

**COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 25th November, 2021

Present:-

Councillor L Collins (Chair)

Councillors Borrell
Dyke

Councillors Fordham

Rachel Appleyard, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Rachel O'Neil, Service Director – Digital, HR and Customer Services +

+ Attended for Minute No. 29

*Matters dealt with under the Delegation Scheme

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

No declarations of interest were received.

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Blakemore, Hollingworth and Kellman.

24 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS PROGRESS UPDATES

The Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer gave an update on the progress of the Scrutiny Project Group (SPG) on the Visitor Economy Strategy. The SPG had met twice since the last Committee meeting. On 8 November, the SPG met with the consultants and key officers to be briefed on the draft strategy document which was undergoing public consultation. The SPG then met on 22 November to review the core proposition and the seven priorities in the strategy in order to agree a written response to the consultation by the beginning of December.

The SPG were aiming to bring their final report and recommendations to the next meeting of the Committee on 3 February, 2022 to coincide with

the timeline for the consideration of the Visitor Economy Strategy by Full Council on 23 February, 2022.

Members discussed the Air Quality Scrutiny Project Group which had been temporarily put on hold due to the pandemic and endorsed the plan to hold a final meeting of the SPG with the key officers in order to formally close the project. It was noted that this Scrutiny Project Group reports to the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

25 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Committee considered the scrutiny recommendations implementation monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED –

That the scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

26 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December, 2021 to 31 March, 2022.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

27 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the items on its work programme for 2021/22. Members discussed the item on crime and disorder scheduled for the meeting in March, 2022 and requested that the police be invited to send a representative to this meeting.

Members discussed the upcoming Lighting Strategy item which would take the form of a scrutiny project group, following an initial briefing from officers. There was also a request to include the Stephenson Memorial

Hall project on the work programme to support the delivery of the project; it was explained that this could be considered as part of the work programme setting process for 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

1. That the work programme be noted.
2. That the police be invited to send a representative to the meeting on 31 March, 2022.

28 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee held on 16 September, 2021 were presented.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes be approved as a correct record and by signed by the Chair.

29 **CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND CUSTOMERS - IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The Service Director – Digital, HR and Customer Services presented a progress report on the implementation of Universal Credit in Chesterfield borough and the latest position regarding the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Cabinet Member for Business Transformation and Customer was unable to attend and provided a written note that was circulated to members of the Committee.

The Universal Credit system had been complex to embed however the staff involved had coped well with all the changes. Relationships had been developed with Job Centre+ and budgeting support had been transferred to voluntary sector organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

In October, 2021 the Government removed the £20 uplift; the impact of this on residents was still emerging however the number of enquiries about access to housing support fund had increased and it had also

placed additional administrative burdens on the team due to the need to re-calculate the Council Tax Support benefit.

The team were now working with Derbyshire County Council to develop the Household Support Grant scheme which aimed to provide further additional support to residents in need over the winter period. In addition, opportunities to maximise the discretionary housing support fund were being explored to supplement areas where funding had been cut.

Members enquired about the process for moving claimants onto management payments and were advised that there was an additional burden due to the administrative process which increased costs for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Service Director explained that a different approach to supporting those in rent arrears was needed, targeting those with smaller arrears where there was more chance of making a difference. Members were also advised that behavioural analytics would be used as part of a pilot exercise to get a better outcome for those in rent arrears.

Members asked about how they could best support residents who they know are falling into rent arrears. The advice from the Service Director was to notify the team; the more intelligence they had, the better they could tailor their response. A new digital platform, Salesforce, was being introduced that would pull together all information about a person, in compliance with data protection, to enable whichever advisor they are dealing with to understand their situation fully.

A need to cross-skill staff had been identified as revenues, benefits and housing were all separate teams. A restructure was under development to put those relationships and skills in place which would be formally consulted on with staff in January, 2022 before consideration by the Joint Cabinet and Employment and General Committee in February, 2022.

In response to questions, Members were advised that discretionary housing payments were provided to people who needed extra help with their housing costs and were awarded depending on needs. The payments were often used to support those with arrears in order to prevent homelessness.

Members discussed whether the foodbank network could be used as part of the intelligence gathering and acknowledged that foodbanks relied on volunteers who may not have the time and resources to undertake this

role, however there may be an opportunity for larger organisations such as the Trussell Trust to engage more with the council.

The Chair and Members thanked the Service Director for providing the update and asked for the thanks of the Committee to be passed to the staff involved for all their work. Members also commended the positive reduction in arrears that had been achieved through managed payments. The Chair noted that the Committee's remit and recommendations for the monitoring of Universal Credit had now been achieved and proposed to remove the item from the Committee's work programme and monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED –

1. That the work of the officers involved in the implementation of Universal Credit be supported and that the thanks of the Committee be passed on to the team.
2. That the Committee is satisfied with the progress made towards the implementation of Universal Credit against the recommendations included on the monitoring schedule and therefore resolves that the work on this scrutiny review area is complete, and that this item be removed from the monitoring schedule and work programme.
3. That it be noted that the Committee may consider as part of its future work programme any significant changes or developments with regard to Universal Credit that impact on Chesterfield residents.