

HINCKLEY & BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

27 NOVEMBER 2008 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman
Mrs R Camamile - Joint Vice-Chairman
Mr P Hall - Joint Vice-Chairman

Mr PR Batty, Mr PS Bessant, Mr DM Gould, Mrs A Hall, Mr DW Inman, Mr CG Joyce, Mr C Ladkin, Mr K Morrell, Mr K Nichols and Mrs BM Witherford.

Officers in attendance: Mr S Atkinson, Mr D Bunker Mr M Evans, Miss L Horton, Mrs B Imison, Mr P Langham, Miss R Owen, Mr TM Prowse, Mrs J Puffett, Mrs S Stacey, Mrs J Stay and Ms J Wykes.

281 MINUTES (SC45)

On the motion of Mr Nichols, seconded by Mrs Hall, it was

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2008 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

282 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

283 PROGRESS REPORT ON KEY CAPITAL PROJECTS (SC46)

Mr Gould arrived at 6.35pm.

Members were briefed on the current position of key capital projects, namely the Bus Station redevelopment, Atkins Site and the Leisure Centre. It was reported that the Capital Programme and Medium Term Financial Strategy were being reviewed in light of the current economic climate and would be presented to the Finance & Audit Services Select Committee and Scrutiny Commission in due course, however it was explained that the Bus Station redevelopment would have no major impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It was also noted that in response to the economic situation, the Council were looking to be tenants of part of the Atkins Site.

Mr Batty arrived at 6.40pm.

A Member questioned the financial stability of the Tin Hat Partnership, and in response it was stated that this had been considered as part of the appraisals.

With regard to the Leisure Centre, concern was expressed that provision should compliment, but not overlap, what was already in existence in Earl

Shilton and Barwell, and it was suggested that the Council liaise with the Town and Parish Councils for those areas.

RESOLVED – the progress made on the Key Capital projects be endorsed.

284 FLEXIBLE WORKING (SC47)

The Scrutiny Commission received a report which outlined progress on implementing flexible working initiatives and plans for further development of the proposals. It was noted that a Scrutiny Group had worked alongside an officer group to look at the issue of flexible working, and that this initiative had been piloted in the Revenues and Benefits service areas. Members acknowledged the hard work of officers and the outstanding quality of the report.

It was reported that a successful Touch Down site had been created in Markfield and Members requested that further Touch Down sites be opened.

Concern was expressed with regard to the culture change required in order to achieve 40% homeworking and the fact that this project had been created by the issue of office accommodation. In response however it was stated that flexible working had been discussed as part of single status – before the issue of office accommodation had become critical.

In response to a Member's question, it was explained that whilst flexible working would be voluntary for existing staff, when new staff were recruited the job description would specify if homeworking was expected and the member of staff would be appointed on those terms, however no-one would work from home 100% of the time as it was felt that interaction with colleagues was important. Members felt that it was essential that any new office accommodation had sufficient meeting rooms and drop-in areas in order for flexible working to be successful.

With regard to the potential temporary accommodation available in the Goddard building, officers agreed to bring a further report in three months' time. Members also requested that the working group continues to meet and to look into issues such as how to manage staff whilst operating flexible working.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the co-ordinated and phased implementation of flexible working be endorsed;
- (ii) the proposal to explore the opportunity to move to the Goddard Building for a limited period be endorsed;
- (iii) a further detailed report be brought to the Scrutiny Commission in three months.

285 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH GENERAL ENFORCEMENT POLICY (SC48)

Members received a report which presented the reviewed and updated Environmental Health General Enforcement Policy. It was reported that this had been agreed by the Executive subject to the Scrutiny Commission's comments. It was noted that the majority of enforcement cases were noise nuisance or dog fouling, and that there had been eight cases in the past year, all of which had been successful. It was stated that penalties ranged from conditional discharge to large fines.

It was reported that there was a high level of customer satisfaction with the Enforcement Service, but that as many cases were resolved informally, there was often no recognition of these.

Mr Gould left the meeting at 7.27pm.

RESOLVED – the report be endorsed.

286 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY (SC49)

Members were presented with the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013. It was stated that this would also be sent to partner agencies for their comments.

Mr Gould returned at 7.32pm.

Members suggested that more work needed to be done to engage private landlords, particularly due to the potential for repossessions and therefore an increase in demand for rented properties. In response officers stated that this had been recognised and that landlords should receive reassurance that the Council could intervene if there were problems with private tenants.

Concern was also expressed with regard to the effects of the 'credit crunch' and the risk of homelessness, inability to purchase properties, negative equity, job loss and reduction in buy-to-let properties. In response it was reported that the Council worked closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau with regard to early intervention to help to prevent homelessness, and that the Government had a Rescue Package to assist those who the local authority had a duty to help. It was stated that the Anti-Poverty group would also be looking at these issues.

RESOLVED – the Homelessness Strategy be endorsed.

287 ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY (SC50)

The Scrutiny Commission was updated on the work commissioned on its behalf, and it was noted that a working party had been established which included Members, officers and external agencies – although disappointment was expressed with regard to the low Member attendance.

It was highlighted that poverty was now becoming apparent in affluent areas, particular in households of older people, but that these areas were not as

easy to identify or address. It was reported that new ways of doing this were being developed, but that some people may be too proud to ask for help, or may not qualify for help. It was agreed that the issue of helping isolated people in affluent communities be raised at the working group.

RESOLVED – the report be noted and progress made be endorsed.

288 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09 (SC51)

Members gave consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2008/09. It was agreed that a report on flexible working and an anti-poverty update be added to the work programme for 2 April 2009.

RESOLVED – the Work Programme be agreed.

289 FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL DECISIONS (SC52)

Members received the Forward Plan of Executive and Council decisions.

RESOLVED – the Forward Plan be noted.

290 MINUTES OF SELECT COMMITTEES

Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Finance & Audit Services Select Committee, 29 September 2008 (SC53).

(The meeting closed at 8.15 pm)