



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Thursday 6 September 2012** at **10.00am**

Present:

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

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
A Frost, Parks and Cemeteries Manager
N Good, Litigation Lawyer
S Harvey, Corporate Performance Officer
L Lacon, Head of Communications
J Magness, Director of Finance
I Morris, Revenues Manager

In attendance:

Councillor A X Smith

Minutes

10 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor S Adeniji.

12 Preparations for a Localised Council Tax Support Scheme

The Committee considered Report No 145/12 which provided an update to the Committee on preparations for the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme.

Councillors received a short presentation from the Director of Finance on how the Scheme worked. He explained that all Councils would need to make important decisions about who would get financial support towards their council tax and how much they received. He took the Committee

through proposals on how the Council could run the scheme and advised that all District and Borough Councils were "Billing Authorities". In East Sussex that meant they had responsibility for the collection of their own council tax, as well as that for East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police Authority, East Sussex Fire Authority and the Town and Parish Councils.

The Director of Finance advised that within this scheme the Government had provided Councils with greater control over certain discounts and exemptions with effect from April 2013 and that Cabinet would consider this at its October meeting. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 required each Billing Authority to implement a Local Council Tax Support scheme.

The Director of Finance explained that a public consultation phase of the Localised Support for Council Tax Scheme had commenced across East Sussex. Lewes District Council's consultation was from 13 August 2012 to 29 October 2012. The Chair confirmed that the scheme had to be in place by 31 January 2013.

The Director of Finance introduced the Revenues Manager to the Committee, who explained how the scheme could work within the District. He added that it was important that any scheme implemented was sustainable and highlighted that pensioners were protected in the new scheme and would not receive any changes to their council tax support.

The Revenues Manager took the Committee through the detailed options in the scheme, as listed in point 2.25 in the Report. A discussion followed, and Councillors requested further modelling on some of the options. Councillors expressed concern that certain elements of the scheme could affect some the poorest members of the District's community, and that the exclusion of pensioners from the scheme led to a potential inequitable balance. In response to a Councillor's question, the Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the current modelling of the scheme assumed a 0% rise in council tax across the District.

Councillors expressed concern that there was not time within this meeting to fully examine all the options with the scheme, and that a further meeting was required to examine the scheme and further financial modelling in more detail.

Resolved:

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| 12.1 | That the Scrutiny Committee supports the removal of the second adult rebate, as set out in paragraph 2.25, in the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme; | S+CO |
| 12.2 | That the Director of Finance be requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel – Localised Council Tax Support Scheme in early November to present financial modelling on how the reduction of the capital limit to £6K would affect residents in the District; | DF |
| 12.3 | That the Scrutiny Committee supports the increase in non-dependents' deductions, as set out in paragraph 2.25, in the | DF |

Localised Council Tax Support Scheme;

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|-------------|---|------|
| 12.4 | That the Director of Finance be requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel –Localised Council Tax Support Scheme in early November to present financial modeling on how the maximum benefit limit of £20 will affect residents in the District; | DF |
| 12.5 | That the Director of Finance be requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel –Localised Council Tax Support Scheme in early November to present financial modeling, by parish where possible, on how the minimum benefit of £5 per week will affect residents in the District; | DF |
| 12.6 | That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a meeting in early November 2012 of the Scrutiny Panel - Localised Council Tax Support Scheme to consist of five Councillors, the names of which are to be nominated by the Group Leaders; and | S+CO |
| 12.7 | That the Director of Finance be requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Panel – Localised Council Tax Support Scheme in early November to present financial modelling on whether different Councils could adopt different financial caps within the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme. | DF |

It was further

Recommended:

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| 12.8 | That Cabinet considers whether the 25% single person discount within the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme be means tested. | S+CO |
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13 Complaints

The Committee considered a set of complaints data as requested at its previous meeting on 28 June 2012. The Corporate Performance Officer took Councillors through the data and explained that it was a further breakdown of the nature of complaints and that the reporting was at a statistical, rather than individual level. A discussion followed, and Councillors expressed concern that all the compliments that the Council received may not be accurately recorded and reported to members of the public. In response to a Councillor's question, the Corporate Performance Officer confirmed that the Nexus Programme could help to improve consistency in the administration of complaints at the Council.

The Corporate Performance Officer explained how the current corporate complaints procedure worked, and took Councillors through some proposals to change the procedure. In response to a Councillor's question, she agreed that details of the Council's complaints data in comparison to other Councils would be useful.

Resolved:

13.1 That the Corporate Performance Officer be requested to provide the Scrutiny Committee with details of comparable complaints data with other Councils; and CPO

13.2 That the Corporate Performance Officer be requested to promote the compliments webform on the front page of the Council's website. CPO

14 Localism Act 2011 – Opportunities for Towns and Parishes

The Committee considered Report No 141/12 which informed the Committee of new powers as set out in the Localism Act 2011.

The Litigation Lawyer took the Committee through the Report. He explained that the Localism Act set out a series of measures with the potential to achieve a substantial and lasting shift in power away from central Government and towards local people. They included new freedoms and flexibilities for local government, new rights and powers for communities and individuals, reform to make the planning system more democratic and more effective, and reform that ensured decisions about housing were taken locally.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Litigation Lawyer advised that a series of briefing notes on some of the measures listed in the Localism Act 2011 would be developed for Town and Parish Councils.

A discussion followed, and Councillors requested further details on the definition of a "community group", as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the Report.

Resolved:

14.1 That Report No 141/12 be noted;

14.2 That the Litigation Lawyer be requested to ensure that any briefing notes prepared by the District Council for Town and Parish Councils on the Localism Act are circulated to a wider audience, such as the fire service and relevant voluntary organisations; LL

14.3 That the Litigation Lawyer be requested to circulate the definition of a "community group", as set out in the Localism Act 2011 to the Scrutiny Committee; and LL

14.4 That the Litigation Lawyer be requested to ensure that information on the new powers, as set out in the Localism Act 2011, is included as part of the Town and Parish Conference 2012. LL

15 Walmer Road Skate Park Petition

The Committee considered Report No 142/12 which detailed a petition relating to a proposed skate-park at Walmer Green Recreation Ground,

Seaford which was presented to the Council meeting on 19 July 2012.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager took the Committee through the Report. He explained that a petition had been received by the Council which requested a skate-park at Walmer Road Recreation Ground in Seaford. He added that a total of 886 signatures had been received, which prompted this petition being presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee examined the maps of two proposed areas for the skate-park, as set out in the appendix to the Report. A discussion followed, and Councillors felt that the proposal of the land to the north of Allfriston Road as a potential site for a skate-park as it may be required as an extension to Seaford cemetery within the next 10-15 years.

The Committee discussed funding for the proposed skate-park, and agreed that local businesses and the Town Council could be approached for joint funding for the project. Councillors were in agreement that it was important to ensure that the resident's views who lived in the vicinity of the proposed skate-park were taken into consideration along with the petition signatories.

Recommended:

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| 15.1 | That Cabinet be requested to note the Scrutiny Committee's support of the development in principle of a skate-park in Walmer Road, Seaford, with the proviso that local residents views are considered along with the petition; | S+CO |
| 15.2 | That Cabinet be requested to reject the land to the north of Alfriston Road as a potential site for a skate-park; and | S+CO |
| 15.3 | That Cabinet be requested to encourage the exploration of part funding for the skate-park, such as contributions from Seaford Town Council and fundraising by the petitioner. | S+CO |

16 Democratic Conversations in Lewes District

The Committee considered Report No 143/12 which related to the promotion of new forms of democratic and civic conversation in the District.

The Head of Communications took the Committee through the Report. She advised that at its meeting on 7 September 2011, Cabinet considered a report prepared by the Democratic Society on a package of measures to improve democratic conversation in the District. The term "democratic conversation meant "the interaction between the public sector and citizens that goes beyond single consultation exercises on specific issues, and builds a continuing dialogue in an environment of mutual trust and shared responsibility". She explained that officers had drafted an Action Plan, as listed as Appendix B to the Report. At its meeting on 30 May 2012, Cabinet had agreed the Action Plan.

A discussion followed, and Councillors expressed concern that the list of recommendations, as set out in Appendix A to the Report, was not worded

in plain english and may be confusing for members of the public.

Resolved:

- 16.1** That the Head of Communications be requested to produce a plain english version of the set of recommendations, as set out in Appendix A, to Report No 143/12.

HC

17 Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2011/12 and Work Programme

The Committee received Report No 146/12 which related to the activities of the Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12 and its Work Programme for 2012/13. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the Work Programme.

The Committee noted the 80% success rating in the recommendations that Cabinet had agreed from the Scrutiny Committee and added that it was a clear sign that the scrutiny process had worked well over the previous year.

Resolved:

- 17.1** That Report No 146/12 relating to the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2011/12 and Work Programme 2012/13 be noted; and

- 17.2** That Councillor James Page be thanked for his contribution to the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2011/12.

S+CO

18 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

- 18.1** That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 22 November 2012 at 10.00am in the Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 12.45pm

S J Osborne
Chair