

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 16 November 2016.

PRESENT

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

Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC

Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC
Mrs. C. M. Radford CC
Mr. R. Sharp CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

In Attendance:

Mrs. P. Posnett CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities (For Minute 40)

33. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

34. Question Time.

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

35. Questions asked by members.

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

36. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

37. 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 interest in respect of all three substantive items on the agenda (Minutes 40, 41 and 42 refer) as members of district/borough councils (as indicated) affected by the proposals:

Mr. S. J. Galton CC (Harborough District Council)
Dr. S. Hill CC (Harborough District Council)
Mr. D. Jennings CC (Blaby District Council)
Mr. K. W. P. Lynch CC (Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council)

Mrs. C. M. Radford CC (Charnwood Borough Council)
 Mr. R. Sharp CC (Charnwood Borough Council)
 Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC (North West Leicestershire District Council)
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC (Charnwood Borough Council)

38. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

39. Presentation of Petitions.

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

40. The Bishop's Poverty Commission Report - County Council Work to Progress Recommendations.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning progress made by the County Council and its partners against those recommendations in the Bishop's Poverty Commission report entitled "How Do They Get By?" that relate to the County Council's area of business. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 8", is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mrs. P. Posnett CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities, who was present to respond to any questions members of the Commission had on the report. By way of an introduction, the lead member stated that addressing poverty was an important area of the Council's work both as a means of supporting communities and reducing dependence on the services of the County Council and other public bodies.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- Though the implications of the Bishop's report were still being understood at a corporate level, the formulation of the report before the Commission had enabled officers to fully appraise the activity being carried out in support of its aims and enable a dialogue to take place with senior management about how this work could be fully embedded across Council departments;
- Loan sharks were a known contributor to poverty with high interest rates that often proved unsustainable for those who often sought loans when struggling to make ends meet. The Council was already tackling loan sharks via its Regulatory Services department, though more would be done to promote credit unions as a more viable means of borrowing at times of need;
- Concern was raised that, instead of simply adopting the Bishop's Report's recommendations, the Council should devise its own definition of poverty in its various forms. A further view was made that County Councillors could play an active role in this work and broaden awareness for services amongst communities;
- The Lead Member attended meetings and received reports from an officer level Communities Board and a Fair Finance Group. These bodies aimed to increase awareness for the services available relating to poverty and encouraged agencies

providing these services to be more joined-up in their approach;

- In response to a point made that, whilst there was a wealth of services available to those who suffered poverty, there appeared to be duplication, it was noted that the County Council aimed to develop a policy framework to address poverty in a more strategic way. It was hoped that work would provide linkages to the Council's economic agenda to increase skills employment opportunities and growth;
- Whilst the importance of addressing the needs of families who were suffering from poverty was stressed, the need to also address the needs of single adults who had perhaps fallen on hard time was of equal importance. The need to ensure joined-up thinking in relation to mental health services was also stressed;
- The location of "Keep Safe Places" was publicised. These locations were often libraries or shops and provided a place of refuge for those who found themselves with difficult situations at home. Those accessing these locations were offered trained support and signposting to important services that would assist them in their rehabilitation;
- A suggestion was made to hold a facilitated discussion around the issues associated with poverty in the company of two agencies providing poverty-related services as a means of aiding members' understanding on this issue.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That a report on the outcomes thus far of meetings of the officer level Communities board and the Fair Finance Group be submitted to the Scrutiny Commissioners in the New Year;
- (c) That the suggestion to hold a facilitated discussion around the issues associated with poverty in the company of two agencies providing poverty-related services be considered as a means of aiding members' understanding on this issue.

41. Leicestershire County Council Annual Performance Report 2015/16.

The Commission considered a Cabinet report of the Chief Executive concerning the County Council's Annual Performance Report 2015/16 which would be considered at its meeting on 23 November. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9" is filed with these minutes.

In support of the report, officers took members through a slide deck which set out some additional statistics and charts around the Council's performance. A copy of the slide deck is filed with these minutes.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was important that the Council's strong delivery in the face of significant budget cuts did not undermine the "Fairer Funding" campaign that was being put to the Government. Equally, it was felt that there should be an increased emphasis in the Report on the service reduction context and the "managed decline" process which the Council was now operating within. Particularly Part A of the Report in its current

form was felt to present a largely positive picture in the face of reduced funding and service reductions and this might inhibit the Council's ability to lobby for financial parity with similar sized authorities. It was intended to imminently hold a separate session for all members of the Council on the Fairer Funding campaign;

- It was suggested that there should be a focus on “spending need per dwelling” as well as “spend per dwelling”;
- Whilst being a low spending authority was generally viewed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy as being a positive in terms of efficiency, it was noted that this could be looked at negatively when funding reduced below a minimum threshold for effective service delivery. It was considered that Leicestershire's low funding meant it was in danger of going below that threshold. Further thought would be given to the way in which this message was presented in future Annual Performance Reports;
- A view was expressed that the Report focused heavily on future transport projects which were viewed by some members as being irrelevant to a review of performance over the past year. In response, it was noted that the Department had felt that it was important to provide this context within the Report;
- It was suggested that on the indicator “average speed on roads” might be better measured in terms of “time lost to congestion”, which was generally viewed as being a more significant factor for the public. Officers agreed to take this suggestion back to the Environment and Transport Department for further consideration. It was noted that congestion was a performance measure currently taken between the hours of 7.00am and 10.00am;
- A view was expressed that the majority of people in the County were affected by the condition and performance of the road network and that this should be reflected in future priorities;
- With an increased national focus on climate change, it was suggested that the Council should remain fully committed to reducing its carbon footprint. Whilst it was noted that the Council had generally made good progress on this issue, it was suggested that extra efforts could be made to ensure that the lights at County Hall were switched off when not in use.

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Commission be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 23 November.

42. Place Marketing and Organisation Business Case.

The Commission considered a Cabinet report of the Chief Executive concerning outcomes of a tourism review process and the proposed arrangements for the delivery of tourism support and related services across Leicester and Leicestershire. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 10”, is filed with these minutes.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- The “teckal-compliant” Place Marketing Organisation (PMO) would be legally independent of the County and City Councils. The PMO would be limited to achieving 20% of its income through trading;
- The County Council would be contributing £475,000 to the funding of the PMO between 2017 and 2020. £350,000 had already been committed through the MTFS and from County Council economic ear-marked funds, leaving a funding gap of £125,000 over three years. This would be addressed through the MTFS;
- The PMO would take on a more strategic role than that previously carried out by Leicester Shire Promotions Ltd (LPL). LPL was aiming to continue to carry out its more tactical responsibilities in support of the new arrangements, though it would be required to do this without any core public funding from the County and City Councils. It would however be able to tender for services that the PMO procured;

RESOLVED:

That the proposed arrangements for the establishment of a Place Marketing Organisation be supported.

43. Dates of Future Meetings.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission was scheduled to be held on 30 November at 2.00pm. It was also NOTED that future meetings of the Commission were scheduled to take place at 10.30am on the following dates in 2017:

25 January
8 March
7 June
13 September
15 November

10.30 am - 12.30 pm
16 November 2016

CHAIRMAN