

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 26 March 2014.

PRESENT

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

Mrs. R. Camamile CC  
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC  
Mr. S. J. Hampson CC  
Dr. S. Hill CC  
Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC  
Mr. P. G. Lewis CC  
Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC  
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC  
Mr. L. Spence CC

In Attendance:

Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Transport (For Minute 82)  
Mr. P. C. Osborne CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Community Safety (For Minute 83)

75. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2014 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

76. Question Time.

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

77. Questions asked by members.

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

78. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

79. 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.

Mr. L. Spence CC declared a personal interest in respect of Item 8 as a school governor (Minute 82 refers).

Mr. P. G. Lewis CC declared a personal interest in respect of Item 10 as Company Secretary of Human Rights and Equalities, Charnwood (Minute 84 refers).

80. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

81. Presentation of Petitions.

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

82. Consideration of Options for Home to School Transport Policy.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services, the Director of Environment and Transport and the County Solicitor concerning a commentary of some further options for Home to School Transport which had been put forward by the Liberal Democrat Group and by a member of the Scrutiny Commission at its previous meeting on 26 February. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 8", is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Lead Member for Transport, Mr. P. C. Osborne CC. The Chairman indicated that he had been asked by the Lead Member if he could make an urgent statement to the Commission in relation to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. The statement was as follows:

*"In light of the concerns raised, I would advise the Commission that I have spoken to the Leader with a view to the Cabinet considering a further round of consultation on a policy which would allow:-*

- *Transport to the nearest available school providing education for the appropriate age range transfer;*

*and/or*

- *Transport to the nearest suitable Leicestershire School.*

*In these circumstances, I think it would be helpful to await the outcome of that further consultation before the Commission responds to the Cabinet."*

With regard to the consultation the Commission was advised that it was the intention to seek the Cabinet's approval at its meeting on 1 April to conduct a further round of consultation and that any new consultation process would run from April to mid-late June. The Cabinet would then be asked to consider the outcome of this process and take a final decision on the matter at its meeting on 15 July. It was noted that, subject to the Cabinet's agreement to conduct a further round of consultation, this would necessitate an extra meeting of the Commission to consider the outcome of the consultation and make its views known to the Cabinet.

In response to a question, the County Solicitor stated that, in preparation for the new consultation proposals, officers at the County Council had made contact with officers at Oxfordshire County Council, which had recently agreed to implement a policy to provide free school transport for pupils attending their nearest available school within Oxfordshire.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Lead Member and officers for the statement and information now provided. Members of the Commission were of the view that the report to the Commission setting out a commentary on the options put forward had been superseded by the new information provided by the Cabinet Lead Member and it would not therefore be appropriate or productive to discuss its content.

It was noted that, prior to the Cabinet Lead Member's announcement, representations had been received and circulated to members of the Commission from an organisation called the "School Transport Policy Group" and The Market Bosworth School (a copy of each is filed with these minutes) and representatives from two schools had requested to speak at meeting. The Chairman felt that it would only be fair to continue to offer those who wished to do so the opportunity to express their views, despite the fact that the Council's position on a way forward for Home to School Transport had now changed significantly. Accordingly, the Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. Stuart Wilson, Co-Principal at The Market Bosworth School and Ms. Helen Tait, Chair of Governors at Fernvale Primary School who had given notice that they wished to address the Commission.

Mr. Wilson made a statement welcoming the new information provided by the Cabinet Lead Member for Transport and requesting that the alternative proposal put forward by The Market Bosworth School be considered as part of any future consultation exercise. Its proposal included the following key elements:

- A default position that all current transport eligibility areas (TEAs) continue to be frozen as they were currently;
- Any academy that changed its catchment area (or free school that was built) would not receive any additional transport eligibility other than the current frozen policy (which included a caveat for 'nearest school');
- Where two or more schools changed their age range within the same TEA (essentially creating overlapping catchment areas), then the 'nearest school' principle be used to create new TEAs for individual schools within the old TEA.

Ms. Tait made a statement on the ways in which the proposed policy would have a damaging effect on the long established feeder links and collaborative working arrangements between Fernvale Primary School and other schools in the "Oadby Development Group". In closing, Ms. Tait welcomed the statement made by the Cabinet Lead Member and the new proposal to consult on a policy which included transport to the nearest suitable school. A copy of Ms. Tait's full statement is filed with these minutes.

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Mr. Lewis CC and carried:-

"(a) That the Commission welcomes the statement from the Cabinet Lead Member for Transport, stating his intention to seek the Cabinet's approval to consider a further round of consultation on a policy which would allow:

- Transport to the nearest available school providing education for the appropriate age range transfer

and/or

- Transport to the nearest suitable Leicestershire School;

- (b) That the Cabinet be urged to agree to consult on the proposals outlined in (a) above and that, subject to that gaining that approval, the Commission receive a further report at the appropriate time setting out the outcome of the further round of consultation.”

83. Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014/15.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services concerning the Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014/15. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 9”, is filed with these minutes.

The Director of Children and Family Services introduced the report by stating that the Youth Offending Service had followed the Supporting Leicestershire Families Service in moving from the Chief Executive’s Department to the Children and Young People’s Service. The report would continue to be considered by the Scrutiny Commission in future years in its capacity as “crime and disorder” scrutiny committee.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Lead Member for Community Safety, Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, who stressed the good work that had been carried out in this area, despite the savings reductions that had been made.

Arising from a discussion on the Plan, the following points were noted:

- The Service was congratulated for its 68.3% reduction of first time entrants into the youth justice system;
- It was noted that the risk management section (set out in pages 51 to 53) did not presently include a scale of risk. It was noted that the higher the risk score given, the higher the risk;
- It was felt by some members that it would be helpful to include more qualitative information around the work that was being carried out to tackle the issues highlighted in the Plan;
- Work continued with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) on some of the issues highlighted in the Plan and he had been consulted on its content. It was noted that the PCC presently funded around 8% of the Youth Offending Service’s budget.

RESOLVED:

That the Draft Youth Justice Plan 2014/15 be commended to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 1 April 2014.

84. Reduction in Support and Funding to Agencies.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the proposed approach to funding and support to agencies in light of the agreed requirement in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to save £590,000 over the next three years. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 10”, is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that the consultation on the proposed approach outlined in the report had commenced on 10 March and would end on 2 June. Any comments the Commission wished to make would be considered as part of that process and a report would be submitted to the Commission's meeting in September setting out a summary of the consultation responses and the final proposals to be submitted to the Cabinet.

In response to questions from members, the following points were made:

- A consultation exercise was underway to enable the public and voluntary sector to help influence how the reduced Council funding can be deployed. The Council's contract with Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL) would be maintained at the existing level of funding in 2014/15 (£600,000), but this would be reduced to £300,000 in future years. It was suggested that the performance targets set for VAL as part of any future contract would need to be more clearly defined given the reduced resources available;
- Some concern was expressed about the "catch all" nature of the Equalities Challenge Group and a lack of elected member involvement;
- With less support available, it was inevitable that voluntary groups would be required to be innovative in order to survive;
- It was recognised that the Citizens Advice Bureaux played an essential role in providing free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to the residents of the County, and as such there were no proposals at present to reduce funding.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposals put forward to provide support to agencies within a reduced budget be broadly supported and that the retention of funding at existing levels for the provision of advice and advocacy services via Citizens Advice Leicestershire and Citizens Advice Charnwood be welcomed;
- (b) That the performance targets associated with the current contract with Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL) be circulated to the Commission prior to consideration of VAL's annual performance presentation at a meeting later in the year.

#### 85. Provision and Refocusing of Grants to Community Groups.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning the implementation of a new SHIRE Community Grants programme and the options for implementation of a SHIRE Community Participatory Grant scheme. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 11", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from questions by members, the following points were noted:

- The Community Forum Participatory Budgets had been abolished as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, but no decision had yet been taken on the future of the Community Forums, though it was known that community engagement activity would continue to be carried out by the Council in various ways. The wider approach on how services would be provided to communities would be articulated in the Communities Strategy, which was expected to be submitted to the

Commission in June;

- Environmental improvement grants were cited as a good example of relatively small amounts of funding being used to affect a significant positive change on the appearance of areas;
- Despite the reductions in resources, it remained the intention to provide advice and support to members of the public and community groups in seeking external funding from within the existing resources in the Chief Executive's Department.

RESOLVED:

- (c) That the options for a Shire Participatory Grants Scheme that involve delivery on a countywide basis based around the County Council's strategic and transformational priorities be broadly supported;
- (d) That it be hoped that an element of environmental improvement can be retained as part of the new grants programmes;
- (e) That the intention to continue the offer of support and advice from within existing resources to community groups wishing to apply for external grant funding be welcomed.

86. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 30 April 2014 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.00 pm  
26 March 2014

CHAIRMAN