

HINCKLEY & BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

8 SEPTEMBER 2011 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman
Mr PAS Hall - Joint Vice-Chairman

Mr JG Bannister, Mr PR Batty, Mr PS Bessant, Mr DW Inman, Mr JS Moore, Mr K Morrell, Mr K Nichols and Miss DM Taylor.

Officers in attendance: Mr S Atkinson, Ms V Bunting, Mr B Cullen, Mr S Curtis, Mr M Evans, Miss R Owen, Ms C Peters, Mrs S Stacey and Mr B Whirry.

138 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Mrs Hodgkins, Mr Ladkin and Mrs Sprason with the following substitutions authorised in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.3:

Mr Bannister for Mrs Hodgkins;
Mr Moore for Mrs Sprason.

139 MINUTES (SC8)

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

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

140 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

141 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12 (SC9)

Further to a request at the previous meeting for a breakdown of funding regarding the above, Members received a presentation showing improvements carried out across the Borough.

Whilst Members endorsed the use of the funding, concern was expressed that parish councils were asked to contribute to improvements carried out within their parish, but that, where improvements were planned in the special expenses area, the same request was not made of the special expenses budget. In response it was agreed that this matter would be taken to the Hinckley Area Committee.

It was noted that a Landscape Partnership Lottery Bid for the Ashby Canal area was being developed by British Waterways in partnership with community groups and the council. If successful although funding could not be spent directly on canal bridge repairs, it could be spent on improving heritage skills such as masonry or hedge laying. Other projects which were being considered included improving sections of the footpath along the canal, the parking at Sutton Cheney Wharf, generating electricity at Help Out Mill in Shackerstone and a new footpath route at Gopsall.

In response to a question about the process for approving improvement schemes, it was explained that the proposal was measured against set criteria, then a list was drawn up which was agreed by Members.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the report be endorsed;
- (ii) the Hinckley Area Committee be RECOMMENDED to give consideration to match funding improvements within the precept area.

142 IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL HOUSING REFORM: DIRECTIONS TO THE SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATOR - CONSULTATION (SC10)

Members were provided with a report on the above consultation paper with the proposed response appended to the report. The new initiatives included in the proposed changing standards were highlighted as affordable rent, tenant panels, flexible tenancies and tenant cashback.

A Member identified the lack of information in the consultation document about the possibility of local authorities becoming registered social landlords. In response it was stated that the document referred to registered providers, which included councils, but referred to developing properties rather than taking over management of affordable housing developed as part of a Section 106 agreement. Officers supported the aspiration to purchase housing from developers for affordable housing purposes and advised that the authority may be in a position to consider this following a review of HRA funding and the stock investment plan in future.

Members expressed concern with regard to the ‘tenant cashback’ initiative outlined in the consultation document, suggesting that monitoring of repairs and provision of cashback would be very difficult to manage. It was reported that this scheme was being piloted in certain areas of the country and the results of these pilots, once available, would need to be understood before further comment could be made.

It was suggested that the responses to the questions should be seen as an opportunity to outline how the authority would like the system to operate. Officers agreed to look again at the responses, but felt that many of the questions did not have sufficient detail to be able to give a definite response. It was also important that Members provided input to ensure the responses were sufficiently hard hitting.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The report be endorsed, subject to the responses being ‘hardened up’ to suggest actions/requests from HBBC perspective;
- (ii) A further report be provided to the Commission on the possibilities for the authority with regard to engaging with developers to purchase affordable housing.

143 ATKINS AND GREENFIELDS DEVELOPMENTS – YIELD AND TENANT LOCATION (SC11)

In response to a request at the previous meeting, the Commission received a report on financial and tenant location details for Greenfields Business Park and the Atkins Building.

Members asked if another similar project could be funded. In response it was stated that the whole estate was currently being considered, including whether to improve older units or replace them.

Information on the number of new jobs created was requested and some examples of where businesses on the sites continued to improve and more jobs had been created. Examples of businesses moving to these two developments from outside of the borough were also provided.

It was noted that there were some security issues on some of the other industrial estates that didn't have as good security as Greenfields, but officers were working with police and tenants to look at options, which would be partly funded by businesses on the site. It was also stated that ways of making all of the sites more 'green' were being considered.

RESOLVED – the report be noted.

144 SHARED SERVICES – CURRENT AND MEDIUM TERM POSITION (SC12)

Members of the Scrutiny Commission were updated on existing joint working or shared services with other councils in Leicestershire and the surrounding areas and of achieved and planned outcomes. The strategic approach and strict criteria was highlighted.

It was reported that the revenues & benefits partnership had not been expected to make savings during the first year, but were now projected to save £84,000. The people involved in this were commended, but whilst Members were impressed with the savings, they asked about the affect on performance. In response it was reported that the first joint board meeting would be held on 21 September and would receive a performance report, but it appeared that performance had improved slightly overall and was anticipated to improve further.

A Member asked if investments were being made to enable future shared services, for example if the authority was to develop its DSO services, it would need a new depot. In response it was noted that, whilst investment was not generally being made to prepare specifically for sharing of more DSO services in the future, a new depot was under discussion. It was requested that a report on the options for this be brought to the next meeting of the Commission.

Concern was expressed that whilst the financial cost of sharing services could be quantified, the human cost may not have been measured in terms of, for example, stress to employees of additional travelling and learning new systems.

RESOLVED –

- (i) the effective joint working initiatives be endorsed;
- (ii) a report on options for a new depot be brought to the next meeting.

145 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12

Further to the Scrutiny workshop on 7 July 2011 and subsequent work to identify priority areas for consideration by the Scrutiny Commission, Members were informed of the priorities and how this work would be managed by the Commission. Members were reminded of the process for scrutiny reviews and in particular interviewing witnesses.

146 FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL DECISIONS (SC13)

Members received the Forward Plan of Executive and Council decisions. It was requested that the following reports be brought before the Commission before a decision being made:

- Protocol for Section 106 contributions including affordable housing;
- Argents Mead (both reports due for decision in December 2011 and June 2012).

RESOLVED – the Forward Plan be noted and the abovementioned items be brought to the Commission.

147 MATTERS FROM WHICH THE PUBLIC MAY BE EXCLUDED

On the motion of Mr Nichols, seconded by Mr Bannister, 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.

148 ARGENTS MEAD (SC14)

Further to a request of the Commission, a report on the options for enhancement of the site on which the council offices currently stood was considered, along with the financial implications of the various options.

RESOLVED –

- (i) should further public consultation be undertaken for this site, all residents of the borough be included;
- (ii) any future consultation on this matter should include the costs, impact and benefits of each of the options;
- (iii) further information on the costs for demolition of the council offices be provided;
- (iv) further information on the costs to the council of each of the options be provided, for example, should the required capital receipt not be achieved;
- (v) the original objective as recommended by the Finance & Audit Services Select Committee of maximising the capital receipt be reinforced.

(The meeting closed at 9.36 pm)