

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 8 March 2017.

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

66. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2017 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

67. Question Time.

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

68. Questions asked by Members.

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

69. Urgent Items.

The Chairman indicated that there were no urgent items.

70. 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 substantive items on the agenda (Minutes 73 to 76 refer) as members of district/borough councils (as indicated):

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)

71. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

72. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

73. Housing Growth and Water.

The Commission considered a report and supplementary report of the Chief Executive concerning Severn Trent Water's (STW's) response to some issues raised in regard to housing growth and water and sewerage capacity. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 8" and the supplementary report is filed with these minutes:

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- Members noted with disappointment that STW had at short notice been unable to attend the Commission meeting given the invitation was made late in November of last year;
- A view was expressed that the fact that STW had been unable to attend at short notice highlighted the need for Overview and Scrutiny to have a greater power to compel representatives from companies providing public services to attend meeting to enable them to be held to account;
- It was felt that, whilst the list of questions had been sent to STW in advance to enable them to build a presentation of relevance for members, it would not be appropriate to re-submit a further list of questions;
- A view was expressed that the responses to questions 9 and 10 appeared contradictory and this point would be worthy of clarification;
- It was suggested that, given the relatively brief nature of the responses provided by STW, it would not be possible to have a meaningful debate on the matter without representatives from STW being in attendance. It was therefore felt appropriate to invite senior representatives from STW to a meeting of the Commission in the summer and that the timing of the session be based around their availability.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That written responses by Severn Trent Water to the issues raised be noted;
- (b) That a letter be sent on behalf of the Commission to Severn Trent Water seeking a meeting in the summer to enable members to ask questions in regard to housing growth and Severn Trent Water's capacity to respond.

74. Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan: Joint Statement of Co-operation.

The Commission considered a Cabinet report of the Chief Executive concerning the Joint Statement of Co-operation Relating to Objectively Assessed Need for Housing which

would be the subject of a Cabinet decision at its meeting on 10 March. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- Full sign up to the Statement by local authority partners would strengthen its status. The Statement set out the latest evidence on housing needs and housing land capacity but did not commit partners to any housing provision figures. It was known, however, that local planning authorities were taking account of the evidence in the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessments (HEDNA) and that this evidence would be tested through the local plans process. It was acknowledged that all authorities were at different stages of this process;
- It was felt that the approach being taken by the County Council to support the development of the Strategic Growth Plan was pragmatic as it would assist housing growth to be planned in a sustainable way, and also ensure the Council fulfilled its 'duty to co-operate';
- The City Council was not expecting to be able to meet its objectively assessed need for housing requirement for housing growth and it was expected therefore that this would have implications for the housing figures for the districts.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan: Joint Statement of Co-operation be supported in principle, but that the Cabinet be advised that concerns remain around the expected housing shortfall in the City and how this may then be re-distributed to the districts;
- (b) That the comments of the Commission be forwarded on to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 10 March.

75. Working Together to Build Great Communities in Leicestershire: Draft Communities Strategy 2017-21.

The Commission considered a Cabinet report of the Chief Executive concerning the draft refreshed Communities Strategy which would be the subject of a Cabinet decision at its meeting on 10 March. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 10", is filed with these minutes.

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Arising from a discussion, during which the general thrust of the Strategy was welcomed, the following points were noted:

- In response to a comment that there appeared to be little focus in the document given to the expected outcomes from work with communities and how its success could be measured, it was suggested that this would be considered in finalising the Strategy and included in an associated action plan following engagement with partners. A view was then made that the expected outcomes should be included in

the Strategy;

- A view was expressed that there had previously been an over focus on how work with communities could contribute to the County Council's priorities and that there should be an increased focus on the priorities of communities. It was noted that this would be a focus of the Strategy but that it would be necessary to fully utilise the skills of the County Council staff in order to have an honest dialogue with communities about their priorities and what was deliverable from the County Council's perspective.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft Communities Strategy 2017-18 be supported in principle, but that the Cabinet be advised that there should be greater recognition in the document for the expected outcomes from this work and how it was expected that these would link to the County Council's strategic objectives and those of communities;
- (b) That the comments of the Commission be forwarded on to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 10 March.

76. 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring (Period 10)

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources concerning an update on the 2016/17 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 11", is filed with these minutes.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Council's prudent approach to financial management and its inclusion of a good level of contingency had enabled it to plan sustainably and avoid knee-jerk reactions when budgets fell behind. It was noted that the poor financial positions of other Councils such as Bristol and Northamptonshire demonstrated why contingency planning was crucial to the financial sustainability of the Council going forward;
- In response to a question around whether Leicestershire had focused too heavily on contingencies that were rarely used and whether this might have meant that savings were being pursued too quickly, it was noted that whilst this was a balancing act, Leicestershire had remained ahead of the curve in forecasting any budgetary difficulties. Effective planning was seen as being key to implementing well balanced and robust savings;
- In response to a question around what the expected savings would be from those measures outlined in paragraph 37 of the report, it was noted that these plans were at the formative stage. It was suggested that greater detail could be provided on these savings in future reports to the Commission;
- In response to a question around vacancies in the Democratic Services section of the Chief Executive's Department, it was noted that a recruitment process was currently underway to fill some of these vacancies whilst others would be filled after the election.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

77. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 7 June 2017 at 10.30am.

78. Chairman's Announcement.

The Chairman announced that, in addition to being the final meeting of the Commission in this Council term, it would also be the final meeting attended by Jackie Dickinson CC who would be retiring and Sam Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Team Leader who was leaving the County Council to take up a post at De Montfort University.

Commission members joined the Chairman in extending his thanks to Sam for his contribution to the Commission's work and the support he had provided to him as Chairman of the Commission over the past eight years. He also took the opportunity to wish Sam all the very best in his new role.

Commission members also joined the Chairman in extending his thanks to Jackie for her contribution to Overview and Scrutiny and in wishing her all the best for a long and happy retirement.

10.30 am - 12.20 pm
08 March 2017

CHAIRMAN