

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 3 March 2010.

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

47. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2010 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

48. Question Time.

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

49. 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).

50. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

51. 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 8 and 9 as members of district/borough councils (Minutes 54 and 55 refer):

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

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

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

53. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

54. Comprehensive Area Assessment - Results 2009 and Improvement Action Plan.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the outcomes of the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). A copy of the report, marked 'B', together with an addendum to the appendix is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that Leicestershire was of the top scoring authorities in the country in the CAA. The appended Assessment Improvement Plan document was the result of consultation with key partners and was presented to the Commission for its views, which would then be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 9 March.

It was reported that the Budget and Performance Monitoring Scrutiny Panel would be kept informed on a quarterly basis of progress against those actions which fell within the remit of the Local Area Agreement.

Arising from discussion of the Improvement Plan, the following points were noted:

1. "Improved Life Chance for Vulnerable People and Places"

- Concern was expressed that settled communities should be given adequate consideration in regard to the location of gypsy and traveller sites via the planning process and that this was a cause of tension. Social and cultural issues would need to be addressed in order that the process was fair to settled communities;

2. "Stronger More Cohesive Communities"

- Firmer actions were required if cohesion was to be achieved in North West Leicestershire. It was stressed that the settlements within the district were somewhat removed from the rest of the County and this factor coupled with the historically insular nature of mining communities, meant that these issues would therefore be more challenging to address. Officers agreed to look again at the proposed actions;

- There was a perception amongst the public that their views were not taken account of in the decision-making process. The Council would need to look critically at the way in which it engaged with the public and provide more feedback on the reasoning behind why decisions had been made;
- Concern was expressed in regard to a lack of volunteers. It was suggested that increasing regulation and bureaucracy from central government had to a certain extent led to increased cynicism amongst the public and had stifled growth in this area;

### 3. A Safe and Attractive Place to Live and Work

- The Commission noted the difficulties experienced in the assessment process on this issue in relation to housing and supported the proposed actions, particularly in relation to ensuring an increase in affordable housing;

### 4. "A More Effective Response to Climate Change"

- Flooding was not given adequate profile in the document. Going forward, flooding was likely to be a key issue and would require increasing district and parish engagement;

### 5. "A Prosperous, Innovative and Dynamic Community"

- Comments were expressed that the aim to increase the number of people with a learning disability who have access to paid employment was not consistent with the budget recently set by the County Council, which included a cut in contribution to the 'Breaking the Barriers' team. It was however acknowledged that some LAA target rewards could support delivery in this area in the future though it was clear that financial risk management would be required to be built into the document. It was considered that timescales should be built into the Improvement Plan on this issue.

#### RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments of the Commission be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9 March;
- (b) That the Commissioners be asked to give consideration to the social and cultural implications of travellers' and gypsy sites, with a view to the Commission receiving a report on the matter.

55. Draft Leicester & Leicestershire Economic Assessment and Economic Strategy.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the Draft Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Assessment and Economic Strategy. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that the documents were presented to the Commission for its views, which would then be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 9 March, prior to approval at the Leicester and Leicestershire Leadership Board. It was highlighted that the documents served as summaries of significantly larger and more comprehensive documents and therefore not all of the information could be included for the Commission's consideration. It was suggested that any views the Commission had be noted and submitted to the Cabinet on this basis.

Arising from discussion, the following comments on the Assessment and Strategy were noted:

- Though ambitious, the stated vision of the Strategy that partners 'will provide enough jobs for people' was felt to be overambitious in the current economic climate;
- Graduate retention was indicated as 'low', however it was felt that more detail should be provided to establish whether a good number of graduates were likely to look outside of the County and City for employment opportunities, despite efforts to make the area an attractive place to live and work. It was suggested that the issue of graduate retention be reassessed from a regional perspective;
- Universities and colleges had been perceived as not being sufficiently business focused and this had an effect on the work readiness of graduates. It was hoped that through increased engagement with the business sector, graduates would be provided with greater opportunity for employment in the area;
- Following the recent announcement that major local employer AztraZeneca was to cut its workforce by 1,200 jobs, it was clear that the documents would need to be robust to take account of the changing financial picture. Though the County was home to some major national brands, there was a risk that in the current economic climate others would also not endure. Reference to specific companies and brands should therefore be limited. A section that took account of financial risk and resilience was felt to therefore be of crucial importance;
- The demography section did not take adequate account of the ageing population and the effect this would have on the labour force.
- The documents appeared urban centred and lacked focus on rural areas, which also offered considerable employment land and some comments were made about the importance of warehousing to the local economy;

- The transport section did not give sufficient detail on congestion in the greater Leicester area and the impact this would have on competitiveness and efficiency of business in the sub-region as a whole;
- Some concern was expressed that the impact of gypsy and traveller sites and their subsequent effect on housing infrastructure was not currently included in the Assessment.
- The desire for increased access to greenspace was admirable, however budget constraints on services such as The Stepping Stones Project, a partnership that enlisted volunteers to improve greenspace and increase access to green infrastructure, would make this a challenging objective.

RESOLVED:

That the views of the Commission be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 9 March.

56. Outcome of 'Light Touch' Review of the Council's Arts Collection.

The Commission considered a Final Report by Messrs Hunt and Lewis concerning the 'Light Touch' Review of the Council's Arts Collection. A copy of the report, marked 'D', together with a supplementary report, marked 'DD', is filed with these minutes.

Members noted the proposed plan of action for works held at Beaumanor Hall as outlined in the appendix to the supplementary report and, arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was important to ascertain whether there were any restrictions relating to particular works of art, which would need to be observed as part of the work in cataloguing and displaying the collection;
- Works would be looked at from a 'fit-for-purpose' point of view; a decision would then need to be made on the retention or otherwise of any pieces of work which were not considered to be suitable for public display or display in schools;
- Some works which were damaged would have to be assessed to ascertain whether they were worthy of restoration;
- The staging process did not give any indication of timescales for the project. Though timescales would only be indicative due to the complex nature of the work, it was acknowledged that it was important to set a provisional timetable.

The current intention was that revenue from the sale of any works would be reinvested in the collection. The outcome of the review would be reported to the Cabinet. The Commission would have the opportunity to comment on any proposals to be presented to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Commission expresses its gratitude to Mr. Hunt and Mr. Lewis for the work undertaken on this review;
- (b) That the outcome of the deliberations of the Scrutiny Commissioners be noted;
- (c) That, subject to the addition of timescales being added, the proposed action plan as appended to the supplementary report be agreed for implementation and be circulated to members;
- (d) That it be noted that there would be a further report to the Cabinet on the matter.

57. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 21 April 2010 at 2.00pm.

2.00 pm - 4.10 pm  
03 March 2010

CHAIRMAN