason why repairs waiting to be completed was so high. Members asked that they be sent the full repairs policy so that they are aware of timescales for different works.

It was asked if the contractors completing voids properties had a time frame to work to. It was reported that a timeframe of two weeks would be ideal, but the pricing structure needed to be looked at and procurement involved. It was noted that an existing contractor was being used for these works as there was budget still available within their contract. When a larger number of voids is being looked at value for money will be a factor. Members asked if the Council was scrutinised nationally on their number of voids. It was reported that there is a government report which contains statistics around the void turn around time. When last assessed, the

Council's turnaround time was 94.7 days. Members asked that they are presented with reports at a future meeting to see how the Council compares nationally on voids, and how much rent and council tax is lost through voids and tenants being placed in temporary accommodation. Members asked whether the outsourcing of voids was going to be a long-term solution. It was reported that that this would only be used until the number had reached a more manageable level, around seventy.

Members asked whether when assessing voids works, we keep kitchens installed by the tenant if they are of a reasonable quality or replace them automatically. Officers subsequently clarified that when a property becomes void after a tenant's own kitchen installation, we will assess the condition. If it is in good working order and a reasonable condition, we will not remove it.

Members asked whether there was a grading system for repairs and voids. It was reported that the repairs are governed by policy. Voids are not currently categorised but there is a plan to introduce a grading system. Members queried whether some of the repairs are historic issues from properties where tenants moved in and there were a set of jobs that were still to be completed. Due to COVID some of these have been missed, therefore becoming repairs requiring attention.

It was noted that there are five more apprentices due to be recruited but more are wanted.

Members asked about the impact of the winter months on damp and mould. It was reported that all properties that were assessed as serious (within social housing) have been rectified. It is more challenging to tackle the private sector. Members discussed whether damp and mould was due to tenants drying clothes inside and not ventilating their properties. Solutions such as outside washing and drying systems (like in Staveley), and access to cleaning materials from the DCC Covid fund were suggested. It was reported that the current schedule of re-roofing and insulation works will help with these issues. Also, as Housing Officer visits have increased, they are able to spot the signs of potential problems early, therefore helping to reduce the severity of issues.

It was reported that no government guidance has yet been received around funding or staff for the decent homes standard for private sector. Members asked for an update on this when the Service Director – Housing returned.

Councillors Brock and Jacobs asked for the list of areas planned for the windows replacement scheme. The Service Director – Housing reported that the information would be forwarded onto them.

Members asked The Service Director – Housing to return in six months' time to present the Housing Strategy/ HRA Business Plan development, private sector decency and enforcement and an update on repairs and voids. Members also asked for an update on adaptations for disabled tenants at a future meeting. Members offered to circulate leaflets (DLC) if they were going to be of benefit of tenants.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

4 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Service Director – Corporate presented a report to the Committee detailing the work of the Council's overview and scrutiny committees.

The annual report, attached at Appendix 1 of the Director's report, set out the work, achievements and impact of the overview and scrutiny function in 2022/23 across all three scrutiny committees.

During the year different approaches to scrutiny engagement had been utilised including, reports, presentations with question and answer sessions, focus groups and working groups. This had enabled scrutiny to take an in depth look at specific policy areas, plans and data sets and provided a variety of opportunities for all scrutiny members to contribute to the discussions and add value and challenge to key activity.

Throughout 2022/23 the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum undertook both pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny, receiving reports and influencing decisions on areas including the Arvato and Kier Transition Plan, Cost of Living, Local Government Boundary Review Communications Plan, and the Skills Action plan refresh.

The new Scrutiny Select Committee model would help to take forward the engagement and pre-decision scrutiny approach and build upon the successes of 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

That the report be recommended to Council.

5 SKILLS ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Senior Economic Development Officer presented The Skills Action Plan Update. The plan aims to ensure that local people have the right skills to support progression into the labour market and benefit from future employment opportunities. We are currently navigating a large and complex landscape where we are reacting to regional and national policy changes that have polarised the importance of skills development and seen a shift towards local delivery. The newly established skills and employment partnership and plan will help ensure that the changes and opportunities arising from them are reflected positively at a local level. The skills action plan has been designed as a partnership plan, including activity that is a mix of Chesterfield Borough Council and activity led partners. It has been established with a private sector chair, which allows us to respond to the needs of employers, and the vice chair of Tricia Gilby.

The partnership will;

- Facilitate a stronger, more co-ordinated skills delivery in Chesterfield.
- Provide advice and guidance on strategic direction of skills and employment activity in Chesterfield.
- Provide Chesterfield with the ability to align with activity delivered under D2N2 People and Skills advisory Board and subsequent arrangements in respect of people and skills under the MCCA.
- Sits within the Chesterfield Community Wellbeing System Framework, alongside other strategic partnerships.
- The key aim of the system framework is to support and promote community wellbeing, create healthier, safer, and stronger communities.

The inclusion of the Skills & Employment Partnership within the System Framework will support existing joined up working across partners and agencies from public, private, voluntary sectors and facilitate discussion and action around common challenges and opportunities in respect of employment and skills (i.e., addressing barriers such as mental health).

To support the development of the skills action plan, a steering group was established in February 2023, consisting of core members of the partnership. The consultation was delivered through two rounds. The first round reached twenty-one distinct organisations, consisting of one-to-one interviews and workshops. This consultation informed priorities and action areas for a draft skills action plan that formed the basis of the second round of consultations, which was detailed discussions with delivery partners. The priorities and actions that have emerged are grounded in evidence and seek to meet both employer needs and equip local people with the skills they need to access and progress into work. The Skills Action Plan is ambitious delivering twelve action areas around six themes.

It was reported that the evidence from the consultation was clear in the need to address high levels of youth unemployment, build on existing good practice and Chesterfield's strong links with employers to deliver activity that better connects our young people to employers.

Over four years it will deliver;

- D2N2 Careers Hub will lead Careers Made in Chesterfield (CMiC) in a combination of activity by CBC and Pilot activity to enhance the programme funded via CEC.
- Will build on the successful pilot to deliver CMiC, scaling it up over four years to deliver activity across more sectors and more schools.
- CMiC Activity provide sector specific careers workshops and experience will be enhanced through Teachers Encounters programme and twilight careers engagement sessions that will seek to provide teachers with increased knowledge of each sector, learning and career pathways and raise awareness across more groups of the many Apprenticeships, technical and vocational pathways.
- Royal Hospital will continue to deliver outreach activity that will enable over 500 placements and engage over 100 school events.
- Chesterfield College will lead work to connect their students with schools to focus on healthy eating and living plans.

- DCC and DWP will continue to deliver the Youth Hub which will be enhanced and supported by wider Skills Action Plan activity including CMiC, UKSPF Work Readiness and Skills Brokerage Project.
- CBC will commission an evaluation of the Apprentice Town Initiative to assess the impact, lessons, and recommendations for future delivery.

It was reported that in Increasing Higher Level Skills, despite seeing significant improvement across all qualification levels, progress remains slower than nationally, particularly at level 4 and above. Chesterfield College and the University of Derby will deliver activity that seeks to increase engagement in higher level skills to deliver;

- 400 students on executive leadership programmes.
- 150 students on Health CPD.
- Support creation of five new business per year.
- 105 Higher/ degree level apprenticeships through Construction Skills Hub (from year three).
- Develop and strengthen teacher education pathways.
- Develop HTQs and Higher National Flex Units/ Professional Qualifications (Digital, Childcare, Health, Construction & Engineering).
- Increased Promotion of post 18 options.

In the area of Barriers to Employment and Widening the Workforce the consultation and evidence calls for more support to enable those further from the labour market to enter and remain in work. The DWP will lead on programmes to help more people gain and stay in work including support for the over 50s. CBC will lead on the delivery of UKSPF work

readiness and digital inclusion programme. Outputs over four years would include;

- 120 people accessing employability and basic skills support.
- Increased tenancy engagement.
- 960 sector-based work academy job outcomes.
- 12 recruitment events (3 per year).

Establishing Anchor Institutions creates an opportunity to collaborate with other large anchor organisations to further develop skills, employment, inclusion, and wider benefits locally. It will build on existing strong networks and help to identify and exploit opportunities to use procurement training and management of capital assets. The action for year one is to share best practice in executive workshops and agree priorities or action.

It was reported that the theme of Sector Specific and Future Skills will help the Council meet the skills needs and take advantage of employment and progression opportunities arising in specific sectors. The three action areas are to deliver the Construction Skills Hub, deliver DRIIVe, and deliver UKSPF Future Skills and Upskilling Programmes. The outputs over four years would be;

- 251 learning outcomes and 105 HE learners.
- Careers Insight Programmes (Construction & Rail).
- 1423sqm Rail Commercial, training, R & D space.
- Increased Investment in Green & Digital Skills.
- 60 people supported with digital/ greens skills to progress and upskill.
- 80 people engaged through FSDF.

The final area, of Skills Brokerage and Partnerships, underpins the plan and provides a means of connecting activity within the plan. It will establish the Chesterfield Skills & Employment Partnership and develop UKSPF Skills Brokerage Service therefore providing a more co-ordinated response to skills delivery, raise awareness of and increase visibility of skills funding and support in Chesterfield.

It was reported that Chesterfield Borough Council will monitor progress in the delivery of the Skills Action Plan and will provide regular progress updates to the Skills & Employment Partnership. Delivery activity and outputs will contribute to achieving improvements in youth unemployment rate and educational attainment. The Skills Action Plan will support and contribute towards the headline 2030 targets outlined in the Chesterfield Growth Strategy. Maintaining the 16-64 claimant count below the national average, and to narrow the 18-24 claimant count to within 1% point of the national average. It was noted that this is currently just over 2% so was an ambitious target.

Members discussed the areas from the report which they may want to scrutinise further. The area of 16-18 engagement and procurement were highlighted. The Officer was invited to return at the next meeting with an update.

RESOLVED –

That the report be presented at Cabinet in response to the Consultation from February 2023.

6 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS PROGRESS UPDATES

There were no Scrutiny Project Groups updates to be presented.

7 SCRUTINY MONITORING

This is a standard agenda item for the Committee to consider the scrutiny recommendations implementation monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED –

There was no scrutiny monitoring schedule to be noted.

8 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 August 2023 to 30 November 2023.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

9 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE - ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITIES**

The Committee Members discussed options for agreeing the next Scrutiny Work Programme for 2023/24. An action was noted that further work was to be carried out for Members to meet and agree which topics would be added to the Work Programme and what timescale this would cover.

RESOLVED –

That the action be noted.

10 **MINUTES**

This is a standard agenda item to present the Minutes of the meeting of the last Scrutiny Select Committee – Resilient Council.

RESOLVED –

There were no previous Minutes to be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.