

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 9 November 2011.

PRESENT

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

Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
Mrs. R. Camamile CC
Mr. J. G. Coxon CC
Dr. R. K. A Feltham CC
Mr. T. Gillard CC
Dr. S. Hill CC

Mr. A. M. Kershaw CC
Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mrs. R. Page CC
Mrs. P. Posnett CC
Mr. R. J. Shepherd CC
Mr. D. Slater CC

In Attendance:

Cabinet Lead Member for Climate Change, Mr. P. C. Osborne CC (for Minute 220)

Mr. D. C. Bill CC (for Minute 222)

213. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2011.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2011 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

214. Question Time.

Mr. Andre Wheeler asked the Chairman the following questions under Standing Order 35:-

- “1. I would like the full running accounts of the George Ward Centre Barwell, which the Centre refuse to produce (Company House have two accounts under this name, but no details).
2. How much money to date has the Centre drawn down from the £180,000 agreed by the County Council to help with the running costs in the first three year?”

The Chairman replied as follows:

1. The County Council holds no details other than a copy of the published accounts held at Companies House, of which you are aware. I am therefore unable to assist you further in this matter.
2. Payments are made on the basis of tapering funding at quarterly intervals. The first payment was made in the second quarter of 2010/11. To date £110,000 has been paid to the Company.

Mr. Wheeler asked the following supplementary question on the reply to question 1:

“Is it the policy of the County Council not to hold the accounts of companies that it funds and to make them openly available?”

The Chairman responded to the effect of:

The County Council does not directly run the George Ward Community Centre. The Centre holds its own accounts, which are publicly available via Companies House.

Mr. Wheeler asked the following supplementary question on the reply to question 2:

“Who can I complain to about this lack of transparency? The County Council should maintain a watching brief on all projects that it funds. Where has the remaining £70,000 been spent?”

The Chairman responded to the effect of:

I have provided you with a response to your question. I would again refer you to Companies House, who will hold this information. The Centre’s Management Committee control where the money is spent and I would advise you to speak directly to them, rather than asking questions of a strategic body such as the Commission. We have previously addressed your questions on this matter at the Commission and you will recall that I wrote to you on 18 November 2010 indicating that it was now necessary to focus on the future of the Community Centre to ensure that it thrived. I now consider this matter closed.

215. Questions asked by members.

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

216. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

217. 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.

No declarations were made.

218. Declarations of the Party Whip.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

219. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

220. Carbon Management Plan Review.

The Commission considered a Cabinet report by the Director of Environment and Transport seeking its approval to the Carbon Management Plan. The report was due to be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 15 November. A copy of the report, marked 'B', is filed with these minutes.

The Director reported that the revised target within the Plan committed the Council to delivering the national carbon target of 34%. Significant investment of £26.6 million was required to put the necessary infrastructure in place to meet this target and a significant proportion of this had already been invested or committed. This was expected to deliver annual savings in the region of £7 million each year in future. The Government's tax on carbon emissions would equate to a loss of £900,000 for the Council this year. This tax levy was expected to rise each year.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Climate Change, Mr. P. C. Osborne CC, was present for the debate on this item.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- There was concern raised that, after two years there had been little progress made and that the Council was not being radical enough in its commitment to carbon reduction;
- There was an impression that the increased usage of ICT was having a negative impact on carbon emissions. It was acknowledged that the Office Accommodation Strategy at the Council would take time to deliver reductions in carbon emissions, as the process of disposing of buildings no longer required had only just started. The usage of energy for street lighting had increased due to an initial increase in adopted street lights compared to the baseline had delayed progress, but a reduction in emissions was now expected to be achieved as the programme to switch off street lights at night had expanded across the County;
- It was confirmed that many avenues were being investigated with regard to renewable energy. These included photovoltaic panels, solar panels, biomass boilers and combined heat and power schemes. Wind energy was not expected to feature within the timescale of the Plan;
- It was felt that the sentence on page 5 of the Plan that stated that: "Climate change is the greatest challenge facing the world today" was incorrect and should be amended to read: "Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today".

The Commission expressed a desire for the Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel to keep a close watching brief on progress made against the Plan and that the Commission should receive an annual update in order to ensure that targets were being reached.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments of the Commission be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on Tuesday 15 November 2011;
- (b) That a report outlining progress against carbon emissions targets be submitted to the Commission on an annual basis.

221. Change to the Order of Business.

The Chairman sought and obtained the consent of the Commission to vary the order of business from that set out in the agenda.

222. Item placed on the agenda at the request of Mr. D. C. Bill CC: Changes to Highways Maintenance Policy.

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Environment and Transport which had been considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 11 October 2011. The matter was being considered by the Commission at the request of Mr. D. C. Bill CC, who had raised concern that the Cabinet had agreed a significant departure from the approved service reductions relating to category 1 defects to highways outlined in the 2010/11 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). A copy of Mr. Bill's letter requesting that the Commission consider the item, marked 'D', together with the relevant Cabinet report, are filed with these minutes.

With the consent of the Chairman, Mr. Bill CC addressed the Commission and drew members' attention to page 7 of the Cabinet report where he suggested that there had been move away from repairing category 1 defects within 24 hours to repairing them within 72 hours, therefore representing a significant departure from the approved service reductions within the MTFS. It was Mr. Bill's view that category 1 defects required immediate emergency repair work.

In response to Mr. Bill's concerns, the Director of Environment and Transport addressed the Commission and underlined the need to repair category 1 defects as soon as possible. It was his view that most category 1 defects were dealt with within 24 hours, but that the Department had given itself some flexibility to repair less urgent category 1 defects within "up to" 72 hours. The Council's commitment to a high quality road network was stressed and it was widely known that the County had one of the best road networks in the country. The Council would also need to identify significant savings of £2.8 million and the approach adopted by Councils such as Northamptonshire of clustering 'patch' repairs may be one way of achieving this. The Council would be investigating this possibility in the coming months and may bring forward some proposals in this regard as part of the 2012/13 MTFS.

Mr Bill expressed that he was content with the explanation provided by the Director of Environment and Transport.

RESOLVED:

That the intention to report back on proposed changes to the highways maintenance policy in 2012 be noted.

223. Traffic Regulation Orders and the West Loughborough Parking Project.

The Commission considered a report by the Director of Environment and Transport concerning work currently being undertaken to develop the Traffic Regulation Order process and the changes to the Environment and Transport departmental structure which would hopefully allow a more strategic approach to traffic management in the County. A copy of the report, marked 'H', is filed with these minutes.

The Director of Environment and Transport reported that this item had originated with a question from Mr. Max Hunt CC at the full meeting of the County Council held on 28 September. At that meeting the Chairman of the Commission had responded by agreeing to consider the issue with his Scrutiny Commissioner colleagues, with a view to considering the item at the Commission.

He stated that the TRO process was one which required review in order to identify efficiencies. It was clear that there was a balance to be struck between the effective use of funding, what was needed for the area and the needs of local residents. As part of this work, a study into parking in Loughborough West had been carried out, to which over 700 objections had been received. The Council continued to liaise with local members in the hope of dealing with parking concerns effectively.

Arising from the debate, the following points were noted:

- Concern was raised by members in relation to the parking situation in Loughborough which was becoming overcrowded and caused significant problems for resident parking and refuse collections. The Director reported that the priority with TROs was to improve traffic flow;
- Arising from a suggestion for smaller 'resident only' parking areas, the Director reported that these schemes had to be designed in such a way as to ensure that they did not transfer parking elsewhere, causing knock-on problems;
- The Council was focusing first on traffic management in the areas with the poorest economies, such as Coalville and Loughborough;
- The Government were proposing that it would no longer be a legal requirement for the Council to advertise TROs in the local newspaper, which would enable a cost saving to be made. There were potentially other changes which may improve the traffic order process.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted and that a further report will be presented to the Commission in April 2012 detailing the outcome of the TRO process review and the future approach to strategic traffic management and parking studies.

224. Flooding Update.

The Commission considered a report by the Director of Environment and Transport concerning an update on developments that have taken place following the work of the submission of the Scrutiny Review Panel's Final Report on Flooding. A copy of the report, marked 'E', is filed with these minutes.

The Director of Environment and Transport introduced the report by stating that there had, as yet, been little clarity provided by central government in regard to funding of sustainable urban drainage systems and how such systems should be formally adopted, a matter of concern for Council as it had now become the Lead Local Flood Risk Authority. Furthermore, no date had been given for when the Council would assume this responsibility, though much planning work had been carried out to prepare for this.

In response to the report, the Commission expressed support for the work undertaken by the Department to prepare itself for this new responsibility. In particular, the role of the Scrutiny Review Panel was acknowledged in helping to bring together the key agencies to enable a dialogue to take place and relationships to be formed. The importance of maintaining strong relationships with the district councils was stressed, given their key role as local planning and land drainage authorities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress being made in all aspects relating to flooding be supported;
- (b) That a further update report on how the new arrangements for managing flood risk will work in practice be submitted to the Commission at the appropriate time.

225. Local Transport Plan 3 - Performance Indicator Set and Targets.

The Commission considered a report by the Director of Environment and Transport concerning the Council's LTP3 performance indicator set and targets. A copy of the report, marked 'F', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from debate, the Director of Environment and Transport reported that:

- The LTP3 was a significant change in the way the Council dealt with transport issues;
- Some targets from the previous LTP would have to be left to decline. The focus remained on maintaining roads in the best condition possible;
- Satisfaction levels with the programme to switch off street lighting early were encouraging. It was important to continue to focus on communication of the reasons why this was happening;
- Most schools now had a School Travel Plan in place. Work continued with schools to maintain and refresh these as appropriate;

- It was important that the Council continued to work with the City Council on transport because of the impact of City traffic on the County.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That further update reports setting out progress against KPIs be submitted to the Commission annually.

226. Final Report of the 'Light Touch' Review Panel on Communications between Members and Officers Regarding Services Provided by the Environment and Transport Department.

The Commission considered the Final Report of the Light Touch Scrutiny Review Panel on Communications between Members and Officers regarding Services provided by the Environment and Transport Department. A copy of the report, marked 'G', is filed with these minutes.

The Director of Environment and Transport indicated that the Final Report would be circulated to his Department next week in order that staff were aware of the new policy. The Final Report would then be circulated to all members of the Council via the Members' Information Service. The Director stressed the need for those members who were unhappy with the way in which an enquiry had been dealt with to contact him directly and discuss their difficulties.

RESOLVED:

That the 'Light Touch' report be approved for implementation and circulation to members and relevant officers.

227. Issues Arising from the Meeting of the Scrutiny Commissioners: Scrutiny Review Panel on Transitions.

The Commission considered a report by the Chief Executive concerning proposals to establish a Scrutiny Review Panel on Transitions. A copy of the report, marked 'C', is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the Chair of the Children and Young people's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Mrs. Posnett had a particular interest in this matter and hence would be an appropriate choice to chair this Panel. Mrs. Camamile had expressed an interest in being part of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the establishment of Scrutiny Review Panel on Transitions with the terms of reference as outlined in the appendix to the report be approved and nominations be sought from political groups for members to serve thereon.

2.30 pm - 5.00 pm
09 November 2011

CHAIRMAN