



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Thursday 5 September 2013** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), A Dean, S J Gauntlett, J V S Harris, E C Merry, J Stockdale and I J White

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
A Frost, Parks and Cemeteries Manager
J Jones, Principal Accountant (Projects)

Minutes

50 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 August 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors P F Gardiner, J M Harrison-Hicks and E E J Russell.

52 Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve – Parks and Cemeteries

The Committee considered Report No 131/13 regarding the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised Councillors that at a previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, they had requested that a Report be brought to a future meeting outlining details of the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve, in particular the size of the reserve and its operation.

He explained that the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve existed to provide funding for works to facilities, parks and open spaces managed by the Council. The necessity for the Reserve and the balance held within it was reviewed by Cabinet twice a year. This indicated that the annual

contribution to the Reserve had been reduced by £17,000 for 2011/12 as a contribution to the Council's overall savings target.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager introduced the Principal Accountant (Projects) to the Committee, who explained that in order to carry out maintenance to parks and cemeteries, the Parks and Cemeteries Section had a number of budgets which covered the Department's regular work. He added that there were often sporadic works that were required, which were paid for from the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve.

He advised the Committee that maintenance of the Reserve ensured that there were finances available to pay for spending not covered by existing budgets, and that if the Reserve was no longer maintained, it would lead to an increased pressure on the recurring base budget for current services.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that more information in relation to how the devolution of assets would affect this Reserve should be available by December 2013.

Resolved:

52.1 That Report No 131/13 regarding the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve be noted;

52.2 That it be noted that the Scrutiny Committee supports the Director of Finance's consideration of the spectrum of proposals to allocate Reserve funding alongside the devolution agenda; and

52.3 That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to return to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in January 2014 for reconsideration of the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve in relation to devolution.

DF

PCM

53 Lewes District Council Tree Management

The Committee considered Report No 132/13 regarding the current arrangements for the management of Lewes District Council's tree stock.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised the Committee that the District Council owned and managed a wide ranging tree stock. These trees were found in Parks, Open Spaces, Housing Estates, Play Areas, Cemeteries and Nature Reserves and were managed by the Parks and Cemeteries Section. He added that the Council also had involvement in trees that it did not own and that this work was managed by the Tree and Landscape Officer within the Planning and Environmental Department.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised that the Council did not have a written policy on tree management. A discussion followed, and Councillors expressed concern that such a policy did not exist. The Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that a new Assistant Parks and Cemeteries Manager had recently been appointed at the Council, whose role could be the development of a Tree Management

Policy for the District.

The Parks and Cemeteries Manager explained that in order to better manage the upkeep of trees on Council land, officers had identified the need to undertake a comprehensive survey, to record the details of all trees. This survey prioritised trees according to the recognised risk assessment methodology whereby the relative location and condition of the tree was considered in relation to issues such as level and frequency of public access. The tree survey commenced in April 2013 and was expected to take 12 – 18 months to complete.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Parks and Cemeteries Manager advised that the tree disease, Ash Dieback, had not been included in the Report as it had not yet reached Lewes District. He added that signage had been placed around the District asking member of the public to contact the Forestry Commission if there were any sightings of the disease. The Committee expressed concern that the Council was not prepared for Ash Dieback, and that it should be more pro-active in its plans for dealing with the disease, including a clear procedure for the replacement of any diseased trees.

The Committee held the view that the devolution of assets should be considered as part of any discussions around tree management at the Council, but it should not delay the development of any policies for this area.

Resolved:

53.1 That Report No 132/13 relating to Lewes District Council's Tree Management Policy be noted;

53.2 That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to prioritise trees that are at risk of contracting Ash Dieback disease at the beginning of the tree survey currently being conducted by the Council;

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53.3 That the Parks and Cemeteries Manager be requested to return to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee with the results of the tree survey; and

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53.4 That the Cabinet Member for Health and Environment be requested to ensure that appropriate resources are put in place for the Parks and Cemeteries Manager to develop a Tree Management Policy for the District.

CMHE

54 Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2012/13

The Committee received Report No 133/13 which related to the activities of the Scrutiny Committee for 2012/13 and its Work Programme for 2013/14. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the Work Programme.

The Committee noted the excellent work that Scrutiny had achieved in 2012/13, especially as some other areas of the country had such a negative perception of Scrutiny. However, it expressed concern that members of the Committee were not entitled to an additional allowance, and that the Chair received a lower allowance than the Chairs of other Committees at the Council.

The Committee discussed how more members of the public, especially young people and schools, could get involved in the Scrutiny process at the Council. The Chair suggested that a Communications Plan for Scrutiny could be developed, with innovative ideas to promote community engagement in the Scrutiny process.

Resolved:

54.1 That Report No 133/13 relating to the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2012/13 and Work Programme 2013/14 be noted;

54.2 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be thanked for her exemplary performance over the past year;

SCO

54.3 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to return to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 21 November 2013 with a draft Communications Plan for Scrutiny at the Council; and

SCO

54.4 That the Independent Remuneration Panel be requested to consider the level of Councillors' allowance payable to members of the Scrutiny Committee.

HDS

55 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

55.1 That the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 7 November 2013 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 11am

S J Osborne
Chair