



**Lewes District Council**

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## **Scrutiny Committee**

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **Rooms 7 and 8, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Thursday 28 June 2012** at **10.00am**

### **Present:**

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), S Adeniji, D R Edmunds, P F Gardiner, J V Harris, E C Merry, I A Nicholson, E E J Russell and J Stockdale

### **Officers Present:**

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer  
S Horne, Head of Housing Management  
L Rowe, Housing Policy and Development Manager  
R Tahsin, Tenant Participation Manager

### **In Attendance:**

S Hemming (Tenant Representative)  
A Hill (Tenant Representative)  
D Tideswell (Tenant Representative)

## **Minutes**

### **1 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **2 Variation in the Order of the Agenda**

#### Resolved:

- 2.1** That Agenda Item 11 "Chair of Council's Business Report", Agenda Item 7 "Complaints" and Agenda Item 9 "Scoping Report for possible Scrutiny Review on Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas", be taken immediately before Agenda Item 6 "Tenant Scrutiny".

### 3 Chair of the Council's Annual Business Report

The Committee received Report No 106/12 which related to the outgoing Chair's civic programme, the civic programme for the forthcoming year and budget provision.

Councillors noted that the spend for 2011/12 had been under budget. The Committee considered whether the budget needed reviewing in light of said underspend and if this had been a common occurrence over previous years.

#### Resolved:

- 3.1 That Report No 106/12 relating to the Chair of the Council's Annual Business Report be noted;
- 3.2 That Councillor E E J Russell be thanked for her work as Chair of the Council for the 2011/12 municipal year; and
- 3.3 That the Head of Democratic Services be requested to provide members of the Scrutiny Committee with details of whether there had been an under spend in the Chair of the Council's budget over previous years.

HDS

### 4 Complaints

The Committee considered Report No 104/12 which related to the level of complaints received by Lewes District Council.

The Chair of the Committee informed Councillors that a report was being presented to Cabinet on 12 July 2012 which detailed proposed changes to the complaints procedure. The Committee advised that it may be prudent to await the publication of the Cabinet report before considering the issue of complaints in any detail.

The Committee expressed concern that there was no process in place for individual departments to provide feedback to Councillors who had sat on a previous Complaints Panel, particularly concerning the progress of any recommendations that were made by that Panel.

The Committee discussed the high volume of planning complaints that escalated to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure. It expressed concern that members of the public may be unaware at the early stages of a complaint that Councillors on a Complaints Panel were unable to overturn decisions made by the Planning Applications Committee as this was outside of a Complaints Panel remit.

Councillors discussed the level of complaints in relation to individual departments at the Council, and requested that more detail be provided to the Committee in relation to these.

Resolved:

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| 4.1 | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to add the Cabinet report dated 12 July 2012 entitled “Annual Complaints Report 2011/12” to the agenda of the next Scrutiny Committee meeting for discussion;  | S+CO |
| 4.2 | That the Corporate Performance Officer be requested to attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to provide a more detailed account of complaints data within individual Council departments; and   | CPO  |
| 4.3 | That the Director of Planning and Environmental Services be requested to ensure that members of the public are made aware at an early stage of a complaint that the Complaints Panel are unable to overturn a planning decision through the Council’s complaints procedure. | DPES |

It was further

Recommended:

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| 4.4 | That Cabinet be requested to ensure that a mechanism be put in place for individual departments at the Council to feedback the progress of recommendations from Complaints Panels to Councillors from those Panels. | S+CO |
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## 5 **Scoping Report for possible Scrutiny Review on “Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas**

The Committee considered Report No 105/12 which detailed the scope of a possible future Scrutiny Review on the provision of affordable housing in urban areas.

The Housing Policy and Development Manager took the Committee through the Report. He explained that the Review would complement the recent Scrutiny Review undertaken on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas.

The Chair requested nominations for membership of the Panel and a proposed start date. Councillors agreed that a Panel of seven members would be appropriate for this Review. In response to a Councillor’s question, the Chair confirmed that Newhaven Town Council could be included as a witness.

The Chair suggested that two members could be co-opted to the Panel, for example a representative from a housing association and an officer from the planning policy team at the Council. She added that other Councillors, particularly those who represented urban wards, could be invited to give evidence for the Review. She advised that some of the meetings could take place in locations around the District, particularly in the main urban settlements. The Committee highlighted the importance of the early

inclusion of the relevant Cabinet members in the Review.

Resolved:

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| <b>5.1</b> | That the draft scope of the Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review, as set out in Report No 105/12, be approved;  |       |
| <b>5.2</b> | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a meeting in September 2012 of the Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review Panel to consist of seven Councillors, the names of which are to be nominated by the Group Leaders; and         | S+CO  |
| <b>5.3</b> | That the Housing Policy and Development Manager be requested to suggest suitable representatives from a relevant housing association and the planning policy team at the Council to act as co-optees on the Affordable Housing in Urban Areas Scrutiny Review Panel. | HP+DM |

## 6 Tenant Scrutiny

The Committee welcomed representatives from the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) Scrutiny Panel. The Tenant Participation Manager explained that the Panel consisted of eight tenant volunteers who undertook Scrutiny Reviews and inspections throughout Lewes District. She added that the biggest lesson learnt so far by the Panel was the importance of a scope for a review that was not too broad.

Ms Tideswell (TOLD) advised the Committee that the Panel had recently undertaken a Review which examined empty properties throughout the District and that the Panel's next project concerned choice based lettings.

The Committee thanked TOLD for their work and advised that there would be future opportunities for the Scrutiny Committee and TOLD's Scrutiny Panel to work together on joint projects, and requested that TOLD kept the Committee informed of its work programme.

The Chair advised TOLD's Scrutiny Panel that if there were areas that were outside of its remit, members of TOLD were welcome to make suggestions to the Council's Scrutiny Committee for inclusion in its Work Programme.

Resolved:

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| <b>6.1</b> | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to ensure that the Tenants of Lewes District Scrutiny Panel's report concerning empty properties be included in the background information provided to the Scrutiny Panel for the Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas; and | S+CO |
| <b>6.2</b> | That the Tenant Participation Manager be requested to keep the Scrutiny Committee informed of the Tenants of Lewes District Scrutiny Panel's current work programme.   | TPM  |

## **7 Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas Scrutiny Review**

The Committee received an oral update from the Housing Policy and Development Manager on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas Scrutiny Review. He advised that the Report had been considered by Cabinet on 18 April 2012. He added that since that meeting the list of recommendations within the Report had been summarised into three main groups, which would be further discussed by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Members and officers.

### Resolved:

- 7.1** That the update on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas Scrutiny Review be noted.

## **8 Work Programme 2012/2013**

The Committee considered the existing 2012/2013 Work Programme which included the Parks and Open Spaces Contract, Working with the Voluntary Sector, Attraction of New Investment and Business to Lewes District, Provision of Affordable Housing in Urban Areas and Value for Money Benchmarking Reviews.

The Chair took Councillors through the existing topics on the Work Programme. She advised that the Attraction of New Investment and Business to Lewes District Scrutiny Review could be taken off the Work Programme as there was now a specific Cabinet Member in place with responsibility for that portfolio. Councillors discussed the Review relating to Working with the Voluntary Sector, and requested that a report be presented to the Scrutiny Committee meeting in November 2012.

The Committee re-considered the Parks and Open Spaces contract, and noted that the Committee needed further information on the contract in order to examine this in further detail.

The Chair invited Councillors to suggest any further topics for the Work Programme for 2012/2013. Members of the Committee proposed that a Review could be undertaken examining devolution, especially in light of the Localism Act, and how the District Council could work with Town and Parish Councils to devolve certain powers. The Committee noted that the Devolution Committee at the Council had not met for some time and that the Scrutiny Committee required further information before this topic was placed on its Work Programme.

Members of the Committee suggested that a Review could be undertaken regarding how the Council had implemented the Democratic Conversations Report in Lewes District which had been presented to Cabinet in September 2011. Councillors also suggested that a Review could be undertaken to assess the level of provision for children's play areas in urban and rural areas as there was an assumption that, in rural areas,

children had more space to play.

The Committee highlighted how helpful the recent Scrutiny Review training had been, and that it would be useful to offer a Scrutiny briefing for Cabinet Members.

Resolved:

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| <b>8.1</b> | That the Corporate Head -Legal and Democratic Services be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2012 to provide information on Devolution at the Council;   | CH-L+DS |
| <b>8.2</b> | That a Review of Attraction of New Investment and Business to Lewes District be removed from the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme;   | S+CO    |
| <b>8.3</b> | That a Review of how the Council communicates with the public be added to the Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme;  | S+CO    |
| <b>8.4</b> | That a Review of The Provision of Children's Play Areas in Urban and Rural Areas be added to the Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme;   | S+CO    |
| <b>8.5</b> | That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2012 to present a report on the Parks and Open Spaces contract; and          | P+CM    |
| <b>8.6</b> | That the Corporate Head – Communities and Enterprise be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting in November 2012 to present a Report on Working with the Voluntary Sector. | CH-C+E  |

It was further

Recommended:

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| <b>8.7</b> | That Cabinet Members be requested to consider attending a briefing session regarding Scrutiny and how the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet can work together to improve services. | S+CO |
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**9 Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

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| <b>9.1</b> | That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 6 September at 10.00am in the Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes be noted. |
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The meeting ended at 11.55am  
S J Osborne  
Chair