



COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Meeting: Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at 6.30 pm in a Virtual meeting

Present: Councillor R Quinn (Chair)

Councillors J Benzer, J Collins, S De Pee, S Gardner, L Grooby, P Hacking, M Hall, Inman, D Lomax, P Mackie and K Sizeland

In Attendance: Councillor(s) G Claff, D Elliott-Starkey, D Greenhalgh, A McKeown and J Todd

24/7 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair confirmed that the meeting was being broadcast live to the internet via the Council's website and was capable of repeated viewing. The images and sound recording may be used for training purposes within the Council. All were asked to keep to the speaking guidelines which were outlined. Any views expressed by any speaker in the meeting are the speaker's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of High Peak Borough Council.

24/8 TO RECEIVE DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST ON ANY MATTERS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda Item 2)

None

24/9 ANY MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE UNDER THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE

(Agenda Item 3)

None

24/10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(Agenda Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

24/11 SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda Item 5)

It was agreed that regular updates on the following would be added to the work programme:

- Private rented housing
- Social Housing Regulation Act

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the above, the Select Committee Work Programme be noted.

24/12 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION ACT UPDATE (PRESENTATION)

(Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Housing Services made a presentation to the committee which provided an update on progress with the implementation of the requirements within the Government's White Paper, 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents', which is changing the way that social housing landlords engage with their tenants to ensure that in future, tenants have a real say in their homes and services are managed. (A copy of the presentation has been circulated).

The Charter for social housing sets out seven steps every social housing resident should be able to expect, and a new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures has been developed and consulted on and published by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), and all social housing landlords are required to start collecting tenant satisfaction data from 1 April 2023. The expectations of the Regulator were set out, including the imposition of unlimited fines for non-compliance.

Information was provided around the 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures, which cover 5 themes namely, keeping properties in good repair, maintaining building safety, respectful and helpful engagement, effective handling of complaints and responsible neighbourhood management. The RSH was undertaking consultation on new consumer standards, the details of the consultation undertaken locally were set out and it was anticipated that a final response would be made by 12 October, ahead of the revised consumer standards coming into force by April 2024.

A landlord survey has been undertaken, the results of which will be used as part of initial tenant engagement discussions.

All social landlords are now required to capture and report back to the Regulator on a range of tenant satisfaction measure via surveys sent directly to tenants, and data from the survey will feed into the newly established tenant engagement group to drive improvements into High Peak's future strategic and operational planning. The first survey was sent out in April 2023 and information was provided around the response rate and future plans for the delivery of the survey, which will be outsourced in future.

TPAS had also done a review which led to the publication of key TPAS recommendations linked to TPAS national standards. Members were also informed around the HPBC's tenant engagement framework, which is a work in progress, future next steps and risks.

In terms of tenant engagement, it was noted that of the responses received, females were well represented as well as the 60+ age group. A suite of different methods including the use of social media will be used to encourage tenants, including those harder to reach, to engage in the process. Members could assist in this process by encouraging tenants to get involve via the email address of engagement@highpeak.gov.uk Targeted contact could also be made with tenants where appropriate to ensure as wide a range of involvement as possible.

Regarding private landlords, reference was made to the statutory powers of the council in respect of serving improvement notices for example. Additional members of staff have just been recruited to help drive up standards in Supported Housing as well as the private landlord offer, and the committee will receive updates in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received with thanks.

24/13 LEISURE OPERATING MODEL - ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUP
(Agenda Item 7)

The Committee considered proposals for the re-establishment of a working group to consider the future operations model for the Council's Leisure Centre. The working group would be politically balanced and operate jointly with SMDC.

In response to a query, the Executive Director and Monitoring Officer set out the governance and scrutiny arrangements for teckal companies.

RESOLVED:

That a joint working group be established with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to scrutinise proposals for the leisure operations model as detailed in paragraphs 6.3 and 6.4 of the report.

24/14 ANY QUESTIONS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER (DEMOCRATIC SERVICES TO BE ADVISED OF ANY QUESTIONS AT LEAST 4 DAYS PRIOR TO THE MEETING)
(Agenda Item 8)

1. Question from Councillor Sizeland:

Does the council have a plan to address the continuing issues with gas/plumbing maintenance and repairs by Liberty Norse?

Response from the Cllr McKeown Leader of the Council:

Liberty's performance has varied throughout the contract term, resulting in periods of significant tenant complaints, dissatisfaction, and increased workload for the Compliance Team when Liberty have failed to deliver.

The poor performance experienced over the previous autumn/winter period was reported to the CEO of Liberty in early March, which focused national managerial attention on the performance of Liberty's local service delivery.

Following this formal complaint, a service review was undertaken, and an improvement plan was prepared and implemented. This has seen significant investment in the number of local engineers, increasing from 2 to 4. Liberty has also improved the training and management of their administrative staff at their Knowsley office responsible for the service delivery of the HPBC account.

They have also appointed a dedicated Commercial HVAC Team Leader to improve performance across the general fund portfolio. In addition, the weekly meeting between Alliance Norse and Liberty has also been reinstated to ensure that service issues are communicated between all parties, allowing opportunity for timely resolution and improved communications to tenants, avoiding the need for escalation. These actions and interventions have significantly improved Liberty's performance and reduced the number of complaints received.

However, it is noted that this has been over the spring/summer period when heating issues are not at their peak.

It is also vital to acknowledge that whilst Liberty's performance has been mixed when delivering the reactive element of the contract, Liberty has maintained 100% gas compliance of all HPBC housing units throughout the 9-year contract term. The AN Compliance Team will continue to manage the Liberty contract until 31st March 2024, when the contract ends.

Alliance Norse and Norse Group procurement are currently working on the new HVAC and Gas Servicing tender that will be published in early October. The new contract will include additional terms and conditions holding the service provider to account, aimed at improving the overall performance and execution of the HVAC and gas maintenance contract.

2. Question from Councillor Elliott-Starkey:

Please can the committee advise why there has been a decrease in the standard of community pride over the last few months; parks such as Howard park in Dinting have been neglected regarding grass cutting. In addition, the street cleaning and weeding has been substandard, and I would like to urge this be looked into as a matter of urgency.

Response from the Cllr Greenhalgh Deputy Leader of the Council:

The development our Council's first ever Parks Strategy demonstrates our commitment to actively encourage community engagement and involvement in the protection, maintenance, development and positive environmental impacts of our parks. Both politically and at officer level, we are continuing to build upon and strengthen the relationship we have with our local communities who are keen to work in partnership to ensure that our parks and open spaces are well looked after.

Howard Park, as a formal park, has a specific site management plan which sets out the priorities for the park over a 10 year period.

We have supported the longstanding Friends of Howard Park over many years. Cllr Rob Baker as Assistant Executive Member, officers and I have been involved in the group's refresh and reinvigoration in recent months. We will continue to work co-operatively with the Friends on improvements to the park, as well as with discussions around funding opportunities to enhance the play facilities and other park infrastructure.

In terms of grass cutting, Alliance Environmental Services (AES) have provided a service response to explain that the parks and open spaces have been very wet over the past few months which has provided challenges for grass cutting, including Howard Park. It has caused delays with the regular mowing regimes and this can be perceived by some as a decrease in the maintenance standards of our parks. We have also been informed of performance issues with mowing equipment, these have been referred back to the manufacturers and suppliers for discussion over winter. The Council has a commitment that AES will ensure that all the equipment is in a suitable condition and fit for purpose in readiness for the new season in April.

Likewise with street cleaning, AES have reported ongoing issues for the past 12 months in terms of obtaining parts for the fleet of pavement sweepers that operate across the whole of the High Peak. The procurement process for replacing this equipment has started and new sweepers will be in place by the end of March 2024. In the meantime, if Ward Councillors have areas of concern, if these could be reported to the Service Commissioning Team or The Executive and we will endeavour to direct resources to these locations.

Councillor Elliott-Starkey asked a supplementary question around when services would be reviewed and benchmarking. The Executive Councillor advised that in respect of grass cutting, action was being taken to seek to improve the equipment used and it was anticipated that this would lead to an improvement by next Spring. The Executive Councillor for Climate Change and the Environment, made reference to a pilot being undertaken by DCC around rural verges which may lead to a change in policy. Improvements to parks was on-going, including working with local groups such as the Friends of Howard Park. In response to a further query around street cleaning, members were requested to forward details of specific concerns to AES.

The meeting concluded at 8 pm

CHAIR