

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

9 OCTOBER 2017 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman
Mrs R Camamile and Mr KWP Lynch – Vice-Chairman

Mr DC Bill MBE, Mr SL Bray, Mr WJ Crooks, Mr RB Roberts and Mr R Ward

Officers in attendance: Rebecca Owen, Edwina Grant, Julie Kenny, Caroline Roffey, Clive Taylor and Ashley Wilson

152 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Williams.

153 MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor Lynch, seconded by Councillor Camamile and

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 10 August be confirmed and signed by the chairman.

154 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

155 COUNCIL HOUSING SATISFACTION SURVEY

The results of the latest housing satisfaction survey were presented to members. In relation to the poor satisfaction with the gas contractor, it was noted that there was now a new contractor in place and feedback had been positive and the number of complaints had reduced considerably.

Members asked if an arrow indicating direction of travel could be included on the graphs in future so they could see whether satisfaction had improved.

The Scrutiny Commission wished to congratulate the Housing and Housing Repairs teams on their hard work to maintain high satisfaction.

156 BUSINESS RATES ENTERPRISE ZONE RELIEF POLICY

The Scrutiny Commission received a report which informed members of business formalisation of the council's enterprise zone relief policy arrangements. Some members felt it unfair on businesses not in the enterprise zone that those in the enterprise zone received rate relief based purely on their location, but it was acknowledged that it had been a government initiative with that clear intention.

157 BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEF - NEW BUSINESS INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

Members were informed of the proposed change to the discretionary business rates relief policy to encourage investment into the area by new businesses. It was emphasised that this policy was not intended to encourage businesses to move from

elsewhere in Leicestershire, but to discourage them from moving away from the area. Whilst it was explained that all authorities were able to adopt such a policy, Hinckley & Bosworth was the only authority in Leicestershire currently pursuing it.

At this stage, Councillor Bray asked it to be recorded that he was a member of Leicestershire County Council and the CFA, who were both consultees on the policy.

Concern was expressed in relation to measuring the success of the incentives.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the policy be supported and RECOMMENDED to the Executive;
- (ii) the application of the policy and benefit to businesses be reported back to the Scrutiny Commission.

158 SCRUTINY REVIEW: LIBRARIES

Members received a report on library service provision across the borough following Leicestershire County Council's review of libraries in 2014/15. Mrs Bowler, trustee and chairman of Markfield Community Library, was in attendance as witness to outline her experience of setting up the group and taking over management and running of the library.

Councillor Lay declared a personal interest as ward councillor, parish councillor and having supported the group.

The difficulty in recruiting volunteers at Newbold Verdon library was discussed, and it was envisaged that this may become more of a problem across the borough as time passed.

In relation to Desford library, it was noted that, should the current negotiations not be successful, the library would close and a mobile library would serve the village. It was anticipated that the outcome would be known by the end of the year. One of the issues appeared to relate to maintenance of the building as work was required to repair the roof.

It was acknowledged that, whilst there were six community libraries now in operation, they may start to struggle once the financial support from the county council ended in five years, along with the difficulty in recruiting volunteers to operate the facilities.

The Scrutiny Commission supported Mrs Bowler's request, on behalf of all community libraries, for the continuation of discretionary business rates discount for libraries and support with training for volunteers.

Councillor Ward left the meeting at 7.36pm.

Concern was expressed in relation to Barwell Library and the fact that an agreement could not be reached with the George Ward Centre which would have been ideal as it was a public building built for the community.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the Scrutiny Commission supports the continuation of business rate relief for libraries;
- (ii) officers be RECOMMENDED to consider how to provide access to training for the volunteers.

159 SCRUTINY REVIEW: SPECIAL EXPENSES AREA

The Scrutiny Commission received a report to support its review of the special expenses governance arrangements. It was emphasised that special expenses was a charging mechanism and part of the functions of Council and could not function as a parish. It was noted that, should members wish to change the charging mechanism or the assets included in the special expenses area, a public consultation would be required. The benefits, risks and impact on council tax payers of having a town council for Hinckley were also highlighted.

During discussion, reference was made to:

- The possibility of moving funding for Hollycroft Park from the general fund to special expenses, but the impact this would have on the budget for that area
- The above being offset by moving car parks income into the special expenses budget
- The risk of loss of control of assets (for example, Argents Mead), should a town council be created
- The requirement for a public petition and lengthy process to create a town council
- The advantages of maintaining the 'status quo' due to the current, less complicated way of dealing with special expenses which works well.

It was felt that the report should now be passed to the Hinckley Area Committee for its consideration.

RESOLVED – the report be presented to Hinckley Area Committee.

160 BUSINESS RATES RELIEF SCHEMES 2017/18

Members were advised of additional business rate relief schemes arising from the government's spring budget.

At this juncture, Councillors Bill, Bray and Crooks declared a personal interest in the business rates and libraries reports as county councillors.

Councillor Bray left the meeting at 8.18pm.

It was noted that, of the 59 public houses contacted, only 38 had responded to request rate relief.

RESOLVED – the report be RECOMMENDED to the Executive.

161 CRESCENT DEVELOPMENT - UPDATE

Members received an update on the performance of the Crescent retail development, with particular focus on block C. It was noted that, in 2015, Hinckley was listed in the top 5% for retail footprint in the UK and was the eleventh largest retail footprint in the East Midlands.

In relation to block C, it was noted that there were two vacant units which had resulted in a lower contribution to balances, but this had been offset in the general fund by other reductions in expenditure.

162 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2016-18

The work programme was noted.

163 MATTERS FROM WHICH THE PUBLIC MAY BE EXCLUDED

On the motion of Councillor Camamile seconded by Councillor Lynch, it was

RESOLVED – in accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 10 of Part I of Schedule 12A of that Act.

164 DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES FUND

The Scrutiny Commission received a report regarding the allocation of funding from the Developing Communities Fund.

RESOLVED – the following funding allocations be supported as per the recommendation:

- (i) Sport in Desford: £234,000;
- (ii) All Saints Church, Sheepy Magna: £57,000;
- (iii) Barlestone: £139,000 (conditional grant).

(The Meeting closed at 8.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN