

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 8 April 2020.

PRESENT

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

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

Mr. D. Harrison CC  
Mrs. R. Page CC  
Mr. A. E. Pearson CC  
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC  
Mr. M. B. Wyatt CC

82. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

83. Chairman's Announcement

The Chairman made the following announcement.

“As a country we are going through a very difficult time. I would like to take this opportunity to reassure members and the public that as a Council we are doing all we can to support the most vulnerable in our society. The staff of the County Council have adapted their working practices and are working tirelessly to support and protect the residents of the County.

I am sure that members would wish to join with me to thank all staff involved in delivering direct services and those behind the scenes providing support services for the work to date and ask for them to continue this work for the duration of this emergency.

As mentioned, this meeting is proceeding by skype and is only going to be considering items which have been identified as necessary before they are referred to Cabinet and full Council for approval. Other non-essential items are being deferred and this will be kept under review by the Commissioners over the coming weeks. Skype offers a great opportunity for us to continue to operate meetings, and the Council has adapted and is well set up to manage this. However, the need for meetings must be balanced against other, more pressing matters which the Council is having to respond to.”

84. Question Time

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

85. 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).

86. Urgent items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

87. 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 of the Commission who were also members of district councils declared a personal interest in all items on the agenda.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

89. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35

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

90. Leicestershire County Council's Revised Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought its view on the draft revisions made to the Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 to reflect the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Members welcomed the revised Strategy and the changes made to reflect the Council's climate change commitments. It was suggested that reference to Parish and Town Council's and other community groups be included in the Plan, as these had enormous capacity to contribute to the delivery of the outcomes identified.
- (ii) Concern was raised about the extent of the Council's ability to influence the local planning process to ensure housing growth in the area did not jeopardise the Council's environmental ambitions. Reassurance was provided that as well as the County Council, all local authorities in the area took climate change seriously. Members noted that whilst the County Council was not a local planning authority it was a consultee on all local neighbourhood plans which it helped shape. Though this process it was able to address issues such as climate change and the meeting of other wider environmental targets.
- (iii) Members noted that the Council's Head of Planning and Historic and Natural Environment chaired the local Chief Planning Officer Group which looked at

detailed approaches to planning matters and at which concerns over environmental performance could be addressed.

- (iv) It was highlighted that the Council's newly formed Growth Unit would play a key role in discussions with partners to ensure growth in the area was delivered in an environmentally sustainable way. The revised Strategic Plan and Environment Strategy would underpin future growth delivery proposals and environmental considerations would therefore play a central role in future growth planning.
- (v) Members noted that the Tranche 2 of the carbon reduction roadmap linked to the Environment Strategy (which it would consider next on the agenda) would look more closely at the delivery of carbon reduction in areas such housing and whilst there was a great challenge in this area for the County and District Councils, both recognised the opportunities available. Members felt this would require a significant change in attitudes to local planning and housing.
- (vi) Members expressed concern that the current circumstances arising from Covid-19 could seriously impact the County and District Councils specifically in terms of s.106 receipts, if timescales set down in contracts overran, and in the delivery of local housing supplies, as developments were put on hold. Members were particularly concerned that the latter could result in future unstructured developments taking place and pressure to priorities growth and the economy to the detriment of environmental ambitions. Members agreed that Government support in this area would be necessary and requested that the Cabinet consider these issues and the need, at some future date, to raise the matter with Government to ensure local authorities were not unduly disadvantaged.
- (vii) A member expressed concern that local planning authorities were required to continue the planning process during the virus outbreak and questioned whether this should be paused. Officers undertook to refer this concern to the Chair of the Chief Officer Planning Group for its consideration.
- (viii) It was acknowledged that the assumptions on which the report had been based would need to be updated to reflect the outbreak of Covid-19 which had impacted significantly on the way the Council was currently operating. Members acknowledged that at present, the Council's priority was to respond to the crisis as it developed. However, they were reassured that recovery planning was already underway, though understandably, this was in its early stages.
- (ix) It was highlighted that the current review had been only a light touch review to reflect the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and Members agreed that to continue to progress this commitment even in the current circumstances was necessary and appropriate. Members agreed that the Council's ambition remained unchanged through specific aspects of its approach might need to be altered because of the Coronavirus outbreak.
- (x) Members noted that a detailed review of the Plan would begin later this year/early next year which would take account of all the circumstances and outcomes arising from the coronavirus outbreak. However, it was suggested that in the short term, the Council's Environment Strategy and related Action

Plan would be best placed to recognise and adapt to specific issues in the short/medium term.

- (xi) This approach was supported by Members, but it was suggested that a preamble be included in the Plan which acknowledged the current circumstances and how the Covid-19 outbreak would impact Council Policy which would need to be addressed at an appropriate time.

AGREED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April;
- (b) That the concern expressed regarding Government Guidance for local planning authorities to continue with the planning process during the coronavirus outbreak be referred to the Chief Planning Officer Group for consideration.

#### 91. Revised Environment Strategy and Action Plan

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which sought its views on the draft revised Environment Strategy for 2018-203, the supporting draft revised Action Plan and draft Tranche 1 Carbon Reduction Roadmap. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

- (i) Members noted that the Action Plan was a live document and therefore flexible enough to allow for the current circumstances arising from the coronavirus outbreak to be reflected. It was suggested that in the pre-amble to the Action Plan, the outbreak and impact of Covid-19 be recorded and the need for further work as a result acknowledged.
- (ii) It was highlighted that whilst the Council's current environmental ambitions remained unchanged, some of the work and timescales for targets would need to be adjusted given that business as usual was on hold in some areas due to restrictions put in place to fight Covid-19. It was noted that in addition to the Action Plan, the business cases supporting delivery of some initiatives within the Strategy would also need to be considered and refreshed.
- (iii) Members noted the comments of the Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee which had also considered the Strategy and agreed that proceeding with the revised Strategy despite current circumstances was right and necessary.
- (iv) Members noted the carbon emissions from the Council's internal operations which fell within Tranche 1 of the carbon reduction roadmap (13,000 tonnes) was much lower than that within Tranche 2 (areas over which the local authorities would have influence) (3.6 million tonnes). Members agreed that Tranche 2 would be much harder to deliver and dependent on joint working with other organisations including District Councils and the LLEP. Members noted that those areas over which the Council was considered *not* to have influence included motorways, power stations and airports which were under

central Government control.

- (v) Members expressed the view that whilst the County Council was not responsible for monitoring air quality, this was a key environmental factor for local residents and the County Council would play its part in the design and construction of roads across the County. Members were reassured that whilst the report had focused on changes made to address the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, the Strategy itself had a total of 6 themes that went beyond climate change, air quality being one of them. These had also been updated and reflected in the revised Action Plan.
- (vi) The impact of Covid-19 on the Council's working practices had been significant with many officers now working from home. It was acknowledged that this had reduced those driving into the office and therefore represented a positive, environmentally. It was agreed that working practices and the benefits of home working on a larger scale may present an opportunity to be looked at in future. A view was raised, however, of the need to ensure this was balanced with the needs of individual staff who might feel isolated working from home and whose mental health and wellbeing might be adversely affected as a result. It was agreed, that a holistic view of any future proposals would be necessary.
- (vii) A lot of work on biodiversity had been undertaken and the Council's Tree Management Strategy had been aligned with the Council's environmental ambitions.
- (viii) HGV transport in the County, particularly on minor routes and in built up residential and rural areas was raised as a concern. Whilst technology was progressing for electric cars, this had not yet extended to commercial vehicles, lorries and HGVs. A suggestion was raised that the use of A and B roads by HGV lorries should be limited, but it was acknowledged that this would require Government intervention and new legislation. Members noted that the Council already worked with partners in addressing environmental matters arising from transport, including, for example, work with the LLEP on the Local Industrial Strategy and its own environment strategies.

AGREED:

That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April.

## 92. Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its views on the revised draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2020 – 2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these notes.

Arising from discussion, the following points arose:

- (i) A key area of concern related to the exploitation of children, particularly vulnerable children, but all partners were focused on addressing this. It was noted as a key risk area and so would be heavily monitored under the revised Plan. It was acknowledged that current circumstances meant it was difficult to operate in the usual way as schools which were currently closed, played a key

roll in identifying and reporting such issues.

- (ii) It would be important for the Service to look at the impact of isolation on some families and how this had affected children and young people who might not be being supported in the usual way.
- (iii) The potential release of young offenders because of the coronavirus outbreak would be unlikely to have a significant impact in Leicestershire. The National Probation Service and the Youth Justice Board would be responsible for those released, though the County Council would have a role to play in arranging accommodation. It was expected that only 2 young offenders would be released, and they were coming to the end of their custodial sentence.
- (iv) There was some concern that the Plan was difficult to follow for someone who had little knowledge of the Youth Offending Services (YOS). It was suggested that a glossary of terms and an overall summary be included for the future.
- (v) The Youth Offending Service Management Board was chaired by the Chief Executive of the County Council and the Board involved representatives from the Council's Youth Offending Service, the Police, Probation Service and Health. It had general oversight of all YOS work including those not in education, employment and training (NEET). The Board received a quarterly report and unlike some areas, had good knowledge of where these young people were. Whilst it was not possible for the Service to force young people to engage, knowledge of their location and links with the family through the Early Help and Wellbeing Services meant they could be monitored.
- (vi) It was acknowledged that some young people did not engage due to bad experiences in school and the lack of a support network that would encourage them to take part in EET. Members noted that the Council had introduced additional resources including a psychologist and forensic psychologist that would support this work and help address any such issues. It was noted that it was not possible for one agency to provide the solution so partnership work in this area was key.
- (vii) Members welcomed the excellent work continuing to take place with families and the whole family approach adopted by the Council. Members also supported the work not only to provide support to those subject to youth referral orders which was a statutory requirement, but also first-time entrants. It was agreed that such preventative action was necessary and right, and the likely reason the Council's figures were lower than the national average.
- (viii) In response to a question, Members were advised that the YOS was a County Service and that the City Council YOS operated separately.
- (ix) A request was made that the plan attached at page 105 of the draft Youth Justice Plan be amended to include reference to Oadby and Wigston.

#### AGREED:

- (a) That the comments now made be referred to the Cabinet at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> June;

(b) That Officers be requested to amend page 105 of the Plan to include reference to Oadby and Wigston and to consider the comments made regarding the inclusion of a glossary and summary when it was next reviewed.

93. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Commission would be held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at 10.30 am.

1 10.30 am – 12.40 pm  
08 8 April 2020

CHAIRMAN