

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

28 MARCH 2018 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, Mr BE Sutton, Mr R Ward and Mr HG Williams

Also in attendance: Councillor MB Cartwright and Councillor Ms BM Witherford

Officers in attendance: Valerie Bunting, Bill Cullen, Gemma Dennis, Simon D Jones, Rebecca Owen, Rob Parkinson, Caroline Roffey, Madeline Shellard, Sharon Stacey, Judith Sturley and Mark Tuff

401 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor MacDonald.

402 MINUTES

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

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting be held on 1 February be confirmed and signed by the chairman.

403 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Bray and Lynch declared a personal interest in item 15 (Developing Communities Fund – Burbage Parish Council) as members of Burbage Parish Council.

404 SCRUTINY REVIEW: MARTINSHAW LANE - REVIEW OF HOUSING PROJECT

Following Council's agreement for a scrutiny review to take place, members received a high level scoping report which recommended establishment of a task and finish group to look into concerns raised by residents about the Martinshaw Lane development in Groby.

A member requested that in addition to the terms of reference in the report, the task & finish group should also consider the project management of the contractor and the council's monitoring of the contract in terms of performance and delivery.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The need for two meetings – the first in Groby to which the affected residents would be invited and the second at the Hub, to which officers would be invited
- "Affected residents" would include those adjacent to or backing onto the site
- The suggested split of the group being 3:2:1 with Cllr Lay chairing the task & finish group
- The outcomes from the task & finish group would be brought back to the Scrutiny Commission
- The need for a site visit for the task & finish group.

It was agreed that nominations for the task & finish group should be provided to the Democratic Services Officer by 6 April.

RESOLVED – a task & finish group be established.

405 SCRUTINY REVIEW: KLONDYKE

The Scrutiny Commission gave consideration to a report which recommended the setting up of a task and finish group to consider actions in relation to the Klondyke site, Newtown Linford Lane, Groby.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The need for a site visit for task & finish group members
- The intention to hold a minimum of two meetings – the first for invited residents and representatives of the parish council to be held in Groby
- The right of the task & finish group to view records
- The need for officer support for the task & finish group
- The importance of ensuring witnesses were able to attend.

It was agreed that nominations for membership of the task & finish group would be sought from each group following the meeting.

RESOLVED – a task & finish group be established.

Councillor Cartwright left the meeting at 7.12pm.

406 TENANCY MANAGEMENT - UNTIDY GARDENS

In response to a request of the Scrutiny Commission, members were presented with a report on tackling untidy gardens. Members were informed that the council had powers to deal with not only council tenants with untidy gardens, but also private tenants or owners using enforcement powers available. It was also noted that the council worked closely with other agencies to provide support to those who were unable to look after their gardens.

In response to a member's question, it was stated that there were around 30 complaints a year about gardens of council properties, and around 600 a year made to the environmental health team which covered anything from refuse bags left in the garden to overgrown gardens. Officers agreed to provide members with the figures for planning enforcement cases and the number of cases pursued by the tenancy management and environmental health teams in response to the complaints made.

Members acknowledged that it was easier to deal with untidy gardens of council properties but felt that the situation with non-council properties had improved in terms of the number of cases resolved, and officers were thanked for their hard work.

A briefing note to inform members of who to contact depending on the situation and the powers available to officers was requested. It was requested that a briefing note also be sent to parish councils.

RESOLVED – a briefing note about untidy gardens be prepared for members and parish councils.

407 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Members received a report on universal credit full service roll out. It was explained that this combined six benefits into one and had been effective from March 2017 for those linked to Hinckley's job centre. It was noted that there had been problems initially with delays when customers were changing over to universal credit but, in response to criticism, the DWP had removed the waiting period and made the helpline free of charge to call. It was acknowledged that there was a close working relationship between the council and Job Centre Plus in the Hub which helped to resolve issues more quickly.

Concern was expressed in relation to the increasing level of debt from tenants. In response it was noted that this was partly a result of universal credit being paid to the tenant for them to then pay their bills, whereas previously housing benefit was paid directly to the landlord, but also because of the benefit cap and courts being more reluctant to grant possession orders so tenants could remain in council properties but continue to fail to pay rent.

In response to further questions, the following points were made:

- Assistance in making claims was provided for customers who did not have internet access
- The term 'preparing for work' (paragraph 4.1 of the report) referred to those who were actively applying for jobs and attending interviews
- The funding for the citizens advice service to support applicants was sufficient and had not needed to be supplemented by the authority
- In some cases, direct payments to the landlord could be requested and to date all requested had been granted.

Members expressed concern about the move away from direct rent payments and it was felt that the situation, including rising debt, may be the same throughout the country. It was moved by Councillor Bill and seconded by Councillor Lay that the Scrutiny Commission writes to the MP to ask him to take the matter up and that the Leader of the Council should be requested to raise the matter with the District Councils Network.

Concern was also expressed about the lack of ability to share data with Job Centre Plus, which would enable staff to address non payment of rent with the tenant at their individual meetings. It was requested that this be included in the letter to the MP and raised at the District Councils Network.

It was requested that a further report be brought to the Commission in six months, focussing on the relevant data, and that a representative of the DWP be asked to attend.

#### RESOLVED –

- (i) The chairman of the Scrutiny Commission writes to the MP for Bosworth to express concern about the move away from direct payments of rent to the landlord and the restriction on information sharing between the local authority and Job Centre Plus and to ask him to raise these matters;
- (ii) The Leader of Council be requested to raise the issues mentioned in (i) above with the District Councils Network;
- (iii) A statistical report be brought to the Scrutiny Commission in six months and a representative of the DWP be invited to the meeting.

Members received the Prevention Strategy which detailed the prevention work undertaken across the council. Members congratulated officers on the work undertaken.

RESOLVED – the Prevention Strategy be endorsed.

409 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY UPDATE

The Scrutiny Commission received an annual update in relation to the delivery of affordable housing in the borough. It was reported that a more robust approach on viability assessments had been adopted, which members welcomed.

Members felt that the council should take on more affordable housing from developers and should have its own house building programme. In response it was stated that some affordable housing had been taken on but that the authority was constrained by the HRA and the borrowing cap. The Commission requested that strategies to assist the council in acquiring properties or building its own be sought.

In relation to viability assessments, it was reported that three external organisation had been appointed as consultees which had improved capacity and meant there were specialisms available when necessary.

RESOLVED –

- (i) The report be welcomed and noted;
- (ii) Strategies be sought to assist the authority in acquiring affordable properties or building its own.

410 ECONOMIC REGENERATION STRATEGY 2016-2020

Members were provided with an update on work undertaken to fulfil the aims of the Economic Regeneration Strategy Action Plan.

A member felt that more should be done to inform parish councils when funding was available, for example through the LEADER programme. In response, it was stated that parishes were notified when any funding was available but agreed that the information distributed recently would be re-sent.

Concern was expressed that infrastructure was needed to support economic growth, given the economic success of the area and development in neighbouring areas.

411 SECTION 106 CONTRIBUTIONS UPDATE

Members were updated on the situation in relation to S106 monies received and spent during 2017.

Members were informed of the significant S106 monies which had been secured. In respect of education contributions, Members expressed disappointment about the content of the October 2017 report to the Cabinet at Leicestershire County Council which stated that the Borough Council had reduced contributions for education in favour of affordable housing, yet failed to mention this was only on a few schemes in favour of 100% affordable housing and that there had been several occasions where the authority had foregone affordable housing in favour of contributions to education. It was further noted that, when asked for comparative information about other districts, the County Council was unable to provide this. The Scrutiny Commission was extremely concerned about this lack of information available, particularly in light of the statements made in the Cabinet report. It was requested that the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission writes to

the Cabinet member to ask where the education contributions collected by the council had been spent.

It was acknowledged that the report to the Scrutiny Commission contained correct data about the significant education contributions collected by the council for the County Council, amounting to £7,432,424.14 over the last five years. A member commended this and requested that the report be sent to the parish councils to clarify this, as he had been subject to criticism from them following the County Council's Cabinet report.

Concern was expressed that, when contributions to health, education and the police were collected, there was no feedback to show where, or even if, the money had been used. Members referred to the legal requirement to use the money in that particular area and wished to do further work in the future to encourage the recipients of the money to audit the use and report back.

RESOLVED –

- (i) A briefing note be sent to parish councils to confirm the level of contributions to education collected by this authority;
- (ii) A letter be sent on behalf of the Scrutiny Commission to the Cabinet member for education at Leicestershire County Council requesting a breakdown of where the contributions collected had been spent.

412 CAR PARKS ACTION PLAN (HINCKLEY TOWN CENTRE)

The Scrutiny Commission was advised of the car parks action plan for the Hinckley area.

Whilst members supported the move towards card payments, some were not supportive of the increase in charges, particularly residents' permits. Councillor Bray requested that his objection to the charges and his disappointment that the report continued to refer to ward councillors being invited to discuss the changes, whereas only a token effort was made.

Members were reminded that the consultation was still open and they were still able to input into it.

RESOLVED – the report be noted.

413 DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES FUND - BURBAGE PARISH COUNCIL

A report was presented which recommended that the Scrutiny Commission endorsed the allocation of funding from the Developing Communities Fund to Burbage Parish Council's project.

RESOLVED – the allocation of funding be endorsed.

414 LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICTS ICT PARTNERSHIP DIGITAL STRATEGY

Members were informed of the work being done by the Leicestershire ICT Partnership and the vision set out in the Digital Strategy for the partnership. A member expressed concern that ICT equipment for public use in the community houses had become dated and asked that renewal be explored.

RESOLVED – the Digital Strategy be endorsed.

415 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2016-18

Consideration was given to the work programme. It was requested that an update on Hinckley Hospital be sought for a future meeting. A member suggested that consideration be given to having shorter agendas to allow for fuller consideration of all agenda items.

416 MINUTES OF FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY

The minutes of Finance & Performance Scrutiny on 29 January were received and noted.

(The Meeting closed at 9.29 pm)

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CHAIRMAN