

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 9 December 2009.

PRESENT

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (in the Chair)

Mr. A. D. Bailey CC	Mr. Max Hunt CC
Mr. R. Blunt CC	Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
Mr. G. A. Boulter CC	Mrs. R. Page CC
Mrs. R. Camamile CC	Mrs. P. Posnett CC
Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC	Mrs. J. Richards CC
Dr. R. K. A Feltham CC	Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

28. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2009 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

29. Question Time.

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

30. 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).

31. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

32. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following members each declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in respect of items 7 and 8 as members of district/borough councils (Minutes 34 and 35 refer):

Mr. A. D. Bailey CC
Mr. R. Blunt CC
Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC

Mr. Max Hunt CC
 Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
 Mrs. J. Richards CC
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

The Chairman and Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC also each declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in respect of the item 8 - 'The East Midlands Regional Plan: Partial Review – Section 4(4) Advice to the East Midlands Regional Assembly' as members of CASCET, a pressure group that campaigned against the establishment of an Eco-Town in Stoughton (Minute 35 refers).

33. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

34. Petition: Shepshed Volunteer Centre - Request for the Continued £10,000 Funding from Leicestershire County Council.

A petition submitted by Mrs. C. M. Radford CC in her capacity as local member for Shepshed and as a representative of the Town Council signed by 532 local residents was presented to the Commission in the following terms:

“We the undersigned ask that Voluntary Action Leicester and Voluntary Action Charnwood secure more funding to return the Shepshed Volunteer Centre to its previous opening hours. Also, that the lease on the current premises is renewed in 2010 when it comes up for renewal.”

The Chief Executive advised that, as Mrs. Radford was unable to attend the meeting to present the petition herself, he would try to encapsulate her views on the matter. In this regard, the following points were noted about the Volunteer Centre:

- It was an important community resource that had recently suffered a loss in opening hours from 20 hours per week to eight;
- It offered a number of community support schemes, such as gardening services for those unable to maintain their gardens through ill-health or disability and a personalised transport service for those unable to cope with existing transport services;
- Increased funding was required in order that it could continue to provide its major projects to enable vulnerable people to remain active in the community.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive in response to the petition, alongside supporting letters and documentation from Mrs. Radford. A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- The County Council had provided the Shepshed Volunteer Centre (SVC) with a one-off £10,000 parachute payment due to the withdrawal of contracts for services;

- The SVC was part of Voluntary Action Charnwood (VAC) which received £70k as core funding and other funding to deliver specific services. How VAC used its funding to maintain opening hours in Shepshed as well as John Storer House in Loughborough was therefore relevant;
- Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) had been contracted on behalf of the County Council and other public partners from 1 April 2009 to act as a single Countywide Infrastructure Organisation to provide support to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Leicestershire and to increase the Sector's influence and capacity. It therefore fell within VAL's remit to support the SVC in locating funding and it had already met with SVC and agreed to assist in this regard.

As the contract was still in its infancy, members felt that VAL should be given time to fully assess the support arrangements for the voluntary sector before precedents were set in regard to funding allocations for volunteer centres. It was further felt that, as the first year performance of the new arrangements was due to be reviewed by the Cabinet, it would be important that VAL's overall performance was scrutinised.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That it be noted that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire has already agreed to assist the SVC to provide additional funding;
- (b) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Commission concerning VAL's first year of operation in delivering support services to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

35. East Midlands Regional Plan: Partial Review - Section 4(4) Advice to the East Midlands Regional Assembly.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the County Council's formal advice on the Partial Review of the East Midlands Regional Plan as Section 4(4) Authority. A copy of the report marked 'C' is filed with these minutes.

The Commission was advised that, arising from representations made by the Regional Assembly to Government, a delay or abandonment of the review of the housing aspects of the Regional Plan was now being considered. As any review would only affect housing projections after 2021, it was not felt necessary to carry out a review at this time and it would be essential that the Authority be given the necessary time to assess fully consultation responses and other comparative data and evidence to inform any review at a later stage.

In the discussion, members commented that the advice that new housing development should be 'as low carbon as possible' was vague. The view was expressed that, if the Government's CO₂ targets were to be met and perhaps exceeded to ensure that the environment was safeguarded for future generations, more challenging targets should be set. Whilst recognising that this would increase costs and perhaps housing prices in the short term, it could

avoid costly retro-fitting in the future. Higher environmental standards in new build houses would also reduce the recovery costs for householders.

It was moved by the Chairman, seconded and carried:-

“That the Cabinet be advised that the Commission:-

- (i) supports the deferral of the review of the housing aspects of the Regional Plan;
- (ii) notes that sufficient evidence is not currently available to enable the Council to undertake a thorough transport assessment of the Partial Review options (as outlined in paragraph 8 of Appendix 5) and that this evidence could not be ascertained until there was greater clarity of housing figures for the County;
- (iii) has concerns about the lack of ambition in the Government’s proposal for housing development to be zero carbon from 2016 (as outlined in paragraph 4 of Appendix 6) and would urge the Cabinet to seek further advice in order to establish whether it was feasible to recommend that this date be brought forward and for focused and specific interim energy efficiency targets for developers to be set.”

36. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 3 February 2010 at 2.00pm, prior to a presentation being delivered on the non-economic work of the Community Planning Branch at 3.45pm.

2.00 pm - 3.15 pm
09 December 2009

CHAIRMAN