



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Tuesday 22 April 2014** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), A Dean, P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J V Harris, J M Harrison-Hicks, E C Merry, E E J Russell, J Stockdale and I J White

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
C Bibb, Projects Co-ordinator
J Magness, Director of Finance
A Woolridge, Housing Contracts Manager

In attendance:

Chief Inspector R Leet, Sussex Police
Councillor A X Smith, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Lewes District Council

Minutes

84 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

85 Apologies

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor D R Edmunds.

86 Crime and Disorder Matters

The Chair explained that it was a statutory duty for the Committee to consider crime and disorder matters per annum. She introduced Chief Inspector Rob Leet to the Committee, who was the new Lewes District Commander for Sussex.

Chief Inspector Leet took the Committee through his new role at Sussex Police, and explained the recent crime statistics for the District. He advised that crime was generally decreasing in the District, and that there had been

recent successes, such as the White Ribbon Campaign, which had increased the reporting of domestic abuse.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Chief Inspector explained that plans had been put in place that ensured residents understood crime statistics. He added that the police were also increasing their presence in the District through focused street meetings, and follow up visits to victims of crime.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, which included responsibility for Community Safety, took the Committee through the Council's relationship with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). He explained that the Council and police were one of a number of partners, and that the CSP had a pot of money available to support initiatives that reduced crime across the District.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Chief Inspector advised that the police were actively engaging with the community, and would welcome the Scrutiny Committee's involvement in any future issues.

Resolved:

86.1 That a vote of thanks be accorded to the Chief Inspector, Sussex Police for his attendance at the Scrutiny Committee meeting; and

SCO

86.2 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to contact the Chief Inspector, Sussex Police in six months to ascertain if there are any relevant crimes and disorder matters that the Committee should consider.

SCO

87 Forward Plan

The Chair advised that at its previous meeting, members of the Committee had agreed that the Forward Plan of the Council should be considered at each meeting to enable the Committee to get involved with Cabinet decisions at an early stage in the process. She added that, further to recommendations made at its previous meeting, a revised, plain English version of the Forward Plan would be circulated to all Councillors once finalised.

The Committee considered the Forward Plan, and highlighted issues regarding the cashless paying for parking proposal due to be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 2 June 2014. A discussion followed, and Councillors advised that this should be considered in conjunction with the Notice of Motion regarding parking that had been discussed at the Full Council meeting on 26 February 2014.

Resolved:

87.1 That the Contracts Manager - Leisure and Facilities, be requested to contact the Chair of Scrutiny Committee before the Cabinet meeting on 2 June 2014 to discuss how the cashless parking proposal, as

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detailed in the Forward Plan, could be considered in conjunction with the Notice of Motion regarding parking that had been discussed at the Full Council meeting on 26 February 2014.

88 Financial Resilience

The Committee considered Report No 67/14, which provided a commentary against the Grant Thornton good practice checklist of financial resilience as requested by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 January 2014.

The Director of Finance took the Committee through the Report. He advised that Grant Thornton were the appointed external auditors to a number of councils, but not to Lewes District Council. Grant Thornton published an analysis on the financial resilience of councils. The Government had advised that funding for the public sector would continue to reduce even when economic growth rose. This trend was expected to continue through to 2019/2020. The publication included a good practice checklist and this was reproduced at Appendix A, together with the requested commentary.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance explained that the one area in the checklist that Lewes District Council was unable to meet was that relating to the Working Capital ratio. This ratio reported on a position at a precise point in time and measured the current assets less current liabilities and the result as a percentage of net revenue expenditure. It sought to measure the extent to which an authority could cover existing expenditure from working capital if necessary. Authorities with strongly positive indicators would have little difficulty liquidating sufficient assets to continue operating in the event of a cash flow crisis, authorities with negative indicators may have to borrow to cover cash requirements, thus incurring additional costs.

The Director of Finance added that whilst it was essential to control and have targets for the constituent elements of working capital, having an overall indicator could be viewed as a rather simplistic approach. It overlooked financial powers available to councils and strategies that may be adopted, such as the Annual Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, with an objective to borrow internally thus minimising investment risk by using cash and investments to reduce external borrowings.

A discussion followed, and Councillors expressed concern that they were unaware of the plan for the replacement of the current Director of Finance following his retirement as his role was essential in the financial planning of the Council.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance advised that certain monies, such as New Homes Bonus funding, may not be available in future years, and therefore should not be relied upon as a source of income for the Council. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, which included responsibility for Finance, added that it was important to ensure that the Council had sound financial planning in place.

Resolved:

- 88.1** That Report No 67/14 which provided a commentary against the Grant Thornton good practice checklist of financial resilience for Councils be noted;
- 88.2** That the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council be requested to provide the Scrutiny Committee with the plan for the replacement of the Director of Finance, when available; and
- 88.3** That the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council be requested to provide the Scrutiny Committee with a projected timescale of the business plan for future financial planning, when available.

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89 Photovoltaic Panels to Housing Properties

At its previous meeting, the Committee had requested an update regarding the addition of Photovoltaic Panels to the Council's housing properties.

The Housing Contracts Manager explained to Councillors the financial benefit to residents and the Council regarding Photovoltaic Panels. He added that tenants were already seeing a large reduction in their energy bill due to this.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Housing Contracts Manager explained that there were no plans in place at present to assist those tenants who, due to the location of their property, were unable to have Photovoltaic Panels added to their property. He advised however that other sites, such as redundant garage sites, could be considered as suitable locations.

A discussion followed, and the Committee expressed concern regarding the potential legal risks on ownership of Photovoltaic Panels when a property was sold. It added that it was important to ensure that Photovoltaic Panels were in keeping with the scenic area surrounding the property.

Resolved:

- 89.1** That the Head of Strategic Policy be requested to consider the potential use of Photovoltaic Panels for other sites such as garage sites; and
- 89.2** That the Housing Contracts Manager be requested to ensure that the scenic area surrounding properties is considered as part of the Photovoltaic Panels project.

HSP

HCM

90 Home Zones and after hours use of school fields

The Committee received Report No 68/14 which detailed the Home Zones, residential streets in which the road space is shared between drivers of motor vehicles and other road users, with the wider needs of residents being accommodated, and the use of school facilities out of term time by

members of the public.

Due to officer time constraints, the Committee agreed to postpone discussion of this Report to its next meeting on 26 June 2014. It added that prioritising Homes Zones could be discussed as part of the Local Development Framework discussion at the next Cabinet meeting.

Resolved:

90.1 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to add Report No 68/14 regarding Homes Zones and the use of school facilities after hours to the Scrutiny Committee Agenda on 26 June 2014; and

SCO

90.2 That the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee be requested to raise the issue of Home Zones as part of its discussion on the Local Development Framework at the Cabinet meeting on 24 April 2014.

SCO

91 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

91.1 That the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 26 June 2014 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 12.05pm

S J Osborne
Chair