

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 14 July 2010.

PRESENT

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

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

In Attendance:

Mr. Nick Carter, Chairman -	Prospect Leicestershire
Mr. David Hughes, CEO -	Prospect Leicestershire

(For Minute 95)

Mr. Kevan Liles, CEO -	Voluntary Action LeicesterShire
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(For Minute 96)

88. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2010 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

89. Question Time.

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

90. 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).

91. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

92. 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, non-prejudicial interest in respect of items 8, 9, and 10 as members of district/borough councils (Minutes 95, 96 and 97 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. D. Jennings CC  
 Mr. G. Jones CC  
 Mr. P. G. Lewis CC  
 Mrs. P. Posnett CC  
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

93. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

94. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

95. Review of Prospect Leicestershire Performance.

The Commission considered a performance report concerning the past year in operation of Prospect Leicestershire (PLS), the new economic development company charged with delivering physical regeneration and growth, business innovation and support and inward investment across Leicester and Leicestershire. A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed David Hughes, Chief Executive and Nick Carter, Executive Chairman of PLS to the meeting. Prior to questioning, a three minute promotional film was screened which the company had produced for the purpose of briefing potential investors.

In response to questions from members, Mr. Hughes and Mr. Carter advised the Commission as follows:-

- PLS had experienced a challenging first year in operation, particularly given the current economic climate. The recession and lack of availability of capital funding was an ongoing concern, though it had managed to secure public funding for three major projects in the City and County;

- The disparate nature of the County meant that it was more challenging to present a meaningful case to investors. Unlike other counties/cities, there was not one central reason for investing in Leicestershire, but rather a series of advantages which collectively were likely to attract interest from the private sector;
- PLS had received feedback from Government that the mature partnerships it had formed with the City and County Council and other bodies was viewed as a template for other authorities to follow;
- It had been successful in bringing together the three universities for productive talks on how best they could support the local economy. A 'Universities Partnership' had now been created and it was felt that this was 'a first' and, therefore, a significant achievement;
- A bid for funding had been submitted at the end of June to enable better support for graduates wishing to move into business. This was intended to retain and attract high quality graduates to the County and promote small business developments;
- Through the Commissioning Group, under the Leadership Board, a plan was being prepared which would identify where PLS should focus its delivery activity to help further support the local economy. Relationships had been developed with the district councils and support was now being provided to them, though in some cases this had yet to lead to the allocation of funding;

Arising from questioning from members, the following points were noted:-

- Though the promotional video had not included much by way of content specific to the County, it was stressed that it was not a stand alone entity and required support from PLS officers when presented to investors in order that the full breadth of opportunities in the area could be adequately presented;
- Going forward, there would be significant challenges faced by the company in respect of funding. Though it was felt that there was a possibility that there would remain a very limited pot of funding available from Government, efficiencies within the company would need to be identified to ensure it was equipped to respond to the challenges it faced in the future;
- The abolition of emda was viewed as an opportunity in as much as it was regarded a setback. PLS now hoped to be in a better position to create alliances with neighbouring cities and counties and other LEPs outside the existing sub-regional area;
- Despite the recession, it was felt that there remained a reasonable level of resilience within the private sector and that constructive discussions on projects would continue;

- The identification of quality sites for office space and industries such as manufacturing was an ongoing challenge, particularly land in close proximity to Leicester Station. It was felt that it was important that redundant land be released for redevelopment for instance via compulsory purchase order;
- Building on the work carried out in respect of the Total Place project, it was hoped that alliances on the shared use of property could be created across the public sector. The shared use of call centres was viewed as a possible area in which efficiency opportunities could be identified;
- The case for Growth Point funding bids for any existing projects would need to be re-emphasised to the Coalition Government in order that it could be satisfied that they fit within its priorities and PLS was confident that it would be successful in this respect;
- The possibility that LeicesterShire Promotions could be brought together with PLS in order to create efficiency savings on areas where the work of the two bodies overlapped was a matter for the funding partners;
- Though Blaby District Council and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council had yet to see a 'cash' return on their investment in PLS, it was felt that time would be needed for projects to come to fruition. With regard to Oadby and Wigston, discussions were in hand regarding the availability of good quality industrial units in the area.

A White Paper was expected in October which would address the decision as to whether or not to abolish all remaining regional government offices and it was felt that the Commission, in coming to a view on how to proceed with scrutiny of the economic delivery arrangements, should have regard to any proposals included therein. A view was also expressed that the Leader, and/or the Deputy Leader (in his capacity as Prospect Board Member) should be involved in any future discussions at the Commission on this matter.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the performance report of Prospect Leicestershire be noted;
- (b) That the points now raised be the subject of a discussion between the Scrutiny Commissioners in order that a view can be formed on how best to progress the matter and that the outcome of those discussions, together with a summary of the points raised, be presented to the Commission at its next meeting on 1 September.

96. Voluntary Action LeicesterShire - Performance Report 2009/10.

The Commission considered a performance report of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) during the first year of the new infrastructure contract. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Kevan Liles, Chief Executive of VAL to the meeting.

In response to questions from members, Mr. Liles advised the Commission as follows:-

- The relationship between VAL and the community hubs had been a difficult one, as there had been a perception that VAL had ‘taken’ their funding. It was VAL’s responsibility to keep a watching brief on the hubs and some work had been carried out to assist them in defining their role in the sector, though their role remained largely unclear at this stage. It was stressed that VAL was required to create effective relationships and support all 3,500 voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups and that the hubs represented small part of the voluntary sector;
- If the community hubs did not deliver a return for their funding (£70,000 per hub), there remained the concern that this funding would be lost, not only to the hubs, but to the voluntary sector as a whole;
- There was a concern that there was a limited pool of VCS representatives that could be drawn on to represent the sector. It would take time before a diverse group of representatives with the necessary range of skills, knowledge and experience could be recruited to respond to the range of pressures faced by the sector;
- The survey of public agencies’ satisfaction with the VCS issued by VAL had received a poor response rate. For this reason, the survey would be re-issued in the hope that more data could be collected to formulate a more solid basis on which to form views on the sector;
- Voluntary Action Hinckley and Bosworth had put forward the possibility of joining forces with VAL in an effort to deliver efficiency savings. It remained, however, a hope that the hubs in each of the districts would be enabled to work more effectively and deliver sustainable services to the public;

The Chief Executive reported that the single contract for the voluntary sector support that had been awarded from April 2009 was a response to the unsatisfactory service that had previously been provided to the VCS as a whole (including the separate 3,500 separate groups) by the Voluntary Actions (now known as community hubs). VAL’s role as the successful contractor was to achieve challenging targets including better training and support for those 3,500 organisations and higher numbers of volunteers being recruited. The community hubs were separately contracted to provide general support within their district areas and to provide specific services, although a number of these services were currently under review.

A view was expressed that in order for the Commission to scrutinise fully the voluntary sector in a balanced fashion, it might wish to hear evidence from a range of VCS agencies including the larger providers such as Age Concern, the community hubs and other voluntary and community groups. It was acknowledged that this might fall more appropriately within the remit of a scrutiny review panel.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the first year performance report of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire be noted;
- (b) That the points now raised be the subject of a discussion between the Scrutiny Commissioners in order that a view can be formed on how best to progress the matter and that the outcome of those discussions, together with a summary of the points raised, be presented to the Commission at its next meeting on 1 September.

97. Design Guide for County Council Developments.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the draft Design Guide for County Council Developments. A copy of the report, marked 'D', is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that the Design Guide would not apply to private developments. It was also noted that district councils had been consulted about whether they would wish to sign up to the Guide, however, at this stage none had expressed an interest.

It was suggested that 'Public Art' that was connected to specific areas in the County be taken account of in the 'Landscape' section of the document, as it was felt that they were of value to the local distinctiveness of those areas.

RESOLVED:

That the Commission is generally supportive of the Design Guide and that the comments made in relation to public art as outlined above, be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 7 September 2010.

98. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 1 September 2010 at 2.00pm, with a presentation on progress made against the climate change targets within the Environment Strategy to follow at 3.15pm.

2.00 pm - 4.15 pm  
14 July 2010

CHAIRMAN