

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

10 OCTOBER 2013 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman
Miss DM Taylor – Vice-Chairman

Mr JG Bannister (for Mr MS Hulbert), Mr PR Batty, Mr DW Inman, Mr JS Moore, Mr K Morrell and Mr K Nichols

Also in attendance: Councillor DC Bill MBE, Councillor SL Bray and Councillor LJP O'Shea

Officers in attendance: Valerie Bunting, Bill Cullen, Edwina Grant, Louisa Horton, Sanjiv Kohli, Rebecca Owen, Caroline Roffey, Sally Smith and Sharon Stacey

214 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Hulbert with Councillor Bannister substituting in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.

215 MINUTES

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

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 29 August 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

216 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this juncture.

217 QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE LEADER & DEPUTY LEADER

The Leader and Deputy Leader of Council had been invited and were in attendance to answer questions regarding their plans, policies and direction. During the question and answer session, the following topics were discussed:

- Consultation and reporting to Council on the site allocations DPDs;
- The sound system in the Chamber;
- The future of the old Police Station, Social Services offices and cinema in Bond Street, Hinckley;
- Future budget constraints and the relatively positive position of the authority, particularly in comparison with Leicestershire County Council;
- The benefits of maintaining services in house rather than outsourcing;
- The success of shared services and the unlikely possibility of the county council becoming a unitary authority;
- Council house building as a preference to registered social landlords and the HRA investment plan;
- Bringing empty homes back into use;
- Equitable distribution of resources across the urban and rural areas of the borough;

- The need for improvements in the town centre and the links between the bus station development and the town centre needed in order to encourage the use of both;
- The lack of rural transport and transport links from rural to urban areas.

The Leader and Deputy Leader were thanked for their attendance and the opportunity to ask questions.

218 ENERGY SAVING - SCHEMES

The Scrutiny Commission received a presentation from the Private Sector Housing team regarding energy saving schemes available and the level of take up. It was noted that the definition of fuel poverty had recently been changed and many people, even in deprived areas, were no longer considered to be in fuel poverty as they used mains gas for heating which was cheaper.

Updates were provided on funding streams such as Green Deal, and the benefits of solid and cavity wall insulation, loft insulation and boiler replacements were also discussed.

Officers were thanked for their good work and achievements on this which included achieving a recent national award.

219 REFUSE & RECYCLING OUTPUTS

Members were informed of performance of the council's waste management service. It was stated that all national targets had been met and the main challenge was controlling costs in light of the likelihood that recycling levels would reach a limit fairly soon. The possibility of a kitchen waste collection service was discussed, but it was noted that this was costly and did not necessarily provide value for money.

220 GYPSY & TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT

Members were informed of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Hinckley and Bosworth which was to be used as an evidence base to inform the preparation of the local plan.

Some members expressed concern that many 'travellers' no longer lived a nomadic lifestyle and therefore should be subject to the same rules as the settled community, and it was suggested that this was a national issue which should have been addressed in the NPPF and should be challenged.

Concern was also expressed regarding the number of vans per pitch considered acceptable under the requirements. It was stated that pitch requirement calculations were based on two vans per pitch, yet the actual average figure across the borough was currently 1.2 vans per pitch, which meant that they were under-occupied.

Despite the concerns, members generally felt that the methodology was robust and the document was much clearer than the previous county-wide document.

221 ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY - APPROACH GOING FORWARD

The Commission was informed of progress with implementation of the Anti Poverty Strategy 2009 – 2012 and the action plan. Members reiterated their concerns regarding under-occupancy ('bedroom tax') and disabled residents and the lack of flexibility with the current regime. It was requested that a report be brought to the Commission on the impact of the changes. It was reported that representations had been made to CLG and these had been acknowledged.

RESOLVED – a report on the impact of the changes to council tax and benefits be brought to a future meeting of the Commission.

222 MOVEMENT TO RESERVES - REQUEST FOR DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The Scrutiny Commission received a report which had been withdrawn from the Council agenda pending further consideration of the issues and methods of prioritising reserves and reporting back. It was explained that, under Financial Procedure Rules, movements to reserves had to be agreed by Council, thereby delaying the process. It was noted that this was a particular problem when the Government announced changes at short notice which required the authority to take action immediately.

At this juncture and having reached 9.30pm it was

RESOLVED – the meeting be extended for ten minutes to conclude the business on the agenda.

Having discussed the possible reasons for having to move funds to reserves at short notice, including the likelihood of submitting returns showing underspends in the interim whilst awaiting approval of the movement to reserves, a compromise was suggested in creating a list of key services for which movements could be made without prior council approval, with movements being reported back to members at the next possible opportunity. Members generally felt that this was an acceptable way forward and agreed to receive a report to a future meeting of the Finance, Audit & Performance Committee on key services which may be subject to movement of funds to reserves.

223 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2013-2015

Members received the work programme for 2013-15 and suggested the following additional items:

- Planning enforcement staffing;
- Joint budget meeting with Finance, Audit & Performance in January 2014;
- Continuation of the Barwell & Earl Shilton Scrutiny Group.

(The Meeting closed at 9.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN