



Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, on Thursday, 19 April 2018** at 10:00am

Present:

Councillor P Gardiner (Chair)

Councillors J Carter, S Catlin, N Enever, V lent and R Robertson

Officers Present:

J Gavigan, Head of Democratic Services

R King, Senior Planning Policy Officer

J Victory, Scrutiny Officer

In Attendance:

Councillor T Jones, Lewes District Council

Councillor T Nicholson, Lewes District Council

R Blake, Railfuture

C Page, Railfuture

Minutes

38 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39 Apology for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Member

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor R O'Keeffe (MBE).

Councillor S Catlin declared that he was acting as substitute for Councillor R O'Keeffe for the duration of the meeting.

40 Lewes to Uckfield Railway Line

The Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Scrutiny Officer, which provided background information regarding the proposal to reinstate the Lewes to Uckfield railway line. Members expressed disappointment that East Sussex County Council had not been available to attend this meeting of the Scrutiny

Action

Committee.

The Committee welcomed Roger Blake and Chris Page, representatives of Railfuture, and received a presentation which covered the following topics:

- **Railfuture** – Railfuture was introduced as a not-for-profit company which was a long-established, national, voluntary, and independent organisation campaigning for a bigger better railway in Britain. Railfuture’s 2017 review could be viewed at: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1709>
- **‘Irresistible Justification’** – Railfuture encouraged members to regard rail as, not just a means of transport, but a method of communication which enabled the growth and prosperity of communities and individuals. By considering the line as a growth-enabling investment, its reinstatement may be considered more justified.
- **Housing Needs** – The Association of Train Operating Companies suggested that a population of 15,000 (6,000 homes) should act as a guidance threshold for new/reopened rail lines/stations. Members were encouraged to contemplate whether Districts, including Lewes, would work together to accept their share of growth in order to reach this target.
- **Alternative funding** - Railfuture welcomed the interest of private investors, and asked the Committee to consider this as an alternative approach.
- **Stakeholder partnerships** – Railfuture encouraged the Committee to consider the benefits of an alliance with other Councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LSP) and Transport for South East (TfSE) and assured the Committee that, as advocates for the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line, Railfuture remained ready to collaborate.

Following the presentation, members of the Scrutiny Committee and Councillors present participated in an open Q&A session.

Members’ discussion included:

- Why the presentation did not mention the environmental advantages of reopening the line, such as; reduced air pollution, sustainable tourism, climate change impact and international obligations.
- Referring back to the Association of Train Operating Companies suggestion of a population of 15,000 (6,000 homes) as a guidance threshold. As Lewes had passed this threshold, why had the reinstatement of the line not already been warranted.
- Whether a Brighton to Uckfield railway line had been considered.
- Considering factors such as the ageing population, transport access and recruitment opportunities, could the economic cost of the line not

being reinstated be used to support the case.

- Whether the impact on property prices had been considered should the line be reinstated.
- What recommendations did Railfuture have regarding how Lewes District Council should pursue the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line.

Railfuture responded that:

- The positive environmental impact of the railway line being reinstated had been factored into the work of Railfuture; however members were informed that, with technological advancements such as electric cars affecting future forecasts of air pollution, it was not the most compelling argument that could be put forward.
- The population of 15,000 (6,000 homes) as a guidance threshold was if there was not already a railway line. This meant that Lewes would have to increase by another 15,000.
- Although Railfuture were advocates for the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield line, they also supported the idea that the new railway did not have to be exactly where the old railway line was.
- They were thankful for the alternative perspective regarding the economic cost of the railway line not being reinstated, and agreed with the Committee that this viewpoint could be used to support the case.
- An additional railway line in Lewes may increase property prices, but there was no way of forecasting this.
- The importance of alliance building, forming partnerships, and discussing how this project could profit different stakeholders would be a key starting point for Lewes District Council pursuing the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line.

Resolved:

- (1) That the presentation by Railfuture regarding the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line be noted.
- (2) That East Sussex County Council once again be invited to to give a presentation and participate in a Q&A session regarding the Lewes to Uckfield Railway line at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 28 June 2018.

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Reason:

To comply with the Scrutiny Committee's right to invite people outside of the Council to address it, discuss issues of local concern and/or answer questions as stated in the Council's Constitution with regard to the Attendance by Others (Part 4, rule 15).

38 Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee received the Work Programme, which set out the timetable of Scrutiny meetings for 2018/19. The new start time of 2:00pm was noted.

Members were informed that, in addition to the items listed on the work programme, a report regarding the Council Tax Reduction scheme would be presented to the Committee in September.

The Chair brought to the Committees attention that, whilst being briefed on the performance targets for 2018/19, he recognised that the target for Affordable Homes Delivered was not consistent with the target that had been recommended by Scrutiny and agreed by Cabinet following a Scrutiny Review Panel which took place in 2013. The Chair therefore requested that an officer attend a future Scrutiny Committee meeting to provide an update regarding Affordable Housing across the District.

Regarding the performance monitoring reports, it was asked if the Head of Business, Strategy and Performance could include an update on air quality in future reports.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted.

Reason:

To meet the requirement of the Council's Constitution with regard to the preparation, execution and adjustment of the Work Programme.

39 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Committee received the Forward Plan for the period from 1 April 2018 – 31 July 2018.

Regarding the Environmental Issues item, the Head of Democratic Services agreed to confirm who the Lead Member would be for this decision.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Forward Plan of the Council for the period from 1 April 2018 – 31 July 2018, be noted.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9 (d) to have regard to the Forward Plan of Decisions.

40 Date of Next MeetingResolved:

- (1) That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on Thursday, 28 June 2018 in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, commencing at 2:00pm, be noted.

All to note.

The meeting ended at 11:25am.

P Gardiner
Chair