



**Lewes District Council**

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## **Scrutiny Committee**

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **Room 7, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Thursday 22 November 2012** at **10.00am**

### **Present:**

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

### **Officers Present:**

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer  
A Frost, Parks and Cemeteries Manager  
K Kingston, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development  
L Knott, Regeneration Project Manager

## **Minutes**

### **19 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **20 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J V S Harris and E E J Russell.

### **21 How the Council works with the Voluntary Sector**

The Committee considered Report No 197/12 which detailed the scope of a potential Scrutiny Review on how the Council works with the voluntary sector. The Review would enable the District Council to consider any changes to its existing policies which may be necessary to improve how the Council worked with voluntary bodies in the District.

The Regeneration Project Manager took the Committee through the Report. She explained that a Scrutiny Review into this area was very timely in light of the recently achieved Regeneration Strategy, the Localism Act, the reduction in officer resources dedicated to the community engagement function at the Council and the current economic climate. She added that many other Councils had a dedicated Communities Department, whereas

Lewes District Council had recently incorporated that work into the Economic and Regeneration Team.

The Regeneration Project Manager introduced the Committee to the new Head of Regeneration and Economic Development. He explained his role, and advised that his team were currently putting together an 18 month work programme which would focus staff resources to meet key priorities for the Council, the top priority being the regeneration of Newhaven. He advised that the team was working on a number of large projects that had recently emerged such as the University Technical College and the Water Park in Newhaven. New projects, such as the work proposed in the Report, would need to be assessed on the impact they had in meeting the Council's regeneration objectives and priorities.

Members of the Committee commented that it may be beneficial for voluntary organisations to work smarter by working together in a hub at a sole location, which would allow for the sharing of resources. They were concerned that the changes to the benefits system would have a resource implication on the voluntary sector as members of the community would have additional queries and concerns about their financial position and would likely seek that help from voluntary organisations.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Regeneration Project Manager explained that there was an officers' working group which covered the District and County Councils in East Sussex, which had the potential for joint working in this area. The Chair of the Committee advised that some of the work that Future Gov, a social media consultancy, was undertaking with the Council could compliment the proposed scoping report.

Members of the Committee confirmed that this was an important piece of work for the Council, and that extra resources needed to be dedicated to undertaking this Scrutiny Review.

Resolved:

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|---|-------------|
| <p><b>21.1</b> That the Scoping Report on "How the Council works with the Voluntary Sector" be agreed, subject to further discussion at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 January 2013;</p>  | <p>HRED</p> |
| <p><b>21.2</b> That the Chief Executive be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2013 to advise whether the draft Scoping Report for the Scrutiny Review on "How the Council works with the Voluntary Sector" could be included within the Future Gov project; and</p> | <p>CE</p>   |
| <p><b>21.3</b> That the Chief Executive be requested to consider whether an extra resource could be utilised to progress the work on how the Council works with the voluntary sector.</p>   | <p>CE</p>   |

## **22 Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas**

The Committee considered the update concerning the Scrutiny Review on the Provision of Affordable Housing in Rural Areas.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer took the Committee through the update. She explained that all the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review had been approved by the Nexus Programme Board and that the recommendations would be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 7 January 2013, specifically requesting approval for undertaking a Housing Needs Survey and market testing for a formal partnership with a regulated provider/social landlord to bring forward land for development to deliver affordable housing in the District.

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer advised that the Planning Department was currently developing a draft protocol for working with Parish Councils in rural exception sites, in consultation with Parish Councils across the District. A draft version was scheduled to be taken to Cabinet in early Spring 2013.

The Chair advised that all the recommendations from the Review had support from the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Members for Housing and Planning.

### Resolved:

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

## **23 Parks and Open Spaces Grounds Maintenance Contract**

The Committee considered Report No 197/12 which informed the Committee of the current status of the Parks and Open Spaces Contract.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager took the Committee through the Report. He advised that the Parks and Cemeteries Service was part of District Services, which was within the Planning and Environmental Services Directorate. The Service was responsible for looking after 185 hectares of parks, formal gardens, open spaces, sports pitches, cemeteries, closed churchyards etc, as well as a further 250 hectares of environmental and common land areas. The main grounds maintenance contract, known as the Leisure Management (Outdoor) Contract (LMO), was awarded to the current contractor in March 2004.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised that the Council was examining the possibility of a joint scheme across the County, and an update concerning this would be taken to Cabinet for consideration in March 2013.

The Committee was concerned that regarding the devolution of assets, as part of the Localism Act, and whether Town and Parish Councils would be given any support in order to take on the maintenance of any land within

their area. It was also concerned that if, in one particular area, there was more than one authority cutting the grass it would be confusing for members of the public as the grass would be cut to different levels and standards.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that although a ten year contract appeared long, the length kept costs low. He added that the contract had a break clause at five years.

The Committee questioned the figures, as listed in paragraph 7 of the Report, as they were unclear. The Parks and Cemeteries Manager took Councillors through the figures and confirmed that the total charged to the Council for the Parks and Open Spaces Contract was £727,020.

Resolved:

- 23.1** That Report No 197/12 concerning the Parks and Open Spaces Maintenance Contract be noted;
- 23.2** That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to ensure that the breakdown of figures in Report No 197/12, paragraph 7 be displayed in a clearer table; and
- 23.3** That the Parks and Cemeteries Managed be requested to return to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 March 2012 with an update on the Parks and Open Spaces Maintenance Contract.

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It was further

Recommended:

- 23.4** That Cabinet be requested to consider whether a clear policy steer on the devolution of land to Town and Parish Councils at the Council is required.

**24 Date of Next Meeting**

Resolved:

- 24.1** That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 7 January 2013 at 10.00am in the Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 11.20am

S J Osborne  
Chair