

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 3 September 2008.

PRESENT

Dr. M. O'Callaghan CC (in the Chair)

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mr. D. R. Bown CC
Mr. R. Fraser CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mr. G. A. Hart CC

Mr. D. W. Houseman CC
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
Mr. J. S. Moore CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. C. A. Stanley CC

By Invitation

Mrs J A Dickinson – Chairman of the Review Panel – Office Accommodation Strategy, for minute number 133.

128. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2008 were taken as read, confirmed and signed, subject to paragraph (v) of the preamble to minute 120 being amended to read as follows:

“v) The further work required outlined in paragraph 18 of the report would be particularly challenging. Part of this process would involve conducting a 'due diligence' exercise including financial aspects; this needed to be undertaken to ensure that an independent and expert view was obtained;”

129. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

130. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

131. Urgent Items.

The Chairman indicated that he would wish to raise as an urgent item the issue of inviting the Chief Constable to a future meeting of the Commission.

132. Declarations of Interest.

Messrs Boulter, Lewis and O'Callaghan declared personal non prejudicial interests as members of District Councils in relation to the Regional Plan.

Mr Shepherd declared a personal non prejudicial interest as member of Charnwood Borough Council and the Regional Assembly in relation to the Regional Plan.

Mr Galton and Mr Hart declared personal non prejudicial interests as members of Harborough District Council in relation to the Regional Plan. They also indicated that they had fettered their discretion in relation to the proposals for an eco-town in Leicestershire and as such would withdraw from the meeting if the discussions on the Regional Plan were to include a discussion on eco towns.

133. Office Accommodation Strategy.

The Commission considered a report of its Review Panel set up to consider the current utilisation of office accommodation within the Authority and make suggestions that would inform the development of a Corporate Office Accommodation Strategy. A copy of the report marked 'A' is filed with these minutes.

Mrs Dickinson, the Chairman of the Panel attended the meeting. In introducing the report she drew attention to the following points:-

- The way in which work was undertaken had changed fundamentally in the last decade and these changes continue. Advances in ICT had enabled organisations to streamline and physically disperse their business processes. Staff were no longer tied to a single location or constrained by standard working hours. Increasingly staff wanted flexibility to choose the most appropriate place and time to do their work in order to create a better work-life balance. The County Council needed to change if it was to become an employer of choice.
- The findings of the Panel pointed to the need for the Council to review its office accommodation portfolio with the aim of improving the working environment (for both staff and customers) achieve efficiencies (fewer buildings which were more economic to run) and reduce its carbon footprint.
- The Panel report emphasised that developing an Office Accommodation Strategy was not simply about buildings. To be successful it needed support from the highest levels within the Authority including elected members. It also required close working between Human Resources, ICT Services, Property Services and senior departmental managers to implement the technological and cultural changes necessary.

In reply to questions, the Commission was advised that in developing the Strategy, officers would seek to learn lessons from Melton Borough Council in managing staff, who had to be dispersed from a central location as a result of

the recent fire which had destroyed its offices. The staff in the Highways and Transportation Department would also be surveyed to get a better understanding of the issues facing them as a result of moving out of an office base and making increasing use of 'touch-down' points.

On the issue of storage, the Commission was advised that a separate review was underway to consider how this could be tackled. Currently some 10-15% of office accommodation was taken up by storage.

RESOLVED

- a) That the findings of the Review Panel on Office Accommodation be endorsed and that officers be asked to have regard to these in developing the County Council's Corporate Office Accommodation Strategy.
- b) That a further report be submitted in twelve months' time on progress in developing and implementing the Strategy.
- c) That the members of the Panel be thanked for their work.

134. Regional Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning proposed changes to the draft Regional Plan and the proposed comments to be submitted thereon from the County Council. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions the Commission was advised as follows:-

- (i) The reason for requesting that the policy guidance should ensure that Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) were provided in significant blocks of development was to ensure that developer contribution could be obtained to offset the associated infrastructure costs of development such as roads, schools surgeries etc;
- (ii) The Structure Plan process had allocated sufficient land for development in previous years but the build rate was below projected levels. This problem would be exacerbated as a result of the 'credit crunch';
- (iii) There appeared to be no obvious rationale for the 'front-loading' of the number of houses to be built in certain district areas and in the present economic climate this would be impractical;
- (iv) The potential for some joint working between the County Council and District Councils in developing LDFs would be explored.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission supports the proposed response to the draft Regional Plan subject to:-

- a) The addition at paragraph 24 of an acknowledgement of the need for local decision making in planning housing provision in LDFs;
- b) It being restated that the key policy underpinning the Plan is that housing distribution is demand led and not driven by potential developer contributions for infrastructure projects.

135. Performance Report for the First Quarter.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning performance information at the end of the first quarter of 2008/09 in relation to the CPA Action Plan, LAA1 Reward targets and delivery of the Medium Term Corporate Strategy. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the information now provided be noted and that the following areas of underperformance be drawn to the attention of the relevant overview and scrutiny committees:-

Adult Social Care and Health

LAA1 Targets 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 – Number of Older People claiming Attendance Allowances, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Children and Young People's Service

MTCS Commitment – to provide good quality local placements for looked after children.

136. Review of Scrutiny and Proposed Actions.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the findings of the recent review of scrutiny arrangements within the Council and the response thereto. A copy of the report marked 'D' is filed with these minutes.

Mr Lewis informed the Commission of statements made by two members of the Review Panel on Grass Cutting and raised concerns that this was a breach of the understanding that proceedings of such Panels were private until such time as the final report was issued. He was concerned that this could have implications for the future conduct of review panels particularly where companies or contractors were invited to provide evidence which may be commercially confidential.

The Chairman concurred with the concerns now expressed and asked that all Scrutiny Review panel members be reminded of the need to respect confidentiality to ensure that the work of panels was not compromised.

RESOLVED:

That the actions taken and proposed in response to the findings of the review of scrutiny arrangements in Leicestershire be noted.

137. Date of Next Meeting.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the next meeting of the Commission be held at 2.00pm on Wednesday 5th November 2008; and
- b) That arrangements be made for a workshop to be held at 11.00am on Wednesday 5th November 2008 to consider the budget and service pressures on the Chief Executive and Resources Departments.

138. Urgent Item - Meeting with the Police.

The Commission considered this matter, the Chairman having decided it was of an urgent nature, in view of the need to agree a way forward and to consider inviting the Chief Constable to attend the next meeting of the Commission.

The Chairman reported that the Chief Constable had written to inform him and the Spokesmen of the Commission that due to other commitments he was unable to attend a planned Scrutiny Commission meeting on 10th September. The Chief Constable had indicated in his letter that he had however accepted an invitation to make a presentation on policing issues to all members of the Council on 6th October.

The Chairman felt it was still important that the Chief Constable should attend, if possible, the next meeting of the Commission on 5th November 2008. The Chairman and Spokesmen of the Commission would meet following the presentation on 6th October to identify the specific issues the Chief Constable would be asked to address at the Scrutiny Commission meeting.

RESOLVED:

That a letter be sent to the Chief Constable inviting him to the next meeting of the Commission on 5th November.

2.00 pm - 3.25 pm
03 September 2008

CHAIRMAN