



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Thursday 4 September 2014** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), A Dean, P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J V Harris, C R O’Keeffe, E E J Russell, J Stockdale and I J White

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
S Andrews, Electoral Services Manager
A Blanshard, Committee Officer
J Gavigan, Head of Democratic Services
J Harper, Head of Business Strategy and Performance
B Lewis, Contracts Manager, Leisure and Facilities
A Osborne, Director of Corporate Services

Minutes

18 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19 Apologies

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor J M Harrison-Hicks.

20 Disclosure of Interest

Councillor C R O’Keeffe declared her personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 10 (Response to Thebes Annexe Petition).

21 Crime and Disorder Matters

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer reminded the Committee that at its meeting on 22 April 2014, Councillors requested that crime and disorder matters be tabled at a future meeting of the Committee to ascertain whether

any issues relating to this area should be placed on the Work Programme.

Resolved:

21.1 That the Scrutiny Committee notes that there are no issues relating to crime and disorder matters that are required to be placed on the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2014/15.

SCO

22 Encouraging residents to vote and stand at local elections

The Committee considered Report No 121/14 regarding the work being undertaken by the Council to encourage more residents to vote and stand as candidates at local elections.

The Head of Democratic Services took the Committee through the Report. She explained that at a previous meeting, the Scrutiny Committee had requested that a report on the Council's responsibilities for encouraging more residents to vote and to stand as candidates at local elections, and suggestions for improvements, be brought to the Committee. Under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Section 69 (1)), electoral officers had a duty to take appropriate steps to encourage the participation of electors in their area in the electoral process.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Democratic Services explained that Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was the new system for registering to vote. It replaced the outdated household registration system and made registration quicker and easier for the elector. She added that the key principles behind IER were to address concerns about potential fraud by verifying that everyone on the register was who they said they were, resulting in greater trust in the legitimacy and fairness of elections. A discussion followed, and the Head of Democratic Services advised that this new system should address concerns that Councillors had of perceptions of fraud in the electoral system.

The Head of Democratic Services took the Committee through the Appendix to the Report, which detailed the activities being undertaken or planned by the Council to encourage more residents to vote, and included some suggestions for improvements. She added that there would be an increased use of technology to promote IER locally, specifically social media and podcasts. She further added that there was potential to link up with schools through texting and school intranets. A discussion followed, and Councillors felt that young people could be involved in the production of a podcast regarding this issue.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Democratic Services advised that legislation dictated that all residents were automatically entered onto the open register, but had the ability to "opt out" if they wished. She added that the Electoral Commission had prescribed the wording in the letters and on envelopes that had been recently distributed to all residents in the District informing them of the new registration system.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that the Council had contacted all Care Home Managers in the District requesting their assistance in ensuring that care home residents were registered.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Democratic Services advised that there was a public engagement plan that included some information broken down to ward level on potentially under-registered groups. A discussion followed, and the Committee felt that this would be useful information for Councillors where information was available for their wards.

The Head of Democratic Services took the Committee through the Appendix to the Report, which also detailed the activities being undertaken by the Council to encourage more residents to stand as candidates at local elections, and included some suggestions for improvements. A discussion followed, and the Committee highlighted how important it was that honest information concerning the type of work and time commitment being a Councillor required was made available to potential candidates, and that a podcast by existing Councillors explaining their role could be helpful. The Head of Democratic Services added that the intention was to target specific under-represented groups as potential candidates, rather than hold an open event.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Democratic Services explained that work was being undertaken to improve the induction pack received by Councillors after their election, and that Councillors would soon be consulted on their experience as a Councillor over the past four years.

Resolved:

22.1 That Report No 121/14 relating to the work being undertaken by the Council to encourage more residents to vote, and stand as candidates at local elections be noted;

22.2 That the Head of Democratic Services be requested to investigate whether local students would be interested in working with the Council to develop a podcast to explain the electoral system;

HDS

22.3 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to circulate the Appendix to Report No 121/14 to all Councillors for information; and

HDS

22.4 That a vote of thanks be accorded to officers in Democratic Services for their excellent work in this area.

SCO

23 Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2013/14 and Work Programme

The Committee received Report No 122/14 which related to the activities of the Scrutiny Committee for 2013/14 and its Work Programme for 2014/15.

The Chair took the Committee through the Report. She highlighted that the Report should be more explicit on the number of recommendations that had

been agreed and acted upon.

The Committee noted that there were few suggestions from Councillors, outside of the Scrutiny Committee, for inclusion on the Work Programme, and that more information could be included within the Report to remind Councillors of this opportunity.

The Chair of the Committee suggested that the examination of Cabinet Portfolios be added to the Work Programme. She added that this could be staggered over the year to coincide with pertinent Reports that the Committee was already scheduled to consider.

The Chair further suggested that the Committee scrutinised the voluntary sector organisations that held Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or partnership agreements with the Council.

Councillors questioned whether the Scrutiny Committee could offer a response to the bus consultation currently being run by East Sussex County Council.

Resolved:

23.1 That Report No 122/14 relating to the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2013/14 and Work Programme 2014/15 be noted;

23.2 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to add an additional sentence to the Chair's introduction, as set out in Report No 122/14, to explain the number of Scrutiny Committee recommendations that had been agreed or acted upon;

23.3 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to add an additional paragraph to the Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2013/14 to encourage more Councillors to suggest topics for the Work Programme 2014/15; and

23.4 That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to investigate whether the Scrutiny Committee could respond as a body to the consultation run by East Sussex County Council regarding local bus services.

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24 Thebes Annexe Response to Petition

The Committee considered Report No 123/14 which responded to the petition to re-open Thebes Annexe in Lewes as an art gallery.

The Contracts Manager, Leisure and Facilities, took the Committee through the Report. She advised that on 17 July 2014, Full Council was presented with a 763 signature petition that had requested that Thebes Gallery, situated in outbuildings behind Lewes House off Lewes High Street, be re-opened as a small gallery.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Contracts Manager, Leisure and

Facilities, explained that Thebes Annexe was used between 1997 and 2008 as a low-cost gallery for local artists. From 2008, the building was used as office accommodation for the Council. The Committee highlighted that, when it was run as an art gallery, it was a unique project as it was the only gallery in the town, and was not run as a commercial venture.

The Contracts Manager, Leisure and Facilities, advised that the Council had been approached by an organisation that wished to lease Thebes Annexe for a period of up to two years and, if it were possible to successfully negotiate the terms of a lease, would mean additional income for the Council. Issuing a lease at Thebes for a 2 year period would enable the exploration of avenues of external funding for a gallery space and a thorough evaluation of the exhibition space project at Lewes House, in order to give some context to the estimated visitor numbers.

The Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee that Cabinet would be making a decision at its meeting on 29 September 2014 whether to lease Thebes Annexe to the organisation that had approached the Council. He added that this was an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to either make recommendations to Cabinet before its next meeting, or to use its right of call-in following the Cabinet decision.

The Committee recognised the financial pressure that the Council was dealing with, but considered that it may be better to look at this proposal after the Cabinet meeting on 29 September 2014. Councillors expressed concern about the process, specifically that other organisations may not have had an opportunity to express an interest in leasing Thebes Annexe. The Director of Corporate Services advised that this was the reason officers had suggested to Cabinet that only a two year contract be offered. He added that, as the renewal of the lease was approaching, this could be reconsidered.

(Note: Councillor O’Keeffe declared her personal, non-prejudicial interest in this item as she was the lead petitioner of the Thebes Annexe Petition, and therefore, was able to take part in the consideration, discussion and voting thereon)

Resolved:

- 24.1** That Report No 123/14 responding to the petition to re-open Thebes Annexe, Lewes as an art gallery be noted; and
- 24.2** That the Contracts Manager, Leisure and Facilities, be requested to draw the previous use of Thebes Annexe as a non-commercial gallery to Cabinet’s attention when it considered the Report on leasing Thebes Annexe at its meeting on 29 September 2014.

CM - L&F

25 Date of Next Meeting**Resolved:**

- 25.1** That the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 23 October 2014 at 10.00am in the Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 11.36am

S J Osborne
Chair