

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

4 JULY 2013 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

Officers in attendance: Steve Atkinson, Bill Cullen, Louisa Horton, Julie Kenny, Sanjiv Kohli, Rebecca Owen, Rob Parkinson and Sharon Stacey

54 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

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

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May be approved and signed by the Chairman.

55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

56 HRA INVESTMENT PLAN PRESENTATION

Members received a thorough presentation on the Housing Investment Plan. During discussion following the presentation, the following points were raised:

- Some members felt that the priority was to build new units;
- Generally current housing stock was in good condition;
- Affordable housing in rural areas was needed;
- The possibility of buying back stock should be considered;
- There had been a large increase in applications for housing and there were currently approximately 2000 on the waiting list for housing;
- Ideally land should be purchased for housing;
- Upgrading boilers should be a priority in existing housing in addition to bathrooms and kitchens – in response it was noted that energy companies also had a responsibility regarding boilers.

Members welcomed the detailed presentation and endorsed it for presentation to Council.

RESOLVED – Council be RECOMMENDED to

- (i) support the increase of new housing stock;
- (ii) focus on S106 and rural exception sites for new stock;
- (iii) ensure links with energy companies for contributions to new boilers.

57 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Members were presented with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and also provided with a verbal update with information that had been announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Spending Review 2015/16 since production of the report. The conflict between the reduction of grants from central government and the pressure from the public to keep fees and charges low was highlighted.

The New Homes Bonus was discussed and it was explained that the government had announced that a portion would go to Local Enterprise Partnerships. It had originally been thought that this would be from the district councils' portions only, but it had since been confirmed by the Secretary of State that it would be from both the district and county councils' sums. It was stated that the government would be consulting on the amount to go to Local Enterprise Partnerships within the next couple of months.

With regard to council tax, Members were reminded that in order to increase the Borough Council's income from this by more than 2%, a referendum must be held, but the cost of running a referendum would be higher than the income from the council tax increase. It was noted that the council tax support scheme would need to be reconsidered, including considering the contribution by residents who were eligible for support. Concern was expressed that all decisions both locally and nationally had a knock-on effect on preceptors.

The impact on district council jobs of moving to universal credits was discussed, and it was stated that it was not yet known whether this would be a centralised service or whether it would be administered by local authorities on behalf of the government.

Members were reminded that many efficiency savings had been identified and actioned by the Council over the past few years and a further senior management re-structure report would be presented to Council on 16 July which proposed further savings as a result of a vacancy. It was also reiterated that efficiency savings as a result of moving to the Hub and of sharing the building were also being realised. It was felt that the point may be reached that sharing with other authorities, particularly at management level, became the next logical step.

With regard to other major projects it was noted that the projected capital receipt for the bus station redevelopment was still £2.72m which would be used for the leisure centre.

RESOLVED – the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted and RECOMMENDED to Council for approval.

58 WILDLIFE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ACTIVITIES UPDATE

The Scrutiny Commission received a report on activities relating to wildlife and the natural environment in response to a request from a Member. The report explained which authority was responsible for different aspects of wildlife and conservation and also named the Chief Officer (Environmental Health) as the lead officer within the borough council for such matters.

It was stated that Leicestershire County Council held a directory of information and useful websites in relation to wildlife and that Councillors Crooks and Gould were members of the countywide Environment Board. It was suggested that our representatives on the Board be invited to the Scrutiny Commission.

Members were also informed that a Heritage Lottery Bid had been submitted which if successful would fund a range of activities across the Charnwood Forest Area. It was reported that an internal restructure had enabled an officer to undertake more work on

biodiversity. The Chief Officer (Environmental Health) agreed to circulate information on the remit of the Environment Board and a directory of all agencies and how to contact them.

Members raised concerns regarding mowing of specific verges and the resulting impact on biodiversity. It was agreed that liaison with parishes and the County Council should be encouraged and it was suggested that representatives of Leicestershire County Council be invited to the Parishes Forum and that the matter also be raised at the Highways Forum.

RESOLVED –

- (i) Members be provided with details of organisations involved in protection of wildlife and the natural environment;
- (ii) Representatives of Leicestershire County Council Highways department be invited to the Parishes Forum;
- (iii) Issues of cutting back verges on straight roads be raised at the Highways Forum;
- (iv) Officers be thanked for the comprehensive report and the report be endorsed.

59 CITIZENS PANEL SATISFACTION SURVEY WINTER REPORT 2012/13

The Scrutiny Commission was informed of the findings of the Citizens Panel survey for winter 2012/13. It was reported that satisfaction generally had reduced, except for refuse & recycling. Members acknowledged that the return rate was quite high but felt that people may be more disposed to completing the survey if they had complaints, and as such the survey would never be a true representation of satisfaction with the council's services.

Members asked if there was an opportunity to make comments on the form, for example to get an idea of the aspect of waste that residents weren't happy with, such as dog mess, waste collections, street cleansing etc. Officers agreed to investigate this potential.

60 MEMBERSHIP OF SCRUTINY ENVIRONMENT GROUP

Members agreed to let the Democratic Services Officer know if they were interested in remaining or becoming a member of the Scrutiny Environment Group.

61 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

It was agreed that the annual report would be discussed at the next briefing.

62 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2014

Members were reminded of the topics raised at the workshop for inclusion in the work programme for 2013-14 and 2014-15. In addition to those items raised previously, the following items were requested for future meetings:

- Background information about Academies including how they're run, who owns the land (information item, not to scrutinise);
- Regeneration across the borough (not just Hinckley Town Centre).

It was agreed that an update on rural high speed broadband would be brought to the August meeting.

Officers agreed to produce a draft programme for confirmation by the Commission.

(The Meeting closed at 8.55 pm)

CHAIRMAN