

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 6 March 2019.

PRESENT

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

Mr. P. Bedford CC  
Mr. D. C. Bill MBE CC  
Mr. G. A. Boulter CC  
Dr. T. Eynon CC  
Dr. R. K. A. Feltham CC  
Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC

Mr. J. Morgan CC  
Mrs. R. Page CC  
Mr. A. E. Pearson CC  
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC  
Mrs B. Seaton CC  
Mr. M. B. Wyatt CC

Webcast.

A webcast of the meeting can be viewed at  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWFpwBLs6MnUzG0WjejrQtQ>

93. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2019 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

94. Question Time.

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

95. 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).

96. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

97. 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.

All members who were also members of a district or parish council declared a personal interest in the review of proposals for the development of a unitary structure for local government in Leicestershire (minute 101 refers).

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

99. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

100. Update on Police and Crime Panel Activity.

The Commission considered a presentation from Mr J T Orson CC, Chairman of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), which provided details of the activity undertaken by the Panel since the previous report to the Scrutiny Commission. A copy of the presentation is filed with these minutes.

In his introduction, Mr Orson highlighted that the PCP had recently visited the Police call centre at Enderby; this had been informative. He confirmed that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Lord Bach, had attended every meeting of the PCP. The Chief Constable had only been formally invited to one PCP meeting although he regularly attended meetings at the invitation of the PCC.

Arising from discussion and questions the following points were raised:-

- (i) The Government had not passed the total liability relating to police pensions to the PCC. However, the position would be reviewed in two years' time.
- (ii) A member expressed concern regarding the recording of instances of hate crime by the Police. Mr Orson advised that the PCP felt that hate crime was grossly under-reported and was monitoring the situation. He had also met with the Crown Prosecution Service to discuss prosecution. He undertook to follow up the specific case that was referred to.
- (iii) With regard to knife crime, it was noted that during the second quarter of 2017/18 603 offences had been recorded, an increase of 23% compared to the previous year. During this quarter, the police had carried out two operations and supported a national campaign, all of which had seen successful results. The PCC had also sponsored an event in November targeted at professionals to raise awareness of knife crime and was using £100,000 of reserves to run a small grants process to tackle knife crime. The PCC had also made catastrophic haemorrhage packs available in all police front line vehicles. There had been no mention of setting up a dedicated knife crime unit like in Nottingham, although Mr Orson advised that the two PCCs worked well together.
- (iv) In response to a query regarding the PCP's confidence in the reporting of crime by the Police, Mr Orson confirmed that the Panel was satisfied with the accuracy of the figures. This had been a significant area of scrutiny by the Panel including holding the PCC to account for the recent HMICFRS report into the accuracy of crime data recording.
- (v) The PCP had been advised that the PCC had decided to increase the number of Police Officers for 2019/20 and 2020/21 by 107 officers. It was recognised that

recruiting this number of officers in a single year would be challenging and the process was expected to take approximately eighteen months. It was queried whether the police force shared a HR service with other forces in the region; officers undertook to investigate this and provide the Commission with a written response.

- (vi) The number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) was stable and new posts would only be recruited to when current PCSOs left the service. However, PCSOs were almost entirely funded through the base budget, giving greater certainty to this resource.
- (vii) It was noted that the level of reserves held by Leicestershire Police was fairly constant at around £28 million. It was queried whether this level of reserve was too high and suggested that some of the reserves should be used to employ front line officers. However, members were reminded that ongoing reliance should not be placed on reserves. The PCP had received a budget report which contained detail on the use of reserves and balances, including the principle that general fund reserves should be the range of two percent to five percent of the total net budget. The current general fund reserve was £6 million, equivalent to 3.2 percent of the net budget. Officers undertook to provide the Commission with a breakdown of the level of reserves held by the Police.
- (viii) In response to a query about police response times, the Commission was advised that the PCC's budget was designed to improve rural response times. The majority of the additional officers being recruited would be based in neighbourhood police areas to increase police presence and visibility. The PCP was holding the PCC to account on this matter.
- (ix) In terms of the prevention of crime, it was noted that People Zones had recently been established in Coalville and Loughborough aimed at partnership working and early intervention. A report on People Zones would be considered by the PCP at its meeting in September. The PCP also gave consideration to the success of activities commissioned by the PCC through the quarterly performance report.

The Chairman thanked Mr Orson for attending the meeting and advised the Commission that the Commissioners would be considering how to improve its engagement with Leicestershire Police.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation and information now received be noted;
- (b) That officers be requested to provide the Commission with further information regarding the extent of shared services with other Force areas and a breakdown of the reserves held by Leicestershire Police.

101. Review of Proposals for a Unitary Structure of Local Government for Leicestershire.

The Commission considered a report setting out the findings of its examination of the County Council's proposals for a unitary structure for local government in Leicestershire. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Chairman reminded members that the report did not make any clear recommendations but set out the findings from the evidence that had been gathered and issues which the business case should address.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:-

- (i) The Commission indicated its support for the report, which presented an objective and balanced view of the evidence that had been considered. Whilst a consensus on the way forward had not been reached, the discussions to date had enabled members to develop a greater understanding of the outline proposals and had identified some pitfalls to avoid.
- (ii) There was a general recognition of the need for change and for a more streamlined approach to local government in Leicestershire. However, members of the Commission would welcome greater consideration of options to share services between the County Council and District Councils.
- (iii) Some concern was expressed that the Commission had not undertaken a detailed exploration of the option of two unitary authorities for Leicestershire. It was hoped that the business case would include more detail on the options. A further view was expressed that the proposal for a unitary structure of local government in Leicestershire should be abandoned.
- (iv) It was noted that the Government's criteria for unitary proposals included the need for a population substantially in excess of 300,000. However, guidance on the upper size limit had not been issued. It would be useful to explore issues relating to size further; a single unitary authority for Leicestershire would have a population that was more than double the lower limit in the criteria.
- (v) It was reported that staff in district councils were feeling unsettled by the proposals and a member suggested that a clear message should be sent to them regarding the process and how staffing issues would be addressed if the proposals progressed.
- (vi) It was noted that the County Council's financial situation remained challenging and that there was still no clarity around the outcome of the national fairer funding review. Some members could see logic behind the concept of a single tier of local government for Leicestershire but felt that the economic and local factors, including why some councils had abandoned unitary proposals, had not been sufficiently investigated.
- (vii) A member suggested that the financial case for change should include a greater level of detail than had been presented to date. Comparisons made with the level of savings that existing unitary authorities had achieved should also be put in the context of the savings that the County Council had already achieved through austerity.
- (viii) Some concern was expressed that the 'transition then transformation' approach did not give a clear picture of what the future organisation would ultimately be like and that this resulted in prolonged uncertainty for staff.
- (ix) If a new unitary authority was created for Leicestershire, it would need a culture that enabled it to engage with communities in a meaningful way.

- (x) Some members emphasised the importance of being open-minded and of concentrating on what would best deliver services for the people of Leicestershire. It was recognised that the national direction of travel was to move towards a unitary structure for local government and that the local focus ought not to be on preserving structures.

RESOLVED:

That the report and comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 29 March 2019.

102. 2018/19 Medium Term Financial Strategy Monitoring (Period 10).

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources which provided an update on the 2018/19 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion and questions the following points were raised:-

- (i) It was queried why part of the overspend on Recycling and Household Waste Sites, caused by prolonged vehicle hire following a road traffic accident, had not been offset by insurance. Officers undertook to investigate this issue and provide a written to the Commission.
- (ii) The Capital Programme was fully funded. The future developments fund currently had a potential shortfall of £53 million. The Commission was advised that it was usual for there to be a funding gap. However, the growing demand on the Capital Programme was an area of concern. It was recognised that the Council's policy of not borrowing to fund the Capital Programme had stood the Authority in good stead, but that it might need revisiting in the future.
- (iii) It was noted that the reduction in demand for mainstream school transport was a result of a change to the Council's policy.
- (iv) Consultation was currently being undertaken regarding the location of the increased local provision for children with SEND. The revenue savings that this project would deliver would become clear towards the end of the year. However, it was expected that the Dedicated School's Grant would have a negative reserve for the next couple of years, whilst the new provision was taking effect.
- (v) It was queried whether the £6.3 million of corporate funding should have been removed from the highways maintenance budget when a similar sum of national funding was received. Whilst the importance of highways maintenance was acknowledged, it had been felt that the corporate funding would be better being re-allocated to addressing the funding gap in the future development schemes, particularly as a large number of the future developments were highways schemes.
- (vi) It was suggested that the County Council should consider providing funding to develop drop-off points outside schools to address parking issues. However, it was noted that this was not currently a priority for the Council and that the majority of schools were Academies.

(vii) The £1.1 million slippage on the Hinckley Hub project related to funding spent in the current financial year rather than the overall project. There had been a delay between receipt of funding and the work starting.

(viii) It was confirmed that, if the County Council's bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund for funding to support transport infrastructure was successful, a report would be submitted to the Cabinet seeking its approval to accept the funding. This project would then be shown in the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the 2018/19 revenue budget and capital programme monitoring position be noted.

103. Date of next meeting.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 10 April 2019 at 10.30am.

10.30 am - 12.10 pm  
06 March 2019

CHAIRMAN