

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 1 September 2010.

PRESENT

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

Mr. A. D. Bailey CC	Mr. D. Jennings CC
Mr. R. Blunt CC	Mrs. R. Page CC
Mr. G. A. Boulter CC	Mr. B. L. Pain CC
Mrs. R. Camamile CC	Mrs. P. Posnett CC
Dr. R. K. A Feltham CC	Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. Max Hunt CC	

99. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2010 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

100. Question Time.

Mr. Andre Wheeler, a resident in Barwell, asked the following questions under Standing Order 35:-

- “1. When did the Council sign the contract Galliford Try Plc to build the George Ward Community Centre?”
2. Why was a group of residents in Barwell given £20,000 of tax payers’ money, of which a large part was spent without any checks and balances put in place by the County Council? Can I be reassured that this is not happening in other parts of the County Council?”

The Chairman replied as follows:-

- “1. In line with Constructing Excellence principles, Property Services undertook a tender exercise in 2006 to establish a framework of contractors to procure capital works. The tender was based on a quality / price assessment with the price establishing a % figure for fixed prelims and profit that, pro – rata could be applied to all projects. The framework, whilst not being a specific works contract, is a binding document that sets out the working relationship between the parties including conditions of appointment, the form of contract etc. The agreed form of contract was the NEC option C which works on an open book basis to which the % addition is applied.

A competitive tender to establish a guaranteed maximum price was held between the contractors in July 2008 leading to the appointment of Galliford Try Construction Ltd as principle contractor.

An instruction to proceed was issued by letter on the 14th August 2008 in the sum of £1,725,181 on the basis of the signed framework agreement and the NEC option C contract for the project delivery.

2. The County Council allocated a grant of £20,000 per year to the George Ward Community Project (GWCP) from 2007/08 to support the local Steering Group in the development of the GWCP and, now that the Centre is open, to contribute toward on-going expenditure and help it to achieve sustainability as soon as possible.

The money has been held by the County Council and allocated to the Group as required. Expenditure was agreed at the multi-agency project board that met monthly until the completion of the Centre in July. Key items, for example were to develop the George Ward Centre website and training, which were approved at the Project Board and the detail discussed at GWCP Committee meetings. Smaller items of expenditure such as travel expenses for Committee Members and printing costs were agreed in principle by the Project Board, with the detail overseen by the GWCP Committee.

The County Council has worked with the volunteers from the GWCP Committee, who have dedicated a significant amount of time to deliver this exciting new Community Centre, to keep the costs of the project down and leave the Centre in the best possible financial position going forward.”

Mr. Wheeler asked the following supplementary question in relation to question 1:-

“Why did the instruction to proceed with building the Centre precede the GWCP Committee’s business plan?”

The Chairman responded that he would ensure that Mr. Wheeler was provided with a written response to his supplementary question.

Mr. Wheeler asked the following supplementary question in relation to question 2:-

“Why were the following key items of expenditure approved by the George Ward Community Project Committee, making use of taxpayer” money:

- A PC maintenance contract worth over £1,000;
- Travel expenses amounting to over £400; and
- Web page costs amounting to over £3,000?”

The Chairman responded to the effect of:-

“As stated, all key items of expenditure were agreed by the multi-agency project board and this would have included the two larger amounts stated in the supplementary question.

Smaller items of expenditure, such as travel costs, were overseen by the GWCP Committee. The majority of the travel costs incurred were due to members of the GWCP Committee traveling to and from County Hall. The County Council is thankful to the volunteers involved in the GWCP Committee for their work in ensuring that the project came to fruition.”

101. 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).

102. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

103. 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, non-prejudicial interest in respect of items 8, 9 and 10 on the agenda as members of district/borough or parish councils (Minutes 106, 107 and 108 refer):

Mr. A. D. Bailey CC
 Mr. R. Blunt CC
 Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
 Mrs. R. Camamile CC
 Mr. S. J. Galton CC
 Mr. Max Hunt CC
 Mr. D. Jennings CC
 Mr. G. Jones CC
 Mr. P. G. Lewis CC
 Mrs. P. Posnett CC
 Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC

Mr. D. Jennings also declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 11 on the agenda as a member of Blaby District Council (Minute 109 refers).

104. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

105. Petition: Request for Retention and Enhancement of the 129 Bus Service from Ashby to Loughborough.

A petition submitted by Mrs. Johnson, a local resident in Belton, signed by 284 local residents was presented to the Commission requesting retention and improvements to the 129 service between Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Loughborough.

A briefing note of the Director of Environment and Transport summarising the situation relating to the petition was considered by the Commission. A copy of this report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

With the consent of the Chairman, Mrs. Johnson addressed the Commission and stated that there had been rumours that the service was to be withdrawn and that this would have an adverse effect on the older people in Belton and Osgathorpe who relied on the service to gain access to essential services of those villages. She further stated that it was the opinion of many in those villages that a 'dial-a-ride' or equivalent demand-response service would not be adequate for the needs of villagers.

The Director of Environment and Transport addressed the Commission and made the following key points:

- The service was being reviewed within the context of the Council's need to identify unprecedented savings of £66 million;
- The Council's Cabinet had agreed to review all services that were outside of the Council's policy to provide a daytime network of services to at least an hourly timetable and within 800 metres of 95% of County residents;
- The Council was currently in the process of gathering information on the service. No final decision had yet been made and users were encouraged to inform the Council of their essential journey needs in order that an appropriate alternative service could be designed in the event of withdrawal;
- Those affected by the withdrawal of the service would be given four months' notice;
- The operator of the service had already been notified that the contract for the service may be terminated;
- The Council was having to look critically at all services and it was acknowledged that there were a number of services outside of Council policy that, for historical reasons, had continued to operate, of which this was one. The potential saving from withdrawal of the service was in the region of £47,000 per annum.

Arising from discussion of the points made above, and in response to questions from members the following key points were noted:

- There were a number of alternative ways to provide a service for users, of which one was a demand-response service provided by a taxi company. It was highlighted that this had been successful in other villages as it was guaranteed and viewed as more personal – allowing users to make arrangements for regular journeys;
- It was felt that the Council's policy might need to be reviewed in the future to take account of the significant savings being expected of the Council.

It was proposed, seconded and carried:-

“That the matter be referred to officers in the Environment and Transport Department for consideration as part of the ongoing review of services that were regarded as exceptions to the Council's policy for supported bus services.”

106. Prospect Leicestershire.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning a summary of the key points raised at the Commission's meeting with representatives of Prospect Leicestershire and the views of the Commissioners in regard to future scrutiny of this area. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Executive reported that the Council had submitted its bid for a joint Leicestershire and Leicester Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). As part of the bid, the Council had also expressed a willingness to work with Northamptonshire County Council and other nearby authorities to deliver services. More would be known on the success of the bid in October when a Coalition Government white paper was due to be published. A report on the review of delivery arrangements involving Prospect Leicestershire and LeicesterShire Promotions was expected imminently.

In order for the Commission to scrutinise this area in a meaningful way, it was felt beneficial to await further information on the arrangements for the LEP. Members further felt that it would be helpful to have a briefing on these arrangements when more details were available.

In the long term, it was suggested that the County Council should take the lead role in establishing how best to scrutinise the economic delivery arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current position in relation to the submission of the Local Enterprise Partnership bid be noted;
- (b) That the views of the Commissioners be noted and that the intention to review the new arrangements for economic delivery at a future meeting of the Commission be supported;

- (c) That the Chief Executive be requested to provide a briefing to all members on the new arrangements for the LEP at the appropriate time.

107. Voluntary Action LeicesterShire.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive concerning a summary of the key points raised at the Commission's meeting with Kevan Liles, Chief Executive of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) and the views of the Commissioners in regard to future scrutiny of this area. A copy of the report, marked 'D', is filed with these minutes.

With regard to page 1 of the report, it was acknowledged that Paragraph 2 (a) should have read, "VAL had been awarded the contract by the County Council because of the poor level of service offered to the voluntary sector."

The Chief Executive reported that, in view of the Coalition Government's proposals for the "Big Society", it would be important to refocus the voluntary sector in order to respond to the new challenges it faced in the future. An external review commissioned by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership was to be carried out through September and would consult widely with the sector. The Commissioners had proposed to establish a review panel at a time when the outcomes of the external review were known to look at the sector as a whole and the targets that VAL were required to achieve.

RESOLVED:

That the intention to establish a scrutiny review panel to assess the voluntary sector's readiness to meet the challenges posed by the Coalition Government and how the County Council and other partners would need to engage with the voluntary sector to enable them to rise to the challenge be supported.

108. Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Winter Maintenance.

The Commission considered the Draft Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Winter Maintenance. A copy of the report, marked 'E', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman of the Commission, who had chaired the Review Panel, introduced the report and commended its recommendations which would assist in further improving the Council's Winter Maintenance Service, despite the resources pressures the Council currently faced. Members agreed and felt that the review had been particularly thorough in a very short timescale.

The Director of Environment and Transport reported that government advice was expected shortly on the legal implications for members of the public acting as 'Snow Wardens' clearing snow on behalf of the parish council. The Head of Legal Services advised that the Litigation Team in Legal Services would also be looking at this area with a view to providing clear advice.

The Commission advised that, in future, review panel reports should include a summary of headline recommendations at the front of the report, rather than the current practice of including them throughout.

RESOLVED:

That the overall findings of the Scrutiny Review Panel be supported and referred to the Cabinet for consideration.

109. Hall Farm, Blaby - Item Requested by Mr. A. D. Bailey CC.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources placed on the agenda at the request of Mr. A. D. Bailey CC concerning the proposed sale of Hall Farm, Blaby. A copy of the report, marked 'F', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from questioning by Mr. Bailey, the following key points were noted:

- As part of any development put forward by the County Council, there would be a number of improvements to the area such as footways, bridleways and an extension to the park. Wildlife surveys would be conducted to ensure minimal impact to any affected habitats;
- Blaby District Council had indicated in their spatial policies that areas to the north and south of Hall Farm were not suitable for development and there was a lack of brownfield land available in the area;
- Although there had been around 400 residents who had strongly opposed the plans, this was not felt to be a significant number of objections for the area's size;
- A decision on the feasibility of any sale would initially be made by officers in Property Services and a recommendation then put to the Council's Cabinet for a final decision;
- The matter could not proceed until the District Council's housing targets were made clear.

RESOLVED:

That the decision to suspend the master plan for Hall Farm be noted and that the matter will be considered by the Cabinet at a time when Blaby District Council has reviewed its level of housing need.

110. Date of next meeting.

It was NOTED that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 10 November 2010 at 2.00pm.

2.00 pm - 4.30 pm
01 September 2010

CHAIRMAN