

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

6 MARCH 2014 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman
Mr C Ladkin – Vice-Chairman

Mr PR Batty, Mr PAS Hall, Mrs WA Hall, Mr MS Hulbert, Mr DW Inman, Mr JS Moore,
Mr K Morrell and Mr K Nichols

Also in attendance: Councillor DC Bill MBE and Councillor Ms BM Witherford

Officers in attendance: Storme Coop, Bill Cullen, Edwina Grant, Lindsay Orton, Rebecca Owen, Ian Pinfold, Caroline Roffey and Sharon Stacey

432 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bessant and Taylor.

433 MINUTES

On the motion of Councillor Nichols, seconded by Councillor Morrell, it was

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

434 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

435 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP & COMMUNITY POLICING UPDATE

Inspector Starbuck of Hinckley LPU and Sharon Stacey provided an update on the Community Safety Partnership and crime statistics. During the presentation, the following main points were made:

- There were now good links between the police, councillors and the community and the engagement plan was working well;
- There had been no particular spikes in crime although there had been an increase in house burglaries for a couple of months due to the a serial burglar moving to the area;
- Whilst there had been a reduction in vehicle crime, there had been a slight increase in most crimes compared to last year, but fewer than the year before;
- Endeavour had developed well and had won a national award the previous week for the positive impact it had had on the community;
- Numerous campaigns had been developed through Endeavour, including the current campaign against sale of illicit tobacco;
- Various support services were provided through Endeavour including work around male domestic abuse, single vulnerable people, hate crime and children who had witnessed domestic abuse. Visits and talks in schools were also continuing.

During discussion following the presentation, a member said that there had been greater visibility of the police in his parish, and a good response to calls. Another member felt

that the reduction in resources had noticeably reduced the proactive element of the work of the Police, for example speed checks. Reference was also made to the consultation on priorities and the hope that the Police & Crime Commissioner took note of the outcome, the judicial reviews around the country into the developer contributions for policing and whether the requests for contributions was realistic when calculated on the average cost per household of policing.

Councillor Mrs Hall left the meeting at 7:24pm and Councillor Morrell left at 7.25pm.

A member enquired about the success of the 'Neighbourhood Takes Charge' initiative in Earl Shilton. Inspector Starbuck advised that in particular the Keats Lane project had been really successful.

In response to a member's question, Inspector Starbuck reported that Neighbourhood Watch and CCTV were encouraged by the police as they were a core tactic in deterring and detecting crime. The use of Crimestoppers was also endorsed and encouraged.

436 WELFARE REFORM CHANGES & IMPACT ON HBBC RESIDENTS

Members received an update on the impact of welfare reform changes. The main changes were outlined, including those that had already been implemented and those that were awaited. It was reported that the additional charges and reduction in benefits for some was starting to have an impact which was identified by an increase in arrears. All those affected by the spare room subsidy had received a personal visit and had been given advice.

With regard to universal credit, it was noted that this had been delayed from the original roll out date of October 2013 and was now expected to be fully implemented by 2016-17. The Government appeared to have learned from the pilot schemes regarding direct payments, and it was now likely that direct payment would be possible where a tenant was in arrears.

During the presentation and discussion thereon, the following comments were made:

- Some people lacked the basic skills to be able to budget so required support;
- Payments totalling £75,000 had been made from the discretionary housing payment fund. It was noted that the fund was available to support housing costs and could be used for removal costs for example if a tenant facing a benefit reduction because of under-occupancy was moving to a smaller property;
- It was reported that the authority had experienced difficulty in getting council tax payers to apply for the Discretionary discount fund, this was despite contacting them directly;
- The Leicestershire Welfare Provision fund could assist people in basic furnishing or by providing funds if someone lost their purse or their benefit money;
- There had been an increase in use of the foodbank and providers in the rural areas were sought, as well as looking at signposting to such services. It was felt that provision was not uniform and it was difficult to know how the scheme was administered in different areas and where the food could be obtained;
- It was reported that whilst some people subject to the under-occupancy charges had the option of moving to smaller properties, the lack of one-bedroom properties prevented some people from down-sizing.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the report be endorsed and the impact be reviewed again in 12 months;

- (ii) Investigate utilising Markfield Community Centre to secure Foodbank Provision in northern parishes.

437 CLOCKWISE CREDIT UNION UPDATE

The Scrutiny Commission received an update on Clockwise Credit Union, including the new information points in Barwell and Wykin and the branch set up at Earl Shilton Community House. It was reported that there was also now a local access point at Next Generation in Hinckley.

Councillor Hulbert left the meeting at 8.27pm.

Members were pleased that the number of customers of the Credit Union was continuing to grow, but concern was expressed that many of the most vulnerable people were not aware of the Credit Union, or still found it easier to access loan sharks. Information was requested on the percentage of loans that were approved. It was reported that Clockwise in Leicester had launched an automatic lending decision in order to respond to market pressure and make the process quicker to be able to compete with less reputable loan providers.

Members were concerned that not enough people knew about the Credit Union and that the provision should be better publicised. It was agreed that the Communication Strategy be brought to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Commission along with options for identifying financial support for publicity of the Clockwise services for the Borough.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the report be noted and the continuation of the current delivery model be endorsed;
- (ii) a Communications Strategy be brought to the next meeting;
- (iii) officers be RECOMMENDED to identify resources to support the Communications Strategy and that these be brought back to the next meeting.

438 DEMENTIA FRIENDS

The Scrutiny Commission received a short presentation on the national Dementia Friends campaign which was an introduction and precursor to a longer presentation. Members found the presentation very informative and agreed that all members should receive the presentation.

RESOLVED – a similar presentation to Council be arranged.

Councillor Batty left the meeting at 8.50pm.

439 GREEN SPACE DELIVERY PLAN

Members received the Green Space Delivery Plan which had been out for consultation and was due to be considered by Council on 8 April. It was noted that the plan would be updated annually to reflect funding available and that most funding would come from developer contributions. It was emphasised that the plan mostly covered the Hinckley area as other parts of the borough were covered by parish councils. It was noted that a similar approach was being promoted with parish councils.

Discussion ensued on whether some aspects should be funded from the special expenses budget or HBBC's general fund. Members felt that the plan should clearly identify which projects were to be funded by Hinckley special expenses, and which from the Borough rate.

Concern was also expressed that there were gaps in the strategy as it only covered land in the responsibility of the Green Space team and not council housing land which meant that where the two were adjacent there was no strategy to link them. It was further noted that some Green infrastructure routes went through HBBC, housing and parish land, and in response officers explained that in those situations a project team with representatives from all land owners would need to be set up. Members felt that an overarching strategy for all green space for HBBC, housing, parish and privately owned land would be beneficial and resources should be secured for this.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the Green Space Strategy be noted and endorsed;
- (ii) Financial requirements from Hinckley Special Expenses and the Borough rate be clearly identified;
- (iii) resources be sought for creation of a green space strategy for all green space within the Borough.

440 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014

In considering the work programme, the following was discussed:

- The April meeting would be brought forward from the 10th to 3 April so the MTFS could be considered by the Scrutiny Commission prior to decision by Council;
- Information on the Earl Shilton SUE planning application would be brought to the meeting on 3 April and members of the Barwell & Earl Shilton Scrutiny Group would be invited to attend and take full part in the debate on the item;
- The May meeting of the Commission would be held on 15 May not the 22nd as originally scheduled as this would clash with the European Elections.

It was also reported that Blaby District Council had expressed an interest in undertaking joint scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership. Members agreed to the suggestion that a joint meeting of both authorities' scrutiny commissions be held once a year, with an interim 'local' meeting.

RESOLVED – the work programme be noted with the addition of items mentioned above and any others agreed at this meeting.

(The Meeting closed at 9.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN